

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Sir James Hennessy, KBE, 1982 (OBE 1968; MBE 1959), CMG 1975

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR JAMES HENNESSY KBE CMG****RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ALASDAIR MACDERMOTT, AUGUST 2018.**

AM: Sir James Hennessy, thank you very much for agreeing to be recorded for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme. After your military service, you went into the Overseas Civil Service and served in Basutoland and Southern Africa?

JH: I did, yes. I had four years in the army and then when the war ended in 1945 my regiment moved to Dehra Dun in northern India. I was then adjutant and so saw all the recruitment papers that were sent out from HQ in London to returning soldiers. My first thought had been to stay on, in India, (I had learnt Urdu, the lingua franca) and join the political service, but it was clear that independence for India was not far off. So my thoughts then turned to the Diplomatic Service. But the 1945 recruitment literature I saw suggested that a small private income was desirable. That I did not have so I didn't go down that route and ended up applying for the Colonial Service in 1946 when I came out of the army. I passed the first interview in Simla and then came back to London for the final two day interview which I also passed.

Then, unlike in the Foreign Office, where I was given no training at all, I was sent on a training course which involved spending an academic year at Cambridge University studying law, criminal law and procedure, colonial history, agriculture, surveying and so on; and then another year at the London School of Economics and School of Oriental and African Studies. At the latter, you learnt a smattering of the language of the Colony to which you were posted. As I was going to Basutoland, I learnt enough Sesotho to get by.

I went out to Basutoland in January 1948 on a Union Castle ship and arrived in Cape Town at the end of January or beginning of February 1948. I spent a week there in the High Commission office being showed around Cape Town by one of the staff of the Office, then went up to Basutoland. My first posting was to the Secretariat, as an Assistant Secretary; I think there were three of us altogether. We each had a schedule of work, and the usual form was that submissions from the different Departments in the Capital - agriculture, works,

whatever - all came to the Secretariat where they were processed by Assistant Secretaries, much like in the Foreign Office or any other office, and went up the line to your next superior and then eventually, if it were really necessary, to the Resident Commissioner, although they rarely went that far. So to that extent, I suppose, it was similar to what happens in the Foreign Office but I think we were much more particular about sending everything up to the next senior officer. I was quite surprised when I entered the Foreign Office that there didn't seem to be any particular drill about whether you sent it to the Counsellor, the next one up, or two up or whatever. I eventually discovered that each rank had a certain authority to take a decision on something and if you were at the bottom of the pile, you knew who would take the final decision so there was no need to pass it through the intervening ranks. That was a bit of a surprise to me but the things learnt in the Secretariat in Basutoland were very similar to the things you would do in any home department or the Foreign Office.

So I started in the Secretariat and then went, after 18 months or so, to a District. In the case of Basutoland, the Colony was divided into nine Districts. The job of a District Officer was threefold: to deal with court cases, which took up about a third of your time; to deal with administrative matters about a third of your time, and to go on trek, which in the case of Basutoland meant going out on horseback to tour your District. The object of touring was to see whether the law was being kept, the courts were working properly, the chiefs and police were doing their jobs, that sort of thing. I did that for two years in one District, Mafeteng, and then I was transferred to another District in the south of the country where the job was very similar. After four years, I went on leave to England with two children who had been born out there.

We lived in houses which were usually pretty primitive, so servants were a necessity, not a luxury. And in Mokhotlong, the District in the Drakensburg Mountains, which lies at over 7,000 ft., where I was District Commissioner from 1954-56, we relied on donkeys or mules to bring food up the Sani Pass from Natal. The Pass is over 10,000 ft. high so was blocked with snow in the long winter months. Then it was a case of living off tinned or frozen food. There was no electricity so we used paraffin lanterns for lighting and burnt 'disu,' dried dung, for fuel. We lived in Mokhotlong for a couple of years and then in 1956 I went on leave. It marked the end of my touring in Basutoland, six years in the Districts doing different jobs and three months as Judicial Commissioner. The J.C. was in effect the Appeal Court Judge for all the Basuto courts, so all the appeals came up to you. Occasionally, I was appointed an

Assessor in the High Court in the Capital, Maseru. You sat next to the Chief Justice and advised him, after hearing the evidence, whether you thought the man was guilty or not. Many of the cases were for ritual murders, that sort of thing.

After my leave in 1956, I was posted back to the Secretariat in 1957 to work on constitutional development. When I went to Basutoland in 1948, it was a Crown Colony with very few Basuto in the Administration. But from 1957 onwards constitutional development became a priority. The aim was to bring the country up to a state where it could govern itself. There was a chap called "Soapy" Williams, an American Assistant Secretary, who was going around Africa telling the British to get out so there was a bit of pressure coming up from below for more self-government.

In 1957, I was first of all given the job of running courses in law for local Court Presidents. That lasted about 3 months and then I went back to the Secretariat. My next job was to work on constitutional development with a committee consisting of all the senior Ward Chiefs in the country. That Committee was later amalgamated with another Committee of leading Members of the National Council and, to cut a long story short, we eventually produced a Report which recommended the setting up of a Legislative Council. Our recommendations were approved by the Resident Commissioner, High Commissioner and eventually the Secretary of State. I was then asked to make recommendations for the setting up of an Executive Council (an embryo cabinet). I was given leave to tour the East and Central African Colonies to see how they had done it and again produced a report which was eventually accepted by the Government. I was next given the task of organising the first General Election in the country. From there, it was a short step to independence for the colony, which came in 1966.

That's roughly what my life in Basutoland was like, and at that point in 1966, most of the expatriate staff, who were in the Colonial Administration, as I was, decided to leave the country. I was asked to stay on by the Prime Minister, which I did, and became his Permanent Secretary and Cabinet Secretary, and stayed with him for two years until 1968. At that point it was quite clear that Ministers were getting a bit edgy about having a white man in the Cabinet, knowing what they were doing, so I got the message that it was time I left.

I have missed out the bit between 1960 and 1963. For those years I was seconded from Basutoland to the Office of our High Commissioner in South Africa, which moved between Cape Town and Pretoria, the Legislative and Administrative capitals of South Africa respectively. The High Commissioner wore two hats: one as Ambassador to South Africa and one as Governor of the three High Commission Territories. The H.C. had a small staff, of which I was one. We had diplomatic rank and worked closely with the diplomatic side of the Office, so I got to know quite a bit about how diplomats worked.

This experience proved very useful when I left Basutoland in 1968, not knowing what I was going to do next. I applied for a number of jobs in South Africa and London. Eventually, with the help of Sir John Maud, who had been High Commissioner at the time I was seconded to the Embassy (later Lord Redcliffe-Maud, 'Brain of Britain', Master of University College, Oxford, and the author of Local Government Reform in England, who became a good friend), Sir Hugh Stephenson, who succeeded him as High Commissioner, and who had served in the Indian Civil Service at the time I was in India – also gave me his support and I got into the Foreign Office. I don't know whether I would have been taken on otherwise!

First Secretary, Rhodesia Economic Department, FCO, London, 1968

Having been accepted, I was told I should join the Office in November 1968. I was given the rank of First Secretary and posted to Rhodesia Economic Department. My job was to receive the reports from our people in South Africa who were monitoring the ships that were trying to avoid the sanctions imposed on Rhodesia. I had been in South Africa long enough to know that all the stuff Rhodesia needed was going across the border from South Africa anyway, and that our job in the Department, trying to monitor ships evading sanctions, was a sheer waste of time. So I didn't really, I suppose, pull my weight and got a rather poor report from the Department at the end of the year. I was called into Personal Operations Department to explain myself. I said, 'Well I am sorry, but I thought the whole thing was a waste of time.'

Southern and Central Africa Department

Anyway, the upshot was the Department was abolished and I was sent to another Department which turned out to be South and Central Africa Department, where there was a very good Head of Department, and I quite enjoyed it. I was there for about eighteen months in the

course of which the Prime Minister of Basutoland came to England on an official visit. He asked the Foreign Office if he could see this chap Hennessy, which rather surprised them. They eventually found me down at the bottom of the pile in one of the Departments! After about 18 months I was told that I would probably be getting a posting abroad. As I didn't have any languages, apart from school French and German, Urdu learnt in the Indian Army, and Sesotho, they suggested I was likely to go to a French speaking African country.

Head of Chancery, Uruguay, Chargé d'Affaires, Montevideo, 1970-72

In the event, I was sent to Uruguay in South America, a Spanish speaking country, as Head of Chancery and Deputy to the Ambassador. We arrived in August 1970. The Ambassador, Geoffrey Jackson, an old Spanish speaking hand, was in his last post, a Grade III Embassy. I hardly knew him because he tended to come into the office at half past ten in the morning and was off again at half past one, so I did not see much of him. I think he reckoned he knew everything there was to know about the country and its people so didn't have to bother with the office too much; I was left to keep the pot boiling.

I should have said that when we arrived, the country was in a bit of a turmoil because the Tupamaro guerrillas (an underground movement composed largely of left wing, middle class Uruguayans, who were having a tough time economically under the very right wing government, composed largely of wealthy land owners) were starting to embarrass the government by kidnapping diplomats. A man in the American Embassy, a First Secretary, was kidnapped just before I arrived, and eventually killed. But we in the Embassy were pretty relaxed. Everybody said, 'Well the Uruguayans love the British, we have always been friends, so we'll be fine.'

In fact, some four months after I arrived, the Ambassador was kidnapped. He himself had always had the idea he might be kidnapped, or so he told his wife (he didn't tell anybody else.) But there was no way really of avoiding being caught because our Embassy was right down in the centre of the town, with only one route to get to it. And so it was a simple matter for the Tupamaros, as they did, to stop his car, shoot at everybody on the side of the road, grab the Ambassador, put him into their car, and rush off with him to an underground hideout. So that happened sort of overnight and he disappeared. Nobody knew where he was. No demands came from the Tupamaros until much later.

Oliver Wright came out from London a couple of days later. He was Chief Clerk at that point. We greatly admired him. He arrived on the plane overnight and went to see the Foreign Minister almost as soon as he got up. He made a very good impression, telling the Uruguayans that we expected them to find the Ambassador quickly, and that in the meantime, we would maintain diplomatic relations and I would be in charge. He went back after two days having made a big impression. A great man and very supportive.

From then on, while the Ambassador was underground, we kept a pretty low profile. Other Embassies, especially the Americans, were very supportive and life in our Embassy carried on much as I suppose one would expect. The Foreign Office sent out a team of security experts who recommended that I had an escort wherever I went and guards on my house, but I didn't think that was really necessary. I didn't think the Tupamaros would strike at the same Embassy twice and the restrictions on my movements would have been intolerable. The Foreign Office agreed so long as I had a bodyguard with me all the time and a sentry outside my house. I recruited a Uruguayan bodyguard, who was very faithful and followed me everywhere with a rifle over his shoulder and a couple of hand guns. The poor man was eventually shot after I left. The Uruguayan sentry did not in the event prove very effective. I had a couple of boxer dogs who used to sleep outside my house by the front door. One day we found they had disappeared - kidnapped. A warning. My family devised a scheme to ensure that if I was kidnapped on the way home from the office, they would know about it straight away and sound the alarm. (I kept very irregular hours, sometimes leaving the office very late at night.)

There was nothing very much I could do about finding the Ambassador. We expected the Government of Uruguay to do that, but I used to go and see the Foreign Minister every month and ask 'Have you found him? What are you doing? What's happening etc. etc.?' However, after some time, I did get a message from the Tupamaros demanding a ransom for the Ambassador. I replied, on instructions, that the British did not pay ransoms. I heard no more. Meanwhile, unbeknown to me, our Embassy in Chile had been instructed by the Foreign Office to get in touch with the Chileans about the kidnapping. Chile at the time had a very left wing government under Allende and it was thought they would be able to arrange a deal with the Tupamaros. The deal consisted, I believe, not in our having to pay any ransom, but agreeing to put pressure on the Uruguayan government to release 146 Tupamaro

prisoners in exchange for Geoffrey Jackson. It was made to look as though the prisoners had escaped; a tunnel was built from the prison as a way out, and one day a stream of Tupamaro guerrillas got out! Some three days later, I got a message, supposedly from the Tupamaros, saying I was to go alone to a certain place in town where I would find the Ambassador. People thought it was a trap, because I was told to go alone to this very seedy part of town. Anyway, I did go, it was a very long way, and eventually spotted Geoffrey Jackson, standing by the side of the road on his own. That was after about nine months in captivity. When he came out, he seemed to be in comparatively good shape after having been in an underground cell for so long. He had kept his dignity, saying he was the Ambassador and the Tupamaros seem to have respected him. He'd been moved to different hideouts and never quite knew if he was going to be chopped or not, but anyway, he came out in fairly good shape. He wanted to stay on in Uruguay but the Foreign Office decided that it was better that he didn't, so he left after two or three days and I was left in charge for the rest of my tour. The Foreign Office were very good to us in the Embassy, I should say, feeling perhaps that as we had worked our socks off for so long, we deserved a break. I was told I could take a week or two off in Bariloche in Argentina, a lovely high resort in the Andes mountains, while the staff were also given time to recover and relax after all the trauma of the kidnapping. So after two years in Uruguay, I went back to London on leave.

South East Asia Department, FCO

I then went back to the Foreign Office, to South East Asia Department. I knew nothing about S.E. Asia, or the languages. Bill Squire was the Head of Department and I was his Assistant so I told him I didn't know anything about the countries I would be dealing with so it might be a good idea if I could get out there. He agreed and nominated me as the U.K. Delegate to a SEATO Conference in Bangkok, which lasted a month. In that time I got to know a bit about Thailand. On the way back, I called in at Rangoon and got to know a bit about Burma too. After a year in the Department, I was posted abroad again.

High Commissioner, Uganda, 1973-76

In September 1973, I went to Uganda as acting High Commissioner. My predecessor, as High Commissioner, did not know Africa at all. I think it was his first African posting and he had welcomed the appointment of Amin as President - as many others did - in place of

Obote, who'd been the first President, and who had a pretty bad reputation. But he then fell out with Amin, which wasn't difficult! It was thought Amin was about to expel him. To avoid this happening, he was recalled by the Foreign Office and, after a suitable interval, I was sent out as Acting High Commissioner to hold the fort and try to get some compensation from the Ugandans for the British Asian businesses they had expropriated.

One of the first broadcasts I heard on the radio when I got to Kampala, was the military spokesman, i.e. Amin, being quoted as saying that the British were about to invade Uganda and that all Ugandans should be aware that parachutes might be dropping at any time, and that they should take precautions and have their guns at the ready. So I rang up the Ugandan Foreign Office and said: 'this is absolute rubbish, the military spokesman is talking absolute rubbish, we are not doing anything of the sort.' I had an immediate summons to the Command Post (Amin's Office) where Amin, i.e. the military spokesman, had his headquarters. He had me on the mat in front of him and said: 'What do you mean by this?' I said: 'well, I'm only telling the truth, the British are not going to invade this country. If they were, I would have known about it and you would have been told.' He said: 'Oh yes, ah well,' (I noticed he kept a picture of the Queen on the wall behind him) 'thank you for telling me that.' He was quite polite. That was our first meeting.

I was there for nearly three years and our relations with Uganda went up and down. One minute we were the blue eyed boys, the next minute we were being threatened with expulsion. On one occasion, more than half of my staff were told to get out within three days, and I was left with a very small High Commission. That was the kind of thing that happened. But equally, I hadn't been there more than a month when I was invited to some great do (Amin was fond of having great, big parties). When I arrived at the reception, he treated me very courteously, saying: 'come along, come and see what's going on.' He had been asked to give an exhibition boxing match in the middle of a huge crowd of cheering supporters.

He was a Jekyll and Hyde kind of character: one minute charming (he charmed many U.K. visitors, like Judith Listowel, who wrote a book about him) and then a killer. He was the first Ugandan to become an officer in the King's African Rifles having been the brightest recruit the King's African Rifles had ever had and the best Under Officer. He was also an extremely good athlete despite his height and weight. He could run, box, play rugby, so at first, he was

quite popular with his people, despite being a Muslim from a minor Nilotic tribe in the North East of the country.

When he kicked out the Asian business community, before I arrived, it had been a very popular move because they'd been lording it up and down the streets of Kampala in their saris and in their Indian shops while the Ugandans were really dirt poor in comparison. However, once they had been kicked out, the Ugandans who took over and started trading in their place, did not have the required experience, so it was not a very good move economically although popular with the people.

Amin had been in charge of the army when he had taken over from Obote, his predecessor as President. And having got rid of Obote's corrupt Ministers and promoted the Permanent Secretaries (who were British trained and extremely good) in their place as Ministers, all went smoothly for a time. But when he started being devious, and wanting to do all sorts of tricky things, which his Ministers, the ex Permanent Secretaries, didn't approve of, things started to deteriorate. Some of them, knowing I had served as a Permanent Secretary in Basutoland, came to ask me to intervene with the President on their behalf. I had to explain that was something I could not do. The upshot was that Amin kicked them out and replaced them with Army Colonels who knew nothing about civil administration. From then on, the Administration gradually wound down and became pretty corrupt, and Uganda became more and more of a basket case, having once been the jewel in the Colonial Service crown. Then, after Amin had been in power for a couple of years, the killings started.

Amin used to be very frank with me, he would ask me to come and see him about something and then explain how loyal he was to the Queen, how he loved the Scots, they were great soldiers, and if people were not with you, they were against you, and if they were against you it was either you or them, so you would have to kill them. Once he told me, after his third wife had been killed in an 'accident' that he'd just got a new young wife: 'You should come and see her,' he said, 'she's a great beauty.' He was very frank about all sorts of things. For instance, he told me on another occasion how it was he had become President. He said Obote, Uganda's first President, was very jealous of him and his popularity as Commander in Chief of the Army, and was afraid he, Amin, might try and take his place in a coup. So he arranged to have Amin killed while he, Obote, was at a conference in Malaya, and the blame could not be put on him. The plan was that Obote would telephone his Secretary in Kampala

when the killing should take place. As it happened, Amin said, he was in Obote's office in Kampala when the telephone rang. Amin picked up the phone and Obote, at the other end, thinking he was talking to his Secretary, said: 'OK, you can kill Amin now,' or words to that effect. Amin just said 'yes,' put the phone down, and proceeded to make arrangements to take over the government!

I should also mention the case of Dennis Hills, the man who wrote a book about Amin. He called it 'The White Pumpkin' and somehow people in the Government got hold of a copy before it was published. Dennis Hills, I may say, had a pretty unsavoury reputation among the white community in Uganda. His wife had left him and he used to go round the brothels supposedly getting background for a book he was writing about Uganda. A copy of this book was found by the Ugandan police and it referred to Amin as a tyrant, a dictator who ought to be removed. The police showed it to Amin who ordered Hills to be arrested on a charge of treason, which carried the death penalty. So Hills was arrested and held in custody awaiting the death sentence. As he was a British subject I was instructed by the Foreign Office to make a demarche with the other diplomats in protest. It didn't have any effect, of course, on Amin, as we knew it wouldn't, but the British Government insisted we do this.

Then, the Foreign Office decided to send out a delegation consisting of Amin's former Commander in the King's African Rifles, a General, with a Major, both of whom knew him well, carrying a message from the Queen asking that Hills be released. When they arrived Amin kept them waiting for three days, eventually receiving them in a large, thatched rondavel miles away in the countryside. The entrance to the rondavel was so low that they had to enter on their hands and knees. Amin had arranged for photographers to take pictures of them entering. Having humiliated them in this way, Amin sent them back empty handed. The next step in the drama was the arrival of the Foreign Secretary himself to come out and talk to Amin. This, of course, is what Amin had wanted all along.

Jim Callaghan, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, arrived in Kampala one evening and I took him straight to see Amin in his office. But Amin didn't appear. Three of his Ministers saw him instead. Callaghan took a strong line saying something like, 'I have come here to get Hills; I want Hills released now.' After about half an hour it was clear that we were getting nowhere. The Ministers were saying in effect that it was ridiculous to expect the Ugandan government to release him after what he had done. So I took Callaghan back to my

house and he said: 'Phew, I've torn it, haven't I? We won't get anywhere now.' I said, 'Let's wait until you see Amin.' The next morning we were told by the Ugandan government that we should go to Amin's office. So we went, and sure enough, there was Amin sitting at his desk: 'Come in, Foreign Minister,' he said, 'very nice to see you,' or words to that effect. Callaghan said he had come to get Dennis Hills who, he understood, had been sentenced to be shot. As he was a British subject, he had to intervene. Amin said something like: 'Oh, Dennis Hills, yes.' And turning to a soldier nearby, he said, 'fetch the man, will you?' After a few minutes, Dennis Hills suddenly appeared through the door. Callaghan looked astonished. Amin said that if he wanted to take Hills away, he could. So Callaghan had achieved his aim. And so had Amin, by bringing the Foreign Secretary to Uganda. Amin then said to Callaghan 'Before you go, I would just like to show you around the town. Come with me.' He took Callaghan out of his office, downstairs and into his Maserati. They then roared off, by themselves, at great speed. Callaghan's bodyguard and staff were all left behind. Amin drove him all round the town, telling him what a lovely country Uganda was etc., that everything was fine, he loved the Queen. And then brought Callaghan back. Later that day, Callaghan left Kampala with Hills and they flew back to London. The result of all this was that diplomatic relations with Uganda were restored. I was instructed to present my credentials as High Commissioner and everything was hunky-dory with Uganda again.

A lot of other things happened in Uganda which I've missed out. For instance, I was summoned on one occasion when our relations were particularly bad to go and see the President immediately at Lusira Prison. I was to go alone. Lusira prison was where executions usually took place! I sent a flash telegram to the Foreign Office saying they might not see me again and then went off alone to this prison. It was a long, lonely walk. When I arrived, there was Amin with all his staff. He was perfectly civil. Apparently he had forgotten all the stuff he'd said before about shooting the High Commissioner. That was just one incident, the sort of thing that happened while I was there. On another occasion, when relations were really bad, I was invited with my wife and other members of the diplomatic Corps to meet the President at a remote spot in the jungle outside Kampala. When I got there, I found a stage had been set up in a clearing in the jungle, with an awning over it. Under the awning sat Amin, dressed as an Arab Sheikh (he was of course a Muslim from the Nilotic region of N.E. Uganda, unlike 90% of Ugandans, who were Catholic.) Beside him sat the Cardinal Secretary of State, who was on a visit from the Vatican. Before them, in serried tiers of seats, set in a semi-circle facing the stage, sat the distinguished visitors, Permanent

Secretaries, senior Army officers and civil servants. In the front row sat the Diplomatic Corps. There must have been several hundred. And in the aisles stood armed soldiers with their rifles. My wife and I took our seats in the front row. Amin then began to address the crowd. It consisted of a lengthy tirade against the British. After about ten minutes of this, I said to my wife; 'we had better go, we can't stay and be insulted.' So we got up, under Amin's nose as it were, and started the long, or seemingly long, walk out. As we went up the aisles, lined with armed soldiers, I expected to be arrested at any moment. The relief when we got to my car was immense. The following day the Cardinal called on me to apologise, saying he had been expecting to say Mass on the dais! Some of the other Ambassadors also let me know how appalled they were at Amin's behaviour.

That was one of the good things about the diplomatic corps in Uganda. It was small but united. Even the Russian and Chinese Ambassadors were friendly and supportive. The former would give parties at which the vodka flowed freely and he danced about while his wife shouted; 'sit down, you old Bolshevik.' I was sorry when I heard much later that he had been recalled and executed. The Saudi Ambassador, too, gave parties for his colleagues at which, despite being a strict Muslim, the alcohol flowed freely. The Chinese Ambassador had no English so he would only give lunches with an interpreter between himself and his guest (usually only one, but with many minions scuttling around.) He, too, was supportive.

Another incident occurred while I was there that I think illustrates Amin's astuteness. It was a time when our relations were rather poor. One Sunday afternoon, there was a knock on the door of my Residence. My wife answered the door and there was the President! 'May I come in?' he asked. My wife felt she could do no other than agree. So in walked this enormous man, followed by a whole host of Army officers, some carrying TV cameras. After congratulating us on our splendid house Amin said; 'I see you have a swimming pool. Shall we have a swim?' I felt obliged to agree. So Amin and I got into the pool and he said; 'I'll race you to the other end.' Again, I felt obliged to agree. So off we set, I being careful not to get in front of Amin!

While we were in the pool, the Ugandan TV reporters were filming us in the water. And that night Ugandan TV showed the film explaining it showed how friendly Britain was to Uganda. Needless to say, the British press, and possibly TV, got hold of the pictures and in

no time at all I was in deep trouble with the Foreign Office who wanted to know what the hell I was up to!

One last incident might be worth mentioning. Amin had a keen eye for a pretty woman and there was in Kampala at that time a very beautiful woman, a Princess Bagaya. Amin 'persuaded' her to sleep with him and as a reward appointed her his Foreign Secretary! She didn't take long to go on an official trip to America - and didn't come back, taking up a career I believe, as a model instead! Eventually, after I had been made High Commissioner, things went relatively smoothly and I was told that I could go on leave.

While I was High Commissioner to Uganda, I was also concurrently Ambassador to Rwanda, a French speaking country. My French wasn't all that brilliant so the Foreign Office agreed I could do a month's French course at Villefranche while I was on leave. I went down there in June 1976. Towards the end of that month, a message came through to me from the Foreign Office that the Israelis had raided Entebbe. I left Villefranche immediately and drove hell for leather across France to the Foreign Office in London where I was told that Arab terrorists had hijacked a plane flying from, I think, Cairo and had come down at Entebbe Airport to refuel, with a whole lot of Israeli passengers on board. The Arab hijackers had told Amin that they wanted the Israelis kept at the airport but didn't mind if the other passengers were released. So Amin kept the plane under guard, herded all the Israeli passengers into a part of the airport where they were kept separately under guard.

Israel had once been very supportive of Amin and had done a lot for Uganda by way of development, but they had eventually fallen out with him and left. So the Israelis knew Entebbe pretty well and quickly organised an audacious rescue mission. They sent a plane from Tel Aviv with a company of Commandos on board which flew directly to the airport in Uganda at dead of night. The raiding party was commanded by Netanyahu's brother, a colonel. He led the raid, which was brilliantly organised. The plane landed on the far side of Entebbe airport, very quietly at dead of night so the Ugandans were not aware of it until the raiding party got close to the airport. But then something happened, a shot I think, and all hell was let loose. The Ugandan soldiers on guard at the airport started firing and the Israeli soldiers returned the fire. It didn't last very long but the airport was shot up, Netanyahu was killed, and a lot of Ugandan Air Force planes were destroyed. Anyway, the Israeli passengers were rescued, all except for one, a woman called Mrs. Bloch, who had got a fish bone stuck

in her throat when she was eating in the airport. Amin had been very concerned about her and arranged for her to be taken to the hospital in Kampala. In the course of the raid, the Israelis forgot about, or did not know about, Mrs. Bloch, who was left in the hospital. So from the Israeli point of view, it was a very successful raid. They went back to Israel with the hostages, but for the Ugandans, who'd lost all their planes - everything had been shot up - it was a disaster. They felt murderous about anything or anybody to do with Israel.

When I got back to London from my French course in Villefranche, the raid was over. Officials told me that one of the passengers on the hijacked plane was Mrs. Bloch, an Israeli citizen who had been travelling on a British passport. She had been taken to the hospital in Kampala and had disappeared. My Consul in Kampala had made enquiries, as she was a British subject, but could not find out what had happened to her. So I flew off next morning, back to Kampala, and went immediately to see Amin in his office, and asked him what had happened to Mrs. Bloch. He looked absolutely distraught. He said he didn't know what had happened to her. 'The Israelis came here and shot us all up, what do you expect? The whole town's gone mad, anyone with anything to do with Israel might well have been killed.' I said that if they couldn't find her, we were probably going to have to break relations with Uganda. He replied, in effect: 'What can I do?' So I flew back to London and reported to the Foreign Secretary who decided that we had better break relations with Uganda. I took the view that it would be a pity if we did because we now hoped to get compensation from the Ugandan government for all the Indian shops that had been taken over. And also the remaining British Community in Uganda would feel even more at risk if there was trouble and no High Commission to turn to. But David Owen took the view that we should break relations with Uganda. So we did. I went back to Uganda briefly to collect some of my personal belongings and left Eustace Gibbs, who was in the middle of an inspection, in charge. I then went on leave.

I had quite a long leave while the Foreign Office was deciding where I should go next. I was told that the only two Head of Mission posts available, and for which I was suitably qualified, were Montevideo as Ambassador and the Falklands, as Governor and Commander in Chief. I said I didn't think I wanted to go back to Montevideo again after all the dramas we had had there and as for the Falklands, I said I had five children who would find it very difficult to get to the Falklands for holidays, so I would rather not go there either. I was then told by P.O.D. that I would have to go somewhere as Consul-General. There was a choice between Calcutta,

Durban and Cape Town. I did not particularly want to go back to India but after my time in the High Commission in South Africa, I knew that Cape Town would be both interesting and enjoyable. P.O.D. agreed I could go there.

Consul General, Cape Town, 1977-80

The Consul General's office at that time was situated away from the High Commission in down town Cape Town so opposition politicians were able to come and see me without coming to the notice of the government. It was a time of change in South Africa. The black population was still disenfranchised and subject to the strict laws of apartheid but becoming increasingly restless. The Embassy/High Commission still had to conform to the apartheid laws, which meant that the High Commissioner could not entertain blacks and coloureds and so get to know their leaders. But these restrictions did not apply to me in the Consulate, so I was able to get to know a number of them well and give them some encouragement. Indeed, I was on my way to meet one of them, Steve Biko, at a secret destination, when I heard he had been arrested. He died in custody. I have no doubt he was killed by the Police. Those whites working for change also found the Consulate was a good channel for getting letters and messages out of South Africa which would otherwise have been censored. Namibia, or South West Africa, as it then was when mandated to South Africa, was also out of bounds to the Ambassador, so I made a point of visiting the country and writing a report on the situation in Windhoek.

When the six month Parliamentary Session ended in Cape Town, the government moved to Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, and with it most of the Diplomatic Corps. This meant that the Consul-General became the sole British representative in the Cape. That in turn meant that I met many more South African Ministers, parliamentarians, business men etc. who either had homes in the Cape or were there on business. My impression was that in general they were fair minded, God fearing men, who really believed that to give the vote to all blacks at that time would quickly lead to chaos in South Africa and that Verwoerd's policy of apartheid, whereby the blacks would be given their own areas (the Bantustans) where they could run their own affairs, was the best solution for South Africa's racial problems at the time. I met very few whites, even in the Opposition United Party, who believed in universal suffrage in those days.

Another bonus of being in Cape Town at that time was that we in the Consulate were able to help Ranulph Fiennes with his preparations for crossing the Antarctic on foot for the first time.

All in all, I quite enjoyed my time in Cape Town - certainly a lot better I think than the Falklands would have been, although I should say that the retiring Governor of the Falklands, when he passed through Cape Town after six years in post, said he loved the place and would gladly go back!

At the end of 1979 I went on leave before taking up my next post as Governor and Commander in Chief of Belize.

Governor and Commander in Chief, Belize, 1980-81

When I arrived in Belize (formerly British Honduras) it had been a colony for a long time, and had already got internal self-government. There was a Premier, who was responsible for internal affairs, while I as Governor, looked after foreign affairs, defence and internal security. The Premier was George Price, a man who had originally intended to be a priest, a Jesuit, I think. He was very devout, getting up at 5.30 every morning and going to Mass in Belize city before going to his office. When I visited him in his house, I noticed that his bookshelves were full of the English classics. In other ways, he was typical of the mestizo population of Belize, having ancestors that were Welsh, Spanish and Creole. He was bilingual in English and Spanish. The Creole (black) population of Belize did not trust him and favoured Belize remaining a British Colony. Price himself had been Premier for some fifteen years when I arrived and desperately wanted independence. He thought the British wanted to keep Belize as a Colony. I quickly disabused him of that idea and said I would work to bring about independence as soon as we could be sure the Guatemalans, who claimed Belize as part of their territory, would not just walk in when we left. The only thing preventing them from doing so until then was the presence of British troops in the country. But what would happen when we left on Independence and Belize was on her own? I took the view that once Belize was independent and a member of the U.N. the Guatemalans would think twice about invading it, so it was a risk worth taking. As things turned out, when independence did come, we kept our troops in Belize as the territory was ideal for jungle training. I believe it is still used.

The troops under my command consisted of an Infantry Battalion, a Squadron of Harrier Jets (which kept crashing) a Troop of Artillery and a Destroyer, which patrolled off the coast. The Brigade Commander would fly up in his helicopter from his HQ in Belize City every week to give me a briefing on the situation on the frontier with Guatemala, where we had patrols keeping an eye on the Guatemalans. I flew to the frontier myself a couple of times to inspect them. And on one occasion, when a Troop of the Royal Horse Artillery was about to be relieved, I was asked by the Commander, who knew I had been a Field Artillery Officer myself during the war, to fire the last round. I still have the shell case as a door stop in my house!

But going back to the question of independence, the first step was to get the Foreign Office on side. The department that dealt with colonial affairs was not in my view any kind of substitute for the old Colonial Office. It did not even seem to know the difference between an Ambassador and a Governor. A Governor, for instance, has the power of life and death - not something academic in the case of Belize. I remember soon after I got there, a court case in which a murderer had been sentenced to death in the Belizean courts, came before me for confirmation. I personally was against the death sentence, but I felt as there were no extenuating circumstances I had to follow precedent. (It caused me many sleepless nights.) Nor did the Department seem to know that a Governor is the Queen's representative, not the government's representative. That is why he is greeted with the national anthem, 'God save the Queen' on official occasions and all stand.

The department was inclined to think of Price as the head of the Government in Belize. Anyway, having got the Department on side, it was agreed that Nicholas Ridley, the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, should come out to discuss tactics with us. When I told George Price, his immediate reaction was to say *he* would meet Ridley in *his* office; I had to remind him that as Governor, it was my responsibility and if he wanted to be present at the meeting, he would have to come to *my* office. He rather reluctantly agreed to do so.

When Ridley came out and was told that the Guatemalans claimed Belize as part of their territory and would protest strongly at what we were proposing, he thought the best tactic would be to offer the Guatemalans a slice of Belize in the west of the country, which would give them access to the sea - something the Guatemalans desperately wanted. The idea was

of course anathema to the Belizeans. I felt it necessary at that point to ensure the Foreign Office was on side and did not take Ridley's proposal forward, so I flew home to brief the P.U.S.

To cut a long story short, the negotiations with the Guatemalans continued, both in Belize and at the U.N. in New York, with many ups and downs. Ridley could not have been a better negotiator. On one occasion the Guatemalan delegation came to Belize armed. We had taken the precaution of having a few soldiers on hand and I still remember Ridley's bodyguard standing nearby with a revolver during the negotiations, looking for all the world as if he was about to use it when the Guatemalans got a bit excited. Ridley remained calm throughout.

As we got near the end of the negotiations the Creole Opposition in Belize city became more and more concerned and eventually riots broke out. As I was miles away in Belmopan, the capital, I asked the Brigadier in Belize city to keep an eye on things and let me know if I needed to intervene. By the time he did let me know things had got out of hand and I had to declare a State of Emergency – not something I was very happy about, but it did the trick. From then on it was a short run to the Independence celebrations, which we had to organise in record time. Prince Michael of Kent came out as the Queen's representative with his beautiful wife. They stayed with us in Old Government House for a few days, relaxing in our swimming pool and being taken around by my wife.

When the time came to haul down the Union Jack and raise the flag of Belize, the newly independent nation, the Premier George Price, now Prime Minister, made a great conciliatory speech.

That was the end of my time in Belize doing a job more fitted to my original career in the Colonial Service. I don't think I have ever worked so hard, 12 hours a day every day. Occasionally though, at the weekends, when I was able to take the Governor's launch out to the Cays, and spend the day snorkelling in the crystal clear waters of the barrier reef, it all seemed worthwhile. Before I left, the Foreign Office asked me to consult George Price on whom he wished to nominate as Governor General on independence, pointing out that it would be normal for the Governor to succeed to the role, which would bring with it a knighthood and GCMG. George Price, as I thought, wanted none of it and after lengthy

deliberations, nominated a prominent Belizean woman as the first Governor General. I cannot say I was disappointed. Now, some 35 years later, and at the age of 95, I consider I was lucky to have served in such places as Belize.

You asked about the difference between the way the Colonial Service operated and the Foreign Office. I found there were quite a few differences. The Colonial Secretariats all followed a particular line or format. You wrote a minute and you sent it to your superior, he would initial it, take a decision or pass it up. In the Foreign Office, I was a bit confused, it depended on who was dealing with the question. You didn't have to send it to the next chap. If it was the Deputy Under Secretary who was dealing with it, you sent it direct to him. I didn't know who the hell was going to take a decision when I first arrived. So that was one thing that was quite different to Colonial Service procedure. Also we minuted on ordinary minuting paper. I was told in the Foreign Office that, if your Minute was going to a Deputy Under Secretary, it had to be on blue paper! Yes, you had to have two copies, one on blue paper. Oh, for God's sake. That was another difference in the Foreign Office. What other differences? Well I thought the Colonial Service was more efficient and logical than the Foreign Office and a lot more conscious of cost. But they were all brilliant people in the Foreign Office, no doubt about that. The Third Room, where I started, was a hum of activity all the time. You had to be dictating or writing minutes with two other people doing the same thing beside you. It was a bit foreign to me. And the Diplomatic Service of course spend much more time in the office unless you are in an Embassy and going out to parties every night! In the Colonial Service you had periods in the Districts where you were out on horseback trekking a lot of the time or in court, dealing with cases as a Magistrate, or in the office dealing with administrative matters. So it was very different in many ways. Procedures were basically the same I suppose. But both Services in my view were very worthwhile, interesting and enjoyable.

AM: James Hennessy, thank you very much.