

RUTH A. MCLENDON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial Interview date: December 18, 1995

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Q: What's the date today?

McLENDON: The 18th.

Q: Yes. Today is the 18th of December, 1995. This is an interview with Ruth McClendon. That's M-C-L-E-N-D-O-N and its being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, sort of to start at the beginning, could you tell us when and where were you born?

McLENDON: I was born in 1929 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Q: Could you tell me about your family and early childhood please?

McLENDON: My family, my parents on both sides were born on farms in Texas. My grandparents on my father's side were pioneers in a way. They had homestead land in west Texas and settled in Rockwall County, Stonewall County. I've forgotten the name of the other county. My mother's family were from Comanche County. My parents met in Fort Worth and lived there the rest of their lives. My brother and I were born there and grew up in a very middle to lower middle class neighborhood that had once been a small town clustered around a small Methodist college. It was almost like growing up in a small town.

Q: Yes and this of course was the period of the Depression for part of this.

McLENDON: It was primarily Depression years and money was tight. Our pleasures were if you tried to think of your most typical small town childhood. You virtually knew everyone as you grew up and the teachers, most of them, had known my mother when she was still a teacher and if you didn't know people through school and neighborhood you knew them in church. It was a very simple secure existence. We spent all of our vacations visiting our grandparents and other relatives on farms and had marvelous times.

Q: Oh, I'm sure. Where did you go to high school?

McLENDON: I went to the public schools right in my neighborhood never more than five blocks away from my school, three blocks from the high school. I went through on an accelerated program because the school system changed, when I was midway through and split my class and booted half of us up and kept half of them back. So, I ended up graduating at 15.

Q: Good heavens.

McLENDON: And went straight into college at TCU because my brother had started there and this was 1945 and he thought he was going to be drafted and wanted to have at least one semester together before he left. I joined him at TCU and stayed on.

Q: Well, you were at TCU. That's Texas Christian?

McLENDON: Texas Christian University. It's a very small school.

Q: A very small school in those days.

McLENDON: 1,500 students.

Q: Oh boy. You were there from '45 to '50?

McLENDON: '49.

Q: '49. What were you taking?

McLENDON: I changed majors five times. I ended up with a major in political science and English literature and modern history.

Q: What moved you toward the liberal arts field?

McLENDON: I had always been fascinated by literature and history and I still am and also philosophy. I wish now that I had been curious, more curious about the sciences and acquired a better education there.

Q: Well, what about foreign affairs? I mean this is, the United States was entering out into the world at that time. I'm a contemporary of yours, I was born in 1928.

McLENDON: It was a new thing for us then.

Q: By reading the newspapers we got a wonderful geographic feel for the world because the war was being waged while we were kids and well reported and then at this time the United States was emerging as the major power in the world and how was this affecting your time as a student?

McLENDON: I was wrapped up in the war primarily when I was in high school because just before I graduated, just as I graduated from TCU the war in Europe ended and the handwriting was on the wall, but that, the war was like a dark cloud for me. This feeling of dread that never escaped you. Who next might be killed and how many and when will it ever end. So, it was I guess the most tremendous relief I've ever known and it was finally over. But it did leave my generation, our generation with a determination that it never happen again.

Q: Well, how did this, you're saying TCU, it's a Christian university, a small one and in the middle of Texas. One would think everything would be very insular, but the United States was all of a sudden taking an expanded role in the world.

McLENDON: Well, TCU at that time was insular. Some of my professors were not. The career counselors such as they were in those days had only two careers to suggest for women, teaching and secretarial; clerical and I was determined to avoid either. I went into political science. I preferred English Lit, but I saw only teaching at the end of that, so I went into political science hoping that I would become a lawyer. That held until the spring of my senior year. I'd already been accepted at Vanderbilt Law School. I'd been turned down by Harvard with a one-line reply to my letter of application. Harvard Law School does not admit women.

Q: Isn't that nice?

McLENDON: They did the following year. They started the following year. That spring the head of the political science department, Dr. Spain, called me in. He'd received notice of a special scholarship for women at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and he very much wanted me to apply for it. The deadline had passed, but he insisted that I go ahead and apply. Then I read a little bit more about the school. I was fascinated and had nothing to lose so I applied. Fletcher being a small and informal school accepted me and offered me a tuition scholarship. Once I went to Fletcher I was pointed very much in the direction of the Foreign Service.

Q: Absolutely. Well, describe Fletcher. You were there from when, from '49 to?

McLENDON: From 1949 to June of '51.

Q: Can you describe Fletcher and what you got out of it at that time?

McLENDON: That's hard to describe because I got so much out of it. Fletcher was in those days a small school. The number of new students that they accepted for the master's program each year was limited to 50. The students who continued on for a second period or a third or as some did five or six working on Ph.D.'s brought the total number up to 100, but that's still quite low.

Q: Oh, yes.

McLENDON: Of those Fletcher reserved about 10% of its places for women which was unusual.

Q: It really was, yes. Had this been going on for some time?

McLENDON: The Fletcher School was founded in '33.

Q: But I mean reserving its part for women? Had this been a policy for some time?

McLENDON: Oh, I think so. I think so. I know there were Fletcher women dating back to the earlier years. But it's an international school. A fairly high percentage of its students come from other countries and several countries use Fletcher as one of the training schools for their Foreign Service. Thailand for example, Pakistan. I'm not sure of others. In the year of '49 when I went there Pakistan sent its first, the best of its first Foreign Service class to Fletcher. At the last minute we received seven Pakistani Foreign Service Officers as part of our class. For me it was a beautiful exposure. Coming from a provincial school to a very provincial state and a very how would I say, unsophisticated background, it was a whole new world out there.

Q: Oh, I'm sure it was. What was your impression of the Pakistanis? I mean Pakistan had just become a state. British India had been partitioned.

McLENDON: We were concerned because the Kashmir dispute had already arisen of course and it had that bloody time.

Q: Oh, a bloody separation. It was just awful.

McLENDON: We had a couple of Indian students already at Fletcher and we were concerned that they might be on unpleasant terms. In fact, the Indian student I knew best rather adopted them and took them under his wing and helped them adjust to our culture and they were good friends. The Pakistanis were like anyone, some you liked and some you weren't so fond of. We tended to resent them because most of us were on tight money and they had their salaries plus generous allowances.

Q: Oh, yes that made a tremendous difference in those days.

McLENDON: We pretended to resent their style of living, but that was beside the point.

Q: Was there any feel towards what America's role, I mean was Fletcher preparing you or were you looking at America's role in the world of 1950, '51?

McLENDON: Oh, very much so. Our studies were more classical, that is the Fletcher curriculum was a conservative one and we studied diplomatic history, American and European and the Far East as we called it in those days. You had to take international law organization and economics, but we were always looking at, taking the lessons of history and applying them to present times, taking international law and thinking how it applied into current problems.

Q: Could you specialize at Fletcher at all or was it a fairly general education?

McLENDON: It was general. You specialized in your first year for your master's only to the degree of taking two out of your four courses in one subject because you had to take one course in all three areas. It's a much broader curriculum now, but they still tend to emphasize the need for general knowledge.

Q: Well, as a woman we're still talking about a difficult time for women finding careers in the early '50s and all. How did you analyze and what were you getting about whether women in foreign relations at that time?

McLENDON: Well, Fletcher had a speaker's program for luncheon guests and speakers. Sometimes ambassadors, sometimes representatives of business friends with international connections. We'd get an impression from them. The ambassadors from other countries would look at the number of women students and tactfully applaud the school and confess that their own Foreign Service had no women officers. I remember a representative from Morgan Bank who was describing the terms on which Morgan admitted its trainees. For the men graduates with master's degree it would offer \$60 a week which even in those days was pretty small potatoes.

Q: Oh, it was.

McLENDON: But for women, he said frankly we're not interested in women, but if one were exceptionally qualified we'd pay \$40 a week which was less than a steno person would get. We got the message and we thought about going into editing as an editor or something. I remember going on a trip down to New York with a friend who graduated from Wesleyan and we had lunch with a friend of hers who was doing editing with one of the publishing houses and the field was very hard to get into, it paid a pittance. It didn't particularly discriminate against women.

Q: I graduated from Williams in 1950 and I got caught up in the Korean War, but I remember visiting friends of mine from Smith who were in New York and they were all, editing was what they did in those times. This was some extremely bright women ended up going there and again living six to an apartment or something like that.

McLENDON: In order to afford it.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: When people, when women began to talk about how disgracefully the Foreign Service had discriminated against women I tended to put it in perspective and they did, no question about it. I tend to put it in perspective and say, in comparison with almost anyone else they didn't. They were fairer and tried harder to be fair than anyone else.

Q: I think the real one that the Foreign Service couldn't quite swallow was the marriage thing. That if you were a woman and you got married you had to get out. Other than that there were women coming in and getting the same salary and all that. Not many.

McLENDON: No, they weren't necessarily getting the same salary.

Q: Weren't they?

McLENDON: No. They took a look at whether you were married or single. There wasn't much discrimination in the salary level.

Q: Well, you were faced with the sort of bleak prospect you and thousands of other bright women coming in and the world was changing, but it hadn't really changed yet, but it was sort of on the way.

McLENDON: In those days the world didn't realize it was going to change toward women. They thought everything would, they'd taken women in during the war and when things settled down they'd all go back home.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: And rear the children.

Q: Now, okay, how did you approach this then?

McLENDON: Well, with the same spirit that I applied at Fletcher. I decided I had nothing to lose and I took the Foreign Service exam as soon as I was old enough.

Q: You had to be 21.

McLENDON: You had to be 21 in those days.

Q: You started in school at 15.

McLENDON: I wasn't quite 21 when I, I was 20 when I went off to Fletcher. I wasn't 21 until I finished the first year and I couldn't take the Foreign Service exam until the following year. I tried to find a job in the meantime and when I didn't I went back to Fletcher to continue working. I went ahead and applied for the Foreign Service and I was still determined to stay with it at least until I was turned down. I passed the written and in the spring of my second year at Fletcher I went down to Washington for the orals.

Q: This would be '51?

McLENDON: This would be '51 and one of my classmates at Fletcher, a good friend, Bill Allen was scheduled for his orals on the same morning I was, so we took the train down together and stayed with Fletcher friends down in Washington. Bill passed his orals with distinction and I was deferred on mine. The chairman of the orals board explained it, he said that quite frankly they thought that I would not stay there. That I would be engaged within a year and would not stay the course and because of the policy that women officers must resign if they married, they didn't think they could risk the \$5,000 it would cost to make me a productive Foreign Service Officer. I could see the point, but they said I passed the written with a high enough score that they didn't want to turn me down altogether, so under the deferral I could take the orals again without having to take the written anytime between 11 and 24 months.

Q: The basic assumption being if you didn't find a mate or something like that?

McLENDON: If I didn't become engaged and was stubborn enough to continue then they would consider me again.

Q: Can you talk a little about the oral exam? I mean some of the things that you remember about it.

McLENDON: Well, it was, for me some of the questions were if they went into diplomatic history or international law or relations or something it was easy. Then they would touch on my weaker areas of economics or geography. I know one question was, they were very nice, they were sort of fun, but one question they asked me on geography was the main branches of one of the rivers. I think we started up the Mississippi and then the Ohio and so forth. They finally got up far enough that I couldn't tell them the main tributaries and the member of the orals board who had asked the question, gave the name of one river and another member turned to him and said, "That river leads into the Chesapeake. It doesn't go anywhere near the _____."

Q: Probably the Susquehanna.

McLENDON: Which gave me the impression they weren't terribly serious about that one. In those days the Department of Agriculture was usually represented and he was the only grumpy member of the board. He asked me about the war with Mexico and the acquisition of the territories and I explained the treaty terms and then he said how do you justify this? It's pure conquest. I said, today we would not. That's the way we look at it today, but in the 19th Century that was a perfectly acceptable way of conducting foreign policy. He said, well, I disagree and I think it was an immoral land grab or words to that affect. I said, I hope you don't think that about Texas. I had pointed out that Texas did fight a war of independence and won. I didn't mention that it was largely subsidized from the United States.

Q: Well, how did you feel because I mean today this would have set off, I mean somebody said, well you'll probably get engaged and we won't take you. The logic at that time made sense, but how did you deal with this?

McLENDON: I was not a committed career woman. Like most women of my generation I'd been brought up to think that marriage and children was natural, it was a natural life to be desired. I simply wanted to follow my interests as to where they took me and see where I came out. I intended to marry if I found the right man, if I met the right man, I intended to marry in those years. I wasn't going to marry just anyone. I had no intention of marrying just to marry. Just to follow that lifestyle, so I thought it perfectly fair to say that. I couldn't have said that I wouldn't. It didn't upset me as much as it would a young woman today. You couldn't say that today.

Q: I know. What I'm trying to do is to capture the time. We accepted an awful lot of things that we wouldn't and probably today people are accepting that in another next generation they wouldn't either so its not as though its that a benighted a time, its just different generations and different thoughts.

McLENDON: I know. That reminds me of one of my best friends at Fletcher was Paul Walsh and Paul and his wife, Marie, were close friends all these years. Paul rather hurt my feelings once at Fletcher when he said he was talking to two of us, the women, and he said you shouldn't be here. I said why not. We're doing just as good a job as you are and he said because you're taking the place of a man. He said, you're going to leave and get married and not use your education whereas a man would continue to use the education. Well, 20 or 30 years afterwards, after that incident.

Q: Which you remembered.

McLENDON: When we were having dinner with friends, I turned to Paul and reminded him of it and said I want you to take back those words.

Q: Well, what did you do? Here you are and they say, well, in the proviso that you stay from engagements and all, we'll look at you again. What did you do, we're talking about 1951?

McLENDON: I just shrugged my shoulders. I was feeling discouraged at that point, but not terribly because all my friends at Fletcher had reassured me that I probably wouldn't make it the first time around. I remember that I was in the corridors in the old Walker Johnson building where BEX had its interviews and personnel branch had its offices. I was doing some other job hunting while I was in Washington at the time and I ran into an ambassador who had been on my orals board and he was very kind. He asked me what I was doing. He said, "You are going to continue in the Foreign Service aren't you?" Because they had recommended I enter Foreign Service staff to see whether I liked it or not. I was exploring it. I said, "Well, do you think I should? Do you think I have a chance?" He said, "Oh, yes, you just get a little experience and continue." He was very encouraging and that's the way it turned out. I entered Foreign Service staff and they were very kind.

Q: Could you explain what the Foreign Service staff was?

McLENDON: The Foreign Service staff basically was the clerical branch and they made no allowances for education. You had to come in at the bottom and pass the typing test if possible. If you didn't pass the typing test you were sure to be assigned to communications. Fortunately I passed the typing test. In those days it was very personalized and they hand-picked my assignment to be placed in a position in which the office needed me for my trainability more than for my clerical skills which were at a very low level. It happened to be as a clerk to the one visa officer in Sao Paulo. I went through training at the same time as two of my classmates went through the basic officers' course, my Fletcher classmates. I did not realize, I was happy and I was excited about going overseas and I was thrilled with having my first job, even though it was clerical. I did not realize until just a couple of years ago when I pulled out the letter, my letters that I had written home and my parents had kept all those years and every other letter I wrote had some expression of bitterness and resentment over where my Fletcher classmates were and what they were doing and there I was cooling my heels because I was a woman. You know, all these years, I had thought I didn't resent it that much because it faded with time.

Q: Yes, faded with time. This is why I wanted to capture this. How did they train you?

McLENDON: It was a combination of orientation to what the Foreign Service is and then they sat us down with typewriters and we had to familiarize ourselves with what was then called a Foreign Service Correspondent's Handbook in which you practiced the various forms of letters and telegrams and diplomatic notes. Lord help me if I ever had to type a diplomatic note.

Q: So, those things had to be letter perfect.

McLENDON: Of course, no erasure. When I got down to Sao Paulo, we had an agreement, my boss and I, if it had to be letter perfect, we would send it to one of the other secretaries who were all good pals of mine and say pretty please, would you do this.

Q: I also like to nail it down, you were in Sao Paulo from when to when?

McLENDON: I was in Sao Paulo from July of 1951 to June of 1952.

Q: 1952, so a year approximately.

McLENDON: Approximately a year. No, maybe early August.

Q: Anyway, we're talking about essentially a year. What did we have in Sao Paulo and sort of can you describe the consulate there?

McLENDON: We had a consulate general. It was not nearly the size it is now, but a small consulate general, rather heavily on the area of economic commercial side and I assume it still should be except to the extent the consular work doesn't devour the whole thing. The consular section such as it was consisted of one officer who handled only citizenship and protective service citizens which was not a full time job, but he didn't like visas and he was the senior, the chief of the consular section. The visa officer was somewhat overworked, but only because our procedures in those days were so backwards.

Q: Yes. Can you describe a little of the life in Brazil and in Sao Paulo at that time as you observed it?

McLENDON: Sao Paulo at that time was the fastest growing city in the Western Hemisphere. One thing I remember is of Sao Paulo is the sound. You could not escape the sound of construction, of buildings being constructed, of new bridge crossings and underground crossings and every form of transportation being constructed. It was I guess about two million in the city. It was still a livable size.

Q: What about the social life there?

McLENDON: The social life I fitted in with the other clerks and secretaries. We were a small enough post to be sort of an informal family and we would get together with officers and their families. Not long after I arrived, I teamed up with two other women who were looking for quarters because we didn't have furniture and furnished apartments were not to be had, so we started a system of house sitting. We would house sit houses of families who had gone on home leave for two, three or five months. That way we had a very comfortable furnished house and we could be flexible. We had very little to pack up and if we needed extra furniture we knew that we could borrow some from the consulate general and haul it in the consular jeep. We were gypsies.

Q: Who was the consular general when you were there?

McLENDON: Julian Greenup.

Q: Who?

McLENDON: Julian Greenup.

Q: Greenup.

McLENDON: He was replaced by Clarence I cannot remember his last name.

Q: That's all right.

McLENDON: He was very kind to me, but I cannot remember the last name.

Q: How did you find your Foreign Service experience was at this place?

McLENDON: Well, I was fascinated with Brazil and still I didn't like it much. I was, that was before I had learned to look at a country with more understanding. I reacted to Brazilians rudely and Brazilians as with some of the continental cultures and I found it in Mexico. I had gone to live with a Mexican friend when I was 16 to learn Spanish. If you were of the people one knows, they were polite and otherwise no one else was entitled to politeness. The French were a little like that and the Brazilians were and I reacted against that. I had dated a student from Brazil my first year at Fletcher, had almost become engaged to him, and that should have given me a kind of feeling for them, but it didn't.

Q: Would you say the Foreign Service family, how would you describe it?

McLENDON: My social life consisted of the Foreign Service family and some friends, a young single international group I had met through fellow boarders at homes in Sao Paulo. I met a young American physicist there and he had introduced me to friends of his. I had a cluster of friends who included Germans, one Czech, one Dutch, one or two Brazilians and so forth. We read plays.

Q: Oh yes, wonderful exercise. It's a little hard, I'm not sure how it is today, but in those days the staff so many of the secretaries would be coming essentially out of the same educated class, the same gene pool as the officers that the interest.

McLENDON: Even those who didn't had the gumption and the interest to want to go overseas. They were a good group.

Q: It was a good group, but I think in many ways, in large embassies things would sort of fall out because that's the problem of large embassies, but in the smaller places it is very cohesive because it wasn't them and us as far as the staff versus the officer corps then.

McLENDON: No, in those days it wasn't. We were a family. We liked and enjoyed each other. They would all go on trips together, several of the women and with one or two of my friends from the circus, my little play reading group. It was a fun time.

Q: Later you got involved from time to time on the consular side. What was the consular work like in Sao Paulo at that time?

McLENDON: Oh, my God. Consular work was just totally buried under layer after layer of regulations that simply could not be all carried out and procedures that were just totally out of date. We had to fingerprint every applicant for every visa, non-immigrant visas as well. A businessman going for a brief trip to the United States, a full set of fingerprints. Oh, just total absurdity. The files we kept, just total absurdity. It was a system I fought from the day I first encountered it until the day I retired.

Q: Did it sort of appall you at the time?

McLENDON: Yes. It appalled me at the time. It was so totally. Not to the degree it did later because I was still green enough to think well, maybe for security reasons we have to do these stupid things, but no, the system was appalling.

Q: Excuse me a minute.

McLENDON: The system did not make allowances for human nature.

Q: Or the sensitivities of foreigners, too.

McLENDON: Or the sensitivities of foreigners. I remember that only the flexibility in the mind of the officer applying the law allowed us to survive. I remember there was at that time and may still be a section in the immigration law that prohibits the issuance of a visa to anyone who is entering the United States primarily for the purpose of engaging in immoral behavior.

Q: Yes, in immoral sexual practices. I think that was it.

McLENDON: I remember we were handling the application of one of the better known of the Brazilian industrialists who was going to the States with his mistress. I sort of raised my eyebrows and said, "How do you get around that?" He looked at me, and of course he's going for business, and he said, "She is going for shopping." It says primarily.

Q: When that came in a little bit later, I said, well, you've got to figure out what are they going to be doing most of the time, unless they real sort of sexual athletes, they're going to be doing a lot of other things, too.

McLENDON: No one is doing it primarily.

Q: I mean who would go to the United States to. But it was embarrassing to have to administer this law. These things were thrown in by congress on almost a whim or something. Were you feeling the hand of McCarthyism or something like that while you were there?

McLENDON: Oh, very much so.

Q: Here you are a new girl on the block and all of a sudden this manifestation of.

McLENDON: We were all painfully aware of McCarthy and when I really felt the hand of McCarthy on the Foreign Service was when I came back and passed my orals and was brought in by the Foreign Service class of 1953. I said the Foreign Service class of 1953 because we were the last Foreign Service class for 18 months, the only one that year.

Q: The next one was renumbered and called class one.

McLENDON: Was it?

Q: That was mine. I started in July of 1955.

McLENDON: We were a small class. There were 20 of us. The Eisenhower administration had taken over and John Foster Dulles had pledged to rid the State Department of all those commies and at that same time they were determined to cut it back substantially. We took a RIF of I think one-third that year, one-fourth to one-third. They were trying to select out and they did select out 25% of the Foreign Service Officers. My class was caught up in that before we had our commissions because no one was commissioned for 18 months and no one was promoted for 18 months because the promotion lists, the commission lists, were all held up in the senate until everyone got a new full field FBI security clearance. The debate went on in the personnel division. We were in training three months and throughout that three months they were debating within the personnel division, there was a debate whether we would be considered career and they would hang on to us or whether we were to be dropped at the end of our training. So, every week we would call, we had two contacts in personnel and we'd get one side from one and one side from the other. It was all right for me, I was single and young, but there were married classmates. Some of them with children.

Q: And they tended to be older because of the veterans and all this coming back in yes.

McLENDON: Yes. So, it was a stressful time and at the end of it I was one of the first to be cleared because as it turned out I had been investigated by the FBI before my orals and that was accepted. A number of us were cleared and were able to take overseas assignments and a number were held back and two of our class were dropped, not permanently, but one they simply allowed him to be drafted because he had served all but I think two months of the amount of time that would have exempted him from being called up for the Korean War and the State Department would not ask for his, they could easily have gotten him excused for that, but they wouldn't and that allowed him to be called out. The other one there was some vague report of a security issue that they didn't have time to investigate and so they dropped him saying if they later had time to investigate and if they cleared him he could come back and he did eventually. My attitude at the end of the training was if I had another job and had the moral courage I'd leave this outfit. It isn't worth it. It isn't worth working for. It doesn't have any loyalty to us. Not any sense of loyalty.

Q: I came with that same feeling that John Foster Dulles and his group would, the phrase was that Dean Acheson he would not turn his back on Alger Hess. I had the feeling that John Foster Dulles would turn his back on anybody.

McLENDON: I was in Washington at the time of the changeover in administration. I attended both Dean Acheson's farewell meeting with the entire staff of the State Department and Dulles' first. At Acheson's, his senior staff members had taken up money and purchased for him the chair in which he sat as a cabinet member in the cabinet meetings as a farewell gift. Of course with his wit and graceful turn of phrase he smiled and said, "This has not been a chair of ease." Then he went on to explain his philosophy. He said, "I have taken it from my role to be that of the political appointee who is responsible for the policy of this department and who defends it and who takes the blame. The career service are there for the long run. They are not responsible for these political fights and it's my role to bear the brunt of that, not you. You're doing your best." Of course everyone was very much touched by that. The following week Dulles gave his address to the staff and said things are different, things are going to change around here. We are going to insist on positive loyalty.

Q: That phrase positive loyalty stuck to him like a tar baby for the rest of the time and many would never forgive him for that.

McLENDON: I will never forgive him. I never forgave him I should say.

Q: At the time you were new to this business, did that send a chill up into your spine?

McLENDON: It did indeed. At the time I thought as a career officer I'll simply do my best in the traditions of a non-political career service and try to survive. I didn't realize that it was going to have a permanent effect on the culture of the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, was there much in your group after this contrast? What were you talking about between Acheson and Dulles? Do you recall how people were talking about this?

McLENDON: We admired Acheson. He'd been a great Secretary of State. He was a creative Secretary of State. Dulles came across as a very negative man. Almost a fanatic on the Cold War. I did meet him. This was at a time when all Foreign Service was taken upstairs to meet the Secretary, but he was never comfortable dealing with the underlings on his staff.

Q: I want to go back just a bit. Before we leave Sao Paulo, were there any protection and welfare cases that particularly stuck in your mind or was there not much?

McLENDON: Yes. You know the old protection and welfare cases. There'd been a traveling circus in Brazil that was owned by an American couple or at least the wife was an American citizen and the circus went bankrupt or ran short of funds in Sao Paulo. They had to sell what they could of the menagerie and physical assets to settle their debts and then there were some left over. Well, the husband died and little was left and the assets gradually dwindled down. She had to be put in a nursing home and the assets were down to one elephant. The consular officer negotiated a rental arrangement; a lease arrangement with another circus on that elephant and the rental was just enough to pay the expenses in the nursing home. No one knew the age of the elephant. They knew he wasn't a young elephant by any means and the question was would the elephant live long enough so that the funds would be there for the widow or would the widow die first and then what does one do with the elephant. While I was there the widow died and we breathed a sigh of relief. We didn't have to come up with some source of funds for this widow.

Q: You went back and took the oral exam. Was this any different or how did you find the oral?

McLENDON: Oh, it was a breeze. I think they'd made up their minds ahead of time. I had studied up on geography.

Q: Did you know the sources of the Ohio by this time?

McLENDON: Oh, I'd memorized. Mr. Bartlett was our professor of history at Fletcher and he had made us memorize the terms of the treaties. He asked very detailed questions and you would have to trace the northern boundaries or trace the southern boundary as laid out by such and such treaty. So, we memorized that sort of thing, but I'd also done a bit more studying on exports and imports and that sort of thing. It was sort of a breeze.

Q: Was there anything about the training at the time except you had this whole McCarthy and this whole RIF and all that hanging over your heads as far as were you in or were you out of the Foreign Service. How did you find the training of your class?

McLENDON: Long and boring. I think not much that was of real interest. I remember the consular training the fun part was Francis Baylor a seaman in shipping. Remember sailor Baylor?

Q: Oh, yes.

McLENDON: The really fun part was that we had a week's excursion in New York to visit the UN which of course I'd done while I was at Fletcher and to visit the customs house which was fascinating and to go out with INS and greet an incoming ship and see how they processed the incoming to visit Ellis Island and see how they processed for Ellis Island, all that kind of stuff. Sailor Baylor was our escort. All I remember of that week was just a lot of fun.

Q: That was great. I stayed at the seaman's institute. Men could do that.

McLENDON: Men could do that.

Q: I mean there were lots of sailors staggering in at all sorts of hours.

McLENDON: It wasn't considered suitable for women.

Q: Yes. I felt a little out of place there. I'd been an enlisted man for four years, but this was a pretty rough crowd, it was a rough area.

McLENDON: Not a bad introduction for consular work I should say.

Q: Okay, we're back in business. Ruth, now, where did you go? You got out and finally they determined they were going to keep you all or most of you in this basic officer course and we're talking about '53 is it?

McLENDON: Yes, we're talking about '53.

Q: Whither?

McLENDON: I went to Manila. I was originally assigned to a slot in the political section, which was biographic reporting. Thank God that was changed, but it served me a bad turn later. I was supposed to go to that, but a consular officer, an officer in the consular section had developed hearing problems and could not handle the consular work and was moved into that position and they moved me into the consular section which worked out very nicely.

Q: You were in Manila from when to when?

McLENDON: From July of 1953 to September, no early October of 1955.

Q: Can you kind of give a feel for the Philippines in the '53 to '55 period?

McLENDON: It was seven or eight years after the war. Manila was not yet completely rebuilt. Of the capital cities, Manila was second only to Warsaw in the amount of devastation and bombing and attacks. It had not yet recovered. It had received its full independence from the United States a year after the end of the war.

Q: In 1946.

McLENDON: It was delayed. We had the commonwealth act in 1935. It was supposed to receive independence in 1945 on our independence day, July 4th and we postponed one year because the war was not yet over in Asia in 1945. They had become independent with all of the devastation the war had wreaked in the Philippines and without assistance from us to rebuild at first. They had a rocky start for independence, but we did come in with the war plans act and we did a lot of compensating. A lot of money was poured in which did help in rebuilding. At the time this was before the Filipinos had become very nationalistic. They were still largely pro-American. There were Philippine nationalists. They were particularly journalists who loved to beat us over the head, but it was still a country in which we had far too much influence, you couldn't avoid it. We had a special economic relationship. We had negotiated an agreement which had established preferences for Philippine products in American markets and the same for American products and American investments in the Philippines. We had the Philippines bases agreement which guaranteed our role in protecting the Philippines as the price for the bases. We didn't pay a cash price. The relationship was close, too close for a healthy development of the Philippines and they were beginning to resent it. It's awfully hard to cut an umbilical cord like that.

Q: Can you describe the embassy at the time and then we'll get to your job.

McLENDON: The embassy was in and still is I guess in the old high commissioner's residence right on Manila Bay, a nice old, art deco, early '30s building. Very pleasant and surrounded by Quonset huts because we had to expand it temporarily and we had a whole cluster of Quonset huts off to one side that was staff housing. We had some larger Quonset huts on the other side that housed USIA and our snack bar. The consular section had the ground floor and one entire wing off the ground floor plus a few offices on one side, plus a few offices in the other wing.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

McLENDON: My first ambassador there was Raymond Spruance, the former admiral and everyone loves Ambassador Spruance. He was.

Q: He was the victor of Midway.

McLENDON: Midway. He was not only highly respected, but venerated I would say for his role in Midway certainly by the ex-navy, but he was also a thoroughly decent, nice human being. Just the nicest sort of person to work for. His wife was like him. She was a delightful woman with a long experience of being a navy wife and looking after the morale of the navy wives under her husband's command. She was a superb ambassador's wife. They were a lovely couple. I didn't work obviously with Ambassador Spruance on political matters, but my friends who did respected him also for his common sense as well as grasp of important elements in the relationship. The criticisms that I heard of him tended on the side that he was ex-military, he was overly committed to the importance of those bases, but who wasn't.

Q: Which really remained for the next 30 years, the same thing. Can you describe the consular section? Was it one of our biggest at that time?

McLENDON: It was one of our largest. Manila was, I think, at that time our largest embassy or one of the largest embassies. We had a large AID mission. We had a large military assistance group as well as bases. We had a large consular section. We had a heavy demand for visas and we had probably the largest number of American citizens abroad at that time because of the long relationship and because of the over 5,000 Philippine veterans who had been naturalized at the very close of the war and were still citizens and with children.

Q: Well, now, who was in charge of the consular section?

McLENDON: I was there two years and we had five different consuls general.

Q: Okay. Why?

McLENDON: The first one, the best one was selected out that year. He was basically a political officer who was moved into the consular section and I'm not sure why. He was selected out. It was because we selected out 25% and it happened to be a bad time.

Q: Yes, a bad time.

McLENDON: He was followed by an old-line consular officer and I don't remember his name. I can see his face, but I don't remember his name who, let's just say he was unimaginative. At one point Terry Sanders took over the consular section, I don't know why. He was sort of interim. He was basically an economic officer and I think very bright, but a bit temperamental and not at all interested in consular work. Then we had Raleigh Gibson who was transferred down to us from the political section. He was on his last six or eight months before retirement and he retired from there. I think the first three I mentioned, we're talking about only a few months and I don't know why. Then the last was Hayward Hill and our name for him was Haywire Hill who was a very nice person, very tender hearted and not inclined to pay much attention to consular regulations. The heart ruled the head.

Q: Well, what were you doing there?

McLENDON: I was moved around a lot. I started off in the citizenship side and I was working under Irv Ross who was an old line staff officer who had been in Manila since the days of the high commissioner, had been interned there during the war and had returned after the war and he was a complete character. The complete opposite of the type anyone would identify with the Foreign Service as being a Foreign Service Officer. I would say he looked like a retired merchant marine or non-com in the navy, balding, very heavyset, tattooed I think, a real character. When I was brought in and introduced to him as his new junior officer he looked me up and down and said, oh. He wasn't a bit impressed. Irv and I got along. When he learned that I had done some consular work on the clerical side and I didn't mind, I didn't at all mind being sat with one of his senior Philippine employees, we called them local employees, to be taught the intricacies of nationality law as applied in the Philippines a former possession.

Q: Where it was extremely complicated.

McLENDON: Where it had all kinds of complications, yes, because our Foreign Service national employees were very high quality. They did a higher level of work particularly on the nationality side than I'd ever seen anywhere else. They could process the cases, handle the interviews, bring the case entirely to decision point, write a draft decision and then bring it in to the officer for the final interview and decision. I seldom had to make changes, occasionally a minor grammatical or file change in the decision, but I almost never had to question either their law or their evaluation of the individual in terms of reliability.

Q: Were there any particular problem type citizenship cases?

McLENDON: Oh, yes. We had a very high level of fraud. I knew when we went through consular training in the Philippines it had been mentioned as that. The Philippines and Hong Kong were in competition of who could produce the greatest number of fraudulent claims to citizenship. Hong Kong had by far the more elaborate system set up. The Philippines' operation was much more amateur, but it became more professional to the degree to which we professionalized our handling of it. We had basically two types of fraudulent cases. Three. One, the largest number involved Filipinos who claimed to have been born in Hawaii. There had been from the late '20s or early '30s, I think, a program by the Hawaiian sugar planters association importing labor from the Philippines. While most of them did not remain in Hawaii permanently, they had children born to them there and then returned to the Philippines. There were literally thousands of American citizens by birth who had at one time been returned to the Philippines as children with their families. After the war, when we made war reparations available to American citizens in the Philippines, that put a high premium, a high cash premium on American citizenship. So, immediately we had all kinds of competing claims for citizenship. There were a lot of Filipinos who simply obtained the birth certificates of those born in the Philippines. They might have come from the same village in the Philippines as the parents and then filed their own claim. The child who had been born in the United States might have died and you've never known about the citizenship or what have you, but we had this steady flow of applications with all kinds of fraudulent documentation and no capability of investigating except we could send it back to the immigration service in Honolulu. They could do a field investigation and interview those who lived still, Filipinos who still lived in the same area in which this person was allegedly born. And sometimes turn up information that clearly indicated that this was not the one; or we could get attestations from the home village in the Philippines from the priest and the mayor and the chief of police, but given the system in the Philippines of village loyalty and everybody will do anything to help somebody else, those were not worth the time it took to look at them, to glance at them. So, that was one type.

We had the case of the Philippine veterans who had been naturalized, never had left the Philippines, never had been in the United States, but had been naturalized in the Philippines at the close of the war or the close of their service. Never had any intention of going to the United States to live because they just considered the tie between the two countries would go on forever. They married and had children and of course Philippine families tend to be large. They would register a child a year with us and no questions asked and then somewhere along the line we began to realize that not all of these children belong to the same father. If they didn't happen to have a child born that year they'd register the brother's child or cousin's child, anybody's child, you know. We were acquiring American citizens at a much higher rate. Then the third case was what we called the bamboo Americans and these tended to be veterans of the Spanish American War who had settled in the Philippines or those who had gone out with the U.S. military at whatever time back in the old days.

Q: The turn of the century.

McLENDON: And had settled down and married and taken a Filipino wife and settled in happily. A notable percentage of them tended to have multiple marriages. We'd have first one family who would come in and be registered as his family. By this time the original American was in most cases dead, not there for us to ask questions, and we'd get one family registered and then another group would turn up claiming to be also the family and then in some cases a third, but we'd have competing families because of course under our nationality laws only the legitimate wife and the Philippines did not legally recognize bigamist marriages or polygamist marriages. We had fraud in that case because then we had all the competing claims about well the other marriage never really took place. All of this was complicated by the fact that with all of the devastation of the war parish records and civil records had been destroyed and even where they perhaps had not been destroyed it wasn't very hard to get a certificate from the local priest saying that they had been. So, it was reconstruction on the basis of affidavits of very little credibility. It was fun.

Q: Was there much attempt of the Filipinos to get to the consular officers either through money, sex, gifts or what have you or anything like that or was that a problem?

McLENDON: I did not hear of anything like that involving an officer. We did have a strange incident in the visa section in which our receptionist who did the initial counter interview, who was American staff personnel, found \$500 in cash on the floor, this packet of \$500 in cash lying on the floor of the main processing unit of the visa section. No one ever claimed it. No one ever admitted having lost any money, possibly because it could have been a perfectly legitimate case of which the applicant, it had slipped out of the pocket and they had so little faith in recovering it they never thought to mention it. While I was there and later after I left, several of our Filipino staff had to be dismissed for fraud.

Q: I was many years later in Korea and it was endemic there.

McLENDON: There was a lot of pressure on the visa side and perhaps on the citizenship side. I was not aware of it on the citizenship and I don't remember, I cannot think or remember hearing of any of our Filipino staff on the citizenship side who was ever let go because of fraud. One was eventually let go because of rudeness, but I can't think of anyone else. On the visa side I knew a couple of them and I must say there were a couple of them when I worked in the visa section that I watched very closely.

Q: This is tape two, side one with Ruth McLendon. You moved over to the visa side what after about a year or so or?

McLENDON: I don't remember the timing of it, probably.

Q: What then.

McLENDON: But then they transferred two officers from the political section down, three actually. One was in the economic section and one from pol/mil or something, political military, but they were transferred down at their own request because they wanted to have a stint in consular work and learn that they were on their perhaps third tour. All good friends and they became my very good friends. We were buddies and I learned a great deal from them, but we were sort of a, there was a great deal of camaraderie. We would switch around so that we were all learning the different aspects of the work. I spent less time on the visa side. I may have spent not more than six or eight months there I guess.

Q: How did you deal with, what were some of the problems in the visa side that you were doing?

McLENDON: Again, it was fraud. There it was a very heavy pressure on non-immigrant visa of those who in fact intended to remain in the United States by whatever means. We had high pressure on non-immigrant visas almost year round. It was high volume work. We also had a long waiting list on the immigrant visa side, but with a quota of 100 a year as an Asian country in those days we were not issuing many except to the non-quota category, the wives and husbands.

Q: Was there much fraud in the marriage business particularly with sailors, soldiers, American soldiers, sailors who were married more for money than?

McLENDON: There may have been some of that, there undoubtedly was, but we were not as much aware of it in those days as we had seen later. I don't recall ever having to give the kind of in-depth interviews that one gives in those cases. In most cases there was at least one child already.

Q: Something was going on.

McLENDON: Someone had been around. No, it wasn't that, I think that became a fraud sideline a little bit further down the road.

Q: Then you left there, I mean is there anything else we should cover do you think?

McLENDON: One thing, this is ego speaking, but I take credit for finally having had a tantrum in simply insisting to the Department that we had to have a small investigative unit of our own. It was absurd to attempt to handle the kind of fraud cases we were handling without the capacity of asking questions vocally. I blew my stack one day after I sat and took the affidavit of a man, an American citizen, who admitted to having fraudulently identified five individuals as persons born from his home village, born in the United States, and not one of the five was. I thought that's egregious fraud. So, I put together some figures and a description. I wrote it, in those days, to communicate with the passport office, one wrote by dispatch, not by operations memorandum or other more informal methods, but by dispatch. I wrote a dispatch and had it cleared. I think I was the acting chief of the citizenship section at that time, so there wasn't anyone to clear it with, but the consul general who very wisely suggested that I clear it around the embassy, which I did. The first place I started was with our security officer to get his advice and I incorporated his advice into it and then I cleared it with the political section I think as high as the DCM and the administrative section. It went out and when it hit the Philippine desk, Dave Koffell, who was on the Philippine desk at that time with Bob Fuline and Bob told me later that they carried it into his office, tips his finger and said, who wrote that? What's responsible for that? I made a modest request. I thought that we had to have a small investigative unit of our own consisting of a minimum of one American officer and one or more Filipino investigators, or if that were failing that, I forgot what my second request was. Or failing that, that we at least be allowed to send an officer over to the Hong Kong fraud unit for him to get some training and look into it there. The officers on the desk interpreted that as the desire of our consul general to get a free trip to Hong Kong. The passport office was really upset when I gave them the statistics on the fraud. I've never seen it happen so fast until the Mexico thing. I think it was three months we had our authorization. It was very fast.

Q: This wouldn't have been Frances Knight, would she have been there?

McLENDON: Yes.

Q: Well, she carried an awful lot of weight.

McLENDON: Yes and when she got mad.

Q: When she got mad, she would go straight to both congress and to J. Edgar Hoover. I suppose too the times were right, you know, people; we were being super patriotic and all I suppose fraudulent American citizenship didn't sit very well.

McLENDON: Well, just that degree of fraud in any operation didn't sit well. It makes you look stupid.

Q: But when you left there you must have gone with a certain aura of she who gets things done.

McLENDON: I don't know. I felt that it was, I was just very, I thought, at least I accomplished one thing. One thing.

Q: Yes. Then you went to where, to Australia, was that it?

McLENDON: No.

Q: No?

McLENDON: No, unfortunately because I had been listed on the personnel records as having been assigned to biographic reporting position in Manila, when the, remember we're talking 1955 and the, what was his name? The Wriston Report.

Q: The Wriston Program, yes.

McLENDON: The Wriston Report had come out in '54 pointing out all the positions in the Department of State that should be filled by Foreign Service. All of the cross training that needed to be taking place and every available Foreign Service Officer was being dragged back to Washington and put into positions in the Department. All these people in the Department who had never intended to go overseas were being forced overseas. I was dragged back and put into the division of biographic reporting, the Division of Biographic Information.

Q: It was in INR, wasn't it?

McLENDON: It was in INR. It was the deadliest part of INR.

Q: What was?

McLENDON: Diego Asencio was in there at that time, yes.

Q: I suppose you just got these reports and essentially filed them, is that it?

McLENDON: That is what we were supposed to do. We were supposed to get these reports and it was full biographic report filing, but more often it was a mention of the person in a paragraph or a sentence or less in a longer report. Then you were supposed to excise this little squib and card it and put it in the card file, which was largely clerical. I was in the Western European branch and we had, let's see, one, two, three, four, five, six officers and two clerks, one of whom didn't work much. The old biographic hands were very much upset when I kept pointing out that our proportions were reversed, we should have at least five clerk typists to every officer or to every two officers because it was primarily clerical work. Yes, we pulled out the information together and did biographical work, but that was very low level writing.

Q: Were you up against sort of an entrenched little kingdom or something there?

McLENDON: Well, it was an entrenched little kingdom that very soon disappeared. It was a little kingdom. It had been a cozy nest for a lot of people primarily women, but there were men who were also comfortable there. Intelligent, well educated, deeply interested in the countries they were working on and knowledgeable about them who happened to love the detailed work of following people. Then we had the Foreign Service Officers coming in and looking at this with a completely different viewpoint and then we had the younger wave of Foreign Service Officers coming in like Diego and a few others who not only had a different way of looking at things, but weren't about to do that clerical work and things began to change.

Q: How long were you doing that?

McLENDON: Three years.

Q: Three years?!

McLENDON: Three years. I finally got out. I would have liked an assignment to political or economic work, but I was ready to take anything to get overseas again. So, when they offered me Adelaide, because we were just reopening, I jumped at it.

Q: So, you were in Adelaide from when to when?

McLENDON: January of 1959 to June of 1961. I was there two and a half years because I had to be extended to get on the right assignment cycle.

Q: What was Adelaide like and what was the importance consular wise of Adelaide?

McLENDON: Adelaide had been one of our old posts, we had had a consulate there for more than a hundred years and then we closed it in 1953. Now we were reopening. Originally it had been there to protect seaman because we had whalers in the area that would come through the southern seas and other shipping of all kinds. Later on there was not very much justification. We kept fairly busy with visas. We had a growing number of American citizens there as American firms invested in Australia. We had a fairly active commercial program that was largely carried on by our senior Australia staff. We did some minor political reporting all of which the Department could have lived without. It was my first chance to become involved in political reporting because John Ausland who was principal officer had been in political work most of his life and was rather blasé about it and practically willing to turn it over, most of it to me.

Q: I might say that John Ausland comes up in my radar all the time because I'm on an Internet connection. He's continually commenting on things. It's a diplomatic history connection on the electronic net and he's continually making comments to people about they got it wrong, you know, this is what happened. He's still doing his political reporting.

McLENDON: I would think John would be pretty up on it. He tends to do his background work pretty carefully. John was a very sensible, laid back sort of type. We didn't really need to be there.

Q: Were there two of you?

McLENDON: There were two of us. It was fun, but I can't think of anything essential in it.

Q: How were the Australians there?

McLENDON: They were overwhelmingly friendly. It wasn't a case of getting out and making friends, it was a case of fighting off invitations from everyone, fending off I should say because you couldn't spread yourself that thin. No, they were great and very easy to make friends. You could make friends anywhere. It was a little sticky. I was supposed to have the labor party for a beat and it meant largely trade union members and they were just as nervous as cats with a woman officer.

Q: Really?

McLENDON: Yes. It made them uncomfortable. They weren't used to women in that position.

Q: Well, they really were, my understanding is that the labor party in Australia was almost a direct import from England, I mean a very working class, very class conscious and all that.

McLENDON: Oh, very, yes. Australia as a country has a reputation for being not class conscious and that is largely true. They are very democratic as a rule. Adelaide at that time tended to be the exception because the south Australians were the first to tell you that south Australia was not settled, never settled by convicts. They were younger sons.

Q: Sort of remittance men and that type of thing.

McLENDON: They didn't put it that way. The implication was that they were never of that class. It was a mixture because they were the younger Australians and the intellectuals and they were delightful. It was, the top level of society in Adelaide was like a step back into the 19th Century and in fact Mallory Ausland and I were both compulsive readers and I discovered Trollop about that time and we decided that that was probably the best guide to Adelaide society. We were working our way through all of the Trollop novels and we thought that some of it might possibly be important, but that's getting pretty far advanced here.

Q: Those were pretty racy crowds.

McLENDON: Pretty racy crowds. You're better off. Anyhow. When John and Mallory left they gave me as a farewell present, they had found an old blotter with a silver cover over it and they had it engraved Adelaide 1861.

Q: I take it by this time you really were hooked on the Foreign Service, weren't you?

McLENDON: Oh, yes and I loved Australia. I traveled all over Australia and loved it and went back later to visit my friends. The Aussies are great friends.

Q: What did your family back in Texas think of this girl running around to all these places and all that?

McLENDON: Well, my parents were very supportive, my mother particularly. For my parents it was a bit of a sacrifice because we had lost my brother the year after he graduated from college. He drowned in an accident and I was the only one left. They were still willing to free me and allow me to go off and follow the kind of life I did and not produce grandchildren, not marry and produce grandchildren as they had every right to hope I would and never criticized me for it. I thought it was remarkable and something that I deeply appreciated, but my father I know would have much preferred that I stayed at home and marry and have children. My mother vicariously was right there with me, enjoying every bit of it.

Q: That's great. Did you, I mean, let's take I mean at this point we're talking about the Kennedy administration just coming in. Did you see any change in the role of women in the Foreign Service, what you could look forward to, how women were dealt with, not necessarily with Kennedy, but in the time now that you'd been in.

McLENDON: Not that soon, no. In fact, not at all. I didn't. I went back from Australia to go into Burmese language training because even though there were things I hadn't liked about the Philippines and I hadn't liked the climate of the Philippines, the longer I stayed away, the more homesick I got for it. I also had realized that if I were going to have any sort of chance at a career in political work, I needed a specialization in an area that was not terribly popular. So, I applied for southeast area specialization and specifically Thai or Burmese. There were of course always more applicants for Thai training and they happened to have no volunteers that year for Burmese.

Q: You took Burmese, what was it a year course?

McLENDON: It was the regular ten-month course.

Q: Can you describe Burmese as an American approaching this language?

McLENDON: Burmese has a writing system, but it is not based on the Roman alphabet. It is an alphabet which is derived from Bali, which is similar to Sanskrit. Its grammar actually is closer to Japanese than to any other language which is odd, but the Burmese grammar is very simple. It is a tonal language. It has four tones, not as difficult to a Westerner as for example Chinese with its five or six tones, but it is composed of one-syllable units, consonant vowel, consonant vowel and multiples. You string them together.

Q: How did you find it as far as your grasping?

McLENDON: I found it fascinating. I found it certainly for the first month or so the hardest work I'd ever done. I was physically exhausted at the end of the day from the concentration. We were six hours a day in class with two of us in class and a tutor. He was a lovely man to go through that kind of training with because he was very relaxed and gentle and he had lots of funny stories and he didn't push us too hard, but he was free with explanations when we needed them. So, we survived. The only thing was he smoked a smelly pipe and FSI was at that time in the basement of Arlington Towers. You remember that network of underground corridors and little cubicles? We were at the very back of that network in a tiny cubicle and the ventilation was very poor when you got that far back. He would puff on that pipe and it didn't bother me at all at first, but that spring we would take a break and go outdoors and it took a physical act of will for me to go back inside. I had to force myself to go back inside that classroom.

Q: While you were doing that I was taking Serbian for a year with some very intense work. An underground garage is not the best place to learn a language.

McLENDON: No. Anyhow, I loved Burmese. I loved the Southeast Asia studies. It gave me a chance to do a lot of reading on Burma.

Q: Getting ready to go out there, how did, I mean what was American interests in Burma at that time. We're talking about, I mean you went out in '62 I guess?

McLENDON: Well, when I started preparing to go they had a parliamentary regime that wasn't working very well. They had a number of insurgencies on their hands. They were a friendly country in which we had a number of economic aid projects and a military assistance group operating and a lot of exchange USIA programs operating. We had a full complement there. Then slightly more than midway through my training the army officers had started the revolution and arrested the cabinet and began the Burmese socialist revolution. They started down a radical socialist path. An intensely nationalistic fear of foreigners.

Q: Xenophobic.

McLENDON: More xenophobic than anything else. I arrived in July of 1962 very shortly after the student demonstrations. These had resulted in the army suppression which had resulted in the deaths of over 100 students. I don't think the full number was ever known and they arrested hundreds. So, there had been a rather brutal crack down right before I got there. It was at the time I first arrived. I think the Burmese people had been accustomed to British rule and then of course they'd had Japanese domination during the war, but then a return to the British rule and quickly independence. Then this attempt at parliamentary rule. They had been accustomed to a moderate government all these years basically and they had not yet become adjusted to this government. They did not yet realize what they were up against and they were still being fairly free to talk and be with foreigners and so forth. That changed.

Q: You were there at a very interesting time, but you were there from when to when?

McLENDON: It was fascinating. I was there four and a half years. I was there from July of '62 to December of '66.

Q: How did you see Burma? I mean we've talked about the political situation was just in the process of changing. It had changed, but.

McLENDON: It had changed and they were just in the process of their revolution. Let me describe first what happened to me and then I'll go into that if I may.

Q: Okay. Please.

McLENDON: I can speak with less authority on the earlier part, the first year I was there than the later part because of one of the things, you know, another of these little switches that the Foreign Service felt free to pull on women officers in those days, more than men. I was a mid-career officer at this point of what, two, three, four posts. I had finished Burmese training with the highest score by one they had. I was supposed to go into the political section as a Burmese language officer. The DCM decided to move a first tour officer from the consular section who wanted to change out of consular work into the political section and give me the consular job which was a job appropriate for a first tour officer and the DCM did it. Although I protested, I didn't have much to say about it. Fortunately, the officer who was moved up in my place, although I resented it terribly, was in fact a fine officer. He turned out to be a fine officer and I had nothing against him, but it wasn't right. Fortunately during that first year we were inspected. The inspectors supported me and the recommendation was that I be moved into the political section at the first opportunity. That eventually took place but for that first year I was not in a position to follow the political situation except through the newspaper and so forth.

Q: Well, who was the ambassador and DCM at that time when you first arrived?

McLENDON: Well, we had an ambassador who was a former missionary, a political appointee, a Kennedy political appointee. John Edgerton, a former missionary. He knew Burma. With a good supportive DCM he would have been a good ambassador, but he had been too close. He also had been with the Ford Foundation and he was too closely associated with the Ford Foundation for this revolutionary regime to accept him. At that point, no ambassador could have been effective I think. His DCM was not supportive and he was a weak man himself.

Q: Who was it?

McLENDON: It was Alexander Schnee. He would undercut the ambassador with the staff and it was an embassy divided within itself.

Q: It's sad because it's obviously a small place and it doesn't take much to create a very unhappy feeling.

McLENDON: It doesn't take much to create unhappiness and it was not a happy place. But fortunately, Edgerton was replaced by Hank Byroade and Hank Byroade was exactly what we needed once we got him.

Q: He was the youngest general.

McLENDON: The youngest brigadier general since the Revolutionary War and had been the ambassador to Egypt at the time that we backed out of the Aswan dam project. If you've heard that story you know something of Byroade's personality. Byroade could be a hard charger, but he was also one of the best judges of human nature I've ever worked with and a very nice guy to work with. Anyhow, he came along and we were in good hands. We weren't going to have that kind of problem anymore. From the time Byroade arrived he was fretting. First, it took him a while to get in and present his credentials. Then after he did, after that formal meeting with the Head of State he couldn't get in to see him at all. He was cooling his heels and fretting and he wanted to know why. There were those within the embassy, and this was something that I'd struggled against with Rick Schnee, there were those within the embassy that were convinced Burma for all practical purposes was a communist country. It was going to go down the communist line, it was a satellite of China and this was it. I think the first report I remember writing when I wrote, when I joined the political section.

Q: This would be about '63?

McLENDON: This was '63, the fall of '63. Was a visit by I think it was from China.

Q: The Premier of China.

McLENDON: Foreign Minister at the time.

Q: Foreign Minister, yes.

McLENDON: All the publicity, all the headlines of the newspapers were about these friendly relations and that was in the English language press in Burma. There were still two English language dailies. I read also the Burmese press and commentary. My task was supervising the translation pool and I would select things for them to translate and there was a lot of comment in Burmese on the other side and one of the most telling comments was here he comes again. They told a story, a Burmese tale of a bully who made the point of brushing his teeth in front of his, who wanted to be known as the sweetheart or a lover of a certain village girl and she would have nothing to do with him. So, he made a point of performing his morning brushing in front of her house so it appeared as if he had stayed there. In effect the comparison was with the Chinese Minister. He was coming down with all this fanfare to make it appear that Burma was a satellite of China. I wrote a dispatch on that visit pointing out the contrast and the chief of the political section and I were on track on that. We both agreed that Burma was very carefully following its own path and was trying very, very hard to stay out of both camps. Byroade understood that very well and agreed with it, but he didn't understand, he couldn't see why they should be so suspicious of us and I remember sitting down with them and saying they have good reason. If you look at the surface. If you know enough to see surface indications and don't know what was actually going on, they have good reason because there were a number of things. There was a group of Buddhist monks while I was up in Mandalay temporarily in charge of Mandalay before I went to the political section had started the first public opposition to the regime and it created quite a stir. We followed them very closely because remember this was '63 and just over the way in Vietnam we had the monks burning themselves. We were acutely sensitive. This was the same group of monks who had been active in the agitation for Burmese independence. The first group of Buddhist monks to become politicized and they had played a role in the Burmese movement for independence, so there was also that angle to consider and consider how much they might do. So, we were, as it turned out that was the same group of monks that were anti-communists and our USIA had been providing I think equipment primarily to help them in some of their anti-communist efforts. Equipment like movie projectors and cameras and things like that. We're not talking about subversive stuff.

Q: No, but I mean, very, yes.

McLENDON: We're talking propaganda stuff.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: Maybe a printing press, we may have loaned them or bought them a printing press. I don't know that side of it. I was only aware of it because some of it had been handled in Mandalay, not while I was there. All of this had stopped before this time. We also had some aid projects that looked funny. We had some Americans who were still wandering around the country and had been there since the end of World War Two and may or may not have been brought in by the CIA or recruited by the CIA as reporting. I don't know.

Q: Let me stop here.

McLENDON: From my side I guess I could say, the monk who came out who started the protest movement, asked to meet me in Mandalay. Met me at the residence of our branch public affairs officer. He and his senior Burmese assistant were there and his interpreter. He made a perfectly straightforward appeal for help against the Burmese government, against the revolutionary government. Why are you fighting communism everywhere in the world and not here? I just without any policy instructions from my government, I just said, we are involved in Vietnam. We have our hands full in Vietnam. We have very limited interests in Burma and Burma is a long way from the United States and we are not going to get involved here. We're just, that's just not in our interest at this point. I told Byroade. I said, I assume the Burmese military intelligence knew about that meeting because they must have been following him and they probably were following me. The only thing is they probably don't know that I told him no. They probably don't know what I told him.

Q: Yes, yes.

McLENDON: Of course he later came down; he didn't want to take that no for an answer and later he came down to the embassy and was given an appointment with the ambassador. I pointed out that he was seen coming in here and the Burmese Government know that, but they don't know what you told him.

Q: What was your analysis, yours and him and obviously the political section and ambassador's analysis of why this government coterie took this very xenophobic line which is really quite different from around there and it remains that way to today?

McLENDON: I think it was that their experience. The Burmese had an inferiority complex in dealing with foreign powers. Their experience was that when they had any dealings with foreigners they got taken over first by the British and then the Japanese. They didn't want to be dominated by our culture. They didn't want to be dominated by us politically and the alternative, it seemed to them, was they would likely be dominated by China which they wanted if anything even less. One statement that I heard quoted and I'm not sure who it was, it may have been Harrison Salisbury.

Q: Who was a writer for the New York Times.

McLENDON: He was. He had come to Burma in 1965 or so, and had an extensive interview with Burmese officials and then came back and briefed us on it. After that briefing, I said for the first time I think I have heard the true version of why Burma is doing this. It was either that interview with Salisbury or a later one in which he was equally or almost equally frank with another visitor whom he'd known a long time. The Burmese said, he pointed and looked at a map and he just sort of seemed discouraged and he said, "I wish I had a pair of atomic scissors and I could just cut this off from this continent and move it someplace else." He feared the pressure from China and yet to be drawn into our train would provoke trouble too, he feared.

Q: Was there any affinity with India?

McLENDON: No, the opposite. There was a strong racial prejudice against Indians in Burma, racial and cultural. Because the Indians had been brought in as laborers to build the railroads and to do all the work that the Burmese would not do. Then they stayed and then had taken over and adapted very well and taken over the economy and they were the merchants and the bankers and the civil servants and so forth. The Burmese felt that between the Indians who had been brought in by the British and the Chinese the overseas Chinese, who had come in their own way, they felt that economically they had lost control of their country that way. That was another motivation.

Q: Was the Government working to get rid of the Indians and Chinese?

McLENDON: They did get rid of the Indians by forcing those who were not third generation Burmese to leave. There were these forced deportations of Indians, all the while I was there. Well, first they were encouraging all of those who would leave to leave and then they were forcing out the others, they were making it impossible for them to stay. They were leaving; there were chartered boats. The Indian embassy, the Indian government was running just a fleet of chartered boats taking them home. Those who could afford it were flying out.

Q: Well, now, we've got this increasing xenophobic country that don't want to get involved with us.

McLENDON: They don't want to get involved with anybody.

Q: You were a political officer and the whole idea of a political officer is to mix and mingle and find out what the ruling people are doing and you're representing this country which is becoming an anathema to the ruling party. How did you operate during your four and a half years there?

McLENDON: We weren't talking to the Burmese representatives of the Burmese government at any significant level. What we were told didn't have much significance. The Burmese who would talk to us had no influence in the government. We were watching and reading. I was reading the Burmese newspapers. We were talking to our Burmese friends. Some of my friends were retired. Some were in nonpolitical jobs, technical jobs that were still needed. We were not talking; they were not in on the political decisions. We were not talking about political decisions. It just gave a feeling for how the Burmese react and how they think and how likely it might be that these policies of the government would succeed. I thought no way with the Burmese, no way. The most individualistic people on earth, they'll never ever bring them to the first step.

Q: Where was their leader getting his socialist ideas?

McLENDON: Of course we had CIA operating and they had sources that I didn't know, but some of them were good. I had access to most of the agency people and in fact they sometimes touched base with me before they went out on a report after I'd been there a while. We knew a lot of what was going on, but not through your normal diplomatic contacts.

Q: How about the insurgents?

McLENDON: Oh, Lordy.

Q: One always used to hear about the flag insurgencies, red flag, white flag, black flag.

McLENDON: Yes, the red flag communists, the white flag communists, the insurgents.

Q: The mountaineers?

McLENDON: No, not mountaineers. Some insurgents were in the south and east primarily over to the Thai border which is when that became such a sensitive area.

Q: But they weren't?

McLENDON: Not mountaineers. Some were largely Baptists, or Christian which is a further division. There were about 14 or 15 different groups, most of them small. The KIA were the big threat because they had at one time had moved within 30 miles of Rangoon and had Rangoon surrounded. There were just wide areas that were either no man's land or largely held by the rebels. I remember we had a very bright officer who joined the political section at that time who was just convinced that the government was going to collapse in a couple of months because. We'd go over the map. We were sitting with him and trying to explain why we're not going to say in such strong terms that the government was really in very serious straits from these rebels. He pointed out all the territory they held and then I said, yes, but look at the productive areas of the country. Look where the rice was produced and those are not held by the rebels. I said the areas you are talking about are economically dependent; they are not income producing areas. As long as they can hold that, this central strip, that's where lies the revenue. He was furious. He just thought we were overcome by localitis and couldn't see the real picture.

Q: What was America, I mean at this time, I mean, did you feel that as long as Burma didn't turn violently red or that the Department of State, hence the American government was quite content to leave it as it was?

McLENDON: We were told in not so many words, we've got our hands full, we'd just as soon forget about you. We know you don't feel appreciated and you think all of your reporting is not appreciated and we know you think we don't give you any of our time, but we don't worry or think about Burma.

Q: Well, of course we are talking about a tremendous commitment in Indochina.

McLENDON: You're talking about an increasing commitment because the dividing line in Vietnam was '63 with the fall of Diem.

Q: You were there until '67 is that right?

McLENDON: '66. The end of '66.

Q: '66. Did you see Byroade getting anywhere?

McLENDON: Yes, I saw him beginning to get someplace. When Byroade finally got his first appointment with the head of the Burmese Government, I spoke to Byroade. I said, if you're going to overcome this, with ego I don't want to make it sound as if I had to tell Byroade how to conduct his business. Byroade I will say again was one of the shrewdest, the best ambassadors in terms of knowing his people and how to get his message across. Knowing his people, I mean knowing the government he was dealing with. I suggested to him that there were a lot of things that needed explaining. He had better be prepared to explain everything in terms that would be credible. He had to say that what made the Burmese feel suspicious was in fact not directed against the revolutionary government. Byroade spent weeks waiting for his appointment doing the most thorough preparation I've ever seen. He demanded and I think got agreements from CIA that they would brief him completely on everything they had ever done in Burma. That was the promise in any case and he was briefed very thoroughly. So this meeting made a start and then he was able to build on that and he began to make headway. The leader was beginning to at least trust him personally. Then we had an opportunity to invite the leader for a State Visit. Now this was not terribly popular with Washington at the time, but we proposed that it would serve both our interests to invite him for a State Visit to Washington because he was a representative of a thoroughly independent and neutral nation which had gone out of its way to make us feel unwelcome. By inviting him to Washington with full honors we would show to all the independent neutral nations that we had nothing against it. As long as it is genuine neutrality, we respect it and we'll work with it. It would show that he didn't just visit communist countries, but was respected and invited to visit the leader of the Western side. Somewhat to our surprise, he was invited. We got him in.

Q: Were you there when he went?

McLENDON: Yes.

Q: How did it go?

McLENDON: It went very well. Not without your usual glitches. You think everything and everyone is agreed and then they start bringing in the protocol people. They want to overturn everything you've set up. Well, that's what happened. That was the only big problem. It went very well. The leader did not want to wear a military uniform because he was aware that that would not be well received, and he did not want to wear traditional Burmese dress. He was very sensitive to the reaction that Westerners have to a man wearing a basically a sarong and a funny looking hat on his head with a bow on the side. In Burma, Burmese men wearing it look dignified and fine, but in a Western capital, no. He also detested white tie and tails. So, he was making a state visit to Japan on the same trip and they had managed to get agreement from Japan that he did not have to wear white tie and tails to call on the emperor and that was a first.

Q: Oh, yes.

McLENDON: The Japanese had waived their protocol which is very, very unusual.

Q: Court driven, yes.

McLENDON: So, then after he was already en route to London with the wardrobe he had packed, the White House protocol got in the act. They absolutely could not have a White House state dinner that was not white tie. We said, forget it. We pointed out, well, not in those terms, one doesn't talk so bluntly to the White House. We pointed out that if the Japanese royal family could waive their protocol, surely, surely the White House could find some way to do it. So, I don't know where it was decided in the White House, but it was decided to call it a family style dinner. Since we were all on such close terms, it was a family style dinner and it was so popular that LBJ decided to make that the style. He liked those family style dinners.

Q: Now, I've heard one of the things at least about later on that the way to make inroads with the ruling group of military officers there was golf. When you were there was golf much of an entree or not?

McLENDON: I don't recall the details. It may have been at one time, it may have been later, not during my time.

Q: Well, now, you left there the end of '66. Is that right? Where was Burma with the United States at that time?

McLENDON: I was sad that Burma made such a hash of its economic policies. It was just incredibly bad. I felt very sorry for that, but I felt that we were on a sound course. We were dealing with them in the only way they could accept. They could not at that time accept aid. Aid at that time would have been thrown away unless they were willing to do something sensible in terms of distribution.

Q: Yes, well, I thought we'd end at this point.

McLENDON: We were doing what they could accept and we were willing to do. Everybody by this time had calmed down and realized that they were indeed neutral and were really fiercely determined to stay that way. We had a limited role and as long as we accepted that it was a very limited role, we could get along just fine and we did. After I left it wasn't long before they were beginning to accept aid again in a limited manner where they had more control and then they began to cooperate on the drug effort.

Q: Were drugs a problem at the time you were there?

McLENDON: We did not recognize them so much as a problem, but yes. The golden triangle was in existence at that time and we were aware at that time that the KMT, the ex-KMT.

Q: KMT?

McLENDON: The remnants of the Chinese troops that had over the border from China into Thailand. They controlled the opium traffic from Burma through Thailand.

Q: Before we leave here and stop this interview, was there anything else in Burma, any problems or episodes or anything that we should cover?

McLENDON: Well, it depends on your interest. One thing that was fascinating in Burma was watching the attempt by the revolutionary government to impose these radical socialist policies from elsewhere, imported from elsewhere, on a largely rural, Buddhist, peasant society with highly individualistic ways. Another was comparing the theory of the communist socialist state and revolution with what happened in actual practice and at times it would move you to tears and at times it was just like watching a Marx Brothers comedy. It was hilarious.

Q: Well, another year has passed and this is December 16th, 1996. So, why don't we talk about your time in Burma, some of the events that you saw there and if there are any problems or specific things that you were dealing with?

McLENDON: I arrived four months after the socialist revolution had overthrown the former government. Immediately before my arrival there were student demonstrations in which the army turned the guns on the students. We never knew how many were killed, far more than the government ever admitted. The estimates were backed up by eyewitnesses who saw bodies being unloaded at hospitals and morgues. The number was well over 100 and some estimates over 200. It was a time that the revolution was just beginning to organize itself. I don't think that the revolutionary council came into power with any real framework or idea of what they wanted to do. They wanted to take over the country with a strong hand. They were I think fed up with politicians who could waffle and they had been convinced by some theorists among them that a radical socialist path would fit Burma and would enable them to develop the country more quickly. In fact they had as it turned out no concept at all of how to run an economy or how to run a government. They were simply very good at military intelligence and at ferreting out their opposition and arresting them.

Q: What was our feeling about the composition of the Burmese army, particularly the officer corps at this time?

McLENDON: The officer corps were not those who had served under British rule. These were the officers who had led the opposition, the nationalist opposition to the British. Those who had led the movement that eventually led to Burmese independence with the British were through. The army had remained loyal through the years of parliamentary rule, but they had become increasingly restless because the policies were causing more and more of the ethnic minorities to rebel against the central government.

I think they set about writing their policy after they took over and eventually came up with the Burmese way to socialism.

Q: Did we have any or was there any chance for us to have any input at that time? Did the embassy play, what sort of a role was the embassy playing during this period?

McLENDON: We and the other embassies were totally out in left field. They were not speaking to us. They were having nothing to do with us. They made it clear to any government employee that his career was in danger if he was friendly with foreigners. That feeling gradually spread so I would say the majority of Burmese were afraid of us. The Burmese were on the whole very friendly. They would have liked to be friendly and if you could get outside of Rangoon, they were friendly. Army officers had taken over the civilian posts of district superintendents and that sort of thing or at least were controlling them.

Q: You were there from when to when?

McLENDON: From July of 1962 to December of 1966.

Q: Well, you were there about four years. What did you do?

McLENDON: Well, as one of my colleagues put it, we became expert criminologists. We learned to interpret the newspapers very carefully, looking for very small indications, reading the editorials. That's where my training came in handy because I had spent ten months learning Burmese before I went out and I could read the Burmese newspapers which were far more revealing than the English language newspapers. It was very frustrating. Of course we had intelligence sources and we sometimes had good intelligence through those sources. There were still Burmese opposed to the government. There was basically a lot of popular support for not just the U.S., but Western powers. We also knew that every such contact was probably almost certainly known to the military intelligence and that may have deepened their suspicions of us. For the first couple of years I was there, the leader was really afraid that we were going to try to overthrow him. I think he really thought that. A lot of our former contacts were among his opposition and most of them ended up being arrested.

Q: Well, also, we had had a hand in some action that had taken place. This was somewhat earlier, but there had been some rebellions and the hand of the CIA was not completely hidden.

McLENDON: If you look back at that time, if you look back at the sixties, that was not so long after we had almost openly been involved in Guatemala. We were much more an activist in political struggles within countries then than we are now. These were the years of Vietnam. We had had close ties through our USIA with the young monks association, and specifically with the group in Mandalay more than in Rangoon. We had because the communists had made an attempt to infiltrate the Buddhist monks or at least so we thought. I think we helped them purchase a press, a printing press to put out their pamphlets and publicize their viewpoint. I, of course, was not then nor have I ever been aware of what our CIA might have been doing. When Henry Byroade came as ambassador, replacing Edgerton in July or August of '63, I'd been sent to take over Mandalay while one of the officers in charge was transferred. While I was in Mandalay some dissidents began their open opposition to the regime. One of their leaders started making speeches in Mandalay that were openly calling for resistance to this in his view communist government. Through his contact with our information office there, he sent word that he wanted to meet with me and we met at the home of our branch PAO, Jim Bradley? Bradfield? I'm terrible with names, worse every year.

Q: No problem.

McLENDON: But we met and this person made a direct appeal to the U.S. to intervene and displace this allegedly communist government. I explained that we had no intention, that we had our hands full in Vietnam and had absolutely no intention of taking any action in Burma.

Q: Let me stop here for just a minute.

This is tape three, side one with Ruth McLendon. Yes?

McLENDON: I even used my Burmese which was not fluent and it was very basic to put it in so many words, our interests in Burma were very limited, that as long as Burma remained independent and neutral then its government was of no direct concern to us. We were sympathetic with the need for a government to follow its own policies. He was polite, but he didn't take my word for it. I think a few months later he came to Rangoon and asked for and received an appointment with the ambassador where he was again turned down. I reported all this. By the time I returned to Rangoon Byroade had arrived but had yet to meet the leader. I think he may have, I think he had been allowed to present his credentials, but there was no way he could get an appointment to sit down and try to talk with him. He was very frustrated because Ambassador Byroade was one of the canniest men I've ever known, canny in terms of human nature and in relating to people and putting people at ease with him. He couldn't practice his skill because he couldn't get his foot in the door. He was very informal with his staff and he would wander around the embassy. At that time I think his wife had persuaded him to give up smoking and he would wander around the second floor of the embassy where our officers were trying to bum cigarettes from everybody around and all of us had been warned not to help him out. He'd just come and flop down in the chair by my desk and say, what can I do about this? You can't, until he is ready to see you, you can't. He said, why is he afraid, what is he afraid of? I said, you don't realize how it looks to him. Then I started listing all of the things that had gone on before and some were going on. We had an ex-CIA stringer, an American, who was a loose cannon still wandering around the country. We had of course the monks; that was the worst. I pointed out all of the contacts that had been made. Those who were in opposition to the military government or who had become opponents who had immediately run to us asking for help. I said, you know, the military intelligence knows very well they've been to see us, they just don't know what we said. If you ever do get that appointment with the leader you better be prepared to discuss our relationship, our activities, our policy in Burma from the beginning. So, he did. He spent those intervening months or weeks informing himself and he demanded that the Department lean heavily on the CIA to brief him fully on everything they'd ever done in Burma so that he was prepared to lay it all out on the table and discuss and answer any questions. He eventually did get his appointment with the leader and he made a reasonably good start and he had a further appointment and did discuss and explain and because, then he was able to bring his real strengths into play. They built a relationship of mutual trust so that in the last year I was in Burma we were able to arrange a state visit for the leader. I don't know how we were able to manage to do that, but we persuaded the White House to invite him. Our point of view was that it would be the clearest possible indication that we wished to be friends with the leader, the neutral, and that we would honor him and respect him, too. It went very well.

We had been on fairly close terms with Frank Trager who was a scholar, an historian on Southeast Asia and particularly on Burma. The Tragers visited Rangoon a couple of times while I was there and were always invited to the government residence and had dinner with the leader. On the second visit Trager I know came back and reported that the leader really trusted Byroade, and he was practically the only foreigner he did trust.

Q: How did we feel as the leader took power and consolidate his power during this time you were there up until 1966? What did we feel the role of the communist Chinese was?

McLENDON: We were split on that within the embassy. Military attachés tended to think that the Chinese were coming over the border any minute. We had one naval attaché who had some sources who were very happy to take his money and tell him anything he wanted to hear. He had some of the wildest reports from northern Burma in the Mandalay area. Our CIA had better sources and their reporting was much sounder. Before Byroade arrived, our chargé at the time tended to go with the military attaché and I know there was some strange reporting coming out of the embassy. While I was still up in Mandalay and when I came down on one visit before I was transferred back I stopped in to talk things over with the political counselor, Jim Martin. I said, some of these reports I've been reading, that doesn't go with anything we're seeing. Jim gave a sigh of relief and he said, "We have a problem here." He said, "I'm glad you put it that way. I don't feel that way at all. That's not my reading of the leader and where he would head. It's not Burmese and it's not, it just seems out of character." Our chargé pretty well lost his reputation over this handling of the embassy during that interim period and things settled down right after Byroade arrived. I think we were able to get the reporting back on track. Again, that was where my knowledge of Burmese came in handy. I got back to Rangoon and was able to read the two official versions of the working peoples daily, the English and the Burmese which were very different and the other Burmese language papers and I could pick up on things. I also was able to supervise the translation pool and select items that I thought important instead of leaving them entirely free to select the items that they thought were of interest, I selected some that I was particularly interested in. I think that was probably my greatest contribution to the embassy in those years that I could help them get the flavor of these very subtle, well, not very subtle, but was able to pick up on the editorial comment that was viciously anti-American, but also the editorial comment and the columns that were more subtly, but distinctly anti-Chinese. The headlines in all of the articles in the English language press made it sound as if Burma was right there in China's lap, but some of the other articles in the Burmese language press were much less complimentary to the Chinese. So the report I wrote was, I entitled it something like Warm on the Surface, Cool at the Depths and tried to put it in balance. This was practically my first experience in political reporting because I'd only done a little bit in Adelaide and that of no importance at all. I will always remember that one because Jim came in when I'd turned the draft in to him and he said, "I think that's the best report that's been prepared in this section since I've been here." We'd come out at the same time. I'd been delayed in the consular section for a while.

I tended to be sympathetic with what the leader was trying to do and this was later confirmed by Harrison Salisbury that he was just driven with the desire to keep his country isolated from what was happening in Vietnam and to keep it from being taken over by China or become a tool of the Western powers. He was just obsessed with this and the quote that Harrison Salisbury brought back to us after his interview with him was that looking at a map of Asia and he said, "I wish I had a pair of atomic scissors and I could cut us right out of there and move us out in the ocean."

Q: You left there in 1966?

McLENDON: The end of '66.

Q: Where did you go?

McLENDON: I went back to the Department.

Q: What were you doing in the Department?

McLENDON: I was assigned as direct, as chairman of the basic officers' course.

Q: You did that from '66 to?

McLENDON: I started out as assistant chairman.

Q: Yes. From when to when?

McLENDON: I did that for a year. It wasn't a good assignment for me because I needed desk experience if I were going to stay in political work. In fact, East Asia personnel had agreed to it only on a deal that FSI could have me for a year, but they had to release me to the Philippine desk after a year. There was no desk, appropriate desk opening in EA at the time of my transfer that I was due out.

Q: What was your impression, you're the first person who I've talked to who sort of had their hands on the junior officers when they came in at one point. What was your impression of the class or classes that you dealt with in this '66 to sort of '67 period?

McLENDON: We had fine classes. We had the ex-Peace Corps.

Q: Oh, yes.

McLENDON: We had the first of the Peace Corps graduates. They were fine officers. Not all of them survived the State Department, the Foreign Service system.

Q: I guess they were too used to being on their own?

McLENDON: They tended to be rebels. We had some and as anyone who has ever worked with the junior, the younger officers, it's such a pleasure watching them as they develop and rise.

Q: Did you find, was this too early in the game for them to be beginning about Vietnam or not?

McLENDON: Oh, no. We were running officer classes through at about six a year then, six weeks and then we'd have a break of about three or four weeks and then another. We had two classes. We always had evaluations at the end of the classes. At the time I was working with Alex Davit who was the coordinator of the junior officer training and my title was chairman. Alex was a great guy, very upbeat. I was trying to warn them about some of the frustrations and some of the problems and some of the problems that the Foreign Service needed to face and get its act together in terms of management. I wasn't talking policy; I was talking management and administration. I was upset at the second class. Alex had pretty well left me almost to run it myself with Jim Martin because it was a small class and he was phasing out and headed out for his next assignment. I was really crushed at one comment at the end of it on the evaluation at the end of it. One of the junior officers said it gave us the impression there was a great deal wrong with the Foreign Service, but not much we can do about it. I thought now there's a message for you. This was the end of the period of Crockett?

Q: Crockett.

McLENDON: Crockett and then William Macomber took over. It was the end of Crockett and Crockett had brought in all kinds of experimental things. This was the days of letting it all hang out.

Q: Sensitivity training.

McLENDON: Sensitivity training and that sort of thing. So, I went to one of those offices in the Department and I said, "What suggestions do you have for our training that will overcome this? Give them the feeling that this is their Foreign Service. They have to do something about it and they're the future and they're the ones who are going to need to be making some of these decisions." He said, "Well, let us organize something for you." So, what they did for us was, I have to admit in retrospect, not very impressive, but it was a lovely kind of show and tell with a jazzed up video or slides and music and all kinds of things. What made the difference with that class and this was the big class of the year, the summer class when you take in the ones who just are ready to come in from their graduate school or college; I was lucky enough to have Ed Adams. Ed agreed to postpone his retirement to stay on with that class. Ed and I divided the class and our whole approach was to turn them loose and encourage them to get out there and do their own thing and come up with their own ideas. All through that class we kept getting reports back of how blunt they were and they asked all kinds of impolite questions. Not impolite, but hostile questions. They were a joy to work with because as I said a lot of them were Peace Corps graduates and they were not to be treated like children or couch potatoes. They were a fine group and then a number of them were being assigned much against their will to Vietnam because this was the year that the Secretary made the decision, Secretary Rusk made the decision that we were going. We kept getting reports back that Foreign Service Officers made the best district liaison officers, much better than the military. They wanted all of the Foreign Service Officers that they could get and they took some of the best and brightest of our young officers and assigned them there much against their will. We fought that as hard as we could because it was not the assignment they should have had. Some of them had already served in Vietnam with the military. Some of them had Peace Corps service out in the boondocks and they did not need another similar assignment, but willy nilly they were snatched up and sent there. They were put in the military training center, which was based in Arlington Towers for the Vietnam program. That's when we really started to get complaints about them because they decided all right, we're going to have to take on a great deal of responsibility when we get to Vietnam. We'll just start right here. They did it their own way. I went as an observer when they had their war games. This was a Vietnam situation simulation game and our junior officers made havoc with it. The military was livid because they played by the rules, but they played with a far shrewder sense of what was actually likely to be going on in Vietnam. One of them was playing, I remember very well, the role of headman. His role in this simulation was headman of a village and he said if I were a headman in this particular village in Vietnam with the Viet Cong leaning on me I'd sell out. So, that's what he did. They were great. They made good reputations for themselves in Vietnam, but the military never cared much for them.

Q: No. It was a difficult crew. A little later I was in Vietnam running the consular section in '69 to '70 and I was getting feedback about them.

McLENDON: Then you had my graduates.

Q: Yes. It was a little difficult because to be the heart of the beast in the American Embassy. You had people, you had to almost sit on them to keep them from protesting in front of the embassy. They were smart people, I liked them and I always found that whole era was fun because you also got more interesting work out of this crew, but you really couldn't rely on absolute discipline.

McLENDON: No, you couldn't except they were self-disciplined. You couldn't rely on discipline which they disagreed with. That was a key division point between the old Foreign Service and the new.

Q: Well, I think most of us who went through that era as supervisors kind of enjoyed the challenge if you were willing to play with a challenge rather than to expect somebody to listen to your words of wisdom and say yes sir or yes ma'am.

McLENDON: I never had any trouble with that, did you?

Q: No, I thought it was great.

McLENDON: I liked their brains. I liked their gumption. I liked their creativity.

Q: I think all of us found, I mean those who like that sort of thing, it was great.

McLENDON: I know some more conservative Foreign Service Officers couldn't stand them. I had really hated going to FSI at the time that I did. Quite to my surprise I discovered that I thoroughly enjoyed working with the junior officers. I enjoyed them. I disliked what we were doing to them. I thought the training course was as dull as anything could be, just deadly dull.

Q: One of the problems I think is everybody wants to lecture to that group and it means that they don't get the most inspiring lectures either.

McLENDON: Well, that was another thing. I tried to point that out in staff meetings. John Stutesman was I guess in charge of the school of professional studies then and John encouraged new ideas up to a point. He would organize things and he would go preferably to an offsite place for a week together of a think tank. You would come up with all your ideas for doing things differently, but you never got around to doing anything differently. You never got around to the next step of putting this into motion. One of the last things I did in that job was to present my ideas for reorganizing the training course, but nothing was ever done.

Q: Then you moved in '67, was it?

McLENDON: In January of '67 I moved to the Philippine desk.

Q: The Philippine desk. You were on the Philippine desk from '67 until when?

McLENDON: Until I went to the War College in '69.

Q: In this time what was the state of our relations with the Philippines?

McLENDON: Incomplete effort to break the colonial ties. I had been in Manila. That was my first post as an officer. We had at the time negotiated the Langley Agreement, which would set up a preferential trade status for the Philippines. No, I'm sorry, the Philippines had preferential trade status from the time of independence. The Langley Agreement was supposed to begin to phase that out and it continued special preferences for American investors, special positions for American investors in the Philippines. When I had been on the Philippine desk we were facing the renegotiation of Langley and we had renegotiated the bases agreement, the military bases agreement, the other major source of problems for us in '65 I guess it was and we were satisfied with the renegotiation. I'm not sure. The Philippines thought they were satisfied until we came down to the finer points of interpretation. The Philippines was then and so far as I know still is, unsure of just how much they want to be independent of us. At the time I was serving in Manila, I think any honest poll of the Philippine public would have shown a majority preferred to remain with us or preferably become an American state. Even those who were most nationalistic in their talk were nervous about being on their own. They still had an inferiority complex. They didn't think they could survive in Asia with communists in control of China without us right there with our military. They didn't like to survive without a lot of assistance from us in addition to the packet that they automatically got with the bases. We were trying to roll back on that relationship and normalize it to put an end to this special relationship. Our military were perfectly happy with that special relationship as long as they needed their bases.

Q: Well, then to put it in fairer terms, I mean this was at the height of Vietnam.

McLENDON: Oh, this was at the height of the Vietnam War.

Q: Subic Bay and Clark Field were absolute key bases.

McLENDON: And the State Department we recognized that. We said, once Vietnam is over, then we can normalize, then we can talk about it and see whether we need those bases and see what, but no, we weren't talking. We were trying to encourage the Filipinos to think in terms of ending a special relationship. They talked about it a lot, but they didn't want to. I was lucky enough at that time to work with one of the smartest men I've ever known, Hoyt Price. Did you ever know Hoyt?

Q: No. Hoyt Price?

McLENDON: Hoyt Price, an economist. He had his Ph.D. in economics, but above his Foreign Service experience and his depth of knowledge in economics and his understanding of human nature, he had the soundest common sense of any man I've ever run across. When I talked with him I was curious about what we were going to do about the Langley agreement, what our position would be. I talked with Hoyt, what are we going to do to preserve these privileges, he said, "We're perfectly prepared to let Langley lapse and not replace it with any agreement. We are not prepared to give special preferences because the Philippines have to learn to compete." I said, "What about American investors?" He said, "Our position is that if the Philippines wants investments they will know what to do to make their country attractive to investors." I said, "Is this going to mean a lot of trouble?" He said, "If the Philippines wants investors, they will have to create the conditions for them. If they don't, if they really don't want that American investment, there isn't a treaty we could write with them that would be worth the paper its written on." I thought absolutely right. Absolutely right.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: We sat down several times with them to negotiate and when it came to the final round, the negotiations collapsed because we wouldn't budge. Their chief negotiator requested an emergency appointment, an immediate appointment with the Secretary and of course was given it to appeal, make this desperate appeal, don't let this these preferences go.

Q: Anything happen?

McLENDON: No, the opposition was firm that on the basis of, of course we were paying heavily for the bases, we paid through the nose for the Philippines, what did they call it? Civil action?

Q: Civil action group.

McLENDON: Group.

Q: In Vietnam.

McLENDON: Yes. We wanted a shopping list. We wanted the numbers of how many countries were actively supporting us in Vietnam and their price tag on that one was just out of reason.

Q: Quite a few Filipinos were working as third country nationals in Vietnam. I mean they and the Koreans were the two big groups that helped us maintain our forces there by working in the shops.

McLENDON: That is still a major source of foreign exchange for the Philippines, a major cash income for the Philippines.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: I mean not in Vietnam, but I'm thinking more of Saudi Arabia and places like that.

Q: Were there senators or congressmen closely identified with the Philippines who got to you all the time?

McLENDON: Well, it wasn't that they got to us all the time. The one who got to us all the time was the deputy under secretary of the air force. He was called up about every other day and was livid over something that had happened on the bases. We had a couple of nasty incidents on the bases when I was there. The first one involved a guard at Langley Point Naval Air Station who shot a Filipino who was trying to steal a bicycle and because he was armed only with a 45 killed him and you can't do much else with a 45, can you if you hit? It was one of those things. By the time we even had the embassy's cables reporting it, the Pentagon had already been geared up into action and we had Senator Russell's office calling and this senator's office and that congressman's office and they were all hauling out the big guns. The embassy very much wanted to give the Philippines jurisdiction over that case. Under the '65 bases agreement, the old bases agreement had been a question of whether an incident had occurred on base or off base and the '65 agreement was I think the one Japanese agreement. It was a question of whether the military personnel were on duty or off duty, if they were acting in performance of duties, then we had jurisdiction. In this case there was the proviso if his action while on duty clearly exceeded the bounds of his official duties. The argument that the embassy wanted to make was that his shooting the young man as he did in the torso and killing him was excessive use of force. Again, this is where Hoyt's common sense was our strength. When we talked about it with him at first I was eager to go with the embassy to demonstrate that we could give up jurisdiction. We trusted their judgment and Hoyt just looked at me and said, "If you were in the Philippines without diplomatic immunity, would you want to be tried in a Philippine court under those circumstances?" I said, "No." He said, "The Pentagon will never, never agree to that." He had a great deal of sympathy with it and when I thought about it I did, too because the young man had a good record. He had served with honor in Vietnam and I think he had been wounded. It was not a case of just a wild drunk or anything of that kind. So, the end result was that we took it. Our ambassador at the time was Governor Williams, Soapy Williams, an awfully nice guy, and just the nicest guy in the world. When we indicated that it was not going to be a clear cut, quick decision in favor of the embassy's point of view, he insisted on coming back to fight his own battle. It just consisted of having, talking to enough people and sitting in on enough meetings that he saw that there was no way. We tried to use what leverage we could to say all right, we'll agree that we have to claim jurisdiction, but you've got to clean up your act and for heavens sake, arm those guards with something less lethal than a 45 and give them clearer instructions and so forth.

It was a fascinating look into our relations, the heart of our relations with the Philippines and with the Pentagon. Just as I left the Philippine desk to go to the War College, there was another shooting. Oh, I'm sorry, as a result of the outcry over that case, the Philippines renounced the '65 agreement and we went back to the original bases agreement, the on base, off base. Then the next case that came up with a shooting that occurred on Clark Field or Subic, one of our personnel had been out in the jungle area on base shooting, hunting for wild pig. He shot a Filipino who was I guess bare from the waist up and to him he thought he looked like a wild pig. It was altogether a much worse shooting than the other one.

Q: Let me just stop here.

McLENDON: It was altogether a much worse case than the other one, but the Filipinos accepted it our claim of jurisdiction because it was on base. They had to.

Q: What type of government, who did the Filipinos have at that time and what was our impression or your impression of it, who was the chief of state and what?

McLENDON: This was during the earlier years of Marcos, Ferdinand Marcos. Washington was very high on him because he supported us in Vietnam and he had a beautiful wife and many of our leaders found her very charming. He frequently sent her back to Washington. She came two or three times a year during the time I was on the desk she was there. He didn't come at all. Our former consul general in Manila, Lewis Carson, had retired in Manila and had known Marcos quite well when he was a congressman and wrote for us an in-depth assessment of the man that was quite the most revealing I've ever read of any foreign leader. It was one of the first things that Hoyt gave me to read when I was reading in on the desk and after I'd read it I wanted to sit down and talk to him about it. I said, "I've read this." He said, "What do you think of it?" I said, "It's a great study, but why is everyone so high on Marcos?" He said, "What do you think of him based on this?" I said, "I thought he's very bright and he's a very shrewd politician, but I don't trust him. This is a man who could end democracy in the Philippines. I don't see any merit to him." I thought it was all there in that study if you read it closely enough. Again, this was something Hoyt and I agreed on, but we didn't go around trying to smear the chief of state of our area of responsibility. We didn't have the facts. We only had these hunches and then later, began to get the reports from American businessmen who had been there with experience of 30 years in the Philippines. They were saying we're accustomed to the Philippines and its ways and we're accustomed to paying the cut, but this administration is really beyond bounds. We had all of these warnings. That's why I couldn't understand once the Vietnam War was over why we still continued to be so tied to the Marcos regime because by then they had done away with elections.

Q: Did you get any, was there any change in our attitude towards the Philippines, you were there during a major transition from the Johnson administration to the Nixon administration.

McLENDON: Yes.

Q: Did you get any feel for a difference?

McLENDON: No.

Q: Because we were involved in the war.

McLENDON: There couldn't be that much difference because as long as we were dependent on those bases. We did what we could to make sure that Nixon was aware of Marcos and of the problems with his regime and to beware of Imelda. Do you remember that Nixon made that trip in July, I think it was July of '69 through Asia and Manila was one of his stops.

Q: Yes, and he went to Guam and this was where he articulated the Vietnamese doctrine I think.

McLENDON: Yes. Well, of course the Philippines were not high on his list of priorities at the time, but it was necessary for him to stop there because of the relationship. We prepared the briefing papers and our guidelines from the White House were to make them short and punchy and avoid diplomatic language. We took them at their word and tried to do just that, but the sixth floor used a red pencil on our efforts. They wouldn't let me describe Imelda Marcos, compare her to Eva Peron or Madam Nhu.

Q: Were you getting anything from your Filipino contacts, how they regarded the Vietnam War and our involvement in it?

McLENDON: In the Philippines?

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: They were terrified of communists. They had fought and were still to a degree fighting their own communist rebellion. In general they supported us in Vietnam, but I think like all of the states that were close to us in Southeast Asia they were becoming very nervous that we weren't doing better in Vietnam. Perhaps not as early as '69. I think I'm reading too much in that from my experiences later in Thailand.

Q: Well, then you went to the War College in '70 to '71? Which War College did you go to?

McLENDON: The National War College.

Q: The National War College.

McLENDON: Yes.

Q: That was high Vietnam then, we were beginning to pull out. What were you getting from our military at that time when you were working there?

McLENDON: Almost all of them had had tours in Vietnam, at least one tour and some of them multiple tours. All of them were extremely frustrated with a war that we were not exerting the kind of force to win. All of them were humiliated, chagrined and absolutely outraged at the fact that they had had to fight in a war that was not supported by the public and they were cursed and hissed when they came back to this country. They were supposed to be ashamed of wearing the uniform that they'd always been proud of. All very human reactions. I sympathize with them. I opposed the war in Vietnam. I just thought, I didn't know anything about Vietnam, but if it had been in Burma, I know it would have never worked in Burma. The Burmese might not have been so efficient fighting us, but they wouldn't have done as much good to try and put the wrong kind of government in. Anyhow, no, the dominant feeling of my class and it was from the whole year we wanted to know how we got ourselves into this. What combination, what decisions or combination of decisions put us there in the circumstances in which we were and as each speaker came, with his presentation, the questions would zero in on decision points and why this decision? With each speaker from the point that he had handled, because we were, I won't say traumatized, except that I don't see how anyone could have seen close up action in Vietnam and not have been somewhat traumatized. We were almost obsessed by this and we got some very interesting answers. No one gave us the whole picture, but a composite picture began to emerge of Roger Hilsman on the decision to dump Diem. I've forgotten who it was on the decision not to ask congress to declare war. Oh, Melvin Laird, maybe.

Q: Secretary of Defense.

McLENDON: Yes. Secretary Rusk talked about his generation, the generation that saw England go to war unprepared. Rusk had been a student in England at the time, a Rhodes scholar at the time of the Oxford union debate, against a fight for king and country and then saw them go into war unprepared after that. His generation was traumatized by the unwillingness and inability to stand up to aggression. He just didn't see the distinction between that and what was happening in Vietnam.

Q: You then, this would be 1970 you went where, or '71?

McLENDON: In '70. In August of '69 I went into the War College and in June of '70 I went on out to Bangkok.

Q: What was your position in Bangkok?

McLENDON: I was deputy to the political counselor.

Q: You were in Bangkok from when to when?

McLENDON: '70 to '72.

Q: Who was the ambassador then?

McLENDON: Leonard Unger.

Q: Yes.

McLENDON: Bangkok was one of our largest embassies at the time because it was kind of our political base for the operations in Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos. We had not one political section, but three on the State Department side of the house and we're not talking about the third floor.

Q: The third floor being?

McLENDON: CIA.

Q: The CIA.

McLENDON: Which was and of course, they were very large. We had a conventional political section, that was the section I was in and we had a political military section and then we had, what did they call it, public safety? Development in safety? At that time we were deeply involved in helping the Thai government develop its rural areas so that it would not easily become a Vietnam, not that the two countries were similar in a way.

Q: I take it we were concerned about rural insurgency?

McLENDON: Rural insurgency and strengthening village democracy and the economy and all that and we had a lot of our aid that went in that direction. We had our USIA deeply involved. They had a lot of their junior officers assigned in provinces where their main function was not running a branch office, but helping the local government with its public relations. They were inspected about that time and that policy was changed shortly thereafter and they pulled out their personnel from divisions of that type.

Q: Now, when you look at this, in those countries we had huge political sections and all this and when you think about it, what does it translate into when it gets back to the people who use it. Sometimes one almost has the feeling that we tend to throw people at a problem and money at a problem rather than it's hard to decide what are our interests and all.

McLENDON: I thought that our whole approach in Thailand was sadly skewed in that direction - throwing too many people in and doing things that the Thai could only do for themselves. The Thai aren't that bad for doing for themselves. The government we were dealing with was corrupt at the top, but the king was a force of strength as he is now. The Thai have for the most part been very capable of looking after their own best interests in foreign affairs and they were doing it then. I had the highest respect for their foreign minister and their staff. There was one policy, one policy proposal of ours that I won't go into because I doubt that it has been declassified that I thought was really suicidal, well, not suicidal, but really about the worst thing that we could do. It was being pushed very strongly from the White House and our ambassador had to try and present it there and did. I know I worried about it until I finally read the report of the meeting and saw the questions they asked and thought thank God they know enough to protect themselves.

Q: Did you have many dealings with the Thai government?

McLENDON: No, I didn't. I didn't speak Thai, which wasn't necessary. Most of them either spoke very good English or had their translators, interpreters with them. I did not in Burma develop skills at representation and developing and using contacts. I didn't pick up on it in Thailand and that was fine. Before I left Thailand I made a decision to drop out of political work and return to consular work where those skills could be less in demand and where I thought I did have skills that I could put to good use. I liked political work from the research and analysis point, but I just didn't take to it.

Q: I know how you feel. I stayed in consular work mainly because the development and the work with representational skills, really is social as a long term, but it's a very strong social component. If you feel that that's not your thing, there are other things one can do.

McLENDON: I had a good friend who was director general of information in the Thai foreign ministry at the time and I wouldn't have even used him. When we were together it was as if we were old friends and classmates and we relaxed and enjoyed each other's company. He knew that I didn't pester him with questions and he didn't pester me with requests.

Q: What feeling, what were you getting from the Thai seeing our effort in Vietnam, this was '70 to '72 really winding down, where was it going? Were the Thai beginning to wonder about our commitment or what were you getting?

McLENDON: Yes, they were. I don't know how we handled that with Thailand after the collapse of Vietnam as we pulled out of Vietnam with the collapse of Vietnam, but someone must have handled it reasonably well because we remained close. We remain close allies and there was a time I didn't think our relationship would survive that.

Q: What was your feeling about the CIA?

McLENDON: They had some of the smartest people around and they had very good sources. Our political counselor, Larry Pickering, was a Thai language officer and this was his second or third, third tour I think in Thailand and he had good, useful contacts. He did very good reporting. Most of our other officers were talented. But they were largely wasted because Ambassador Unger was running such a large operation and he felt he had to be informed in detail on such a wide area including all of the neighboring countries that most of our political section junior officers and most of the mid-career officers spent most of their time doing briefing papers for the ambassador and seldom were given the time to go out and develop information for reporting. I thought it a terrible waste. It's just a function of the size of the operation when you're trying to.

Q: What was your impression of Ambassador Unger?

McLENDON: Again, he was a Thai specialist, fluent in Thai, deeply knowledgeable. He cared deeply about the country. I thought he was too willing to carry out bad instructions from Washington without questioning them. We were so wrapped up in Vietnam and I thought the embassy was out of touch with the feeling back home. I thought they underestimated the strength of the opposition and the fact that we were one way or another going to be forced out of that war and that we couldn't play around as we had before. They were not as sensitive as I thought they could be to how much we used to conceal from congress about what we were doing. This was of course after some of our former allies in congress were opposing us very strongly on Vietnam and questioning everything we did. I was out of step. I was totally out of step at that embassy. That was another thing, another reason that made it the hardest assignment I ever had and I thought the least, I thought I was at my least effective.

Q: Well, then I thought we might stop at this point. You left there in 1972? I take it you asked for a shorter tour, didn't you?

McLENDON: I managed to get my position abolished after an inspection. I volunteered it, which did not raise my rating with my boss.

Q: No. Where did you go then?

McLENDON: I had to go home on emergency leave because my mother had a very severe heart attack at that time. So, I left even before my travel orders had come in or my assignment had been made. I had to stay at home helping my father with her for three months and then by that time or not long after I got home actually they had assigned me to Paris as chief of the American Services side of the consular section.

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

End of interview