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## Interview with Sir William Harding for Diplomatic Oral History

26 March 2014

*So, Bill, would you like to tell me how it was that you came to choose the Foreign Service as a career?*

It was a tortuous path really, because it began when I was at school. My house master, talking to me, I think in my last year, said, 'I think that the right thing for you to do is to try for the Foreign Service.' And I said, 'oh, how interesting.' I thought about it a bit and then I went off and joined the Royal Marines, doing my National Service, which I prolonged a bit. It took me to Cambridge on a short course and then two and a half years serving in the corps. By the time I came out in 1948, I thought, Well, I think I've had enough to do with the government and military service and maybe I should branch out and think in terms of going into commerce. I did think about that. I went to the University Careers board and they gave me some introductions. I was offered a couple of jobs, one with Imperial Tobacco and the other with Cadbury's, I think. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought over the conversation I'd had with these guys who didn't impress me awfully, I began to think I had made a wrong turning and that perhaps I should have directed my steps at the Foreign Office. I talked to my tutor at St John's College, Cambridge, a very intelligent guy, and he said, 'Well, I think you should go for it.' So that's how, in the end, I did go for it. But it was a bit back and forth. But you might say interesting that my house master made that recommendation before I had even left school. So I got into the service and after the usual elementary training in the office I was sent to Singapore.

### **SINGAPORE 1951-2**

Bear in mind that not only had I not travelled to the Far East, I hadn't travelled anywhere. Nobody travelled in those days. And when you did travel, you travelled usually by boat. And so I went by boat; I went on a cargo ship, of the Glen line, and we stopped in various places like Aden and Colombo and so on, and we eventually got to Singapore, and unloaded ourselves. I was greeted by somebody from the Commissioner General's office, which is

what I was joining, and taken along and installed in a really quite commodious flat, with another guy, whom I didn't know, called Adrian Enthoven, who was reputed to be a rather difficult person. But he and I got on fine. Then I was moved to a little flat of my own in somebody's converted garage, which doesn't sound very convenient, but in fact was rather fun. It gave me a lot of independence. I had a cook and a dog and I was as happy as Larry. In brackets, I would say that the place I lived in, called Fern Hill, became one of the most sought after residential areas in the whole of Singapore. It now has the huge Shangri-La Hotel, thirty storeys high, looking over it. It is extremely beautiful, wonderfully well-kept and it's worth absolutely billions of dollars. And there was little me, just not knowing this, in this rather commodious estate, in which I lived in this flat, with gardens and gardeners. And down at the bottom of the garden was a little clump of palm trees. It was a Malayan kampong. Because in those days in Singapore, I can't tell you the exact population, but probably the majority were Malays, but you didn't see them very much. They did the menial tasks; they were also drivers. I had a part-time driver and he was Malay. The Malays lived in this kampong, which was a village, which you might have in the middle of Malaya. You wouldn't have known that it wasn't in the middle of Malaya, with palm trees and other sort of greenery around. It was quite bizarre, looking back on it. The famous, or infamous, division and, indeed, hostility between the Chinese and the Malays was under the surface, so you didn't see it, but it was there. The Malays resented the superiority of the Chinese, the fact they had all the top jobs and the Malays had all the menial tasks. There were also some Indians there too, but not so many. There are Indians everywhere.

How was Singapore? It was a colony, but it was not a very usual colony. It was a large armed camp. It had very big establishments of all three services, Navy, Army and Air Force, and masses of generals and admirals and air marshals, because it was the nexus of the old British Empire in South East Asia. It was a strategic base, a command post. This was headed up, you might say, by Malcolm MacDonald, who was the Commissioner General for South East Asia, with the rank of minister of the government, and I was on his staff. Did I see Malcolm MacDonald? I think I saw him about twice in the year that I was there. I was a rather lowly form of animal life. But I enjoyed my job enormously because it was all very new. I had all this freedom I hadn't had in England. I had been through the war in England, then ration-ridden, post-war Britain was not a nice place to live in. And here was this lovely, comfortable, colonial society, where there were gin and tonics and all these other delights.

The thing that I found useful in my career later on was that all the Whitehall departments and all the services were represented in this gigantic Phoenix Park, which was the Commissioner General's camp, as it were. So you got to know all these guys, and you got to understand where they were coming from, what their different interests were, how they meshed together or didn't mesh together, including the Intelligence Services. I found it all fascinating, and it stood me in good stead. Later on in my career when I had quite a lot to do with the military, and having not only been in the Marines, but also kicked off in Singapore where I knew all these military people, it helped me to re-insert myself in that particular world. So it was a very good training ground.

The second part of my stay I shared a house with John Heath, who was in the Foreign Office. He was the number two to the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Michael Stewart, with whom he had serious differences, you might say. John Heath was a very intelligent, very sophisticated character, who introduced me, a tyro, to a lot of interesting things. Classical music was one of them. My parents, neither of them was musical and we didn't have much classical music in the house, except what I brought into it. John had the most wonderful collection of records, at that time we were just beginning 33 rev, and he had this big collection and then I started collecting records too. And I started collecting some books. He was one of the early members of the Folio Society. I've got quite a lot of Folio Society books around here and it's thanks to John that I got that introduction. So you might say culturally my horizon was enlarged a lot by my time in Singapore.

Another friend of mine was Oliver Wright, who later became ambassador in Washington. He and his wife were tremendously keen on opera, so I got to learn quite a lot about opera when I was there, too. So you might say that, although Singapore had nothing to do with the Diplomatic Service really, except tangentially, it was an extremely good training ground for a young stripling like me. What happened next? Burma. Shall we talk about that?

### **BURMA 1952-55**

*Yes, why don't we? Did you go straight to Burma?*

Yes. I went on a ship, of course. As I say, we went everywhere by ship, unless there was great haste involved. I went by ship, calling at Penang in Malaysia. I arrived in Rangoon and was met and taken to a house that I shared with another guy. No, I'm wrong there. I was

taken to a house that was divided in two, a small bungalow, really. The other part of the bungalow was occupied by Elizabeth Barraclough, who was the Chief Information Officer of the Embassy, in charge of publicity and that sort of thing. A very bossy lady, but with a good heart. She didn't really give me any trouble. I had this little half of a small house. I was allocated a servant, who was a Tamil, Raji. Raji was a most engaging and helpful sort of fellow, who worked well. He was one of the worst cooks I've ever encountered. I had a friend of mine from the Embassy to dinner with a good bottle we'd found somewhere or other, not easy to find in Rangoon in those days. The chicken or whatever it was, was OK and then along came the pudding which was a bastardised version of a sort of rice pudding. But my friend, Ellis Morgan, said, 'Bill, I'm sorry. I can't eat this.'

What was the Embassy like? When I first got there the ambassador was one of these rather unsuccessful people in the service. I think he had been given the Embassy in Rangoon as a consolation prize. His name was Richard Speaght and I had very little to do with him. He was generally regarded as pretty useless. On one occasion he gave to the Foreign Minister a book on Burma, in English. I can't remember what it was called now. And when he next saw the Foreign Minister, the Foreign Minister treated him rather coldly and Richard said to him, 'Did you enjoy that book?' And the Minister said to him, 'Have you read it?' And Richard said, 'Well, no, I haven't, actually.' He said, 'Well, I suggest you read and you'll see why I wasn't very pleased with it.' It was a colonialist book, rather awful. But it just showed the sort of person Richard was. He didn't look beyond the next step, as it were, and he didn't see the possible consequences of his actions. He was pretty much of a disaster.

The Embassy was full of interesting people. It had people from the Intelligence Services; it had many representatives of the armed forces, in fact there was a small military mission that was supposed to be training the Burmese even then. Our relations with the Burmese had always been slightly tense, much more tense than in the case of the Pakistanis and the Indians, who remained in the Commonwealth, as it was then founded, whereas the Burmese declined membership of the Commonwealth and wanted to go their own way. I think they never got over the insult of being brigaded together with India in the colonial days, and in fact governed from India. The Viceroy in Delhi commanded not only India and what became Pakistan, but also Burma. The Burmese didn't like that at all. And it was actually very insensitive, when you come to think of it.

The Burmese government was extraordinarily inept. It was a sort of half-baked Socialist government, rejoicing in the title Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, commonly known in the Embassy as the AF Piffle. They were conspicuous by their ineptitude. They had no idea of administration; they didn't know anything about diplomacy, and they didn't want anybody to tell them about it. So from that point of view the Burmese were a bit of a write-off. They didn't have a very important strategic position in South East Asia. Of course, we were all worried about Mao Tse-tung and the Long March, and Communism, and China and so on. The Burmese, although next door to China, paid no attention to it at all. I don't think I ever saw a Chinese politician in Rangoon.

*Was it true that at that time Burma was economically much more prosperous than many of its neighbours that subsequently became much richer?*

Well, I'd say yes and no. Its most prosperous time was before the War, in the colonial days. It was one of the rice baskets of South East Asia. It exported rice; it exported oil; it exported precious stones; it exported timber in large quantities. It was a rich country and its resources were exploited assiduously by the British in the Bombay-Burma Company and people of that kind. It was a rich country, yes, but partly because of maladministration and partly because of the fact that there was a lot of internal strife in Burma, and there are still relics of that today, between the various nationalities, the biggest of whom were the Shans, in the Shan States. I got to know them better later on, as I'll mention. People like the Shans, the Kachins, the Chins, all of whom were rebellious to one degree or another against this incompetent and unpleasant Burmese government. The net result was that the economy, already seriously dislocated by the War, went downhill.

There are two things particularly specific to Burma that one has to remember; one is that Burma has historically been a very go-it-alone country, run by a king, a succession of kings, mainly descended by blood, in both senses, i.e. parental relationship, but also a lot of killing went on. There was an infamous occasion in the nineteenth century when King Thibaw ascended the throne and had all his, not only brothers, nephews, cousins, but anybody remotely related to him, put in a red hessian sack and bludgeoned to death and thrown into the river, the Irrawaddy. That was with the idea to make sure that you had no rival who could challenge your power. So they had a history of pretty blood-stained monarchs, some more enlightened than others, and very sealed off from the rest of the world, including Thailand. Thailand was perhaps the only country with which they had anything like close relations, and

those close relations were mainly warlike: they invaded each another's countries and laid waste to them. So there was not a huge amount of sympathy, historically, between the Burmese and the Thais.

The other thing to remember is how profoundly Buddhist the Burmese are. They belong to the Theravada strain of Buddhism, as opposed to the Mahayana strain which predominates in Tibet and China, etc. Theravada: the two principal countries are Ceylon, rather Sri Lanka now, and Burma. There was a lot of scholarly work done by Burmese monks, of the same kind that we used to have among Christian monks, very studious, very erudite, researching, collating. Intelligent people, no question about it, but very cut off from the rest of the world. Now, shall we go from Rangoon to Maymyo?

*Yes, I understand you spent some time living upcountry in Burma.*

I did indeed. I was despatched to be the Acting British Consul in Maymyo. What was Maymyo? Maymyo had been in the colonial days the seat of the British Government in the hot season, rather like in India where the Viceroy moved from Delhi to Simla. Maymyo was the Simla of Burma and the governor and his staff and the High Command moved lock, stock and barrel to Maymyo. Of course, along comes the war with the Japanese, it was overrun, laid waste, but after the war they reconstructed it. Maymyo again became the headquarters of the North Burma Command, the independent North Burma command of the Burmese Army. And there was this little consulate to take care of British subjects who'd been left behind, as it were, of whom there were quite a lot. And that was what I was sent to do. And I quite enjoyed doing it. I was all by myself, in the sense that I wasn't married, which in a way would have been an advantage. I lived in a quite sizeable house by myself. I had a vice consul and a proconsul and a wireless operator - in those days of the Diplomatic Wireless Service, that's how we communicated - called Tex Hill, lovely guy. And then, of course, a mass of servants of various kinds, cooks and butlers and gardeners and people like that, not all that many, but enough to keep me happy.

There was not a lot of work for me to do in the Consulate itself. Most of it was done by my very competent Burmese secretary, a woman, very good. I spent quite a lot of time, certainly at least once a month, I went off on tour. I went on tour with my driver who was also as it were my batman and looked after me and made sure that everything was in order. A rather naughty boy who had a girl in every port, as it were. I used to go to a procession of rest houses and even smaller places, where, traditionally, visiting officials had lodged, rather like

circuit judges, only much less comfortable. As I lived on the fringe of the Shan States, which is where Maymyo is, at 4000ft on the Shan Plateau, lovely micro-climate, where they grew strawberries and lots of lovely flowers, which they exported to Rangoon, I used to visit the Shan Sawbwas. The Sawbwas were the local chieftains, and you might think, chieftains, rather primitive people. Not at all, they were extremely sophisticated; some of them sent their children off to England to be educated, and they were on the whole rather more open than the Burmese proper, the ethnic Burmese. They liked the British very much; they had happy memories of the British. And the Burmese always suspected them of being rather in league with us and against them. However, it was my business to keep them sweet, and our relations with them sweet, which is what I did.

While I was there ... bear in mind that we are talking about the early days of the Cold War and Burma was one of those pawns in the game. Both sides wanted to be nice to Burma and get them on their side, and so while I was there, we had a visit from Tito, of all people, Marshal Tito from Yugoslavia. The Burmese government got themselves into a great state about having somebody as well known in the world as Tito, and concentrated all their resources on this project. The North Burma Command, which he visited in Maymyo, had a big dinner for him and a friend of mine there came round to me, cap in hand, asking if he could borrow my silver. Rather sweet, wasn't it? This wasn't Consulate silver, this was mine that I happened to have. Then the Foreign Minister gave a reception in Mandalay, down on the river, the Irrawaddy, for Tito and invited all the notables and also the Acting British Consul. So I went along there. We didn't have tropical uniform in those days; previously of course people did. So I think I wore a blazer or something like that: it was very hot. And I was introduced to Tito. So here was this imposing, very stocky, well-built fellow with these piercing, piercing light blue eyes, which bored into you. He was a man of few words and he said, 'What does the British Consul do here? Why have you got a British Consul?' So I said, 'Well, precisely in order to look after British interests and specifically the stay-behind British subjects who have elected to remain in Burma and make their home here and who need to be looked after.' And he gave me such a look of scorn that I practically melted into the floor. It was one of those encounters that marks you for a long time. Later on, not in my day, one of my successors, a good friend of mine, Cranley Onslow, who became a well-known politician, was visited by none other than Bulge and Krush, do you remember? Bulganin and Khrushchev. So you see, people did tread a path to Burma's door. And also we had in those days the Secretary General of the United Nations who was

Burmese, U Thant, actually thought to be a very competent Secretary General, unlike some. So Burma was not the centre of the universe, though the kings used to think it was, but because of the particular political scene of those days, people did want to go to Burma to try and get them on their side.

What else is there to say about Maymyo? Not a lot. It has no strategic interest; it has no commercial activity. It is, and was, a relic of the past, but, anecdotally, I can say that the Commander-in-Chief South East Asia i.e. the British Commander-in-Chief who was in Malcolm MacDonald's office, came up to visit. I thought he was a real blockhead; he was Australian, if I remember rightly. I was in the airplane with him after he had visited North Burma Command and that sort of thing. Oh yes, he said, 'I served in Maymyo,' said he. 'I remember exactly where our encampment was situated, let's go and see it.' So we went off into the scrub in a Landrover and came to a sort of clearing where there had obviously been the remains of houses and a few chimneys and that sort of thing. He located his house, which really was just a chimney and a fireplace and not much else. Then he said, 'We used to sit in front of the fire here and when we weren't sitting in front of the fire, we were exercising in the polo pit.' Do you know what a polo pit is? It's a thing where you sit on a make-believe horse in the middle of this pit and you whack a ball around it. And he said, 'It must still be here.' We struck out into the bush and we found the polo pit. So he was thrilled, of course. And he said, this buffoon, in the plane on the way back, 'Now I know that my northern flank is secure in Burma.' I thought, Good God, you haven't read your history for a start. I thought that just typified the useless staff visit that used to be made in those days.

### **PARIS 1956-59**

*So, Bill, after Burma, you moved from a place which was really very remote, to one of the cities that counts itself as the centre of the universe. In 1956 you went to Paris.*

I did. I was quite surprised to be posted to Paris because at one moment, a year or two before, when I was home on home leave from Burma, they talked about sending me to Phnom Penh, in Cambodia, and then they decided instead to send me back to Burma, because I knew it and they sent me to Maymyo to be Acting British Consul. But they said, 'We don't think we'll send you to Phnom Penh because we don't think your French is good enough.' So then the next thing after being there I was sent to Paris. In fact, that was a bit of a slander because my French was reasonably good, even at that time. I had been taught by a

succession of very good teachers since my prep school in Sussex, through my public school afterwards, and so I had a very good grounding in French, and what passed for a good accent, too. So I wasn't all that surprised to be sent to Paris. I went there for a fortnight to brush up my French, stayed in a French family, spoke French all the time, and that was helpful in getting me attuned to Paris. By that time I was married to Sheila, and we had already one baby boy, Rupert, whom we took with us to Paris and we stayed in a flat on the sixth floor near the Etoile and I began to plunge into affairs French.

But they were rapidly overshadowed by what was going on in the Mediterranean, where we, the British, had taken it into our heads, together with the French, to invade Egypt, which is what it amounted to, and try and reassert our authority there, in other words, to confront Colonel Nasser, who was President of Egypt, with all the folderol that we know about afterwards. Now this serious expedition, most of which started out in Cyprus, I think, was an incredibly laborious exercise. It took forever to get the troops there; there they were steaming along at about 12 knots or something. Even with the communications of those days, which were not as instant as they are now, it was pretty ludicrous. This exercise was a slow motion march to defeat. We found ourselves in Paris in the only country in the world that was in support of this exercise, because we were joined together with the French in this attack. As is well known, this was mounted in enormous secrecy by very few people, politicians mainly, without their political advisers, and without the Ambassador in Paris being informed, Gladwyn Jebb, not a man to be trifled with. You can imagine how cross he was when he discovered that Eden and Selwyn Lloyd had been talking to Pineau, the French Foreign Minister, without Gladwyn being in the loop at all. He was taken by surprise by this ludicrous exercise, as everybody else was. What about the effect on the Embassy? Well, it polarised the Embassy, because the military attachés and some of the other people on the whole instinctively stood by our boys and thought this must be the right thing to do, and this Nasser was an awkward bugger and needed to be chased out. Whereas the politicians, like myself, thought where do we think we are going in this modern world, what sort of an exercise is this? Where can it possibly lead to? Even if we didn't know the strategic balance precisely, this is surely a no-win situation. I remember having a talk on the telephone with my stockbroker in London and you can imagine my stockbroker was very gung-ho and go and give the Gyppos a bloody nose sort of thing. I had this long conversation with him, Rupert Lebutt he was called, and he ended by saying, 'Of course I respect your opinion, Bill, but I must say most of the people that I deal with back here are very much in favour of this

exercise and we hope it's a great success,' which of course it wasn't. It was another large nail in the coffin of the British Empire really.

*Were there differing opinions inside the Embassy? Did it become very bitter?*

No. It was not bitter, no.

*And what about the French? How did the French reaction to what happened at Suez affect you, and how did it compare with the British reaction?*

I think the French were completely taken by surprise, for one thing. But on the other hand, they were still very much on the colonialist bandwagon. Remember they still had Algeria and Morocco, indeed. And their colonial spirit was just as lively as ours was. So they were quite glad to be in on this exercise, if it looked as if it were going to succeed. Of course, as soon as it became apparent that it wasn't, they changed sides. As is their wont. And life became a bit awkward in Paris for those who had very close dealings with the French authorities, which I, being a very junior fellow, didn't. But it could have poisoned the atmosphere; I wouldn't say it did, at all. But there were very obvious divisions between people who thought this and people who thought that within the ranks of the Embassy itself. But it was all pretty civilised.

*And following the events of Suez in 1956 came the Queen's visit in 1957, in part perhaps to strike a note of solidarity between the two countries.*

Indeed. I don't think that it had an immediate political significance, in the sense that there was any attempt to patch over the Suez crisis, or anything like that. I think it was just that the Queen had been crowned in '53 and I don't think she'd been anywhere else. She'd probably been to Washington, I don't recall. But certainly France was number one on her list. And over she came. And the French just adored her. They absolutely fell on their faces. I won't say they worshipped her, but she was like a goddess to them. They were so enormously taken by her; and she, I would say, by them, by the reception that she got. It was a fairy story, really. The fairy story aspect of it was magnified by one or two things: there was an opera staged in the great opera house in Paris and the Queen arrived. Everybody was wearing full dress; all the women wearing every jewel they had, many of them not dusted off since before the war. When she arrived at the Palais Garnier, I think it's called, the famous opera house, which is a pretty magnificent building, like so many French buildings are of the nineteenth century; she arrived and she came up the stairs, the white marble stairs in front of

the Opera House, under the klieg lights of the television, and it was the most extraordinary spectacle. Sheila and I were standing up in the gallery, looking down at this. And you could hardly see her for the blaze of her jewels. It was extraordinary. It was, indeed, like a fairy story. The other thing I would say I remember particularly about it: we had a big reception at the Embassy Residence, directed by Gladwyn Jebb who was in top form, wearing his court dress, with lots of frogging and his sword and his silk stockings and all that stuff. I was of the party, in the sense that I was a young man in the Chancery of the Embassy and I was dragooned into – no dragooned is the wrong word, as I was very glad to be there – into being there and helping as I could. So I stood just behind the Queen when we were waiting for President Coty and other notables to arrive. She had just been on this famous boat trip up the Seine. I think it was on a glorified *bateau mouche* and a special display had been arranged for her. Everything was floodlit; there were fireworks and the Queen was dazzled by this, no question about it. Young Queen, I mean she was, how old was she? She is about a year or two older than me, so in her early thirties, and I remember she stood in front of me, getting up on her toes and going back on her heels, up on her toes and back on her heels, and she looked so thrilled with the whole thing; it was really a delight to see. That visit was something that anybody who took part in it would always remember. And the great people of Paris remembered it too. Even the *banlieux rouges* didn't complain about it, you know, the Communist belt. So I would say that it was a great success, not because it had any great political context, but because it resealed the *Entente Cordiale*.

I ought to mention something about Gladwyn Jebb himself, the Ambassador. He was a grandee; I would say a self-styled grandee too, frightfully pleased with himself. A very arrogant man, but very competent, highly intelligent, had had a good war. He was in the Ministry of Economic Warfare, I think. He was, either before or after, at the United Nations. He was immensely superior and some people couldn't stand that, but a lot of other people looked past that at his extreme competence. Certainly, from my lowly position in the Embassy, he was a very big figure, who was no threat to me. On the contrary, he was very nice to me. I remember the first meeting I had with him; I was introduced to the presence, in his office. After he had talked rather condescendingly to me for a while, he said, 'Ah, I've got a book that might interest you.' It was *To The Finland Station*, you probably know it. He handed me this book about Marx and all that, and he said, 'You can have it rebound before you give it back to me.' So I thought, Wow! I must think about that one. So you'll be glad to hear, or perhaps you won't be glad to hear, that I did have it rebound, but I never gave it back

to him. I had dealings with Gladwyn afterwards. Fast forward to 1987, I had just retired from the Foreign Office and Gladwyn Jebb was Chairman of the Government Wine Committee, which was in charge of the government cellars which furnished state banquets and so on, and also less important government affairs. They had, I don't think it has any longer, a celebrated cellar, with some names to conjure with, you know, La Tour, Lafite, Petrus, and we had to taste them from time to time. He appointed me as his successor. I will tell you a little cameo about that, which doesn't reflect frightfully well on me, I don't think. There was an element of cheating in it. Sheila and I were staying with Gladwyn and Cynthia, his very powerful wife. I can't remember who else was staying there. They had invited some people to lunch, and Gladwyn had said to me, 'You know, I'm thinking about you as a possible successor for this Government Wine Committee.' And I said, 'Oh, that's very nice.' I went out for a walk in the garden and on my way back, I passed the dining room window. And through the dining room window I saw the bottles that had been lined up for the lunch. And what I saw was that these bottles were of Bulgarian wine, which one used to drink in those days. It was actually not too bad. So we had this bit of theatre at lunch, when Gladwyn said, 'Now, let's ask Bill what he thinks of this wine that we're drinking here. What could it be?' So I said, 'Well, I don't think it's French, for a start.' I rambled on. I said, 'I think it might be East European, maybe. Could it be Bulgarian?' So, I got the job. How cheeky is that?

One person I ought to mention is Michael Palliser. Why? Because he subsequently became the head of the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service, one of the most successful we've had, I think. An extremely gifted and extremely dedicated public servant, married to the daughter of Paul-Henri Spaak, the second Secretary General of NATO, who had been a Belgian minister. Michael and Marie Palliser became very good friends of ours. I mention Michael because I shared an office with him and Dick Faber, who was in charge of relations with the rest of the world. Michael was in charge of relations with France and internal developments in France itself. What really impressed me about him was that systematically, evening after evening, he would attend two or three cocktail parties and then a dinner. Then he would come back to the Embassy and dictate telegrams, reporting what he had heard and what people had said to him. He had an enormous file of these telegrams and his *modus operandi* impressed me enormously. He was very ambitious, you could see that. But he was also very nice, very helpful to me, a younger man. And above all, his example fired me up, I think, to try and do better in the service. He was a very good example to me.

His wife was a sweet person. I remember having a dance with her at the NATO delegation annual dance. Frank Roberts was then ambassador to NATO.

While dancing Marie and I were talking about this and that, and she said, 'Bill, what is your ambition in life?'

I said, 'Well, I don't think strictly speaking I have got an ambition, certainly not a refined one. I mean, I naturally want to do well in my job and that sort of thing.'

She said, 'You're wrong. You must have an ambition. Develop an ambition now.'

I remembered that ever afterwards. I didn't actually develop an ambition, but it did often remind me, firstly of Michael, who had had an ambition and realised it. And secondly, of the fact that you did have, as far as possible, to develop a concrete aim to do well in whatever job you were doing. That conversation did stay with me.

In my job in the political department of the Chancery of the Embassy, as I say, I shared this office with Michael Palliser, my particular sector was the French left wing. Why was that? Because, for obvious reasons, people back home in London had become very anxious about the progress of the Communists in getting influence over the government. They had already got about 25% of the deputies. They were big figures in the political scene and needed to be studied and, in so far as that was possible, be got alongside. Well, I never did much getting alongside them, because they were pretty impenetrable people. They weren't interested in having contacts with western embassies, capitalist embassies. But one thing I did do with Sheila was to go to the *Fête de l'Humanité*, *L'Humanité* being the Communist party's daily paper. Now, this was a big annual event, a sort of omnium gatherum, usually in somewhere like the Parc de Versailles. It was like a fete anywhere, only not like a garden party at the Embassy where everybody dressed up. Everybody came along in their proletarian clothes, including Sheila and me, in what we thought were proletarian. We felt very much out of it; there weren't many foreigners like us. There were some, but they were mainly comrades from other countries, whom we didn't look like very much, you know, Iron Curtain countries and so on. However, nobody tripped us up or asked awkward questions. We did, I remember, go to the book tent, and there we saw Picasso signing books. That was a surprise. I suppose he was a card-carrying member of the Party. But otherwise, it was not really very thrilling because it was just like a public fete.

*You didn't have a splendid lunch?*

No, we managed to avoid that.

*Interview with Sir William Harding for Diplomatic Oral History*

*Thursday 10 April 2014*

**PERMANENT UNDER-SECRETARY'S DEPARTMENT, FCO, LONDON 1959-60**

*So, Bill, when you left Paris in 1959, you came back to London, and worked in the Foreign Office for a couple of years. What were you doing there?*

I was posted to the Permanent Under-Secretary's Department which was a sort of *omnium gatherum* department that dealt with things that nobody else dealt with and also more secret matters like liaison with the Intelligence Services, with the Defence Department and that sort of thing. I was put in charge of the War Book. Now the War Book is a rather terrifying tome which tells you what to do when war is declared. I had to pore through this thing and make sure that it was updated regularly. It had in it one or two rather terrifying graphs of nuclear fall-out if we were bombarded with nuclear bombs, the sort of thing that would really make you lie awake at night. It didn't actually, but it did rather impress me. And there was lots of stuff about arrangements for the Government decamping from London to somewhere out in the wilds where there was a complete wartime hutted and underground emplacement where the Government could function with all the necessary communications, which in those days, of course, did not include lovely modern things like the internet. They were things by landline or possibly by radio. So I did this job. It enabled me to go to Norfolk and have a ride on one of these V bombers that was supposed to deliver our nuclear weapons, if need be. We got into this V bomber and we flew due east over Norway and then due south over Germany and France. I was allowed to go and look at the bomb aiming place and see how the bomb aimer viewed the targets below him. It was an eerie experience. You felt you were very near to the cutting edge of our defence system if the balloon did go up, which we all fervently hoped it would not. That took about a year.

## **SANTO DOMINGO 1960-63**

After that, I then had a telephone call from Personnel Department who said, 'We want to give you a foreign posting again. We'd like you to go to Latin America.'

So I said, 'Yes, I'm very interested in Latin America. I was rather sad I didn't go there before.'

'Well,' he said, 'We're going to send you to Ciudad Trujillo.'

So I said, 'Thanks very much. That'll be fascinating.'

I put the receiver down and raced to the departmental atlas to find out where on earth Ciudad Trujillo was. Well, of course, it turned out to be Santo Domingo, to which name it's now reverted. It was Ciudad Trujillo because the dictator of the day, Trujillo, decreed that.

So Sheila and I, in due course, took a boat to New York and we stayed in New York for two days, in great discomfort, with our children. It was a weekend, I recall, and we just had to tread water, waiting for a plane. The Office would not pay for us to go on a jet. There was a direct jet flight from New York to Santo Domingo/Ciudad Trujillo, but, oh, no, the Office wouldn't have that. We must go on the milk run which is a miserable plane that went first to Miami and then round the islands and Puerto Rico and places like that, in the early hours of the morning. And meanwhile we had these children and the temperature dropped like a stone. When we arrived on the *Britannic*, I think it was, of the Cunard Line, it was sunny and warm and very pleasant to be in New York. Two days later, as happens there, the thermometer fell like a stone, about 30° Fahrenheit, and my vivid memory is of dragging the children along 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, or whichever avenue it is that runs alongside Central Park, with snow falling and our children moaning in the snow. We thought, God, what have we come to? But we knew it wouldn't last very long and we got on this milk run plane and we got to Santo Domingo/Ciudad Trujillo and were met by a chum of mine whom I knew in the Embassy already and were taken to a flat and installed. And there was a loud speaker system throughout the hotel, which we discovered later was mandatory in Santo Domingo, and on it was the droning, rather high-pitched voice of the Generalissimo. It was his birthday and he was giving his birthday speech. I won't say that everybody was hanging on his word, but everyone would like to pretend to be attending to what was going on. What Trujillo did not know, and we did not know, was that it was his last birthday, because he got assassinated. And serve him right, I would say.

So we got stuck into the Embassy there. I was the First Secretary and Consul, I think. We did all the usual diplomatic jobs. We had very elementary communications; no Diplomatic Wireless Service, no secure telex, so we had to send everything that was enciphered, all confidential material, had to be taken down to the Western Union Post Office, pretty antediluvian procedure. Nothing very much happened for the first year, I would say. It was a pleasant enough life. All the countries of the Organisation of American States had broken relations with Trujillo. They only had consuls there representing their interests, because Trujillo had the previous year tried to blow up his confrère in Venezuela, Romulo Betancourt. They blew up his car and Betancourt was seriously injured, but he didn't die which, of course, was Trujillo's intention. So the Organisation of American States agreed amongst themselves that everybody would withdraw their ambassadors and just have consular representation and that included the Americans. So we were left holding the baby in the sense that we were protecting America's interests and any quasi-diplomatic communications, because they were only a consulate, had to be collected through our Embassy, which was quite an onerous business really. We were a very small Embassy with very limited staff. However, we managed. It was rather nice to be handling America's affairs as well as our own.

The thing to mention before we come to the assassination of Trujillo, which was the big event, we thought it would be nice to make an overland visit to Haiti. Now, if you remember, Haiti was the name given to the whole of the island of Santo Domingo when it was occupied by the French. It was occupied first by the Spaniards and then by the French. Then the Spaniards occupied the eastern half of it again, or three quarters maybe, and since then it has been an amazingly different story. The Dominican Republic has prospered. I wouldn't say it is a particularly happy place, like so many nowadays, there's an enormous gap between rich and poor. A lot of the income of the country comes from tourism, and most of that finds its way into the pockets of private individuals, so government services are pretty stretched. We got in our car, a Ford Consul, and we drove it overland to the Haitian border. We had been told that Trujillo had at one time decreed that there should be a demilitarised strip of land on the Dominican side of the border and no Haitians were to be allowed there. And the border was firmly shut, except for people like us with diplomatic privilege. We got our way through border control and immediately we noticed the difference. In Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic, people tend to be coffee-coloured; in Haiti they are very black. I suppose since the famous uprising of Toussaint Louverture in the days of Napoleon, I think it was, the Haitians

governed themselves, chucked out the French, and had a bit of a thing about *négritude*, in other words black was good and white was not good. We saw that for ourselves, because as we passed through villages, we slowed down and any villagers who were on the road, and there usually were several of them, would point their fingers at us and say, 'Blancs, blancs,' in a rather menacing fashion. White, white, you know, you shouldn't be here. We drove to Petion-ville, overlooking Port au Prince, the capital, and we were ushered into a very nice hotel, well, fairly nice. We made ourselves as comfortable as we could, before going to pay our respects at the Foreign Ministry. I had my radio with me, so we tuned into the news and we discovered that all hell was being let loose in Cuba. It was the time of the Bay of Pigs, John F. Kennedy's inglorious attempt to invade and take over Cuba. So that made for rather interesting listening, you might say.

We were also in the Dominican Republic for the nuclear crisis of 1962, was it? when the Russians were sending missiles to Cuba and were forced by the Americans to turn back. So the Dominican Republic, although not the centre of the universe, happened to be in a rather interesting spot at that time. Our visit to Haiti was fine. We didn't learn very much, I suppose, that people didn't know already. We bought one or two artefacts, some of which we have here in this house. Then we went back to the Dominican Republic. No problem; nobody stopped us or anything like that.

So fast forward now to the death of Trujillo which was on 30 May 1962. Nobody saw that coming except those who were actually involved in it. Trujillo used to have a habit ... Shall I say something about Trujillo? First of all, the Americans from 1916 onwards had control of the customs revenue in the Dominican Republic because the Dominicans were so heavily in debt to them, they had to pledge something and they pledged their customs revenue. And this of course gave the Americans pride of place in the Dominican Republic and they took over practically everything. The Dominicans governed themselves, but the armed forces were trained by the Americans, that sort of thing. And among the people who were trained was this man Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. He proved to be a very good student and he rose through the ranks. In 1930 a big hurricane hit the Dominican Republic and there was a crying need for emergency services pulling the whole thing together to get it out of this mess. Trujillo was appointed in charge of this operation. That was what really gave him the opportunity to make himself President which he eventually did, assumed full powers. The Americans having made him what he was could hardly object. And, indeed, dictatorship was the common pattern in Latin American countries in those days. Most of them had dictators and

Trujillo wanted to be one and he was, and a very fierce one too, very uncompromising, and very nasty to those who crossed his path, even, it is said, feeding them to the sharks. Not very nice.

So fast forward to 30 May 1962. Trujillo had a habit of changing out of his general's uniform into civilian clothes and going off in the car just with his driver to, I think it was San Cristóbal, which was a village outside Ciudad Trujillo where he had a rather nice, I don't know what you would call it. In France it would have been called a *garçonnière*, because it was where he had his assignations. Anyway, he sped off to this assignation. All he had was his driver sitting in the front, he himself sitting in the back, both of them with machine guns at the ready, just like mobsters, you know. At a point just outside Ciudad Trujillo, on the main road, which because it led to San Cristóbal was always very well made up and that kind of thing, this little posse of assassins, good men you might say, laid in wait for Trujillo and they despatched him. That could have been the end of the story, if they had carried their putsch through. A key figure was the then commander of the army, who was supposed to go on television and radio and tell everybody that the dictator was no more and that all good men should rally to the side of those who'd got rid of him at last. But he funk'd it; his courage failed him. That was very bad for him and many of the other conspirators. They were only a very small group of about ten of them and I think only two survived. The others had their finger nails taken out and other nasty things done to them.

I might mention Trujillo's funeral. His funeral took place in San Cristóbal. There again, why not in the cathedral in Santo Domingo? Well, because I think the Trujillo family with the death of the patriarch weren't too sure which way the wind would blow and whether there might be some signs of sympathy with those who had killed Trujillo, so they had it all locked up in San Cristóbal and I went there in my official capacity. I was chargé d'affaires at the time. It was an extraordinary affair because the church was full, but it was full not only with normal people dressed in civilian clothes, but with a huge number of military. The principal figures of the Trujillo regime, the head of the secret service, the head of the, not the army, navy and air force, because he was by then being hunted down, but the other senior generals and also the two sons, Ramfis and Rhadamès, who had been abroad at the time and were summoned home quickly. And what was extraordinary was that these people were ranged against each other. One faction occupied the pulpit, and another grouped themselves around the lectern, and others still were on either side of the altar, all with machine guns. It was a bizarre spectacle. The funeral took place and the coffin was carried out, and great scenes of

wailing and emotion were witnessed, of course. With all these grandees, lots of the more humble people wanted to show themselves as ultra-Trujillista, so there was a great deal of foaming at the mouth and throwing yourself on the floor and screaming in distress. What happened next was that the rump of the Trujillo family, which consisted of Trujillo's brother, Hector, who I think had been living in Miami and the two sons, Ramfis and Rhadamès, named after characters in Verdi's *Aida*, they wanted to take over and they started to do that, but here the Americans entered the picture and said, 'Not so fast. Now the dictator has been removed, what you have to have is democratic elections.' And they paraded whichever fleet it was, the Sixth or Second or something Fleet, off shore Santo Domingo and buzzed the city with their noisy and fast aircraft, and eventually Ramfis and Rhadamès were chased out of the country as was Hector, back to Miami. There was an interim civilian government installed, called the Council of State, I think, and elections were held a year later. Those elections proved to be pretty fair, on the whole. There was an interim President who was called Victor Fiallo. He was a doctor, charming fellow. It had all the ingredients of a good democratic government, but in those sort of countries, if I may say so, democratic government is not really in the blood. Although most Latin American countries have some sort of democracy now, it tends to be a democracy with a difference, sort of democracy, shall we say. So they struggled their way to a democratic regime. But one thing I should have mentioned was that when he was assassinated Trujillo was not titular President. Why not? Because he got bored with all the diplomatic frou-frou and receiving people and all that stuff and he didn't see why he should do that, so he appointed a fellow called Joaquín Balaguer, who was sort of Chief Clerk really, in his place. And this Balaguer turned out to be an amazing survivor.

Perhaps I can say, going fast forward again, that after the interim government, they had new elections and Balaguer came back on top. The extraordinary thing about Balaguer was that he was an extremely unprepossessing, rather insignificant, little man, nearly blind, with nothing very much to recommend him, except his brain. He was an extremely clever, scheming fellow. He managed to get himself elected, and re-elected. I actually attended the inauguration of President Balaguer, representing the British Government. A very extraordinary performance it was. We sat in this big, indoor arena, you might call it, and at the end of this arena was a raised platform or dais, with a few chairs and a microphone or two. As always on these occasions, there were crowds of people who had forced themselves in who had no business to be there. Eventually the doors opened again and in came this doll-

like figure, Balaguer, propelled on the shoulders of his bodyguards, absolutely amazing, wearing a top hat and frock coat and gloves and all that paraphernalia, with his big gig-lamp glasses. He looked an extraordinary figure. And they dumped him down, almost literally, in a chair by the microphone. Various people made short speeches, and then he was introduced; loud applause. But as soon as he began to speak, the atmosphere was electrified. Everybody was spell-bound by the oratory of this little, blind man. And moreover, his speech was being relayed throughout the country, as Trujillo's always was, so in no time at all, he had the country stitched up. It was an extraordinary performance of *realpolitik*, you might say.

I don't think I've got anything more to say about the Dominican Republic.

### **FCO, LONDON 1963-67**

*After Santo Domingo you came back to London and you went into the Latin America Department.*

Yes, actually I spent a year in something called the General Department which was another waste paper basket department in which everything was put that didn't fit elsewhere and I was on the Aviation desk. This turned out to be very taxing, because there was then, not now, an enormous amount of bad blood between various competing countries for traffic rights. Now we have open skies so anybody can do anything, but in those days it was tooth and claw. I took part in some of the negotiations, for instance with the Dutch and KLM, and there was blood on the floor everywhere. It was extremely unpleasant and unforgiving.

What happened there was that I in charge of a desk that occupied itself with Cuba which of course was quite important, and Santo Domingo, which went back to its old name, and Haiti. And in 1965 the balloon went up again in Santo Domingo. There was an uprising by a socialist-inclined colonel, whose name escapes me. (It might be Camaño, but I can't be sure.) Everybody got a bit excited about this, because of its propinquity to Cuba and they didn't want to have another Castro on their hands, so they were watching things closely. Then the Americans mobilised their fleet again, and they flew their planes over. I don't think they landed, but they were threatening to land so the whole thing collapsed. The point I'm going to make is that I had the good fortune to be on that desk when this happened, because nobody else knew where Santo Domingo was, let alone what happened there. So one day I found myself summoned to the Chiefs of Staff, these very grand heads of the Army, Navy

and Air Force, with on top of them Lord Mountbatten, who was Chief of Defence Staff. So I went to this meeting; I sat at the end of the table, quite rightly, and these grandees came in about ten or fifteen minutes late, puffing large cigars, and generally showing signs of having had a very nice lunch together. We scampered through the agenda and nothing very important seemed to be discussed and then we came to Santo Domingo. So the Ministry of Defence was asked to give their view of what was going on there.

Then Mountbatten turned to me and said, 'What's the Foreign Office say about this?'

So I said what the Foreign Office said about it and he said to the Secretary, 'Well, the Foreign Office think blah, blah, blah.'

So I said, 'Excuse me, sir, that's not what I said.'

'Well, strike that out then.' I don't think he was used to being talked to like that. It was an interesting moment.

On the snakes and ladders, it got me another ladder because the new head of my department, Robin Edmunds, fell out with the assistant head, George Hall, and got him removed, and had to appoint somebody in his place and I was the somebody who was chosen. And so that was quite an important leg up for me in the hierarchy, shall we say.

### **MEXICO 1967-70**

So after that, I was posted as First Secretary and Head of Chancery, to the Embassy in Mexico. We are now in 1967. That was a very agreeable post. A lot of running around the country, meeting people, but seeing the fantastic Aztec and Mayan remains and imbibing the antique culture and all that. On the political side there was nothing of any great importance except Belize. Belize in those days was a British colony and part of it was claimed both by Mexico and by Guatemala. So it was very important for us to keep onside with the Mexicans, so that the Guatemalans' case could be stymied. And I made it my business to be very, very close to the Foreign Ministry and I cultivated them like mad. And very nice people they turned out to be. The Official Mayor who was the sort of chief executive of the Foreign Ministry became a close friend of mine. That was rather interesting later on.

*How did sticking to the Mexicans help Belize?*

Because as long as the Mexicans kept their claim up, it was difficult for the Guatemalans to insist too firmly on theirs. I don't think there is much more to say about Belize. Let's go onto the Olympic Games.

The Olympic Games in 1968. The Mexicans handled the whole thing very, very well. When they put their mind to it, they could be extremely efficient, better than some European countries, I would say. And that all passed off very well, except that immediately before it, the government, though civilian, being a pretty steely outfit, wanted to take measures to ensure that there were no opposition demonstrations or anything like that, which normally there would be, because of the huge concentration of the international press. So there was a show-down outside the Foreign Ministry building. A whole bunch of rebellious students were paraded there to shout at the government and generally make their presence felt. And at one moment firing broke out. Nobody knows who started this firing, but the obvious conclusion was that it was the armed forces, or the special services, some of whom were posted on the buildings round the Foreign Ministry. Anyway, somebody shot into the crowd. But it was also alleged, and I think with some reason, that there were *agents provocateurs* among the crowd who were trying to stir things up and probably took a pot shot at these chaps on the roof. Certainly there was some firing from down there, and we had proof of it, because a bullet went through the window of my friend the Chief Executive's office and lodged in the bottom of his chauffeur. So we had material proof that somebody down there had been firing. All that was hushed up, of course. Interestingly enough, it was something that caught the attention of the international press anyway and I was asked about my view of what happened only a very few years ago, after I had retired, because somebody was writing a thesis about it. You might say that was extremely undemocratic to say the least and not anything that the Mexicans were very proud of, but on the other hand, it did have the effect of shutting everybody up and making sure that the Olympics were conducted in a very calm and ordered atmosphere, which they were. Very effective. I think that's all I have to say about Mexico, really.

### **PARIS, 1970-74**

*The next stage of your career took you away from Latin America and you returned to Paris in 1970.*

Yes, I was promoted to be Counsellor in charge of Press Relations and Public Information, which is what it sounds like, namely projecting the image of Britain in France. Not all that easy, because there is quite a lot of latent antipathy in this country where we are now sitting, in France, to the British. That came out in the war of course, and it's still there. So I plunged into the media, got to know them pretty well. But before I had gone very far, General de Gaulle died, of natural causes, I'm glad to say, and we had a state funeral, big affair, attended by magnates from lots of different countries. Britain was represented by Prince Charles; the Shah of Iran came in person, so did Nicolai Podgorny, a very senior figure from the Soviet Union, and the President of the United States came (Richard Nixon), and we all crowded into Notre Dame. There were armed police officers, and security detail on the roofs of the adjoining building, so I thought to myself, if we don't look out we're going to have to replay this next week for whoever gets shot as they're going into the cathedral.

I stood at the back. In order to get into the cathedral I wore morning dress, as did the protection officer of the Prince of Wales, and we stood together near the entrance to the cathedral so we saw everything, coming and going. The thing that really struck me most was the appearance of the Shah of Persia. He looked incredibly frightened, as if he was expecting a bullet himself and he was not wrong in that. There must have been many people who would have been glad to knock him off. But we didn't know about the Ayatollah Khomeini in those days, but there were a lot of people who would have liked to have done that. So that was a big affair. I didn't have very much to do in terms of press and public information because it wasn't a British event. But I have photographs, one or two of which appeared in Whitaker's or the Statesman's Year Book, one or the other, of the important figures from Britain who came over for this. There were four or five Prime Ministers, Macmillan, Eden, Wilson, and Heath. So it was a big event.

What was next? Perhaps I should say that the business of managing the press really, as so often happens, entailed just getting to know the principal figures in the media, i.e. the president and director general of the radio and the television and the chief editors of major papers like *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* and so on. One thing I did do was that I arranged for four of the senior editors to be invited to England and rather than taking the day ferry ... no, what we did was we took the night boat train, you know, when the train goes on the boat, the *paquet de Douvres*, as they called it, the Dover packet, and crossed over. And these four chaps, it was really very interesting to see, they'd started off very sceptical about the delights of England and being among the English; by the time they came back they were completely

converted. It was quite remarkable. This does happen. That's why I think these sponsored visits are very important. They open the eyes of some people who had kept them firmly closed.

*Why not say something about the Embassy itself? Who was your ambassador?*

Christopher Soames. Christopher Soames was a big figure. Son-in-law of Churchill, married to Mary Churchill. Sent as ambassador to Paris by Harold Wilson, surprisingly, because we were anxious to remove the French obstacle to our joining the Common Market, as it was in those days. What shall I say about that? There was a Soames affair which happened before I got there, which was the leaking to the press of a telegram written by Soames, I think, or one of his underlings, reporting a conversation he'd had with General de Gaulle. That was when General de Gaulle was President and that was extremely unfortunate because it froze relations between Soames and de Gaulle and this had an impact on everything else. Then de Gaulle died and he was replaced by Pompidou. Soames was very good at buttering people up and he did a lot of very high level entertaining with extremely good food and wine and all that sort of thing. Everybody wanted to be invited to the Embassy, as they did for a long time afterwards.

By this time my friend Michael Palliser, whom I referred to earlier as somebody who inspired me to do better in the Service, was Minister in the Embassy and number two to Soames. His role in organizing the negotiations and particularly the visit of Heath for face-to-face discussions with Pompidou, Michael Palliser was in charge of that. Soames was there, a rather bombastic fellow, making his presence felt, but as one of his counsellors said, 'The thing about Christopher is, he's like a toy train; you have to wind him up and put him on the track and he'll go chuffing down it quite happily.'

The meeting between Heath and Pompidou was, of course, of crucial importance. Heath had already been to the Embassy shortly after I arrived, when he was Leader of the Opposition. I remember Soames remarking rather condescendingly, 'There's poor Ted Heath sitting in the garden reading his papers. He hasn't got a very bright future in front of him,' said Soames. Well, the next year when this great meeting was organised between Heath and Pompidou, Heath showed that it was quite different. Heath got on very well with Pompidou. Heath was not an easy man, as we all know, but there was something about him that Pompidou rather took to and he liked the fact that what Heath said could be relied upon. So we had a marvellous piece of theatre at the end with the joint press conference. Nobody knew what

was going to come out of these conversations. We had the advantage then because it was a face-to-face between Pompidou and Heath with interpreters.

*Without officials?*

Ah, we're coming to that. The French mobilised their principal English-speaking interpreter and we mobilised Michael Palliser, who was of course bi-lingual in French, but was also the most senior official involved and knew all the angles, so that gave us a big advantage, in terms of his nudging Heath in the right direction. The bit of theatre was like this. The two great men agreed on a joint communiqué and we had to organise in my section for the text of this communiqué to be sped to the Embassy, translated into English and printed so that we could have copies to give out at the press conference that was taking place a couple of hours later. I went to this press conference. It was held in a sort of place like a small theatre, bulging with press correspondents and klieg lights and so on. Along came these two potentates, Pompidou and Heath, and sat down. And Pompidou opened his mouth to say, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, you have before you two people who have been discussing this question of the entry of Britain to the European Common Market. Many people think that it is impossible that Britain should adjust itself and take on all the responsibilities involved by being a member of the Common Market and we knew that this was going to be a difficult negotiation. However, in contrast to those doubters, you have in front of you two people sitting here who are convinced of the contrary.' Electrifying! Can you imagine? Then we produced from behind a curtain our copies of the communiqué in English and French, which was quite a coup. We weren't trying to be clever and be one up on them, but it did turn out that we managed our side of the thing much more efficiently than the French did. As is often the case. The French are not very efficient. They talk a lot; they are not good administrators. They are marvellous at expressing themselves, but sometimes it is not that which is necessary.

One thing I ought to mention as I was the Counsellor in charge of press relations and so on was the importance of the BBC French Service in those days, now unfortunately axed. The reason why it was so influential was that during the War the BBC transmissions in the French language to France had been a major factor in mobilising and directing those parts of the Resistance, not all of them by any means, who liked to liaise with the British. And it became a trusted source of information. So a lot of people listened to it because they wanted to know

what was the truth. I spoke to Jacques Fauvet, who was the editorial director of *Le Monde*, about the BBC one day. I said, 'Tell me about how you organise your day.'

'Well,' he said, 'I don't get up very early; I get up at about seven-ish, then have breakfast and so on and at eight o'clock I listen to the BBC News. Then I go to the office and I have my editorial meeting with the staff.'

So I reported this to London, because it seemed to me that that, in itself, was probably justification for the French language service. If the editor of the most important newspaper in France, the most authoritative, particularly among officials, was listening to the BBC every day and taking his tune from us, as it were, that was a wonderful feather in the cap of the BBC.

What I think we might do is to fast forward again to the State Visit of the Queen to set the seal on our adhesion to the Common Market. That took place in 1972, in about April, (15-19 May 1952) and I had quite a big hand in planning this thing, and organising it and particularly the public relations side of it, which was huge. I made the mistake of going off skiing in January, just when the final programme was being agreed, the programme for her visit. What I had suggested was that, rather than arriving by air in Paris and going direct to the Elysée, she should arrive by boat and that meant the Royal Yacht. I suggested that Cherbourg would be a good place because Cherbourg is the terminal of transatlantic shipping which we had shared in the past with the French. And it had all kinds of connotations, including during the War. And from there she would have gone from Cherbourg to the Abbey of Fontévrard on the Loire, which is in itself a rather fascinating building. And in that Abbey are buried King Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, his wife. I could see a very good television moment for the Queen to stand looking benevolently at the graves of her forefathers, as it were, which epitomised the very long standing relationship between Britain and France. And she would then go from there, thought I, to Saumur, where they have the *Cadre Noir*, this talented school of riding, where they do amazing collective horse antics. The Queen being a horsey person would love to do that, and then she could go to Paris and do the rest of the stuff. So when I came back from skiing I said, 'Well, what was decided? So they said, 'Well, no, she's not going to Saumur and she's not going to Fontévrard, but she will use *Britannia*, she will go to Rouen. From Rouen she'll go to Paris and after a couple of days in Paris doing her official engagements, she'll go down south and stay in Beaumanière, where it turned out that the hotel keeper was a friend of Pompidou's, of course. And also the chateau belonging to the

then Chief of Protocol, the Comte de Sénard, was not far away and she would have tea there. So this had all been stitched up, as it were, and she was not going to Saumur or Fontévrard. However, the *Cadre Noir* was thought to be a good idea, so they arranged for that to come to the Champs de Mars, overlooked by the Tour Eiffel. And so it happened, not very happily, because it was pouring with rain that evening and the Queen and the President and all the other people sat, just about under cover, watching these drenched Saumur *Cadre Noir* doing their manoeuvres. Not really quite as good as it might have been.

Meanwhile, I was busily occupied in the first floor restaurant of the said Tour Eiffel, negotiating with British journalists accredited in Paris for the coverage of the Queen's visit to see her sick uncle, the Duke of Windsor, who was residing in a sort of grace and favour chateau outside Paris. That was a tricky thing. I was determined that we would not, as the Embassy, or officialdom, decree who should represent them or who not. There needed to be one BBC television camera, one ITV television camera (those were the only two television stations) and there needed to be photographers from four daily papers. The contestants were people like the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Herald*, the daily this, that and the other, and of course the *Times* and the *Telegraph* and so on. There were six altogether, two television camera men and four still camera men, of which two were the self-appointed *Times* and *Telegraph*. And then the other two were up for grabs. In parenthesis, it was sad to say that the *Daily Mirror* fellow, who was a very nice guy, a very competent photographer, agreed with the *Daily Express* photographer that the *Daily Express* photographer would represent both of them and he would give all his pictures to the *Daily Mirror*, and of course that came to the hearing of the boss. Who was the boss then? Robert Maxwell. So the *Daily Mirror* photographer got sacked for his pains. Not so good.

At least we were undercover in the Eiffel Tower; we could overlook the Champs de Mars and see these soaked to the skin soldiers on horseback, performing their manoeuvres and felt very sorry for them. The next day we had the visit to the Duke of Windsor. Along I went and along these six representatives went with their television cameras and still cameras. We lined them up, and along came the Queen and the Duchess of Windsor, what was her name? Wallis Simpson. She met the Queen on the steps of the chateau, quite properly and curtsied and led her inside and all that. In fact, the Duke of Windsor was manifestly dying and nobody knew how long he was going to live. So in the background we had a rolling programme of what to do if he died while the Queen was actually there. You know, if he died on the first day, the rest of the programme would be cancelled; if he died on the second

day, an abbreviated programme would be adhered to and no visit to the south; and if he died on the third day, by which time she was in the south, well just let it roll. What happened there, we don't know. Of course, the Queen went in to see her uncle, came out, not sort of visibly moved, but she must have known he was on the way out, but the photographers did not, nor did the press. So more photographs getting in to her car, off she sped. Then what happened? The photographers were still standing in a line, more or less, and there was the Duchess of Windsor on the *perron*, the steps leading up to the chateau. So they shouted to her, 'May we have some photos of you?' So she agreed to this and the next ten minutes or so were spent with the Duchess of Windsor, her husband, the Duke, dying upstairs, cavorting around on the steps of the chateau, posing for these photographers. Absolutely bizarre scene.

*Bill, let's continue talking about Paris.*

Well, I think the next milestone in Paris was the change of ambassadors. Soames had done his bit; we'd got ourselves into the Common Market; the French ban had been removed, thanks to Pompidou. Soames had done his work, so he left and he went back to be a minister in Heath's government. He was replaced by Eddie Tompkins, an excellent choice; because he had a French mother, he was bi-lingual in French. He knew France extremely well and was respected by the French for that reason. And, moreover, he'd been Press and Information Counsellor when I had first joined the Embassy in 1956, under Gladwyn Jebb, so he knew my job very well. You might say that was a bit risky, because he might have wanted to tell me what to do, but he didn't. He was very laid back, our Eddie. Some people thought he was too laid back, because I remember he went to sleep once in a very boring meeting of the French Geographical Society. He was a bit dozy, but I liked him enormously. And he was very good to me, I would say. And even later on, when I retired, he was one of the very few people that I went to for advice as to what I should do. I might mention that now. He said, 'The one thing you have to remember, Bill, that there is nothing so interesting as having represented your country as an ambassador. I wouldn't recommend you to get involved in anything to do with government work.' And that was very good advice. He himself had not heeded this advice; he got involved in the County Council, I think it was, and he found it all extremely tedious. Close brackets on that.

## **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND DEPARTMENT, FCO 1974-77**

From Paris we went back to England and I was appointed Head of the Irish Department, the so-called Republic of Ireland Department, because our job was relations with Dublin. And that was pretty much of a sharp-edge appointment. Merlyn Rees was the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

*How was he as a Minister?*

Good, without being brilliant and very nice to deal with. And the Irish liked him, which of course was important. His was a good appointment. I had to go to Belfast; I had to go to Dublin. I was not dealing with any of the ultra-secret stuff, but there were as it were back-channel conversations with the IRA which I was privy to. Various people I knew went over and talked to the IRA and talked to the Protestants, and interestingly enough to my mind, they said, that of the two the Protestants were the more detestable, particularly the wives. I had a direct line, a confidential line to the Embassy in Dublin; they were my principal concern.

This is how I received the news of the assassination of Christopher Ewart-Biggs, who had just been appointed our Ambassador to Dublin, in succession to Sir Arthur Galsworthy, who was a good friend of mine. I knew Christopher very well, because after Michael Palliser left, he (i.e. Christopher) had been Minister in the Embassy, so he was, you might say, directly above me, between me and Soames. Nice chap, very intelligent, not really very forceful, unfortunately. Anyway, one day I was sitting in my office and my number two burst into the office and said, 'I'm sorry to do this, but I must tell you that Christopher Ewart-Biggs has just been blown up.' And it turned out that the IRA had put a bomb in a culvert under the road over which the ambassadorial Jaguar was going to pass. And they blew it up. They killed Christopher and they killed Judith Cooke, the Private Secretary to the head of the Northern Ireland Office and the Head of the Office himself, Brian Cubbon, was seriously injured. The chauffeur was less seriously injured. That of course was a huge event, and everybody got very excited about it and then the question arose to find a successor to Christopher. Of course, there was nobody in line for it, because he'd only just got there. And suddenly the name of his wife, Jane Ewart-Biggs, was put forward. And it was said that Jim Callaghan, the then Prime Minister, was rather in favour of this. So I, knowing Jane, and knowing the business of being an ambassador in Dublin, the degree of secrecy attending some of the conversations and negotiations to which the ambassador was privy, I thought this was a thoroughly rotten idea.

*Did she have any professional experience?*

No, none whatsoever. But after her husband was killed, she proved to be very good at dealing with the press, and making the most of herself, you might say. She became a political figure after that. She was adopted by the Labour Party.

*I think she worked for reconciliation, didn't she. She went into the House of Lords.*

Yes, she did. But I dug my toes in and I said, 'We are not in any way going to have this person as the next ambassador. It has to be a professional. Fortunately, that's how it turned out. But it was a near thing. She had the wind in her sails, because she'd become a public figure, you know, the grieving Jane and how stoical she was and all that kind of stuff. The general public would have rather liked to see her as ambassador.

*And would she have liked it?*

Of course she would. She loved publicity. I don't think there's any more I should say about the Irish Department. Quite a lot of it was very secret, as you can imagine.

Shall we go on to Peru?

*Do let's. This was the first time that you were ambassador?*

Yes. I'll tell a little anecdote here that doesn't reflect very well on me, but it shows a little bit how these things worked. After I had been in the Republic of Ireland Department for, let's say, three years, a little bit less. The Personnel Department rang me and said, 'The Secretary of State would like you to be the first ambassador to the Republic of Angola in Africa. I thought, God, I know nothing about Africa. I never really wanted to serve there. So while I was dealing with this rather important department and reading a mass of papers and so on, I also had to bone up on Angola, which I dutifully did; I also had to learn Portuguese. It was all very stressful. I think I received this bit of intelligence about my posting in April and in August I found myself in the same car as the Chief Clerk, Head of Personnel, on our way to the funeral of poor Judith Cooke, which was somewhere in south-east London. The Chief Clerk and I were delegated to represent the Office at this funeral.

So the Chief Clerk, Curtis Keeble, said to me, 'How's the Irish Department?'

So I said, 'Well, it's OK; it goes on.'

'Are you enjoying it?'

I said, 'No, I'm not really enjoying it very much because I've been told I'm going to be the first ambassador to Angola, but nothing's happening.'

Of course, it transpired at about that time the Angolan government forces caught some British mercenaries who were fighting on the other side and decided they wanted to make a great public fuss about this. And so they were not interested in having ambassadorial relations with us, so the whole thing hung fire. I told Curtis Keeble all this, the Chief Clerk.

He said, 'Oh, right. Well, if you can't go there, where would you like to go?'

I'd done a bit of homework, and I said, 'Well, I think it is possible that Peru will be falling vacant soon, or possibly Ecuador, and one of those would be very nice, because I know something about Latin America, I speak Spanish, and so on.'

So the next thing is that Sheila and I went to Jersey to stay with the French Consul there whom we'd met a long time ago in Santo Domingo. Our boat stopped at Guernsey. I walked along the deck and I saw a telephone box and I thought to myself, If I telephone somebody I know in the Permanent Under Secretary's office, they may know what has happened in the discussion today of the Number One Board, as it was called, concerning the appointment of the new ambassador to Peru. So I said to Sheila, 'I'm just going to stretch my legs on the quay-side. I'll be back soon and we'll have a drink.' So I stretched my legs as far as the telephone box, and I rang up my contact in the PUS's office, and said, 'What happened at the Number One Board meeting this afternoon?' and she said, 'You were unanimously selected to be the new ambassador.' So I was very pleased with this, because although the ultimate decision is the Foreign Secretary's, normally he takes advice, unless he's got some axe to grind, and the Queen herself doesn't mind very much, so long as it is somebody who is competent. So I went back on board, and said to Sheila, 'Let's have a drink.' So we went to have a drink and I said, 'You know we have discussed where we would like to go if we're not going to Angola, and we thought it would be nice to go back to Latin America, where would you really like to go to?'

So Sheila, whom you knew very well, Catherine, was quite a deep person and she reflected for a moment and she said, 'Well, I do think it would be nice to go to Peru.'

And I said, 'That's where we are going.' So it was a nice theatrical moment.

## AMBASSADOR TO PERU 1977-79

The Embassy in Peru: that was a very nice first posting as ambassador. The regime that governed Peru was a military regime, as was the case in many Latin American republics at that time. So I played a certain amount on my three years in the Royal Marines and my knowledge of Defence Department affairs, except in so far that they were secret or confidential. The Peruvians seemed to like what they heard about this. And even before I had had time to present my credentials, I had an invitation from the Prime Minister for what Sheila called a 'jump up', which is a sort of party where you dance: it's a Trinidadian term. So I went to this thing and it was amazing because I got my foot in the door right at the beginning, before I'd even presented my credentials, through no doing of my own, but just by happenstance, my name had come to the attention of the Prime Minister and he thought I might be an interesting person to know. So I went on trying to make myself interesting. I had a very satisfactory first posting there. We did a lot of work in aid projects, of all kinds, aid to very poor townships on the fringe of Lima and also aid upcountry to struggling agricultural communities, whom we helped with advice and to a certain extent with material. All that, I thought, was well worth doing, quite apart from what you might say the foreign policy dividend that it brought us.

There was one little incident that occurred while I was there. We had a meeting of British ambassadors to South America, in my Embassy Residence. Not all of them came, but quite a lot. It was chaired by George Hall, who was the man way back who told me I was going to Ciudad Trujillo, and whom I came across later on and whom I had succeeded as Assistant Head of Latin America Department, too. Anyway, George came along; we had a meeting; all that was going very well. The telephone rang. It was my secretary, no, it was my deputy, David Lewis.

I said, 'What's going on?'

He said, 'The Embassy's been invaded.'

I said, 'What do you mean?'

'Well,' he said, 'a bunch of angry trades unionists have invaded us and say they're not going to leave until the government pays attention to their demands.'

So I thought for a moment. I rang up the Foreign Minister and said, 'Look, we have these rebellious trades unionists who have invaded the Embassy, and I want them removed

immediately, before they start consolidating their position. But I'd like your guarantee that none of them will be prosecuted, or in any way hurt, or interfered with.'

And he said, 'Yes, that's fine.'

So we got rid of them. And when I reflected back on this, it seemed to me that is one lesson: you must always deal with the situation before it begins to jell. Don't you agree with that?

I had a thing called the Ambassador's Business Advisory Group, the BAG, which was a bunch of British businessmen residing in Peru, who would have useful knowledge to bring to bear on our relations with Peru, our trade opportunities, all that sort of thing. I decided to gee up this group a bit, so we met not only in Lima, but in various state capitals I had to visit in my capacity as ambassador, I took members of the BAG along with me. That proved to be very good at breaking the ice and also in stitching up some commercial contracts. There was one amusing moment when we took plane to Iquitos. Iquitos is a far-flung part of Peru, on the edge of the Amazon basin. We flew in this plane and got involved in a thunderstorm and it was a question of whether we would turn back or not, because we couldn't see anything. We had no idea where the landing strip was in Iquitos. Then suddenly the clouds parted and there was the landing strip, so we landed with a big bump. So that was all fine, and I had my Business Advisory Group with me. We had a programme we'd organised there; we called on the various potentates; and one person we called on was the Prefect, but he wasn't there. But his deputy came along, a very unassuming little man, and shook us by the hand and said, 'I'm sorry the Prefect's not here, but I've been asked to represent him.'

And so, we probably sucked our teeth a bit, but we went along with it.

And he said, 'Please sit down.'

We sat down in a circle on very hard chairs, with arms but very uncomfortable. We were out in the jungle, remember.

And he said, 'Wait a moment.'

And he summoned a serf and whispered something in his ear and this chap smiled and came back a few minutes later with a tray on which were champagne glasses filled with a liquid the colour of tea, I would say, rather cloudy tea, at that.

The Sub-Prefect said, 'This is our local drink, and I'm sure you're going to like it.'

So we all tasted this and we found indeed we did like it. It was very good. So we had not one, but two or three of them. And then we began to have a very hilarious conversation with the Sub-Prefect, who turned out to be much better value than we'd imagined. After a while, we went back to our hotel, and then we all jumped into the pool and were splashing around and our wives came back from visiting some installation or something and found this uproarious group of husbands, behaving like children in the swimming pool. The fact is that we'd all got thoroughly pissed on this stuff, which turned out to be something called *siete raices* which is 'seven roots'. It's a jungly potion and it's supposed to have all sorts of interesting qualities, including of course, aphrodisiac. So what had been an extremely boring and unpromising visit turned into a rave-up.

I think I should say something about relations with the Peruvian government. They did like having a diplomat who had some military experience, because they were all generals. I found them actually quite amenable to reason and, with one or two exceptions, very easy to deal with. I wasn't quite sure what made them tick, because they were supposed to be socialist, but their ideas seemed to be rather far from what I knew about socialism. One day I found myself talking to the Polish Ambassador, who was a very nice guy with a very pretty wife, and quite *sortable*. He was getting rather pissed at a party, so I said to him, 'Look, I'd like you to explain to me the political colour of this government. It's not communist; it is supposed to be socialist, but I'm not quite clear whether it is or not.'

He looked at me rather pityingly. He said, 'What you have to remember is that this is a military government and all the captains want to be colonels; all the colonels want to be generals, and all the generals want to end up as ministers. Everything else you can forget.'

I thought that was very revealing really. It was supposed to be a socialist government. He told me, nothing of the kind, this Polish Communist.

I had a farewell audience with the President, General Morales-Bermudez, very nice guy. Rather sad in a way, because I think he didn't quite know how to do his job and after quite an amiable chat for fifteen minutes or so, he said, 'Ambassador, are you going back to London now?'

I said, 'Yes, I am.'

He said, 'Well, if you have any good ideas as to how we might run this country a bit better, would you write to me?'

Isn't that rather charming? Needless to say, I didn't, but I thought, how very modest of him to say a thing like that. Rather indiscreet too. So my feelings on leaving Peru were ones of sadness because we'd enjoyed our time. We felt that Peru was not on course to being a great success. However, there were a lot of very nice people who lived there. And a lot of fantastic places to visit and explore. So then I went home to London.

## **ASSISTANT UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE AMERICAS,**

### **FCO, 1979-81**

My next posting after Peru was back to the Foreign Office to be Assistant Under Secretary of State for the Americas, North and South. As I surmised, I had very little to do with North America, particularly the United States, because everybody from the Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under Secretary downwards thought they were experts on the United States and didn't want to be told what to do or what to think. So it was more in the nature of administration of our Embassy that the North American Department dealt. However, the Latin American side of it was quite busy with two issues. One was the negotiations with the Guatemalans over the proposed independence of Belize and the other was the vexed question of the Falklands and Argentina's claim to it.

On Belize: I attended the negotiations with the Guatemalans which took place in Bermuda. The leader of our team was Nicholas Ridley who was the Minister of State with responsibility for Latin America. He and I and one or two others went off. We had a meeting with a really rough bunch of Guatemalans, all military, all stamping around, showing their authority. Eventually, we came to an agreement with them which resulted in the independence of Belize, so that was pretty satisfactory. The Venezuelans, who also had a claim on Belize, decided to relinquish it, so it was all fairly plain sailing from then.

But as far as the Falklands were concerned, that was a different matter altogether. For one thing we were dealing with Argentina, which although it was not a very well-run country, and it was run by a military government, it had serious armed forces, some of which were very competent, particularly the air force, and we were never quite sure that they might not make some move against the Falklands. So we were quite keen to get an agreement with them that would last and would safeguard the interests of the islanders, the wishes of the islanders, should I say. An important distinction, because we would always say, well, we are

a democracy and these people we are governing, we want to adhere to democratic principles, so it is up to them to decide what sort of regime they want and if they want independence or if they want another form of government.

And the Argentines would argue with us, no, that's nonsense. You're responsible for looking after their interests, so you can decide what their interests are. Of course being military people of that colour, they wouldn't hesitate to impose their own ideas on the poor inhabitants.

So the next thing was, what sort of proposals to put forward to the Argentines? And that was how my predecessor, again George Hall, had thought up this plan for leaseback, the idea being on the Hong Kong pattern, leaseback for 99 years, or whatever. We would cede sovereignty to the Argentine Republic and the administration would continue to be conducted by us until the lease was up. We thought this was rather a good idea, so I took it on as well and we got as far as Cabinet. And rather to our surprise, Mrs Thatcher and the Cabinet agreed that we might put this to the Argentines. So Nicholas Ridley and I had a clandestine meeting with the Argentine Deputy Foreign Minister who was an airman and the senior official of the Argentine Foreign Ministry who dealt with this problem. This took place in Switzerland on a lake, I can't remember which lake it was, but it doesn't matter very much. As a result the Argentines involved said, 'Yes, we think this is a great idea. Yes, that might well work.'

Because actually one of them who had lived in the Falklands for a while said, 'No intelligent Argentine is going to want to live in that god-forsaken place. So why don't we try this?'

So far, so good. But then of course it turned sour because of the reception that this proposal received in the House of Commons. So this proposal for leaseback was suddenly dead in the water.

Now, how were the Argentine government going to take this, because of course they had received news from the Deputy Foreign Minister that we might put forward this thing? So they were angry. They thought, Typical *perfidie Albion*. For a moment things stalled and we suggested, Let's have a sovereignty freeze and then trade with each other and be very matey. The Argentines said, understandably, Not a bit of it. We don't particularly want to trade with you; what we are interested in is getting sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, and don't forget it. So there was a stand off.

## **BRAZIL 1981-84**

Then I was posted as Ambassador to Brazil, a very interesting post, very demanding I would say. Fortunately, we lived in Brasilia, and I'll talk a bit more about that in a moment. But that brought me into contact with the Argentines. Shortly after I got there, a new Argentine ambassador was posted to Brasilia and as is the way with recently arrived ambassadors, having presented his credentials, he did the rounds of other foreign ambassadors there, introducing himself. So he came along to my Embassy which at the time was quite a small temporary building and he proved to be an amiable fellow, not a professional diplomat, but a lawyer who I think was a friend of the Foreign Minister.

So I said to him, 'Look, our countries don't have very friendly relations at the moment, but we want to be sure that none of this bad blood spills over into Brazil and our dealings with them, why don't you and I have a pact, that we will not allow ourselves to be interviewed by the press on the subject of the Falkland Islands. I'll gladly give you that guarantee, if you can do it in return.'

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'a very good idea.'

Of course, this fellow was a complete tyro, he'd never been an ambassador before. He didn't see what he was getting into. Meanwhile, a couple of months later the Argentine Foreign Minister paid an official visit to Brazil. There was a big reception in the Armed Forces Club in Brasilia, it being a military government. I went along; I walked up the steps to the entrance and there was the Foreign Minister and when he saw me and was told who I was, he turned his back on me. I reported this. I said, There is obviously a feeling of very bad blood between us and the Argentines and this idea of a sovereignty freeze, we may think it'll wash, but I don't think it will.

I've never quite understood why it was said at the time that we were caught short by the Argentine invasion of the Falklands, because we had many indications that they might be thinking of this. All these intelligence reports are read by everybody from the Ambassador downwards in the Embassy and of course all over Whitehall in the responsible departments, so it was really an unsustainable proposal that we were caught short: we were not. I think it is true to say that the people who were at fault were the Ministry of Defence, because the defence of the realm is their baby, isn't it? And they should have had plans for stymying any

Argentine attempt. And they didn't seem to have that. And somehow they also managed in a rather sneaky way to pin the blame on the Foreign Office and on the Intelligence Services either for not having read the signals correctly or not having drawn ministers' attention to them. Both of which were rubbish.

However, I was reminded of a conversation I had had in Peru four years ago, or something like that, with the Argentine Ambassador. Whichever post I went to I always made a point of socializing with the enemy, as it were. And that applied to people like the Russian ambassador, and so on. I became very friendly with the Argentine Ambassador who was an admiral. We didn't talk about the Falklands more than about twice. One day we were having dinner at the house of a Latin American colleague, I can't remember which one. We'd come out of dinner and he and I found ourselves standing by the fireplace, clutching a glass of something or other, and he said, 'You know, I've got something to tell you on this Falklands business.' He said, 'You know, we really are quite upset about the fact that you won't accept your responsibility for defending the interests of the islanders. You just leave it up to their whim as to what they will decide. Meanwhile, we have this perfectly legitimate claim which we think we can press against yours, and we think that the Falklands should belong to us.'

So I said, 'There are, how many? 2500 islanders or whatever it is, not very many people, admittedly, but they constitute the population of these islands and what they decide goes.'

So he said, 'Yes, OK, but supposing we landed 3000 Argentines on the island, then the balance of this vote would go towards us, wouldn't it?' said this Admiral.

Interesting point in view of what came later; so I reported this at the time. So I was never surprised about this invasion. We'd received all kinds of indications from various sources that something funny was going on. Then we all became aware of the fact that the Argentine Navy had set forth on manoeuvres in Uruguayan waters, that is northwards. I said to my Number Two in the Embassy, 'I don't like the look of this. I think we need to watch these guys.' Meanwhile, I was off to Recife for some official appointment with Sheila and I said, 'Keep me posted.' So sure enough. We got there and we went to a really fascinating biblical staging of a biblical story, the life of Christ really. What's that thing they have in Europe?

*Oberammergau?*

Yes, that sort of thing. It was very well done because it was in a sort of desert and that gave it more credibility. And when they talked about breaking bread, they brought out a loaf and broke it and we could see that this was something that could affect people.

So I was not exactly surprised when my deputy, John Flynn, rang me from Brasilia to say that in fact the Argentines had invaded the Falkland Islands. What could I do about it?

Absolutely nothing at all. So I completed my programme in Recife and went back to the Embassy. And the rest is history, really. But we were in the forefront of, not of the campaign itself, but of the administrative tail.

There was one moment of some significance when I received a cable, brought to me by the duty officer, from Admiral Fieldhouse, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Task Force that had been sent to expel the Argentines. This telegram said it would be extremely useful if you could get a guarantee from the Brazilians, the Brazilian Navy, that they would not get anywhere near the line of sailing of the Task Force. You know, keep everything out of the way.

So I thought, OK, this is not all that difficult. My next door neighbour was the Chief-of Staff of the Brazilian Navy and I had got to know him very well. So I called him and said, 'Could I come over and have a word with you?'

And he said, 'Yes, of course.'

It was a lovely moonlit night and I didn't even go through his front gate. I climbed easily over the white railing fence that separated his garden from mine and we met on his lawn. We walked up and down and I said, 'Listen, I've just received this cable from London and it's rather important that we should get a clear answer to this. They are asking for an assurance from the Brazilian Navy that you will keep all your ships, including submarines, out of the line of the Task Force. How do I go about this?'

And he said, 'Don't worry. I can give you that assurance now.'

So, armed with this, I went back. I summoned the duty officer and gave him a telegram to send back, saying that the Chief-of-Staff of the Brazilian Navy has agreed that this is exactly what they will do and they were planning to do so anyway. So they were delighted back in London. They felt this would pretty good. They got their reply by 2 o'clock in the morning our time.

So that was a minor involvement I had in the question of the Task Force and the other was the celebrated deviation of a British bomber to the airfield in Rio because it had run out of fuel. It had failed in its refuelling over the Falklands somewhere and had to land somewhere. Not a pretty sight. So I went round to a neighbour on my other side, who was the Aviation Minister and said, 'Look, we have a problem here, and it would be very nice if you could treat these fellows decently and not impound their aircraft.'

He said, 'No problem at all.' And so it transpired. The captain and the crew of the aircraft were feted in the officers' mess. Everything looked rosy until the Foreign Ministry stepped in. They didn't at all like the idea that they were going to be short-circuited by the Air Ministry. They wanted their pound of flesh and that consisted in impounding the aircraft. So I was summoned to the Foreign Minister's residence. I think all this was on a Sunday, anyway it was a holiday. There was the Foreign Minister; there was his rather tiresome private secretary in a t-shirt. The conversation went a bit like this: he said, 'I don't know what you think this aircraft is going to do, but I can assure you it's not going to be allowed to leave Brazilian territory.' There was an awkward moment there. However, it being a military government, it was allowed to, and then the aircraft was allowed to go and waved off.

I think the point of that story and the naval one is that you have to adapt yourself to whatever circumstances you find. Much later, I heard that one of the senior lecturers in the Brazilian Diplomatic School, which is a very famous one, and one where a lot of Latin Americans go. I must say that the Peruvians also have one: they are the only two countries in Latin America that have a Diplomatic school. And of course we in Britain don't have one, which I think is a pity. The lecturer, talking about the Falklands War, said, 'There was a moment when the British Ambassador intervened directly with the Air Force Minister to get the release of this grounded airplane that had run out of fuel and had a missile hanging off its wing. Naturally, we opposed the release of this aircraft. However, things being as they were in those days, the Aviation Ministry got their way and the aircraft took off.' He paused, then he said, 'Of course, it was absolutely against all the rules that the British Ambassador should side track the Foreign Ministry and go direct to the Air Ministry, absolutely unacceptable.' And then he said, 'But I hope in similar circumstances you would have done the same.' I thought that was rather nice.

I don't think there's anything more to say about the Falklands War, because of course we weren't intimately involved in it. But I do think that those two stories about the Navy and the Air Force indicate the importance of dealing with the government you are accredited to on their terms. If they're a military government and they want to be treated in a military way, do so. Don't stand on ceremony and don't in any event try to impose any ideas of yours about what a democracy should be like, and so on. I think we'll leave Brazil there, shall we?

*And, Bill, you were the first British Ambassador to occupy the new British Embassy Residence in Brasilia, were you not?*

That is correct, yes. In fact, it was *force majeure* that obliged all foreign ambassadors to move up from Rio where they were very comfortably ensconced. We had a new Embassy in Rio that had been built in 1945-46. It was a bit like the palace of Versailles, only a bit smaller, but very commodious, very good for entertaining, plenty of room for the offices and everything else. And successive ambassadors didn't want to leave, although the Foreign Ministry and the government as a whole had dictated that all ambassadors should go to Brasilia. Then they put the screws on and they said that by January of next year, any embassy that remains in Rio will have its diplomatic privileges withdrawn. So everybody scampered up to Brasilia. We occupied a pretty unsatisfactory building that had been put up for some other purpose as our offices. And the Ambassador occupied the rather unappealing blockhouse that had been put up for the number two in the Embassy, the counsellor. So what I took over in 1981: that is the residence that Sheila and I lived in, turned out to be OK, but it was a temporary and not very agreeable place to be. However, meanwhile the Chancery building, that's to say the office of the Embassy, had been completed a year or two earlier. It was a glass box, rectangular glass box, not really very intelligent in the climatic conditions of Brasilia, because for six months of the year you have blistering sunshine, which bores through everything because there is no atmosphere there, no clouds or anything. So what did they have to do? Not only did they have to put tinted glass, very expensively, over the whole thing, but they had to install an air conditioning unit which was the size of a nuclear submarine. It was absolutely immense, occupied a very large part of the ground floor of this building. In other words, not a very intelligent architectural effort. The Embassy Residence had been the result of a competition in London. There was a partnership of a brother and sister called Smithson, who'd produced a plan which was very politically correct in those days where the ambassador's residence and the chancery were sort of melded together, so that the facilities enjoyed by the ambassador could be enjoyed by members of the embassy as

well. And this was a building described by somebody as a squashed crocodile: it was a long, elongated building with a sort of concertina look to it. The ambassador lived at one end and the offices were at the other end and in the middle there was an entertaining area, which anybody could use. I'm glad to say that this was sat upon and another much better proposal was produced which actually was in keeping with the architecture of Brazil, which if you look at it from the sky it is in the shape of a bird, with wings and a tail, and we were out on the wings. Also, where the head it, where the President's Palace is, there's a big lake. Because of the extreme dryness of the summer there, everything is very desiccated and this lake was to try to soften that a bit, which I suppose it did, depending which way the wind was blowing. So a totally new drawing was produced on a ground plan of something a bit like a bird, though I would say it was something a bit more like a V bomber. One of the wings on the ground floor was occupied by the ambassador's salon, where he entertained, and on the right-hand side was a large dining room where he would also entertain and then there were bedrooms above. Well, of course, when the Treasury got to hear about this they said, 'This embassy is far too big for Brazil, which is not one of our major allies, and it must be made smaller.' So they cut off some of the bedrooms above, quite unnecessarily and structurally very stupid, and they shrank them and they also shrank the salon, used for entertaining large numbers of people. It was grotesque. However, it was quite liveable in from my point of view. It had a small swimming pool near it; it had a garden, that was still maturing you might say, and it was well protected. But what was it protected against? We weren't expecting any onslaught in Brasilia. And if we had been, we'd have been defended by the Brazilian military. However, there you are. When I took the Head of the Western European Department of the Foreign Ministry over the building, he having become a friend of mine, he said yes, he'd like to see it. We went into the entrance hall, which was triangular in shape, rather attractive really, then we went up a couple of steps and went into this quite small salon and I said, 'This is the salon,'

He said, 'And where is the main entertaining space?'

I said, 'There isn't any, apart from the dining room.'

But that was fair enough. And actually for entertaining we did quite a lot outside, and on the terrace and it served its purpose. But it was a pity. An opportunity of building a really good embassy that everybody would have wanted to go to, that's the whole point. You want everybody to want to go there, so you have to have the reputation for having good food and

plenteous wine, but you also have to have a good building that people want to be in. So there we were.

Again, I had close relations with the military government, which made life much easier for me. Sheila and I visited all the outlying states. You could do that easily by flying from Brasilia. Brazil is a huge country, as you know, but even the further part of Brazil can be reached in three hours flying. So you could pay an official visit to a state to discuss commercial relations and all that sort of thing in a weekend. It was an easy place to be an ambassador, you might say.

## **DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE AMERICAS AND ASIA 1984-**

### **86**

My last posting was as Deputy Under Secretary of State for the Americas and Asia, that was '84-'86. Rather a big bailiwick, so I had quite a lot of visits abroad. Not to Latin America because I had a very able Assistant Under Secretary of State, and I'd seen enough of it anyway. But I had to go to the USA, obviously, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, China, Hong Kong. And all that was very interesting, I would say. There was another Under Secretary, Percy Cradock, who was specifically earmarked as the Under Secretary in charge of Hong Kong. I hadn't been there five minutes before he came along to my office and said, 'I want to be quite clear about this. You are Deputy Under Secretary of State for Asia, but I am in charge of Hong Kong.'

I said, 'You're welcome to it!'

There's not a lot to describe about this. I think they have flattened the structure of the Foreign Office now; the hierarchy has been compressed. Is that a good idea? I'm not sure. I would like to see it in operation, but I think the old idea where we did have a fairly layered hierarchical structure was that proposals and information and so on were passed through a series of filters from people who had wider and wider experience and were more likely to be able to advise the Foreign Secretary on our affairs with one country which had to be looked at against the background of our affairs with other countries, which might compete. It was quite an exacting job, but it was also a very interesting one. It brought me into constant relations with the Palace, particularly when Antony Acland was away for a while. His wife was dying,

Anne, so I was deputed to introduce all the foreign ambassadors who came to the Court of St James. And I spent a lot of time with the Foreign Secretary, advising him on this and that.

*And that was who, at that time?*

Geoffrey Howe. And that's it really, I think.