

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

Sir (Henry) David (Alastair Capel) Miers, KBE 1985; CMG 1979

Born 10 January 1937; son of late Col R D M C Miers, DSO, QO Cameron Highlanders, and Honor (née Bucknill). In 1966 he married Imelda Maria Emilia, daughter of Jean-Baptiste Wouters, of Huizingen, Belgium, having two sons and one daughter.

Career Details (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Entered Foreign Office, 1961	pp 2- 3
Reporting Officer UNGA 16 and UN Department FO, 1961-63	pp 3-12
Tokyo, 1963-65	pp 12-22
Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies, 1965-66	pp 22-24
Ventiane, 1966-68	pp 24-34
Private Secretary to Minister of State, FO, 1968	pp 34-38
Paris, 1972	pp 38-43
Assistant in Energy Department, FCO, 1975-76	pp 43-46, 48
Counsellor, Tehran, 1977-79	pp 49-73
Head of Middle Eastern Dept, FCO, 1980-83	pp 74-78
Ambassador to Lebanon, 1983-85	pp 79-102
Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Middle East, FCO, 1986-89	pp 102-107
Ambassador to Greece, 1989-93	pp 108-120
Ambassador to the Netherlands, 1993-96	pp 120-130

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR DAVID MIERS KBE CMG**RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY ABBEY WRIGHT**

Copyright: Sir David Miers

AW: It is 9th September and this is Abbey Wright in conversation with David Miers recording the recollections of his diplomatic career. David, thank you so much for your wonderful CV and notes, you've done just about everything! You have such a broad base. Perhaps we could go back to the beginning, you entered the Foreign Office in 1961, what made you decide to do that?

DM: I lived in the north of Scotland and didn't have much contact with the swinging world of London and the South. My father was a soldier. I didn't have a clear idea about a career or any profession that I was being directed towards and so I took advice from friends who were also considering their careers. I was with a group of people at school and university many of whom thought that joining the Foreign Service might be an agreeable thing to do. Of course some of the considerations turned out to be completely false. One was that you were quite well paid! But I don't think that in retrospect we were particularly well paid although when you were abroad you were certainly paid enough to do your job and save a bit.

There were many considerations. There was quite a stiff exam you were supposed to pass, a bit of a challenge. You felt that if you passed it and joined the Foreign Service, in those days anyway, it was quite a decent thing to have done so that if you wanted to change your mind and were offered other, more attractive careers, your entry to the Foreign Service would be a good thing on your CV. You could travel. One forgets that in those days the era of cheap travel hadn't arrived and it was quite an adventure when I was a school boy to go abroad. People wanted to travel. My parents had both served abroad, so I quite wanted to see the world.

The public service ethos was also influential. In those idealistic days one thought one might be able to do some good by placing one's services at the disposal of the community. I was also told that it was a secure employment, which it was I think, and you got a pension at the end of it. I don't think anybody thought the pension was a particularly lucrative one but actually now that pensions are collapsing, it's a good thing to have.

When I was at university there were friends who had joined the Foreign Service and when I talked to them they seemed to think it was interesting. They were sent abroad to learn a language and they seemed to regard it as a challenging and an interesting career.

I did the exam and I was accepted and found myself in the Foreign Service and was never under any strong temptation to change course.

AW: Did they still do the “country house weekend” selection for your entry or was it the exam and interviews?

DM: There was a thing called Method One and Method Two. Method One was the Victorian exam where you got something very similar to your finals as a university student to do. This has been replaced, I think since World War Two, by a thing called Method Two which was quite wrongly called the “country house weekend”. I didn’t do that at all. Method Two was a set of interviews and group tests which were done at a civil service office in London, I forget exactly where. Nobody was the least bit interested in whether you had good table manners or not!

Reporting Officer UNGA 16 and United Nations Department FCO, 1961

AW: So after you arrived, you did an induction course? It looks from your notes that you went straight off to the United Nations?

DM: Yes. The induction course was rather a brief affair and I don’t remember much about it except that we had an extremely urbane retired Ambassador as chairman. He leavened the thing up because some of the new recruits were a bit on the serious side. He let them understand that *trop de zèle* was not actually a diplomatic requirement! It was probably apocryphal, but he described how when his father had joined the Foreign Service, as it still was in those days, he’d been quizzed by *his* father on his first day. He had said “We don’t have to arrive before ten o’clock at the earliest because the boxes aren’t in from Dover before then. Then we are expected to have a decent break for lunch and then mull things over. We come back and when the Secretary of State goes down to the House of Commons we get released quite early in the evening, and so it’s all very agreeable.” “I don’t know about that” said his father, “It seems to me that it cuts into the day a bit”. So with little anecdotes like that he leavened the proceedings.

We were introduced to lots of things that were not particularly new and were not technical but were meant to give us a bit of a grounding. I had to leave early because I had to go to New York to help out with our delegation to the UN. I think they normally took two people who were completely new entrants, to go off to New York to gain experience. I found it very informative and very instructive and also rather exciting because for someone who hadn't seen very much of the world we were suddenly told we were going to have a cabin on the Queen Elizabeth, cross the Atlantic, go to America which was in those days regarded as an El Dorado to some extent. When I was a student there was the America Club and everyone was encouraged in the long vacation to get themselves to America, earn some money and cross the States. It was a different planet in some respects so it was very exciting for a young person to do all of that. I learned a lot at the United Nations.

AW: You were a reporting officer for UNGA 16. Who did you report to?

DM: The idea was that there were six committees and the main plenary session of the General Assembly that were all going on simultaneously. Countries had to staff all of these six committees and some of them were quite controversial. These two new reporting officers would sit as a British presence through these sessions, particularly the plenary which consisted of a long series of Heads of State or Prime Ministers or Foreign Secretaries of the Member States all coming in and delivering their set piece speeches for about two months. So someone had to be there in case they said something important. The regular members of the delegation and the members of the United Nations Department who had been sent out with us as a supplementary reinforcement were all quite busy on the actual technical questions. We couldn't be there so we sat listening to what went on elsewhere. Of course this could have been incredibly boring but luckily there was a press service which was doing exactly the same thing. So if you missed a bit, or fell asleep, you could nip along to the press section and see what you'd missed. You then composed a telegram which you submitted to the officer who was supervising us. He was a delightful man. He was a nephew of Clement Attlee. He was a Desk Officer in the United Nations Department and he was responsible for us and made sure that what we wrote was sense and relevant.

A lot of it was about the decolonisation programme and we, the British, were being attacked over Rhodesia, our support for South Africa, apartheid and all of that. General de Gaulle had recently declared, in the past two years, that all the French colonies in Africa were to be independent countries. This had caused a bit of a stir. We were going through our own

possessions rather more methodically but there was a certain amount of criticism and acrimony, particularly in relation to Rhodesia, which I mentioned. We used to have to listen to all of this and there were some quite exciting events.

Once we had a speech to the General Assembly from the South African Foreign Minister. The place was pretty empty and I was actually sitting in the United Kingdom's seat. He was called Mr Louw. He made a speech which was rather provocative. He said that all the African countries were critical of South Africa but if it was as bad as they said, why was there such an influx of people wanting to come to South Africa and be maltreated. He said that the place used to be much emptier than it was but had been very largely filled with Bantu tribes who had immigrated into South Africa and were still coming. So it couldn't be that bad, and they had a democratic process, and he went on like this. You could see that the Africans in the audience were getting increasingly restive and at the end of it the Representative of Niger, I think it was, leapt up on a point of order and said that he thought it was such a disgrace to the General Assembly and its proceedings that this speech should be expunged from the record. This caused a terrible stir and the representative of the United Kingdom was asked how we were going to vote! I was saying, just hold on a minute, we must all calm down a bit and luckily there was the most marvellous man who happened to be in the auditorium who was the representative of Australia and he leapt up and said "I think it's rather rash to suggest that anybody's contribution be expunged from the record because people disapprove, so I think we should all adjourn for lunch and reassemble after an interval when people have been able to consult more widely, ask for legal opinion and that sort of thing." There was a sigh of relief from the more serious participants and we all went off for lunch. Of course afterwards people came flooding in wondering what was going to happen and we had to explain to our bosses in our Delegation office what had happened. After lunch they agreed to passing some sort of motion saying that they didn't approve of what he had said. It was all resolved.

There were diplomatic parties to go to. I tried very hard to be polite, constructive, eager and responsible at these parties. I remember addressing a very large gentleman who was swathed in African robes of one kind or another, hanging loosely around him. He asked me what I did so I explained I was a junior official in the British Delegation. We had a talk about the proceedings of the UN and then I asked him what he did. He said "I am the Nigerian Foreign Minister"! I discovered that he was referred to by his friends and colleagues as the unmade

double bed because of the voluminous robes he had. It was curious how you could find yourself in all sorts of situations.

New members kept arriving. We had the representatives of Outer Mongolia who were admitted for the first time to the membership of the UN which was the result of a great shift. There had been a complicated deal under which the Representative of Outer Mongolia had been vetoed by China because they were communists and the Russians had been vetoing the admission of Mauritania for some reason at the behest of Morocco. It all related to China. China was represented by the regime in Taiwan in those days and they couldn't have Mongolians in, and the Africans were now saying they would no longer support the American thesis that Taiwan were representatives of China, ie they would vote against acceptance of the Taiwan regime's credentials as representing China, unless they agreed with the Russians that both Mongolia and this African country be let in. Morocco was objecting to the arrival of Mauritania. Anyway this deal was done and suddenly we had new members including Mauritania and Outer Mongolia. There we were watching the arrival. The Foreign Minister of Outer Mongolia was called Tsevegmd Dondogynn. He spoke in Mongolian. Nobody could understand in the slightest what he said. What you did if you were going to speak in a language that wasn't one of the official languages of the UN, you provided a translation of the remarks in one of the official languages. He provided a translation in Russian and so everyone was listening to the Russian interpreters reading at what they thought was an appropriate speed. But they came to the end of their text long before Mr Tsevegmd Dondogynn had finished. So we surveyed him in a rather ill-fitting blue suit as he went on addressing this august body in guttural monosyllables. Everyone was switching their translation controls to see if there was any language coming through and sniggers began to break out. Eventually the monologue finished and everyone could clap politely. It's the sort of absurd things like this which you remember!

I always thought that we should do knitting. It was incredibly boring sometimes and why not? A means of keeping yourself productively occupied. I discovered that the Russian Minister of Culture, who for some reason was part of their delegation, was also an advocate of knitting although I don't think she ever did actually knit!

The other thing which quite amazed me was that they all started late. No UN meeting ever began at the announced time. They were a minimum of twenty minutes late. This was resolved at a later session, at which I wasn't present, by a marvellous gentleman who was the

Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, called Zafrullah Khan. He insisted that everything began on time and rapped his gavel and asked who was first up and if the person wasn't there he missed his slot and they moved on to the next person. As a result he finished the whole thing by the beginning of December where previous sessions had dragged on, threatening resumed sessions after Christmas.

It was a great experience to be there and to get used to multilateral diplomacy.

AW: And the British Delegation, were there interesting colleagues?

DM: Yes there were. They were extremely instructive. Pat Dean was the Permanent Representative and he was assisted by Hugh Foot who later became a Minister in the Wilson Government and then back to the UN as UK Representative for the Labour Government.

We had a number of people including Alan Campbell, who was the Head of Chancery and went on to be Political Director and our man in Rome. We had John Cambridge, an Arabist who became our man in Kuwait and there were some interesting representatives who were brought in for the session. For instance Roger du Boulay, who I think was actually posted in Washington at the time, was brought in as our African Liaison Officer. We had in the delegation an African Liaison Officer and a Latin American Liaison Officer who were supposed to make friends with these delegations and persuade them to turn out and vote for things which were important to us but of no interest to them and keep them in the picture on difficult subjects like Berlin, disarmament, nuclear testing which were all important from the Cold War point of view. They were very useful because they hung about like we did and were talking to people, what nowadays would be called networking, although it hadn't been invented in those days! Watching them operate and listening to how they operated was extremely useful. There was a delightful chap called Fordham who was brought in as our Latin American lobbyist. He was a diplomat of the old school. He looked like a pre-war chap with a smart moustache, properly outfitted suits and so on. He was the most delightful man and you could see all the Latin American delegates thought he was the perfect model of a British diplomat. They all wanted to get their suits made at the same London tailor! Watching him and Roger operate was very educative.

We used to have a meeting every morning at which the Permanent Representative Pat Dean would brief everybody on what was going on regarding the replacement of Hammarskjöld who'd been killed in the Congo. The Russians felt that he hadn't taken their interests

sufficiently into account and they were against having a single Secretary General, they wanted to have a troika of three equal Secretary Generals. This of course was hopeless but they had to be beaten back slowly, and eventually through these negotiations which went on day after day they were persuaded that they would accept a single Secretary General but with three Under Secretaries. Sop to them. And the person they chose was U Thant. But the process of arriving at that was explained every day to us by Pat Dean.

The Indians took over Goa while I was there. There was a sudden meeting about what on earth was to be done because it was pretty unprovoked. It was Portuguese territory and the Portuguese were not terribly open to negotiation about the decolonisation process. But eventually it was a *fait accompli*. Krishna Menan was the Indian Defence Minister and he also represented India on key committees at the UN. He was very hostile to the West and he used to make sympathy if he could with the Russians on Cold War issues. He was very funny because he had tremendous presence and would sit there in the First Committee unbriefed and be quite unashamed. Most people were quite correct and tried to make their speeches coherent and well-formed but he used to ramble on saying to an underling “Where are my notes? Give me my notes.” He didn’t mind at all being unprepared but he had a mind like a razor, extremely sharp. It was an education to watch him.

We had an address by President Kennedy, by Nehru, and lots of important world leaders, very instructive for a young diplomat, so I learned a lot.

AW: You get such a sense of the great when you are watching them, live? So much better than a broadcast, just being in the same room ...

DM: Yes that’s true. Also it is a great privilege just to have been in the same room, particularly when President Kennedy was killed, it had been a privilege to hear him make a speech. He had very good speech writers had Kennedy, he made very good speeches.

AW: So then you moved from being a reporting officer at the UN to being a UN political desk officer....

DM: Yes, so I then joined the United Nations Department back in the Foreign Office. At the end of the General Assembly which was supposed to last three months. It always starts, I think, the second Tuesday of September and is supposed to finish before Christmas. In our case we needed to get back to the desks in London and on with ordinary business. We

finished in December and after Christmas I joined the United Nations Department in London of which I think I was technically a member already, and told to work on the Specialised Agencies under the supervision of David Burns who was the Desk Officer for this. After I'd been taught by him how to write on one side of the page and leave the left hand margin free for anybody to write in their balloons, and how you stuck things together with india tags and not with paperclips, I was then the Desk Officer for the political bits of the UN that weren't anybody else's responsibility. We had a special desk officer dealing with decolonisation and Africa, but I was the desk officer for things like who was going to be the next President of the General Assembly, who we were going to vote for to be the non-permanent members of the Security Council, what you used to call the Slate, and all those kind of things. I was also responsible, which was a bit of a surprise, for making sure that the next delegation to the UN, the 17th in 1962, had a brief written for every single subject on the agenda. This was all very well for Commonwealth subjects because you could ring up a delightful man called Barry Smallman and ask him to write the brief for this or that part. The problem of Gibraltar was put down by the Spanish every year, and luckily Gibraltar was dealt with by him. Then you could ring up the Treasury who were very keen to keep charge of their business, UN money, and they would write the briefs for that. But you had to make sure there was a brief for everything even though it might be pretty superficial and everybody knew that the business would develop as it went on. We had to get ninety or so briefs put together. The most difficult one of all was the Sixth Committee of the UN which was legal questions. I rang up the UN Department's legal adviser who was called Francis Vallat and then he was succeeded by Ian Sinclair. So there was me one of the most junior people in the whole of the Foreign Office required to persuade the Legal Adviser to write some briefs. "Oh we never write" they said "we only advise". I said that I couldn't draft over a complicated legal constitutional question at the UN. They said that of course I could. So I would struggle and write briefs and I would give it to them and they would say "That's fine, no problem, excellent"! It was absolute rubbish because I had no legal experience at all but they knew, which I didn't, that nobody was going to take the slightest bit of notice at all. It was vaguely in English, made sense, had a main verb, so it was acceptable.

We had to do Development briefs. Now that was controversial because in those days there used to be a big argument, I suppose there still is, about whether contraceptives were an appropriate subject on which to spend aid money because the Muslim world and the Pope were against contraceptives but most enlightened people in Britain seemed to think spending

money on helping the developing world to acquire contraceptive capabilities would help solve the problems because even then people were worried about the food supply. What was the British position on this? Well the answer was that it was highly difficult and we didn't have a position on it, but D Miers had to write a brief on what our position was. So I managed to string sentences together saying "On the one hand, and on the other"!

Nowadays there is a very powerful Ministry dealing with it, DFID. In those days there was the Department of Technical Cooperation but they weren't in a position to write briefs on participation at the UN. They were basically providing technical aid.

What I learned was that you wrote something and then you sent it round and you had to get clearance. I learned a lot about government bureaucracy. You had to get it round in good time and give them deadlines for their replies and create balloons in the margins and then it all had to get typed out again. In those days there were no computers but you had to get hard working young ladies in the typing pool to retype all these things again and again. Things got produced on Roneo skins and then they were churned out. So the actual mechanics of being a desk officer was quite a business.

U Thant was now new so he came round on a tour to see everybody and he came to see the Foreign Secretary. I was the desk officer for the UN so I was drafted along to sit at the meeting of these great men and make a note of what was said and afterwards submit it to the Private Secretary. In those days they used to do a thing that said Present, the Earl of Home, and all the rest and then D Miers, and on the other side U Thant and all his acolytes. So I sat there busily scribbling away. The Earl of Home got lower and lower in his chair talking to U Thant. I was electrified by it. They were talking about the Congo. U Thant was very earnest. I think that somebody in one of the provinces of the Congo, called Katanga, had arrested the complete UN army that had been sent there. It was composed of a battalion of Irishmen who had been arrested by this chap called Tshombe who was a dissident. All the wealth was in this breakaway province and this was what caused the problem. The United Nations was saddled with sorting this out and it was how poor old Hammarskjold got himself killed. The Earl of Home said to U Thant "Of course we all know that nobody in the Congo is fit to run a village post office but nevertheless we've got to try and sort this out". I didn't know whether I was supposed to write this down or not! Anyway I did my best and I sent the draft round to the Private Secretary saying "Here is my record". He rang me up and said "This record you've produced ..." and I said "Yes I've done my best" and he said "But it's

not coherent, you've put down the Foreign Secretary as saying "What about the Congo?" I said "But that is what happened". So the Private Secretary said "Well what did he say? It's no good saying he asked about it, he must have said something about it". So I said "You'd better ask him if you want to change the draft", so I got a bollocking for not being sufficiently precise about what the Foreign Secretary had said! But I'd used his very words.

The other thing that happened was that dear old Clement Attlee was still alive as Lord Attlee in the House of Lords and he put down a motion saying that we should have a world government. I was sent down to the House of Lords to be the chap who sits in that funny little box perched at the end and you are allowed to occupy what was called, and probably still is, the "space behind the throne". You sat there and of course the Foreign Secretary was extremely respectful to ex-Prime Minister Attlee. Although he allowed people to know that he didn't have much respect for what he was saying about world government, nobody was going to be the least bit discourteous in the House of Lords. I wrote this brief saying world government on the whole is going to be quite difficult! They really didn't need the brief at all but they had a very gentlemanly and civilised discussion about whether it was or wasn't possible to have world government.

You had some experience of how Cabinet ministers actually dealt with problems, it could be brusque, it could be relaxed, but it was quite different from the way it was handled at a lower level. The Foreign Secretary, when he was first appointed, made a famous speech about the UN in Berwick on Tweed, which was near where he lived up in Scotland. Normally if you wanted to say something new or controversial you were supposed to write a Cabinet paper and submit it for discussion by one of the Cabinet committees who would then endorse it. But the Foreign Secretary didn't believe in too much bureaucracy, he just made a speech in Berwick on Tweed which immediately became the policy of Her Majesty's Government! Again, a great introduction to how government could be done!

There was another occasion when I submitted a draft reply to some question which had been sent in and which the Foreign Secretary had to answer. We were all used to writing in those days "Sir, I am directed by the Earl of Home to acknowledge ...". It's all changed now but it was a bit of a cheap thrill to write "Sir" etc. This reply had been written in some haste because it was needed quickly and it wasn't looked at properly by the Assistant in the Department or by the Head of the Department. It was quite a routine matter, I can't remember quite what it was relating to, and it wasn't terribly well drafted, but it went through

with the magic red H at the bottom of it and so it became the official text to which all subsequent letters on the subject had to conform. The fact that it wasn't very well drafted or very coherently argued was of no importance as it had the magic H and it went through!

I also had to write a draft letter for the Foreign Secretary to a gentleman who wanted the support of HM Government for the use of Esperanto. So I wrote that as it wasn't actually spoken by anybody it was going to be quite difficult to teach it and all sorts of reasons why it might not be positive for the Government to adopt for easing the world's problems. I submitted this draft and the Foreign Secretary crossed it out and wrote "It is not the policy of Her Majesty's Government to support the use of Esperanto as a world language as the Government doesn't believe the pursuit of Esperanto is a sensible way of increasing inter-communication of governments around the world. If there is to be any language to be more widely adopted by other governments as a means of international communication it is the opinion of Her Majesty's Government that English should be used!" This went out with the red H at the bottom!

AW: So you were in the UN Department for about two years ...?

DM: Yes, I was there for two years. It was a very good first posting. I was seeking to learn Spanish because we were all supposed to learn a language when we joined the Foreign Service. I was hoping to be sent to Latin America because there are lots of countries there, big ones and small ones, cold ones, warm ones and lots of pretty girls and it was the place to be. So I wanted to learn Spanish and I was all set up to go off to Madrid for three months to learn Spanish. Other friends had already gone off and done it and they said they would keep a good slot for me.

When they rang me up to say they had a posting for me and to come and see them at two o'clock, I said "Come on, you can't leave me in suspense over lunch, I will come at two o'clock but tell me what the posting is". They said "We are sending you to Japan come and see us at two o'clock but Japan is what we have lined up for you". So I put the telephone down in a bit of a huff but my friends who were in the Third Room said "You can't possibly turn down a post in Japan, it's a marvellous place to go". I said "But it's miles away and I don't speak Japanese and my parents wouldn't be thrilled if I came home with a Japanese wife whereas in Latin America there are lots of eligible Catholic girls I could marry!" But

they told me I was daft and I couldn't possibly turn down a post in Japan and that I could learn Spanish any time and I should go to Japan because it's the country of the moment.

Tokyo 3rd, then 2nd Secretary, 1963-65

So I went round to the Personnel Department and they said they wanted me to go to Japan and I didn't have to learn Japanese because they had plenty of Japanese speakers all teed up there but that they needed one or two amateurs in the Embassy and I would be dealing with the Japanese Foreign Ministry officials all of whom speak excellent English and would be discussing with the Japanese lots of international questions which they thought the Japanese should be drawn in to discuss, like the ones I had been dealing with in the United Nations, and I must go out there and have this posting. They said I probably wouldn't do a four year posting because that was for the Japanese experts but that I would do a two and a half year posting. I was told it was a privilege for me and that I shouldn't argue about it and I could learn Spanish when I came back.

I prepared to go to Japan and I was allowed to go to by boat!

AW: How long did that journey take?

DM: It was five weeks! It was a very slow boat which was half cargo and half passengers. There were two of them and they belonged to P&O and they'd previously been used for the Congo, steaming backwards and forwards, with ore for Belgian industry. They had cabins on board for the Belgian officials. So P&O got these boats from the Belgians and were employing them on the Far Eastern route for people and cargo. It was very agreeable.

I had a new motorcar and the motorcar was going to go on the boat with me. It was put on top of everything else so it wouldn't get squashed. Every time we came to a port the first thing that was unloaded was my car! I looked out with extreme trepidation, on the docks of say Penang, fearing they would drop a load of tin on it! It was an open top MG because in Japan they have long winters with no rain and lots of sunshine so I was told it would be a good car to have. I was able to drive it around for a week or two in England first and then onto the boat. When they were unloading it at every port, it swung about so I looked at it with huge concern! When it was off the boat they loaded up, tin in Penang, tea in Ceylon, and then they put my car back on top.

When we got to Japan they unloaded it and I thought I would be able to drive it up to Tokyo but no, it had to be licenced and registered, Customs, and all that sort of thing.

There wasn't much exercise on the journey, and you eat too much, so by the end of it I was quite glad it was over.

AW: Yes a long time to be at sea?

DM: Yes it was like the old days. When people were posted in the past they went off for long postings of two stints of three years and then they had six months leave in the middle because all these trips took such a long time. You had to have a long posting and one long leave to minimise the number of journeys. Air travel was coming in but these privileges were written into the terms of service and their erosion was obvious but it took a bit of time and negotiation.

There were two other members of the Embassy on the boat, one just posted but with prior experience of Japan and one going back after their leave, and they were able to tell me a bit about what we were in for at the other end.

AW: How did you find it when you arrived? The Japanese economy was taking off?

DM: Yes, it was the place to be. No fewer than three of my exact contemporaries as schoolboys were also posted to Japan at the time. One was working for BP, another was working for the Financial Times and the third for J Walter Thompson, the advertising people. It was quite a coincidence all four contemporaries as schoolboys finding ourselves in Japan at the same time, but it was symptomatic of the interest that had suddenly been woken in Japan and the Japanese were very keen to make their way back respectably onto the world stage. They staged the Olympic Games and the year before that they staged the annual meeting of the IMF as a kind of trial run. So it was definitely on the map. Also we were very keen on trade. In those days there used to be a sterling crisis about once every two years. The Office's answer to the sterling crisis was to export more. We were all encouraged to be keen on exports and commercial work. The Embassy in Japan was extremely keen on this and we had a huge trade drive when I was there. Princess Alexandra came out for a British trade fair and we sent all kinds of ships and delegations to support this effort. The Commercial Department of the Embassy was quite big and important. Although I was working on the political side I was quite interested in the commercial work because the ethos of the Embassy

was to try and do more about this exciting economy that was clearly so vibrant and growing so fast. But it was quite difficult as the Japanese were quite protectionist at the time. Exporting whisky for instance, you were up against Japanese whisky and motor cars; the Japanese had a licence to make cars which were originally locally produced versions of cars made in Europe, Hillmans I think, and they had a rapidly developing car industry. There were therefore lots of things we couldn't export to them. They had, believe it or not, a huge balance of payments deficit on commercial trade so they were importing more than they wanted to. This was then balanced by American investment in Japan. The Americans were very prevalent; all the big American companies like NCR had Japanese operations, and the American pharmaceutical companies were big in Japan.

I found it rather funny, every new government that comes in, ever since I joined the Foreign Service, has said that we must do more to help our exporters and try and convince the Embassies to work harder to support exports! We have tried to do this assiduously for as long as I can remember. We still can't for some reason export goods around the world. The Belgians apparently export more to India than we do!

AW: Who were you there with? Who was your Ambassador?

DM: The Ambassador was somebody called Rundle who was thought to be a commercial pundit. He wasn't a Japanese expert, which was rather rare, but he had been the Consul General in New York and he'd been the Chief Clerk and because we needed to support this commercial drive, he'd been sent to Japan. I don't think we had done it before, or since, to send a non-Japanese speaking person. But he was very wise and a supportive Ambassador and he had some extremely able people working for him like John Figgis. He'd been Military Attaché after the War and he spoke Japanese. He wasn't a member of the Foreign Service, he was a contract officer I think and he was the information officer responsible for much of our drive to get our culture better understood and get the Japanese media to help with our export promotion fair. The Commercial Department was led by a chap called Harris and he was supported by some very able Japanese speakers at first Secretary level who were on their second tour in Japan. The Head of Chancery was Hugh Cortazzi who was a great Japanese expert and took all us first posters under his wing and gave us a lot of advice and instruction and also by example. Looking back it's extraordinary that somebody as able, accomplished, knowledgeable and old as Hugh Cortazzi should be employed by the Diplomatic Service then as a First Secretary! Indeed his next job was on promotion but he

was hugely more experienced and wise than First Secretary level. He was responsible for the work of young people who came into the Embassy, first for their two years Japanese study and then after their leave back for their second two years to actually work in the Embassy. So there was quite a group of young officers and there were also the people on their first tour, who were learning Japanese. I think there were three or four of them building up a cadre of Japanese Foreign Service experts so that we would always have enough people to staff the Embassy. It was very noticeable how professional and good at their various jobs everybody was.

I had a very interesting time because the young Japanese Diplomatic Service officers in the Gaimu-sho, the Japanese Foreign Ministry, were all very keen to have contacts in the Embassies and their contact in our Embassy was me. I became quite close friends with a lot of these people. The Japanese plan at that time was to send their new entrants into their Foreign Service abroad, rather like us, to learn a foreign language because for the Japanese all foreign languages were hard languages. English was probably the one they were most keen to learn and also Chinese which was easier for them because they had the characters although not the language. Japan didn't have a relationship with the Chinese because they were still under American influence and obliged to pretend the Chinese Government lived in Taiwan. So they were desperate for news. We had an Embassy in China, so the Japanese were very keen to glean from us what was going on there. And of course we also had a big staff in Hong Kong. They had a Consul General in Hong Kong which was as near as they could get to China. So we had a very good relationship with the Japanese in discussing China and it was one of the subjects where we could helpfully have a dialogue.

We also had the confrontation going on in Borneo. Sukarno was trying to take over North Borneo. He was seen off in rapid order by some Gurkhas who we let loose in the jungle! Politically it was difficult for the Japanese to be seen to be siding with the colonial power except that the Malaysians were dead keen for them to understand that they were not for being taken over by Sukarno. I'm not sure what relations they had with Indonesia at that time but they were very careful and used to send senior party members from the ruling party to Indonesia to talk to Sukarno so we couldn't accuse them of having ministerial talks with the evil man. And all of that had to be managed quite delicately so I had quite an interesting job.

Reverting to what I was saying earlier about the young Japanese diplomats, they'd all be sent to Britain, America, France, Germany or Russia to learn languages and some of them were

sent to MECAS to learn Arabic. When they came back having learned their language, they had their first, or possibly second, job in the Japanese Foreign Ministry but they were very much encouraged to keep up their expertise. We used to have a lot of their young diplomats who'd been sent off to America or to Britain to attend university and I remember that when I was a student we had some of them at my college in Oxford. So all these people wanted to be friends and practise their English with us. It was rather unusual, normally in the Embassy you are not expected to go and cultivate the Foreign Ministry but these young people wanted to cultivate me and my friends. But my friends weren't encouraged to because they had to speak Japanese so they were discouraged from hobnobbing too much with young Japanese Foreign Ministry officials who only wanted to speak English to them!

I was not supposed to be learning Japanese although I did learn some. Japanese is a very easy language provided you don't have to deal in the abstract. If you want to buy a bus ticket it's an absolute doddle, "I want bus ticket". But if you have to explain that you want a season ticket for options to travel twice on certain days, that's very complicated and requires great expertise. I hugely respected the language skills that our people had. They had to not only learn how to handle abstract ideas but also to read Japanese which is a mixture of Chinese and add-on Japanese characters. Then there is the hugely complicated business about shortenings and abbreviations which they had to master. After our people had two years study they then worked in the Embassy and they needed to because if you wanted really to get alongside the Japanese it was only the Japanese who dealt with the outside world that were fluent in English. The major part of the population and particularly some of the older people in senior positions didn't speak English.

We became really quite close friends with these young Japanese diplomats; we used to get asked to their weddings. I remember that going to a wedding there would be a grand dinner at which there would be a lot of interminable speeches which being an amateur in the Embassy, I couldn't understand. What was impressive was that the Japanese all sat without moving a muscle during all these speeches, no fidgeting, moving about, lighting cigarettes, they all sat absolutely impassively. I thought it was very interesting and wondered why the Japanese were so disciplined and lacking in impatience, although they can be very impatient and vigorous when necessary. But it's a facet of Japanese society which is quite different from Western society and one tried to understand it a bit.

They used to invite me to a weekend cottage which belonged to the Foreign Ministry but which individual diplomats could take. They liked playing bridge. So we'd go off and spend the weekend together and it was possible to talk to them quite openly about their culture and their habits and the difference between East and West. They welcomed this as they were trying to develop expertise in foreign cultures.

We were very privileged because in those days, can you believe it, there were 1000 yen to the pound. It went a very long way. We all had motor cars which were quite rare for Japanese as individuals; it wasn't yet a motor car owning society. So we could drive off for fun weekends and easily book quite expensive, but not for us, weekends skiing. We had quite a big group of foreign friends who we could do things with. Climbing Mount Fuji in a group of disorganised foreigners rather than a disciplined Japanese group! There is a certain weekend, towards the end of the summer, when there is a festival to climb Mount Fuji. There would be 30,000 Japanese on Mount Fuji as well as us, so quite crowded!

So I had a very interesting time and learned about the many different aspects of diplomacy and about exports and trade promotion and also cultural promotion. We had a very active British Council there with a very active and open Director and I used to enjoy talking to him. My experience has been that the British Council people always have a very interesting take on the local cultural scene and a different angle from the one that Embassy people pick up. I always found being close to the British Council a very wise policy. They sometimes get looked upon as a poor relation of the Embassy but this can be quite an advantage and being a lower profile they actually have an insight and entree which the Embassies don't enjoy. I also thought that the British Council's policy to recruit local employees was much better than our Embassies. They have more loyal, better informed and more useful local staff that we seem to manage to collect.

AW: And the Olympic Games took place during your time?

DM: Yes, you could apply for tickets and go and watch. The British team came. I had one friend who was a member of the British hockey team. He showed us around the Olympic Village and gave us the inside story of what it was like being a competitor in Japan. I think its right to say that this was the first time a country had made a huge thing of the Games and spent a lot of money using the Olympic Games as a way of improving its image and becoming a more respected member of the international community. They put up very

exciting new buildings for it. They built a grand stadium and, rather like we did here, they had a very interesting take on the architecture and style and design. They had some magnificent buildings which were much commented on. They also made an advanced artistic film about the Olympics, some things done in slow and some in fast motion. They produced an Olympic coin.

We all went to watch the opening and closing ceremonies and I applied to watch the basketball, the pole vault and some of the judo. To get a ticket for the judo finals was rather difficult. It was very embarrassing for the Japanese. Judo was in its infancy as an international sport and everyone expected the Japanese to win the judo. But everybody knew that the heavyweight final was going to be won by an enormous Dutchman called Geesink who would just pick up his opponent, put him on the floor and sit on him. I'm exaggerating of course but he was a very fine judo wrestler and was the international champion.

Everybody was very concerned that the Japanese national champion was clearly going to be defeated by this chap and it would be a huge blow to Japanese national pride and how was it going to be handled. The Japanese were still in the situation where if a public figure let the country down, people wouldn't have been surprised if he committed hara-kiri. Nobody expected this to happen but there was a slight worry that this might be such a humiliation that somebody would have to make a public apology for it. Geesink, being a delightful man, was hugely popular in Japan because he took the trouble to become friends with all these people. He also was popularising judo around the world. Years later when we were in the Netherlands and told to go and lobby for the games to be held first of all in Manchester and later on in Birmingham, Geesink was the Netherlands representative on the Olympic Committee. Because we'd had this Japanese experience we were able to invite him to dinner and talk about Japan which he was still visiting, and solicit his vote.

I wanted to see the basketball because I'd seen it on television with the Harlem Globetrotters, though I think they were professionals. However the Americans were extremely good and I wanted to see it live. I also saw some gymnasts rushing about and that was an eye opener because I didn't know you could do gymnastics in any other way than what we'd all done very boringly as schoolboys, swinging about the parallel bars. Seeing these people doing the floor exercises, which was more or less ballet, and bouncing about on rings and the extraordinary things they did on the vaulting. The pole vault was the most amazing feat of human acrobatics. We had a rather glamorous half mile athlete who got a silver medal.

AW: There must have been some VIP visitors?

DM: Yes I suppose we did but I was so junior in the Embassy that I didn't have to worry about them. But we did have the splendid chap who appeared in the film "Chariots of Fire", as Lord Andrew Lindsay, actually Lord Burghley, but he was looked after by the nobs.

AW: You mentioned in your notes the Embassy Squash Courts?

DM: We were all quite energetic in those days and we had a squash court. But the squash court had been erected before the War, in the 1920s I think, by subscription of its users, the Embassy personnel. There was a great Tokyo earthquake in 1923 which destroyed the neo classical Embassy which had been made of quite robust chunks of composite material. The earthquake had shaken all the tiles off our nice English style Embassy buildings and after a rain of firebrands the houses had all caught fire, so the Embassy had to be rebuilt. It was, but not the squash court, because it had been put up privately, the government didn't have an obligation to do anything about it. So the squash court was still a ruin when lo and behold a delegation consisting, I think, of three Royal princes, arrived to confer the Order of the Garter on the Emperor in about 1926 or thereabouts, because the Japanese emperor never ever left the country. The delegation were shown around the smart new buildings and I think it was the Duke of Gloucester who was leading the delegation and he asked why the building had not been repaired and it was explained that the Embassy personnel were saving up to redo it. He asked how much they wanted, whipped out his cheque book and wrote out a cheque! I am probably exaggerating here but it was with Royal patronage and support that the Embassy managed to rebuild the court.

After the War it had been used less and it was being used for storage and needed to have some money spent to get it going again. Then the young Duke of Gloucester visited, I think for one of the trade fairs, and we told him all about this and we asked him to tell the Department of Works about it when he got home. In fact we didn't actually need his help because Hugh Cortazzi, who was Head of Chancery, did a deal with the Ministry of Works man that the squash court could be repainted half on 30th March and half on 6th April and thus cover two financial years! So it was then redone and we founded a squash club with some money from the Foreign Office, who had just had one of those interminable reviews that said amenities ought to be better, and we had a brand new club. I was the Secretary of this and it was very instructive in terms of how to work the government machine and how much of your

negotiation is with your government at home on many important subjects! There were about half a dozen of us who played squash but we got some Americans and some Japanese people along too and we had a thriving club. In the nature of things, it's now probably a furniture store again.

When I was in Tokyo there was another big earthquake on the far side of Japan. It was a bad one but it was in a thinly populated area so there were hardly any casualties but it did cause us to wonder what would happen if we had one in Tokyo so we sent for the papers from the Foreign Office archive about what had happened in 1923 and see if there were any lessons to be learned.

It was very interesting reading the archive, there were two things which I remember. One was that the Ambassador was absent, the Chargé d'Affaires was in charge and he was just coming back from the Foreign Ministry in the Rolls Royce when the earthquake struck. He couldn't understand what was going on because the car tyres completely absorbed the shock of the earthquake but at the same time he saw trees falling down, walls collapsing, while the car continued up the road. We did have one or two casualties but they were mostly in Yokohama; but nobody was killed in Tokyo.

Another facet of it was that the Emperor was deeply concerned because Tokyo then caught fire because it happened at lunchtime when everyone was cooking and the houses all made of paper went up in smoke. There was a huge fire and I think about 150,000 people were killed in what became known in the Second World War as the "Firebomb Vortex", the fire gets so big that it sucks in all the oxygen and everyone is asphyxiated. There were huge casualties in a sports arena where people had congregated.

The Emperor sent round a note to all the Embassies saying how very sorry he was that under the circumstances it wasn't possible to maintain the level of hospitality that Embassies accredited to his court had reason to expect, and he very much hoped the enclosed contribution would be of some assistance. The enclosed contribution consisted of two dead ducks! He had them culled from the Imperial Duck Farm.

Every New Year there was the occasion of the annual Imperial Duck Hunt and Ambassadors were invited with two or three members of their staff. I went one year and it was rather exciting. What happened was that the ducks were all kept in a pond like the moat of the Imperial Palace and they got enticed up a channel which led off, the sides of which got

steeper and steeper. When it was about as deep as the size of a room, members of the court and the French Ambassador's wife in high heels, rushed forward with huge nets and as soon as they leant over the sides, the air was filled with huge clouds of flying ducks and they had to see how many they could catch!

This duck farm, or whatever arrangement they had for rearing ducks, had supplied the ducks for the Emperor to give out in 1923. The culture and the obligation of a sense of hospitality was such that he had to do this.

The other thing which was interesting was what the Chargé d'Affaires had been discussing when he had been at the Foreign Ministry. He volunteered it in his despatch. They were discussing requirements for the tram lines which the Japanese were about to install opposite the Embassy and that they should not make too much of a clatter but that the trams should discreetly transfer themselves to a line on the far side of the road. So they crossed from the middle to the far side, and returned to the centre, once they had gone past. We noticed it when we caught trams that they crossed over. Nowadays it might be thought to be because of security and lorry bombs. We were also discussing in 1963 with them the advanced tunnelling system they were putting in for speeding up Tokyo traffic. They were moving their Houses of Parliament and a huge amount of road repairs were going on. We wanted to make sure that when the tunnel was built to go past the Embassy, it would only come up on the other side of our buildings. It seemed funny, reading the archive that the Embassy had been negotiating on exactly the same subject in the 1920s. Embassies have to worry about their own domestic arrangements at the same time as matters of high international diplomacy.

So we had that scare, and I believe there is a seismic event in Japan about every twenty minutes, normally a little shudder, but one of these days there's going to be a big one.

Course at HM Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies, 1965-66

AW: You escaped Japan without being caught by an earthquake and returned home in the winter of 1965-66 and you took a sabbatical for a course?

DM: No, what happened was the Government had been told by one of their interminable reports that the public service was untrained and full of arts graduates who didn't know anything about the world and they didn't think enough people had economic training. We

were all to attend a four month course in a very nice government building in Regent's Park. It was a very civilised and agreeable course run by a Ministry of Defence chap and there was an assistant from the Treasury and also Peter Marshall from the Foreign Office, a group of three. We were about thirty with about half a dozen from the Foreign Service. It was quite useful in instructing you although if you were inquisitive you probably knew or had gathered quite a lot of what they taught. The really useful thing was that you met a cross section of your civil service contemporaries, all from the administrative grades of civil service entrants so you always had an entree into any government department ever afterwards. So you could ring up old "so and so" who had been on the course and ask him who was the person dealing with whatever you needed – for example "the future of electricity generation causing trouble in the EEC" and you would always find the right person to speak to.

We did learn a certain amount about the modern approach to the formulation of policy. Nowadays, as Ivor Roberts wrote his valedictory despatch on jargon everyone goes on about "owning processes". Well in those days there was a rather esoteric culture which they were trying to encourage us to adopt of a hard economic look, cost benefit analysis based on research and we were supposed to be much more hard headed in our attitude to what things cost. It was quite interesting to be exposed to this and being keen to get on and do what we could about exports, we were all receptive to this approach and to improve our financial performance.

It was quite interesting therefore when we did a little bit of foreign policy. We had a discussion about the Persian Gulf because the government was discussing, at that time, whether we should stay there or whether we should withdraw. The almost universal attitude of people on this course was that we should withdraw because it was costing us a lot of money to maintain our armed forces and ships and we were not getting any measureable benefit from it. Although you could say that it was helping to assure the supply of oil, people argued that it was an international market and if you couldn't get it from there you could buy it from somewhere else.

Tom Brenchley, who was Head of the Arabian Department at the Foreign Office, came to a discussion about this. He had been warned by Peter Marshall that he was going to get a lot of aggro from us, because we were all encouraged to be quite critical, about the costs of maintaining a military presence in the Gulf. He arrived and instead of producing arguments which were attuned to meeting our criticisms, he said "I'm not discussing this with you at all.

I haven't come here to discuss the costs, because the reasons we maintain our forces out there are entirely political. We don't want an upheaval in the Gulf, we have signed agreements with the rulers which are working very well on defence, security and international relations and they are responsible for running their sheikdoms and we don't want trouble between the Arabs and the Persians or between the Shi'a and the Sunni, we are getting the stability we need in an effective way and the reasons are unassailable".

He saw off this potentially disputatious group with a most masterly performance.

Not much else happened there except we spent four months having a rather good time. It was cleverly conceived, it kept us on our toes and we learned a certain amount about how the country was run, the procedures of the parliamentary programme, and the budget and how it was composed, The Queen's Speech, the machinery of running the country was interestingly explained which otherwise we would have had to assimilate gradually. It was worthwhile but as I say the most valuable thing was the networking.

Vientiane, Second Secretary Political and then First Secretary Commercial/Aid, 1966-68

AW: This is 17th September and we took a break after the end of your course at the Treasury. So, David, you are off to Laos. How did you learn about that?

DM: They told me that after the end of the course I would have some leave and then go to a French speaking post either in Asia, or possibly North Africa. I was rather keen on the latter because it was slightly closer to home as I'd lost touch with friends and family during my Japanese posting. But they told me I was off to Laos, to Vientiane about which I knew absolutely nothing. They said it would be a two year posting. In the middle of this, I got married, because I had met Imelda in Japan and we had to sort out setting off as a newly married couple to a posting which was different from going as a bachelor, and this had to be done quite hurriedly to fit in with the leave patterns in Laos.

We arrived as a newly married couple, more or less on honeymoon, in Laos! I think we had one day in Rome on the way as our official honeymoon. It was quite a different experience because in Japan, where we had both been, although we had not been married then, it was a very well organised, methodical and efficient country, everything was meticulously planned

down to how many steps a visitor would take on the red carpet for a State Visit, but in Laos you learned to live on the “alright on the night” principle and the Laotians were delightful people but not planners or terribly thorough.

You might ask what we were doing in Laos. And in retrospect it’s a rather good question! At the time the Ambassador was Fred Warner, a charismatic person, who had been Head of the South East Asia Department in London and this was his first post as Ambassador. We had the position of Co-Chair of the Geneva Conference which was the framework under which people were still trying to sort out the problems of Indo China. The French had been defeated at Dien Bien Phu and washed their hands of the place and the Americans had decided that Vietnam must be saved from communism. Laos was supposed to have a neutral government which was neither pro-Western nor pro-communist and it was headed by a member of the Royal Family called Souvanna Phouma who was a delightful, French educated senior citizen. What was actually happening was that this neutral government was struggling to maintain its position in that part of the country that wasn’t dominated by the communists and North Vietnamese. The Americans were fighting the North Vietnamese in neighbouring Vietnam and this war was spilling over into Laos and Cambodia but the international community was observing the provisions of the Geneva Settlement with a Commission, it had a French name, which was composed of Canadians, Poles and Indians who were supposed to go and investigate any breaches of ceasefire. Well of course there was a full scale war along the border where supplies were being ferried clandestinely through the jungle from North Vietnam to the insurgents in the south. The Americans were trying to stop this with bombing and all kinds of tactics and paying the hill tribes to try and frustrate the activities of the North Vietnamese who were in practice running this bit of Laos. It was a very messy situation.

We had the official position of Co-Chair of this Geneva Conference which was supposed to police the settlement and we were also under pressure from the Americans to join in the battle against the North Vietnamese in South Vietnam. The Australians had joined the Americans in this venture but we refrained from doing so on what I suppose would now be called the “no boots on the ground” principle. We didn’t want to get drawn into it and we didn’t believe that the Americans were conducting the war very skilfully. We thought that our own activities against the communists in Malaya had been much more successful which had involved smaller numbers of troops properly trained for jungle warfare and not using huge B52 bombing attacks to pulverise the enemy. It was of course a different situation, we didn’t

press our views. Harold Wilson's government was very keen on keeping us out of this. But in order to show some sympathy for the American objectives to try and stem the spread of communism in Asia, we mounted quite a substantial aid programme for such a tiny country as Laos, it had a small population mostly concentrated along the Mekong River, but it was a big aid programme. It was the early days of the history of international aid giving and we had a thing called the Department of Technical Cooperation which turned into Department of Overseas Cooperation, but it was still not a full Ministry. It was very much less than the DFID apparatus that we have nowadays. They were finding their way and many of the structures which are now quite common were in their infancy at that time.

I was sent out there as the junior Second Secretary Political working with Justin Staples who was the Head of Chancery. Because Laos was rather a remote country and people didn't want to serve there, we had several people who were there under contract who had previous experience of serving in South East Asia either in the British or the Malayan Civil Service in the post-colonial period. Some of these people were employed by the Department of Overseas Development, or whatever it was called, to work in our aid programme and there was quite a large number of British committed to this aid effort, a dozen people if you included the Embassy staff.

I think that Fred Warner was hoping to have a young Second Secretary who would be his bag carrier and ADC going around Laos, because he was a very active and good Ambassador. He was very energetic, charming and spoke good French and the Laotians and the Americans all liked him very much because they could see that he was a very effective operator. The French were a bit suspicious of the Anglo Saxon presence and were a bit aloof. I think Fred Warner was probably a bit disappointed that I got married before I got there because I think he was hoping to have someone who would not be worried about getting on domestically but be happy to make flights with him. We had an aeroplane which was flown by the Assistant Defence Attaché who was a delightful RAF Officer called Hogan. He would arrive for the dry period of the year and was at the disposal of the Ambassador to fly around to provincial places to see how our aid programme was getting on and play an active role in diplomacy. Driving about Laos was very time consuming because there were not many effective roads and they were quite dangerous because you could be ambushed by the Vietcong or the communists, the Pathet Lao as they were called.

One of our officers, quite a senior chap who was on contract and was nominally the Commercial Secretary, but was more or less in charge of running our aid programme, left and Fred Warner said to me “Why don’t you take on this job because you’re perfectly competent at it and it doesn’t need commercial experience because you’d be running the aid programme”. We had a team of doctors and we had a radio programme which was meant to provide the Laotian government with a broadcasting ability to help them to get understood. This needed coordination and some grip on the ground. He asked me to take this on and he then proceeded to recruit an extremely nice young man who the Foreign Office engaged on a contractual basis to come and act as the bag carrier that he’d originally envisaged I would be. This was a chap, who has been a lifelong friend, called Billy Whitbread and who was the son of the brewer. He had his own aeroplane! He was young, energetic and charming and when he wasn’t accompanying Fred Warner in his official aeroplane, he used to fly his own aeroplane around Laos. He used to be invited shooting by the army, quite good snipe shooting in the paddy fields. So we used to fly off on a Sunday morning in Billy’s aeroplane to fly up at the invitation of the Laotian army to shoot snipe in the paddy fields. They were very good shots, rather surprisingly, we couldn’t hit these snipe at all! Billy was a very conscientious aviator; he knew all about the checks to be made before you flew your aeroplane. Because there were lots of semi clandestine American airstrips built around Laos, where you asked no questions, and they welcomed you with petrol and told you what was happening, Billy was able to fly extensively around Laos and was a very agreeable extra member of our Embassy staff and is a friend to this day.

So I was transferred to be the Commercial Secretary. We had an artificial element of our aid programme which was to provide goods which were thought useful for development at the official exchange rate which was about half the market exchange rate and enabled the Laotians to buy these things at half price. So there was a job steering the Laotians to buy useful equipment, pumps and tools and machinery for their development, which they could buy if they got an export licence approved by this programme. It wasn’t difficult to do commercial promotion when your goods were available at half price. We could stretch this to cover things which we thought the Laotians could usefully have so I had quite a useful introduction to the world of selling developmental equipment.

There was an annual fair at which embassies were invited to take a space, and we organised, for two successive years, the most tremendous pavilion. One year was Massey Fergusson

Tractors that did a sort of Bath and West Country show heaving bales of straw around and another year people demonstrated pumps and Gestetner showed how to make copies of documents. It was tremendous and Fred got a bit of money out of the Committee for South East Asian Trade when he was back on leave for having our pavilion. The Department of Trade didn't want to know about us because we were, as far as they were concerned, a frivolous enterprise operating in a country where there was no money to buy serious British exports, and they thought we should be treated at an extension of the Thai market. That was fine by me because I was great friends with the Commercial Secretary in Bangkok, a chap called Arthur Watts. He was ex Malayan Civil Service and a most delightful man, had been in a bomber crew during the War and was an avuncular figure for me.

There was one export which we tried very hard to encourage, but on which again we were rather let down by Britain Inc. There was a huge import of gold into Laos and the tax on the legal importation of gold contributed about a half of the Laotian Government's revenue. What was happening was that the Vietnam War was being paid for in dollars and the wily Vietnamese wanted to covert these dollars into gold as fast as they could. In those days the American Government undertook to supply an ounce of gold to anybody who could produce thirty-five dollars. Can you believe it? The price of gold is now \$1400 an ounce! This was the American Government's way of preventing speculation in gold. All the serious members of the IMF and the International Banks had agreed that they wouldn't speculate in gold but the Laotians had special permission to do this. So this was all part of keeping the Laotian government alive. We also had a complicated programme under which we would provide foreign exchange for the Laotians while at the same time limiting the amount of liquidity that the Laotian Central Bank could create. We had a little committee to supervise this operation. There was a British chap called Fillingham who was the power behind the Laotian Central Bank to supervise this plan to limit the amount of local currency generated which could be exchanged for dollars. It all meant that there was a legitimate import of gold into Laos which was then turned into jewellery in the Vientiane jewellery market and a lot of it was turned into suppositories that you could smuggle into Vietnam! You were allowed to take in a certain amount but a huge extra amount was being smuggled. Even while we were there the American Government altered the price at which you could buy gold with dollars from \$35 an ounce to \$42 an ounce. So I said to the Standard Chartered Bank, who prided themselves on being first in and last out of Asian countries, "There is this amazing trade in gold which you should be participating in, why don't you come and set up here?" They looked all

embarrassed and said they didn't think that Laos was the kind of country where they wanted to be. I asked them about the motto of theirs and asked them weren't we supposed to be a country which knows about the gold trade, fixing a price in London? Earlier we had had a visitor from the Bank of England, and shortly after he left, the price went up to \$42! But the Bank of England was instrumental with the Americans in trying to keep the price of gold down. I suggested the same thing to the Hong Kong Bank. The legal bit of the gold trade was actually being managed by the Bank of Tokyo and the Banque de L'Indochine and these were the people who were shipping in a huge amount of gold. If you caught the aeroplane from Bangkok to Vientiane every flight had its gold consignment. Air Lao used working Dakotas and Royal Thai were operating a more modern replacement. They would have their gold stacked behind the pilot's cabin, an area of 10ft square, and the floor was covered with boxes of gold. The Dakotas couldn't put all the gold in one place because it was so heavy so there would be a box, like a shoe box, underneath every seat. When you got in one of these planes you would say to the person next to you "Do you know everyone is responsible for the box under their seat?" And they would come across this shoe box and say "This is full of gold"! Each box had four bars of gold, you couldn't move it, 12.5kg I think! I was always worried that someone might put a bomb on the plane to get the gold, but it never happened! But to give an idea of how much gold was coming in, every flight had, what, 20 seats on either side of the aisle, which is 40 shoeboxes of gold every day! So I digress a bit, but this commercial effort to try and persuade the British Banks to participate was never successful.

AW: Did you enjoy your new role?

DM: Yes it was quite stimulating because we had all sorts of eccentric people who volunteered to serve in Laos, either because they were misfits back in England, or they wanted to earn some money because they got quite well paid by the ODA as it was called. They were all very cross when the Foreign Office Inspectors came and cut our allowances, they didn't reckon the FCO Inspectors were anything to do with them and why should they, for example a person who had signed on for two years to be a doctor in Laos suddenly find that their overall package had been reduced. They were very miffed!

Our radio project, which was to provide the Laotian government with an effective broadcasting system, was staffed by people who had experience of working overseas. We

had some engineers from Cable & Wireless and also a team of doctors who had a clinic in central Laos in a place called Thakkek who were running a pilot project to improve public health. In those days we were trying very hard to get a sense of strategy because the doctors said “Here we are dishing out medicine but with no sense of strategy or of what will happen next”. The idea was that for every visiting doctor there would be a Laotian doctor to get a nucleus of medically trained Laotian people who would carry on when our people left. But this just wasn’t happening because the extent of Laotian professional training was very low.

In the whole of Laos there were seven wholly trained engineers! One was the Prime Minister, Souvanna Phouma, another was his half-brother, the leader of the opposition, Prince Souphannovong, sitting with the communists in the jungle, a third was running a French radar station in Algeria, a fourth was in France and where the other three were I don’t know! But you could count the engineers on your fingers. The idea that there were going to be counterparts was ridiculous.

The personalities were important. The Works Supervisor provided by the ODA in charge of the construction of the radio stations was a delightful engineer called Jimmy James whose last job had been building an airstrip on an island somewhere in the Indian Ocean called Gan. He understood about getting local workers in an undeveloped place to do work and he was very good at getting on with them. We had German participation. The radio station was being provided under the Colombo Plan which was a thing that the European countries and I think the Australians were members of. It was part of the overall strategy to increase prosperity and wealth in underdeveloped areas and defeat communism. The Germans were providing the transmitters. My German opposite number from their Embassy in Bangkok would come up from time to time and see how the project was going on. He had a bit of paper signed between Laos and Germany about these transmitters, from Siemens I think. He said “We must have two Laotian engineers to manage this.” They had a huge pylon on the ground with a right angled bracket. They put a pole into it and when they pulled on the pole the pylon was meant to pull up. They also had lots of wires that humans were pulling to keep it up and straight and get it over the angle of 45 degrees, so that it would go up. It reminded one of the erection of the obelisk in St Peters Square! So the German engineer came to supervise this and Jimmy James was there to try and help organise the local labour to do it. They got it up to 25 or 30 degrees and it began to wobble. The German engineer lost the plot

and started shouting at the people! They let go and it crashed to the ground. At St Peter's everyone had to be silent on the pain of death when the obelisk was erected so that they could hear the instructions. The thing began to slip and there was a sailor in the crowd in Rome, who shouted, at the risk of his life, "Water on the ropes, water on the ropes". They put water on the ropes and saved the thing, and got it up. But there was no one to save the Laotians and the thing crashed and the Germans were terribly cross! This was the kind of Ruritanian pantomime life we lived.

Our accommodation was pretty primitive but there were some nice houses on the banks of the Mekong. The gardens went down into the Mekong but I think someone put a fence up because we were vulnerable to burglars. It was like the Nile, I suppose, before they built the dams. The river went right up and then right down and it was incredibly fertile, people would plant vegetables, they would get three crops of vegetables a year. They left a little tongue of land opposite us because it was rather rude to go and plant vegetables opposite our house!

We did get burgled. We were burgled by somebody in a boat when the water was up. In the night I woke up because there was a noise going on in our house. We had an air conditioned bedroom. We had a small son, who had just been born, and we pulled him in his cot into our room every night and locked the door. The house was on stilts. I heard this noise so I got my shotgun out, loaded it, and snapping it shut woke Imelda who was very frightened. I said "shssh" and crept out into the passage which led into our big open plan living room. I couldn't see anything but I could see that there was stuff strewn all over the place. With my back to the wall I edged round. I heard a jaunty step of someone coming up the stairs and I thought this must be our locally employed guard. A chap appeared with a torch, he hadn't seen me, and I said, thinking he was the guard "Where the hell have you been? What's going on?" He jumped out of his skin and turned and fled down the stairs. I then realised this was one of the burglars and they were transferring our possessions into their pirogue, one of the long narrow boats which was moored at the bottom of our garden. I rushed to the staircase but didn't know quite what to do as I didn't want to shoot the chap. So I discharged the gun into the wall and I didn't do any damage to him. But this woke everybody up and some of our stuff was half way down the stairs, some already in their boat. What had actually woken me up was this chap trying to get our sewing machine out of the cupboard! It was very heavy!

The Polish people, officers of the International Control Commission, about half a dozen of them who were woken up when burgled, just machine gunned the burglars, but I was quite glad I hadn't tried to shoot anybody.

AW: Did they get away?

DM: Yes, they got away but the police were then alerted and it came out subsequently that they had been taking our stuff to an island in the Mekong, to the Thai side, and were going to collect it all having done some more burglaries later. There was a clash of pirogues in the Mekong when the Laotian police clashed with these people and they got back some of our stuff, but not the sewing machine which had gone to the bottom of the Mekong! They took a lot of our clothes and I had to wear my diplomatic uniform trousers and a shirt for about fortnight until I could get some proper clothes in Bangkok. But it was a very informal society to live in and everybody understood.

The Prime Minister would come to parties, obviously not those given by me, but he knew everybody, and his wife, who was French, had a Christmas party with charades and a play. She roped in me and some Americans and some French, to produce a play at Christmas. It was very informal and rather attractive. Every year there was a water festival called Pimai. Everybody was allowed to shower everybody else with water and if necessary throw them in the pond. The Prime Minister would appear at the top of his stairs with the most enormous pail of water! There were boat races. The British Laos Association would hire a boat for the boat race and furiously paddle!

AW: You mentioned in your notes the floods?

DM: Yes we had some floods. The Mekong flooded. The French had built a flood bank, a dyke around the capital. Every twenty years or so we were told the Mekong flooded badly and then would inundate the countryside to a depth of about a metre. In a live-for-the-day attitude they had driven roads through the dyke so when the river flooded it came in. It did last for some time and people were worried about there being disease and the water supply being contaminated as well as a lack of food. A huge aid effort was mounted by the

Americans. We got the RAF to bring up a helicopter from Singapore. We flew around making sure our aid programme people could keep operating despite the floods. None of it was damaged.

The Foreign Office said we could have a swimming pool so we built one but when the floods came it hadn't been tiled and it hadn't been filled. The supervising person was a sergeant from the Royal Engineers and he said "If you are not careful, this pool is going to pop out of the ground because the water is building up around it". So we had to fill it up and then we had a reservoir of reliable water. We poured in some chemicals and then we had a supply of uncontaminated fresh water. So we were able to offer people jerry cans of clean water, so the swimming pool turned out to be a jolly good amenity.

AW: You also mentioned that there was a failed *coup d'état* whilst you were there?

DM: Basically there was a civil war going on in the country and there were those who thought that the neutral government was being much too neutral. I don't know whether the CIA were involved, probably not, because the Americans thought having a neutral government was the best way forward, but there were those who thought it was a hopeless and feeble response to the communist threat. There was a General Ma who thought he could mount a *coup d'état* by bombing the military headquarters replacing the dead chiefs of the Laotian armed forces with his sympathisers. So one day we woke up to find these primitive post World War II bombers which the Laotians had, dive-bombing their headquarters. The charming Laotian boy who was our servant (he was probably in his forties but everyone called them "Boy") came rushing in saying "*Madame, Madame, c'est la guerre*"! It was all quite frightening for a short time but the bombs didn't hit their target and that was the end of that!

The people were interesting. Fred Warner was dynamic and enthused us all with his insight. We were a small and happy team. We had a delightful Military Attaché, Horace Moore who when taking a trip in this aeroplane we were borrowing, got shot at through his elbow. The aeroplane flew very slowly. It was a single-engined Pioneer and it could land across the runway rather than down it because it flew so slowly. You started it by discharging a shotgun

into its engine. It sounds rather unlikely but the pilot had a sandbag full of 12 bore cartridges which were especially designed for the plane!

It was all rather tragic because Horace Moore went off to Singapore to have his elbow repaired and came back with his arm in a sling. Just after he got better we all went up to Luang Prabang for the Pimai Water Ceremony. Luang Prabang was the royal capital and was on the border between the two bits that were controlled by the Pathet Lao and the Government. Most people went up by air because sometimes the road was closed but this time we went up in a military convoy. All the government and the diplomatic corps went up there and it was a very cosy party with beautiful dancing by the Laotian equivalent of the dancers you see in Bangkok and Bali. They lit up the trees with fairy lights. Horace was in a hurry to return back home and he got a place on the Dakota and on the way back they tried to fly down the river but there was a rainstorm and they hit a mountain. They were all killed, including Horace. Tragic moments as well as happy ones and we are still friends with Horace Moore's widow and family. We've kept up our friendships with other people who served there too, because it was an intimate group and very different from serving in a bigger capital which I did before or later on.

Private Secretary to Junior FCO Minister, 1968-70, Arabian Department, 1970-71

AW: So next you are coming home and back to the Office, working as PS for one of the Ministers?

DM: Yes, they brought me home to an FCO job because I was due a home posting and I succeeded Hugh Arbuthnot as the Private Secretary to one of the three or four Ministers of State we had in the Office. It was quite a new kind of job for me and I had to learn it as we went along. My Minister, Goronwy Roberts, was the most delightful Welshman, who couldn't have been kinder, more helpful or an easier person to be PS to. He was responsible for the Middle East and Eastern Europe. We had various journeys to these regions.

He had just been to the Middle East twice. It was very embarrassing for him and I think rather for Britain too. What happened was that the then Labour Government had a review

about whether or not it was going to maintain its position in the Persian Gulf where we had these Victorian agreements with the rulers to keep out foreigners. This was because it had been the route to India in those days. Anybody who wanted to establish a coaling station or have naval ships in the Indian Ocean was told to forget it and we told the rulers to cancel the stations and told them they were signed up with the British who would look after their foreign affairs and defence. The place got richer because oil was discovered and this then attracted a lot of international interest and our position was becoming increasingly anomalous and also expensive in terms of maintaining a military presence in the Gulf. India was now a separate affair and so people wondered what was the point.

AW: Yes, on your Treasury Course, this had been one of the issues you discussed?

DM: Yes, Tom Brenchley had seen our discussion off, saying it was of political interest and to forget about the cost. So the Labour Government decided it would stick with it and continue to conduct the foreign affairs and defence of these Sheikdoms which were not yet independent states. From their point of view this was not an unattractive option because they were threatened by Saudi Arabia and Iran and had border disputes with each other.

Goronwy Roberts was sent out by the Government to reassure them we would maintain our position and they needn't worry.

Within six months the situation entirely changed because the Government entirely reversed its position. I think it was probably economic, the Ministry of Defence was told to curtail its activities and the whole of our East of Suez policy was under review. Goronwy Roberts said that as he was the one who had told them we would maintain our position, if we were going to change, the honourable thing to do was for him to go and tell them of this and why. So he volunteered to go and do it and had gone out there with Hugh, his previous PS, and not surprisingly was regarded as somebody who was not reliable. So he was feeling a bit miserable about all of this and this was the situation when I joined him as PS.

It was an interesting introduction to the Middle East and also to Eastern Europe which was getting restive and required quite a lot of interest and attention. The work was very different.

We had an election in 1970 which, to the surprise of a lot of people, was won by the Conservatives and Ted Heath came in as Prime Minister. So the whole policy of the Middle East and the Gulf came under review again! Bill Luce, who was an ex Sudan Civil Service official who had served as Governor of Aden and Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, an immensely experienced Arabist public servant, and father of Richard Luce, who was eventually a Conservative Minister, was appointed as Special Representative to do the review and see if the previous Labour Government had come to the right answer.

But before the election, Goronwy Roberts had been moved from the Foreign Office to the Department of Trade and had been replaced by a delightful younger Labour MP called Evan Luard who was only a Parliamentary Secretary. He wasn't entitled to quite the same range of support as a Minister; he didn't have a car for instance. I stayed on as his PS and we got on very well. He had been a don at St Antony's; indeed he was the MP for Oxford. He was a UN expert. He would stay at his very comfortable desk in the Foreign Office doing his work. We would have to sit there with him. He told us not to be silly and to go home. But we said "We can't leave you, if the telephone rings we've got to be here". He said "Nonsense, everyone has gone home, I've got all my papers and I'm going to go on reading". We told him we had to lock up otherwise it was a security breach. He'd been in the Office as a young diplomat himself and even been to China and learned some Chinese, so he said that he knew the form about locking up the cupboards and told us to go home. Very reluctantly we went home and after a short interval he forgot to lock his cupboard properly and everyone came and complained! So he was then discouraged from staying late. But he was a very nice and sensible person. He died prematurely and it was a big loss to British public life, we were very fond of him. He went out to the Persian Gulf and I remember going with him. He was very realistic about the situation and knew about the mess that Goronwy Roberts had got into. At the same time he was treated with some doubt by the locals so didn't have a terribly good time of it. Being a younger man he was also quite an informal don-like person, and when he was told he had got to take a hat so he could take it off when the Trucial Scouts presented arms, he said that was ridiculous. I was also told by the Office that I must persuade him to buy a new suit. He said he didn't need one, thank you very much!

Julian Bullard, who was the Political Agent in Dubai, which was then still a separate Sheikdom, together with his wife Margaret gave a party in Dubai which was then just at the

beginning of its international development. Evan Luard came back from meeting one of the rulers and it was very hot and had been wearing the coat of this suit that he owned, and Margaret invited him to take his coat off to have lunch in the garden. He took the coat off but because the suit was coming to bits, the lining of the coat stayed on his arm. So Margaret had to spend the lunch interval sewing the lining back in! It was all very amusing and we all giggled about it! But it showed how Evan Luard believed in the informal approach to work.

Ted Heath's Government then got elected but he didn't appoint so many Ministers. So I had no job and I sat there with an empty office for a few days wondering who was coming to be my Minister. The answer was nobody. The Arabian Department of the Foreign Office, who was struggling with what they were going to do with the Persian Gulf, said that they needed some extra people and that I should go and work for them. Not being an Arabist, my job was to work on the relations with Iran and the problem of the oil concessions which the rulers had let there and which we had to approve. They were drawn up on the basis of Admiralty charts, some of which were pretty ancient. There was an island in the middle of the Persian Gulf called Abu Musa which the Persians said belonged to them but the ruler of Sharjah claimed it belonged to him. It had three mile territorial waters around it. The ruler of Umm Al Quwain had let a concession 9 miles off the island in what he regarded as his continental shelf but Sharjah then unilaterally declared 12 mile territorial waters, and there was a big argument between oil companies as to who could develop it all. It was a gloriously complicated business. Bill Luce's recommendation was that we should stick with what the Labour Government had agreed and sign new agreements with the rulers saying we would give them military training and assistance but we would no longer be responsible for their foreign and defence affairs. We encouraged them to join in a union which has since become the Union of Arab Emirates, which they did, with the exception of Qatar. The political agents which we had had, became Consuls under the Ambassador who was in Abu Dhabi. But the problem of dealing with the Persians, who claimed these islands, remained and it was extremely interesting because it required negotiation with the Persians and flying to Iran on two or three occasions.

Bill Luce had an assistant and bag carrier for all this work called Duncan Slater. But when the last bit of the jigsaw had to be put in place, which was sorting out the claims made by the Persians on the various islands which affected the oil concessions quite importantly, Bill took

me. We went to see the Shah, and it was very interesting for a comparatively junior diplomat to see all that. We came to an arrangement where Abu Musa was divided into two, the Shah occupied one part without either side giving up sovereignty. We agreed that Sharjah should get the oil revenue. Bahrain had been sorted out by Tony Parsons and had become a separate country and admitted to the UN by then. So it was a fairly satisfactory solution although the Arab countries still resented it. The oil concession may still be respected, but I'm not sure about that.

In the Arabian Department we then had to work out new relationships with the Emirates and the Gulf and focus on the considerable commercial opportunities which were arising and of course which other countries were keen to exploit too. We had the inside track to start off with. Again, the people one worked with were all extremely able diplomats. Apart from Bill Luce himself, who was the most delightful character, we had Tony Parsons who was the Under Secretary and masterminded the Bahrain settlement, we had Anthony Acland, who was Head of the Department, Stephen Egerton was the Assistant, and a number of the other desk officers went on to be Ambassadors, Tony Reeve, who went to South Africa, Duncan Slater in Malaysia and also Oman. It was very exhilarating to work in this quite professional and competent environment.

I think that's about it ...

First Secretary, Economic, Paris, 1971-74

AW: And you still haven't learned Spanish?

DM: No! Every time I was told I could learn it in three months at some later date!

AW: Looking at your CV notes, your French is going to become useful again?

DM: Yes. I learned some in Laos and passed the exam. I'd done about four years in London with the two posts in the Ministerial Office and then in the Arabian Department, and so they told me I was going off to Paris as First Secretary Economic. This was a very interesting job

because we had just joined the Common Market. Ted Heath was the Prime Minister and everybody was full of enthusiasm about how this was going to work and the French were excited and interested about the British joining. Up until then their chief partner had been the Germans. The Germans had not taken the bureaucratic structural part of the EEC as seriously as the French encouraged them to do. The French had played a key role in forming the outlook of the Commission and ensuring that French ideas about bureaucracy were adopted. French was the working language of the Commission at that time and the French wanted another country with a good bureaucracy, or so they thought, like ours to discuss with them a European policy on almost every single subject. My job was to deal with the French bureaucracy on EEC matters which was very interesting. The French welcomed our delegations in quite big numbers from various sources in the UK, to talk to their French opposite numbers about European policy about which we knew very little. What we were told in Brussels was very much what the EEC Commission wanted us to know because they were in the business of empire building and we needed to know what the prospects were for European policy, what the starting point was very often, and the French wanted to talk to us about that. So we had delegations from various ministries. The Department of Agriculture was very interested in what the French were doing. I had quite an important role to keep in touch with the French agricultural circles and get to understand about French agriculture which was regarded in Britain as a disgraceful and indefensible means of subsidising French farming at much too high a price! So one studied this and the French would then explain that France was two and half times the size of Britain but with a similar population and that unless the agriculture was subsidised there was a danger of large parts of France becoming depopulated. In those days there was a farm door banging shut at the rate of one every twenty minutes, or some such, like pubs in England now. This wasn't understood in London and even if it was, it was resented because it seemed as if the French had the whole of the EEC mobilised to pay for this French rural policy.

The French wanted to discuss with us over the whole range of government activity. For instance there was work going on to have a common transport policy and the big subject of the day was the permitted weight of lorries. During the interim period after we had joined but before the treaty was ratified, a period of about a year, we had the right to sit on committees but not to vote, so the French were trying to push through a rule on lorries. Our Ministry of Transport didn't know why the French were being so difficult and so keen to push this

through, nor did the French apparently! I went to talk to a lot of people in France and every time I did, I got a different reply! In fact there were a number of reasons why the French were keen to have heavier lorry weights and what actually mattered I discovered, was not the lorry weight but the axle weight, which was what produced the pressure on the road. It was important for us because we worked, I think, on the basis of ten tons of axle weight and the French wanted fifteen tons and it meant that a lot of our bridges would no longer be viable. It was a big argument and some of our bridges are still closed to this day. If you want to cross from Kensington to Olympia the bridge is narrowed off. There was another bridge near Victoria in the same category.

My colleagues in the French civil service were quite ready to enlighten me as to the real reasons and I was then able to tell London who were then able to get our Embassies to lobby other European capitals (eight of them in those days excluding ourselves). There was a lot of work.

We had to work out a European Company Statute that would apply in all countries. I still think we haven't properly delivered it. People thought in those days, and probably still do, that it should happen. We had the Secretary of the Institute of Chartered Accountants come over to talk to his French opposite number. It was extremely illuminating because it exemplified in quite a dramatic fashion one of the important differences between the French approach to government and our own. The French had a senior civil servant from the Ministry of Trade who spoke no English and wanted to know what the law was, so he could read in simple words what the requirement was for a company in Britain to have its annual accounts approved. What were the factors that led the accountants to sign off the accounts? Our representative started trying to explain and I found myself having to try to translate, it was quite arduous but everyone congratulated me on it! But I felt hugely better informed because what the French were looking for was a set of rules and what we were looking for was a culture. The answer to the French official's question was "That's why it takes five years to qualify as a Chartered Accountant!" It's not a question of simple rules - you have got to learn to exercise judgement as a qualified professional. The French understood that intellectually but didn't agree. When you feed in the German, Scandinavian and South European cultures, it shows clearly how difficult it is to reach agreement.

AW: And your colleagues, who were you in the Embassy with?

DM: We had a lot of very able people. When we arrived the Ambassador was Christopher Soames who was modelling himself on Winston Churchill. He used to hold meetings at which he behaved rather like a fierce headmaster and used to go round the table and when he thought someone was droning on too long would go "Next!" He would interrogate them in a Churchillian fashion. It was an interesting exercise in leadership. Because he was a larger than life figure, and had actually served briefly in Paris before, he spoke good French, knew his way around and gave good parties and used the Embassy in a way that in some capitals - and France is one of them - is a good entertainment tool, cultural springboard. He had been supported up until just before I arrived by Michael Palliser who was the Minister and was replaced by Christopher Ewart-Biggs. Then we had Derek Thomas who was our Economic Head, I was one of the economic secretaries, and we had a Chancery that was composed of people who went on to do good things. We had Nicholas Spreckley who sadly died young but was our Ambassador in Malaya, we had Michael Simpson-Orlebar who was a Persian expert and was Ambassador in Mexico and Humphrey Maud who became Ambassador in Argentina. We had Robin Renwick who had a very distinguished career and we had George Walden. We had quite an able group of younger people. I think perhaps we had too many people with too much ability because there was a tendency for people to tread on each other's toes. Not that there was any ill feeling about this, people were having to look round and see what they could usefully do and very often somebody else was already doing it!

Luckily I was breaking new ground and was dealing with a French organisation called the SGCI, which was the body which coordinated French policy for all their EEC questions which weren't the domain of the Quai d'Orsay. The Cabinet Office in Britain then formed their secretariat based on the model of what the French did and my job was to get to know all these people. The French bureaucrats were very competent and very keen to welcome a British person in to the work. They were very impressed by our technical efficiency. We knew, because of our diplomatic wireless system, what had happened in Brussels very often before they did because we had people who went to the meetings about technical things, like the lorry weights, and all the things, like reverse preferences, that were under constant negotiation. They would write telegrams saying what had happened at the meeting, which would be copied to us in Paris, even if it was coming from Luxembourg, and we knew what

the outcome was before the French did. I was at a party one evening and asked them what they thought about a meeting and they hadn't heard, and we had! They were very impressed by this. They thought we were very efficient, which I think we probably were.

They were very busy. I think every capital is different, but in France then, and I believe still now, the French believed in civilised life and lunch was a very important element of the day. They were very happy to accept an invitation to lunch because it was accepted that you could go off for an hour or more and have lunch and they didn't have to answer a telephone during this period. If you went to see a French official in his office you were wasting his time because you couldn't decently go and see him for less than twenty minutes or half an hour and you probably only needed five minutes to resolve the question you wanted to ask him. So he would much rather be invited out to lunch, talk about general things over lunch and if you wanted to get an answer to a particular question you rang him up. If he wanted to discuss it further, then you did go down and talk it over or you would go out to lunch! So a good method of proceeding was to get friends with the people, buy them lunch and they would introduce you to lots of interesting restaurants which they knew about. There was a lovely restaurant just by the Quai Branly called the Délices St André which they and I used to use and they loved being invited there. The staff got to know us very well and always kept Iles Flottantes for us for pudding which wasn't on the menu. So we had a very good relationship with the dozen or so people who formed this Secretariat and I was able to pass this on to my successor who was Anthony Goodenough.

Then we had all the agony of Ted Heath losing the next election and Wilson having a referendum on whether we should stay in the Common Market or not. This was an absolute nightmare because all these good relationships which we were enjoying and profiting from were then thrown into a mess. The French said "Do you want to be part of this thing, or not?" We had to say that it all depended on democratic procedures. By then the Ambassador was a chap called Tomkins, a very efficient man who had come from being our Ambassador in the Netherlands, knew France quite well. But he was quite different and I think he probably found Soames quite a difficult act to follow. He was quite well connected with our Ministers and the Government and he would come back and say that the last thing they wanted in London were wise despatches from Paris telling them about what the French were saying about it. He told us that the government was split, some against, some for, the

Prime Minister was equivocal and just wanted to get a result that was agreed by everybody and rocking the boat was not wanted. We didn't know what to do. The Foreign Office usually writes papers or telegrams that get circulated and adds to the understanding of what the French were up to. We weren't allowed to do this so we took to writing occasional fictional conversations that we'd had which were distributed informally as fictional parodies, but which were actually the truth! I remember writing spoof instructions to the French Delegation from the SGCI about how they were to conduct their affairs and writing in all the procedures of French bureaucracy! This had to be dressed up as a document which we'd been given by a French official! It was one way we could communicate during this silly period. Luckily the referendum went the right way and we could carry on doing our jobs.

The Embassy started filling up with more and more people. The Department of Agriculture wanted somebody devoted entirely to agriculture. We were running this thing in Paris with me being the person in the Economic Section who did agriculture but we also had a very nice locally employed officer in the Commercial Department who was responsible for UK agricultural exports and he was the Agricultural Attaché, he was called Sedgewick, he was a very nice chap and used to play in string ensembles with Humphrey Maud who was also very musical. Because Sedgewick was locally engaged, because of our funny rules, he wasn't able to come to the policy meetings or read papers above a certain classification. The Ministry of Agriculture wanted to have an officer who was fulltime their chap and so the FCO nominated a Counsellor to come and take over from me who was called David Ratcliffe and he was Counsellor for Economic and Agricultural Affairs, really to do the job that I was doing. I didn't want to continue if the job was going to be split up in that way so said that I'd be quite happy to go home, I'd done three and a half years. Imelda wasn't terribly happy as our children were in school and we were enjoying life in Paris but I thought the Embassy was in danger of being over staffed and there wasn't enough sensible work to go around so I was quite happy to be posted back to London.

Assistant in Energy Department, FCO, 1975-76

There was a flap because the first energy crisis had broken on the world and the price of oil had gone up and everyone was horrified by it. There were negotiations going on in the

OECD for an international agreement setting up a new organisation within the OECD called the IEA, the energy agency in which Kissinger was playing a leading role to try and get the other developed countries into a body which could cope collectively with the problems of the oil price and what would happen if there was an oil boycott. That's what had actually happened, provoked by the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and the Arab countries all boycotted the Netherlands and I think some other country. Stephen Egerton, who was the Head of the Energy Department of the Foreign Office and who had been the Assistant in the Arabian Department when I was there, needed an Assistant and he knew that I was becoming spare in the Embassy, so he asked the FCO whether I could be transferred to him in the Energy Department, which I did.

I did a couple of years there which was very much involved with Whitehall activities too. We actually had an Energy Ministry in those days, because of North Sea Oil which had just come on stream. It was headed by Tony Benn who was an extremely interesting character. He was opposed to the EEC but he quite understood that there had to be a proper international response to the threat of energy supplies being cut off. He was quite ready to cooperate with the Foreign Office on activities to that end, but his real views (and he was very open) were very different on most subjects from those maintained by the Foreign Office. But because he was extremely articulate and intelligent and a nice person we all got on very well.

Sheikh Yamani was then the Saudi Arabian supremo on oil and the key figure on OPEC who had cooperated with the developed world in keeping the price of oil down to about \$11 or 12 a barrel (which seems very little now). The Saudi Arabians didn't want the price of oil to shoot up too high because this would then price oil out of the market, cause alternative energy sources to be developed and remove this very important asset which they wanted to last a long time. So they undertook to maintain the price of oil at a low level by producing enough to meet supply at a certain price. This annoyed their OPEC partners who were all conducting their own affairs to their own interests. Sheikh Yamani wanted to come and explain all this to Benn and the British Government and to make sure that if the Saudis risked antagonising their OPEC partners by increasing production, which they could just about manage, to keep the price steady, then demand from industrial countries would remain low enough to maintain this equilibrium. He came to see Benn just before Christmas, December

22nd or 23rd or thereabouts, and I thought it was terribly important. Here we were being offered a deal on the price of oil which was a subject of great concern. Absolutely nothing happened and we gave no reply until well into January because the whole of Britain was closed down for Christmas and nobody was interested enough to compose a properly considered reply to him! I thought it was an interesting comment on the way our country was governed.

Tony Benn was an interesting and attractive person and we in the Foreign Office got on with him perfectly well. One of the things the EEC Commission complained about was the landing requirement. What Tony Benn wanted to do and which I thought was laudable, was to use British access to North Sea Oil to build up a British oil industry on an international scale contributing to our exports and our prosperity. Most of us thought this was a commendable idea. It required elements allegedly contrary to what the EEC treaties said. The Commission were trying to stimulate other countries to contest our policies and one of these was the landing requirement. As part of the drive to get maximum profit from North Sea Oil we required anybody extracting North Sea Oil or Gas to land it in Britain. Some of them wanted to take their oil straight to Holland and into European system but Benn said no. This was regarded as contrary to EEC treaties. I said "Why?" I rang up the Ministry of Defence because defence is not covered by EEC treaties and said that it must be in our national interest to have the stuff landed in the UK and could the MoD take an interest in this because if the Russians were sitting on the shore of Europe in Antwerp because war had broken out in Europe, we want the stuff from the North Sea to be delivered in the UK, not in Antwerp! They weren't interested and said that if the Russians were sitting on the other side of the Channel we wouldn't be getting much oil out of the North Sea! I said that was a worst case scenario and didn't they see there was an important British interest. I spoke to the Department of Trade, but I couldn't get anybody to speak to their Ministers and get them to write in to the Committee that was looking at this. I am sure that if Mrs Thatcher had been Prime Minister I don't believe we would have had any nonsense! Luckily the EEC Commission eventually accepted that we weren't going to have our stuff landed in Holland or elsewhere on the Continent.

We had the CPRS Review while I was there and at the end of it all they came to see the Foreign Office and ask us why we thought it necessary to have an Energy Department at all.

I can see to this day the picture of us sitting there with someone called Kate Mortimer and another lady, Tessa Blackstone, who became head of Birkbeck College, who were asking this question. Stephen Egerton said that because most of the oil came out of the Arabian Peninsula, there were important national strategic issues at stake and Foreign Office Ministers had to be properly briefed and it was not just a question of leaving it to other government departments, we had to take it seriously. They were doubtful, so we had an argument with them.

Another thing we wanted to do in our Energy Department was to stimulate our nationalised industries because at that stage electricity and coal were dealt with by nationalised industries who had to ensure that coal was dug out in sufficient quantities to keep the home fires burning and electricity distributed to every household. But the thought that they had a huge industry which could go and sell its services abroad and earn us money did not occur. We managed to get ourselves interviews with the Gas Board, the Coal Board and we went see the electricity people and asked them why they weren't exporting. We said that the oil supply for Britain is done by international bodies like Shell and BP who are Anglo Dutch and British and doing us a tremendous amount of good worldwide and asked them why gas and coal and electricity should be any different. They said "Oh no", they hadn't thought of that! From the position of an Assistant in the Energy Department it was very difficult to relay the serious national interest, but we agitated away!

The Gas Board was responsible for gas supplies and we did have a relationship with Norway and the North Sea. I had lawyer friends who were advising the Gas Board and were horrified by the rather non-aggressive approach of the people who were dealing with the Norwegians on this foreign affairs question. They kept asking me why we were being so feeble about it.

AW: You mentioned Palliser's entertainment review during this period?

DM: In the middle of all of this I got a telephone call from the Personnel Department asking to see me. They said that the CPRS Review was looking into the Foreign Office and were going to attack the Office on its lavish lifestyle overseas and the money we devote to entertaining foreigners. They knew they could defend this but what they needed was a report by a couple of young officers at medium level, not just padded up with the views of

Ambassadors, but an intensive and critical review of the whole policy on entertainment. They told me that I would take six weeks off my job and that I and Sophia Lambert would go and carry out the review. So we went to see Palliser, who was the Permanent Secretary. He sent us off asking for a report in six weeks. He suggested we visit a couple of dozen Embassies, choosing them ourselves and the Personnel Department would write and say we were coming. He suggested we spent a month on the visit and a couple of weeks writing up the report. I said that I thought if we were going to visit 24 Embassies in 30 days we had better split up but he wanted us to go together as a team.

So Sophia and I set off around the world spending a couple of days here, and a day there. We did it together most of the time but she wanted to visit her sister who was married to someone in Latin America so she went off on a detour there and I wanted to go to Japan and Australia. So apart from that, we did it together. We wrote our report which said basically entertainment was an essential tool and we shouldn't be too bureaucratic about how it's done. The only important thing was that it should be accounted for by people making lists of the people they entertained and this would be a useful tool for building up a range of contacts and continuity for passing on predecessors' contacts. We thought the working out of how much you spent on lunch or a drink or so forth was quite unnecessary and that people should be allowed to spend the money responsibly and be free to work out what worked best for them. Some people might want to give dinner parties, other people want to take guests to the theatre, but how they spent the money was entirely up to them but to make an impact they had to develop a circle of friends. We thought that the Counsellors should be brought into the system because they should be making lists of who they entertained, lodged with the admin office, and if it was thought that anybody was abusing this money it was up to the line managers or the Ambassador to guide people responsibly. Most people thought this was a sensible approach. People had been nervous that we would be critical of Ambassadors and parties. Sophia Lambert was quite a firebrand but she was also very sensible so we didn't have any difficulty writing up the report which was approved and I think did help the Administration to deal with the CPRS because it was difficult for them to second guess perfectly intelligent people who were comparatively junior and didn't have an interest or an axe to grind.

What it did illustrate rather well was the diversity and difficulty of having a rule. In Africa, for instance, you never know who is coming to your party! You have to have it pretty informal. In a lot of Northern European countries they don't dine at 9pm like in Italy or Spain, they eat at 6pm. If you want to entertain the Dutch, half the people that matter in the Netherlands don't believe in going out to dine late but want their supper early. But they will come to a concert and they may eat first, or you provide some food after. But everybody in Holland is thought to be interested in cultural activity. We had access to some young violinists and piano players who were hoping to make their way, and they would come and play for nothing. That was fine for the Netherlands but not at all the form for Botswana!

Returning to energy and use of oil revenues, there was a great committee on which we represented the Foreign Office on how to apply North Sea Oil revenue so that it would benefit and develop British manufacturing industry which was thought to be in decline and not contributing anything to our balance of payments. Mr Wilson had a special thing called the Selective Employment Tax. People were very conscious of trying to develop the manufacturing industry. We had meetings and a report was drawn up but the most influential person I remember was a young economist called Bean, and I think he has just retired as Deputy Governor in the Bank of England. Bean said that the Government could not actually direct how money was to be deployed to promote industry, and that what we were into was the business of backing winners. If something is worthwhile it will attract the capital it needs and if it isn't and you pour money into it, it is a waste. What we were looking at was trying to identify marginal companies to invest in, which was, incidentally, against the rules of the EEC! We would be trying to pick winners and bureaucrats were not good at this, we had to leave it to the market. This was very instructive. We did manage to get a certain amount of offshore oil industry going in Glasgow largely through implicit pressure on the oil companies to place their orders there or they wouldn't be well regarded in the next round of licencing. Apart from that it wasn't really possible to use the money in the way that everybody wanted to. Some of the mandarins were rather put off by Bean's dismissive approach!

Tehran: Head of Chancery, 1977-79

AW: It is the 22nd October and we are resuming David Miers's recollections of his diplomatic career. David, it's 1977 and you are about to go to Tehran as Head of Chancery. You had visited Tehran before, so was that very exciting to be going there?

DM: Yes, it was a very popular posting, Iran, and very agreeable surroundings. We had a large Embassy with a huge compound with houses in it. It was good for children and you could go on interesting trips for local leave. The work was interesting and important and Iran was supposed to be a friendly and welcoming country. We had just had the huge increase in the price of oil. There was a lot of commercial work going on. Everyone was talking about the streets of Tehran being paved with gold and businessmen from all over the world arriving in large numbers to get contracts to do this, that and the other!

The policy of the Ambassador was to try to diversify a bit and not create the impression that our interest in Iran was solely commercial but that we wanted to have a new and more mature relationship at all levels, political and cultural as well as commercial and economic. He had a strategy of improving the level of our political cooperation and I was mandated to develop this and not be involved in the commercial work but deal with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and engage them in discussion on issues of mutual interest and try to build what I think is the phrase that had been coined in respect to India by the Labour Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, a mature relationship and one that puts the imperial, colonial period behind us and develop a relationship of mutual respect and not bedevilled by the imperial hang-ups.

The Ambassador actually wanted someone one rank up, my two predecessors had been First Secretaries but he said he wanted a Counsellor to head it up to give it a bit more bite. It was interesting and promising. One of the difficulties was that I was not a Persian speaker. We had a cadre of people who had been trained in Persian by the redoubtable Nancy Lambton, I had many friends who had enjoyed this, but I wasn't a member of that cadre. Parsons said that I didn't need to worry about it because the Persians I would be speaking to were all Anglophone in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and he didn't think my lack of Persian would be a handicap. He had selected me for the job because we had known each other a little when I was working on the islands in the Persian Gulf ...

AW: Tony Parsons was the Ambassador?

DM: Yes he was and I was looking forward to the posting very much. We arrived at the beginning of the summer just in time for the Queen's Silver Jubilee. So almost the first thing that happened was a huge party in the upper compound for the whole British community and I think it was financed through the community itself, ie not just those invited by the Embassy.

Parsons's plan was that in the autumn we were going to have a cultural festival as part of this effort to broaden the relationship. It was an extremely good example of how a dynamic and strategically minded Ambassador could, through his personal qualities, do a lot to improve a relationship. Tony Parsons did this with his own spirit of enterprise and drive helped very much by a similarly endowed head of the British Council, John Hanson. They, between them with their staff, set up this cultural festival without any interference, involvement or requirement for money with government departments at home at all. It was sponsored by the many British companies who were doing business in Iran. The plan was that there would be a lot of cultural events which the British Council would recruit the performers for. They had a small budget for cultural events and they began by hiring the Prospect Theatre or the Kings Singers or the Royal Ballet to come and they would devote their budget to guarantee the finances of that and at the same time publicise it to the British community and offer them tickets they could network with and be invited to underwrite the performance. As soon as they got enough sponsorship for one event they switched their pump priming effort to the next thing and they built up a huge programme of events. The major one was the performance by the Royal Ballet which the Empress, the Shahbanou, was committed to attend. Tony Parsons had recruited her to back this and she was an enthusiastic supporter and regarded it as her mission to civilise the Shah a bit and get him interested in backing cultural initiatives as well as military and commercial ones. So it was very much up her street and she and the Ambassador worked together which was a huge help as it also mobilised support.

We had a royal patron on each side. We had the Shah's half-sister, Princess Fatima, who was a widow. She'd been married to the head of the Air Force who'd been killed in a hang gliding accident in rather curious circumstances. She was still a youngish woman with some presence and character and was the royal patron on the Iranian side. We were going to have

the Duchess of Kent to be the opposite number on the British side and these two ladies were going to jointly preside over the activities and the Shah's wife would attend the opening event. The only snag was that the Duchess of Kent, shortly before the event, fell ill and was ordered by the Doctors not to come. At the last minute, marvellously filling the gap was Princess Alexandra and she came to be the British royal patron and charmed everybody. So this cultural festival was an enormous success and all the other embassies were amazed that we'd been able to mount it and were wondering how they could emulate it.

We had the Royal Ballet, the Prospect Theatre did Hamlet, we had the Kings Singers, we had piano recitals, an exhibition of modern art, and an extensive list of cultural attractions including lectures, films and symposia. We also had a football match. We didn't know who it was going to be until the last minute. The Football League had promised to send out a premier team but couldn't tell us who it was going to be. Everyone was hoping for Manchester United, because they were enormously popular in Iran, and they came and played a football match against the Iran National Team and it took place with a packed stadium. The most popular thing of all was the military bands. We had four military bands, a marine band, a pipe band, a bugle band and a fourth band. They played all around Iran in provincial towns as well as Tehran. Every event we had was very well attended and a huge success.

There were all kinds of difficult moments. The Prospect Theatre was doing Hamlet with Derek Jacobi. In Hamlet there is the regicide play within the play. Apparently there had been some discussion about whether they could have this in Iran with its hints of regicide! It was agreed and the Shah's wife said of course it would be perfectly alright. However we discovered on the eve of the performance that there was going to be a protest and the actors were going to come onto the stage and say that they were agreeing to play as part of the British Iranian Cultural Festival but they wanted the very strong views of a large proportion of the British public to be taken into account. This was against the incarceration of political prisoners. They were planning to make a huge fuss, read out names, and demand release and so on. Tony Parsons was absolutely horrified at this because he realised that this would immediately turn the Shah off and poison the atmosphere, the whole thing might get cancelled and the Shahbanou wouldn't be able to support us. So what to do? We told the Prospect Theatre Company that they couldn't do this, it would be disastrous but they said they were going to and eventually Tony Parsons said he would see them privately at the

house and try and persuade them not to. He went off to his friends at Court and said he was faced with this public act of protest, which we had just learned about, and said he would try to find some way of defusing it and offer some alternative way of giving expression to their feelings but obviously we had to do it in cooperation with the Iranians. He asked them if they could field somebody to be a viable interlocutor and to whom the protest could be made privately. This was done with the Prime Minister Hoveyda who was a confidant of the Shah's. A solution was agreed under which the Persians would field a retired senior minister who was known to be a respectable figure and who would receive a delegation from the Prospect Theatre Company who would say everything they wanted to say to him. They would do this on the understanding that it would get results rather than just get into the newspapers. They accepted this and the meeting was arranged and they were able to say what they thought and the Persians to realise the strength of opinion. The Persians were hugely conscious of image. The Shah had a very bad image in the Western press and they were keen to do what they could to put this right so it was, all in all, quite a helpful exercise although we had our hearts in our mouths at the beginning because these people were determined not to be put off.

The Cultural Festival was a huge success but within less than twelve months the whole thing had turned to dust and ashes because of the revolution. It was really remarkable how in the period of the first bit of my posting there, the whole scene in Iran completely changed from one where the country was prosperous and pro-western, we had good contacts and were doing good business there, the whole thing turned into revolution, upheaval and extreme hostility of the theocratic regime which succeeded the Shah. The United States was number one Satan and we were number two. It was all a great upheaval and everything which we had constructed was lost.

AW: Could you see it coming?

DM: Well this was the thing. People had been predicting that the Shah would have potential unrest. One of the landmarks of the Shah's progress towards this Greek tragedy outcome was the Persepolis extravaganza in 1971 when he had decided to celebrate the 2500th anniversary of the monarchy in Persia. He went to Persepolis and built an enormous tent city and got a French company to lay on magnificent banquets. He asked everybody in the world to come.

We fielded two Royal personages, the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Anne. I was not involved in this at all but I had travelled to Iran when we were negotiating the islands. So we had, for some time, been following the threats to internal stability and there were people who said the regime was utterly corrupt and could be thrown over at any time and we shouldn't invest too much and so on.

That was a real problem for the Germans. The Germans were the people with whom the Shah wanted to sign contracts and the British and the others were playing catch up. So we were trying to get all the business we could and any suggestion that we should go steady on this would not have gone down well in London. The German Ambassador used to ask Tony Parsons what he ought to do because for them the volume of business was building up in Iran and what they were underwriting was very much greater than ours and leading to what the German Ambassador regarded as a dangerous amount of exposure.

A lot of people were quite concerned about this but like all these things, you couldn't predict what the timing would be. You could talk to somebody who would tell you the reasons why the Shah's regime couldn't last and that there would be an uprising against it. The Universities, the students and the teaching profession were all unhappy about the level of corruption and the façade of democracy. The political classes were all excluded from government because the Shah was in effect running a one party system; the parliamentary activity was really a façade. The corruption which was quite common in Middle Eastern society was accentuated by the oil wealth and the money sloshing about. But the timing is very difficult. If we recommended that we should stop investing because there was going to be a revolution people would ask when it would be and how long had they got? To predict the timing of these things is much harder than making general predictions and as an Embassy it's very difficult to back up any feelings you might have about uncertainty or instability. I know that Tony Parsons after the Revolution used to be very apologetic that the Revolution had come so suddenly and as such a surprise. I used to think his apologetic approach was rather overdone because firstly, what could we have done about it even if we had been certain, and secondly I know that he was continually worried about this and he was very conscious of two mistakes that had been made in the past. First of all in Iraq where we had a rather similar situation with King Faisal. Iraq had been very firmly aligned with Western interests and we'd had the Baghdad Pact which after the overthrow of the Iraq regime had

been turned into CENTO, but he said we hadn't foreseen the Iraq Revolution, which was more a *coup d'état*, and the overthrow of the pro-British regime and the installation of a nationalist one which was rather comparable with what happened in Egypt with Colonel Nasser. On the other hand we had the example of Kuwait where in the 1960s you had an Ambassador, who I shan't name, who was predicting the place was going to fall apart because the ruler was autocratic and there was no democratic infrastructure, and a lot of Palestinian refugees who had set up in Kuwait were forcing the government to adopt, possibly against its better judgement, a rather shrill anti-Western approach on certain matters, and therefore the huge investment we had in terms of oil was at risk and we should reinsure because the regime could not last. He was invited to say when should cover be withdrawn, but the answer was that nobody knew when. It's all very well if you are doing an academic study to say that this is unstable and doomed to be overthrown but if you are a responsible person who has to take real decisions, you have to have a much clearer view. In fact the Kuwait regime is still there!

After the Revolution Tony Parsons was Deputy Secretary in the Foreign Office before he became our man in New York and he was regarded as the big expert on the Iranian Revolution and he went on a tour of the Gulf countries to discuss it and particularly to Oman where we had responsibilities. They were very interested to know his analysis of why the Shah had been overthrown and he explained the problems, lack of democratic infrastructure, no outlet for critics to voice their concerns and have them taken into account, the corruption and so on. This was quite difficult to put across in regimes where these failings were conspicuously being practiced! But they are all still there. The British representatives were asked to say how long they thought the stability could be taken for granted. I remember James Craig, our man in Saudi Arabia, said that many of the failings that had brought the Shah down were easily observable in Saudi Arabia but that he thought the regime was well in control for five years and that a five year rolling view should be taken, which indeed it was.

After the Revolution, Nick Browne who died earlier this year and was a big Persian expert, was asked to do a post mortem study of lessons to be learned and we used to get it out and read it from time to time and ask ourselves if we were learning the lessons. But actually one of the lessons was that we should spend more time on political work and not focus too much, at the expense of political work, on commercial possibilities. But we didn't reduce our

commercial activity and haven't and to some extent have been vindicated in this by the fact that the other regimes are still going strong but I'm sure for how much longer is being continually reviewed.

There are many reasons why the kind of analysis which we might have done before the Revolution was not done as soon as we could have, the chief, I think, being that the cultivation of opposition elements would have been completely contrary to the policy which the Embassy was committed to, I think rightly by Tony Parsons, in trying to develop a more mature relationship with the regime. The one thing that they suspected the British of doing was manipulating the internal affairs of Iran when the Shah was reinstated in 1953 after the revolt under Mosaddegh. So we had this reputation for being involved in the internal affairs of Iran and if we had been developing relationships of any significance it would have come to the attention of the Shah who would have not accepted at face value our wish to develop this more mature relationship. As it would have been impossible to develop relationships with the opposition without it coming to the attention of the Shah, we deliberately refrained from doing that.

This is not to say we didn't have quite a good understanding of what was going on in Iran. What actually happened in the Revolution was that the Shah, lacking good advisers, because he'd outlived many of his contemporaries, or they had retired, who were able to speak to him frankly, was surrounded by yes men who thought that he, the wise old Shah, had the right answers and he was quite open to flattery. He managed to unite against him all the various elements that were potentially a threat to his regime. There were policies of concession too late or repression that wasn't sufficiently severe or effective. He eventually had more or less all the political elements in Iran that could be hostile to him ready to back the mullahs who, with the overseas propaganda of Khomeini, were leading the attack on the Shah's regime and encouraging subversion and people to attack symbolic targets of Western cultural influence. Liquor stores, cinemas, banks, all these kinds of things were smashed up. So much for our efforts at the Cultural Festival!

AW: Did you feel unsafe? Did you feel under threat?

DM: Well we were under threat but we didn't feel particularly so. The kind of people that were causing difficulties on the streets were quite tolerant to foreigners. The attitude was that "Britain and America had been interfering in the country for quite a long time but you like us are ordinary human beings and we haven't got anything against you, it's only against your governments. So we will set your Embassy on fire but we won't actually hurt you". That was the attitude although this then deteriorated when young people, encouraged by an extremist faction, took the American Embassy hostage because they thought they could swap them for the Shah who had been to hospital in America because he was quite ill. So they took the Americans hostage saying they would release them when America gave them the Shah to put on trial. Of course this was contrary to every sort of international rule. The Shah then died and they were left with 52 hostages, basically prisoners, who were being held for no very good purpose. So eventually a solution was found for the Iranians to release them. Up until that point we didn't feel particularly threatened although some of the Embassy staff were quite concerned. Our premises were invaded and set on fire in 1978. In 1979 there was the hostage taking because the enthusiasm of the students grew after the taking of the American Embassy, which to the surprise of many people had been endorsed by Khomeini, and they thought "We'll have the British too". So they took our Embassy hostage. I think Khomeini realised that this was silly so they got a message from Ahmed Khomeini, his son, that they should stop and we were all released so we didn't have the aggro of being held prisoner for months like the Americans.

AW: In your notes you mentioned there was an evacuation of the British community, at what point did that happen?

DM: Well the Revolution went on for quite a long time. The Revolution matured in the summer of 1978, not long after the Shah made Amouzegar Prime Minister. He had been in charge of the Rasatakhiz Party which was the Shah's attempt at democracy, but it was basically a one-party state. Amouzegar became the Prime Minister and he was a technocrat. The Shah thought that he would address the economic problems which were a major cause of popular discontent because the huge increase in wealth resulted in a huge increase in expenditure but it also created many economic distortions and bottlenecks and the benefits of the great increase in wealth were taking some time to work through to the general population. So you had a situation that is familiar in many other rapidly developing countries where the

capital sucked in huge numbers of people from the provinces who then lived in very primitive conditions and shanty towns and became the source of great discontent. But at the same time you had money being spent on new developments and building. This created a very turbulent economic situation, although the Shah's government was quite genuine in its wish to use the oil wealth to improve the economic situation of the country and individuals in it, schools, health and education. It is possible to see this in our own history when the industrialisation of Europe was occurring; you had revolution all over the place!

Amouzegar wasn't able to buy off the economic discontent. The Shah then replaced him. There was a fire in the cinema in Abadan where 300 or 400 people got burnt. Everybody accused the government of being responsible for this although subsequent enquiries showed it was not the government's fault at all, it was a health and safety issue and if anything it might even have been arson by subversives. The Shah then got in someone he thought would be a compromise, a somewhat passive elder statesman called Sharif-Emami. He said he would only take the mandate to be the Prime Minister if the Shah would do lots of things to indicate his readiness to take public concern into account. This was at the end of the summer and it was about at that stage people realised that things were on the slide and that the regime wasn't going to be able to cope. Sharif-Emami also insisted that there should be the arrest of ministers that the popular complaints were levelled at and that there should be a commission to look into corruption, and all sorts of other reforms. But it was too late and we had actually got rioting in the city, people would come out of the mosques and go on the rampage and it culminated, at the beginning of the autumn, with a rally in Jaleh Square in the centre of town. The government declared this illegal and there was some dispute about whether the public knew this had been declared illegal, and that martial law was in force. The long and the short of it was that the army were deployed to confront this demonstration, which was a fairly peaceful one, and opened fire on the crowd who refused to disperse. This was, in a sense, the point of no return. We'd already had, outside Tehran, instances, from the beginning of the year on, in which the army had been called upon to disperse crowds. For people who had been killed in these confrontations, forty days after their deaths in Persian culture was a time for commemoration, so you had a series of commemorations which led to further repression, further casualties. It started in the provinces but didn't come to Tehran seriously until the autumn when it culminated in the so called massacre in Jaleh Square.

This was on a day when we were not working. We used to take Friday and Saturday off. The Iranian weekend was Thursday and Friday, the Friday being their “Sunday”, so as a compromise we took Friday and Saturday. We were organising the Embassy swimming gala at the end of the summer holidays and wondered whether to continue with this or not because we all knew there was unrest in the city. But we got quite used to there being unrest and manifestations so we decided to continue because if we gave up our plans we would be losing our own cohesion. As the children did their splashing about, we could hear gunfire in the city and I remember being rung up by the Foreign Office in the middle of all of this and they said “There are press reports of a massacre taking place in Tehran, what can you tell us about it”. So I said “Well, not very much, but we are investigating and will let you know”.

It was all very nasty and the media were beginning to concentrate on Tehran because they sensed that things were going wrong. They were obsessed with knowing how many people had been shot and killed and wounded. Numbers was what they were after and of course nobody knew, because some were dragged away, some were taken to hospitals, some went home, it was impossible to establish the numbers and the fact that the Iranian Government couldn't give numbers was regarded as further duplicity. The tone of the media was hugely hostile to the regime, led by the BBC, about which the Shah continually complained. The Shah was very unpopular in the West and that was one of the problems. There were Middle Eastern leaders who were equally autocratic but were very popular. King Hussein ruled Jordan with just as strong an arm as the Shah but he was very popular. The Shah was very obsessed about his image and in fact a book has been written about this by Parviz Radji, who was his Ambassador in London at the time.

In the middle of all of this the Embassy was having an inspection! Can you believe it? We had a delightful chap called Langridge and his merry men who were pottering about. We would say “Don't go down to the bazaar there is going to be a riot today” and they would say “But we've got to get our facts” and they went down to the bazaar to find out the price of soap! And whether we could get Daz soap powder! They were very understanding actually about our difficulties and they could see there was turmoil. Later on the staff would complain that the inspectors hadn't taken sufficient account of our difficulties and shortages, the electricity being turned off and all that sort of thing, but if we hadn't had the inspection squeezed in then, our allowances wouldn't have been put up for another four years. They had

been very low as a result of inflation and were due for revision, and so we got them revised and should have been very pleased about it.

After the inspection I was planning to have some local leave, which I was badly in need of because we'd had to put it off more than once owing to the political situation and we'd been in Iran for a year and a half on posting of two year stints. A nice time for local leave was in the autumn when it was cooler but not yet cold and you could go to Afghanistan and even into India, by car. Nowadays of course you couldn't do that. So we set off after the inspection and hoped to go at least to Mashad which was an interesting town with a very important shrine in the East of Iran. The first night we spent in a town with interesting excavations, the site of one of the early capitals of Iran. That evening we watched on the hotel television a scene of total disorder in the capital, particularly the University, which rather worried us. The students had been quelled by military intervention and there were dramatic pictures. What was surprising was not that the turmoil had taken place but that it had been on television. But this was one of the things about the so called liberalisation that Sharif-Emami had insisted on, that there should be less control of the media. Not speaking Persian I wasn't able to follow the report very well but we could see some dramatic events taking place. We were therefore quite apprehensive as we drove on the next day and we got to a place called Sabsevar where we got a room in a hotel and went for a walk. The place was pretty deserted but there were signs of the favourite targets of banks and liquor shops smashed up by subversive activity. So we watched the news on the television and everyone in the hotel was gathered around the TV at news time and there was a sombre news reader reading a prepared statement saying there had been serious rioting in Tehran and amongst the things that had happened was the fact that two rooms of the British Embassy had been set on fire. We were rather worried because our children were in the Embassy. We had some friends in the British Council with children of the same age and they had agreed to house sit for all four children and look after things while we were on holiday. So we rang up to find out what had happened and we got no reply, not even a ringing tone. So we got hold of somebody who lived outside and he said "Yes, you were attacked and they did set the gate house and the Chancery on fire but we've managed to deal with that, but the conference hall has been damaged". So I asked about our children and he had no idea but he said they must be alright because no one has actually been hurt. So we drove back through the night, about 400 miles on bad roads hogged by enormous tankers. All the petrol stations were luckily

open so we arrived back with a full tank at dawn. There were scenes of quite serious devastation in Tehran with lots of banks and shops smashed up. Martial law had been declared and the Chief of the General Staff, Azhari, had been made Prime Minister.

We arrived back and saw huge queues at the petrol pumps. People sensed there was not going to be any fuel, but luckily we had a full tank and were able to get back to the Embassy where we saw the gatehouse had been burnt down. It was about 7.30am. People were wandering about the Embassy in a daze, it was a scene of considerable disquiet and everyone was very uneasy. I got to our house and discovered it had been turned into a dormitory during the night full of members of staff who were unable to get home. Our children were acting as host and hostess telling people which cups to use! I told everybody we would get together in one of the undamaged houses at 8.30am and would take stock of what needed to be done. I then went to find the Ambassador who was sitting by his wireless trying to listen to a broadcast by the Shah. As I arrived, he said "Good heavens, I thought you were away" and I told him I had told everybody to get together at 8.30 so we can take stock and tell them what to do. So he said he would come over and we'd get the place operational. Some of the younger members of staff were quite shaken by the events but luckily we had plenty to do to clear up the mess and everyone rallied around very well. The worst thing was that our telephone exchange had been damaged but we got the engineer to fish for pairs of wires in the ditch outside the Embassy and connect up our telephones so we connected up eight lines. Each time a line was connected, it immediately rang so we set people in the ditch to answer the telephone! We then wired up the lines to come through the window and we thus had an old fashioned telephone exchange. We amalgamated the commercial department, who didn't have any work to do, with the consular department and told them to speak to the British community who were all calling in wanting to know what to do. It was quite a business.

We had lots of broken windows to repair and we also had no light, no power. We had an emergency generator which we could mobilise for the communications but the communications staff had dutifully smashed up all their cyphers which is one of the rules in an Embassy if trouble starts. There is an axe in a red box for doing this. We had quite a big diplomatic wireless section; these days it's probably all done by emails. Their emergency procedures required them to use a different wavelength in Morse code to reach Darwin in

Australia. To their enormous credit by mid morning they were actually in touch with Darwin in Morse code! We then got new cyphers sent out.

The Queen's Messengers were also there because it was a bag day. So the first thing we thought we'd better do was to send back our most sensitive files because we didn't want to have to burn them. So we sent back as much as we could and sent the messenger off to his flight with these enormous bags. For some reason in those years in Tehran we also sent off the Australian and New Zealand bags with our bag, so we sent those off too. They were amazed we could do this.

The people who were particularly good were the wives of our defence section. They immediately appeared with scrubbing brushes to get our offices operational again, because there was a huge amount of smoke damage and everything had to be scrubbed. Luckily the offices upstairs in our main Chancery building could still be used. The windows on the street side had been smashed. They used bricks with slings to break our windows and the slings managed to reach quite high windows. Our Ministry of Works person was an absolutely splendid man called John Paine and he knew exactly what to do and found people to mend all the windows and had an enormous spare fuse with which he could replace the fuse that had gone in the transformer station. It was the size of a torpedo! He then went into the town and hijacked an engineer from the electricity company and brought him back to reconnect us, so we had power again by that evening.

Luckily there was lots of work for everyone to do and no time to sit around feeling sorry for ourselves. We had an annual camp in a place called the Lar Valley, dating from the time when the diplomatic presence was much smaller and people used to go off for the summer, and we put up one of these tents from the camp as a makeshift gatehouse and were able to resume operations much more quickly than had looked possible at the beginning.

One thing I insisted we should do was to send a huge complaint – quantified - into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I said to one of the rather mystified commercial secretaries, because their files had been burnt, "How many man hours has it taken you to compose these files because we will price it" and we concocted a claim which we sent in that morning complaining that the Embassy had not been properly protected against violation, against the

Vienna Convention, and we held the Persian Government responsible and we reserved the right to revise our figures upwards! Later on when the SAS set the Persian Embassy on fire here there were mutual claims and I believe we were able to show that there had been a much bigger amount of damage done to our Embassy than had been done in Princes's Gate, so it shows how important it is to get these things properly registered.

The thing then deteriorated into a rather sad crisis and it was clear that the Revolution was not going to be put into reverse. The Shah had put General Azhari in charge and we had martial law in Tehran and had a curfew. We then had a tank outside which absolutely fascinated the children. There was a detachment of soldiers which we housed in an empty house. They wouldn't have protected us but it salved the Iranians conscience to put them in. It gave some sort of element of reassurance to people I suppose.

The problem of dealing with the British community became quite important. It was very large but they were in a worse situation than us because they didn't have any work to do to keep them busy. Their offices were shut or occupied by sit-ins. The Ministries that authorised them getting paid had been closed down. The customs were on strike. The power which they needed was unreliable, they were not getting paid but they had to pay their staff. They wanted to know what to do and we had to tell them that they had to make their own judgement.

By January it was clear that the Shah wouldn't be able to stay. He left, I think in January, having set up an interim government ran by a gentleman called Bakhtiar who had been one of the professional opposition. He was not a particularly prominent figure but he was the leading respectable opposition politician who had been allowed back by the Shah as a result of Sharif-Emami's reforms. He was appointed by the Shah to replace General Azhari but one of his conditions was that the Shah should withdraw and the Shah then left and Bakhtiar appointed a government which was not able to function because the Ministries were mostly on strike and Khomeini was refusing to recognise Bakhtiar as a legitimate Prime Minister. Bakhtiar was unable to exercise the levers of power and the army, on which so much depended, was also ambiguous about accepting his instructions. So he operated a nominal government that was not recognised by the mullahs who were taking their cue from Khomeini, who was preparing to return.

There then was a popular uprising which the army refrained from trying to quell. The army was taken over by the Revolution, the generals were all arrested and Khomeini came back, appointed a chap called Bazargan as Prime Minister and it was decided that there would be Islamic government in Iran and they would have an Islamic Republic. It took them more or less the rest of the year to work out how they were going to implement Islamic government and a very complicated constitution was worked out which provided for the religious hierarchy to retain control and have a veto over policy. There was then a purge of all the important positions and executions of huge numbers of quite well intentioned people who were tried before an Islamic tribunal of judges, sometimes hooded. They were sentenced to death for corruption on earth and shot. They were replaced by inexperienced people who in turn were mostly soon replaced.

There was an organisation called the Mujahedin al Khalkh who were an underground organisation of young revolutionaries who were supporting Khomeini and the theocratic regime but were rapidly identified as a main threat against it because they wanted to have a modern socialist regime which would be run on Islamic principles. They had various quite interesting writers who had prescribed how you could marry up the requirements for a modern government with Islamic tradition and they were very disheartened when they were completely ignored by the mullahs and then repressed. They became a subversive body supported by Saddam Hussein against the Khomeini regime. A sad story.

I'd like to backtrack a little bit. When the Shah appointed Sharif Emami to be PM way back in August, Tony Parsons was due back from leave. The beginning of the collapse had begun in the summer while he had been on leave and he had been following it with alarm from England. He rang up asking if he ought to come back at the time of the Jaleh Square events and we said we thought it was not necessary for him to come back because we could remain operational without him and it might be regarded as a sign of concern on the part of the British Government and lack of confidence in the Shah's regime if he came back early. When he did return he went to see the Shah and said that we had refrained up until that point from having any contact with the opposition because we knew that the Shah thought we were interfering in internal affairs, but which was not the case. But Parsons told him that he was going to instruct his staff to have some contacts with the opposition because we needed to

know what was going on and we might even be able to help. The Shah agreed and we had a mandate to establish links. There were various elements who we could have a relationship with, the ordinary political opposition which had been side-lined and consisted of naïve politicians of whom the best was Bakhtiar. It was difficult for Tony Parsons to meet him but I arranged for him to come and have tea with me so that Tony Parsons could drop in and have quite a useful talk with him. He was a man of great principle but not competent to assume great responsibility although he did his best and for his pains was assassinated by the regime in Paris which was very sad. He'd been tortured earlier in his political career and was a man of great courage.

We got in touch with the political activists who were approved by the mullahs. Tony Parsons couldn't send a member of the Embassy staff down to Qom, where the theological establishment was, because they would be much too conspicuous but he did have a Persian speaking member of the British community called Roger Cooper who knew his way around. Tony Parsons told him that he wanted to get a message to Shariatmadari, who was the leading cleric at the time because Khomeini was still in exile. Shariatmadari was a don-like figure, not a political figure at all; the whole system of how the religious hierarchy exercised its authority in the quite pious Iranian community is quite a separate subject which I won't go into now. Shariatmadari had a big following. Tony Parsons told Roger Cooper to go to Qom and attend Shariat Madari's open house and give him an oral message to say that we didn't have proper communication with the mullahs but that we would like to feel that they were as well informed as they needed to be and ask if they had given adequate thought to what was going to come, if the Shah was overthrown, to replace him because it was a matter of concern to those who wished the best for Iran. Cooper went down but was unable to get alongside so he wrote down on a bit of paper the message from the British that asked if they realised the regime that might follow the Shah might not be any better than the one it replaced. Tony Parsons was rather cross with Roger Cooper having written anything down, but the message was got through. A chap called Minachi got in touch to ask if the message from Tony Parsons that Shariat Madari had received was genuine. I went to see these people and we talked. I talked to Bazargan, the chap that was eventually appointed Prime Minister, and managed to get in communication with these people although we didn't have much of a meeting of minds.

John Graham arrived, who was the successor to Tony Parsons who had left when the Shah did. Parsons was overdue to go and had realised that his usefulness was over. John Graham had a bit of a shock when he arrived because it hadn't been realised in London how much Iran had ceased to be a functioning state. He arrived in our Embassy which was still showing signs of having been set on fire and the streets weren't under proper control, but I was able to introduce him to Bakhtiar, who was the nominal Prime Minister, and also to Bazargan who was the Prime Minister who Khomeini was backing but who hadn't yet taken over. By the time Khomeini came back we did have quite effective contacts. But there was nothing that we could very usefully say to them. However, when you are trying to look after the interests of your country and one of the major problems is the huge numbers of compatriots who are trying to do business there but unable to do so because the system has closed down and the contracts are not being paid, it does help to have communication.

We did manage to do one or two constructive things. They started ploughing again around the tomb of Cyrus where the Shah had spoken during Persepolis. They used to plough right up to the foot of this monument but the government put a fence round it to stop them doing it and to protect the monument. Persepolis was called Takhte Jamshid by the Persians, meaning the bed of Jamshid, a mythical hero. The tomb of Cyrus had been identified by scholars but was known by the locals as the Tomb of the mother of Solomon. They thought it was monstrous of the Shah to call upon pre-Islamic heritage and as soon as he was overthrown they ripped the fence up and started ploughing up to it again. But they were ploughing with huge tractors instead of the old fashioned implements and were hitting the corners and budging the thing, jeopardising it as a monument. We were rung up by the British Institute of Persian Studies, which was our cultural foundation for archaeology and Persian studies who in turn had been rung up by their contacts in Shiraz, asking them if they knew that the monument was in danger of tractors dislodging its base and they asked us to do something about it. So we told the mullahs about this and the Ayatollah in Shiraz nipped round and put the fence up again! So the contacts we had were of some use!

But on the political level of what was going to happen to Iran, I'm afraid we didn't have a meeting of minds at all. This raises the whole question about what you are supposed to do in a revolution. One of the interesting questions is how you handle what I call "the self-fulfilling prophecy". I had been asked by a friend of mine called John Orange who was a BP

lawyer and the representative of the multinational oil consortium in Tehran if there was going to be a revolution. I said then that everybody was not talking about Sharif Emami but Sharif Kerensky! Was it possible that a Revolution that had got this far to be reversed? I said that students of history would say no, but that I wasn't in a position to give an official view. I didn't really feel able to discuss with him the full misgivings that we had. He was asking me as the Counsellor in the British Embassy what we thought about the thing and he was going to tell the consortium. I didn't feel that I could be completely frank with him. The problem rose in a much bigger way very shortly afterwards. We used to have a monthly lunch at which the heads of the political sections in the various Western Embassies would get together. My opposite number in the American Embassy was a chap called Lambrakis who used to come as well as the EEC countries and I think Australia. The Revolution was one of the main topics of discussion. We used to organise the monitoring of the press and produce a digest which we could share. It was quite a useful forum. Lambrakis was asked whether or not he thought the Shah was doomed. He said "No" but we all thought privately, including Lambrakis, that the Shah was. Now the representative of Portugal, say, or Austria could openly say that the Shah was doomed but if at a meeting of political Counsellors the American Political Counsellor should say that, it's wildfire, and they would all go back to their offices and say that the Americans think the Shah is doomed. They were all saying "Oh come on George, you know the Shah is doomed". But he said "No, no we think that he can soldier on". So I intervened privately and told some of them to stop bullying Lambrakis. I said "Stop bullying George, if he thinks the Shah is doomed, he certainly won't say so because it would be news and you would all report it to your governments. This would mean that such support that the Shah may be getting from his Western allies will be reduced and we in a sense would be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy". All sorts of decisions would flow from actually saying it. It's very difficult to be open and completely transparent about what you think is going on because what you think can actually influence what does go on. This is, I think, a hugely underestimated factor.

The other thing is that we never actually had any instructions from London on policy regarding the revolution because London was in the same situation of not wanting to accept that the Shah was doomed although they were less on the spot and less able to gauge what was going on.

At this stage Tony Parsons and the American Ambassador were seeing the Shah, sometimes together, once a week throughout this autumn, up to the moment of his withdrawal. Parsons was dealing, not on the basis of instructions from London, but on the basis of keeping in touch and hoping to be able to help Iran through the crisis. For instance, there was quite a lot of activity going on in Northern Ireland at the time and we had experience in crowd control, the main lesson was that you needed more people if you wanted to control crowds effectively. We had a chap called David Ramsbotham who was one of the brigade commanders in Northern Ireland and he subsequently became Lord Ramsbotham and HM Inspector of Prisons. He was a good chap and came out to give the Iranian Army advice on how to deal with subversive elements that were causing trouble on the streets. He said that he thought they hadn't a clue because they didn't understand that in order to avoid having to open fire you had to have enough soldiers and vehicles to keep control without it. Insofar as we could help, we did try to help by producing experts and that kind of thing.

We did have one instruction which was quite amusing. Before he came back from leave, Tony Parsons had been interviewed by the BBC who asked him if he thought the Shah could survive. Of course he said he thought he could, because we were still hoping he would. This didn't get published and was kept in the can and they produced it a month or more after he'd done it! This produced a huge flurry of complaint in Britain with people forming up to question David Owen who was the Foreign Secretary. David Owen had to answer these questions in Parliament and he sent a message to Tony Parsons, in tactful terms, saying that he had dealt with his remarks to the BBC which admittedly had been made some time ago, but could Tony Parsons refrain from saying anything more in public "and let Ministers take the flak". I was summoned in to deal with the telegram when I was trying to play tennis with Tony Parsons on our tennis court while the crowd was marching up and down outside calling for death to the Shah on the other side of the wall. I got the telegram and brought it back to Tony Parsons. It said "Personal from the Foreign Secretary" and that they had dealt with the furore from his interview but not to make any public pronouncements about support for the Shah for the time being "and let Ministers take the flak". When our Embassy was overrun by protesters some days later I said to Tony Parsons "I'm going to send a telegram to ask Ministers to take the flak!" That was the only positive instruction I remember us receiving. I don't think that the government knew what to do and all of the important tactical decisions, like getting in touch with the opposition, advising the Shah on how to handle the riots, was

done on Tony Parsons' initiative. He'd talked to Ministers before coming back from leave and felt he knew their minds well enough to be able to rely on his own initiatives.

Tony Parsons was asked by the Shah whether if he did a crackdown, he would have the support of the British Government. The fact of the matter was that neither the British, the American nor any Western Government was in a position to back the Shah in the repression that would be necessary to restore the situation and give the army carte blanche to get really tough. There would have been more massacres, the media would have been utterly hostile and the British Government in no position to have backed the Shah. It was a question which the Shah understood and to his credit he refrained from trying to bring about the necessary repression.

Tony Parsons had to reply to the Shah and he told me that he had to think very quickly but told the Shah that if he took that decision he couldn't foresee what the reaction of the British Government would be but that we would respect any decision that he took. That was as far as he could go.

In those days of course there was much less travelling by Ministers and senior officials and we hardly had any visitors at all. Nowadays the Head of the Middle Eastern Department would probably have come out to assess the situation. In fact the official occupying that post, a good friend of mine, Ivor Lucas, chided me with not sending a proper account of what had happened when our Embassy had been set on fire, but our preoccupation had not been with sending an account but with getting the Embassy working again. We sent back some reports of course but the full extent to which the Embassy was beleaguered and damaged was something of a shock to visitors when they did come. John Graham, when he arrived, was certainly very surprised to find the state we were in. But people didn't travel so much in those days.

The Americans in a sense were in the same position as we were about policy but they were more in a position to deliver. If they had wanted to, they could have deployed military assets to the Middle East but they hadn't done. One forgets. The idea that they crash around with aircraft carriers and arrive with missile firing jets above targets in the Middle East was not actually prevalent then. The last time the Americans had done anything like that was post-

Suez when they rescued Lebanon in 1958. The idea that the Americans would deploy carriers or land troops was something which people regarded as theoretically possible in 1978/9 but not practical or called for. The series of steps which have taken the Americans to the position they are in today is something which I think is not accurately enough appreciated.

The American Ambassador was Sullivan who I'd known in Laos because he had been the American Ambassador there, and he'd been closely involved with American policy in South East Asia. When he was accused of losing Iran, he said famously "I've lost much better countries than Iran in my time"! He had a difficult time because Brzezinski, who was the National Security Advisor, a post-Kissinger figure, and the State Department were approaching the thing slightly differently. Brzezinski, I think - and a huge amount has been written about this subsequently, had an American policy which was then extremely obscure. The reasons, I think, were that firstly they didn't want to say what they were doing but also both Brzezinski and the State Department were asking Sullivan what could be done and were not very happy with his view that the best hope was a reformist government that satisfied the revolutionaries. Brzezinski sent an American Air Force General called Hauser who'd been Deputy Supreme Commander in NATO and knew the Iranian military because of CENTO and various other military tie-ups. He'd been sent not, I think, at the request of Sullivan, but to talk to the generals and see if some sort of solution couldn't be arrived at and he made a perfunctory call on the Shah but the Shah knew perfectly well that he was going to talk to his generals behind his back and that didn't please him very much. But the Shah was on his way out, this was in the last days before he left. What the Americans were trying to do was see whether it was possible for the military to intervene effectively without the Americans having to back it if it went to repression. Also to try to get the military to back some kind of reliable structure on which a replacement government could take charge other than handing the thing over to extremely vociferous anti-American figures like Khomeini and his backers. Anyway none of it worked and the Americans had their Embassy overrun and staff taken hostage, although that was a bit later.

I've spoken at enormous length on Iran, do you think there is anything I've missed?

AW: In your note, you mentioned a visit by Margaret Thatcher that was presumably before the Revolution?

DM: Yes, that visit was part of Tony Parsons' policy. He liked to think ahead and have a strategy. He correctly saw that the Conservatives would, sooner or later, get back into power and when they did so their Ministers would be very busy. So he said to the Shah "Why don't you invite Mrs Thatcher to come and visit the country, while she is still Leader of the Opposition and not busy, you will get to know her, she's a very impressive lady". The Shah thought it was a brilliant idea and told his Prime Minister, who by then was Amouzegar, to invite her. Her host was thus the Prime Minister and she was given a very good tour, saw the Shah, it was all very impressive. We also had a Parliamentary delegation with some people who became quite important. They all reported that the Shah was unpopular and that there was corruption but none of them had sufficiently acute political noses to actually say that they thought the place was unstable enough for the Shah to be overthrown.

One of the things we needed to understand better was the Iranian Army because the conventional wisdom was that if there was unrest, as in other Middle Eastern countries, the army would take control. But we wondered about this and when Tony Parsons was on leave I said to the Military Attaché and head of our defence staff, all three services were represented, that we must prepare a paper on the capacity of the Iranian Armed Forces to take control of the country if necessary, and were we right in thinking that as a last resort the army would back the Shah, keeping the country under control if necessary by force. He nodded wisely and after a fortnight I asked how they were getting on and he said they didn't think they could write the paper because they didn't have enough information. So I said that if they couldn't write it, I would write it! That I would clear it with them but we had to reach some rapid conclusions because people in London needed to know. I then wrote a paper. There were lots of other people in addition to the attaches because we had some very intelligent soldiers posted in Iran in touch with the Iranian military. They were treated as potential spies by the Iranians because if we suggested we send anyone who could speak Persian, they immediately thought they were spies! We did eventually produce a paper and when forced to actually come up with a view they said that they were not confident that the army could control events. So we sent this paper back to London and told them we couldn't be sure that the army could control things and this turned out to be accurate. The army had the numbers and

the fire power but there were no figures of sufficient character disposed to staging a coup and a coup was not what was wanted to restore the position of the Shah. The degree of repression was not something which the Shah was prepared to authorise. There were one or two generals who were “gung-ho” but they were side-lined and not given a free hand and of course the Shah was always suspicious there might be a coup against him!

All the senior generals were viciously exterminated, they nearly all suffered from being on the wrong side of the Revolution, there were ghoulis pictures of their dead and bleeding bodies after they had been shot across the newspapers and the television, it was all very distasteful.

AW: So in summary, the important points you want to get across about all of this?

DM: Yes, the question about the extent to which we could have foreseen all this or could have taken action to do something about it is really quite interesting. I often have thought about this and I know that people without first-hand experience think it could have been averted but I’m really not sure that it could have been.

The Shah had been on the throne since the 1940s and in 1953 he survived an attempt by Mosaddegh to overthrow him. In 1961 he successfully deployed the army to suppress dissent by opening fire and had arrested Khomeini and exiled him. So the Shah was, to some extent, trusted to know how to deal with his own country.

We were still quite close to the Vietnam experience where first the French and then the Americans had not benefitted from strong local leadership against communist subversion. Attempts to bolster weak regimes had failed and people were therefore relieved to feel that in Iran they had the Shah who was the head of a credible indigenous regime in a prosperous and oil rich country and not obviously dependent, like some weak regimes, on Western support, or hadn’t been since 1953. The third point is that the Shah was unpopular in the West where he was regarded as arrogant, corrupt, autocratic and repressive. He was by nature not good at showing humility and he didn’t have the advantage, like some of the others like King Hussein and the Sultan of Oman, of having been to Sandhurst and understanding better how to deal with becoming popular in the West.

The Shah was given, however, every assistance he asked for both in material questions and expertise. Money was no problem for him and he got intelligence advice, technical advice, military assistance with teams to tell him how to run his tanks. He bought all the helicopters the Americans had over from Vietnam and he got any cooperation he wanted.

Pressure to liberalise his regime was brought. There was a famous scene when the Shah visited Washington during Jimmy Carter's Presidency. Jimmy Carter wanted to put pressure on him to liberalise. During the Shah's visit the Americans had to suppress the riots outside the White House with tear gas which drifted in and caused everybody to burst into tears at the grand ceremony of welcome. So the Shah could say to Jimmy Carter "So much for liberalisation!" An attempt was made to make the Shah understand that he must deal with the concerns that made him unpopular in Iran. He understood this but didn't take more notice of it than he thought he ought to. The Americans stopped nagging him after a bit because I think they realised that any liberalisation had to be done at whatever speed he could and it wasn't actually possible to liberalise at all fast. The pressure on the Shah to liberalise was not brought to bear and if it had been it's difficult to know whether it would have been successful.

To deal with the corruption was very difficult too. The Shah himself was not particularly corrupt because he had everything he wanted and he didn't actually need any more money but he allowed his wife's relations and the underlings under him to behave in pretty corrupt ways. Corruption was therefore very difficult to deal with. Today the situation in Afghanistan is the same, there is corruption but what is anyone actually going to do about it?

Another point I think I have made, but it is important. People had long been noting the defects in the Shah's regime and predicting his downfall, certainly since the Persepolis extravaganza. It's easy to point out the weaknesses but less easy to be sure whether it is actually going to collapse. So many times there have been regimes which have looked as if they were going to collapse but have actually managed to muddle through. The Gulf regimes are still there after everybody predicted that they would be the next to fall after the Shah. And then we have, as I mentioned, the so-called self-fulfilling prophecy problem. So I think those are the points that ought to be recorded.

One last point about the extent to which this could have been foreseen. Robert Alston was my predecessor as Head of Chancery in Iran and he left some notes when he left. One of the things he wrote down, and remember this was the time when we were preparing for the cultural festival and developing a mature relationship with what we thought was a stable and viable regime, something about the mullahs and the Islamic religious establishment and he said “We must never forget that the mullahs can have a huge crowd on the streets at their behest at very short notice at any time they want to”. I thought this was an interesting remark because this is what had happened when the previous unrest had occurred and it had been dealt with by the army and the Shah had arrested Khomeini back in 1961. But I thought it was something which I hadn’t expected to see written down and left a very clear impression on me and I thought that we must bear it in mind. When we had the report on lessons to be learned, the study by Nick Browne, I drew attention to this because I thought it important that Robert Alston should have credit for saying this about the potential of the mullahs to destabilise the regime and put people on the street should never be underestimated.

AW: So you left this very different Iran at the end of December ‘79?

DM: Yes it was December ‘79. The Embassy had to be thinned out. After the Embassy had been taken over for the second time we had avoided being taken hostage thanks to the skilful young David Reddaway who spoke excellent Persian and the intervention of the authorities and Khomeini telling his son not to let them treat us as they were treating the Americans. Two or three weeks later we got a telegram from the Foreign Office saying that Ministers had decided the situation in Iran was unstable and that there were dangers of our Embassy being taken over in the same way as the American Embassy had been so we should thin out the staff and make recommendations about who should be sent home! So we now had an instruction to reduce numbers and it wasn’t viable for me to stay there with two small children who’d been at the British School but which had been closed down. So I had to recommend that I should be thinned out myself. We reduced the size of the Embassy quite considerably. This coincided with there being a vacancy as Head of the Middle East Department and they clearly realised they wanted somebody with experience of what was going on in Iran.

Head of Middle East Department, FCO, 1980-83

So I was drafted in to be Head of the Middle East Department and this was quite an interesting job. To start off with you were at a level in the Foreign Office where the opinions of your department counted, you were the element in the Foreign Office for actually producing recommendations for what should happen and dealing with events that did happen. You were your own boss, you could come and go and send yourself on leave if you felt like it! You could make what you would of it.

AW: How big was the department?

DM: It was quite small. We had about a dozen people of what used to be called policy officers, the registry staff, we had 15-20 people in all and at one stage we had to have two Assistants. I was very conscious of the work load and when it became what I thought too much for the department and people were having to stay much too late, I told Personnel Department they would have to send us more people. They were very good about it. I was given a new temporary Assistant who was Jeremy Greenstock who was then the Assistant in Personnel Department and he volunteered himself to come and help out. He was an Arabist so it was very good. We had a chap called Patrick Wogan who was a Persian speaker who was the assistant for the Persian part of the operation and Jeremy Greenstock took over dealing with the Arab side of it which was very useful for him, perhaps, because later on he became the Commercial Counsellor in Saudi Arabia which was then a very important job.

AW: And so the work you were doing?

DM: Yes, when I started off we had, of course, Iran to deal with. We had the Americans telling us their Embassy had been taken hostage and asking for help and to engage in sanctions and all the rest of it, so we had to work out a policy towards Iran which did include the EEC taking appropriate sanctions against Iran for breach of international law taking these American hostages. This kept on right through until the end of Jimmy Carter's term of office when eventually the problem was resolved. This was quite difficult because each EEC country wanted to make sure that the packet of sanctions was one which didn't impinge on them too much. We had the Governor of the Bank of England ringing up the Prime Minister

and then a message coming from Number 10 saying that there couldn't be any financial sanctions against Iran! We were afraid that if we did that, other countries which had big investments in London, like the Kuwait Investment Authority, would then switch their money away so we didn't want to suggest we would participate in that.

The one sanction that would have been effective, not to buy Iranian oil, was also ruled out from the beginning because it was decreed that we needed the oil, so the two effective sanctions were excluded from our package though the Americans brought in a package which was both a financial one and included not buying Iranian oil.

We had to get all the Whitehall departments on board for this, also the DTI was closely involved. The mentality and the extent of the Revolution was not properly understood. People who were making policy in Washington, and in other capitals, did not understand that the Iranians were quite impervious to arguments about breach of international law. Despite taking over our Embassies they were still asking for visas! They didn't understand that even if they got one they wouldn't be honoured.

Tony Parsons, back in London (this is when I was still in Iran), organised a joint appeal to try and save the life of Hoveyda who was a most humane and civilised man and didn't deserve to be shot. It was thought that if the EEC all together put in an appeal somebody would listen. They just didn't understand that this was not the kind of message that would have any traction at all in Tehran. If they were going to shoot Hoveyda, they were going to shoot Hoveyda and getting people to understand the extent to which the Iranians were impervious to the kind of pressures which, in the diplomatic world, were normally brought to bear, was quite difficult at the beginning. However, as the full nature of the Iranian regime gradually became known, people began to accept this.

The work therefore became Iran orientated and we still had the Iran/Iraq War, the hostage crisis with the SAS in London and lots of Iranian-angled excitements but we also had very important interests in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf which were jeopardised to some extent by what had happened in Iran and we also had very big important commercial interests, the same as had been going on in Iran until the Revolution, and people like James Craig, our Ambassador in Saudi Arabia at the time, were very much dependent on the Foreign Office to

get the non-internationally minded departments in Whitehall committed to boosting Britain Inc in the Gulf. Very often the major items that the Saudi Arabians and other Gulf countries wanted to buy, like fighters for their air forces, depended on an effort which went much wider than the Ministry of Defence. They needed engineers to service the engines, they needed to speak English so the British Council had to mobilise, and the British Universities to teach them courses, for example, that would teach Saudi engineers how to service jet engines. All this in an infrastructure that didn't have any engineering base. The Ministry of Health was brought into play to help us build state of the art hospitals in Saudi Arabia. British contractors were happy to build them but they needed to be functioning hospitals so we had to get health authorities, who had never thought they might have a role overseas, to stimulate hospitals into having liaisons with the Prince Khalid Hospital, say, in some town in Saudi Arabia about providing and training nurses and sending out doctors to work there. To start with people wouldn't agree that this should be given any sort of priority because they were trying to get the NHS working at home, as they are now. You had to first of all convince your opposite numbers in the British civil service that this was worth doing, and then help them act as a liaison. My approach to being Head of Middle East Department was not one which the Foreign Office, then and more subsequently has tried to develop, as a sort of hierarchy in which the Government decides to do x, y and z and the Foreign Office sends instructions to posts abroad to do x, y and z, but far more the practical question of finding out how the Whitehall machine, stimulated by the Foreign Office, could help people like James Craig and our men in Abu Dhabi and Oman to win contracts, get business and extend the influence of Britain, discover what needed to be done and go back and persuade the relevant departments to do it.

AW: Now some of these other things that happened during this period, the impounding of the Yemen Prime Minister's aircraft?

DM: Yes, I went into the office in December '79, really to touch base because I didn't think I was going to have to start work properly until after Christmas. Not a bit of it! They said that it was jolly nice to have a new Head of Department but they were all terribly busy because the Yemen Prime Minister was on an official visit to England and they had just heard that his aeroplane had been impounded at Heathrow by somebody sticking a stop order on its nose. This was because the Yemen hadn't paid the British service companies money which

the Yemen airlines owed and it was a long outstanding debt. We had said you can't take advantage of the PM's aeroplane being here because if you want your debt paid we will need to get the Yemen's Prime Minister's support. "No, no" they said but, of course, as soon as it landed somebody slapped this order on its nose! So this was the problem of the day but they told me not to worry and to take over the department and they would handle the plane question! It was so humiliating because in the Arab world hospitality is everything, particularly in the unsophisticated Arab worlds of the Arabian Peninsula. He was our guest and what had we done but impound his aeroplane! We ought to have flown him home. But any suggestion like that and it was "Who's going to pay?" I'm not sure how it was solved in the end but it wasn't solved with any credit to us and any hope to improve relations with the two Yemens was completely wrecked.

AW: And the death of the princess?

DM: Yes there was the TV film about the princess who was executed over adultery and this was thought to be a direct slur on the Saudi Royal Family who felt they were being unfairly characterised in the film. It led to a huge business, they wanted us to intervene but we said that we had a free press. And they then produced the ITV rules that did give the government power to intervene. James Craig, who was on leave, had to be summoned back to Riyadh so that he could be booted out. Luckily he then took charge in London of the business of sorting this out which was eventually done by getting Carrington, who was the Foreign Secretary, to make a speech to the Middle East Association at which he made a half apology or produced a form of words that would satisfy. The Saudis were in a situation in which they were embarrassed and had to take action as a result the indignation of non-foreign minded members of the Royal Family and punish the British for this amazing attack on their Royal Family. When James Craig was able to negotiate a sensible outcome with them involving Carrington's form of words which was construed as an apology, the whole thing was able to be calmed down and James Craig was welcomed back. Luckily he had a desk in our department from which he was working to get himself back so he could carry on with his important job. They threatened to boycott us from winning contracts as well and there were one or two recorded instances of people being told they weren't welcome to do this or that.

AW: And the State visits during this period?

DM: Yes, they were all part of our effort to try to boost our position in the Gulf. We had decided to ask the Gulf rulers and the King of Saudi Arabia to come on State Visits at a rate of one a year. We had King Khalid, I think it was, who came on a State Visit. He was an interim ruler. He was next in line but he wasn't terribly fit and the government was actually being conducted by Prince Fahad who was next in line and eventually became King. This had to be organised and put a heavy, although very interesting, load on the department.

AW: And your Foreign Secretary was Carrington?

DM: Yes but he had to resign over the Falkland Islands in the middle of it all so we then had Pym briefly up until the election. What was interesting was that the Ministers of the Conservative Government that had come in in 1979 were as new as I was, so we went up quite an interesting learning curve dealing with these Arab countries at the same time. The junior Minister at the Foreign Office was Douglas Hurd who was an ex-member of the Foreign Service, so he knew the form very well. He was extremely good because he understood exactly, without having to have it all explained to him, what all the difficulties and complications and foibles in dealing with Arabs were. He was very good at playing the right role and helping out at Ministerial level. He also presided over one or two Heads of Mission conferences that we had. He was able to be more influential than a Minister of State would normally be because the whole Government was new. Mrs Thatcher was not nearly as prominent in foreign relations as she subsequently became. When Carrington was Foreign Secretary she didn't interfere nearly as much as she did later when Geoffrey Howe was Foreign Secretary and they had a somewhat difficult relationship.

It was an invigorating and stimulating time to be working in London because the world was changing and we had to come to terms with the shake-up the Iranian Revolution had created and also to learn the lessons that needed to be learned without sacrificing day-to-day activity and advantages and opportunities with commercial contracts that could be won.

Ambassador to Lebanon, 1983-5

AW: This is 29 October 2014 and David Miers is resuming his recollections of his diplomatic career in conversation with Abbey Wright. At our last session you were finishing your post as Head of Middle East Department and about to start an exciting new appointment as Ambassador in Lebanon. Did you have a long preparation period for this or were you sent straight off?

DM: The process always take a bit of time after they ask you if you want the job, then they have to submit it to the Foreign Secretary who then submits it to the Prime Minister who then submits it to the Queen and they then go and ask the foreign government whether they will accept this person and when it comes back it has to go through the same chain with official signatures. Actually, I was asked to do this and discovered later that I was in fact a replacement for a colleague who was withdrawn on security grounds for reasons of his personal safety. I don't want to go into that and I didn't know it at the time. So they wanted to get me off as soon as possible because of this delay but they wanted me to ask my wife because there was the so-called siege of Beirut at the time and a lot of publicity for all that was happening with Beirut getting smashed up. So I didn't get to Lebanon until November. It was a rather unconventional posting because of this civil war and the upheaval.

AW: You weren't an Arabist, did they think that mattered?

DM: Well they didn't think it mattered but I thought it did. But the Lebanese are very cosmopolitan and they had a long association with France, they'd had the French Mandate, and then become a separate country so most Lebanese spoke French and English. Even when they were talking to each other they would switch from one to the other quite a bit. Actually I got paid for speaking French! Fortunately Lebanon was a country where enough French was spoken for me to qualify for the allowance. But I think Arabic was important because it was the language of the streets and the TV was in Arabic so following what was going on, in the newspapers too, was difficult. There was a French journal called *Orient-Le Jour* and some other non-Arabic press but I regarded it as a disadvantage not speaking Arabic, but of all the Arabic-speaking countries in the world, Lebanon is probably the one where it has least import, but it is important to follow what is going on.

AW: Did Imelda accompany you from the beginning?

DM: Yes, she did. I was of course advised that I should check with her given that it was a slightly dicey place. Our children were at boarding school but needed to come and visit in the holidays and that was not guaranteed because of the security situation. We thought about it quite carefully. We were advised to go there via Cyprus because the Sovereign Base there was a bit of a refuge for the Embassy in times of difficulty. They gave us quite a lot of administrative support. We had a close protection team which was composed of military policemen and I will come to that later. Having the military backup from Cyprus was really quite useful. There was a ferry which went over to Cyprus and when we arrived in Beirut we still had a British element in the multinational force but, again, I will come onto that later. They used to fly helicopters back and forward from Lebanon to the Sovereign Base in Cyprus.

We arrived in Cyprus and stayed with the Commander of the Sovereign Base who was a very delightful and hospitable person called Langley. He told us what he could about Lebanon and then put us in a helicopter which took us to the airport where we were properly met by the Head of Protocol and members of the Embassy staff, just like arriving at a normal posting. We were taken to our house by Richard Palmer and the close protection team and the first thing that happened was their briefing about our daily life and how we would be accompanied by them.

We went into the office the next morning and met various members of staff who we hadn't already met and began our posting with the first impressions of Lebanon as a war-torn place which were rather different from first impressions of other capitals one has been in. The Embassy was sheathed in wire mesh. It was a fine building on the Corniche and the esplanade along the sea front. The British Embassy had originally been an office building and we had occupied the whole of it. We had a huge amount of space because many of the functions which had been based in Lebanon had moved out with the civil war. We had had a regional labour officer, a regional civil aviation adviser, an overseas development office. It was the kind of place where organisations had sited their regional offices and so we had had quite a big "footprint" as they say. After these offices had been vacated there was a lot of

spare space and the American Embassy, which had been just down the road and had been devastated by one of the first car bombs, was no longer usable. So the British had asked the Americans if they would like to occupy the empty space until they could sort themselves out and so they did. They had fenced off the piece of Corniche opposite this building with dragon's teeth and anti lorry bomb blocks at each end and these were manned by American Marines. The Americans also had a detachment in this multilateral force, which I will come onto, and they deployed some of them to guard these joint British-American premises. They had enormous amphibious tanks called Amtracks, which are like huge stranded whales, to supplement the concrete blocks, there was a chicane, a check point, and so on and we were fairly secure. The wire mesh, which I mentioned, could repel rocket-propelled grenades which were a popular form of attack in Lebanon at that time. It was quite a surprising sight to arrive at this defensive position in a war-torn city.

I proceeded to go through the normal drill for any Ambassador in a post: present credentials to the President and call on the ministers.

AW: And the political situation?

DM: It was slightly curious. Lebanon hadn't always been a country. To the irritation of the Syrians it was carved out of the Ottoman Empire and created as a separate mandate for the French under the League of Nations after the First World War. The Syrians regarded this as an amputation; it should have been part of their territory and they were also annoyed that the Ottomans kept Antioch which had traditionally been the main city of the Middle East after Alexandria. They regarded that as part of Syria which is still in Turkey. The French policy was that they had created Lebanon as a country with a sufficiently large Christian majority to be a Christian state in what was basically the Arab Islamic environment there. In order to cope with the multicultural make-up of the Lebanon there was a convention under which the Prime Minister was a Sunni but the President was a Maronite and the Chairman of the National Assembly was a Shia and other posts were reserved for other sects like the Greek Orthodox and the Druze. There was always a composite government that was put together with a delicate balance. This worked quite well because the Lebanese accepted their multi-confessional status and made a virtue of it. It was a *laissez-faire* society in which entrepreneurs could flourish and did. Beirut became comparatively rich and prosperous and

was thought to be a viable and useful place where many organisations had placed their Middle East headquarters.

It was very sad when all this broke down with the civil war between the confessions. One element contributing to this was the Arab Israel dispute and the Palestinian problem. After the occupation of the West Bank by Israel following the '67 War, I think it was, the Palestinian fighters withdrew to Jordan and there was a Palestinian presence there which became increasingly challenging. King Hussein clamped down and suppressed this state within a state which was beginning to grow in Jordan. The Palestinians transferred themselves to Lebanon where the Lebanese Government, because it was a permanent coalition, didn't have the strength to control the Palestinians in the way that the Jordanians did. So the Palestinian presence to which all Arabs had to pay lip service became a state within a state in Lebanon which then caused a lot of trouble. The traditional Maronite Christian ascendancy was then challenged by the Palestinian state within a state and this led to clashes and the Maronite President actually called in the Syrians to come and control the situation in Lebanon. So although the Syrians became very unpopular in Lebanon, they could claim they actually had been invited in by the Lebanese Government, which was in fact true, originally. The situation then developed into an ugly competition for power, territory and position between the various confessional groups and the government was composed of representatives of these various groups because the preservation of Lebanon as a country was regarded as an important aim even if they were quarrelling.

So the government didn't actually control much territory outside the capital, in fact it didn't even control the capital which was divided in half with a so-called green line and East Beirut was Christian and controlled by the Maronites and various elements of the army which were Maronite. Each confessional group also had its militia which would control its territory. So the Druze occupied the Shouf Mountains which they had traditionally done and they had traditionally competed for control there with the Maronite Christians. Although they were both originally rather reclusive religious sects, the Maronites were becoming increasingly internationally minded and had developed this relationship particularly with the French and had opted, way back in history, to be part of Western rather than Eastern Christianity. They had been taken up by the French and then there had been clashes between the Druze and the Christians in the Shouf Mountains in the 19th century when the Ottomans controlled the

empire. It all led to a lot of European interference in this part of the Ottoman Empire which the Ottomans had to manage under ever increasing pressure from those in Lebanon who thought that there should be proper control. So this is one reason why the French got the mandate for that part of the Levant after the First World War but there had been Russian, British and Austrian, though not much German, interest. After the Second World War when the civil war broke out again there was foreign interference supporting different confessional groups. The Maronites looked to the French for support but realised also the muscle to offer them protection would actually come from America and America was a more useful place if they were going to become refugees to look to. So the Christians looked to America, particularly the Armenians and the Orthodox, but also to France and many Maronites were completely at home in France.

The Druze had traditionally looked to the British to protect their interests but the interest had shifted to the Russians by the time we were there and the leader of the Druze, who was a very interesting man called Walid Jumblatt, had collected quite a lot of Russian military material one way or another. Again I will come on to that because we used to go and visit him.

The Shia had been neglected but had close relations with Iran, and following the Iranian Revolution they were encouraged by the Iranians to assert their rights. They were a numerous body in terms of population, but they didn't control much wealth or political power. They formed the party called Hezbollah and which is now named a terrorist organisation. When we were there the Hezbollah was very much in its infancy but the Shia were involved in this hostage taking which again, I will come onto.

The people who didn't really have a protecting power were the Sunni who, after the Maronites, were the most influential group in Lebanon. They had been the main body of the merchant class in the coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre and so on. During the Ottoman period they'd been allowed to get on with their commercial and bourgeois activity and they had been very successful. During the Mandate they reluctantly accepted there would be a Christian ascendancy in Lebanon but they were then encouraged by anti-imperialist powers in the Middle East to assert themselves and there were some quite leading Sunni activists in the 1930s demanding independence for Syria and Lebanon and Egypt. With the rise of Nasser some of the Sunnis looked to him but when Nasser's successor Sadat

did a deal with Israel a lot of Sunnis thought this was a betrayal and these ones supported the Palestinians. The Palestinian presence, if anything, was a Sunni one. The rising influence of Saudi Arabia and the money which Sunni Lebanese could make in the Gulf became increasingly important. The best known of the recent Prime Ministers of Lebanon was Hariri, who was a Sunni, and he was assassinated, most people think by the Syrians. He was a figure that was in the ascendant while we were there because of the money he'd made and the way he was devoting it to trying to get reconstruction in Lebanon.

So these confessional groups traditionally looked to outside powers for protection and influence and Lebanon was very prone to outside interference. It was essential if you were going to get a peaceful settlement in Lebanon and get the civil war resolved that these outside influences should be reconciled otherwise they would cause trouble.

You also had military deployments. When we arrived the Israelis had invaded Lebanon because they wished to deal with the rising trouble caused by the Palestinian presence and the fact that the Palestinians were more or less taking over Lebanon and forming a state within a state and had armed establishments on the Israeli border. So the Israelis decided, and it was highly controversial in Israel, that they would invade Lebanon and this was done by Defence Minister Sharon and PM Begin. It was controversial because the Israeli Government was not taken properly into the confidence of the ministers who did it and it ended up with the siege of Beirut and the agreement that the Palestinians would withdraw their political and military presence out of Lebanon. They went off to Tunis and the PLO established itself in Tunis. They tried to come back to Tripoli in Northern Lebanon but were firmly suppressed by the Syrians who weren't going to have any Palestinians trying to build up a second state in Syria! The Palestinians initially said they couldn't withdraw their fighters because of what would happen to the women and children left in the refugee camps and were told there would be an agreement. But of course there wasn't and what happened were the Sabra and Shatila massacres which were carried out by the Christian militias with the connivance or, some would say, the active support of the Israelis who were occupying most of Beirut at the time.

The multinational force composed of the Americans, the French and the Italians - and we were persuaded later to bring in a small detachment for reasons of cosmetic participation - initially oversaw the withdrawal of the Palestinians and then retired offshore. After the

massacres it occupied certain places in Beirut and was supposed to be guaranteeing the settlement under which the Palestinians would withdraw, and the Israelis would then withdraw. But what happened before our arrival was that the Shia, egged on by the Iranians, drove two colossal lorry bombs into the headquarters of the American and French detachments and killed something like 200 US Marines and I think 100 French soldiers in what were then quite sensational attacks. In those days this was quite a shock. The multinational force, instead of being able to guarantee anything very much, became a target of attack. The Americans were very close to the beach, because the American Marines have a tradition of liking to land on the beach and then establishing themselves, which was beside the airport south of Beirut. They hadn't got a clear idea of what they wanted to do but deployed this force to guarantee the settlement which had collapsed and the force was now beleaguered and actually being shelled by hostile artillery from the Shouf Mountains. The Americans had a large number of ships offshore including an amazing World War II battleship called the *New Jersey* which President Reagan had brought back into operation. He had brought back two of these ships and they had cruise missiles installed on them. So one of them was steaming up and down and occasionally firing its 16 inch guns in retaliation to the Shouf for the sporadic shelling. To deal with this would have required a proper invasion of Lebanon but to withdraw under rather humiliating circumstances was not an option at the time.

Therefore in the early months of our arrival the multinational force stayed in Lebanon. I saw the battleship steaming up and down. I didn't see it open fire although it certainly did. The ammunition that it was using dated from the Second World War and was regarded as being of secondary reliability and it wasn't all of uniform quality. If you are firing over a range of 26 miles, which is what these shells could do, you have to correct onto the target which means each shell has to arrive in a reliable place with a uniform amount of propellant. But this was not the case with this battleship. Sometimes the shells landed in the snow and were recovered and put on display by the Druze against whom they had been aimed! It was all a fiasco and eventually the governments concerned decided that they would withdraw the multinational force. Our small contribution, which was not really strong enough to do anything but was there as a political rather than a military act, caused concerns with Ministers for its safety and with great relief they withdrew it to Cyprus.

But when we arrived, there were the Israelis in the south, having withdrawn as far as the Awali River where Sidon is; the Syrians in the north, cautiously creeping back into the areas from where they had withdrawn; the multinational force in Beirut which was guaranteeing nothing but was a target for attack; and a United Nations Force in the south called UNIFIL which was supposed to be monitoring the ceasefire agreement which had resulted from an earlier incursion by the Israelis, so the place was awash with foreign units of one kind or another and the Lebanese were not in control of their own country.

AW: So how did you do your work and what were you supposed to do?

DM: Yes, I think the British role in Lebanon is something one ought to touch on. I was never given any very coherent explanation of what our objectives were because nobody really thought we could consider not having an Embassy in Lebanon. It had been a place where everybody had had their regional headquarters and was therefore quite a big Embassy with quite a big commercial element because of the Lebanese entrepreneurs doing a lot of work in the Middle East with a lot of oil wealth and a lot of British companies had had their headquarters in Lebanon. There was still a considerable international community. One hoped it would go back to normal because the Lebanese are a talented, entrepreneurial and potentially prosperous people. Also the extent to which the problems were caused by the overflow of the Arab- Israeli dispute over the question of Palestine was something which we had been involved with since the beginning. Although most of the activity on this was conducted by envoys from America or the UN, we were still involved and needed to be following it. The situation in Lebanon itself, with all this foreign intervention, was something which the British Government felt it had to be informed about. We did such work as we could in following events and looking after the British community and hoping there would be a return to prosperity and the normal work of the Embassy in commercial, diplomatic and other fields. The protection of the British community was something which was important and then questions arose when the hostage taking started.

Shortly after I arrived we had to evacuate the British community. There had been a temporary settlement but after the withdrawal of the multinational force the settlement was not holding. The struggle for turf in Lebanon and Beirut itself resumed. So there was more shooting across the green line between the confessional enclaves between East and West, and

there was also infighting between the Druze and the Shia and the Sunni in the West and a split between the Lebanese Christians in the East between those who were looking to establish Lebanon as an independent entity with a Christian ascendancy and those who thought Lebanon was an Arab country obliged to show some sympathy with the Palestinians and have a proper relationship with Syria. So the Lebanese Christians themselves were split. There were fierce dynastic struggles between those led by President Gemayel and supporters of ex-President Frangieh. It was an uncertain situation. The Maronites were split and some believed that President Assad of Syria should be regarded as their protector ahead of the Americans who were a long way away. So there were splits on all sides amongst the political activists. But the vast majority of the Lebanese just wanted to live in peace and get back to prosperity.

We used to get subjected to quite vicious shelling and at one stage we thought there might be serious fighting in West Beirut where our Embassy was on the Moslem side of the green line. I was rung up by the Foreign Office asking if I was going to suggest that the British community should be evacuated with all the fighting going on. I said that as long as they stayed in their houses and didn't venture out they would be alright but that the moment may come.... So the moment came and it was done. The BBC told everybody who wanted to be evacuated to come to the Corniche with their passport and no more than one case, no servants, no non-British citizens. It was very efficient. The Services organised it from Cyprus. They posted a naval auxiliary ship that helicopters could land on easily and they flew the people to it from the Corniche where they assembled. American Marines were guarding it. Someone made a list, they were put in a helicopter and flown off to the ship and then taken off to the SBAs where they were flown to England. It was very sad, we knew so many of them and they had businesses which they were leaving and didn't know whether they would return, whether their houses would be safe; and many were leaving their livelihoods behind. It is always sad when you have to evacuate the British community; we did it in Iran as well. Luckily in this case the thing blew over quite quickly because it transpired that this awful shelling which we had been subjected to and which was quite frightening, was to keep everyone's heads down in West Beirut whilst a unit of the army which was sympathetic to the East, a Christian battalion, was evacuated by sea via a rather makeshift pier in West Beirut and didn't want to be interfered with. We didn't know it at the time but the American University and the American and British Embassies, which were all

quite close together on the Corniche, usually didn't get shelled and the Christian gunners had been told not to drop any shells on us. But it was very disturbing while it was going on. We made some arrangements in the basement of the Embassy to accommodate people who had to be in the Chancery building. You came out the next morning and there were scenes of devastation. There was a Red Cross lorry with supplies for a village which had been hit head-on by a shell, with its stores thrown all over the place. The situation calmed down and the British community could come back after a bit.

Access to the various militias that did control the country was important and we managed to develop a sensible working relationship with most of the militias largely because each confessional grouping wanted to state its case and be understood. Foreign missions, instead of being regarded as a nuisance, were actually embraced as audiences with whom they hoped to evoke some sympathy.

AW: And the hostage taking?

DM: Yes, the hostage taking was just beginning. If somebody got taken hostage, there were two possibilities either they could be taken for a dark political purpose, which you had to establish; or they were taken because they were of value and could be sold on to somebody who needed a hostage for a dark political purpose. On the way to the airport you were quite liable to be accosted and stopped. The first thing was to establish why anyone wanted to take you hostage. Very often they didn't want to take you hostage; they just wanted your Mercedes motorcar. We used to advise the British community that if they were stopped on no account to resist the theft of their car, they could get shot doing that. They have a saying in Arabic "*Beite Beitak*" which means "my house is your house", so we said that the equivalent as far as the motorcar was concerned was "*Sayara Sayartak*" and they should say that and hand over the keys and then they could negotiate to get the car back again later from the appropriate militia!

Indeed our own car, a brand new Range Rover specially designed for protection with reinforced armour, was parked outside the Residence. A militia thought that this was very attractive and the object of attention and they decided to hijack it. They couldn't open the doors and couldn't get into it. Our bodyguards were watching from inside the house and they

saw the militia empty a complete magazine from a Kalashnikov into the driver's window and not one bullet penetrated, so it was very refreshing from the point of security! They eventually managed to drag the vehicle off and they prised the door open with a crow bar. We got it back two or three days later when things had calmed down and we'd complained to the militia. It had to have new tyres but they took it off to Cyprus and pored over it and were very excited to see what the effects were! Protective vehicle knowledge was therefore improved and its construction was vindicated. There had been suggestions that we didn't need specially armoured vehicles, there were some armoured Mercedes on the market like this which we could buy. But our experts said they were not reliable because where the armoured glass went up into the frame of the door there was a gap and bullets could come in, so they didn't regard the Mercedes armoured cars as safe. The German Ambassador had one, they were quite popular and the Lebanese President had a BMW and the Australian Ambassador in Damascus who was accredited to Lebanon also had an armoured German made car. After we'd had another problem with our car, he lent us this for a month. It was very comfortable inside but subsequently the German Ambassador was driving his Mercedes and he went through a check point, where they were supposed to let Ambassadors through, but on this occasion they didn't. He didn't want to fiddle about so he told his driver to drive on, I suspect he'd done this before, and the militia decided to give him a lesson and they peppered the car with their Kalashnikovs. A bullet entered in precisely the way which our experts said it could and killed the driver.

The armoured Range Rover didn't have springs which were adequate for the additional weight of the armour. It had a metal floor and some sort of ceramic armour in the sides of the doors. The floor got amazingly hot because the exhaust heated it up, so you had to move your feet about and the carpet was glued to the floor and rapidly came unstuck and the metal was bare. It swayed about because of the springs, the clutch and the brakes were not man enough for the job either but it was safe! It only returned from Cyprus towards the end of our time there and most of the time we relied upon another armoured vehicle called The Minster. The Minster was a Ford Zephyr which had been stretched, and had lots of armour and thick windows and when it was blown up, which I will get to later on, the part where the driver and passengers sat was not breached, which was a great tribute to the car. Again, it didn't have the right suspension, brakes or clutch and smelt of hot oil and asbestos and wasn't an attractive car to drive in.

We also had a Daimler which was left over from the days before the Civil War. It was alleged to be safe below waist level. So we drove around quite a lot in it under the completely false idea that we were safe if we crouched on the floor. We eventually had another of these bust ups in Beirut and my deputy was using the Daimler to go to a lunch party. They all had to take refuge and the car was parked downstairs. It was peppered with bullet holes and all of them penetrated so it was absolutely not safe below waist level at all!

The key thing was to discover the purpose of the hostage taking. If it wasn't car theft and they actually wanted a person, would they pass him on to anybody that had a serious political aim or did they simply want money? If they wanted money, the British Government didn't pay ransoms but other people might see what they could do. In fact there were only two serious political hostage takings, one was of a rather sad United Nations official who was taken hostage by a nasty Palestinian terrorist group and although we tried to make contact with them and find out what it was they wanted and what the context of this kidnapping was, although we had no authority to pay a ransom or negotiate terms of release, we still needed to know. But we never really discovered and they hanged him, and eventually we got photographs, which was very sad.

Other people got taken under the misapprehension that they were either Jewish or British. Terry Waite didn't actually get taken prisoner until after I had left but what happened there was that the Hezbollah had blown up the American and the French multinational contingents and a vendetta had developed between the Western governments, who regarded this as a terrorist grouping, and elements in it who were determined to continue attacks on the French and the Americans. So their next target was to try and blow up the French and American embassies in Kuwait. They were arrested by the Kuwaitis and locked up for terrorism. The friends of the leader of this group, who was called Imad Mugniyah, who was quite an activist and was the person who blew up the American Embassy the second time (and I'll come on to this) was determined to get his friends and relations out of prison in Kuwait. So he took American and French hostages in Lebanon and he hid them and said he would release them when the people banged up in Kuwait were freed. So an increasing number of American and French hostages got taken. Understanding why people were taken and understanding whether or not it was part of that operation was critical and you could advise people if the

hostage taking was for a reason you had established and advise the community on how to take precautions against it. In fact when the situation eventually arose that there were dangers for almost any Westerner to go to the airport, we had to advise people it wasn't safe and to travel by another route out of Lebanon.

After a bit the honour of being taken hostage in exchange for the people held in Kuwait extended to the British and we became fair game. Terry Waite appeared on the scene with the intention of getting these people released. The first time he appeared, I was still there. He was very mysterious. He would deal a certain amount with the press, a certain amount with the British Embassy but he never said exactly what he was up to, not even to his own boss the Archbishop of Canterbury whose representative he was. Eventually, Oliver North, who was a maverick American White House staffer, discovered that negotiations with the Iranians, which were clandestine and not supposed to be permitted, could be exploited to put pressure on Hezbollah to release a particular hostage. The Iranians wanted spare parts for their ground to air missiles to fight the war with the Iraqis. North was offering them parts illegally in return for the release of American hostages. Money was also exchanging hands which North could use for some curious campaign in Central America with other guerrillas! All of this allegedly going on with President Reagan's authority but which was disavowed when there was an enquiry into it all. We only knew the tip of the iceberg when occasionally negotiations would take place in a London hotel when Americans, contrary to their public policy, were actually negotiating for the release of hostages. It was all very difficult. North would secure the release of a prisoner and the Hezbollah, under Iranian pressure, would agree to put the chap on the street near the American University. So the Americans rang us up one day and said "Listen, we can't explain this to you but we understand one of our hostages may be getting released could your close protection team please agree to pick him up and make sure he is brought safely to us?" So I agreed to do this and sent our team who found this American standing on the appointed corner looking a bit bemused, picked him up and brought him in. We asked what was going on but they said "Search us", they didn't know but had had a message from Washington, and this was North. After a bit North realised he couldn't use us for this because too many questions were getting asked so he decided to ask Terry Waite to go and stand in a certain place where an American hostage would be released to him. Terry Waite thought this was fine and he then had a press conference with the hostage and when he was asked how he brought it about he was mysterious, which he always

was. To this day I still don't know how much Terry Waite knew about all of this but he had been in contact, to some extent, with North and after it had happened a couple of times North got rumbled by the Americans who formed up to President Reagan and demanded to know what was going on. North was exposed, there was a huge enquiry and then everyone asked Terry Waite if he was involved with North. Waite said he had known North and then had the job of having to vindicate his own *bona fides* as somebody who could negotiate for the hostages.

After I had left he went back to Beirut. We told him not to without proper protection. He got the Druze to look after him. He rang me up, funnily enough it was my birthday, and told me he had got protection and was going back to Beirut. By then John Gray was the Ambassador. Waite told the Druze he would see the people he was in contact with before, who were the captors of the hostages, but had not been interested in him unless he would go to Kuwait and arrange for their people to be released. But the Kuwaitis refused to see him. Terry Waite now told his Druze to stand down and then became a hostage himself. He was kept for a long time. It was very brave of him to do that but it shouldn't have been necessary and poor old Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was then besieged by people. I tried to explain to him what we could usefully do, which was very little because we were not prepared to put pressure on the Kuwaitis to release terrorist prisoners or enter into negotiations when we knew this was what the aim of the captors was. It was resolved eventually when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait and these prisoners disappeared into the tall grass and there was no longer any point in Imad Mugniyan keeping the people hostage. Hezbollah released them in Damascus. So that is the story of the hostage taking, which was all part of looking after the British community.

AW: And the rest of the country? Were you able to travel at all?

DM: Yes we were. The various groupings were keen to explain their positions and were quite ready to receive you, give you a nice lunch and send you home having given you an earful of what they thought should happen! There were lots of places we could go. With the protection of our close protection team, we were fairly safe, not entirely safe because of the fascination with car bombs as a favourite means of resolving disputes.

One of the nice visits I made was to visit the Fiji Battalion UNIFIL force in the south. The Fiji Battalion regarded the Queen as their Head of State and I was the Queen's Representative and would receive a royal salute. They would give me lunch, and I would learn that their ambition was to play rugby football against the Fiji Battalion in the Sinai, where there was another international force! They were very happy to see me; the only thing they asked of me was to bring the video tapes of the latest Five Nations matches at Twickenham! They were, charming, fierce and welcoming.

There was a funny beleaguered Christian enclave at the south end of the Shouf, but it had an uncertain future because they were in the wrong place, not in a part which had been traditionally Christian. The Shouf Mountains were a law unto themselves and the people who controlled the southern end of them were the Druze. The head of the Druze was Walid Jumblatt, who I mentioned earlier, and he is the most delightful urbane chap. He would offer you lunch and let your children play with his weapons collection which included two large Russian T34 tanks. Our teenage children would crawl all over those; it was absolute heaven for them! He would talk seriously about what was going on in Lebanon and what part the Druze would play. The Druze were tough, resolute fighters, you didn't want to mix it with the Druze but at the same time were a very small community compared to the others and didn't have the same level of prosperity from business. Walid Jumblatt is a very interesting man. His father had been blown upon the road by a bomb by the Syrians as a lesson because he'd been a bit too independent. So Walid Jumblatt was cautious about whom he would make enemies with but had strong views about what ought to happen. He was extremely shrewd, and still is. I went to see him a couple of years ago. He wants to retire, but his sons don't want to have anything to do with it!

To the north we would go and see the authorities in Tripoli, we had a British Consul there who was a member of a Maronite family there. The Consul in Tripoli was called Anwar Arida and had a daughter the same age as my daughter and she was at the same convent in Surrey, so we had an affinity with the Aridas who were extremely nice people. They had had a big textile business which had been smashed up by the Civil War. The Syrians ultimately controlled that northern bit above the Christian enclave. So the Consul had to deal with the Syrians and it was very difficult for him.

We could go to skiing in the The Cedars, it was absurd to see the rich in their fashionable ski clothes on holiday from America coming home from America to Lebanon for Christmas. They would go skiing and there would be parties in the chalets, which had been built by the British in the Second World War to practice mountain warfare! But it had been turned into a ski resort by the Lebanese who'd pocketed the money they had been given to demolish it by the British! There was a Syrian check point with shivering Syrian soldiers hunched in their inappropriately thin uniforms and a brazier and then Range Rovers full of rich young Lebanese going up to ski!

There was quite a lot of normal Western European life in the Christian enclave in the north of Beirut which was regarded as fairly safe and they had a ski resort there called Faraya which we used to go to. Travelling around with the bodyguards was not too difficult. The Syrians and the Israelis both reluctantly allowed diplomats to travel around and jump the queues at their check points. They used to take a slightly dim view of our heavily armed CP team but they didn't brandish their weapons too provocatively and put them in the bottom of the car, although it was perfectly legitimate and they had the authority of the Lebanese government.

If the airport was shut, and it often was, the only way you could get in and out of Lebanon was either by driving to Damascus or taking the ferry from Jounieh in the Christian enclave to Cyprus. When the multilateral force was there you could take helicopters to Cyprus but after it had gone the Americans and we ran many fewer.

AW: And I think you want to talk about your Close Protection team?

DM: Yes, as I've mentioned we experimented with lots of different motorcars and whichever car we were using was followed by a Landrover with four members of our CP team in it. The team consisted of eight military policemen who were very specially selected and whose greatest crime was humour failure. They had to have good judgement and be disciplined at all times. There was a sergeant in charge of them who was an exceptionally good chap and five of them would be on duty at a time. One would be the bodyguard who would sit beside the driver in the Ambassador's car. That was why, if we had the family with us, it was quite useful to use the old 7 seater Daimler. The Landrover would then take four more of the team, armed to the teeth and their job, if we were ever stopped, was to get out. They didn't like

stopping, because we were very vulnerable if we stopped. Wherever we went, they would do a recce first and suss out the route and if we got stopped in traffic, they would beat on the cars in front of us and get us through rather like an ambulance. It was difficult sometimes at the check points on the border with Syria where the traffic was very thick and you would also get Lebanese armed to the teeth and the guards had to be very disciplined and good humoured but they would bang on the bonnets and push us through.

The team who were on duty lived in the house with us and they also needed to be fed. The cook was kept busy and we were always negotiating the costs of feeding the bodyguards with London!

And this brings me on to the problem of accommodation. Whatever accommodation we had, it had to be able to house this close protection team too. When the multinational force left our security people thought it was no longer safe to use the Chancery building and the Americans didn't think it was safe either as there were no Marines to guard it. So we moved to a rather small office in another high rise building which again was not very satisfactory, the security people didn't like it, so they pressed us to go and find premises on the East side of the green line where there was a Christian dominated militia and which was regarded as much less vulnerable. We found a house which was empty which would do as an office at the end of a cul de sac which petered out into woods on the side of a hill. There was a police check point at the entrance to the cul de sac and we thought it was about as safe as you could get. We found another house opposite, which we could also hire, to live in. So in this little cul de sac we had an office where we could do our political work and a house for me to live in and it had a swimming pool! The CP team could relax there. We did the non-sensitive work, which didn't need any UK-based staff, consular work, visa applications etc, down in town and we thought any terrorists who wanted to blow us up would be unlikely to blow up this building with only Lebanese staff in it. The house that we had on the Western side was actually fairly safe because it had a big garden with a wall around it and if you were in an interior room an RPG wouldn't penetrate. But it wasn't considered safe driving around there so we used to go to the West only from time to time, depending on whether the security situation had flared up or not. We kept an office in the West in the high rise which we would also visit from time to time but again it wasn't a conspicuous one. They did fire an RPG at it once, it wasn't occupied at the time, which came in the window and it was refreshing to see

that the security net curtains worked quite well. The glass was penetrated by the RPG but the film wrapped itself round it, so there was glass, film and netting in a great ball which ended up in the corner and no serious damage done so we were reassured that the net curtains were really quite effective. So in theory we had two residences and two offices but the safest one was in the East where we spent most of the time.

I feel I should come on to the problem of being blown up in the American Embassy. We were driving about in this way and being lucky not being hit by bullets or a bomb but the law of averages came up and we got blown up in the most unlikely place, which was inside what was supposed to be an ultra-secure room in the American Ambassador's office in the American Embassy. I'd been told by the Chief Clerk that I was not to take any silly risks and not to "get winged" and we were very conscious of this and never took irresponsible risks. The Americans had decided like us they should find a new place in the East and build a proper embassy. They converted a building with a perimeter. They hadn't completed the arrangements on the perimeter where there was a chicane, special gates and a large locally engaged force which they had trained with Marines as back-up.

I had just come back from the UK after leave and was catching up with the American Ambassador. We were sitting in his office, I was on a sofa, he in a chair. There was a commotion outside, shots etc., but that was quite normal in Lebanon, we didn't take any notice and all of a sudden the lights went out and the walls collapsed. There was no noise; I subsequently discovered your ear drums are pierced if there is a serious explosion. The windows were all blown in and the wall fell in on me and the Ambassador. We were very lucky because it was made of breeze blocks and we found ourselves sitting with debris all around. I discovered I could wriggle out and looked around for Reg Bartholomew, who was the Ambassador, and the place was full of dust. I couldn't see him but there was a muffled noise from him. He was squashed in his chair and the arms of his chair were holding up a slab which otherwise would have been down on him. He said he was having difficulty breathing and at this moment the bodyguard who accompanied me came rushing in from the outer office and said we must leave at once. But I said that we must rescue the American Ambassador who was underneath the slab. So we heaved and heaved and then some Americans came in and we managed to move it sideways and poor Bartholomew could sit up.

His mouth was cut and he'd lost his glasses. I discovered the frames sitting in the rubble a few days later when we were taken to view the scene.

We were incredibly lucky. The CP team had seen this commotion and they'd seen a white van driving erratically up from the gate with a wild looking man behind the wheel. They had opened fire on him and shot him. As a result the van which had 1400 kilos of explosive in it had blown up in front of the building, instead of getting into the underground car park, in which case that would have been the end of us all. So it had just blown off the front of the building and the glass went into little pellets so other than a few cuts and bruises there was no serious injury to us. We were taken off to hospital and patched up. Both Bartholomew and me were very lucky. Some of the local staff who had been standing at the front were killed and I think one or more Marines were killed. But casualties which could have been awful were quite light.

A problem in Lebanon was that telephones worked very badly, before the days of mobile phones. Nobody could get through to England at this time but luckily the lovely man who was our Hon Consul in Tripoli came to see me. Imelda was in England and it was important to get hold of her because the Foreign Office had told her about the explosion before she heard it on the media. She had no details and needed reassurance. Anwar Arida managed to ring his cousin in Paris, who was then able to ring Imelda and the cousin held the telephones together and I was able to have a conversation with her! Eventually she came out and joined me again but had been home getting the children back into school.

There was no doubt that the CP team saved the day through their discipline and training. You have to take an instant decision whether to open fire or not and they undoubtedly saved a lot of lives.

But I wouldn't want people to think it was utter gloom. We actually had a very agreeable life in Lebanon, there was the skiing, nice shops in the Christian enclave, the ferry from Jounieh to Cyprus worked and in the Christian enclave life was very hospitable. Nothing gave the Lebanese more pleasure than giving a party and it had a nice Mediterranean climate with lovely outdoor restaurants. The old town of Byblos that had an old castle also had a famous restaurant we used to drive out to and that continued, undisturbed by the Civil War, for the

whole time. So we could drive around and go and see people like Walid Jumblatt in the Shouf but we had to be very careful with the children because we couldn't take any risks with them and when we lived in the house in the East we didn't take them back to the old house. One of the holidays had to be spent in Cyprus because we had temporarily evacuated dependents and we managed to borrow an Army Major's house. They were frightfully cross and sulky and difficult about it all because they thought the glamour and excitement of the bodyguards, driving around in convoys, playing with the guns were wonderful stories to tell to their friends who hadn't had comparable adventures when they got back to school!

There were lots of sites, old castles and things to see in Lebanon and provided you went in a cautious and responsible way it was OK. Also we could go to Syria because in those days it was a haven of tranquillity. Assad had the country well under control and if you were a subversive you no doubt were tortured, but if you behaved properly it was a very peaceful and agreeable place and we could visit the amazing sites of Syria. Once we went down to Jordan, we had a holiday in Akaba with friends from the Embassy in Damascus. The Military Attaché in Damascus was also accredited to Lebanon and our Attaché was also accredited to Syria and they used to drive around together photographing the Russian aeroplanes that the Syrians had bought! They were hugely popular with the MOD for their successful photography. They also visited the Beqaa valley which was not safe, Hezbollah were there and if there was going to be any kidnapping or attack on a diplomatic car that was where it would be likely to happen. Apart from crossing a bit of the Beqaa to get to Damascus we didn't go there.

AW: And was there a large diplomatic community:

DM: Yes there was. Most of the Western countries and most of the Arab countries had embassies. Apart from us, the Americans and the French, they weren't very well organised because they were very often accredited to other places like Jordan or Damascus as well. But Lebanon was where all the news was, where the press was, and where governments wanted to hear about so they had to do the job of being an ambassador without having the material backup that the bigger embassies provided to their staff like protection teams etc. And it didn't shell every day. Instead of saying "Will it rain today?" you used to say "Will it shell

today?” Sometimes it was quiet and we had EEC meetings and we tried to celebrate our national days although on the whole that was not easy.

There was a marvellous man who was the Ambassador of the Sovereign Order of Malta. As Lebanon was a Catholic country with these Maronites, the Order had an Ambassador. He was non-resident and he was French but had fought in the Eighth Army during the War. He was a thoroughly excellent chap and I think he was called Prince Lobkowitz and his wife was a grand dame who distributed aid and Red Cross parcels. His national day was the Feast of St John the Baptist and he would have a party in the safe Christian side of Beirut and invite everybody. Although neither we, nor the Americans had any formal relations with the Sovereign Order, both Reg Bartholomew and I thought Prince Lobkowitz was OK. He used to come and call on us and we'd tell him anything he needed and we'd go to his party!

The Lebanese themselves were very keen to continue with their education as far as possible, it was one investment they could make which couldn't be destroyed by an Israeli bomb or somebody's car bomb. They were laudably keen on that; this zest to continue life wherever they could in the schools and the American University, which functioned throughout, and had the best hospital in Lebanon. When people got hurt or were ill that's where they went to be treated and this seemed to be a territory that even the most tiresome militias didn't want to encroach on.

AW: And MECAS was long gone?

DM: Yes it was but people who had been Arabists and had studied there wanted to drive out and visit it but it was more or less on the green line, so I never actually visited but I know that some people, for nostalgic reasons, used to creep back.

AW: And was the press corps there permanently?

DM: Yes, the press were there the whole time. The Commodore Hotel was entirely full of the world's press and they would rush about reporting what was going on. The most conspicuous of the British press was Robert Fisk who got very passionate about various causes. He's very popular in the Lebanon. The BBC had an office and there was a chap

with a gravelly voice called Keith Graves who used to report for ITV. There was a lot of media and quite often they were a useful source of information.

I have made a list of sights, of incredible things to see which made it such a fascinating place to be. There was the Hippodrome at Tyre, which I think at one stage they were going to use for Ben Hur. And then we went to visit, almost by accident, a tank cemetery. There had been one of these clashes between the Israelis and I think the Lebanese, and there was a mass of smashed up tanks. When a tank gets hit, the thick armour gets red hot almost immediately and after the shell has gone through it, it hardens again and looks like chocolate! Bent, like a bar of chocolate which was originally stiff and straight and then melted and hardened again. To see this armour, which was so thick, with a hole in it was quite remarkable.

We were always coming across sights which we didn't expect to see. Our first lunch with a lovely man called Gordon Ferguson, Commander of the British Contingent in the multinational force, was on a lovely day in November, nice and warm, and there were little silvery shapes which were Israeli aircraft looking to see if there was anything going on that shouldn't be. There was a pop and we looked up and saw a puff of smoke and this Israeli aircraft had been hit by a ground to air missile, and this silvery shape was coming down like a falling leaf. There was another pop and the pilot ejected and after a bit a parachute opened and landed on the Christian side along with the wreckage.

We had some British ships off the coast and I was invited to lunch by an excellent man who had been in command temporarily of the liner Canberra in the Falklands and was now in charge of this destroyer. We had an excellent lunch in his wardroom and talked about what the Navy were doing and he then said that they would give me and Imelda a ride home in their helicopter. The pilot of the helicopter was an American who was on exchange. There was a helicopter landing place well inland which was under the control of the Lebanese army, so we flew over the American fleet and as we approached the Lebanese coast (because we had been steaming away from it during lunch which is why I was offered a helicopter to get home) he said "I'm going to have to fly quite low, what we call tactical flying, so don't be frightened". We flew up the course of a dried river bed. On either side of the river, there were roads with street lamps. The river bed was probably the width of a dual carriageway. We flew over this thing with the rotor blades below the level of the lamp posts! In order to

turn corners we had to bank and then the centrifugal force would carry us out as we went round! Absolutely terrifying! At the end he said that he hoped I'd enjoyed it!

AW: One thing we haven't mentioned is your colleagues in the Embassy?

DM: Well they were remarkable. Adversity brings people together and they were an extremely robust and useful lot of people. We had the Assistant Military Attaché in the Lebanon and the Military Attaché in Damascus and they would come backwards and forwards as a team. We had a political section, which was very small, I think we only had about a dozen UK-based staff altogether but they were all excellent people which whom I'm still quite friendly. We had a lovely person called Ailsa McIntosh who I'd known in Tehran because she'd replaced the Ambassador's secretary there, and she said that she'd love to come to Lebanon and was absolutely imperturbable and she happily settled down in wherever we found her an office and made sure it worked. We had the usual registry staff to look after the files and an administration officer consul. The administration officer had a pretty nightmarish time because we kept having to find new houses and new places to install ourselves. We had a big problem over visas because the Lebanese wanted visas and they wanted to come into the Embassy to get them. When the Embassy was shut, because it was regarded as too dangerous to open it, or there were no UK-based staff present to sign visas, this caused aggro. In some of the more dangerous moments we would get all the UK-based staff over on the Eastern side and then I would get complaints from people in the West who wanted a visa but couldn't cross the green line.

We had a situation where the only house that the British Government actually owned, got destroyed. It was a beautiful old stone house at Abay, a place which was out above the airport in the Shouf Mountains, looking out over the sea. It had been used by the Ambassador for R&R and to invite the Lebanese to for weekends, have outdoor parties and so on. It was a perk from the times of rather more leisurely ambassadorial living than is now financed by the British Government. It was a lovely place but it got entirely trashed up during the Civil War. The Druze and the Christians had had a battle there. The generator had been stolen. We used to go up there sometimes, for picnics. However, it was the Lebanese Government's job to protect this place so they had to mend it. So I said to them that I wasn't going to ask them to repair it in the middle of a Civil War but asked them that if I collected

the money would they agree to rebuild it. I told them that I would put a surcharge on all the visa applicants and put the money into an account which would be jointly owned by the British and Lebanese Governments and when the time came to rebuild, they could draw out the money and do the necessary work. They said they thought that sounded alright by them so I sent a report back to London telling them about my brilliant plan and asking them to authorise it. I got an imperial rocket back telling me to forget about my plan and that the only body allowed to levy taxes in Britain was Parliament! The visa costs were set by Order in Council once a year on the authority of Parliament which I didn't command. So the house was never repaired and they sold it, not so long ago, sadly.

AW: Thinking of Parliament, did you get many visitors?

DM: No not really, because of the security. Geoffrey Howe came once in a helicopter from Cyprus to call on the President. He flew into the Christian enclave where the President invited him to his house on the edge of the mountains. We very carefully calculated who was going to come. Lady Howe was going to stay behind but he was coming with his Private Secretary, bodyguard and one or two other people who would fit into the helicopter. We drove to the Presidential Residence in the East and Imelda was then taken home. Who should step out of the helicopter without announcement but Lady Howe, us having assured the President that she wouldn't be there. She'd heard that there was a trip on to Lebanon which was an exciting place to visit and said firmly that she was going too. So we had to send the driver to get Imelda back and the President had to get his wife and they had a great old time.

We got Foreign Office visitors from time to time and from the Ministry of Defence. We had the Chief of the General Staff, when the multinational force was still there. But we didn't have many visitors.

FCO, Under-Secretary for Middle East, 1986-9

AW: You were in Lebanon for two years and came home in December?

DM: Yes, I think they thought two years was about the ration for a posting in Lebanon and I came back to be the Under-Secretary dealing with the Middle East because they thought I knew about it. This was again a job that should have been given to an Arabist really and it was also a job which I'd half done when I'd been in charge of the Middle East Department. The Near East Department dealt with the countries on the Mediterranean but not Turkey, but including the Sudan, and the Middle East Department dealt with the countries on the Persian Gulf.

We had Saudi Arabia, Persia and the Gulf countries and Iraq in one department and we had Jordan, Egypt and all points West and Israel of course in the other department, so I had done half of it. I would really have preferred to have been sent off to another post abroad, but no. I took the precaution of coming home via Jordan and Israel because the Palestinian problem was such a major element of the Department's work.

First I went to Jordan where John Coles was the Ambassador and he took anyone of any standing at all to see King Hussein. John Coles briefed me on the King, who was held in great respect in Britain by everybody from the Royal Family and the Prime Minister down to the humblest of people. They all thought he was the most marvellous chap and I think he must have been so. John Coles said "I have to be careful because I am the first British Ambassador who is younger than the King" because the King had taken over when he was very young. He had ridden this very difficult horse through the period of Nasser, the period of the Israeli war, he'd been dragged into the '67 war against his better judgement, the West Bank and Jerusalem had been lost and he was very brave. Anyway I was given a briefing on Jordan by John Coles and I was given a briefing on the relationship with Mrs Thatcher and her Government, because John Coles had also just finished being Private Secretary to Margaret Thatcher. He explained to me that she was hostile to the Foreign Office but not to its people. She had a lot of respect for certain individuals. She regarded the institution as basically representing foreigners just as Agriculture was there to represent the farmers! And foreigners were foreign. He was very helpful and he put me in a car and we crossed the Allenby Bridge and came to Israel where Bill Squire was Ambassador. I'd known him before when he was Under Secretary for Africa and he, again, was extremely instructive. He said "The Israelis here are different from the Jews in Britain and this is one of the problems. Some Jews in Britain feel guilty about living in comfortable Britain when brave and

pioneering Israelis are creating an oasis in the desert so they speak up sometimes unobjectively to compensate". But he said that in Israel, the Israelis were dynamic and open and it was a very stimulating society to live in.

We went in a car up to the Lebanese border to see how it looked from the other side and we came upon a Druze encampment. I hadn't known there were any Druze in Israel. We went to see where the Crusaders had been defeated above the Sea of Galilee. So it was good to see the Holy Land as well as talk to the Israelis, so we had a bit of a holiday there.

I returned to London to do this job and I really don't have a very vivid memory of it. We had a succession of State Visits again from oil rich countries, we had the hostage problem. As I mentioned earlier, I was already in this new job when Terry Waite rang me to say he was leaving to go back to Lebanon. Then he got himself kidnapped and locked up, it was terrible.

We had the bombing of Libya. Gadhafi was sponsoring terrorism and we had no sympathy for him. Although he claimed not to be, there were various secret sources which showed pretty convincingly that terrorist activity had been sponsored by him and Reagan decided to teach him a lesson and go and bomb Tripoli. There was the question of whether Reagan could use the aeroplanes that were based in Britain and this was quite controversial because by allowing it to happen we were then going to be associated with the bombing. The French and Spanish and others said they wouldn't agree and I, as Under Secretary, was inclined to take the same view. Mrs Thatcher, for alliance reasons, understandably said yes and so the Foreign Office was regarded as in disgrace for having opposed this but the people who might well have spoken out in the defence establishment didn't seem to think the American case was strong. The result of the bombing was that it was regarded in Lebanon and elsewhere as fair game to round up British hostages as well as Americans and two British people who had been taken hostage were killed in Lebanon. The lawyers had been against it and the Attorney General was eventually persuaded to agree on the grounds that the Americans would not hit any civilian targets. The Americans, of course, wanted to bomb Gadhafi and it was all fudged and they apologised afterwards that bombs had been dropped on the wrong targets, but it all left a nasty taste I thought.

AW: And you had the Rushdie affair?

DM: Yes, this was very sad. It was some time after the Iranian Revolution and there was no reason why we shouldn't get back into a responsible relationship with the Iranians. For instance there was no reason why we shouldn't reopen our Embassy there. We'd never closed the Iranian Embassy down in London and so now that we thought it was safe to send our people back we decided to do so. When we said we were sending them back the Iranians said "No, you withdrew them, we are not going to allow you to send them back unless we have a wider agreement". It was an uneasy situation, so we thought we would try and have a discussion with them. We had a perfectly good British interests section operating as part of the Swedish Embassy and one of the problems was that the Iranians thought this was a devilishly clever device that we had engineered and they wanted to make us pay for it. Every time a hostile crowd tried to form up to us, out would come the Swedish Ambassador who would tell them that they got the wrong Embassy!

After a bit Geoffrey Howe met the Iranian Foreign Minister in New York and suggested we restore the Embassy and get back into a sensible relationship. I met the Iranians three times. We met first of all in Geneva and had a nice meeting in the house of the British Representative to the UN there, and sussed out what we needed to do. We thought about it and the Iranians wanted to make some statement about non-intervention in internal affairs so I said we would sign up to it if they were going to observe it but the last time we had seen their people was at the funeral of Bobby Sands in Belfast! We laughed about it and drew up a statement. They kept adding more and more things to it. Eventually people in London thought it was all getting too complicated and to tell the Iranians we didn't want to have the statement at all. So I took my Iranian colleague out into the garden and told him that I was afraid negotiations were reaching an impasse because they were asking too much and he said that was a great pity because he had just cleared the draft with Tehran. So that was another impasse. Ministers met again in New York and after further discussions we then met in Vienna to sign the agreement to reopen the Embassy and I thought we would have a nice celebratory meal in a Persian restaurant in Vienna and agree to be friends. But not a bit of it. We sat again while they argued about it and I said that we had all agreed what we were going to sign and if they weren't going to sign it I would go home because we weren't going to argue any more. I had a young chap with me called Simmonds who was the Desk Officer for this. At the end of it all they said "OK, we'll sign". He agreed. They said they agreed, there

had been one or two things they might have added to it, but they would sign. So we signed one sheet of paper and went home.

I was afraid they would renege on it and make us look foolish, but not a bit of it, they allowed us to go back and Gordon Pirie, who was very fond of Iran, was designated as our Chargé d'Affaires just in time for a trade fair. He was criticised because he had two Saluki dogs, which are about the only dogs that Moslems will tolerate, they look a bit like greyhounds, very thin, with their bones showing through. There was a picture of Pirie with these dogs in the newspaper, and Alan Munro, our Deputy Under Secretary, said "Do you think the allowances will stretch to some dog food for these two?" But the poor old Piries when they got there and tried to open up the Embassy, before you could say Jack Robinson, the thing had gone sour and those who were opposed to Britain had gone to Khomeini and told him that their supine government had opened relations again with Satan number two and that it couldn't be right. Khomeini asked what was wrong and they said that there was a terrible Indian called Rushdie who published blasphemous books about Islam and the whole thing got cancelled and poor old Pirie had to come home again. It was rather a good example I thought, on both sides, of how if public opinion and the approach of the governments is in reality not sufficiently close, it doesn't work.

The Office had changed a bit. The Iran/Iraq War was going on but it came to an end whilst I was Under Secretary. Geoffrey Howe, I and one or two others went to the UN in Concorde to endorse the final agreement at a UN Security Council Meeting. It came to an end because basically the Iraqis had started using poison gas on the Iranians inside Iranian territory and the morale of the Iranian Army collapsed and it all stopped.

We had the ghastly Hindawi affair. Hindawi was a Jordanian travelling on Syrian papers who seduced an Irish girl and persuaded her that they get married in Jerusalem and she would fly to the wedding in an El Al Aeroplane with some baggage he asked her to take and he would meet her in Jerusalem having flown via Syria. The Israelis opened her bags and found a bomb in it. Hindawi had not yet left and got arrested and the terrible thing was the girl was pregnant and then had a baby by this terrorist who was released from jail only recently.

AW: So lots of very tricky rather irritating things during this period?

DM: Yes it was very difficult. I kept telling the Syrian Ambassador that if it was proved that Hindawi had been briefed by the Syrians to do this as was alleged, he'd better realise there could be important consequences for him. When the thing came out in court and Hindawi was convicted, we said we should send the Ambassador home but the Prime Minister insisted we should break relations with Syria altogether which again was rather a pity because the British Council had just managed to reopen in Syria and get quite a good operation going. Breaking relations wasn't something we normally did but Mrs Thatcher insisted because it was a terrorist attempt and she had no truck with terrorists.

Mrs Thatcher had been in power for about seven years and she was playing a much bigger role in foreign policy than she had been when I was working in the Middle East Department and Carrington had been Foreign Secretary. Up to the Falklands Crisis he had more or less done his own thing and then we had Pym who she hadn't really got on with. After Geoffrey Howe we had John Major briefly and then we had Douglas Hurd. It was very noticeable how the role of Number 10 changed. I don't call it interference because the Prime Minister is supposed to play a role in foreign affairs. In the early years she had been much more preoccupied with domestic affairs but by this time she was much more sure of her ground. I actually wrote a paper saying we had got it wrong. Mrs Thatcher was a strong Prime Minister and deeply respected in the wider world, even by the Syrians. She was a huge asset and I couldn't really see why there was such a difference between the Foreign Office and her. I think she thought the Foreign Office always sought to manage rather than to solve problems, which I suppose is what happens in international affairs. She thought we were a bit feeble. I used to talk to Powell about this and he said that we simply didn't understand her and surely we should see how her mind worked by now. I think another problem was that as her Government progressed, she outlived her Ministers. There was a difficult relationship between her and Geoffrey Howe and Lawson but history may prove that she had the better of the argument.

Ambassador to Greece, 1989-93

AW: It is the 4th November and we are resuming your recollections, David. When we finished last week you were back in London as Under Secretary for the Middle East until 1989. Up pops Greece! How did that come about?

DM: I'd done three years as Under Secretary and I was due for a posting. I'd been a bit disappointed not to have a posting before returning to the Office for that job so I kept my eye on what was coming up. I thought it would be a good thing to have a slightly more conventional posting for once so I thought what about Greece which was coming up in the right time scale and I thought that as I'd studied Greek as a schoolboy and a student I should be able to learn Greek and the Office was ready to help me with that. Also I knew that Greece was an attractive country, a nice place where people go on holiday, a Mediterranean climate and so on and the Greeks are hospitable and attractive and nice though they get a bit obsessive from time to time. I thought it would be an interesting posting and so it turned out to be. I knew a little bit about the Mediterranean and I knew about the European Common Market which the Greeks were very happy to be members of and were profiting from it.

One of the attractive things about it was the house. The famous Greek Prime Minister Venizelos from the early days of the last century had a wife who was ambitious for him and thought that he, as Prime Minister of Greece, ought to have a proper residence to live in. She was from one of the leading shipping families and she built this house for him. When he died he was in the midst of a constitutional argument and was actually in exile. She went round to the Greek Prime Minister to offer him the house as a residence for the Prime Minister. The Greek Government were very happy with that and wanted to discuss terms. She had said that before they got onto that, she wanted to discuss her husband's State Funeral. The interim Prime Minister said that was very difficult because her husband had been guilty of interfering unconstitutionally and had been in exile in France and he didn't think a State Funeral was going to be the easiest thing! So she said that if that was their attitude she would withdraw her offer and give the house to the British instead who had appreciated him. And she organised her husband's funeral in Crete where she thought they also appreciated his virtues. It was apparently a great event, attended by all the great and good, so virtually a state funeral, so she won on all fronts. And we had this very fine house which was in the middle of being

redone by our property services people. When we arrived we had that to handle and it was something Imelda could get her teeth into.

AW: What was interesting and different about Greece? What sort of work?

DM: The British had been involved in Greece since the 19th century when the Balkans were taken out of the Ottoman Empire and set up as independent countries. We'd been involved with Greece in the First World War because there was a very important Balkan angle to that, particularly when the Turks joined in. The King, who had been married to a German lady and the Government who thought the Allies were going to win, had a clash. After the First World War there was the awful problem of the Greek catastrophe, as they call it, in Asia Minor, when the thought that the Greeks could inherit part of the Ottoman Empire there went badly wrong and the Ataturk Government refused to accept the terms which had been agreed and there was a brief and ugly war between Turkey and Greece in which the Greeks were all forced to leave Asia Minor. Ataturk and Venizelos agreed an exchange of population, which nowadays would be heavily criticised and be described as ethnic cleansing, but it did solve problems of minorities – problems which have survived unresolved in those territories where there was no exchange of population, like Cyprus for instance. There remains a problem with the Greek population in Constantinople, Istanbul, which has been there for ever and the Turks agreed that they could stay provided there was a similar situation for the Turkish population in Northern parts of Greece. This led to difficulty, even when I was in Greece, because the population of Turks had multiplied considerably while the Greeks in Istanbul have dwindled.

So there were many inherited legacy problems which we, the British, had been involved in and some which we were still involved in, particularly as far as Cyprus was concerned. If you look at it from a historical point of view, the threats to the Greeks, insofar as there has been a Greek political entity, have come from the East in the form of the Turks, Islam and so on or they have come from the North in the form of Slav penetration into the Balkans. So the Slav and Eastern threats in their modern forms presented themselves as the Cyprus problem and the difficulties with residual Turkish population in the North. And then, when we were in Greece the Balkans erupted with the end of the Cold War and the split up of Yugoslavia into its constituent republics. This then reawakened lots of old political rivalries and problems which had been masked to some extent by the Cold War and the Communist

and Free World face off in the Balkans, and even to some extent the Yalta Agreement when Stalin had given Churchill an undertaking that he wouldn't interfere in Greece which meant that the Greek communists felt let down at the end of the War. Post-war there had been the Truman Doctrine. We the British had been too impoverished to help the Greek Government much in the civil war which followed the end of the Second World War in Greece, so the Americans stepped in and helped the Greek Government deal with the communist insurgency which went on for some time.

These legacy problems all had their echoes. For instance there was a whole generation who were now senior political figures who had been involved in the civil war and it was rather sad because these energetic and politically motivated young men fought as guerrilla fighters against the Germans and after the War they thought they would be able to find some outlet for their idealism in new political structures but they ended up being on the wrong side as marginalised communists and a whole generation of Greeks in a sense were disappointed. This then found a new echo at the point of the Colonels intervening to stop what they regarded as too socialist a government taking office, the King being involved and then being exiled. The Colonels were then removed and there was a problem about whether the King would come back, so there was political turmoil being played out again. The British were thought traditionally to have a view and a role in all of this. Greece joined the EEC and the difficult question of whether it should be a monarchy or a republic didn't arise while I was there. But many Greeks were always wanting to know what the opinion of the British Government was. They never asked me, they used to ask Imelda, "What does your husband think?" It was the same on other sensitive issues between us and the Greeks. Nobody ever approached me for a view about the Elgin Marbles, for example, and this was always a potential bone of contention. They used to ask other people what I thought about it!

The particular thing which came up of course was the dismemberment of Yugoslavia. This led to the annoying, unnecessary and ill understood problem of Macedonia. A hundred years ago, before the outbreak of the First World War when we had the Second Balkan War in which the Turks had withdrawn from the residual parts of the Balkans which they still occupied except for a little bit of Turkey in Europe, the portion of the Balkans from which they withdrew was heavily mixed up with Slavs, Bulgars, Greeks, Albanians, Moslems, Christians and so on. In fact this is how "Macedoine des fruits" was invented because the so-

called Macedonia Problem in those days was such a mixed up one. This was chiefly a problem between the Bulgarians and the Greeks each of which aspired to acquire that northern strip across the Aegean when the Turks withdrew and where there is Thessaloniki, Macedonia and Thrace. Macedonia of course was the country from where Alexander the Great had originated and was, as far as the Greeks were concerned, an entirely Greek affair. But when the Turks withdrew from Macedonia the Greeks arrived in Thessaloniki only hours before the Bulgarians! This problem was only solved, insofar as it was solved, by another exchange of populations, this time between the Greeks and the Bulgarians. So there were Greeks living in Bulgaria and some of the cities would have Greek names, but now have all been turned into Slav names and equally vice versa on the Greek side. But there was a grey area to the north west of Greek Macedonia which after the Second World War became the Macedonian Republic of Yugoslavia. The population of this was again mixed, a heavy Albanian and therefore Moslem element, a heavy Bulgarian element and another element which described itself as Macedonian. But the Greeks said no, they were Slavs, the only Macedonians were Greeks, so this led to huge difficulties.

When the countries of Former Yugoslavia were seeking admission to the United Nations, the Greeks were not going to have what was the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia admitted to the United Nations under the title of Macedonia because the latent claims, which had been to some extent resolved by the outcomes of the First and Second World Wars, were still there amongst the nationalists who thought that the breakup of Yugoslavia was the moment to assert their rights. The danger really was that the Bulgarians might at some future date stimulate the Bulgarian population in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to demand rights for an area, now the Greek province of Macedonia, which had been inhabited partly by Bulgarians and particularly to seek access to the sea in the Aegean which Bulgaria had had briefly after the First World War, and it was thought they might want to have again. This was how the Greeks saw it and they bitterly opposed any Slav claims to anything "Macedonian". The Bulgarians said they were not making claims on Greek territory but of course the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia proclaimed that its flag was going to have the Macedonian sunburst symbol which had been unearthed in Philip II of Macedon's grave, which the Greeks regarded as entirely Greek, but the Macedonians said "No, this is our indigenous hero, we want to have his emblem on our flag!" And of course this led to all sorts of arguments.

I thought that actually it was an old fashioned discussion which could be solved with a little bit of modern thinking and diplomacy. The British were in the Chair of the EEC, it was our turn to take the Presidency, so when I was asked by the Foreign Office at a Conference for Ambassadors, chaired by Douglas Hurd, how this might be worked out, I said that as we were in the Chair we ought to see if we couldn't solve the problem and that we must have a retired Ambassador or somebody who was clued up to go and produce a solution to the problem. Douglas Hurd said "Why not?" and we got hold of a recently retired European Ambassador and briefed him to go and see the Greek Government and the so-called Macedonian Government and sort the problem out. I thought this would be a big blow for freedom but I was much disillusioned by the fact that it wasn't possible and the person concerned came to the conclusion that the Greeks were behaving quite ridiculously and that the embattled President of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was a good egg and should be given help and assistance and it wasn't possible to reach an agreement. Nothing happened. Although eventually precisely the sort of agreement which could have been envisaged then, was sorted out because they were eventually admitted to the United Nations as the FYROM, "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", which was the only formula to which the Greeks would agree.

AW: Who was the person who tried to sort this out earlier?

DM: I don't really want to mention his name because it sounds as if I am being critical. He felt it failed because the Greeks were being unreasonable and to some extent they were. They kept going on about Alexander the Great which from the point of view of modern political thinking was not at all a winning card!

So that occupied a nice amount of time and there were of course other angles to the breakup of Yugoslavia. It's difficult to put oneself in the shoes of the people who were looking at these problems at that time. Nowadays Tony Blair and other British Prime Ministers have committed forces to go off and get involved in liberating Kuwait and all kinds of things in the Middle East but the thought that British troops would actually be deployed in the Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s is something that really wasn't easily conceivable.

Because of the problems and the fact that the United Nations were getting involved, we had visits under the NATO umbrella from military figures, and the Chief of the General Staff was to come and discuss with his Greek opposite number what was happening. I said to our Military Attaché that we must arrange a proper programme for the CGS because it was beginning to look as if we might be deploying British troops to Yugoslavia and how would they get there. They might have to arrive at Thessaloniki which hadn't happened since the First World War. I thought we had better take the CGS up there so that he got a feel for what was going on and we could also visit the war graves from the First World War and lay a wreath and it would be a good excuse for him to see what was happening. Everyone thought it was a brilliant idea, including London, but as always there were time pressures so it didn't happen. Indeed in quite a short time we were deploying troops to the former Yugoslavia and the American Marines landed on a beach not at all far from Thessaloniki.

The Greeks were inclined to be sympathetic towards Serbia for historical reasons and the Diplomatic Corps were surprised to find out how strongly the Austrians felt about being on the side of Croatia! So we all had to relearn our Balkan history from the First World War. This transformed the work as far as Europe was concerned. When I arrived in 1989 the major problem for the Greeks dealing with Yugoslavia was railway traffic because being part of the EU they wanted to have land connections and not always to go by sea via the Adriatic. There were huge numbers of lorries trundling through Yugoslavia on roads which were not suitable so the Yugoslavs were going to the Greeks telling them that they must help the Yugoslavs develop their railways. It is really quite bizarre to think how this argument about railway traffic became completely upstaged by much more serious arguments about the deployment of troops, difficulties of the siege of Sarajevo, and Serbians worried about the future of Kosovo with its strong Albanian population in what was regarded as the heartland of the Serbian nation. All sorts of much more fundamental questions pushed the issue of the Balkan railways firmly off the stage.

AW: Was the Cyprus issue very alive during your time in Greece?

DM: Yes we had a certain amount of discussion on Cyprus. Cyprus wanted to join the EU and the British Government thought that Cyprus ought to get its own problems solved before it could join, whereas the Greeks, having got themselves into the EU, wanted to get Cyprus in

too. This led to a certain difference of view about that and indeed this did become quite an interesting subject because of the thought of getting Cyprus into the EU and using this as a means of shoehorning a solution to the Greek/Turkish problem in Cyprus. David Hannay was quite closely involved in this. He either was, or had just finished being our man at the UN and he also knew all about the EU and the procedures for expanding it. Sadly, it didn't work because the obstacle to getting a solution to the Cyprus problem had been from the Turkish Cypriot side and suddenly the floor shifted because the Turks who lived in Cyprus saw that joining the EU actually could be a very good thing and thought that the rights of the communities were a minor problem compared with the benefits that would accrue to all in Cyprus from joining the EU. All of a sudden it became the Greek Cypriots who were blocking the solution on the eve of joining the EU and it was the Greek Cypriots who were not prepared to accept the settlement which had been worked out under the United Nations auspices for solving the problem. In the end Cyprus joined the EU without using this quite important milestone as a means of getting a solution. But that was actually after my time, I'd finished by then but it was all cooking up when I was there.

We had the Supergun saga whilst I was there, which was a little flash in the pan of excitement. Saddam Hussein had got the idea that if he bought a gun with a long enough barrel, he could shoot the shells into orbit, more or less, and they would come down in places where nobody thought he could reach. So he ordered this gun and then bits of it were going to be delivered piecemeal, he hoped, without attracting attention. Some of it was made in Britain and was being driven to Baghdad on a lorry which was going through Italy, Greece and Turkey and on to Iraq. The British authorities got wind of this and asked the Embassy to intervene with the Greeks to halt it. I was rather suspicious about this because the knowledge we had acquired about it had obviously come from sources of one kind or another and the instruction for the Embassy to approach the Greeks didn't have the Foreign Secretary's name at the bottom of the telegram. I thought that we should insist that it should be done properly but I couldn't get London to focus on it. Indeed, one's concerns turned out to be not ill-founded because although we were all perfectly happy if necessary to push this thing one dark evening over the edge of the Corinth Canal the fallout was obviously going to be quite public and quite controversial. What actually happened was that the Greeks obligingly entirely saw the point and had this consignment detained on the grounds that it was an illegal passage through Greece of unauthorised military material. The poor old driver of the truck

thought he'd got a load of piping on the back. He turned out to be quite a minor operator and his truck and haulage business was his livelihood and this was going to be completely sabotaged by it getting impounded and it would be a long time before anyone got any resolution as to who it belonged to. He became a conspicuous consular case and was one reason why I had wanted to make absolutely certain that people knew what was happening in London before we got too heavily involved in it. Of course it all got sorted out in the end but I thought it was an unfortunate episode where the Greeks had done what we wanted and then we complained they had arrested our chap!

We had all the usual security problems. Luckily the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein occurred after I had escaped from my duties as Under Secretary for the Middle East in London and we were able to observe the scene from comparative security and peace. There were of course overflying rights to be sorted and quite a lot of activity which went on. We then had a security scare. One of the difficulties was that the British Embassy was regarded as vulnerable to the activities of a rather sinister organisation called November 17. It was a sort of anarchist body, anti-imperialist outfit which nobody knew very much about but they had assassinated prominent Greek personalities and then went for what you might call imperialist targets like the Governor of a very prominent bank in Greece, or they tried to assassinate the Minister of Finance at one stage. They actually had assassinated the Head of the British Council in Greece, before my time, because of his motorcar which he bought from another member of staff who had been leaving. November 17 thought the car belonged to a political officer in the Embassy but it turned out to be driven by the Head of the British Council and he was assassinated. It was a tragic case of mistaken identity, not that it would have been any less tragic if they had assassinated the Political Counsellor.

So we had to guard against threats to our security and I, as Ambassador, was supposed to be escorted by a detachment of Greek police. Whenever I went in the official car with the flag flying they would tag along behind. They didn't seem to mind me driving around in my private car to have picnics and so on, so it wasn't really a problem until we got a warning during the Kuwait invasion that there were more serious security threats in the offing including one which was thought to be from Abu Nidal which was one of the terrorist bodies to which the Iraqis were thought to be giving sponsorship. We all started avoiding routine and going through the usual procedures. I thought the only really sensible thing we could do

was order ourselves some protective vests, it makes you look a bit fat but if you are making a journey from home to office which you can't vary, it could help. We did get some vests in the end and we managed to introduce some quite rigorous procedures to avoid being easy targets. Sadly, much later after my time, this November 17 organisation did actually assassinate our Military Attaché in a traffic jam coming in to work. It was so sad because it was completely pointless and there was no political gain to be made from it.

AW: And on the consular side, did you get a lot of consular problems, other than the man driving the supergun?

DM: Yes we did and it was rather an important part of the work because we had something like two million tourists a year from Britain coming to Greece. One of the statistics we worked out was that we had something like one and a half cases of serious head damage each year from people not wearing motor cycle helmets because, particularly on the islands and the remoter parts of Greece, the tourists would hire scooters and although it was the law in Greece that you couldn't drive these things without a helmet, the hired bikes would be returned, but not the helmets. So this law didn't get properly observed although we were trying the whole time to secure respect for it. One of the difficult things was, and I saw this in several places, you would get a young person who would fall off his bike and suffer serious brain damage and the parents or next of kin would come out and not be on the same wavelength as the Greek police and they would think there was some kind of cover up and the truth about their family victim was not being properly aired. There were all sorts of suspicions which arose and which normally didn't have any grounds. When you come from a British provincial town with not much experience of overseas travel and you suddenly have to deal with authorities that are slightly ill at ease because they think they are being got at, it leads to a lot of difficulty.

One of the things which the office was keen on and which I was doubtful about was the employment of Honorary Consuls. In many Greek provincial towns there was a tradition of a particular family providing the British Consul, a local businessman or a local lawyer. We were trying to stop the idea that because somebody happened to be the senior partner in a leading firm in a town they had the traditional right to be the British Consul. We were trying to get this hereditary approach changed. London was quite keen on having Consuls

appointed because they were able to do a lot of consular work which we would otherwise have to pay somebody to do, probably much less well. Perhaps I was being too much of a purist but I was rather hesitant to go too far down this road. First of all we were doing it on the cheap and if we actually wanted to do it properly we ought to be prepared to pay someone to do it and perhaps pay a locally employed person under our auspices who would actually work as the assistant vice consul under the Hon Consul, who would be a local lawyer – a formula we actually had set up in some places.

My other concern was that the intervention of the Hon Consul might not be sufficiently professional. We were increasingly getting cases with a high publicity potential like the Madeleine McCann abduction in Portugal. We had a very similar case. A little boy called Ben Needham was abducted in Kos. He was from a broken home and the Greeks rather disapproved of this which then led to the family members being suspicious that the authorities weren't trying hard enough. No one discovered what happened to the little boy, he disappeared, and whether he was killed in an accident or abducted, nobody got to the bottom of it. There wasn't any criticism in the British media about this being handled unprofessionally and there wasn't a problem for the DS but it struck me that if we had made any slips or mistakes it could easily have been picked up on and reflected badly on the Service. So I was always a bit doubtful about being too ready to appoint Hon Consuls and thought that we should be quite cautious about it.

The other thing that was extraordinary was the view that was taken about misbehaviour. Somebody, I think from the Sunday Telegraph, came to my office and asked for my advice. He had been witnessing the development of the British tourist industry in, I think, Corfu. He thought what had happened was pretty bad and was going to write a critical article because there were young people who at home were probably keen participants in what we might describe as "football hooliganism", they were happy to get heavily drunk and, as he put it, when they came on holiday they make a fuss on the plane, they arrive in Corfu and are put in a bus before they can cause any trouble, driven to some remote spot where the tourist arrangements are pretty robust and hooligan proof, the telephones all sheathed in metal to stop them being smashed up. They lie on the beach, get thoroughly sunburnt, drink huge amounts of raki and they have what they think is a splendid holiday but any observer of the scene would see as pretty grim and debauched and not a very good advertisement for Britain.

But, he said, “Can I really write it up in a critical way, because who is the loser? These people reckon they’ve had the best holiday they’ve ever enjoyed, the people of Corfu are not disturbed because they’ve arranged for a nice remote place, the airline have made money out of them and have learned how to handle them, no material damage has been done, and who is the loser?” I told him it was up to him what he wrote and he would have to make his own judgement. But it was a difficulty, people were prone to complain that these hooligans were bad ambassadors for Britain but on the other hand they were spending good money and the Greeks were content. What the Greeks really wanted was to move upmarket and have a better and a wealthier class of tourists who would spend more money and behave better.

AW: And did you enjoy living in the beautiful house?

DM: We had a certain amount of housekeeping problems. We had this beautiful house which had to be redone. There was a lack of meeting of minds between the people who were going to use it, namely myself and my wife, and those who were designing it. There was a disagreement about style, to some extent. They wanted to put up notices on health and safety grounds, saying “Exit” above all the doors! These sort of silly niggly problems would arise. Eventually we got it done very attractively and we managed to get London on board for doing it in a sympathetic way. It was a great success and the Greeks who visited thought we had done it well and were flattered that we had devoted resources to making our Embassy in their capital attractive. We had lovely pictures, a lovely one of Byron dressed in an Albanian outfit by Phillips. We had other good stuff from the Government Art Collection but these people at the GAC were always rather like back seat drivers, we felt. I had advice from friends who had experience of getting pictures from the GAC who said “It is a great mistake to go round there with your wife”! Indeed it turned out that way. We went round there and were told by the Director that she had got a magnificent picture for us and knew just the place where it should hang in the refurbished residence. She produced this picture which was a war picture, very dark and sombre, with some sad people in a shelled background. Imelda burst out laughing when she saw the picture, which was a bit tactless. We were firmly told that they would find somewhere else for it if we didn’t like it. But on the whole we did have very fine pictures.

I wanted to get a tapestry because we had a huge hall. The GAC didn't do tapestries because when they had, it had been a disaster with some they had borrowed. I asked them if they minded if I got my own and they said I could go ahead. I wrote off to the Chairman of the V&A because I had read in the newspaper that they hadn't got room to exhibit all the tapestries they owned and there had been some in the basement and they had been damaged by damp in a flood. So I wrote off to the V&A and got an absolute stinker back! How could I possibly be suggesting that anything owned by the V&A could be exhibited in Athens, the most polluted capital in Europe and in any event it would require an Act of Parliament to get them out of the country! It was a ridiculous suggestion.

So I then confided to our friend in the Ministry of Works who thought it was a brilliant idea, measured the space in the hall and promised to send me an email as soon as he got home. Sure enough there was a message asking me which would we prefer, Moses at the Court of Pharaoh or Diogenes teaching at the tomb of Plato, either would fit! So we said we would go for Plato who duly arrived and was hung up. The chap said that on no account was I to reveal to the GAC that there was a tapestry and that as far as we were all concerned it was a piece of furniture because that was what it had been bought as. So that was solved. I only mention it to exemplify my contention that as an Ambassador many of the more time consuming discussions that you have are with your own government.

We also managed to get a swimming pool, in fact not one but two swimming pools! One of the things I discovered was that if you had a swimming pool at a post very often the Ambassador's house would be together with the Chancery and the staff would like to come in to use the pool. You then had to negotiate times and there would no doubt be weekend times when there would be difficulty because the Ambassador might have guests he would like to invite to a swimming party. It always led to trouble. As we had plenty of space I said "Why don't they put up a swimming pool in place of the tennis court which no one ever plays on and while they are about it they can knock up a second much more modest pool in the back garden of the Embassy Residence?" The person in charge was Veronica Sutherland who was the Assistant to the Chief Clerk and entirely saw the point. She had recently been Ambassador in Senegal where she had countless quarrels about when it was legitimate to reserve the pool for staff or for Ambassadorial use. So as well as building a very nice swimming pool for the Embassy staff as a whole they did build a small one in the

Ambassador's garden. It was only finished after we'd left. Even if there were no swimming parties it was an excuse to wear swimming clothes and a dressing gown at the weekends and not have to put on coat and tie! In a Mediterranean climate a swimming pool is a very good amenity. The reasons the house didn't have one was that up until the decade before it had been possible to go and bathe outside in the sea near Athens but by then the pollution was such that this was no longer feasible and not having a pool was a definite problem. Indeed when Douglas Hurd and his wife came on a visit, he arrived early and I asked him what he'd like to do and his wife said they would like to have a swim and we said that was a brilliant suggestion but we didn't have a pool. "Oh dear" she said "I've said the wrong thing". "Not at all" we said "it's absolutely the right thing, now we can tell London we have had demand from the highest quarters for swimming"!

AW: I think we have covered most of the topics in your notes, but who did you have on your staff, good colleagues?

DM: Yes, well we had the usual problem with the inspectors who were trying to cut down on the staff. Not many people speak Greek and so there was a role for the Embassy to help businessmen in Greece and on these consular questions as well. If you served in Greece you felt that you had a sensible job to do and I think on the whole it was a posting which people appreciated getting so we had quite a happy and good team. I think posts closer to home, and I'll come onto this when we talk about the Netherlands, tended to attract people who couldn't be too far away because they had sick parents or something. The closer to home and the more amenities to be had at the posting, the less good the morale and attitudes of the staff in my experience.

Ambassador to the Netherlands, 1993-96

AW: You came back in 1993 and did you go straight from Greece to the Netherlands?

DM: Yes we went directly from Athens which was convenient as we could drive our car there. We arrived in the middle of the summer just before the holiday period and it took a bit of time to get credentials presented. I was able to take leave that was due.

AW: How did you find it when you arrived?

DM: It was very different from Greece. The Dutch, I would say, of all the European partners we have, are the least unpopular as far as the English are concerned because they understand the English quite well. This can be deceptive because they speak English perfectly and are very familiar with our country but they are also very assiduous advancers of their own interests which don't always, by any means, coincide with ours so you have to drive quite a hard bargain with the Dutch. By virtue of being a very successful country they are open to foreign ideas, they are easy to deal with and understand, and they seem to understand Britain's problems, although they don't agree with them, better than many of our partners.

They were surprisingly touchy in some respects because of their size. They coin for themselves the phrase that they are "the biggest of the small EU countries and the smallest of the big countries" which I thought a funny way of describing themselves. Because the Benelux had played an important role in getting the Common Market set up, they were original members and they also claimed to have, rather fraudulently I thought, a mission, a vocation in terms of international law with the International Court of Justice being stationed at the Hague and other traditions of international law to which Dutch scholars had contributed quite a bit, they took themselves rather seriously about that. Except that when their own national interest was at stake these grand principles seemed to be of less importance! One of the most conspicuous things that happened whilst we were in Holland was that the Dutch contribution to the EEC budget suddenly went into the red and they found themselves having to pay extra. Immediately all the arguments advanced by Mrs Thatcher for getting our money back were brought up by the Dutch without any sense of shame at all! That was rather attractive in many ways!

The Dutch are rather Presbyterian in outlook and there are many similarities with the Scots except they are much richer than the Scots. They have the same attitude towards economy and reputation for being rather tight fisted. The joke was that you couldn't get good meat in Holland because all the best meat was exported; the best fruit etc all went for export because the Dutch didn't keep the best back for their own use. Also being a small country and quite thickly populated and not very exciting physically, it's difficult to have an adventure. Most places that we'd served in you could go off for a weekend, walk in the hills, visit some

interesting place but in the Netherlands if you went to an interesting place you found that half the population of Holland seemed to be there too! Unless you were a boat owner and could go sailing, it was difficult to have an adventure and if you do have a boat you are always caught at the end of a long weekend in the wrong place and then you have to moor it and go back next weekend for it. So we didn't become boat owners but we did become bicycle owners but, again, you found you were far from alone wherever you went!

There were some discoveries to be made. Have you ever come across Saint Willibrord? Saint Willibrord more or less invented Holland I discovered. The Dutch introduced me to him and I discovered that when we were being chided for not being good Europeans. I used to say to them that we were the ultimate Europeans because without us Holland would not exist. What happened was that Holland used to be a swamp. It was inhabited by the Frisians who were pagans not under the control of Christendom. In about the 7th Century, the powers that be in Europe decided that the Frisians in Holland must be got under control and the first thing to do was to convert them to Christianity. They selected an English Bishop from Yorkshire called Willibrord, for this task, largely because English and Frisian were then virtually the same language. He set up the first Bishopric in Holland at Utrecht which is still the senior Roman diocese in Holland, and he set about converting the Frisians to Christianity. It was an uphill struggle and although he did manage to make headway there were continual relapses and his successor was another Brit called Winfried who came from Devon. He carried on the good work of evangelising not just Holland but huge swathes of Northern Germany as well. But he was assassinated by the Frisians along with about forty of his companions because they thought he had gone too far too fast.

The Roman hierarchy in Holland decided they would celebrate the 1300th anniversary of St Willibrord's mandate to convert the Frisians and they involved me. I thought it was all excellent; I had a free platform for telling them how European-minded the British were sending Willibrord, who eventually retired to Luxembourg and a Convent at Echternach which I thought was a pretty European thing to do! They brought artefacts from monasteries all over Northern Europe including a fascinating exhibit from one of the German towns where Winfried had been a big figure. He had been assassinated at Dokkum in the Netherlands. They actually brought the bible that he had held over his head when he was killed, it had the sword cuts and stains of blood. It was part of the exhibition and I was

invited to the opening, I enjoyed it very much because one didn't normally have dealings with the Dutch clergy and certainly not necessarily the Catholic clergy because Holland was not predominantly Catholic. So this was an opening into an early example of British-Dutch relations.

Having got the Frisians converted they were then able to start draining the swamps, installing windmills and so on and creating a prosperous country. It all started with Willibrord, I argued to them, and they were too polite to argue back.

I found that it was sometimes difficult in cultural terms. The Dutch don't go in for lavish entertainment; it's not part of their scene at all. Conspicuous consumption is regarded as a Calvinist sin, so the ethos is not to go in for that. Running the British Embassy as a place offering hospitality was not the key to using the premises best. I discovered what the Dutch liked doing, and would happily come to, was musical recitals. Luckily there was a very nice person who was half Dutch, half British who was into encouraging young musicians and I would offer the Embassy as a place where she could bring these musicians to do a performance. It worked well, they got better known but didn't have to be paid very much and was much better than giving a grand dinner party where half the Dutch would arrive already having had their supper at 6.30pm and didn't want to have a dinner at eight! You could have supper available before or after the recital, according to taste.

I'm not even sure the house was in the right place because The Hague is not even legally the capital of Holland, Amsterdam is, an ex-Napoleonic sop to the Amsterdammers to accept the House of Orange back as monarchs. Amsterdam was made the capital under the Batavian Republic even though the Monarchy and the Parliament had been and now still are in The Hague. But it wasn't necessarily the right place for our Embassy because the role that business and commercial activity plays in Holland is greater than in Britain and big business, although not conspicuously prominent, was actually very important. Our interests in the Netherlands were very often commercial. I used to ask myself whether the Embassy being in The Hague was right, or might have been better sited somewhere on the ring around Amsterdam where big companies have their headquarters, long having deserted the centre of Amsterdam which is too congested. We had a big discussion with the inspectors as to whether we should move the commercial department to Amsterdam, which I was eventually

opposed to because I thought the commercial work was important and I wanted it to be where I was but if I'd been a more original thinker perhaps I would have moved the whole lot to Amsterdam and got on with it!

We used to do quite a lot of work with Dutch politicians but this wasn't really terribly fruitful because the important decisions were often taken in light of what the interests of Dutch business concerns were, or on the advice of leading business or other non-political figures, and the ministers were very often not parliamentarians. To get cosy with members of the Dutch Parliament, and while we were there we managed to get a British Dutch group going in the parliament, wasn't really as useful as it would have been in a more traditionally diplomatically minded country.

Nevertheless it was interesting to be there and there was plenty of quite useful work to do. Our commercial work, being so close to Britain and the Dutch being such an open market, them speaking English and it being easy to get there, was interesting. The Dutch regarded Germany as their most important market and our feeling in the Embassy was that if we could get British firms making a success of an export business in the Netherlands it could lead to much greater things in opening up the German market, having been successful in the Netherlands first. We had quite an active role trying to do that. We had a Chamber of Commerce where we used to try and improve our commercial performance but I found, in my whole diplomatic career, that the promotion of commercial work is different in almost every country and it's very difficult to generalise, although that is what everyone wants you to do! "How can you help British exports more?" You would get a very energetic Secretary of State like Heseltine who would lead this effort, but in truth I think it depends very much on the peculiar circumstances of each individual country how you can best promote exports.

We had a lot to learn from the Dutch. Having a Flemish wife it might have caused difficulty because the Dutch and the Belgians love to despise each other but of course they don't really and when they are operating far from home, Benelux is an important consideration. The Dutch would pretend that the Belgians don't speak proper Dutch and the Belgians regard the Dutch as rather too zealous without achieving any results in any measureable field of activity either better or worse than the Belgians! So there is a certain amount of cultural competition and difference. They would sometimes say to me "Ambassador, how is your Dutch coming

along?” I would say that it wasn't coming along very well because none of them would speak Dutch to me and everyone spoke such good English. They would nod very wisely and say “Your wife speaks very good Dutch” and I would say to them “And so do yours!” They would get the message and laugh!

You find yourself at parties and so on, so in order to try and improve my Dutch I would sometimes be quite ruthless if I found myself between two ladies and ask them to give me a Dutch lesson and help me improve my conversation. So they would ask me what we should talk about. So I said “You tell me what the secret of your country is because I believe we British have a lot to learn. You have made out of your country, which started as a swamp, one of the richest and most prosperous countries in the world, what is the secret?” They would say “What interesting questions!” At this time the Jane Austen series “Pride and Prejudice” was on the television and there was the famous Colin Firth scene in a lake and Elizabeth Bennett being shown around Pemberley. I would say to the Dutch “There's not a single house in your great country comparable with Pemberley, why not?” It's true, there isn't, although there was the great age of Dutch wealth in 17th and 18th centuries. They didn't know the answer and some wondered whether it could be a lack of court culture. Actually the answer to the question was given in a book which was published at the time by Simon Schama, “The Embarrassment of Riches”. It explained exactly why the Dutch hadn't developed a consumer culture like us where if Dad made money the children spent it on houses, horses and hunting. There was no hunting in Holland because you would keep coming to a canal. But the real reason as explained in the book when discussing the Calvinist approach to society and the problem about spending money on the undeserving poor was that the Dutch reinvested their wealth. So the young, instead of being able to go in for horses and hunting or an equivalent, were sent off to Indonesia to carry on the business and expand it and create yet more wealth. The houses which the rich merchants built in Amsterdam for themselves would have a warehouse in the front and a beautiful house at the back but there was no conspicuous display of wealth. The Dutch would have their curtains drawn open to discourage them from counting their money and being seen through the window! So there were lots of interesting cultural facets and lessons we could learn about their success, though I didn't think that not being able to spend the wealth we created would be a particularly popular message at home! So it was a very stimulating place to be.

Politically it was difficult. We had dear old John Major, having signed up to Maastricht had all the problem delivering it, I can't quite remember the dates ...

AW: There was the election in 1992 that nobody expected him to win just before you went to the Netherlands, and then his government had to cope with a small majority and all those rebels ...

DM: Yes, that's what happened. The Dutch were pretty fed up with it because after Black Thursday and our failed attempt to join the European currency the popularity of the Major Government slumped and they could see that as soon as there was another election, the Major Government would be out with a much more amenable Labour government with chaps like Tony Blair keen to make friends with everyone. The difficult line we had adopted because of anti-European pressure was greatly exacerbated by uncalled for problems like BSE where we said we were going to boycott decision-making until the excessively severe restrictions that had been forced on us were revoked. It meant that we were being the awkward squad in Europe and the Dutch were waiting for the government to change. So I didn't find it very rewarding to have a close relationship with the Dutch Foreign Ministry, quite apart from the fact that the Dutch, as in all Foreign Ministries, want to deal solely with the Ambassador. If you allow that too much then you take the sails out of any activities that the rest of the staff may be operating. So I used to try to avoid developing relationships too far down the hierarchy and insist that my staff should get involved.

We did develop a very good relationship with the Dutch armed forces who were under pressure from their government to get into a closer relationship with the Germans. The Dutch armed forces wanted to maintain their good relationship with the British and there was very good reason for this because the Dutch were deployed in Yugoslavia without the backup and infrastructure which the British had. So we were able to be of considerable assistance to them and they had the impression that we were even more helpful than I think we were being because we came to understand their problems and I got a good relationship going with the heads of the armed services, particularly the Navy who had a very deep respect for our own Royal Navy and used to send their submarine officers on courses with ours. We had a very active and intelligent Naval Attaché at the time who took the trouble to learn Dutch and develop a good relationship with the Dutch Navy. So we had a fruitful relationship with the

Dutch armed forces much enhanced by the Yugoslavia thing. They had a terrible experience in the Srebrenica disaster when they got overrun by the Serb army and it could have turned into a bloodbath. It ended in a nasty scene which left a bitter taste in the mouths of the Dutch and we were able to offer them some assistance and moral support which was a good investment at a time when the political relationship was in the doldrums.

Both in Greece and in Holland we had these 50th anniversary commemorations because we were working through various 50th anniversaries of wartime activities. In Greece we had the fighting in Crete and in Holland we had Arnhem and there was quite a lot of activity on that front. We had visitors, the Prince of Wales who was Colonel of the Parachute Regiment came for the 50th Anniversary of Arnhem, a lot of veterans were still alive and they came as well. It's quite interesting how the British seem to revel in commemorating defeats! Why Arnhem should have been regarded as a huge thing to commemorate when it wasn't a deeply successful operation is something to do with our character. We had quite a successful operation to open up the Scheldt estuary to Antwerp in 1944 when we desperately needed the port at Antwerp back into operation. We captured it but the Germans still occupied the North bank of the river in Holland. We landed some Marines who suffered quite badly but we cleared this North bank with considerable loss to ourselves in a successful operation. The Marines who came for the 50th Anniversary commemorations had slightly rueful conversations about why their activities had not attracted the national interest that the failure at Arnhem had!

One of the other great achievements of the fighting in 1944 had been the clearance of the bridges all the way up to Arnhem which had been done by the British Guards Armoured Division. Two leading lights of this Guards Armoured Division were Carrington and Runcie and both of whom turned up during our time in the Netherlands. The Guards and the Parachutists didn't see eye to eye in 1944 and were not seeing eye to eye any better in 1994! They had crossed the bridge at Nijmegen with P. Carrington in the leading unit, but couldn't proceed any further because they didn't have any infantry support and the criticisms and the rivalries could still be seen very clearly.

As Ambassador I wore my smartest outfit, which the veterans all liked very much, with feathered hat, but kept strict neutrality between the different groups. It rained a bit and the

feathers got slightly ruffled up. I had two encounters. One was with Carrington who arrived at the event and said “Feathers! My dear chap, feathers! How splendid to see you in feathers”. Later on after it had rained the Prince of Wales said that he did salute me for putting on my diplomatic uniform although it did make me look a bit like a drowned chicken! All in the very nicest good humour!

There was no doubt that the veterans themselves thought that the Ambassador was doing them honour by putting on his uniform although the Dutch themselves don't do it. I had got quite friendly with the Mayors of Arnhem and Osterbeck and these two were asked to go and celebrate with the Parachute Regiment at a grand dinner in Guildhall. They were very jealous of me dashing about Holland in my uniform. So I asked them why they didn't put their uniforms on, I knew they had them. They said that they couldn't possibly do it in Holland because it would be quite contrary to their culture. They said they did put on their uniforms, with gold braid and feathered hat, when they were invited to the Guildhall. They were put up in Croydon because the Mayor of Croydon at that time was a Dutch enthusiast. They were advised to take the train in to the Guildhall, so they got into the train feeling rather conspicuous in their outfits and nobody took the slightest notice of them! Impossible in the Netherlands, they said.

AW: Did you have much to do with the Dutch Royals?

DM: When I presented my credentials to Queen Beatrix she said “How's the Queen?” I hadn't actually had an audience with the Queen before coming to the Netherlands because I had gone direct from Greece but luckily I had boned up and was able to report the things she had said about her “Annus Horribilis”. In fact Queen Beatrix was quite critical of us, on the few occasions I was able to talk to her, she thought the Conservative Party was anti-European. It was also the time when the Spectator had spilt the beans over the Ridley interview about the Germans, and she was very critical of that. She said that we all lived next to the Germans and have to get on with them and that we were being unnecessarily concerned. She said that she went shopping in London and had a lot of English friends and was quite well informed about opinion in Britain and thought we were behaving in a way that didn't have a proper foundation. Queen Beatrix was the one person who was allowed to have an ostentatious show of finery. She opened the Parliament every year, just as our Queen

does, in a golden carriage with lots of soldiers and so on. And that was OK, but only in that context. She was much respected but had quite a difficult time because the Dutch are not attuned to enjoy the monarchy in the sense we are. If you talk to the Dutch about whether they are monarchists or not they would create quite a different category and would say “We’re Orangeists”!

AW: In your notes you mention football hooliganism?

DM: We had a Consul General in Amsterdam and the inspectors indicated that they thought this job was unnecessary. We had this debate about whether to move our commercial operation there but came down against so the only reason for having a senior person in Amsterdam was further eroded. I said to the Consul General who was worried about it to focus on one or two things which demonstrated the value of the job, and what about football hooliganism as we were going to be having several international and club matches and it was something we needed to try and come to terms with and deal with. We made a big effort before one important match to get into a proper dialogue with the Dutch authorities about handling it, so it wouldn’t be a shambles with police dogs chasing drunken British fans around. There was a certain amount of liaison and discussion but the difficulty was that it didn’t really have any content because there was no real wish on either side to adopt a strategic approach to dealing with hooliganism at its root cause. The interest was in not having the symptoms overflow. The Dutch were interested in getting any hooligans out of Holland and back to England as soon as possible. The precautions which should have been taken were insufficiently thorough as we didn’t actually get to the bottom of this. The football match was in Rotterdam; the supporters went over for the weekend and caused lots of problems in Amsterdam and getting themselves arrested there. The Dutch were absolutely determined they were going to have no nonsense at Rotterdam and they went round with teams of Alsations and fierce policemen arresting anybody who looked remotely conspicuous. In fact there was not very much trouble except from the people who felt that they had been badly treated. So they arrested the wrong people and the British media were there writing up how ghastly our fans were and what bad ambassadors they were for Britain. John Major rang up the Dutch Foreign Minister to apologise even before he’d had a report from us. I’m personally convinced that some people were very badly treated merely because

they were easily recognised, got themselves arrested and fined when they were actually rather unlucky victims of obsessively eager police.

AW: Yes, very difficult. Let us close on a highpoint. What would you say was the highpoint of being in the Netherlands?

DM: I don't think there really was a high point. I find it a rather flat place in every respect! The Dutch are very matter of fact and its one of the reasons for their success in business. There weren't any real high points. The cultural exchanges between Britain and the Netherlands go on quite happily without any need for Government sponsorship. The British Council had a very interesting and full job but it got cut after we'd been there because it was felt cultural contact didn't need stimulus, it would happen on its own.

One of the attractive things was that lots of people would want to come and see events like the Vermeer exhibition and so on. We'd enjoyed a lot of hospitality during our time in the DS when we'd been home on leave so we were able to repay some of it by inviting people to come for these manifestations which the Dutch were very good at. The Vermeer exhibition was wonderful. I think there are only about 35 Vermeers in the world and they managed to get about 30 of them, of which we had supplied four, two from the Queen's Collection, one from Scotland and one from the National Gallery. So we got invited to these things as one of the countries who had produced some pictures.

It was an interesting place to be.

AW: And then home?

DM: Yes I reached the magic age of 60 and that was the end of my career. I would have been perfectly able to do another job but I'm rather in favour of retirement at 60 because otherwise you get a blockage in the upper levels of the Service and it was noticeable in some of the services in other countries where they went on serving until they were 65 or even 70 that you got a lot of frustrated middle career people who were blocked in.

AW: I've been talking with various people at the end of these sessions about their valedictories. Were valedictories still being written at the point you retired? There is a bit of a conversation about whether they should be allowed to be filed again?

DM: I think it was silly to cancel them. I personally found it rather difficult to write a valedictory because they got into a kind of form where you had to write down how deeply grateful you had been to the staff and wives, the administration and so forth when, if you didn't say it, it was more conspicuous than if you had said it. There was a tendency to go through the motions. I think that the genuine comment which could be brought to bear through the system for despatches, not necessary valedictory ones, was rather good. If it was felt that they were being used as a means of being critical that was a silly argument because despatches could be critical at any time not just at the end of a posting or a career. However, the whole idea of writing despatches has rather gone out with writing emails. I think that the first impressions despatches were possibly more valuable than the valedictory ones because they did force people to think about what they were doing and how useful and constructive it was.

In general terms I think the amount of organised feedback between posts and the Foreign Office could have been better. Of course there is a huge amount of informal feedback and for Ambassadors who weren't very sure what they were doing, it was their fault for not discovering. I used to find that the Heads of Mission Conferences we used to have were not as fruitful as they should have been because there wasn't enough informal discussion in the margins between posts and the Office about what ought to be happening. What the best way of articulating all of that is I'm not sure but I don't think despatches were a particularly important element in the pattern of communications.

AW: Thank you very much David.