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

DAVID C. McGAFFEY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview has not been edited by Mr. McGaffey]

Q: Today is September the 8th, 1995. This is an interview with David C. McGaffey. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin with, can you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.

McGAFFEY: I was born in 1941 in Michigan. My father was an attorney, my mother was a psychologist. I was born on a farm and raised much of my early life on a farm then moved to the bright lights and big city of Detroit, I thought it was a city at the time. I left there immediately after I got my degree.

Q: Let's go back a bit. Where did you go to high school?

McGAFFEY: A variety of places. I started in a one room schoolhouse in rural Michigan and then moved to a Catholic high school in Detroit. I then moved almost immediately to a boarding school in Windsor, Assumption College High School, where I went through the Canadian system through the 13th grade.

Q: In the high school were you getting much in the way of international affairs?

McGAFFEY: No except that because it was in Canada, it was already slightly international. A number of my friends were "Canadien" and others were Canadians and I learned about something of that. A close friend was Mexican and with him I spent one summer in Mexico.

Q: You went to college where?

McGAFFEY: I did my undergraduate work at the University of Detroit.

Q: What was your field?

McGAFFEY: Multiple fields in engineering, math, literature and psychology were my majors.

Q: I always try to probe any connection or knowledge of the Foreign Service. Did you get anything of that?

McGAFFEY: None at all. I was not particularly consciously aware of the Foreign Service or of international affairs. I read a lot of books and seen some movies and knew that there were ambassadors and that they had secretaries. To the extent that I had knowledge of the rest of the world outside of Mexico and Canada, it was through the Catholic church and Caritas.

Q: Caritas being?

McGAFFEY: The Catholic relief organization which I raised money for, helped promote.

Q: You graduated from college then you went on to what? What did you do then?

McGAFFEY: I was looking for a Ph.D. in folklore and needed some way of financing some field research. A young John Kennedy had started talking about something called the Peace Corps and so I consulted with my professors and they said, "It sounds like a great idea. Join the Peace Corps, take a tape recorder, do your research and come back. You can write you dissertation, we'll give you a degree and you can teach right here. We've got a whole new department starting." I had my whole life planned out. So I and my new bride joined Peace Corps.

Q: What year was this?

McGAFFEY: 1964. We had applied for Chile. Through the Catholic church I knew quite a bit about things that were happening in Chile and, besides, I loved the ocean. The Peace Corps looked at my application and said here is somebody who likes mountains and called me up and said "How would you like to go to Afghanistan?" The only thing I knew about Afghanistan was that Marco Polo had gone through it on his way to China, so I could place it in terms of China and Europe and that was it.

Q: You and your wife went to Afghanistan?

McGAFFEY: That's correct.

Q: Where were you and what did you do there?

McGAFFEY: We were in town of Farah. It is a provincial capital and an oasis in the center of the desert of death in the southwest corner squeezed between Iran and Pakistan, Baluchistan. We were the first foreigners who had ever come to Farah to live. We were teachers in the sense of rabbi. The Peace Corps had one definition of what we were supposed to do and we did that plus a lot of other things: set up a science lab, opened the first high school for girls, dug wells and taught carpentry. Mostly we were being Americans in a place that didn't quite believe in those mythological beings.

Q: I think the Peace Corps experience is an important one so I don't want to just let go of it. Here is an area which as you say, particularly at that time, is practically untouched by the outside and probably, I assume, intensely Islamic religious and all, how did you relate to the mullahs?

McGAFFEY: We were obviously objects of notoriety from the moment we arrived to everyone including the mullahs. I learned a great deal about Islam and taught them a good deal about the evangel, the Bible, and about Christianity. About all that they knew was that the Koranic Sharia said that Christianity was holy, it was part of the direct revelation, and that's all they knew.

Q: How did you communicate?

McGAFFEY: In Farsi, in Persian. I was very poor at the other languages but I became fluent in Persian. That was the trade language.

Q: You said you helped set up a girls high school. I would have thought this would have run counter to much of what was going on.

McGAFFEY: No. As a matter of fact, it was very much what was going on. This was 1964. Afghanistan was very much a part of the exploration of limits and deciding what was new. They were trying to establish a central government for the first time but never quite succeeded. They did things like provided money for schools in all of the towns, built roads out, sent Peace Corps. So I was part of a modernist conspiracy that was myself, the principal of the high school, the governor, the chief of police, and the young doctor who was the first doctor ever in town, all trying to refocus the minds of the people in Farah.

Q: I would expect in that society it would have been very helpful to have been married, wasn't it?

McGAFFEY: The only previous person from the Peace Corps was a young man who had been sent down by himself and was installed in a hotel room. He came very close to having a nervous breakdown because the people were so hospitable, and so concerned for him, that they would sit in his hotel room for 18 hours a day just to keep him company and he never had any privacy. He reported that it was an unlivable town. So, yes, having a wife meant that we could have privacy and so it was very important. Elizabeth was also a teacher, which meant that she was ambisextrous. She was welcomed in both the male areas and the female areas. I was only welcomed in the male areas, except for a very few exceptions.

Q: You were there for how long?

McGAFFEY: For about two years.

Q: Did you have any contact with the embassy or any feel for the embassy at that time?

McGAFFEY: Elizabeth and I were the most remote of the Peace Corps volunteers so we were somewhat objects of notoriety among the Americans as well. Every time we went up to Kabul we got dinner invitations and invitations to call on people at the embassy. Arch Blood was the DCM there and impressed me out of my mind with his sophistication and his awareness of things. But with that and two other exceptions, I was not terribly impressed by the people in the embassy. Nobody there with the exception of a man who I learned was the station chief, spoke the language to anything like my capacity and my capacity was certainly limited. None of them left the capital. All of them felt that talking to the small inner circle of what we called the prop jet set, gave them an insight to what was happening in Afghanistan, and they were wrong. I was very upset to find out that the only people who seemed interested in what was going on in Afghanistan were from the station rather than from the embassy.

Q: When we're talking about the station, we're talking about the CIA. Were you under sort of strict injunction to stay as far away as you could from the CIA?

McGAFFEY: Yes, certainly on any official basis but not on a personal basis. These people did not identify themselves as "Hello, I'm from the CIA and I want you to come to dinner." They said "Hello, I'm Joe Blow and won't you come to dinner." I only found out about this later. When I went to Arch Blood to complain about this, when I did find out about it, he said "All right, if you think you can do better why don't you join the Foreign Service." I said "How does one do that?" He told me, so Elizabeth and I took the examination and we both passed. She got a couple of points higher than I did. I got a lovely letter congratulating me on the exam and welcoming me and telling me about the possibilities for the orals. She got a letter which I wish we had saved but we didn't, which said "We note with interest that you have taken the Foreign Service exam but also that your husband took and passed the Foreign Service exam. Since we do not accept married ladies in the Foreign Service, we assume that you took it only out of interest."

Q: It was a different world.

McGAFFEY: It was a different world. Anyway, I still had not made up my mind but they had the traveling road show in those days and a team came to Teheran. Again Arch Blood persuaded me to spend my money and I flew to Teheran and took the oral. I met a real dragon lady, the ambassador's wife.

Q: Mrs. MacArthur?

McGAFFEY: It was MacArthur, yes. After the exam I was asked to go and sit outside. I was sitting there trying to figure out what they were making of me and she walked through the hall then stopped and came back and took off my head because I had not stood up when she entered the hall.

Q: I'm not sure if she is deceased now but she was one of three or four ladies who were renowned as the dragons in the Foreign Service. Her father was at one point the vice president of the United States, Alben Barkley. This is just an aside.

McGAFFEY: I knew that and I knew of her later. My wife and I were on the drafting team writing the Foreign Service policy on wives, the dreaded A seven. One of the things that a friend of mine who was working for that ambassador later reported was that she personally got 42 copies of A seven mailed to her anonymously. I had just worked for another one of the dragon ladies in Manila.

Anyway, they told me that I passed and they welcomed me into the Foreign Service. I spent long hours talking about this with my wife and writing letters to my academic mentors who kept telling me about this job that was waiting for me in Ohio. We came back to the States still undecided. REA Express lost two footlockers that contained all of my notes and recording and artifacts and I felt a great sense of relief. I realized then that I wanted to join the Foreign Service.

Q: You didn't have all of those folklore stories hanging around.

McGAFFEY: Although Farah was fascinating for that. The storytellers would come in and sit in the market and tell stories that I had successfully traced from the 1837 publication of The Little Yellow Book in London which had been shipped out to the British in India. Picture this Victorian poppy reading to his children and behind every child there was an ayah, a nanny, who would listen and go back to her children and tell the stories. It was picked up and moved from Hindustani through four different languages picking up elements of their culture.

Q: Who was the author? It was Lange wasn't it?

McGAFFEY: Yes, Lange.

Q: How fascinating.

McGAFFEY: It was fascinating. It was a good dissertation topic and I had documented the transmission but having lost it all, I then joined the Foreign Service.

Q: So you came in when?

McGAFFEY: September of '67 was when I was sworn in.

Q: I assume you went to an A 100 course. Because you got involved later in training, in the first place could you describe sort of your colleagues who came in at that time and then a bit about how it was done?

McGAFFEY: It was the beginning of the major change in the Foreign Service. It was a very mixed A 100 group. There was one fellow who was very proud that he had never gone to college. There was a group of three people who were still working on their dissertations and they were expecting their Ph.D.s. There were a number of people with army experience including Vietnam experience and some of the traditional eastern establishment, good school and family history. There was also a very clear expectation that the world was different and the world was changing, and that the traditional idea of the striped pants was not going to happen. Almost all were married and that may have been because it was well known that any bachelors who entered the Foreign Service were shipped off to CORDS in Vietnam.

One of the first things that happened was we received a formal invitation from the Junior Diplomats for the eighth floor fourth of July black tie reception. People were kind of looking at it and so I put up a little notice on the bulletin board saying that I unfortunately have left my black tie at the cleaners. If there is anybody else in that state and would like to spend fourth of July at my place, bring your own dish. We got about two thirds of the class. Because REA had lost our things I asked them to bring their own dinners and leave the pots.

Q: What did you think of the training?

McGAFFEY: A 100 at that time was almost totally an orientation course, not a training. There were some people who told us war stories which were largely irrelevant about the way diplomacy and the Foreign Service used to be in the good old days. There were some very useful things about what is a telegram and how it is made up, what is the organization of the State Department, who does budgeting and how does that affect you. But it was a bureaucratic orientation more than anything else.

Q: You were mentioning that Vietnam was looming its ugly head or something. How did the assignments in your class work out?

McGAFFEY: The dominant thing in my class was language and everybody was explained that the State Department was cutting back because of congressional budget cutting. Remember back in the good old days when that meant that they didn't give us any more money? They could only afford to give language training to people who didn't have a language. I had come in with a three/four in Farsi, Roger Harrison had a three/four in German, and so on, and so on. All of us who had language were then sent to language speaking posts, or at least what the State Department considered English language posts. Anybody who came in without a language was assigned to a hard language post so that they could get training which meant, among other things, that a group of us who came in with language got about a year's head start in the Foreign Service because the others were in one to two year language assignments including Vietnamese for the bachelors. Every bachelor was assigned to CORDS.

Q: With what sort of enthusiasm?

McGAFFEY: Extremely limited. The group was not a group of hawks. Many of them had Peace Corps experience, many of them said the reason that they joined the Foreign Service was we had been screwing up so long, it was time somebody came in who could figure out how to do something without going to war.

Q: Where did you go?

McGAFFEY: To Manila in the Philippines. The president of the Philippines was Ferdinand Marcos, elected and subject to normal electoral things.

Q: This was from when to when you were in Manila?

McGAFFEY: From '67 to '69. The place was something of a shambles with private gangs and shootings on a daily basis. People were feeling as if they lived on Capitol Hill.

Q: Talking about the crime problem in Washington D.C. at that time.

McGAFFEY: While I was there, professionally it was a wonderful job. This was the year that congress abolished the old immigration law that assigned numbers on the basis of previous immigration and there was what they called the triangle in Asia, the Asia Pacific triangle, which was limited to 100 immigrant visas a year. They abolished it and went by a date system which meant that Manila had a backlog of some 45,000 approved petitions for immigrant visas. They had drastically expanded the consular section and I and four others went out there to join the three that were there. While I was there in the two years it was expanded to 15 and I found myself chief of a section supervising seven FSOs and about 20 Filipinos. Almost immediately I was given real responsibility.

Q: Could you talk about the type of work you were doing and maybe some examples?

McGAFFEY: The principal focus and the requirement was to process people for immigrant visas. The backlog was huge of people who had family, friends, relatives, jobs in the States and had applied and been approved but were waiting for numbers. Our job was just to get as many through the gate as possible and weed out those who had what was necessary and what not. One section was just interviewing and processing, and going through the paperwork setting up processes to get the paperwork out of the inefficient Philippine system to assist them. I was in charge of that section which kept expanding until one day when I was called into the ambassador's office. The consul general was there and some people from the FBI and the head of the regional INS office were there. They said they had some questions to ask me and the ambassador said "You don't have the legal obligation to answer these questions at this point but I would appreciate it if you would."

Q: Who was the ambassador by the way?

McGAFFEY: We had four ambassadors in the two years. I believe this was the former general, the youngest general, I can't remember his name. He was there just for a short time and then was replaced by Soapy Williams.

Q: He was also ambassador to South Africa. We can add that.

McGAFFEY: I had no idea what was going on but I answered the questions. It turned out that a plane load of people had arrived on a charter flight from the Philippines to Miami and had gotten off clutching their little yellow envelopes which when they tore the ribbons and opened, they found full of empty blank paper. Each of them said they had been interviewed by vice consul David C. McGaffey, paid him the $500, and had gotten their visas from him. They were interviewing me to find out what exactly this was all about. It turned out that a representative of a veterans organization had been given office space in the consulate. He had scheduled these interviews during the lunch hour and would walk in and borrow my nameplate. He had issued some 5,000 immigrant visas which were supposed to include transportation but one group of people were impatient to go and instead of waiting for his arranged transportation they chartered a plane on their own.

At any rate, to cool things off for a while they shifted me over to head of the American services which was still immigrant visas. My job was to counsel all the American soldiers based in the Philippines or in Vietnam who had found a friendly young lady outside Angeles Air Base. Despite all these rumors about her being a prostitute they decided to marry her and take her home to mom and the kids. I had to interview them about her criminal record and ensure that they wanted to apply for a waiver which was not one of the most pleasant jobs.

Q: At that time the law prohibited anyone who had been engaged in prostitution from being eligible for a visa and the only way to get it was to get a special waiver through their congressmen. The congressmen weren't delighted in having to do this sort of thing. What happened to the veterans administrator there?

McGAFFEY: He had planned to leave about a month later but the FBI arrested him and charged him in the United States with fraud and misrepresentation. He was also charged in the Philippines. He had his choice of pleading guilty and being taken back to the United States to be sentenced in the U.S. courts or trying his luck in the Philippine courts. He pleaded guilty and asked for deportation.

Q: What about other corruption because the Philippines has been renowned over the years for the problem of corruption? Did you or the officers you were serving with run across this type of thing?

McGAFFEY: Yes and no. It was pervasive. There was a lot of anti American feeling at the time. There was a noted television commentator who was doing an exposï¿½ series on those terrible people in the American consulate and was tearing down the character of person after person. He went through 14 officers and he concluded by saying, giving the list of 14 names, "and their ilk." Everybody turned to me and they gave me a little sign for my desk saying "their ilk." Everybody was wondering why he had not mentioned my name. I found out his niece was the fifth down in the pile of applications in front of me.

We were advised not to say what exactly our duties were out in public because if we did we would be inundated with requests, gifts, or what have you. On the other hand it was very mild and good humored. With the exception of this American who had accumulated very large sums of money, mostly it was a matter of just juggling for a little bit of extra advantage. People were quite happy about being told no if it was done politely and they were not surprised when things didn't work out.

We did have arrested one man for consular fraud then we finally decided that we couldn't press charges and just had him cautioned and released. What he was doing was going down the line of applicants outside saying "I have a friend inside and if you pay me x amount of pesos I will give your name to him and he'll do his best and probably get you the visa. But I'll tell you what, it won't cost you a thing unless you get the visa. If you get the visa, you just pay me the equivalent of $100 and if not, no harm done." So he signed up hundreds of people for this. He had nobody inside the consulate but some of them got visas and some didn't. Those who got visas were paying him the money assuming that he had done something. He certainly had not broken any U.S. law and it was very hard to figure out any charge that fit.

Q: Who was in charge of the consular section when you were there?

McGAFFEY: The consul general was a man named Lou Gleek. His wife was one of the famous dragon ladies. She assembled all of the wives of the new junior officers and declared them, in writing, her kindergarten and assigned them tasks like doing her laundry for her.

Q: I thought that they had sort of passed.

McGAFFEY: No, that was very much that day, which was why when I came back to the Department I joined the group that negotiated with the undersecretary for management about the status of spouses, wives at the time, and wrote for him the new Foreign Service policy on wives which he accepted.

Q: Returning once again, you had the general whose name I forget but a very important man, Soapy Williams and who else was ambassador while you were there?

McGAFFEY: I never met the man who was ambassador when I arrived [William McCormack Blair, Jr.]. He was just leaving and he was too high up to bother with a vice consul. There was a long interregnum and then the general came. He got reassigned and there was another interregnum and then Soapy Williams came. Soapy I knew from Michigan. I knew his family, knew his kids. He didn't think much about being an ambassador. He was a stump politician expert at making friends and influencing people so he said to the Foreign Service staff, "You take care of this embassy stuff, I'm going to go out and make friends." He stumped throughout the Philippines and was a wonderful personality.

Q: Although you were in the consular section, and in a way almost not, but your responsibility was not political reporting but obviously you are sitting there talking to people more than probably anyone else, the consular officers. You were also talking to the young political officers who were dealing with the Marcos regime. At this time, we're talking '67 to '69, what was the impression of the Marcos regime? These things change over the decades but at that time what was it?

McGAFFEY: The young political officers who I did talk to were not allowed to write anything or even look into anything about the Marcos regime, that was the job of the senior officer. They were assigned to extremely focused tasks of monitoring publications of this labor union or the other. I and a group of others started a group (I've even forgotten what we called it) which made ourselves available for speeches and discussions at universities. We went out on weekends and evenings to meet with what turned out to be almost always economic clubs at all the universities discussing U.S./Philippine relations. Nobody from the political section was ever interested in anything we heard at these.

In general my impression, and those of the other younger officers, was that people in the Philippines believed that the society was breaking down and that something had to be done or it was all going to collapse. There was a great deal of fear, a great deal of pessimism about the future. University students were interested in leaving. University faculty was interested in leaving. The maids were interested in leaving. A major career choice was to get into the U.S. Navy as a steward so that you could apply for citizenship. The warlords, economic or military, were taking over. The government had no authority outside the capital city. The military was believed to be corrupt. It was just a nasty situation and they were looking for a strongman, somebody on a white horse, to come and rescue them. Marcos was seen as personally a good man, a good war reputation, a try er whose hands were tied by a corrupt legislature. His wife was seen as glamorous, exciting, a Jackie Kennedy type figure. As things got worse and worse and worse, it seemed fairly apparent that somebody would take over so it was not a surprise to me that it was Marcos, but he was only one of several candidates.

The system was not working, it was broken. The main street that the embassy was on was lined with things called day and night clubs. They had a prominent sign as you entered saying "gentlemen are requested to deposit their weapons here" and their armed bouncers who would not let you into the club until you deposited your guns with the gun check girl. This was daily life. The son of the consul was shot by a friend of his showing off the new gun that his daddy had given him. Despite the ambassador's recommendation, they chose to take him to court. He was convicted, sentenced to a fine and a certain period of probation. When they came out of court he ran over to the consul's son who had just gotten out of the hospital from a bullet wound in the stomach and said, "Hey, no hard feelings buddy and look what Daddy just gave me." He pulled out a brand new pistol that his father had given him as a recompense for this terrible ordeal of going to court. Society had broken down. I don't know what the official embassy image was.

Q: Somebody can get into the records to see that. You left there in '69. Where did you go?

McGAFFEY: I went to the operations center in the Department and served as a watch officer, editor, for one year, the standard time. I was privy to everything that was going on worldwide. I was speaking to and writing for the principals both in the Department and the White House. I found out that it was a terribly complicated world and that there was a very wide range of capability on the part of the Foreign Service and other representatives abroad. I found that some ambassadors were lousy and some were excellent. I learned how to write concisely.

Q: It was a very good way to understand how the system worked.

McGAFFEY: It was an excellent way to understand how the top of the system works, how policy is made in relationship between the Department and the White House. I was there during the Kissinger shift. Kissinger was at the NSC [National Security Council] dictating foreign policy despite whatever the State Department said. Then he shifted over and became secretary of State and immediately, to show you a great awareness of the system, he changed procedures that he had instituted himself.

Q: The operations center is the place that gets whatever is happening immediately and often policy is dictated by almost instantaneous decisions because there isn't time for deliberation. When Kissinger was over at the NSC, were you informing the NSC on an immediate basis?

McGAFFEY: The NSC had its own receiver for all of our traffic as well as the CIA, DIA, DOD and everything else. They duplicated all of the equipment so that they received it at the same time. What made a difference was the speed with which somebody in the op center would see something, bring it to the attention of one of the principals and get a response over to the White House or to the NSC. The NSC under Kissinger was very, very hierarchic and the people who got this traffic were very low level. It had to go through many layers before it got to the attention of somebody at the policy level at the NSC. Very often at State we were able to receive it at the same time, get it to the attention of the principal, and have a memo on the desk of Henry Kissinger or the president or whoever before the NSC response to that same telegram had worked its way up.

Q: That is very interesting because normally you think of the NSC as being a rather small thing and the State Department being a very cumbersome organization and the NSC had fancier footwork.

McGAFFEY: The State Department is a large organization but what I found was that there are elements like the op center that are deliberately designed to cut through all of the layers and to get to the people who make a difference. One of the things that Kissinger did when he became Secretary of State was to cut out the direct line to the NSC. He felt that they should be informed through the State Department.

Q: Let's go back. You said that you were involved in the changing of the role of the wives of the Foreign Service. Could you explain how the system perceived it at that time, we are talking about '69 or '70, and how things changed?

McGAFFEY: When I entered in '67 it was the explicit policy of the Foreign Service that a married couple was two for the price of one. It was a phrase that was used in official documents. The explicit statement was that a wife was an employee of the U.S. government with a rank derived from the husband's rank and responsible to a line of command of the wives of the more senior officers. This was almost entirely, but not entirely, representational but they could be called into the embassy to do anything because they owed it to the U.S. government because they were given these nice houses and trips to exotic places and the like.

Some senior wives abused this system. They were the dragon ladies and they ruled over their little fiefdoms. The enforcement mechanism was that in the annual review of each officer, there was a section which reported on the performance of the wife. Unless you were reported as having a wife who complemented you, you were not considered for promotion, and not considered suitable for senior levels. In some cases you had senior wives who were dedicated people who dedicated their lives to the Foreign Service. They expected the assistance of more junior wives, and expected to help teach them, and train them how to be effective. The assumption was that everybody was equally dedicated and it was voluntary work and it was just organized. In other cases you had senior wives who just tried to use this as an army of slaves to make their lives easier like in the case of Mrs. Gleek with her washing machine breaking down just assigned her laundry to the junior wives. You had some husbands who would turn over to their wives the drafting of that section of the EER, others who did not. I found this to be unacceptable. My wife never asked my permission to do anything, so I did not assume that that gave somebody else the authority to demand such a request.

We came back from the Philippines exercised about this because of our personal experience. In the process of unionization of the Foreign Service there was a group that was started out of the Secretary's Open Forum which was again part of this ferment and demand to have voices heard in other channels. A sub group of the Open Forum, which I joined the moment it came into existence, felt that we should deal with this issue so we formed a drafting and negotiating group who dealt directly with the under secretary for management, who was Crocker at the time.

Our basic points were that this policy was illegal, it was contrary to laws that had been passed about the status of women, and that it was improper in terms of the stated objective of the Foreign Service representing the United States to have a slave system when we are talking equal rights for women in the rest of the United States. It was also a source of a great deal of inefficiency, discontent, etc. Our major point was that the housing and transportation, etc. for the wives was a condition of employment for the employees, the spouses, almost all husbands at the time. It did not imply any obligation on the part of the spouse who we don't pay because it was part of a contract between the employee and the U.S. government. Eventually the undersecretary for management agreed and said "If you can draft us a policy statement that I can get approved by my masters, we'll send it out."

A group of seven of us, including my wife and myself, sat down and we hammered out different alternatives and negotiated it with Crocker. He took it up and came back with demands for changes that one of the under secretaries very much opposed. Eventually we got a document which, while not perfect, was a tremendous improvement and it was sent out as an airgram. Knowing the poor distribution of airgrams, there was an informal distribution which made sure that it got out. Some of the difficulties with it were that there was no way in it dealing with these really dedicated women who wanted to serve the U.S. government and had taken on obligations that were more than one person could handle and expected the help of others who they assumed would do it. There had to be worked out a whole new modus vivendi that talked about the role of a spouse who wanted to contribute as an unpaid volunteer. It went a long way toward eliminating abuses and it felt very good to be involved and to see that it was possible to change something that had been around for a long time.

Q: After the op center, you were there from '69 to?

McGAFFEY: One year in the op center and then what in those days was kind of normal, I shifted over to INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] to fill out a normal tour in Washington.

Q: In what area?

McGAFFEY: In INR I was assigned as the analyst of India and Pakistan. I worked in the same office with William Dean Howells who had been born in India. He was the analyst for Afghanistan and Iran and so we just informally shifted jobs. He did the analysis for India and I did it for Afghanistan and we signed each others' names and carried on our business.

Q: When did you leave INR?

McGAFFEY: When I joined the Foreign Service I had requested an assignment to Afghanistan. They told me no and sent me to the Philippines. When I left the Philippines I requested Afghanistan. They told me no and sent me to the op center. Then they said since you've been a good boy we'll give you something in South Asia at least. But this will be the only time and after that you've got to accept the service discipline and go wherever we wish

As I mentioned, while in the Philippines and part of the speaking group I had found that almost all of the requests came from economics clubs and I knew absolutely nothing of economics. It was just a blind area for me and I had been trapped in a number of these lectures, or discussions, or what have you by questions that came out of nowhere and I didn't know the answer to them. I had been requesting some long term training in economics, some university training, and had gotten a no because I was coned as a political officer. Then they started the 26 week course at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] so while I was in INR I started using every devise I could think of to get into the 26 week economic course as the exceptional political officer. They finally did let me but only after I signed an agreement that said I was taking this training on the condition that at the end of the training I would accept any assignment that they gave me without protest, and without regard to any other considerations. So I did. I went from INR to the economics course which was a total immersion course and succeeded brilliantly. At the end of that for my sins they told me that regardless of any protest they were going to send me to Kabul, Afghanistan as the economic officer and they didn't want to hear any objections.

Q: You were in Kabul from '73 to '76 is that right?

McGAFFEY: That's correct.

Q: You were the economic officer?

McGAFFEY: No. I was the junior economic officer, the economic commercial officer, and there was an economic counselor, Bill Rowe.

Q: What was the situation in the '73 to '76 period in Afghanistan?

McGAFFEY: When I was there in the Peace Corps, there was a king in Kabul who was a protï¿½gï¿½ of Ataturk. He wanted to be the Ataturk of Afghanistan to modernize the country, modernize society, change things. His wife would appear with the chador, without the head covering. He did a lot of changes and he approved things like high schools for girls.

Immediately before I arrived, his uncle, cousin, and brother in law, all one man, took advantage of Zahir Shah's vacation in Italy and declared that they were going to abolish the kingdom and make a republic of Afghanistan headed by himself, Mohammed Daoud Khan. The State Department thought that this meant that the communists had taken over because Daoud had some training in the Soviet Union. He was very much focused on economic development and saw the Soviet Union in some ways as the model for economic development, as most of the world did, including the United States. We objected to it but we saw it that way. The U.S. was very concerned about this Soviet communist coup, falsely.

I arrived there in '73 as the first diplomat to arrive after the announcement of the republic. My visa was issued by the royal Afghan embassy and was accepted by the Republic of Afghanistan. What I found was, despite what I had been told in Washington, it still very much a modernist family affair with Daoud disagreeing with his cousin the king about the focus. He thought there should be more focus on economics and less social, and on speed because he wanted things to change quickly. The biggest problem they faced was this huge neighbor to the north, the Soviets, who leaned on them and had the power to lean on them. They had tried under Daoud to get NATO assistance for developing the army and NATO, the U.S. principally, said no because they saw nothing of interest. All of their trade was going through Pakistan, with whom they had a border dispute and had a lot of restriction. Their only access to the rest of the world except the informal access (there had been smugglers for the last 5,000 years) was through the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union dominated them economically and potentially politically. He was trying to develop a modern state, and a more developed state, richer state, without angering this colossus.

As the economic commercial officer I was right in the middle of a lot of what was happening and it was a very exciting time. I was having some successes. We managed to get some independent development in the oil and gas industry which had been developed by the Soviet Union. They had pipelines that led across the river into the Soviet Union where the only meters were, as it was all exported and measured by the customers. He got some independent development by some western firms. We had American companies coming in and bidding for projects. They got a lot of students out of the country to the U.S. as well as to the Soviet Union. There was a good deal of ferment for which there was mostly a positive reaction, as opposed to the ferment under the Shah when a lot of it was negative because it was social under the king. It was an exciting time. I was there for much of it. I got a medal for knocking a Soviet firm out of the competition for one contract. The American firm lost it also because it went to a German but they still gave me a medal because it had been guaranteed to be a Soviet contract.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Afghan bureaucracy at that time?

McGAFFEY: There was no Afghan bureaucracy, there were Afghan people. They were not quite developed enough to have a bureaucracy. Everything was done on an individual basis. Because I was the teacher sir from Farah and I had cousins of my students in all of these various ministries, I could go in and get things done quite effectively. I spoke the language, I knew something of what was happening outside the city, I knew what towns they came from. There were three or four of us younger officers who were able to operate in this way. Ambassador Ted Eliot supported us entirely against some opposition of some counselors who felt that this was somewhat inappropriate. He told us to go ahead and used our reporting verbatim and gave us every support. It was an exciting time.

One of the first things that happened was that somebody came to me from the Ministry of Finance and said "Look, we understand that the government of Afghanistan has borrowed a lot of money from the U.S. but we've gotten rid of the old trappings of the kingdom and are now a republic. We don't know how to work these files so could you tell us what we owe you and when because we don't want to default on any loans?"

Q: When you left there in '76, what was the situation?

McGAFFEY: I left when everything looked like it was moving forward well and there was real change in the air. There was visible change in the economy of the country, a faint beginning of something like central government and there was beginning to be some acknowledgment of the authority of Kabul.

Q: Had the, you might say, visceral reaction of the American government to this new one as being sort of a Soviet system developing, kind of died down?

McGAFFEY: It very much diminished partly because the Saudis and the Iranians and others had decided to provide some support on their own and they were beginning to realize that this was not a Soviet puppet. There was still a great deal of unhappiness about UN votes because they did vote the Soviet line on everything that the Soviets considered important but on other things there was the apparent evidence that it was not a Soviet puppet. The expectations were high for continued improvement.

As a matter of fact I had gotten into serious trouble it seemed finding out some of this. When I had gone to Iran to take my Foreign Service exam, I played chess with a young man in the Ministry of Finance. Eight years later he came on an official visit to Kabul as the head of foreign assistance in the Ministry of Finance, a deputy secretary, or undersecretary. I don't know what his ministerial rank was but it was senior and he was now in charge of all foreign assistance. I invited him over to my house to play chess and pumped him about the Shah's plans for Afghanistan. I sent in a long cable about this which my ambassador thought was great. Then we got a rocket from Ambassador Helms next door in Iran demanding to know who was responsible for this outrage because in Iran access to ministerial level people was strictly limited to heads of departments and had to be cleared by the ambassador so that there was a single voice. This had not been reported out of Iran and to have this major report on Iranian plans for Afghanistan to be coming out of Kabul was unacceptable.

Q: We're talking about a period in Iran where later there was much criticism because there was too much control from the top and only one voice was being heard, not picking up the fact that it was a country getting ready for revolution.

McGAFFEY: Yes and that one voice spoke only to the Shah and saw things with the same limitations as the Shah saw them. I had already been assigned to Iran as my next assignment as principal officer and consul in Tabriz. The ambassador almost broke the assignment. He didn't want me but with a message from Ted Eliot saying that I was a promising officer and did understand discipline, he decided to allow me to come. I went to Iran for my next assignment.

Q: You were there from '76 to '79?

McGAFFEY: Yes, also an interesting period.

Q: Yes, a very interesting period. First place, you went as the consul in Tabriz is that right?

McGAFFEY: That's correct.

Q: First what was the situation in Tabriz and how did the consulate work?

McGAFFEY: It was a very small consulate. I had one vice consul and a small local staff. They had cut down drastically. It had been a major center with a large AID program but as Iran got rich the AID program disappeared so the economic staff disappeared and everything had been reduced. They had been considering making it a consular post only to do consular duties but there was a war between the Kurds out of Iran with Iraq. There was also the very large Soviet border, a permeable border with the Azerbaijanis on both sides, and there was all the commercial traffic and personal traffic to Europe through the Turkish border. They felt that in addition to a vice consul who would do consular work, they needed a political officer, a real Foreign Service officer, to be the principal officer and monitor basically those three things.

There was also the principal question in the mission in Iran, internally, of what happens after the Shah? Everybody in Iran knew that the Shah was working himself out of a job and that there were going to be significant changes when he left. He had scheduled his departure for '80 when he was going to abdicate in favor of his son so there was a need to do reporting to find out what was going to happen. Since the Shah's wife was from Tabriz and there was a different national group in the empire because of the Kurds, the Azerbaijanis, and the Armenians all potentially troublesome, they felt they wanted reporting.

Unfortunately I got very mixed signals and was very lucky in the handling of it. Almost the very first message I received was a cable from State Department addressed to Teheran, Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, etc., (I was an individual addressee) which asked for an assessment of the attitude of the people of my district toward the Shah. I went out and interviewed people and I wrote that I found the attitude significantly different with the different population groups but none of it was very happy. I sent it in through Teheran because I had no communications facilities. About two weeks later I got a rocket from Washington saying you had a request, an instruction for a report and the due date was two weeks ago. When are you going to send the report? I called up Teheran and found out that Ambassador Helms had asked that all the reporting from the consulates be sent to him. He read them and decided that this was not quite the correct view so he had sent the embassy report and put in there a line saying this represents also the consulate reporting.

I called him up and said "Sir, this was addressed to me as principal officer and I've now gotten another one demanding my response. I feel that I should send in my response. I have also seen embassy Teheran's response and while that may be true in the capital district among Persians it does not accurately represent what I am seeing out here." He said, "Are you questioning my judgment?" I said, "No sir. I am suggesting that my observation is of different fact and that difference may be important. Washington has asked for my view and I feel I ought to send it." He said, "No." I said, "Well the secretary has put up this back channel for information and it will go in directly to him. If you don't wish to send it officially I will send it through the back channel."

Q: This is the so called open forum?

McGAFFEY: Yes, through the open forum. It had a different name but I've forgotten what the name was. He said "If you send that, this is the last assignment you will get in the Foreign Service. Do you realize who you are speaking to?" He detailed his employment history as head of CIA, etc. He said, "You are directly defying my authority. You have no right to do so and you will back down or you are through." I said, "I am sending it sir, I am sorry." The next day he was indicted on Watergate issues by a grand jury in Alexandria and he forgot to take the time to discipline an obstreperous young officer. My report did go in. The DCM became chargï¿½. He called and said "What was the resolution on this?" I said, "We talked about it and I said that I would prefer to have it sent in officially but if not I will send it in through the open forum. Ambassador Helms disagreed and I said I would send it one way or the other." He said, "I don't think we have to go that far" so we sent it officially.

Q: On this, how did you feel? Were you getting contact with the political officers at the embassy and all? How were they feeling? Were they feeling under constraints?

McGAFFEY: They were feeling under tremendous constraints. The absolute rule under Helms was that the only person that could talk to the Shah was the ambassador. To speak to any minister you must be the head of a department and only with the permission of the ambassador. Any other contacts with government officials had to be done at the appropriate level by rank under the direct approval of the head of an office. People were hearing things, were writing them up and were finding them ignored. They were not being sent in. There was a major use of memcons.

Curiously enough where I found the greatest frustration was among the CIA officers in Teheran because their commission was explicit and unalterable. They were to look only at the threat only from the Soviet Union: communist infiltration, support, sabotage, pressures for change from the Soviet Union. They had much wider access and were talking with military officers, union people, religious people, but they were not allowed to report on anything except the Soviet threat. They were passing things to me which I was sending in to my friends, my colleagues, in INR and elsewhere who understood the source even though they could not cite it. I would put "I have heard" and they would understand what that meant. But there was a great deal of information in the mission that was just not being reported.

Q: Often when this happens it gets reported. This was true in Vietnam under Graham Martin and the last days of Vietnam, and under Howard Jones in Indonesia with Sukarno. What happens is that there is the use of official informal letters, or informal informal letters, or visits come out. In other words, one doesn't really stop the flow. What happens is at a certain point the ambassador becomes essentially discredited by those that have to use information, by those who have to make decisions. There is this flow underneath.

McGAFFEY: One of the things that often contributes to that underground flow is that different agencies are reporting different things. Specifically the DCI, the intelligence community depending on reports from the CIA stations, is reporting something different than the ambassador is reporting. The DIA is another important source. But we had an unusual situation in Teheran where the ambassador who maintained very strict controls over the Foreign Service reporting, was a former head of the CIA. Through direct command and through his contacts he exercised at least equal, if not greater control over CIA reporting and had somebody who agreed with his mind set as the defense attachï¿½.

Q: One of the jobs of political officers in the Foreign Service is to analyze what the mind set is, why people do things and all in foreign countries. You can't help but also apply you might say this same analysis to your own place particularly if you have a very strong minded arbitrary ambassador. What was sort of what you and others were feeling about Helms? Why was he acting in this way?

McGAFFEY: He was a true believer and felt that the Shah was the major force for change in Iran. He was the leader of his country and the man who would bring development, democracy and strawberries and cream to the whole region. He was the picked U.S. surrogate and had the support of a president of the United States, Mr. Nixon, who came out, met the Shah, and turned and said to the ambassador and to Pentagon representatives "Give him whatever he wants."

It was not a matter so much of suppressing different impressions of the same information, bureaucratically he was very effective in that he suppressed contact. Where perhaps a strong minded junior officer might hear something in the bazaar from a sweeper in the ministry of whatever, he would go in and speak to his boss who had just had an hour long meeting with the minister of whatever. Where the two images differed, they would assume that that junior sweeper from the ministry was either ignorant, or not in the know, or pushing a different agenda because they had it from the horse's mouth. There was nobody else speaking to the Shah so nobody reported any doubts in front of the Shah. There was nobody else speaking to the ministers and the deputy ministers.

There was a very similar thing with the consulates and the embassy. If a consulate reported something that was at odds with what the embassy was reporting, the embassy, the ambassador, would have a note attached to the bottom saying that while this report is interesting and perhaps even dangerous, they had checked it out with senior authorities and found that it does not correspond with the facts as best they can determine so it should be read as a view from some individual out in the provinces. It might help fill out the edges but it's not the truth.

Q: I'm dwelling on this because I think the situation in Iran, I'm really talking about from the American professional point of view, was particularly bad and that you had a awful lot of frustration of people feeling that the real story wasn't getting out. Probably nothing would have happened anyway other than we might have gotten our people out of there sooner but other than that the situation in Iran was being stifled really coming from the top. It was the president and Kissinger who fell in love with the Shah almost and they had an ambassador who wouldn't tell what was really happening.

McGAFFEY: No, who believed. He did speak up but he believed. There were particular issues in which Helms and the Shah differed and Helms would be very forthright on those issues. But it was still a single voice speaking to a single man and Helms, with Kissinger and Nixon, believed that the Shah was the best and greatest hope not only for Iran but for the U.S. in the area. Nobody was interested in retailing stories that would cause the Shah problems when they were just minority opinions. As I know from personal experience, Helms as an individual was willing and capable of using his contacts to threaten the careers of anybody who upset his apple cart.

Q: What about the mullahs and the religious side, can you tell me how you observed during your '76 to '79 period the spread of it?

McGAFFEY: I was in Tabriz for only one year. Toward the end of my first year I got a call from the DCM in Teheran, I think it was Charlie Naas. Basically what he said was that there was real trouble in central Iran, in Isfahan. What we've got down there right now as principal officer is somebody who knows consular regulations backward and forward but has not done any reporting about anything other than the number of visas issued since he got there. They asked if I would be willing to trade places with him which means that people in Teheran were looking at my reporting. They felt that I was able to do something and that they were aware of things going on even if the consulate was not reporting.

You are right, and reporting was going to Washington mostly in the forms of memcons, official informals and the like. I know that the assumption in the mission was that these were being read and Helms' reports were being considered one-sided. I found out later that that was just not true. People were not getting to airgrams, memcons and things or if they did they just never added them up. Anyway, I did not have a great deal to do with the mullahs in Tabriz.

Q: It was also not a center for it?

McGAFFEY: No. I knew the ayatollah of Tabriz. I had talked with him a lot about Islam and my background but I dealt much more with the principal clergy of the Armenians. The man in Tabriz eventually became the patriarch, the pope of the Armenian church worldwide. He was a useful contact and a source of much information on the Armenians. The Kurds were considered heretics by most Muslims because their sect, the Alawi, practically deified the Ali, the son in law of the prophet. I didn't have much to do other than regular social contact with the clergy.

Q: What was the situation vis ï¿½ vis the United States with the Kurds at that time?

McGAFFEY: While I was there the situation changed dramatically. When I was assigned to Tabriz the United States, through the CIA and the Shah, was directly arming and supporting Kurdish separatists that were headquartered in Iran in the Tabriz district in their war with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The Shah considered Saddam Hussein his major enemy and the United States, as a friend of the Shah, was willing to support the Kurds as a surrogate fighter against Saddam Hussein. While I was in Tabriz, Saddam Hussein and the Shah signed a peace treaty delineating the border and settling major issues including ownership of some oil fields. With prospects of changing the eons long war relationship between the two countries, as of the date of the signing of that secret treaty (a total surprise) the Kurds were cut off absolutely. Even things in the pipeline that they had paid for just were not delivered. The intelligence support, and warnings of attacks were cut off along with everything else.

The Iraqis who had been informed that this would happen, opened a major offensive against the Kurdish villages causing a major flood of refugees into both Iran and Turkey. I date from that period the formation of two very separate political wings among the Kurds. They had been fairly well united in their war with Saddam Hussein but the reaction of the Turks and the Iranians was very different. The Turks tried to shove them back into Iraq where they were being killed and used a lot of force. The Iranians let them come in and said as long as you don't cause any trouble for us, we won't cause any trouble for you. So the Iranian side of the Kurds maintained their hatred for Saddam Hussein, deeply distrusted the U.S. and Iran, but didn't hate, and were willing to consider other than military solutions because they were disillusioned with war. The Kurds centered in Turkey hated the Turks, hated Saddam Hussein, and moved to a terrorist option which has been a split that has been maintained ever since.

At any rate, I knew Barzani, the leader. I knew his two sons and after he died I continued to meet with them. They felt that the fault was the Shah's and that he had somehow persuaded the United States to take an action that was contrary to U.S. interests. They tried to use me as a channel for this view. In fact, the U.S. was very much aware of the implications of its actions and was willing to make a sacrifice of the Kurds for our other interests.

Q: This, of course, was the period of both Nixon and Kissinger, who were very much realpolitik and there wasn't much hand wringing over anybody who got caught in...

McGAFFEY: It was a bi polar world and what happened in the fringes was important only in so far as it affected the struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Q: Then you moved down to Isfahan. Could you describe what Isfahan was like at that time?

McGAFFEY: I moved to Isfahan because of rumors of trouble.

Q: This was in '78 wasn't it?

McGAFFEY: Right. It is old Persia and in the province of Fars from which the land, the language and the people get their name. It has a history and a feeling that it should be in charge of Iran and the world for that matter. It has old monuments, old archeology, a long established tradition. They felt that Teheran was a nothing village that had just pumped itself up. It saw itself as very much the center of religious life with the oldest established schools for the mullahs and the like.

The city and region was struggling with the Shah's modernization. The Shah had selected Isfahan as the site for the headquarters of the military industrial complex. He built the largest air base, the base for the army helicopter divisions and training, major factory complexes that were related to the military and other factory complexes that were unrelated. There were some 27,000 foreigners, Americans and otherwise, that had been moved in to support this new industrial military complex in what had been a town of about 100,000. The Iranian population had boomed to about 400,000 with all the military and the employees.

It was a totally disjointed social setup because the influx was almost 100 percent young males and Iranian social structure is very, very dependent on external social controls. The grandmother sits and whips kids into shape. People are punished for infractions and they are never taught any personal discipline. It is always social controls. All of these young men came without families, without wives, without mothers, without a village, and without any mechanism for defining the social rules. There were lots of liquor stores, lots of theaters, lots of nightclubs, lots of prostitution and drinking but no structure to control it.

Isfahan is also the home of the largest population of Christians and Jews outside of Tabriz. The Jews had been brought over by an early king and established there as the goldsmiths, the illuminators, and the skilled craftsmen. They became very wealthy and were therefore a target of envy. The Christians had a ghetto of Armenian Christians which was very large. Again, they were well educated and an object of envy. Particularly for these relatively uneducated young men who were brought in working in the military or working in the factories and had nothing to do with their lives outside of it, one of the things that they did was pursue women. A woman without a veil was assumed to be a prostitute. The fact that most of the women without veils were either Jews or Christians or my family added to the tension.

The Americans brought in some 14,000 of the 26,000 27,000 and they were no prizes. Bell Helicopter was the largest single employer and had 7,000 of the total. It had targeted people with helicopter experience in Vietnam, specifically targeting those who had married a Vietnamese or Thai or Burmese wife and had taken them back home to west Texas or Tennessee and found they didn't quite fit in. They brought these people here, built a ghetto for them and expected them to behave properly without any incentives, so there was an awful lot of social tension.

Because of this, in Isfahan I did have a lot of contact with the religious because I was looking to the religious authorities as one of the centers of possible mediation of these tensions. I got to know the ayatollah very well. After I had talked with him, at his request I talked.

Q: Which ayatollah was this?

McGAFFEY: The ayatollah of Isfahan, not Khomeini, who was not a real ayatollah. At his invitation, I taught a weekly class at two of the largest schools for the mullahs on the Bible. I became a member of the faculty and could talk to the senior religious on a regular basis. I found some very disturbing things because what was happening was that there were men wearing the clothes of mullahs coming in and preaching political things at the mosques. "False mullahs" they called them. Whether they were false mullahs or merely mullahs who were social zealots who were preaching a different thing, I never could determine. What is a false mullah since there is no official clergy? Among other things, they were Khomeini's people or people who were preaching in the Khomeini name.

What I found was a military that had no idea what the Shah wanted, angry young men who just wanted things to be good with a very unfocused anger, students and businessmen who were very upset about the lack of authority, responsibility available to them under the Shah's Iran. I also found constitutionalists, mostly middle class, who felt that the Shah was moving much too slow on social and political reforms, and traditionalists who felt that all of this change was terrible. Everybody was angry. It was unfocused, it was not targeted but it was real and incidents would blow it up so I was very concerned about possible incidents with Americans. It felt like the beginning of a revolution and I reported it as such to Teheran and apparently so did Shiraz and the junior officer in Tabriz. We went up and had a conference with the principal officers in Teheran and Teheran said that they have just not seen any such evidence. This was after Helms had left but there was still a chargï¿½.

Q: The Carter administration had come in by this time hadn't it?

McGAFFEY: About this time the Carter administration came in. One of the incidents which made people explode was Carter's first announcement about human rights and the importance of democracy and everything else, had given a great deal of feeling of support to democrats, Christian Democratic Party people, the middle class, business, and the students. Then he made an announcement after some incident that happened elsewhere saying that he supported the Shah 100 percent. They felt betrayed and they translated that as anger at Americans. They didn't know what the Americans were saying.

Q: Were you there at the time when the Shah had his millennial meeting of ....

McGAFFEY: The 2,000 year anniversary in the tent. I was not present at that celebration outside Shiraz.

Q: Did that sit very well, do you remember?

McGAFFEY: Actually I think that it became a cause celebre but at the time it seemed to suit people fine. It was the kind of thing that you expected the Shah to do. It was showing off Iran and himself. You expect an oriental despot to do a bit of showing off. They didn't understand Jimmy Carter and his self effacing. Was he saying that he was weaker and poorer than the Shah?

At any rate, what we had and what we were reporting from the provinces was an incipient revolution. We had a big conference in Teheran and they said we just need more evidence. There are no indications of this in Teheran. We are just not hearing it. So we went back and continued to report. In effect, we had in Isfahan a successful revolution. The Comitï¿½ came into being and just took over. The military withdrew to its bases, the government withdrew, the policemen were afraid to go into the crowded areas and so the Comitï¿½s began to patrol the streets.

Q: Comitï¿½s being?

McGAFFEY: Groups usually centered around one or more religious, that are there to promote social discipline, to enforce "right behavior" and to overthrow the Shah, if necessary, if he didn't reform. They were certainly there to smash up liquor stores that were serving Iranians, close down movie theaters that were showing pornography. It was a religious political amalgam. Some of them were the followers of various religious figures who were carrying out instructions. Some of them were bunches of students who wanted to throw their weight around and who co opted a religious figure and said you're it. Eventually in Isfahan the ayatollah organized the comitï¿½s in the central city under his authority and they became a disciplined group for the city and provincial government. On the outskirts there were the more radical and more dangerous ones who were the first ones with guns, well supplied. Teheran and the United States continued to say that there was no evidence other than regional disorders and uncertainties.

At about this time I had to take the step of asking the military who were providing security on my post, to withdraw and got the ayatollah to send his people over for security. This was done very quietly because the embassy said that an announcement of this would look like the United States was on the wrong side. But it was on the request of the military who felt that their people were a target sitting in front of the consulate.

Q: What about the Americans here? Here you have this group, I know it well, that gather around where there is a large military and other types of expenditure of the United States. One could almost call them the boomers. They can be very unruly, very difficult. One hears stories about motorcycles being driven up into mosques and all of that. What were the problems you had as the consul in Isfahan in dealing with Americans who were moving beyond their ghetto and getting into trouble outside?

McGAFFEY: I was negotiating for release from various comitï¿½s an average of about ten Americans a week. Four guys would go out, pick up a girl and take her out with a case of liquor in the car with obvious intentions. They would maybe be stopped by a patrol of comitï¿½s and they would be arrested. They would scream for the consul and I would have to go and persuade them to my care.

The worst incident was a little bit later when I actually organized an evacuation. I had quietly negotiated flights directly into the Isfahan military air base for company-chartered planes so that they wouldn't go to the airport and it could be done quietly. I had moved people into a hotel in central Isfahan so they could go in convoy rather than try to collect from the individual homes. The first flight out was supposed to be at four o'clock in the morning. I went and did a bed check (I know these people) about two and found one room empty. I went out and found a jeep had been stolen. We caught the guys as they were leaving a brand new mosque which had just been completed in the center of a new residential area. These were people scheduled on the first flight out. They had taken a ladder and some buckets and on the marble side of this new mosque had written "Jesus saves you fucking ragheads" and were going to sneak back to their beds and leave town the next morning. Between two and four, they spent the night whitewashing the mosque. For some reason, their names slipped off the first flight and they didn't get on until the last flight out.

They caused trouble. They would go into the bazaar and be yelling back and forth at each other. They would wear inappropriate clothing, and they would laugh at the Iranians. They would be drinking and displaying in public and they caused a lot of difficulty. We worked out a modus vivendi. The comitï¿½s would arrest them, throw them into a dirty cell and let them sit. Within four hours they would notify me and I would come and get them out.

Q: What about Bell Helicopter and any other companies, one thinks of Ross Perot's company and all these? Talking about at your level and your area, were they concerned about what was happening and trying to do anything?

McGAFFEY: Bell Helicopter had no interest whatsoever. As long as they were getting paid, they paid no attention. Their headquarters was in Teheran. Their payment was coming out of the military procurement. Their senior officials left Isfahan and I found out, for example, that since no one knew the quality of the people that they were dealing with, they had seized passports of every employee and had them locked in a safe in Teheran. When I had to evacuate these people, no passports were available so I had to issue passports, crossing my fingers, for some 7,000 people, working at midnight, my wife typing and me putting pictures on. With these 7,000 people there were approximately 125 by the end (because I had tried to get the others out earlier) non American citizen spouses for whom no embassies existed in Iran, certainly nothing in Isfahan. Since I had gotten these flights into the air base and they were going to go directly out to Greece, I took them some sheets of parchment and I wrote out "I, David C. McGaffey, consul general of the United States in and for Isfahan, do declare that Hung Mon Sui, a citizen and national of Thailand, is traveling in the company of American citizen spouse so and so, passport number such and such. I request all officials to give her every assistance and allow her to pass unimpeded." I put a seal on the top and a seal on the bottom and stretched some ribbon and I said "This is worthless but see what happens to it." The State Department was very upset when they found out that I had issued these.

Q: All of us do this. These are non documents that you have to issue sometimes.

McGAFFEY: Bell just ignored their people. On the other hand Grumman went out of its way to make sure that its people were safe and were informed. They gave early departure to anybody who wished it. They urged dependents and people with medical difficulties to leave early. They were consulting with me on a daily basis and they were the ones who did the arrangements for the actual charters and the flights. I persuaded Bell to pay for the flights that were carrying mostly Bell employees but they were unwilling to do anything to make any arrangements because it might upset the Iranians who were paying them.

Q: When did you leave there?

McGAFFEY: I left in May. The Shah left in January.

Q: We're talking about '79.

McGAFFEY: Yes.

Q: Let's talk about the sort of end game from your point of view, not what happened afterwards. What determined to get the Americans out of there?

McGAFFEY: About the same time that I was sending messages to Teheran, I gathered the heads of all of the companies and told them my feeling and my disturbances and suggested that it might be a good idea to send people with difficulties on leave. Interestingly enough there was a fairly large Israeli irrigation project and two days later I called the companies back to find out what action, if any, they had taken after this meeting and I couldn't find any Israelis. Every one of them had left two days earlier. Most of the American companies took limited action. Then there were almost daily demonstrations and it was a matter of seeking authorization from Washington, which was not forthcoming, to declare an evacuation, working with the companies on lowering profiles, and the like. I arranged for example for dealers in food stuffs and basic goods to go out to the American compounds to prevent the need for Americans to go into the markets.

Eventually, against the recommendations from Washington, I felt that I couldn't guarantee the safety of the children and closed the American school. At that point, a lot of the women and children left. I worked with Iranian authorities to restrict work areas and transport and the like. We had by this time violent demonstrations on a daily basis. Places where Americans were known to frequent got firebombed at night, not while they were opened but when they were closed. Unfortunately that included my home. I lived above the store at the post and they didn't realize that, so they firebombed the consulate underneath the bedroom of my children. I finally got authority for my wife and children to leave with one suitcase each in a military transport.

Then two incidents happened which convinced people. A bomb was thrown into a bus carrying Bell Helicopter employees and, for the grace of God, it got smothered. There was one casualty, an American who got a piece of shrapnel in his behind. Because the location was amusing, people somehow accepted that without panic. Then a mob surrounded the Grumman building and I believe by accident, but who knows, set fire to it. Two Air Force officers, who I obtained a silver star for eventually, went into the burning building, collected the employees, got them out a back way and got them to my residence. There were no injuries but the building was a total loss. At that point there was agreement for evacuation but the roads between Isfahan and Teheran were no longer safe. They had been taken over by radicals and there was a lot of shooting up. I was unwilling to authorize a drive to Teheran. Teheran by this time had decided there was something going on and was authorizing commercial flights out. That was when I got the aircraft into Isfahan through the air base.

Just in time for the second flight I had some 400 Americans in this hotel. One of these characters who had volunteered to be a late departure was going around to all of the families slated for departure and saying "The company is forcing my to stay here but I had to move out of my place. Could you sell me some things cheap so I could furnish a little flat?" He was buying up for pennies the property of everybody that was leaving and selling them through an Iranian taxi driver. He and the taxi driver got into a fight in front of the hotel and he pulled out a gun and shot the taxi driver who was trying to knife him. Within minutes the rumor had it that Americans were standing on the balconies of the hotel shooting at Iranians going by and they had killed 15, etc. By the time I got there they had drums of petroleum stacked along the bottom floor of the hotel and were planning to burn the whole place down.

I called the military and asked for an escort to arrest the guy and take him out of there. The military refused, so I called the ayatollah and he sent over six of his mullahs. We finally got the guy out of the hotel, both the Iranian in there wounded and the American. At that time we got the mullahs and the American into the car but I didn't get in so I was seized by the mob, shot, stabbed, hanged and had both of my kneecaps broken. They then tried to run me over with a truck and the truck put one wheel into a drainage ditch and tilted up on its side so I was able to roll under the truck and begin speaking to people. I talked my way out of that and got them to arrest me and take me to the ayatollah. He gave me refuge and treated my wounds.

About that time Teheran decided that there was justification for an evacuation order so we got full support then. We got everybody out and I closed office as soon as every foreigner was out of the district who was willing to leave.

Q: I might add that this was when you get later an award for heroism for this.

McGAFFEY: Yes, the one time that I screwed up trying to get an American out of a bad situation I got a medal. All the times that I succeeded, they ignored.

Q: I would have thought that towards the end, as far as closing up the post, it must have been pretty hairy up to the very end.

McGAFFEY: It was extremely hairy. We had men with guns in the building objecting to things like my burning up my passports and visas. They were threatening me and my family until I got them out. We had prospects of incidents that could have resulted in multiple deaths. For one month every morning the man at the garage at the school would call me and say "Should I send the buses out?" At four o'clock in the morning I would have to decide yes or no and put the lives of all of those kids at risk. It was hairy. It was terrible. By this time they had named me consul general because the Soviet representative was a consul general and they didn't want him ranking me. But I was the only western diplomatic representative and I was the one who everybody looked to. I was one of the few people who could talk to the military, and to the governor, and to the ayatollah, to all of the various authorities. I felt every day as if very inadequate shoulders were carrying a lot of lives.

Q: How about getting the Americans out of there, were a lot digging their heels in?

McGAFFEY: About 20 individuals elected to stay. Probably 15 of those were married to Iranians and the other five were young people who had good contacts and felt they wanted to stay. Because it was gradual, the most vulnerable ones left first. The fact that others had left and the fact that tensions were increasing made it a matter of just scheduling them to get them out.

Q: How did you get out of there?

McGAFFEY: When there was nobody else left, I and my remaining staff piled into three cars loaned to us by the ayatollah that were festooned with some 25 people from his comitï¿½s with heavy weaponry. We drove to Teheran and we had more weapons than anybody at the roadblocks. I got into Teheran and found out that meanwhile the embassy had been taken over by security comitï¿½s who almost had a fire fight with my comitï¿½s.

Q: Just to finish off this part, were you in Teheran long?

McGAFFEY: When they found out my physical condition they medevaced me as soon as they could to Greece, which was where my family was. I was there for about six weeks. As soon as I was capable again, they sent me back to Teheran because they needed somebody who could speak the language and knew something of the history because everyone who had dealt with the Shah was persona non grata. I went back as acting political counselor in Teheran, acting DCM I guess for a while.

Q: How long were you there?

McGAFFEY: Until the end of September. I left about 40 days before the final takeover. I was there for three takeovers. I helped get the release of the people from the first takeover when I was still in Isfahan but left before the 444 day one.

Q: How did you find the embassy by the time you got there when you came back from Greece? What was sort of the mood of the embassy?

McGAFFEY: It was badly divided between those who felt that the worst was over and things were coming back to normal, and those who felt that there was no government, there was no social control and we should all get out. Bruce Laingen had been brought in as chargï¿½ and accepted the feeling of those who felt that the worst was over and tried to build up to a normal staff. I and the acting DCM both sent exit messages recommending that the embassy be closed and were asked what would happen if the U.S. admitted the Shah. I said there would be a disaster but it was one of two opinions. We had people lined up in lines for visa applications who were handing their guns to friends so they could get into the line, apply for the visa and then go back and pick up their guns and demonstrate in front of the front door. It was a very confusing situation.

Q: I was just looking at the time and we have to stop at this point. I don't know if there is anything else, there is an awful lot I suppose about Iran but if you want to talk any more about Teheran at this point we can cover that the next time, then we will pick up thereafter. We're talking about up through September '79.

Today is the 30th of January 1998. It has been a while. Was there anything else you can think of as far as going out of Teheran? You left in September was that it?

McGAFFEY: That's correct. I went to Greece, picked up my family and went off to Harvard for a year.

Q: When you were taking off in September what was your feeling about whither? You said we probably should get the hell out but how did you think things would work out on departure?

McGAFFEY: On departure I felt that Iran was going to have to go through a long period of turmoil before it got its own act together. I had already been through personally two takeovers of the embassy and had seen others. I certainly knew that any Americans behind were at risk but I in no way predicted the 465 day takeover or whatever.

Q: I am not sure if we covered this before because we haven't listened to all the previous tape, just the last part, but what were American firms doing by the time you got out of there?

McGAFFEY: American firms basically had left. Everyone had been evacuated who was willing to go. We had a roster, if my memory serves me, of about 42 people who stayed in Iran for various reasons: they were married to Iranians, or there were two students in Isfahan who were studying political science who felt that the risk was worth the unique expertise that they would get. All of the American companies and organizations had pulled out. There were just individuals left. The feeling was the that there would be no place for American business or for that matter for real diplomacy until the Iranians fought it out among themselves and decided what kind of a country, what kind of a government, what kind of a future they wanted.

Q: Did the embassy get involved with the problem that occurs when you have something like this and that is American women married to Iranians who have children. Some of them may have wanted to get out but the children couldn't leave. Was this a problem or not?

McGAFFEY: At the time that I was there and up to the time that I left, we definitely got involved but it was not particularly a problem. It was just a matter of making late night appointments so that people could renew passports and the like. Most of the American women married to Iranians were married to people of the class who were very nervous about the way things were going and were not at all upset about the thought of their wives and children getting out until things calmed down. There were later some problems but at that time it was just assisting Americans and getting documentation so they could leave.

Q: You were off to Harvard. What were you taking?

McGAFFEY: I went to the Kennedy School at Harvard for a one year sabbatical from '79 to '80. I did end up taking a degree, an MPA, public administration. I started out by going back to Washington and debriefing and I was astonished at the level of ignorance in Washington. People did not know what was happening in Iran. People had preconceptions, or misconceptions, or no conceptions of what was going on and they were making policy decisions.

They were saying they had really not expected the Shah to leave because Iran always has these eruptions every once in a while and then they calm down, that's how the Iranians let off steam. So they are waiting for the Iranians to finish letting off steam now. I gave Gary Sick my impressions and I got the clear impression that my impressions had made no impression at all. He was the one who had paper weights on various in boxes on his desk. He had a shell covering the Pentagon in box, a metal dollar sign for Treasury, and a little dancing Shiva. He said, "Do you know what that is?" I said "What?" He said, "That's the State Department, you know on the one hand, then on the other hand, then on the other hand, then on the other hand."

Q: In your debriefings did you find that there were schools of thought or was it pretty much essentially a non school of thought but people were running off in different directions on the moment?

McGAFFEY: I found that up to the level of the desk officer, people had become persuaded of pretty much the same thing that the embassy was reporting. Above the level of the desk officer people had no knowledge of, and therefore very little opinion of Iran. They really had schools of thought on U.S. policy which was made regardless of what was happening on the ground.

Q: Let's go to the Harvard time. You were there during a good part of the crises at our embassy and the takeover of the embassy, all of which sort of fixated the United States. Did you find that Harvard was making use of you at all for this?

McGAFFEY: No. Harvard did not make use of me on this at all. The State Department did. Almost immediately after the takeover I got a call from the future Secretary of State, Christopher, who wanted to know if I had any desire to be useful and had any contacts that might help out. It turned out that I had in my personal notebook the telephone numbers that rang at the front desk in the Foreign Ministry where our chargï¿½ and political counselor were at the time, Bruce Laingen and Victor Tomseth. I was able to call and because I could speak Farsi I got through the secretaries. I was able to establish a direct telephone contact with Bruce and Victor, the first one. It became institutionalized but I saved some days, and weeks, who knows. I was able to contact Iranian friends in the vicinity of the embassy by a direct phone call and get information about what was happening during a time when rumors were rife. I was able for example to make calls after the aborted rescue mission, Carter's rescue attempt.

The State Department asked me to go out and speak to organizations. I remember I spoke to the National Association of Editors which are basically editors of small town newspapers but they gathered in one of the square states, I think it was Colorado but I'm not sure. They were very interested in speaking to me. I felt that I was made use of, but not at Harvard.

Q: It's interesting. Did this thing stir up any emotion at Harvard?

McGAFFEY: Not to my knowledge. At the same time I was asked to go up the street to Tufts at the Fletcher School and lead a seminar on the Iranian Revolution. When I came back to D.C. I was asked to lead seminars at the University of Maryland and at American University. But at Harvard, first their focus was very much first world. It was the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Global diplomacy and what was going on in Iran just didn't seem that important I think. Second they were trying to do something for the ages. Everything was at a level of theory and abstraction that made today's headlines not irrelevant but less relevant. They were only relevant as illustrations of the kinds of things that could happen.

Q: Your course was what? Or courses? Was this public administration and what do you mean by that?

McGAFFEY: It was a wonderful year. The State Department considered it a sabbatical year to do whatever I liked. There were no requirements and not even any encouragement to go for a degree. I was to go and study and refresh my mental capacity. I chose to go for a degree and I found that the requirements were almost infinitely flexible. I ended up taking 85 percent of my courses at the Sloane School at MIT studying systems analysis. Sloane is the school of the people who invented systems dynamics so I studied with people like Nat Mass and others. At Harvard I sat in on the weekly seminars and I participated in the two, I think, required courses. I got good enough marks out of MIT to satisfy Harvard and Harvard awarded me the degree when I had accumulated sufficient credits.

Q: With systems analysis, what did you see that leading to?

McGAFFEY: My dream at the time did not come to fruition but what I hoped to do was to find a way of capturing the knowledge and awareness of how things work for Foreign Service officers who flow through the system. What happens typically is you go to a country for four years. In the first six months you have complete ignorance, the next year and a half you are ignorant but you know enough so you can fake it. Towards the end of your tour you begin to understand how the factions interrelate, who has power, what is important in this culture and this society, and then you leave often with no overlap. What I was looking for was using systems analysis and systems dynamics which talks about inputs and outputs, and weights and measures, to have a structure so that somebody in a position could record, before they leave, their knowledge such that you could do readings saying if this happens it flows through the system and this is a likely outcome. This would be left for the successor who changes it, who comments on it, adds to it, subtracts from it, tries things, finds out it doesn't work. Over time this accumulated analysis of what the system is in country x, becomes a fairly good predictive tool.

I did the beginnings of the work at MIT, brought it back and while I was in Washington I worked with the CIA, DIA, and INR analysts trying to construct it. I understand, though I don't know that, that the CIA actually tried to put it into practice and it may still be there, something like this. By the end I was one of many contributors to something that had gone far beyond my ideas but the State Department never was interested. They saw it as something having to do with computers and therefore having to do with GSO [General Services Officer] kind of work, not the work of real people.

Q: You left in the summer of '80 was it?

McGAFFEY: In September of '80.

Q: What did you do?

McGAFFEY: Actually I left in May of '80 and I then went back up to finish things. I got a call from John Sprott at FSI who said that they felt that they needed somebody to teach political analysis and that when he'd been hearing about who was doing what, my name kept coming up. He read what I had written on Iran and felt that I was doing more analytical work than a lot of people in the Foreign Service, rather than descriptive. He asked if I would be willing to come and teach political analysis. I said yes, when I finished. I kept on talking to FSI, kept coming up. I came up for one short course and went back. At the same time the idea of a mid level graduate refresher for all FSO's was being born so I got hauled into the planning for that and ended up drafting the FSI proposal for a mid level course. It came up originally as deputy coordinator political studies with responsibility for this planning, and then coordinator political studies and initially of the mid level program.

Q: How long were you associated with the FSI, sort of as a tour?

McGAFFEY: It was four years.

Q: This would be '80 to '84?

McGAFFEY: Yes.

Q: Let's talk about when you went to the FSI, here you had been involved in the hottest issue of the day and where political analysis certainly could have been an important factor but probably wasn't used as much. What was your feeling about the role of the FSI as seen by the Foreign Service in general? Not what it should be, but how did you see the FSI working in those days particularly in the fields of turning out good political officers?

McGAFFEY: When I was first approached to join FSI I was somewhat reluctant because other than its reputation as one of the two best language schools in the world, I had the feeling that it was largely a backwater. The more I talked to the people who were there, the more I got the idea that it didn't need to be and that this was an opportunity to put training in an appropriate place in the Foreign Service. I think that if the mid level course I did had not existed, I probably would not have accepted the assignment but I know that for myself, personally, the year at Harvard had been a wonderful rebuilding experience. I had gotten so involved in operations and drafting that my mind had fallen into ruts and at Harvard I was forced to think about how I was thinking and what I was thinking. I saw too many FSOs who came in with a good education, broadly defined, with open minds, and then as the years went by and they stayed in the same type of job and the same area, they got narrower, and narrower, and narrower to the point where they were not able to respond to all of the changes. So I signed on to help revitalize FSI as a means of revitalizing the Foreign Service.

Q: I have been interviewing Howard Sollenberger who was very much with the FSI up until about '76 I think, from the '40s up, and he talked about trying to put in an equivalent to a mid career course and how it didn't work. At one time there was this ad hoc organization called the young Turks. Here I am gray hair with beard, but I was a young Turk in those days and I was on the training committee that was trying to figure out a training program. We figured out the idea of a training program including all the good things. Then we started toting up how long it would take including languages and all. A person would have to train his or her entire career when you start adding on what you want. This is time out and people are paid solid salaries during this time. How was this going to fit into the system as far as value received?

McGAFFEY: We spent a lot of time analyzing exactly that issue. We looked at other foreign diplomatic services, we looked at banks, insurance companies, law firms, and the Supreme Court. We looked at a lot of different institutions and found that medicine made perhaps the best analogy and concluded that to be really effective, an FSO should plan on spending almost a third of their career in training. We were able to show by analogy at least, to the satisfaction of both the State Department at all levels and OMB [Office of Management and Budget], that at least a portion of that would have money benefit, that the money spent would be worth it. Languages are an essential part of it and need to be continuing, need to be ongoing. Initial training is important but what we were showing was that the State Department was actually investing a great deal of money in initial training, a good deal of money in senior training, and nothing in between. The personnel system admitted that the criteria it had for admission to the senior levels was riddled with exceptions and was not being met because people did not have either the breath of experience or the training to meet those criteria.

We persuaded them to go for a mid level course which would be the equivalent of a masters degree or more, certainly graduate level, that would be for mid level officers. We negotiated for almost a year and got the criteria for admission to the mid level program accepted and got the money matters settled. It was designed for people who were roughly in their fourth or fifth tour in the Foreign Service and had been off probation for at least two tours. They had served overseas and in Washington, with at least one tour in their specialty and at least one tour in some other specialty. They had a solid understanding of who they were and what the Foreign Service was. This was designed to provide them with the tools so that they could take that and move forward into the senior levels.

We put it in and the system fought back, the system resisted. People did not want to be assigned for six months to FSI for both practical reasons and philosophical reasons. The practical reason was that the assignment system was designed around an annual cycle and six months put you outside of the cycle and there are not many jobs open. The philosophical reason is that people thought that fast track people could not afford to take any time off. If they were ever out of the leading edge job, they would no longer be on the fast track so the best people for whom this was designed, did not want to come. We finally got the Foreign Service to make it a requirement to enter the senior levels, another one of these threshold criteria. We got the personnel system to assign people willy nilly and I think we built an excellent program.

One of the things that gratifies me these days is that I keep running into Ambassador so and so who says "You probably don't remember me but I was in your mid level course back in 1980. I hated it and I used to complain to you and about you all of the time. You know what, I found that it's really useful. I have been using it every day since then." That was not an untypical reaction when the people finished the course. They started very reluctantly, they got involved and they felt that they really had added something.

Then we were victim to some large extent, of our own success. The more people said it was successful, the more people volunteered to go in and every single mid level class (we only it for the four years) had more people in it. It was designed for a cycle of three a year with 17 people in the class and we thought that we would eventually have two classes with 17 each adding more faculty, etc. We never got any more operational money but by the time that I left, there were 90 people in the class and something that worked very effectively in the seminar setting with 17 people was not as successful with 90 people.

Q: Too much lecturing and not enough participation.

McGAFFEY: Yes, it became talking heads and lecturing, and very little action. How do you get exercises where people actually carry out these things when you have 90 people? People were complaining bitterly and I agreed with them but since they gave me no more staff, that was half of the problem. The other half was that as more and more people were being pushed in, the personnel system was deviating more and more from the criteria. Increasingly, of these 90 people perhaps one third met the criteria and two thirds were people who had finished their first tour and some people were just out of entry level training for whom there was not an immediate obvious job.

Q: So it became sort of a parking place?

McGAFFEY: No, part of it was that it was our mistake. We made it a checklist, a punch card criterion for entering the senior Foreign Service. Everybody wants to get their cards punched as early as possible so any time there was an opportunity, people said let me take that.

Q: When you did this there are various permutations but essentially we have four different specialties: political, economic, consular, administrative. With these courses was there a desire to get people from the various things to look at it as executives, that they are going to go beyond that, or was this essentially originally designed for political and economic officers?

McGAFFEY: That was one of the conditions that I placed on getting involved myself. I've never liked the cone system. I entered before it began. I was labeled a political officer. But I was the first political officer to get admitted to the 26 week economics course because I felt that I can't do political work without an understanding of economics and vice versa. I did political reporting as a consular officer. I wanted to be a principal officer in a small post which meant that I had to understand the administrative side. If you are going to enter the senior Foreign Service, you have to understand everything.

So it was at least partly subversive, an attempt to undermine the cone system, that we insisted that equal numbers from all of the four cones be admitted to every class and we deliberately mixed them. There was no grouping of political officers, economic officers. It was another area of resistance. When we started talking about political analysis the admin types sat back and said this is not for me. We spent a lot of the time persuading them. Sometimes the political types sat back and said this is my field, I know all of this.

Negotiations was one area of greatest success. When I came to FSI there was a negotiations course and it consisted of war stories. Old FSOs, often retired FSOs who had been present at major negotiation events, came in and talked about how good they were and people who had nothing better to do took notes. I had participated in the birth of the Harvard negotiation project while I was at Harvard. This was an area of my particular interests so I developed an entirely new course which is still going on. It was one of the survivors of the mid level program.

Q: How did you craft that one?

McGAFFEY: First I divided it into three equal segments. One was exercises, simulations, actual negotiations that the student had to carry out. Second was war stories, people talking about what they had done but only after people had gone through theory and practice, and could question them. The third was theory of negotiations drawing in some of the best practitioners and theoreticians from the academic world, the business world and elsewhere. I ended up with my principal teacher being a man named Tom Colosi from the American Arbitration Association. Another major teacher was Bill Zartman from SAIS [School of Advanced International Studies] who had been working on Rhodesia's negotiation for independence and for 15 years worked on South Africa, a practitioner and a theoretician. We presented the theory of negotiations, we forced them to actually negotiate in simulations, and then we brought in people like Diego Asencio to talk about negotiation under extreme conditions.

Q: Could you explain the conditions he was negotiating under?

McGAFFEY: We explained to him what he was coming into, and we explained to the students that this is a case study, this is not an ambassador, this is not somebody to be respectful for, this is somebody to examine and to pull lessons out of. We brought him in and said you've got people pointing guns at you, threatening to kill you, what happens? How do you go from that position to negotiating a successful resolution? Many of the practitioners really had no idea. They knew what they had done but they didn't know why some things had worked and why other things had not worked. The students became experts at ferreting this out and seeing why some things worked. We brought in as many failures as successes. The students applied what they had learned in the theory and the practice to the...

Q: In some of my interviews we've talked about people saying that they've sort of analyzed what is the American style of negotiations as seen by other countries. Several of the things are one, the negotiators are generally well informed or they have a lot of information at their hand, but a great impatience and a certain amount of arrogance. Unwillingness but on the other hand a willingness to listen and to come to a deal. Were you able to look at American style negotiations and to let people understand how others were perceiving them?

McGAFFEY: We did quite a bit on that and that's an area, while successful, which needed a lot more work. As a matter of fact I've been doing a lot more work on that ever since this experience. Yes, we had Japanese analyses of American negotiating style, German analyses of American negotiating style. We looked at cultural visions of reality. There was a major dispute that broke out in this period after Bruce Laingen wrote an article that talked about negotiating with Iranians. A man named Said, an academic, wrote a vicious attack on Laingen saying that this is an arrogant colonial white man looking down on Iranians. We put the Said article and the Laingen article side by side and brought in Iranians and people who had dealt with Iranians. We concluded finally that Laingen had made a few unfortunate choices of words but that his analysis of how Iranians approach a negotiation was very accurate and that Said was responding to the words and not the content and that Said just did not understand how Americans look at a negotiating context. It proved to be useful but there is very little practical information about cultural differences, information that you can use in an analytical sense. There is a lot of descriptive and a lot of prescriptive such as saying people stand so many inches apart, but analytical information is low in availability.

Q: What is the difference between when you say analytical and descriptive?

McGAFFEY: Descriptive is strictly surface. You know you've described something and it is accurate and you have no foundation for knowing why it is so, what difference it makes. Analytical information tries to, and again it's systems analysis, break things down to its components and show how the various influences work to result in this behavior. Given a new area for which there is no description, you have enough understanding of the system, of the different values and how they interact, for example the history and the orientation, so that you can predict with some expectation of accuracy what the behavior will be in this new situation. You can understand areas of sensitivity even if you can't predict, you can be alert for unhappiness.

Q: Here you are at the FSI, where would you reach out to sort of come up with models, information, dealing with various parts of the world?

McGAFFEY: The oral history project is not a bad beginning.

Q: I was thinking of at that time.

McGAFFEY: My idea at that time was very much involved in my studies of systems dynamics. If we could take from the experience of people who have lived in, studied and interacted with these meaningful bits of information rather than a summing up which glosses over and gives an accurate image but no depth. If we could extract meaningful items of information about these different cultures, we begin to have a structure that we can add on to, add information to, so that over time a meaningful, analytical structure exists.

Q: I would assume that your classes would be a great source of building blocks wouldn't they? These are people coming from supposedly a couple of tours in other countries.

McGAFFEY: Again this was one of the reasons I was so conscious of the deterioration of the standards by the personnel system. Originally that was true. The seminars where people would compare and contrast their experience, and try to look for meaning were very valuable and former students from the early classes have commented to me how valuable it was. In later classes, first most of the students had not had overseas experience or if they had it was in a visa mill someplace where the only contact they had with locals was a 3.7 minute interview with a supervisor saying "remember they are lying." We used excerpts from the first classes in what we fed to the mobs in the later classes and people took it in but again it is a talking head situation and the loss of information in that is tremendous. Again students from the earlier classes have continued to apply that.

Q: Were there several directors of the Foreign Service Institute while you were there?

McGAFFEY: No there was one, Steve Low.

Q: As a point of his interests, he just retired but he was the head of this organization which is now doing this and he seems to be the spark plug behind many developments. How was he dealing with this?

McGAFFEY: Initially my image of him was as depending a great deal on John Sprott. He kept himself outside of the early developmental fights. John was the head of professional studies. When we, within professional studies, had fought our fights and had reached an agreement, then we took it to Steve Low and Steve then led the fight with the Department and with OMB and was very effective. He questioned us deeply, he had to be convinced. Once he bought on, he was a consummate bureaucratic politician.

For example a friend of mine working for DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, was working in a building on this location and told me over dinner that he had just been informed that they were moving out of this location because it was old and that the Pentagon was planning to donate this site to the county of Arlington. One of the problems we were facing at FSI, which was at that time in I think 11 different buildings all in Rosslyn, was chopped up space and not enough space. I took that bit of information to Steve Low and the result is that we now have FSI housed in the NFATC [National Foreign Affairs Training Center] in one of the best facilities in the area.

Q: We are talking about the National Foreign Affairs Training Center located at the old military place called Arlington Hall which was a decoding intelligence agency.

McGAFFEY: Before then it had been a girls school. It is central and it's spacious. It's a great facility but it cost millions of dollars and it required intense working overtime at the highest levels and that is what Steve Low did.

Q: Were there battles with Personnel? Was Personnel basically in charge of who went? Were there battles to try to get personnel?

McGAFFEY: There were battles with every class and essentially we lost. I did an analysis once for Steve Low pointing out that the problem was timing. By the time that we got a list of names proposed for the course, we had to approve them in theory, the list of names arrived at the end of the assignment cycle and any person that we said no to, had no job. In fight after fight where we felt that somebody was not appropriate, the response was "We have nothing else for them. Won't you please, just this once, take them and we will do better next time?" Because it was true that they had no place else to send them, we ended up accepting them, and shouldn't have.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about, as it developed, the content of the course?

McGAFFEY: There were two parallel streams. One was a list of skills that we kept refining that we wanted them to have: skills in negotiation, bureaucratic politics, science and technology, and writing, and formal skills in analytical methodology. We worked on those and found for example that they needed more math to do the analytical methods and for the science and technology. We brought in a wonderful mathematician from the University of Maryland who unfortunately in the second year won one of those MacArthur grants. He said he was going to go off and write some books and didn't have any time for teaching, sorry about that, David.

We kept focusing on what specific skills they needed and overlaid on that. Justifying the order of classes and the fill ins and everything else was an integrating function. A realization that there is a single Foreign Service and that to be in the senior Foreign Service you had to ignore the cones and focus on it. A need for management at the senior levels, so management policy planning, strategic thinking, and exposure to the principal thinkers in the academic world on matters that touched on the Foreign Service. What are the issues for the next 50 years? What is happening in development economics? The change from the idea of give and they will develop automatically, to focus on capital development and ignore everything else, to focus on market distribution and ignore everything else. Why have the theories taken these different positions, so that people begin to have an understanding so they can lead with appreciation of what somebody was saying.

We had a series of classes that were narrow focused skills with a lot of exercises, a lot of simulations, a lot of role playing, a lot of carrying out. Then we had seminars with a heavy reading lists and interesting speakers so people could talk about the ideas moving toward this idea of the interests of the United States and how to promote them.

Q: Were there similar courses in the academic world? I am interested in interrelationship of the FSI and what you were doing in the academic world.

McGAFFEY: Not similar courses to the extent that we could just reach out and borrow. The closest equivalent, and it was in fact fairly close, was the various war colleges. They had much more of an emphasis on military science and strategy in terms of military strategies but the general concept was similar and so we borrowed from them.

We ended up with an advisory board of 45 academics from all over the U.S. as a matter of fact, from North Carolina, Ohio, Wisconsin, Berkeley, University of Texas. Probably 30 of the 45 were from area universities, American University, University of Maryland, Georgetown, George Mason, and the like. This board met quarterly and usually about 30 of the 45 would manage to show up. We would lay out what we were trying to do and where we were trying to go. Sometimes their advice was as simple as giving us the name of an article saying "This is something that your students should be reading." "This is a teacher who you should be in touch with." "This is a text." But more importantly it was a group that we could invite people from personnel to, people from the seventh floor of the State Department to, Steve Low to, to talk about what we're trying to accomplish and what value it is.

The essential criteria for being on the board was that FSI invited them because we were impressed. We heard the name and thought they had something to contribute. They had no unified point of view. They were all people who were aware that the world existed outside the borders of the United States but not all of them were internationalists by any means. They were intense thinking individuals who thought that this was a worthwhile effort and wanted to make it better.

Q: Did you see any interest from some of the other professional foreign services, British, German, French, Brazilian, Japanese, or anyone else, in what we were doing or was everybody doing their own thing?

McGAFFEY: The British, French and Canadians sent observers which indicates a fairly high level of interest because they were spending money. The really intense interest was in the foreign services in the third world who had no training program at all. One of Steve Low's ideas during this period was to transform FSI from being the training institution for the U.S. Foreign Service to being THE premier diplomatic training institution for the world. If my memory serves me, we managed to get one group of diplomats from I believe Africa. I just can't remember. We had a lot of people coming and talking to us but I think there was only one group that actually got assigned to a class and went through a full course. State Department was not particularly interested in this idea. It was one of those things that everybody nodded and said wouldn't that be interesting but nobody was willing to go out on a limb for. Some people who didn't have a good theoretical understanding of negotiation and were still thinking of it as us versus them, said "Gee, if we train these guys to be negotiators and then they have to negotiate with us, they'll get something out of this that they wouldn't otherwise and that will be bad." It was something that we talked about, we did a lot of work on, we wrote about, we invited observers and while I was here at least, it just never got off stage one.

Q: Is there any other subject we should talk about of this '80 to '84 period?

McGAFFEY: I was at least partially involved in a lot of changes. Much of this is Steve Low and he is the person you should be talking to about it. During this same period we started new ambassadors and DCMs courses and changed drastically the senior seminar. Again we were taking the principals developed for the mid level program and reapplying them with changes for the senior levels. We changed the economics course away from being a course for economists and econometricians to being a course in the economics of international relations put in fairly high level political economy rather than just econometrics. We developed Con Gen Rosslyn with again the same sort of principles: practice, application, uses of material, not just lectures. People had to visit Americans in jail with role playing. They had to do what consular officers do. We changed the course for Foreign Service secretaries. The thinking about the mid level course was the theoretical engine for changes in the way that training was approached throughout.

Up until this time the school of languages and the school of area studies had been two separate schools. Partly because of the kind of inputs from this group of academics, we moved toward integrating them. I believe that now they are a single school.

Q: I think it is a single school.

McGAFFEY: Because the idea that you can learn a language and have no need of understanding the history, the culture, the context of the language, didn't seem to work and how do you understand the context without something of the language. So we moved them toward integration. It was a time of real excitement at FSI.

Q: Where did you go in '84?

McGAFFEY: It was a strange situation. I got a call from the head of VOA [Voice of America] asking if I would be willing to come over and work with their NANESA division, that is North Africa Near East and South Asia. That's an out of everything tour from an FSO and I wanted to know why he called me. He called on the recommendation of Ed Meinland who had been my predecessor as coordinator of political studies at FSI. They had a situation in that division, literally, that had two stabbings with one staff member stabbed by another staff member on two different occasions down in the warrens. They had broadcasts booths, probably 12 would fit into this room.

Q: We're talking about a room of about 20 feet by 15 or something like that.

McGAFFEY: They were basically one person booths with little alleys, all dim so that people could concentrate, and two people had been stabbed. They had intense jealousies and they had people at each throats. They wanted somebody who understood something of the culture of that area and understood something of management, rather than a radio expert. I knew nothing about radio. I had managed a DJ program in college for a year. They asked me to come over on a temporary basis to figure out what they could do to prevent this whole division from collapsing.

I studied it carefully before agreeing and I finally agreed with my heart in my mouth because they had a lot of strikes against them. In this division they had Arabs and Israelis, Greeks and Turks. They had in a single Iranian service with an old group that had been recruited when the Shah was in power and were Shah supporters, and a group of young Turks who were Khomeini types. They had the Pakistanis and the Indians. They had almost half of the standard cultural and ethnic conflicts in the world housed in this one division.

On top of that they had a policy of going to the countries and recruiting the very top people in radio and television services of those countries. Egos and their association with show business are not different in other countries so these were people who were used to being treated as stars. They came in and every single one were at the same level because they were paid top dollar which meant that once they got here, not only was everybody else paid at the same level, there was no basis for claiming stardom, but there was no possibility of promotion. No matter how long they stayed, they were stuck because they had been hired at the top level.

VOA brought in all of these egos, crammed them into inadequate quarters to broadcast 42 hours a day, obviously with overlap, to one of the most important regions in the world that ranged from Marrakech to Bangladesh. They were directed by somebody who had been in radio for 32 years, knew all about radio, and had never been outside of Washington. For some reason they were having difficulties. I finally did accept.

Q: Because we are talking also about the profession, in 1979 you go to Harvard, you to go to the FSI until '84, and now you are going to Voice of America. This is not the ladder towards moving up and becoming an ambassador or something like that within the Foreign Service. You must have been making your choices by your heart rather than sort of the career principle.

McGAFFEY: I was. I told you I disliked the cone system. I never accepted the fact that I was labeled a political officer. I had concluded that the personnel system was irrelevant in terms of ultimate success, and that success was basically a matter of who you knew and who you impressed. When I had worked in the operations center I got an offer of a job with U. Alexis Johnson. He told me that he wanted somebody to be on tap 20 hours a day and that I should say good bye to my wife and children. I knew that that would be a good way to get a promotion, and I said no. I had been making choices with my heart but on the other hand I also had the feeling that if I did an impressive job, I might impress somebody.

Q: You were with the Voice of America starting in '84 until when?

McGAFFEY: '84 to '86. I was there just about two years.

Q: Could you talk a bit about as you saw the structure of USIA and Voice of America as the new boy on the block, how it fit together?

McGAFFEY: Perhaps the most important thing is that neither USIA nor Voice of America took the relationship very seriously. The Voice of America was very visible in the White House and in Congress. Its money was largely based on things like the level of anti communism. Its most prominent features were the old Radio Free Europe and the brand new, what was the anti Castro one?

Q: Radio Marti. We are talking about the high Reagan administration

McGAFFEY: The high Reagan administration. They had largely eliminated most USIA Foreign Service officers from VOA. They had an outside director, an outside deputy director, and most of the senior staff were radio people and they saw themselves as radio people. They had an institutional connection to USIA which was perhaps similar to the attitude within the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency to the State Department. Yes, there is a connection. My boss goes over to see the secretary once a month but that is it. There was not a lot of connection.

Secondly the big debate within VOA was the political debate. There were those who saw its function as being the propaganda voice of the United States. These people were probably more conservative and more anti communist than anything else but their idea was to spread U.S. values, interests, and policy information, and be persuasive. There was a larger, usually somewhat smaller rank but more operational group, who saw that its role was to be the best international radio service in the world. That it must be objective, it must be realistic, it had to out BBC, BBC.

Q: The BBC was sort of your target?

McGAFFEY: Yes, it was put forward as the image to beat all of the time. By those who wanted us to be more propagandistic it was the image of what we should not do. For those who felt we should be an international radio, it was what we should be doing. This was important because there was a lot of money at the time. We were building transmitters everywhere and adding new divisions. We were adding a television division, adding new equipment. When Reagan came in VOA was still using equipment that had been put in under Truman. It was actually in the Carter regime that they got the money for it but they installed the new equipment under Reagan and very much saw itself as a growth organization.

Q: How were you accepted by these radio men? Was it they had too much blood on the floor, they needed somebody? How did they feel about you?

McGAFFEY: The radio men largely ignored me. I headed my own division, on an acting basis by the way. I was not formally there and I made it very clear that I was not tenured, I was not there for the long term. Everybody was concerned about their division. I met other division directors very rarely. I had a good understanding with the director of VOA. The people I had problems with were the technical radio people who felt that any demands that I made would vanish with me and therefore they shouldn't change their operation to do it. I had intense squabbles with things like scheduling and obtaining certain frequencies for my people's broadcasts. But the division people, the people in the NANESA division, were expert radio people. They were the experts in both content and the technical side so they gave me all the ammunition I needed.

Q: How did you go? You got this disparate, which is a mild word, group that you had to deal with with all these rivalries that go back unto the first generation or something like that. How did you deal with this coming from your background, having dealt with systems analysis, your mid career course and all theory and all of a sudden you are faced with probably THE mother of all problems?

McGAFFEY: My area background helped. I speak Farsi and Dari so I was able to talk to those people in their own language. I speak a little bit of Urdu and Hindustani, enough to be polite, and fragments of Arabic, some Turkish and some Greek. I started out by showing that I was interested in them, not in radio. I exposed my ignorance wide open and I said "I am here to see if there is any way for you to shine. For you to show that you are the best people around." Basically I did a thousand and one things. Some worked and some didn't.

The basic thing that I did is I shifted competition away from money, because there couldn't be any, rank because there couldn't be any, kind of class because there couldn't be any, toward creative competition in terms of broadcast content. VOA gave 24 awards a year for the best news program, the best sports program, the best this, that and the other thing. I managed to get these people to start thinking about the fact that they are highly qualified, highly experienced. I said "These (and I would name some other division) people were still banging rocks together when you were first on the radio, how come they are winning awards and you are not?" In my second year there, the NANESA division won 22 of the 24 awards. I managed to get them thinking about competing on the basis of quality.

I got the group of young Turk Iranians and I said "You're saying that these other Iranians are a bunch of old fogies and that you are better than they are. Prove it. I will give you a segment. Give me a show that will win the awards that will get the response." I said to the older ones, "You say that these punk kids don't even know which end of the radio to speak into. Prove it. Give me a show that is better than theirs." These two groups started competing with each other on the basis of radio performance. One of the effects was that even though they continued to disagree politically, they had to recognize the real quality of the people they were facing. They got to admire each other professionally even if they disliked each others politics. Somehow that kind of competition, even though it is still competition, did not lead to the intense jealousies and anger that led to the stabbings.

I brought in a few new people to head country divisions, people who I had made contact with through FSI. Again for the Iranian division I brought in somebody who's an Iranian expert, not a radio expert. I said these people have all the radio expertise you'll ever need. What do you need an American radio expert for? Bring in somebody who knows Iran and who can work with them on what to broadcast to the Iranian people so the Iranian people want to listen to VOA. I managed to turn it around and it was very interesting.

There was something else going on at the same time which also responds to your earlier question of why VOA. While I was in Iran, I think we discussed this, I got very badly messed up by a mob which included both of my knee caps being smashed. During this period I was essentially a cripple. My knees would give out on an unexpected basis and I would fall flat on my face if I wasn't holding onto something so I could not go overseas. I did not particularly like the idea of the halls of State Department and was trying to face up to the idea of whether I was going to live the rest of my life as a cripple.

My departure from VOA was one of those things that, things come together in time whether it was expected or not. I had an operation on my knees which resulted in pulmonary embolism and I lost a lung. Toward the end of my second year I was only being part time there. A new director of VOA came in. He wanted to bring in somebody from USIA (again things were changing in the politics) and didn't know quite what to do with me because I had been very successful but I was standing in the way of his bringing in the person he wanted. Once I understood what was happening, I went to him and said my health does not allow me and I am going to have to sit it out for a while until I can retrain my one lung to take the place of two. So I left with banquet and joy all around and it was a relief both to him and to me. It was a fascinating interlude that was outside of my normal...

Q: Here you are dealing with THE hot spot of the times where Americans were very much concerned, the Cold War was still very much in existence, and you have the Reagan administration which had taken a very strong anti Soviet, anti communist stance. Did you find that your knowledge of the area that you were dealing with, did the right wing emphasis of the Reagan administration intrude on your work at all?

McGAFFEY: It intruded at least once in a very amusing way. I got a call from a man that I had never heard of before. He said that he had just been named as ambassador to Belize and he wondered if I would consider being his DCM. I said I would be glad to consider it, let me find out what is happening. I finally found out that he was a former aide of Senator Jesse Helms who had been named as an ambassador in one of these exchanges. He had gotten my name from Jesse. He had gotten my name because Jesse had sent his people down to VOA to find out what were the politics of this stranger in a very sensitive area. They talked to the Afghan members of my staff, who said "Oh, Mr. McGaffey really hates communists. He is a strong anti communist fighter for the freedom of Afghanistan." It is true, I was a fighter for the freedom for Afghanistan. I would have been a fighter if they had been invaded by the Pakistanis as well.

What happened was I personally had been very careful in VOA to try to keep my own political views, which are generally liberal progressive, out of it. I was there as a management expert trying to let those people do their job. I did feel strongly about Afghanistan. I felt that the people of Afghanistan felt strongly about it so I encouraged the Afghan staff to be very forthright in what they were saying about the Soviet invasion. That got interpreted through the investigation as I'm a hard right winger and so I was asked to be the DCM for an up and coming young right wing ambassador. As it happened, I got posted as DCM to Belize but Jesse Helms chose that moment to refuse to consider the nominations of some half dozen people and the State Department, (by coincidence I am sure, it could not have been retaliation) never managed to forward the name of this ambassador for consideration. So he sat in a tiny little office in old State waiting to have his name forwarded while I was on sick leave recovering from my bad lung.

Then my name got put forward as DCM for another position in the Caribbean. Again it's who knows you and who is impressed. Presumably my name had come to their attention because I was on the list for DCM. There was an ambassador in another country who was an excellent ambassador but the Department was dissatisfied with the reporting from the post, not his reporting but the reporting program. The man in charge of that was one of my students from FSI who knew that I knew what there was to know about reporting and so he suggested my name to him. So this other ambassador called me up and said "Would you like to be my DCM in Georgetown Guyana?" So I went to the first man and said I have another offer and since there seems to be some uncertainty about your position, I think I will accept it if you don't mind. He was quite gracious about it. I was named as DCM for Georgetown.

Q: You went to Georgetown and were there from '86 was it?

McGAFFEY: Yes, from '86 to '90. It turned out that I did not go as DCM. When I arrived the ambassador said that he had just been asked to come in and head one of the selection panels and following that he was to head a study for the board of the Foreign Service. After about one month I was going to be chargï¿½ and the end of his tour was coming so he didn't expect that he would be back. Later after he got to know me a little better, he explained to me that there was a political underlying thing. He had been named as ambassador to the Guyana of the president for life Burnham who was fairly strongly anti American, isolationist, leftist. He had been successful but had a very difficult time and Burnham had just died. The State Department was not willing to name another ambassador until they saw which way this country was going to turn and was rather happy to have no ambassador at all. They pulled him out, not formally, and had no intention of naming another ambassador for the near term at least.

I went from VOA essentially to be chargï¿½ in Georgetown with a whole embassy under my care and a difficult personal situation. My wife had just joined the Foreign Service and I had requested that she be assigned to Georgetown as a junior vice consul. They said "No, that is not possible, nepotism and all. But we will assign her to the next country over. It is only about an hour away, in Trinidad." Then when I became chargï¿½, first I found out that a trip to Trinidad was essentially 24 hour travel time. The two airports were neither accessible. There were not many flights and you had to be there well in advance. By the time you went round trip it was 24 hours. I had to really schedule things to see my wife.

Second I found that as chargï¿½, I had to get permission from the State Department to leave the country which was not easily forthcoming. I also found that the ambassador in Trinidad was not terribly delighted by the situation because if I arrive as the principal officer of an embassy, there is a certain protocol for dealing with me, for example dining with the ambassador, and perhaps be invited to stay at his house. There is a very different protocol for dealing with the most junior vice consul on his large embassy staff. Since we were married to each other there was some uncertainty about how he should deal with us. She came to Guyana a few times and I went to Trinidad a few times but mostly when we could get away we absconded to Venezuela and had our weekends in Venezuela.

Q: I would have thought the Trinidad thing could have been worked out with the ambassador. Was he sort of a stickler for things and not very flexible?

McGAFFEY: It was only a matter of discomfort, there were no obstacles. I was aware of the discomfort and most of the discomfort was on the part of other people. The ambassador's secretary was horrified by this. The consul was not as particularly upset. It was more the middle levels.

Q: When you arrived in 1986 in Georgetown what was the situation there?

McGAFFEY: Burnham had just died. He had been in the practice of rotating his vice presidents. He had people in for about four to six months and then would get somebody else from the cabinet, from the party, explicitly to prevent anybody from having a power base. There was a man, a former minister of finance, who was vice president at the time of his death, who perforce, became president. He was a man who had no particular strength in the party. Nobody had strength in the party because it was Burnham and then everybody else. It was very deliberate policy, very similar to the Shah's policy. He had no particular strength, he was a bureaucrat, a technocrat. He was an acceptably competent finance minister and suddenly he is president. He headed a minority party.

Politics in Guyana was racial, and still is, and every president denies it. He headed the black, the Afro, party which was an urban party heavily concentrated in government. A devote Stalinist style communist headed the opposition party, the Indo [East Indian] party, based on the very militant union of sugar workers, sugarcane cutters. They had been out of power since Burnham came in, since independence. The Indian origin population was the majority, and except for the sugarcane cutters, was basically middle class and dominated small shops, professions, teaching. They were very much not communist, not Stalinist, but Cheddi Jagan was the symbol of opposition so all of the Indo Guyanese supported the party of Cheddi Jagan even though they didn't support his politics.

This new president was trying to figure out what to do with a country that had no experience with politics and what to do with himself and his party. There was a third party that had tried to get started on a non racial basis and was dismissed as the party of the "Douglas", the mixed race. They were basically progressive and had the right ideas but just no structure. Whenever the president tried to move things toward a more democratic basis, the militants within his own party would object and the militants within the Indo Guyanese party would take advantage of any evidence of weakness. He was trying to build something in a country that had not only no experience with politics, but very bad experience with independence.

At the time of independence, Guyana was judged to be the wealthiest country in the Caribbean. Even though it is on the mainland of South America, it was considered one of the Caribbean islands and was in fact the headquarters of Caricom, the community of the English speaking Caribbean. It was probably the wealthiest, by statistics at the time certainly. The city was built wealthy. Every house was Victorian gingerbread with indoor toilets, running water and all cooking by electricity. They had one of the best school systems in the Caribbean. As a matter of fact Guyanese graduates dominated the senior professions throughout the Caribbean. When they had that big trial in Grenada and put the head of the leftist party on trial, I found to my interest that both the prosecuting and the defense attorneys, and four of the five members of the Grenada Supreme Court were Guyanese and graduates of the school. But that was 30 years earlier.

Burnham came in with the radical socialist policy of service to the people and distribution of wealth from these nasty capitalists and had spent the 30 years spending the capital of Guyana. About half of the industries which had been taken over by the government were now closed because equipment had failed, it had not been maintained. There was electricity about four hours a day and this in houses that had no other source of cooking or lighting than electricity. There did not exist a market of cooking oil, cooking stoves, coal, anything else, it was all electric. Water was intermittent, this in houses where there were no wells where there were just running pipes water and you would turn on the tap and nothing happens.

It had gone from being the wealthiest to a condition of desperate poverty where it was now considered to be only above Haiti. There was no obvious sources of wealth except the rain forest. The rain forest had been given to the Amerindian tribes in perpetuity which meant private exploitation but no general exploitation. So the country was dead broke and the capital infrastructure was in shambles and now the president for life was dead.

One of the most disruptive policies of Burnham had been a decision that because importing food allowed other countries to control you, he passed a law saying no food may be imported. This was not too bad for the Afro Guyanese because their culture was basically built around rice which grows well, but the Indo Guyanese culture was based around wheat and wheat does not grow there. The effect had been that they started smuggling wheat. They quickly found out that when you don't pay taxes on smuggled goods, you make a greater profit so they started smuggling other things. By the time that I got there a government minister estimated that 70 percent of the economy was based on smuggling. It had now expanded to include cocaine and other things from the Andes, using Guyana as a way point. The government was surviving on remnants.

One of the first things that Desmond Hoyte, the new president, did was work out a reopening of the U.S. PL480 program to start bringing in wheat. I was seen as negotiating this program and providing wheat to the Guyanese and my picture was on the front page of every paper. People used to stop me on the street, clasp my hands and say "Thank you for my chapattis." We brought it in under the PL480 Title Two program which meant that it was sold for Guyanese dollars, for local currency, and the local currency went into a pot which we at the embassy could use for local developmental projects. There was an immediate benefit; wheat was there, which gave a glow to this new regime plus a flow from developmental projects which meant an increase in optimism. This enabled Hoyte to open up negotiations on joining the Caribbean Basin Initiative which was a U.S. sponsored program to give preferential trade and some development assistance benefits to countries that qualified. While I was there they managed to join CBI.

It was a fascinating period because there was a real feeling of growth, of change, of development, and of improvement, against the background of continuing total political uncertainty because the people in Hoyte's party did not like these changes. These were things that Burnham had fought against so they were increasingly seeing Hoyte as a betrayer of the party. Cheddi Jagan did not like these things because as a staunch Stalinist communist he was anti American and did not like the PL480 program which increased U.S. popularity. He did not like the CBI and wanted increased ties with Cuba. So you had a continuing weak president with a party that was not supportive of the party's programs because it was as a party, not getting any benefits from these popular programs. But the opposition was equally negative. Every time an investor came in, and they started to come in in good numbers, Cheddi Jagan's party would demonstrate against them because this is exploitation by foreign investors. There were all of these changes, and all of this opportunity, but no idea how it was going to work out politically and nobody was willing to make any predictions about where the future would be.

Q: Cheddi Jagan is probably the only reason why most people in the United States know of Guyana because he was always held up with his American born wife and all and he was sort of the personality from Guyana.

McGAFFEY: You are forgetting Jim Jones.

Q: Jim Jones, yes. That was '77. That was horrible. A religious group that committed mass suicide there. Tell me about Cheddi Jagan. What was your impression of him and dealing with him?

McGAFFEY: He was personally, very personable. He was polite, courteous, an interesting conversationalist but his mentality seemed to be frozen in a time warp. He would just not acknowledge any of the changes in the world that had taken place, not acknowledge what was happening in the Soviet Union, not acknowledge what was happening to socialism worldwide. He was waiting to restore things to the way they had been when he was young. His wife Janet seemed to be in my judgment his intellectual superior. She also in her ordinary comments reminded me of listening to radical SDS students in my youth. The two of them had been politically prominent and yet out of politics for 28 years and they were in a holding patterns. Cheddi's brother, also a dentist, was my dentist and he used to fill my mouth full of things and then harangue me so that I couldn't talk back. We dealt with him on a regular basis and his politics in world terms was, as I said, frozen in the past.

What was active politics was race. Everybody identified everybody else by their race and knew mixing to the sixteenths. It is a very small community and so everybody knew everybody else. The democrats who were mostly of mixed race because they couldn't get into the other party, were intellectually stimulating but largely ineffectual. The Catholic church was a radical opposition to the government but criticizing only and not putting forward any particular social programs of its own. It was a country that was going through so many changes that everybody was uncertain and it was fascinating.

Q: What were American interests during this '86 to '90 period?

McGAFFEY: Basically I saw American interests as trying to move Guyana away from a reflexive anti Americanism to participation in local regional politics, a normal association with the United States and with its neighbors, ending the state of war with Venezuela which had been going on since I think '35, activation with Caricom which had become just a name with no activity, and ending the drug stream that was beginning to become quite prominent. The Heritage Foundation in Washington, just about the time I went down there, came out with an article that said there were dozens of airfields hidden in the jungles of Guyana which were going to be used for an invasion of the United States.

Q: Heritage being a right wing political organization.

McGAFFEY: Very right wing and like many other things this particular article had a few fragments of fact. Guyana had been a principal part of the U.S. air bridge to North Africa during World War II. It's on the edge of South America and it's a short hop across the Atlantic to Africa. We had built most of these air fields so the air fields did exist. They were in use and were a matter of concern because they were being used by small planes smuggling cocaine or marijuana, but mostly cocaine. Guyana did have a left wing politics and was very pro Castro but to add the three together and to talk about a security threat to the United States is ludicrous but it was real. Since for 30 years every time that anybody in the United States looked at Guyana there was a president who immediately said something anti American, it had a lot of resonance in Washington.

As chargï¿½ I felt that my job was to fight people in the Department of Treasury, Department of State, Department of Justice, Department of this, that and the other thing, who wanted to have nothing to do with Guyana. They wanted to have no connections because Guyana was the enemy, the bad guys. I wanted to bring people into the 20th century. It was eventually successful. Guyana reestablished its relations with the IMF, joined the CBI and was turning itself around economically.

Desmond Hoyte, after I left, lost the election because his party didn't support him. Cheddi Jagan won and became president. Again an illustration of the way that he was frozen in the past, it was not until after he was elected that he realized that he had nobody in his party with any experience in governments. He ended up turning to the middle class, non party people, mostly Indo Guyanese but even that not exclusively, to staff his own government. He ended up with a technocratic government behind him that did not follow his own policies so the country has continued to grow. Cheddi died and now his wife Janet has been elected as president. As I say, I think that she is the intellectual superior of the two and I think that she has been persuaded by these technocrats to continue these basic policies so Guyana has now changed directions and has moved into the mainstream. I think that is valuable to the U.S.

Q: When you arrived there was the American invasion of Grenada sort of hovering over? Was there concern that if things went too much left that the United States might do something? Did you have to deal with that or not, or was that over and past?

McGAFFEY: It had just occurred and so it was a matter of intense interest but for some reason there was no paranoia, there was no feeling that it had anything to do with Guyana. It just had to do with the United States and what kind of a country the United States was. It interfered particularly within the Hoyte party, the Afro Guyanese party, when Hoyte and I talked about these new programs, he would talk about how that affected the willingness of people in his party to trust the United States but it was one of a number of obstacles to overcome.

Q: What about the Cubans, how active were they there?

McGAFFEY: They had been extremely active and they had a very large presence. But Burnham died because he had a fairly minor medical problem and rather than go to for example the United States or Europe to have it treated, he asked for a Cuban doctor to be flown in to operate on him in Guyana. He died on the operating table. That can happen but that put a severe negative slant on attitude toward the Cubans. They were suddenly seen as incompetent, like Burnham. Now that Burnham was gone people were able to say that he had been incompetent and the Cubans were seen as associated with that bad period.

Q: What about UN votes, was that a problem for you all at that time?

McGAFFEY: No. Basically Guyana could not afford to have much of any presence in New York. Very often there was nobody in its mission. When it voted it tended to vote as a block with the G 77 and it was not seen as being a leader in any sense. If we could persuade the G 77 to back off on this, then Guyana would back off. It was just a follower.

Q: How about the drug interdiction campaign, were you able to do much there?

McGAFFEY: There was perfect willingness of people to participate in the drug interdiction campaign. There is not a drug culture in Guyana. There is a small group of Rastafarians who use ganja, or marijuana, but basically it is a middle class Victorian kind of an attitude and they look down on drug users. What you had was South American drug dealers who were paying off individuals and using secluded air fields or inlets to meet and greet and exchange. The government of Guyana literally had no infrastructure to combat this. They did not have airplanes, they had no boats for a customs service. We supplied them with two used boats which delighted them and they immediately set out catching small boats that were running drugs and other things. The problem came when they were trying to figure out how can you stop drugs without stopping the people who were bringing in bread and wheat.

Q: Because you are talking about the smuggling.

McGAFFEY: Yes. Since the smuggling was universal, they had to learn how to figure out how to distinguish. We supplied them with a number of GPS, global positioning system, receivers to put on small planes which was the only way some of these communities in Guyana had any connections. Every year they had been losing two to three planes and passengers somewhere in the jungles, somewhere in the rain forest. While I was there we discovered three World War II U.S. aircraft with crews suspended 300 feet high in the canopy. They crashed, gone under the top leaves and they were invisible. They were too high up for people to get down and the pilots and crews that survived, starved to death. This was still happening every day because they would get a radio signal saying I'm going down and then they were visually trying to search 500 square miles of rain forest. GPS meant that they could go out and not be afraid of crashing so they were willing to risk their planes and so they shut down a number of these airfields.

The willingness was there. Once they had the equipment they tried but again what they could do was reduce it. Most of these airfields are nothing but a grassy strip someplace and unless they happen to have a plane there at that time, a small plane could fly in, land, they didn't have radar coverage. Everything was makeshift and very poor but the capacity and willingness was there.

Q: Did the collapse of the Soviet Union which happened just towards the end when you were there, have any repercussions?

McGAFFEY: No. Cheddi Jagan didn't believe it which meant that the Indo Guyanese didn't believe it. The government was too occupied to have it concern them. They were focused on their Caribbean neighbors and on the United States now. Yes, Desmond Hoyte said it made it easier to make his arguments with his cabinet.

Q: Did an ambassador come in while you were there?

McGAFFEY: Yes. Right towards the end, and this was a career mistake on my part, an ambassador was finally named after Guyana rejoined the IMF and the CBI. She named her own DCM but then the State Department asked me to stay on for a few months. I agreed to stay on for four months and it was a very difficult period. It was her first assignment as an ambassador. She had fought her way up against a very sexist Foreign Service and was still in a competition mode with everybody. She felt that I was competition, that her political and economic officers were competition, and that her whole staff was, and she had to prove herself better than anyone else. It was a very difficult period particularly because just before I left we had an inspection and the inspectors came down and were very rough on her. At that time she was thinking of resigning but she did not and now she has gotten another ambassadorial post. I hope that she's learned to be an ambassador and not a competitor.

Q: In '90 what happened?

McGAFFEY: In '90 at the end my tour I went up to, again a sideways thing, to IO/D, International Organizations/Development. This is the office of Development responsible for about 750 million dollars in U.S. funds to all of the development agencies like UNDP, UNICEF, World Food Program. We had 17 different agencies. It is a joint State AID office and this was the turn of AID to name the director. A friend of mine called and asked if I would be willing to be the deputy director, the senior State man in this. It was a very interesting period.

Q: You were there from '90 until when?

McGAFFEY: '90 and '91 so two years.

Q: During this two years, '90 and '91, how did you find the atmosphere of IO at that time?

McGAFFEY: We had a very ideological assistant secretary.

Q: Who was that?

McGAFFEY: John Bolton. One of his major issues was preventing the PLO from getting representation anywhere in the UN system, and maintaining the prevention of funding of family planning according to the right wing ideology.

Q: Anti abortion.

McGAFFEY: Anti abortion but also anti , I don't want to say anti UN but it almost ended up to be that he saw his job as preventing damage to the U.S. interests from this UN system.

Q: Which is odd because this is the Bush administration and Bush was not as opposed to the United Nations as was Reagan.

McGAFFEY: No and that's why I say it was almost that because it was never explicit, it was just that was the underlying feeling that I got while I was in IO. AID was very interested in development obviously but there was also a good deal of jealousy. They wanted to make sure that the UN development system did not take over any AID prerogatives and so the woman I worked with as the director felt that that was one of her priorities.

I started to have very serious personnel problems with the State Department at that time. Terri Tull, the temporary superior ambassador who succeeded me, did not supervise me long enough to write an EER. The country director who had worked with me through my tour had left the Latin America bureau just before Terri Tull got assigned and the new country director knew nothing about me. The assistant secretary for Latin America was never interested in the English speaking countries in Latin America and second was very much embroiled in political difficulties down in Nicaragua and El Salvador. This assistant secretary, Jim (can't think of the name), had been a hangover from the Reagan administration who was now having to defend himself about the Iran Contra.

At any rate what that turned out to be is that I had no ratings or no rater for the last two and a half years, from Voice of America, which was odd, where I didn't have a Foreign Service rater, to the present assignment where my boss was an AID officer. Despite my efforts I never got anything into my record to cover that whole period. The only thing I got in to cover the VOA period was an inspectors report, (an inspector came over and inspected what I did) and a letter from the director of VOA. When I talked to the personnel people and to the director general they said that given this absence of information I should probably not expect to be promoted unless I got put on the ambassadors list or possibly got a very visible DCM position. They didn't think that was likely because they had no record of my success or failure as a DCM.

Basically I decided I'd relax and I decided I would do a good job at IO/D and represent the United States. I had two ambassadors and two principal officers overseas reporting to me. I was sitting all the boards of all of these organizations representing the United States. I was responsible for more money than most FSOs ever see and I probably wasn't going to go anywhere in the Foreign Service. So I focused on the international organizations. After I left the Foreign Service I ended up writing a book about two years of negotiations with the World Food Program which was interesting. I learned a great deal about bureaucratic multilateral organizations, UN organizations. I found myself to be a very effective negotiator and was seen as a very effective negotiator and I was sent to places to negotiate specific things. I stayed there for my entire tour and having been informed that I was not going to be promoted, I retired at the end of that tour.

Q: Was this development fund and the American role in it, used at as an instrument of furthering American foreign policy?

McGAFFEY: The intent was very much there and yes it was but it often got tied up in the complexities of determining what U.S. interests and what U.S. policy we were promoting. For example, during a major negotiation in Rome we were trying to get an American elected as president of the assembly of the Food and Agricultural Organization, the FAO. We wanted an American elected as president as a balance to the director of the FAO, Saouma, who we felt was excessively interested in his own power and rewarding his own clique. We wanted to get the program back into a non political mode.

Our biggest weapon was the fact that in the FAO, as in most other organizations, we were in arrears and we had in Washington negotiated the money. We could pay off the arrears and pay up U.S. dues to the FAO, if the FAO was an effective organization. We were using this very explicitly to plump for an American president. The other candidate was a protï¿½gï¿½ of the director, another expatriate Lebanese. The director had the big gun of the responsibility for the administration of the program and if you displease the director your country might not get the FAO programs. But the U.S. had the equally big gun of the money that the organization needed to operate and if you displeased the U.S. and the U.S. doesn't pay its arrears there won't be any program for anybody.

We were fairly confident that we were going to succeed, not easily but we were going to succeed. Then the PLO put in a petition saying that Palestinian farmers in Israel were being discriminated against and they wanted an FAO program to assist Palestinian farmers only. The assistant secretary of IO saw this as another attempt by the PLO to get status within the UN system and he insisted that we give equal priority blocking this program for the PLO. We tried to insert it as part of the evenness and say that we would support a program to provide assistance to farmers in Israel of whatever origin but not just one side in the political thing. We ended up, fairly narrowly, losing on both issues. They passed the Palestinian program by about 52 to 48 percent and they elected the protï¿½gï¿½ of the director by 51 to 49 percent. I think that we would have won the presidency and with the president there would have blocked any program but the insistence on the two things came at the same point.

Similarly we were working with UNICEF, UNDP and the various other agencies involved in assistance to women and trying to promote assistance to women but most of the programs involving assistance to women included some family planning. Even if there was no abortion in those programs, if it said family planning and UN, there was a reflexive anti. And so we were trying to promote women's programs but we stopped all the programs that were proposed. We had a big gun but we did not have this consistency of policy. The UN basically is not seen in Washington as a principal actor. In the field it very often is but it is hard to get Washington to see that.

Q: I guess this would be a good to stop.

End of interview