

MADAGASCAR

My posting as ambassador to Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, was preceded by a briefing in the Foreign Office in October 1984. I was told very little about Madagascar itself but I was told that a private visit was to be made by the Duke of Edinburgh at a date in 1985. I was informed that the visit was to be private and would be entirely organised by the World Wildlife Fund. WWF had a representative in Madagascar and he would be in charge of all the arrangements for the Duke's visit. An arrangement was made by the FO for me to visit the Duke's private office in Buckingham Palace where the private secretary would emphasize the private and unofficial nature of the Duke's visit and the importance attached to the fact that I was not to be involved. I thought this was rather odd but it did not worry me. I had on several occasions been involved with Royal Visits including visits by the Duke so it was something of a relief to learn that I could stand back and let WWF face the music. As for events in Madagascar the Head of East Africa Department said my predecessor had been tasked with starting up the post as an experimental mini-mission which would operate with minimum staff and a reduced level of administration which he would specify. There had been very little political reporting and it would be up to me to rectify the shortfall, telling the FO what was going on in Madagascar.

I therefore embarked on the journey by flying to Paris. The East African Department of the Foreign Office, conscious of the fact that they did not know what was going on in Madagascar, had suggested that I visit the British embassy in Paris on the way to the post in the vain hope that the embassy could give me some briefing. The direct route to Madagascar lay through Paris so, typically for the Foreign Office, it was an inexpensive suggestion. On arrival in that city, I discovered that no one in the Paris embassy seemed to know anything about Madagascar either. Obviously Madagascar was not among their priorities even though, as a former French colony, it was of some importance to France. However, one of the political secretaries in the Chancery had kindly arranged some calls on French ministries including, I recall, one called the DOM/TOMs. This translates as Departements d'Outre Mer et Territoires d'Outre Mer. The call included a rather splendid lunch but little light was shed on Madagascar. After lunch we (Audrey and I) sped in an embassy car to Paris Orly airport to catch the Air Madagascar flight to Antananarivo. I began to feel apprehensive as we approached Orly. This airport is mainly used for French internal flights including flights to overseas Departments of France like Reunion, a tiny volcanic island relatively close to the large island of Madagascar. Orly is less salubrious than the Charles de Gaulle airport where we had arrived on the international flight from London. Still, Orly was big enough to contain a jumbo jet or two. The entrance area of the terminal building was thronged with poor third world type tourist class passengers with substantial quantities of tourist class baggage (and children). I spotted no beautiful people. We went to the first class lounge, again no beautiful people, where there were some passengers who looked as if they might be Malagasy. The Malagasy do not look at their best in the cold light of Northern Europe.

I had not at this stage met any identifiable Malagasy that I was aware of. During the morning of our brief stay in Paris I had met my predecessor as ambassador, Dick Langridge. I knew Dick from a previous encounter when he had been press attaché at the embassy in Paris. On that occasion, in the 1970s, Dick Langridge had been helpful and friendly. He was still helpful and friendly in 1984 and had gone to some

trouble to meet me, while he was on his way back to London. He seemed, understandably perhaps, in no hurry to get there. Indeed, he and his Belgian wife had been reluctant to leave Madagascar. He had arranged to meet me in Paris so that he could give me various bits of advice about the job, and perhaps also to make up in part for his failure to supply any briefing about the post that he was handing over. He also gave me a fistful of Malagasy francs, unobtainable at banks in England and very useful to have in one's possession on arrival in Tana, as Antananarivo is known to the initiated. Dick had greatly enjoyed his time there. He was keen to portray the job as worth doing despite the evident difficulties with which he had been confronted in re-opening the post as a mini-mission in 1980. Dick had been a Foreign Office inspector before his posting to Madagascar and had included in his recommendations the idea that to save manpower and expense the Foreign Office should introduce mini-missions. He had claimed that a full diplomatic job could be done with fewer staff merely by reducing the demands of traditional FO bureaucracy. The Foreign Office were sceptical (another characteristic) but promptly took up the challenge by appointing Dick as an ambassador in a newly created mini-mission to see if he could cope with the practical side of his own recommendation. While being briefed in London by the FO and others about their requirements from me when I got to the post, most briefers harped on about their alleged need for more information and reports from the post. This is a line beloved of the Foreign Office since it is a good excuse for ignorance and does not commit the Office to do anything once they have the information. While still in Texas, my previous post, I had asked the Foreign Office for the post report on Madagascar. All posts were supposed to produce a post report and to update it regularly. I was told no post report had been prepared since Langridge re-opened the embassy in 1980. I found evidence when I got there that Dick had, contrary to the spirit of his own recommendations, spent enormous amounts of time in the office dealing with details of administration instead of doing the presumably more important things.

Before I arrived I relied for basic information about Madagascar on the American post report written by American diplomats for American diplomats. I had been able to obtain a copy of this document while still in Houston, Texas. I simply ordered a copy from the American equivalent of the stationery office. The American report was an unclassified document. It was more than somewhat out of date and had been written on the understanding that under freedom of information legislation in the US it would be released into the public domain. FCO post reports were classified because they tended to contain frank comments about the host country that the writers would prefer not to have made public. They are consequently often worth reading. Otherwise a general Lonely Planet type guide book would serve just as well as an unclassified report and probably be more up to date.

Returning to the story of our journey to Madagascar, we found that after the initial rather discouraging aspect of Orly airport, things began to look up inside the aircraft. The Air Madagascar flight on which we were booked turned out to be an Air France flight. There was plenty of champagne, smoked salmon and other drinks before dinner. Then dinner itself was pleasantly luxurious. After the brandy nightcap at the end of the meal, the lights went down and the cabin crew seemed to go off duty as far as the passengers were concerned, scarcely reappearing even when we landed in completely teetotal Saudi Arabia in the middle of the night. We made the mistake of getting off the plane to stretch our legs. It was a long hot stop. We were glad to be

airborne again even though hours passed before black coffee and rolls were served for a continental hung-over style breakfast next morning. The aircraft was already losing altitude as we approached the north western coast of Madagascar. The first sign of approaching land was a considerable muddy brown river of water staining the blue of the Indian Ocean as a Malagasy river decanted slowly into the sea. Then dilapidated mud brick buildings and mud walls came slowly into view. There seemed little in the way of vegetation or trees, no metalled roads, and no signs of any industry. We were still much too high to spot people but it did not seem likely that there would be many in such an inhospitable barren landscape. We descended through the hazy atmosphere, polluted by smoke from fires (mainly burning vegetation), and circled the outer edges of Tana, already promising on first sight from the air to deliver all the horrors of the Third World. I was met on arrival by the Chef de Protocol, a television crew and second secretary Richard Hyde from the embassy. I had fortunately already worked out in my mind the gist of a suitable short speech in French in case it was required. It was. I duly delivered it to the camera. Richard and the Chef de Protocol took Audrey and me off to the so-called VIP lounge while our luggage was retrieved from the plane and our passports were stamped by the Immigration authorities. The VIP lounge was a dingy, stuffy little room with old leatherette easy chairs. It stank of stale cigarette smoke. It can at least be said in its favour that it was better than the crowded public areas which stank of urine, where normal passengers had to wait. We were eventually cleared to leave and were driven in a worn out Ford Cortina embassy car back to the embassy residence, a thoroughly nasty house reached after driving slowly and bumpily through badly crowded, dirty, unbelievably potholed streets. The people were ill-clothed. All the men wore hats, and, I observed, most were smoking. Most Malagasy on the streets seemed to have gaps in their mouths where the front teeth usually belong. After the beautiful people of Texas, it was depressing to see evidence of such a sadly contrasting life. I later came to realise that the house at any rate was not as bad as all that by comparison with some other houses, and that there were far poorer, and hence worse, areas of Tana than any that I had then seen on the first day. Dick Langridge had expended much effort during his tour of duty in locating the house and the office. These apparently simple tasks were very difficult in practice owing to an almost complete lack of suitable houses. The house owned by the British Government before the post was closed in 1975, the Villa Elizabeth, was close to the new house but in 1984 it was occupied by the Malagasy Minister of Foreign Affairs. There was no chance of getting it back from the government of Madagascar. The American ambassador, Robert Brendon Keating, who became a good friend, told me that the Malagasy Foreign Minister reminded him of a basket ball coach, always bobbing about on his trainers while he warmed up for a game. That seemed a pretty accurate summing up to me.

The British embassy was another anti-climax. The original embassy building up to the date of the closure in 1975 was located in a busy part of town and actually looked like a small embassy. By 1984 it had become an English language training institute and it was in receipt of slender support from British government technical assistance. The uninspiring replacement office found by Langridge was situated in the Cite des 67 hectares, an area that had been set aside at some earlier stage of the development of Antananarivo for commercial activities. The hoped for development had not come about. All the money ran out. Instead the area had just gone further down hill. The embassy was situated on the second floor of a modern style plastic, aluminium and glass building. It was known as the Ny Havana building. Another major tenant was

the European delegation, whose chief, the Delegate, M Jean Cordy, was a distinguished Belgian former colonial servant who had once run the Congo. I found that the British embassy staff conversed among themselves in French and expected people who called at the embassy on consular or commercial business to do likewise. They were obviously expecting me to follow the precedent of my predecessor and also converse in French. That was too much of a challenge for me and was soon changed by the excellent Richard Hyde. It is illustrative of the local scene that shortly before my arrival a lorry had driven into a deep hole in the road just outside the Ny Havana building, had languished there on its nose for months and had only recently been pulled out and towed away.

The Chef de protocol, among his words of greeting, told me that if we required the services of the police for any reason, we should make the request through him. He supplied his home telephone number in case the need should arise. I thought this odd but noted the information. A need did arise soon after we arrived. A gang of armed men attacked the house rented by the head of AMOCO, the American oil company, about two houses away from the residence. We could see men milling about firing off rifles at each other and trying to break into the Amoco house. Sid Greer and his wife were away and I thought the police should be summoned. I tried telephoning the police station. The police said they would be glad to come but their car had no petrol. Would I send a car and driver? I had no driver as my driver did not remain on the premises after he had finished work for the day. I did not know where the police station was: quite a distance for sure. Fortunately, the Amoco nightwatchmen also turned out to be armed and were making a spirited attempt to defend their property. The raiders were repelled. The police never showed up, or displayed the slightest interest in the attack.

I discussed this situation with Hugh Johnson, a British member of the EC Delegation. Hugh was coming to the end of his tour in Madagascar and as he was leaving pressed me to accept with his compliments a handsome Biretta pistol, with box of ammunition. I obviously did not tell the Foreign office about this. They would not have approved. I, in the front line so to speak, thought it would be a good idea to have some means of protecting the residence should the need arise. We did actually have a nightwatchman, Laurent, who was the son of one of the maidservants at the residence. Laurent was a good chap and I am sure that, although unarmed, he would have died at his post if necessary. He came from a fierce and warlike tribe gifted with utter loyalty. His problem was that to while away the long cold nights he would consume rum. Malagasy rum was cheap enough for the staff to be able to buy it even on the wages we paid them. I remember coming home quite late from some evening engagement one night. Lauren had heard the distinctive sound of the Range Rover's V8 engine and sprang to attention to open the gate. He launched himself at the metal gate, misjudged the distance and crashed into it headfirst. He recovered swiftly, if sheepishly, and I knew he had been at the rum again. Later in the tour, another neighbour, Robert Tynes, the Deputy Head of the American embassy, complained that Lauren had threatened to kill one of the American nightwatchmen. They had quarrelled over some minor matter connected with a gambling game that they played while seated on the kerb to keep themselves amused during the long evenings. I had reluctantly to dismiss Laurent. He set up as a rum seller operating from a hole in a nearby wall. He always gave me a respectful salute as I passed in the Range Rover so

there were no hard feelings. He had had plenty of warnings about being drunk on duty.

There were quite a few gun incidents during the night in Madagascar. On one night, we heard the sound of gunshots from just outside the bedroom window. Audrey sat up in bed. What was that? Just lie down low, I said, quite expecting to find a dead body lying on the waste ground behind the back of the house next morning. Next morning, no body. I made enquiries. Another near neighbour was the Sicilian manager of the AGIP oil exploration team, Signor Malgaroli. I regarded Malgaroli as a sort of friend. He spoke English, and listened to the BBC. He wanted to know what I knew about the plans of the other oil exploration companies and I wanted to know what he was up to. However he did cheat at golf, and he was obviously not good at human relations with his staff. It turned out that he had dismissed someone on his domestic staff, and this chap had come back in the middle of the night with a gun intending some mischief. When discovered trying to break into the Malgaroli house, there had been a wild exchange of shots, fortunately without fatal results.

Not long after our arrival, there was a lengthy gun battle at night between the Malagasy army or police and a political group known as the Kung Fu. The Kung Fu were opposed to the Ratsiraka government and as thirty or forty of them were holed up in one building at night, orders were given to wipe them out. The fighting went on over a period of several days, if I remember correctly. If any Kung Fu survived, which seems a bit unlikely, it certainly kept them quiet from then on. On another occasion, much later in my tour, the new American ambassador, Pat Lynch and her husband Bill, were dining with their Deputy Head of mission a couple of doors way from us when firing broke out not very far away (but far enough away for me to not to feel concerned). Ambassador Pat Lynch thought it would be unwise for her to return to their residence on the other side of town in their large and very conspicuous American car, the only one in town. She came and asked if she and Bill could stay the night with us. We were delighted to offer the hospitality of our guest suite, even though the guest suite in our residence was downstairs while we retreated to the keep upstairs protected by a strong metal grill. These were anti-kidnap measures and were a sad reflection of the hazards to which diplomats were exposed in the mid 1980s. No doubt things have become much worse since.

I had also been told by the Chef de Protocol on first arrival that in Madagascar he expected newly arrived ambassadors not to do anything public, and certainly not to call on any ministers in the government before they had presented their letters of credence to the President of the Republic. There must also be no formal contact with accredited members of the Diplomatic Corps. A summons to present letters would come at short notice, he said, although there was likely to be a delay of several weeks as the President liked to deal with new ambassadors in groups. I discovered that Alain Bry, the new French ambassador had actually arrived on the same day as me, although by a later flight. Alain Bry was in charge of a large and important embassy with 180 Paris based staff. The French government wielded a bilateral aid budget equal at the then prevailing exchange rates to £100million or around the size of the UK bilateral aid programme to India, at that time the largest single recipient of UK bilateral aid. In addition there were four French consuls-general located in provincial towns in Madagascar, each with staffs bigger than my embassy. Our bilateral aid budget, an essential tool of third world diplomatic effort, was embarrassingly meagre.

Nevertheless the summons to me to present letters came within days of my arrival and thus a good deal sooner than the Chef de Protocol had expected. A team of motor cycle outriders with flashing blue lights and a black but well worn Mercedes staff car arrived at the residence. The car was then driven at high speed (it seemed to me, cowering in the back) only inches behind two of the motor cyclists who bounced over the non-stop series of spring crashing potholes to the Presidency. I delivered the letters recalling my predecessor, delivered my own letters and made a suitable short speech, in French. President Ratsiraka replied gracefully (and briefly) in perfect French. The whole thing was televised for the evening television news. Next to go in was the new French ambassador. He had prepared a longer speech, garnished with Malagasy proverbs, which language he had already studied in preparation for the posting. We were the only two presenting letters on that day and I was surprised to go in first and to learn that I was therefore to be senior in the Diplomatic Corps of Madagascar to the important French colleague. I watched the evening news on television that evening and, sure enough, there were the two presentations with my short speech in full first, and Alain Bry's speech second, reduced in length to be equal in length to mine. It was a surprising decision by Madagascar, and I could not help feeling that it was not a particularly far-sighted one on their part. It was, I fear, somewhat typical of Radio Television Madagascar's priorities that this presentation of credentials was a major news story. However, in a socialist state such as Madagascar, in a terrible mess of its own making, actual and potential aid donors were big news, could be filmed very cheaply, and helped RTM to fill in time without the expense involved in taking the wire services.

The presentation of letters done, I was able to call on the diplomatic colleagues, government ministers in their offices and other senior representatives, such as the dire and depressing contingent of Conseillers Supreme de la Revolution. I think the CSRs were supposed to be a sort of Senate, but they never performed any effective function that I was able to detect. There was a surprisingly large diplomatic representation in Tana. There were around forty missions, including some quite extraordinary ones that the UK did not recognise, such as a breakaway section of Western Morocco calling itself something like the Democratic Arab Republic of Sahraoui. The Libyans, the ANC, the Cubans, the Vietnamese, the Yugoslavs, the Iranians and North Korea were among many other rather surprising people to be represented in Tana. I did not call on ambassadors not recognised by the UK. There was a repellent Cuban ambassador, a nice Yugoslav, a sinister East German, responsible (I believed without any evidence) for phone tapping for the government. Some of these were directly funded by the USSR, which had a large embassy. The roof of the Soviet embassy was a forest of aerials all presumably intended for nefarious purposes, or to give that impression. Another curious embassy was that of Iran. The Iranian diplomats wore designer stubble on their faces, never smiled or joked in public, did not wear ties, and would never shake hands with a woman, or even speak willingly to another woman diplomat. The grim Iranian ambassador had a Mercedes 500SEL staff car, which did not seem to me to sit well with the public stance of an Islamic ascetic. What a contrast this made with the Shah's diplomats! It was a positive pleasure to make the acquaintance of the US ambassador, who was of course relieved, like me, to be able to converse in English. The Japanese ambassador was not only an English speaker but exceptionally well informed and full of valuable insights into the situation in Madagascar. My French colleague was, of course, so deeply immersed in running his large Mission that he could not afford much time for briefing other ambassadors. The

West German was a steady citizen of course but was keen to demonstrate solidarity with the French. The Americans were more interested in the Cold War game and what the Russians, Chinese and North Koreans were up to. I was lacking in instructions from London and keen to keep it that way as it gave me a free hand.

It rapidly became plain to me that there was a contest in progress for the future of Madagascar. The Russians and their allies (that is, the embassies whose presence they subsidised) were successful in keeping the Malagasy in the Socialist camp and obliged them to demonstrate loyalty to the bloc by voting with the Soviets at the United Nations. The Russians achieved this loyalty by supplying all Madagascar's oil requirements on some kind of credit arrangement, details of which were not made public. The Americans wanted to show support for French efforts to move Madagascar away from the Soviet bloc and to begin to emerge as a properly independent nation. The French and their supporters in the West wanted Madagascar to be independent and as prosperous as possible, overcoming the desolation and despair which the failed Socialist experiment had caused.

President Ratsiraka, by no means a naïve man, had seized power from a pro-French Malagasy government in 1972 and had done so in the somewhat mistaken belief that socialism would enable the island to make economic progress. The French embassy was the largest and most important diplomatic mission in Madagascar. The French still had thousands of French nationals living in Madagascar doing all sorts of jobs. There were French business interests and investments and France wanted its former colony to remain Francophone and French in spirit.

Madagascar had become a French colony in 1896 as a result of a carve up of African territories by the main colonial powers of the day. It might have been a British colonial territory but Britain had secured possession of Zanzibar, and the Zanzibari dependencies of Uganda and Kenya. Britain did not want another big responsibility like Madagascar. After all, we already had India. During the first part of the second World War, the French governor of Madagascar adhered to Vichy France (it was vital for French civil servants to follow Vichy for the sake of their eventual colonial pensions) and was giving covert support to the Japanese, who were operating a large submarine with deadly effect on British shipping in the Mozambique channel. The shipping route to the Middle East was vital to support the British armies in Libya and Egypt and, of course, oil needed to flow Westwards from the Persian Gulf, down the coast of East Africa, through the Mozambique Channel and round the Cape. There was an invasion of Madagascar by the British in 1942 and a Free French governor was installed when, after six months, the British left. The French did not want to give up their colonies after the war in the way that the British had abandoned so many of their territories. Madagascar was a genuine colony with thousands of French colons involved in many aspects of the economy. The situation was similar in some ways to the situation in Kenya, a large part of which territory had been developed comparatively recently (since about 1900) as a British colony. Nevertheless, World War II gave a boost to Malagasy nationalism. The Malagasy probably thought the French were making a good living out of the economy of Madagascar and that if they became independent of France they could have a bigger share of the cake. Madagascar achieved independence in 1960 (earlier than Kenya, where independence was rather forced on a government that was not sure it wanted independence in such a hurry). In Madagascar the French retained a clearly dominant and not altogether

tactful influence after Malagasy independence. The French ambassador told me that by 1972, Madagascar had a gross national product equal to that of Thailand at that time. Since that date, Thailand's GNP had gone steadily up while Madagascar's had gone steadily down. There was a second revolution by Socialist military officers against the independent Malagasy regime in the period 1972-75 and the young socialist revolutionary, Ratsiraka, came to power.

Ratsiraka's urge for rapid socialist style development, urged on by the Russians and others in that camp, lead him to nationalise everything not already nationalised, including rice production and agriculture, and to decree that all produce from the land should be delivered to state co-operatives that would do the marketing. The peasant farmers were to be paid in vouchers exchangeable for the necessities of life from other state co-operatives. Maintenance of the dirt roads connecting towns was to be undertaken by the state, relieving the peasants from a colonial obligation of 'corvee', unpaid work to maintain a given local stretch of highway. The Socialist government decided the first priority of the newly independent government was to tarmac all the main roads making this unpaid and resented corvee redundant. That was popular. However, funds for hard surfacing the roads ran out long before more than a fraction of the road system had been so treated. The President could not re-introduce the 'corvee' without enormous loss of face. So there were no funds to repair and maintain the newly hard surfaced roads. These soon began to develop villainous cracks and potholes. Local labour could no longer be compelled to maintain roads, which descended into a disgraceful condition. The recently hard surfaced roads soon became extremely difficult to travel over. Madagascar in colonial times had, like Kenya, been able to sustain a rather good system of dirt roads but a degraded hard surface done on the cheap just developed potholes that could only be repaired by using more tarmac. The new socialist state had spent everything and could not afford this expenditure. The state system of co-operatives collapsed into chaos even more rapidly than the roads so the economy was soon in severe trouble. It never rose above the level of the most extreme and degrading poverty during the time I was there. However, as an island (and how like Britain itself in some ways) the natives did not really realise quite how miserable their life was by comparison even with ill-managed African states. So they tended to grin and bear it, supported by their natural cheerfulness, resilience and intelligence.

The Russians were keen to gain influence in Madagascar because Madagascar has a potential stranglehold on Western Europe's oil supply from the Persian Gulf. Since the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, oil supplies for the West began to be carried in Very Large Crude Carriers too big to go through the Suez Canal. These VLCCs sail down the Mozambique Channel around the Cape of Good Hope to Europe or elsewhere. VLCCs do not like sailing straight across the Indian Ocean. The heavier seas impose significantly greater strains on the structure of the ships, and increase consumption of fuel compared with sailing up the African coast. In order to retain influence, I believe the Russians offered Madagascar extended credit for the supply of Russian oil. It so happened that during the time I was in Madagascar, three Western oil companies were prospecting for oil in Madagascar itself. The heads of all three companies, AMOCO, Occidental and AGIP lived near my official residence and were well known to me. Having just come from Houston, and having got to know a bit about the oil world in the Houston job, I became a friend of the AMOCO manager, Sid Greer, and was obviously friendly with Neil Campbell, a Scot, who was in charge

locally of the Occidental exploration and drilling programme. AMOCO was first to drill and had a relatively big programme in place. They were spending several hundred millions dollars to see what might lie under their drilling concession territory, only accessible from Antananarivo in practical terms by helicopter. The Occidental concession, although owned by the maverick billionaire and philanthropist, Armand Hammer, was on a smaller scale and only involved an agreement to drill three wells. Occidental were in no hurry to start drilling before they were able to assess what luck AMOCO were having in their concession. In the end they only drilled their minimum contractual three wells. AMOCO had by then found nothing of significance and with a substantial decline in the price of crude oil withdrew from Madagascar in 1987. AGIP did not drill anything and pulled out early in 1987.

Quite early in my time in Madagascar I received a message from the President's office instructing me to get myself to the site of another mining prospect in which there was a British interest. This project was being managed by BP (Coal) and was an investigation into the feasibility of exploiting coal reserves at a place called Sakoa. Sakoa was in the interior of Madagascar and was not conveniently accessible in practical terms by any other means than helicopter. I was told that a seat would be available for me in the AMOCO helicopter on a programme of visits to the AMOCO, Occidental and BP sites. I joined up with Robert Keating, the American ambassador at that time, Sid Greer of AMOCO, and Neil Campbell of Occidental at a very early hour at the airport and we set off. We arrived first at the AMOCO exploration site and waited for the President. He turned up shortly afterwards in a Soviet made helicopter and was briefed on the progress of exploration and drilling at the AMOCO site. We then went off to see the Occidental site. Thirdly we turned up at the BP(Coal) site where there was a British BP manager. The BP manager confirmed to the President that there was good quality coal there all right but the quantity was not great and the problem would be getting it from Sakoa to possible markets in Tana or Antsirabe (where there were a few factories) at a price that would be less than importing coal direct from South Africa via the port in Tamatave. I assume the President had entertained hopes that the UK government might somehow be persuaded to contribute the necessary investment to enable these reserves to be exploited. Afterwards the American ambassador and I took the AMOCO helicopter to the port town of Tulear (or Toliara) to catch an Air Madagascar flight back to Tana on the next day. Later in the evening of the site visit Keating and I were invited to call on the President. The President had taken over the house of the provincial governor. The reception room of the house contained a number of senior generals in the Malagasy army so we were able to talk to them and drink some of the provincial governor's utterly vile whisky. We learned that the president was busy watching videos in some other rooms so we saw nothing of him that evening. I was grateful for the excuse to see the AMOCO and Occidental sites as well as the BP(Coal) study at first hand.

One of my first engagements in Madagascar involved taking a wreath to a ceremony in Diego Suarez to commemorate Remembrance Day. Diego Suarez was difficult to get to by road since there was nowhere to stay on the way and given awful roads it was too far to drive in one day. The only solution was to fly, by heavily overbooked air services. There is a Commonwealth War Cemetery in Diego Suarez in the North of Madagascar. This contains the graves of about three hundred men, victims of the British invasion of 1942. There was also an Anglican Bishop in Diego Suarez, Keith

Benzies. Keith was going to hold a little ceremony at the cemetery and I thought I should be there. Keith was a missionary, a kind, gentle and compassionate man and one of very few missionaries whom I have ever met who struck me as an admirable Christian. (We later learned that he had been trained at the Salisbury Theological College and that he returned to Salisbury when on his very infrequent leaves from Madagascar. He used to stay with a venerable widowed lady with a lovely house in the Close). The custodian of the Commonwealth War cemetery, Michael Valliamee, a Malagasy businessman of Indian descent, was a very different proposition. Talkative, over-assertive, a little of him went a long way. Valliamee made the hotel booking, met me at the airport and generally busied himself with detailed arrangements for my visit, and it must be said, in a very efficient way. Valliamee had wanted me to stay with him and his wife but I had decided on a hunch to stick with the Hotel de la Poste, even though it had lost most of its roof in a hurricane and was in a very run down condition. From the balcony, the view was of the hotel's dilapidated sand and seaweed filled swimming pool on the edge of the magnificent natural harbour, second only in size to Sydney Harbour. The harbour had once contained a French Naval base. It also concealed, I later discovered, the wreck of a Japanese mini submarine sunk after it had successfully attacked the cruiser HMS Ramillies in 1942. There were the remains of some wharfs, some broken down cranes, an empty dry dock and not a floating ship to be seen. At low tide several rusting hulks rose up above the water. There was said to be an airfield somewhere beyond the bleak and uninhabited northern shore, used by Russian aircraft. The port itself was of course totally derelict. The inhabitants of the town were largely Muslim with an Arabic look to them. They had obviously arrived in times past by dhow from Arabia sailing across from African shores via Mombasa, Zanzibar and the Comores. When I checked into the hotel the Malagasy girl at reception enquired whether she should turn up in my room after lights out, bringing her own towel. I thanked her for the offer but told her her services would not be required. I wondered whether Valliamee had tipped her off into making this offer since, had I accepted, he would then have been in a good position to try a little blackmail. Another surprise about the hotel was the excellent food and wine. Breakfast was served on the veranda and consisted of freshly baked French bread, good coffee and butter and jam. In my room, the air conditioner worked but the wires were held in the socket by pieces of matchstick. The shower worked as well. No problem with hot water as the tank was exposed to the sun. During the night, the wind blew constantly causing the remains of the roof of corrugated iron sheets to grate and clatter together. Rather a haunting sound.

I had another surprise next morning. At breakfast a somewhat uncouth man swaggered over to my table. 'You the new British ambassador, then?' 'Yes. Who are you?' 'Oh I'm Kingsley. You will have heard of me.' I told him, untruthfully I fear, that I knew nothing about him, and asked what he did there and why he thought I should know about him. He told me he earned a living from deep sea diving and that he had found a wreck with some valuable gold deposits in it. Only he knew the exact location of this wreck. What he did not reveal, but what I had gleaned from the file in the embassy, was that some years before our meeting he had been arrested and accused by the local police of murdering his French partner. The case had failed because no one had been willing to testify in court against Kingsley. Kingsley had been diving in the area and was the only person who knew where the wreck was. On first arrival to set up in Diego Suarez he spoke no French, and in general hardly anyone there spoke English. He needed a French/English speaking partner to begin

with until he had acquired some working French. By the time I met him, Kingsley had acquired a Malagasy lady partner and he had a brand new Toyota Landcruiser. To get this vehicle into Madagascar legally would have been impossible, or quite impossibly expensive. I surmised that the Toyota had been landed unofficially in Diego Suarez, necessary local bribes had been paid or there had simply been intimidation of officials. Both of these measures would have been possible in a town far from the writ of the government in the capital.

The local Member of the National Assembly for Diego Suarez was the Minister of Defence in the Madagascar government. Like many other people of similar rank and standing, he eventually perished in a helicopter 'accident'. Round about the time of the Minister of Defence's demise, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of External Affairs jointly summoned me to say that they were deporting Kingsley for what on the face of it seemed to be a legitimate reason. I surmised that the true reason was connected with the division of the gold spoils from the wreck, and possibly a vain hope by the Ministers of the Interior and External Affairs that they might be able to get their hands on some loot, if necessary cutting out the Minister of Defence. I could see no objection to the removal from the country of this unpleasant man. The Ministry of the Interior, commanding the internal security apparatus, set in train the deportation. However, Kingsley turned up in the military hospital in Tana under the armed protection of the Malagasy Ministry of Defence and therefore safe from deportation by the Interior Ministry. Richard Hyde and I went to see him on separate occasions, at his request, because he claimed he had a right to consular protection. He said he was not able to visit the UK (I assumed he was 'wanted'). He was not ill, of course, merely in hiding under protection. He told me he was anxious to avoid having his passport stamped to show he had been deported as this would scupper his chances of gaining residence in any neighbouring territory from which he might be able to access the gold in Northern Madagascar waters. The Malagasy Ministry of Defence solved the problem of getting him out of the country with his passport intact by taking a military ambulance straight onto the apron at the airport so that he could board a departing aircraft without going through any immigration procedures. Such are the complications of doing business in the third world.

Another somewhat similar case involved the Highland Spring water bottling company. I knew about Highland Spring because the Consulate in Houston had helped Highland Spring to launch itself onto the Texas market. In Madagascar, a representative of the company turned up with a plan to convey huge rubber tank loads of pure water, of which there was an abundance in Madagascar, to the Persian Gulf, where there is a chronic shortage. The idea was that the water would be bottled in the Gulf. The representative made clear to us in the embassy that although he might let us know how he fared, he needed no help from us in his negotiations with the Malagasy. I heard without surprise from a member of my staff that he had set up home in a flat in the middle of Tana with a young Malagasy girl. He had started his stay in Tana at the Hotel Colbert, as did most foreigners responsible for paying their own hotel bills. The Colbert was targeted by Malagasy women eager to be of service to male foreigners, all comparatively rich. Before long, the Minister of External Affairs summoned me to a meeting in the Ministry to discuss a matter of some delicacy. The Minister of the Interior was also present. 'We are going to deport the Highland Spring representative. What are you going to do about it?' I asked what was the reason for deportation. The Minister of the Interior told me that the Highland

Spring representative was co-habiting with a minor and this was a criminal offence in Madagascar. Moreover, he had gone to see the Minister of the Interior about a licence to conduct his business and had behaved in an inappropriate and offensive manner (he was alleged to have seated himself on the edge of the Minister's desk and to have swung his legs about). I concluded, perhaps unfairly, and certainly without evidence, that the two Ministers had been hoping to get a rake-off from the business. Perhaps they thought I would help them to achieve a bigger cut and were threatening the deportation to put pressure on me to put pressure on the Highland Spring representative to do a deal. He had clearly put himself in a weak position by living with this under age girl. I told the Ministers there was nothing I could do to prevent them from deporting him if they wished to do so but by deporting him they were delivering a blow at a business willing to invest in Madagascar and potentially of benefit to Madagascar as a whole. Whether they actually used the deportation mechanism or not, I do not know. It is always more than possible that Highland Spring had already decided doing business in Madagascar was not worth the investment of time and money.

One of the other highlights of my time in Madagascar was a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh in his capacity of president of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature. I heard about this before coming out to Madagascar. The FCO had said that it was going to be an entirely private visit and would be absolutely nothing to do with me. They had, however, arranged for me to call at Buckingham Palace to be told more or less the same thing by one of the Queen's Private Secretaries. I thought this was all rather strange since I could not see how I could possibly stand aside while such a senior member of the Royal Family as the Duke of Edinburgh was in the country. However, the Palace and the FCO assured me there would be nothing for me to do or arrange, and the visit would just happen all by itself. One of the first things to happen in Madagascar in connection with the visit was that the local representative of the World Wildlife Fund came to call. The representative, a Monsieur Vaohita, a Malagasy national, explained the delicacy of his status. He also possessed a Toyota Landcruiser, imported many years ago under diplomatic privilege by WWF, to enable him to visit sites which were being sponsored for preservation by WWF. Ownership of a good working vehicle was a cause of intense jealousy among other Malagasy. This made Vaohita nervous (with justification I must add). He had been asked by WWF in Geneva to draw up a programme for the Royal visit and badly wanted my advice as to what should or should not be included in the programme. He wanted to be sure that what he proposed was appropriate and was eager to shelter behind the status that I undoubtedly possessed as a properly accredited diplomat with regard to local officials. We embarked on a very entertaining round of visits. We used the Toyota for one of them and I quickly realised that Vaohita, although a splendid chap, was not a naturally efficient organiser and had not much idea about punctuality or organisation. He would, for example, get us all into the Toyota to visit some destination and trail round the town to fill it up with fuel or collect some other person or document that should have been done before loading his passengers. In considering the programme of visits for the Duke I included some of the obviously necessary visits to sites proposed by Vaohita but I had to veto one visit to a small island lemur reserve near a small town called Maroansetra. To get to this place, I had to hire a small aircraft with pilot. I had never before hired an aircraft at official expense and wondered if it would raise FCO eyebrows when it appeared as a large hole in my travel budget. There was never a murmur. Once at Maroansetra, which

possessed a small dirt landing strip, we parked the plane, walked past some small shops to the wharf where there was a simple open boat, with motor, big enough for a few people. Vaohita organised the boatman and Audrey and I took our places, carefully supervised by local experts who were particular about the distribution of weight, but stayed on shore themselves. We set off for the island reserve of Nosy Mangabe. As we left the shelter of the jetty I could see that the waters ahead of us were disturbed and it became increasingly clear that we were going to have to pass through an area of surf that looked ever more angry as we approached. The boat reared up the first wave, crashed down the other side and this continued in a very alarming way for what seemed an uncomfortably long time before we reached the calmer, deeper water of the open sea. I could well understand why Nosy Mangabe was comparatively unspoilt by visitors or by slash and burn cultivators. It was one of very few unspoilt places in Madagascar and possessed plants and animals not easily seen elsewhere. It was quite fascinating for us but not, I thought, suitable for the Royal visitor since there was no alternative to the perilous boat ride. I envisaged unfortunate repercussions if the Duke of Edinburgh drowned.

One of the items in the programme that I added was a visit to Berenty, a wildlife reserve in the south near Fort Dauphin (now Toliagnaro). Berenty was worth a visit because it was run very efficiently by Jean de Heaulme, a splendid Frenchman and his wife. In spite of all the problems created by the revolution the de Heaulmes had stuck to their sizar estate and their nature reserve and were a beacon of sanity in an area of chaos and misery. I thought the Duke of Edinburgh would appreciate meeting this family and seeing the excellent work that they were doing. One of the things that convinced me that de Heaulme was a sound citizen was the discovery in the course of a visit that we had previously made to Berenty that de Heaulme had a light aircraft in a shed on his plantation. It was covered in dust. He explained that since the socialist revolution he had been forbidden to use the aircraft and it was sitting there against the day when sense might again prevail in Madagascar. I had asked him when it had been last used and he told me it was in the 1960s when Rhodesian farmers used to fly over to Berenty, and he presumably flew to Rhodesia. This was in the early days of the blockade of Rhodesia and economic sanctions by Britain, with the Navy operating a frigate in the Mozambique channel. These flights were completely unofficial, of course.

When the Duke finally arrived in Madagascar, he came by British Airways to Nairobi where his own Andover aircraft had been pre-positioned and was waiting for him. He flew that himself to Madagascar. The Malagasy were anxious to put on a fitting arrival ceremony for the husband of Queen Elizabeth of England, herself a direct descendant of Queen Victoria, very important in the history of Anglo-Malagasy relations. It would be the first visit by a senior member of the British Royal Family ever. The only comparable visit of which Madagascar had any recent experience was that of French Presidents (or Madame Mitterrand at least) when bands played, guards of honour were there to be inspected, columns of troops marched past, and a salute was taken. The visitor was then to be taken with flags flying, horns sounding, lights flashing, motor cycle outriders riding in formation, all other traffic brought to a standstill, schoolchildren lined up along the route, etc. I had had a stand-up row about this with the Minister of the Interior, only resolved by reference to the Prime Minister. I told them that there should be no pomp and circumstance, no flashing lights, no parades, no guards of honour, no flags, above all no motor-cycle outriders. 'Just a

minute', the Minister of the Interior said to me, 'who is going to take responsibility for any attack on our Royal visitor by some madman, you or me? Are you prepared to take personal responsibility for dispensing with the security which I judge necessary'? I told him that I was (I happened to know from experience of visits by the Duke of Edinburgh elsewhere that he disliked protocol and formality). The Duke's arrival was therefore pleasantly low key and the Duke had no complaints about that. This was as well for he had just got back from a visit to the Caribbean and had therefore flown for something like 36 hours before getting to Nairobi. He was understandably not in the sweetest of tempers by the time he arrived in Madagascar. I was invited to dine with him and his staff at the house prepared for him by the Malagasy government, and he let me know the house was not what he had wanted. I told him that it had been approved by his own policeman in the course of a preparatory visit. 'Why couldn't I have stayed at the Madagascar Hilton as I wished to do', he demanded of me. 'Ah', I replied, you haven't seen the Madagascar Hilton.' 'I know', he continued, 'it is because they have this place bugged', and he raised his voice and directed it at the nearest light bulb. I said it would have been simplicity itself for the Malagasy authorities to have bugged the Hilton.

The fact that the Duke was piloting his own aircraft meant that for his visits round the sites selected for him to look at only a small number of people could accompany him. This did not include me, but it did include M. Vaohita as the local representative of WWF, supposedly responsible for the local programme. There was no room for the bevy of government representatives that the Malagasies wished to accompany the Duke. With the Duke, his own aircrew, Vaohita and WWF officials from Geneva the plane was full. I was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs to see the Secretary General, who told me that various senior Malagasy, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and others wished to go with Prince Philip on his aircraft and would I arrange it. I explained the shortage of seats in this rather special aircraft and said that there would be no room for anyone other than one Government representative. I said that the Duke wanted a low key visit and was quite happy just to visit the wildlife sites without fuss and certainly did not need or want an escort of senior Malagasy officials. But, he said, you are taking Vaohita on the aircraft. At this point the Secretary General moved to pick up the telephone on his desk and said that it would only take one phone call and Vaohita was a dead man. This would therefore create an immediate vacancy on the aircraft. I hoped that the threat to have Vaohita bumped off was only a negotiating ploy and told him to go ahead. Of course, being rather a nice man, and a poet in his spare time, the Secretary General would not have implemented his threat to have Vaohita executed personally, but what about the Minister of the Interior? It was an uncomfortable conversation but there was no way I was going to be bounced into even trying to interfere with the allocation of the seats on the Duke of Edinburgh's own aircraft. I told the Secretary General that if the Government of Madagascar wanted more seats for officials they would have to hire their own aircraft. Of course, they had no budget for such an expense. We eventually reached a compromise on one senior Conseiller Supreme de la Revolution.

The climax of the visit was an address by the Duke of Edinburgh to the assembled top people of the Malagasy establishment. It came at the end of the visit and it was a summary of the Duke's conclusions. He said he had the impression Madagascar was committing suicide through slash and burn agriculture, destruction of the forests, and failure to protect wildlife. The speech was greeted with astonishment. The Malagasy

had expected the usual flattery such as is delivered by political leaders, and especially Socialist camp leaders. There was some barely polite applause, accompanied by angry murmurings. I realised that, unlikely though it was that they would have had any consideration for me, possibly one of the reasons why the Palace and the FCO had told me to stand back from the visit was that they knew its purpose and may have anticipated dire political repercussions that I would have to deal with. There were no repercussions except good ones. The big aid donors from the West, the US, the international donors like the World Bank, and the European Union, were able to say that Madagascar should heed this message and do something to restrict environmental damage or aid would not be delivered. The warning did some real good eventually. The warning message was clearly something that no diplomat or politician anywhere else in the world would have been happy to deliver to a third world country at that time. Only someone of the stature of the Duke of Edinburgh could have been so straight. I suppose in retrospect that the clear messages that I had given the Malagasy before the visit that there should be a minimum of fuss and protocol redounded greatly to my credit as my advice had saved them from enormously greater embarrassment.

Another visit of an entirely different kind occurred when the United States Commander in Chief, Pacific, Admiral Hayes, arrived for a visit. He was known as CINCPAC, and he explained that for US Defence purposes the world's oceans were divided into two halves. He was responsible for all US defence matters from the Western seaboard of the US up to the East Coast of Africa. His opposite number was responsible for all areas East of the Eastern seaboard up to and including the West coast of the continent of Africa. CINCPAC arrived in some style. He had several generals and their wives with him and he flew in Air Force 2, a Boeing 707 specially fitted out for VIP purposes. It bore the words United States of America in gold above the cabin. It was very impressive. There were no portholes. There were several suites of cabins inside and all equipped with chairs and bunks so that the passengers could sleep between destinations. There were US service personnel acting as attendants, serving food and soft drinks (no alcohol).

CINCPAC's visit was of course the responsibility of the American ambassador, Robert Keating. However, Admiral Hayes had told Keating before visiting that he wished to play a round of golf and, short though the visit was, an afternoon had to be reserved for golf. No one in the US embassy played golf, so Keating asked me if I would play a round with the Admiral. I naturally agreed with pleasure and we talked as we went round the course about Madagascar and its problems. I suppose my view of the problems coincided closely with the US ambassador's but it might have been useful to the Admiral to have had my version. He seemed very grateful at any rate. At the end of his visit, Keating invited Audrey and me to accompany him in Air Force 2 to the Comores, situated half way between Madagascar and the African coast. We also had the President of the Comores on board. He had been on a state visit to Madagascar and Hayes wanted to see what went on in the Comores. The flight was a weird experience. Since Air Force 2 had no windows it was impossible to see where we were going. It was rather like being in an airborne tube train. It was a comfort to know it was being flown by experts.

We had a good look round the Comores and met the chief minister. Audrey and I stayed in a new Novotel which was surprisingly comfortable, compared with hotels in

Madagascar. Everything worked. There were clean towels, showers, running water. The Comores themselves were a puzzle and we came nowhere near understanding the machinations behind the scenes. There was said to be a sinister French mercenary, Bob Denard, in actual charge, although whether this was so or not, I never found out. Shortly after we left, the President of the Comores, who had been on Air Force 2 with us, was assassinated.

After the departure of Admiral Hayes and entourage, we were picked up by a Beechcraft provided by the US government to service US missions in Southern Africa to take us back to Madagascar. We were about six in this eight passenger aircraft and among the passengers was Dick Snow, the US Defence Attaché in Tana. As we flew back we passed within sight of Mayotte, one of the Comores group but still a French possession, with a garrison of French troops on it. Dick said he had landed there once claiming some emergency without having sought prior permission from the French to do so. He was put under escort, not quite arrested, and ordered to leave as soon as they had dealt with his pretext for landing (something like shortage of fuel, I think) and never to return without permission. It was, he said, very unfriendly.

Towards the end of our time in Madagascar, the dubious honour of becoming the Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps fell to me. This involved largely ceremonial functions like being the host at farewell parties for departing diplomats, offering them all champagne, and organising and presenting the departing ambassador with a present to which all the other diplomats had to contribute. The extra costs of the champagne etc fell to me so I negotiated an addition to my 'frais de representation' from the FCO. They paid up with surprisingly little protest. One of the real tasks of the Doyen is to represent the interests of the Corps to the Malagasy authority in case of any dispute or disagreement about the way in which the Corps were being treated. Another responsibility was to reply to the President Ratsiraka's New Year message to the people of Madagascar. This was televised and delivered before a gathering in the Palace of all the senior Malagasy as well as all the diplomats and their wives. One of the tragedies of Madagascar and the French colonial heritage, admirable in many ways, was that the President modelled himself on the French president. Mitterrand, who was then President of France, would give thoughtful speeches to the French but implementation was in the hands of a capable and effective civil service. Ratsiraka's speeches were just talk without any implementation because there was no effective money in the system to do more than just pay basic very low salaries to staff. Schools without books or paper or pencils (or even glass in the windows or desks) were typical. Ratsiraka would nevertheless closet himself away for weeks working on the text of speeches which would sound fine but would have no results. So his New Year message was a big event for him, and the reply of the Doyen on behalf of the Corps was the only response made and broadcast. My two predecessors as Doyen, one of which was the excellent Japanese ambassador, had created much interest. I never worried about this responsibility because my tour of duty was due to come to an end before New Year 1988. When I informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that this was the case, they were appalled (I had performed the duties with impartiality) and asked me to postpone my departure, thinking that the UK Foreign Office would jump at the chance to hold this influential position. My French colleague had already said his farewells, and had been presented with a commemorative silver plate by me to mark his departure from Madagascar, but when I told him that the Malagasy had asked me to postpone my departure so that I could remain as Doyen, he immediately

asked the Quai d'Orsay to cancel his next appointment so that he could stay on. Paris immediately agreed. London of course remained totally indifferent. As a matter of fact, I had decided that as Doyen of the Corps it would be my duty to respond to the President in terms that would be acceptable to all shades of opinion within the very varied diplomatic group. This would inevitably be anodyne and not some challenging and individualist expression of hope that Madagascar would stop destroying the forests.

We departed from Madagascar in December 1987 in style. The Diplomatic Corps, the Foreign Minister and the Secretary General turned up to see us off. There was champagne and touching little speeches. Unfortunately, the Air France 747 was then delayed for some technical reason and some of the diplomats and others drifted away. We finally took off some three hours behind schedule at our ease in seats 1A and 1B. These were definitely the best seats to occupy in that particular 747. We were in the nose of the aircraft and got splendid views of the runway on taking off and landing. While airborne we could see the ground, from a great height admittedly, and we got a wonderful impression of the extended Rift Valley stretching right up to Eritrea. Another advantage was that so far forward of the engines there was very little noise. We arrived late in Paris and after the last onward flight to London had left. We were rebooked on an early flight to London Gatwick next morning so had to spend the night in an airport hotel. We could not take advantage of the VIP lounge, which had been booked for us at London Airport by the Foreign Office. And our hire car was efficiently re-routed by Ford to Gatwick. But arrival back home was a terrible anti-climax compared with the deluxe departure from Madagascar.

We were not finished with the Foreign Office, however. I was invited to make a farewell call on the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe at his residence in Carlton House Terrace. He had done me the favour of actually reading my farewell despatch and had noted that I had offered up some criticisms of the administration of overseas aid. He asked whether I was going to see Christopher Patten, then the Minister in charge of Overseas Development. I had not but an interview was arranged. I met Patten but the interview was not satisfactory as he stuck to the official line that small posts in Francophone Africa should restrict their aid to the teaching of English as a foreign language. I had wanted UK aid to focus more on economic development, from which there might be some trade advantage to the UK. This was important to the embassy in Madagascar as the Foreign Office at that time demanded evidence that the post was doing something to increase UK exports. In Foreign Office eyes only evidence of an increase in exports would justify the existence of the post. This astonishingly narrow minded outlook governed Foreign Office attitudes to posts overseas at that time (and probably still does). However, while in Madagascar I had met two directors of a Canadian subsidiary company of British Petroleum, owned via BP Chemicals. This company Qit Fer et Titane Incorporated and based in Montreal (hence the French name), was interested in exploiting the beach sands in south east Madagascar. The geological conditions there were more or less identical to the situation at Richards Bay in South Africa where Qit Fer was extracting ilmenite and using this product in a wide and important range of other things, including paint and titanium. With pressure to impose sanctions on South Africa and enforce the end of apartheid, Qit Fer feared losing an important source of raw material. Their plans would have entailed building much plant near Fort Dauphin (now Talognaro), rebuilding the port, constructing schools and a hospital and generally creating a lot of

employment while taking good care of the environment. The investment would be considerable and would be a boost to Madagascar. It would have given Madagascar foreign exchange earnings. It would also have been UK trade in a roundabout sort of way, since Qit Fer was theoretically part of BP. I had done much to convince the two directors of Qit Fer that the risks, although considerable, were of manageable proportions (because by then I knew how to access the President). After I had retired Qit-Fer invited me to go to Montreal to see the operation there and to discuss terms of an appointment as Director of the Madagascar investment. This would have amounted to several hundred million Canadian dollars. It came to nothing. QIT Fer having told me that they were going to make me an offer I could not refuse, the British Government suddenly stepped in by demanding that BP repurchase a larger share of its own shares from Kuwait. So BP had to raise money in a hurry. They did this by selling BP Chemicals to another British company, Rio Tinto Zinc. RTZ knew nothing of Madagascar or the background to the plans of Qit Fer to invest in this strange island about which they knew nothing. One of the Qit Fer directors came to London to ask me to help him make a presentation about Madagascar to the board of RTZ but RTZ decided they wanted time to consider the matter. Time was not on my side since my value to Qit Fer lay in the range of contacts that I had built up in Madagascar while ambassador and my knowledge of how the system worked. With unrest and discontent with Ratsiraka building up in Madagascar the situation was changing. One can very rapidly become out of date with political development in the modern world, even in a remote and backward part of the third world.