

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

Peter PENFOLD (Born 27 February 1944)

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This is an interview with Peter Penfold, a former member of HM Diplomatic Service, in Bidborough, Kent, on 10 July 2003. The interviewer is Charles Cullimore, also a former member of the Diplomatic Service.

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CC Can I start by asking you what it was that drew you towards the Diplomatic Service in the first place?

PP It was more by accident than design. I had left grammar school at the age of 19 and had A levels in German, French and geography and had started doing all sorts of odd jobs just to earn some money; so for a while I was a laundry attendant, hospital porter and a butcher and I guess my parents were getting a little bit anxious; they expected me to do a little bit more having stayed on at grammar school. I thought then, misguidedly, that with French and German I must make use of my languages so I started looking for opportunities to join organisations or firms that worked overseas. I approached a few international companies, but at the same time I applied for the Civil Service. I took the civil service exam, which I passed, but I particularly wanted to join the Foreign Service which I recall entailed taking a further exam and having to accept coming in at a lower grade. I could have entered the Civil Service as an executive officer but even with the extra exam I was only able to enter the Foreign Service as a clerical officer, which is what I did. So in 1963 I became a clerical officer in the Foreign Office in the days when the Foreign Office still had coal fires. I remember one of my first tasks every morning was to empty the coal scuttle and get a new scuttle of coal.

CC How times have changed. OK, so that's how you started off so then what happened?

PP My first posting came a couple of years later. I was rung up one day and a voice said pack a bag and in two months time go to the embassy in Bonn, which I did. I enjoyed that very much. I think Bonn was a very easy introduction to living overseas. Certainly my life was transformed. From living in a bed-sit and having to commute to the Office in London, suddenly I had a nice flat, and a car, and I was in the centre of Europe. I was able to pursue some of my interests, for example grand prix racing. I was able to go to all the grand prix races in Europe. It was very comfortable. There was a big staff. I recall very clearly that I was very impressed with the calibre of the people in the Service. There was no doubt in my

mind that the embassy in Bonn, being one of our more important embassies, clearly attracted some of the brightest and best in the Service. All of those I served with, I was only a clerical officer, but second secretaries and first secretaries, for example, all went on to become senior ambassadors, some to be permanent secretaries.

CC That was my own experience in the 1970s in Bonn, exactly as you have said.

PP Then after that, when the posting came to an end, I was posted to Kaduna. Again, in those days, you didn't have post preference forms or anything like that. You would just receive a call and be told to go to Kaduna. I'm glad quite frankly that it happened that way. I would probably never have even thought of going to Kaduna. I didn't know where Kaduna was when they told me. Of course it's in Nigeria, but I'd immediately said fine and off I went. That, quite frankly, started my love affair with Africa. If I had been much more choosy about the places I wanted to go to I might never have considered Kaduna and might not have considered Africa, and yet that has been the most fulfilling part of my career just because of the way the postings were done in those days.

CC So you had a couple of years in Kaduna?

PP Two years in Kaduna.

CC Was this still in a clerical post or...

PP Yes, but obviously in a much smaller post, contrasting with the embassy in Bonn. In Bonn you had a UK based staff of about 100, 200 staff all together. In Kaduna we had just 6 staff. I have to say that it wasn't until I got to Kaduna that I heard for the first time the phrase 'senior staff and junior staff', which I found a little bit un-nerving. We didn't seem to have that in Bonn, although clearly it was there, but in Kaduna in those days of the 6 staff three were considered to be the senior staff and had diplomatic rank. Three junior staff did not have any diplomatic rank at all and as a result had no diplomatic privilege, so in a small post like Kaduna there was much more of a division of staff than there was in Bonn.

CC That's interesting. It was much more noticeable because you didn't have the diplomatic privileges in Bonn either.

PP Well yes you did. In Bonn we did because we had access to the NAAFI, so you didn't need diplomatic status to get your duty free goods.

CC Right, that masked it a bit. So you noticed it for those reasons but are you saying there was a different attitude on the part, perhaps, of the senior staff towards the junior staff?

PP There was to a certain extent. It's hard to explain. I might just mention that when I was in Bonn one of the other interests that I had was the scout association. I set up a cub pack for the children of the entire diplomatic corps in Bonn. We would meet once a week in the canteen at the British embassy. That actually brought me into contact with not just the members of the British embassy but the other embassies as well. My profile therefore was possibly a little bit high. For example, it used to amuse me that the on the Kenyan national day the Ambassador, the Ministers and the Head of Chancery would get invited to it, and I would as well because the son of the Kenyan ambassador was in my cub pack. So from that point of view therefore one didn't feel the differential. When one was in Kaduna there was more separation of what some staff were doing and what other staff were doing.

CC Right. After Kaduna you became what we called a Latin American floater for a time. Would you like to say something about what a floater is and what you actually did?

PP The Latin American floater was one of the more exciting jobs as far as I was concerned. I just loved the job. What it entailed in those days was that you had small missions and when somebody went on leave you would cover for them; or, if an emergency cropped up and extra staff were needed. We had, in the 1960s and 1970s, groups of people called floaters who were allocated to different areas of the world. For example, for Latin America there were 5 of us, 5 floaters. We almost metaphorically had one suitcase and hovered over the continent and if anybody wanted extra help we would beam down to them. Generally, for the Latin American floaters, we tended to stay in Central America because that's where the smaller missions were. If it was a big mission, they didn't normally need to call in extra help. I seemed to be particularly lucky. My first assignment in Latin America was to go to Mexico

City to be vice consul for the world cup. What had happened was that the consul and his consular staff had gone to Guadalajara where England were playing and they needed somebody to keep an eye on things back in Mexico City. Most of the English supporters were expected to stay in Guadalajara where England were playing but, as it happened, a lot of them stayed in Mexico City so it was a very busy time. I got to meet the English football team. I got involved slightly in the Bobby Moore fiasco and with the trouble he had had in Colombia when he was arrested for allegedly stealing jewels. I got to see some of the matches including the final. So that was marvellous. And then after Mexico City I was sent to Ecuador. I was actually in Ecuador for 6 months. I covered for two different people who went on leave. My main job there was with the total refurbishment and renovation of the residence. I was like a glorified clerk of works but I still found it interesting being responsible for a huge building project in, to my mind, what is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. Ecuador has absolutely everything, a beautiful coast, the snow-capped volcanoes of the Andes and of course the Galapagos Islands. After 6 months there, our ambassador in Uruguay, Geoffrey Jackson, had been kidnapped and so I was asked to go to Uruguay to help out there for about 6 weeks. After Uruguay I was posted to Paraguay because it was a very small mission, just one person who had gone on leave. But as a novelty I had decided to travel overland by local buses from Montevideo up to Asuncion. It took about 2 days to do it. It was the sort of thing you could do. Finally, my last assignment as a floater was to St Vincent in the Caribbean, which in those days was not fully independent. It was called an associated state, which meant it had internal self government but Britain still exercised responsibility for defence and foreign relations. We had a 2 man post on the island, and I remember my colleague David Mitchell and I would jokingly decide who was the foreign minister and who was the defence minister for that day. That was a very nice and relaxing time after what had been a very exciting and very hectic time, and I thought that this was my reward, except that I had only been on the island for 3 weeks when the volcano erupted. Because we were responsible for defence and foreign relations, we had to evacuate the people from all around the volcano and bring in the Royal Navy. So that was 2 years of being a Latin American floater. It was absolutely fascinating given the range of cultures you saw, given the range of jobs you did. I think it helped me a great deal in my career in being able to turn my hand to all sorts of different things.

CC Can I take you back to Mexico City for a moment because, interestingly, you made no mention of any problems with British citizens being arrested or riots or anything of that kind. Is that because it didn't happen in those days? Nowadays one would think that whoever had the misfortune to be the consul in a world cup venue would be very worried about all the problems of British people getting into trouble and being arrested and so on. Was that a feature or not?

PP No, it was not a big feature. We had isolated cases. Certainly there were incidents involving British football fans, but on the whole the scale of what we have seen in the last world series was not happening in Mexico in those days. I guess part of the reason for that was that it was not quite so easy to get to those sorts of places as it is now. Yes, some came out as tourist groups but a lot of people had to come out under their own steam, which meant they had to have saved up a fair bit of money. I had spent a lot of time talking to the travel agents to ensure that everybody was insured medically; it was not accepted form as it is nowadays, and we had good relationships with all the local authorities. The Mexican police were very happy because as soon as they found any Brits who were any trouble, they could ring us up and we would go and take the person off their hands. They were very happy to be relieved of it. I remember one case. One of our chaps was a bit drunk and when I arrived on the scene, having been rung up by the railway police, I found that he had smashed the window of a train, claiming he had done it because he was jealous of the power of the train and wanted to prove that man was mightier than the machine. He picked up his beer bottle and threw it through the window. The police were taking the view that as long as he paid his fine then he could go. He was being very belligerent but when I pointed out to him that a Mexican prison faced him unless he paid, he soon calmed down.

CC So it wasn't too big a problem. OK, and then you went briefly to Canberra before the FCO. Can you tell me something about that?

PP Yes, very curious. I ought to mention first one of the things that happened on St Vincent when the volcano blew up. I met my first wife to be. She was actually on holiday there with her sister and we decided we were going to get married. I was actually planning the wedding when the Office rang up and said could I pack a bag and go to Canberra. I said I was going to get married and they persuaded me to defer the wedding for a month because, they said,

our Passport Officer in Canberra was dying and they needed somebody in a bit of a hurry. I jumped on a plane and arrived in Sydney then flew on to Canberra and the first person to meet me was the passport officer, who was far from dying. He was perfectly fit. What had happened was he was a diabetic who had gone into hospital for his regular 2 yearly check up and our Head of Chancery there at the time had panicked, hadn't checked up on what was going on and sent off a telegram saying I must have a replacement. So I flew half way across the world to be there.

CC And you weren't really needed.

PP As it happened there was quite a lot of work. I think it would have been an embarrassment to put me back on the plane and send me straight back anyway. But I stayed there for three months.

CC And then your next posting was to the FCO, actually back to London.

PP Yes, I came back. I clearly remember two features of that home posting. I was assigned to the Pacific and Dependent Territories Department, which was one of the linked departments between the Foreign Office and the ODA, as it was at the time, and I was the desk officer for places like the Pitcairn Islands and the Solomon Islands. It was fascinating to be responsible for a tiny island in the middle of the Pacific. I enjoyed that job very much. It was not too onerous because at the same time I had got married and I was having to renovate a house in Putney which needed a lot of work doing to it and I was doing most of it myself. In the middle of that Personnel rang me up and asked me to report to Number 10 Downing Street. So I went and knocked on the door of No. 10 and said I was Peter Penfold from the Foreign Office. You sent for me? I was shown into an ante-room and then I was sat in front of three people who started firing questions at me, all sorts of questions about what I had done. I stopped them in mid-stream and said look, before we go any further, can you explain to me why I am here? They said I was there because Ted Heath, at the time, was setting up a European Commission secretariat inside Number 10 and they had asked various ministries around Whitehall to send candidates to fill a post. My Personnel Department had not told me this and I said to them I didn't really want the job because I could sense what was going to happen. By now I was an executive officer, and they wanted a glorified clerical officer, and I

was going to be required day and night when I was wanting to get on with rebuilding my house. So I turned that opportunity down at that stage to work for Number 10 which somewhat angered Personnel Department. But I think they should have come to me to tell me what it was they wanted.

CC Indeed, extraordinary that they didn't.

PP I was very ambitious. I was very keen to pursue my career and we still had, in those days, a fast stream and a regular stream. The regular stream were people who had come in before university and so on. I saw that one way to advance oneself was to learn a hard language. It seemed to me that if you did that, first of all it looked good on your career plan and, also, it helped give you a better indication of where you were more likely to be posted to as well. So I volunteered to take the aptitude test for hard languages and I got a pretty high mark, not that I am any sort of great linguist, but I liked games. To me the aptitude test was more like a game with a mock language. As a result of that they said to me what language would I like to learn? I said I would like either Chinese or Japanese. I was told that that would not be possible because at that time they had too many Japanese and Chinese speakers on the books. They asked me if I would like to learn Arabic and I said that I didn't want to learn Arabic because I didn't really want to be stuck in the Middle East for the rest of my career. It wasn't an area that appealed to me. So it was left for a week or so until I got a phone call saying well, how about Amharic? My first thought was what is Amharic? When they explained it was the language of Ethiopia, I was immediately attracted to that. I didn't know much about Ethiopia but what I did know was that it was the only country in the world where it was spoken. So even if it didn't work out, it had not curtailed my opportunities for working in other places. The Ambassador in Addis, at the time Sir Willie Morris, a marvellous chap, had decided to resurrect having an Amharic speaker on the staff. He sent a signal saying he wanted his Second Secretary to be an Amharic speaking officer. So I started. The Office checked around the language lab to see whether we had any Amharic language tapes, and all they could find, in a corner, gathering dust, were some tapes of Amharic, which was not a language course at all, but just tapes of people speaking Amharic, without any translations or anything. So for a week I just sat in the language lab listening to this gobbledegook without knowing what it was. Then I was assigned to Professor Edward Ullendorff at SOAS for about 6 weeks, who started teaching me the basics of Amharic.

Incidentally, when he gave me the book lists, he told me the best Amharic dictionary was the Russian/Amharic dictionary, and he seriously expected me to learn Russian in the evening at the same time. That went on for 6 weeks and then I went to Addis on posting, but first of all as a language student learning Amharic. So that entailed me going to live in Gondar. I was supposed to live in Gondar with an Ethiopian family to learn Amharic. As it happened I ended up living with a British missionary up in Gondar, Roger Cowley, which wasn't quite so good because there was the natural tendency for us to lapse into English on several occasions, particularly as my Amharic was not very good. The other thing I soon learned when I got to Ethiopia was that only, at most, 24% of the population actually spoke Amharic, and when I first arrived of course it wasn't necessary to speak Amharic anyway because all the officials in the government spoke English. But it was useful to try to make conversation with some people with Amharic. I then became the Second Secretary and therefore part of my ambition had worked out, that by learning a hard language I had received an early promotion to Second Secretary.

CC Does that mean you had bridged?

PP No, I still hadn't bridged yet. So I was what I think they called a 7E but I was a second secretary in Chancery, and I was reporting on internal Ethiopian affairs. But, interestingly, the second secretary post in Addis in those days was also responsible for the OAU, the OAU headquarters being in Addis. As a result I had to attend all the OAU summit meetings around Africa and prepare reports about them. That was particularly interesting, not least, for example, when I covered the 1977 conference in Gabon where we didn't have any mission at all, I was very much on my own and reporting via the American embassy back to London. One interesting thing that happened on that conference, those were the days when Rhodesia, as it was then, was very much headline news in Africa and the three Rhodesian Fronts were fighting for the liberation of what became Zimbabwe. David Owen was our Foreign Secretary and when I went to the Gabon OAU conference I was instructed by David Owen to introduce myself to the three Rhodesian leaders who were there at the conference. They were Bishop Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe. It was a very interesting, telling experience how I was treated by the three of them. I first of all went to see the Bishop in his hotel. I warned him I was coming, I knocked on the door, he showed me in and sat me down. He was very friendly and affable, we had tea together and I came away from that meeting

with a very warm feeling; what a lovely man that is; how nice it would be if it ends up that he should be ruling at the end of independence in Zimbabwe. The next day I went to see Joshua Nkomo. Nkomo came to meet me at his door but this time as I walked in the television cameras were there, which he had arranged and he wanted to stage manage this call on him by this representative of the British government. Nevertheless, he was very affable, very much the showman, and you came away from that meeting thinking, well, not as friendly as Bishop Muzorewa but nevertheless I thought if he is in charge we will have good relations with him. The next day I went to see Robert Mugabe and this time I knocked on the hotel door, and an aide came to the door. I said who I was, and he told me to wait at the door. Robert Mugabe came to the door and I explained to Robert Mugabe that I had been asked by my Foreign Secretary, Dr Owen, to introduce myself and to let him know I was in Gabon and if he had any messages that he wished to send to the British government I was available to do that. Mugabe just looked at me and said, I have my own ways of sending messages to your government, and slammed the door in my face. I left there feeling, what a horrible man. It is going to be very difficult if he comes to power. And of course that is how history has now panned out. But I think in those early days to a certain extent we deceived ourselves into thinking that possibly Muzorewa or Nkomo would come to power. If we had analysed the situation more carefully it was obvious from the start that Mugabe would win the election. And if we had appreciated that and if we had made a bit more effort in the earlier days to work with him, even though clearly he was a very difficult person, I wonder whether we would be now facing the serious problems in Zimbabwe today. The other interesting topic from the Addis posting was the Eritrean war. This civil war had been going on for some time, and my job was to try and keep in touch with what was going on in Eritrea; this involved having all sorts of clandestine meetings because all Eritreans were being watched by the Addis government all the time, so literally I used to drive down through the back corners of the streets in Addis and meet informants and stick them in the boot of my car and drive them back to the compound.

CC Literally?

PP Yes. Because we had Sudanese guards on the compound and you didn't wish to compromise them. What is interesting as a follow-up to this is that it was about 20 years later when I was working in the Foreign Office a fax came through to me addressed to Peter

Penfold, Foreign Office. It was on Bank of England notepaper, and it said "Dear Peter, you will never guess who this is. This is your old friend Ato X and I am here in Britain officially as the Governor of the Bank of newly independent Eritrea". And it was from one of my old Eritrean chums whom I had smuggled into the compound in those days.

CC And did you manage to see him?

PP Yes. The other big thing that happened whilst I was there was the changeover in Ethiopia. We had the Red Revolution. The Derg, the military group, were beginning to take power away from Hailie Selassie, and they finally took over. Mengistu finally shot his way to power. Suddenly this pro-Western country became a pro-Soviet country. You saw history being re-written in the newspapers. At one time, for example, Willie Morris, the Ambassador, sent a letter to the editor of "The Ethiopian Herald" noting how interested he was to see that the Second World War had started in 1941. If that was so, perhaps the editor could explain what he (the Ambassador) had been doing as an able seaman in the Royal Navy in 1939 fending off German U-boats who were attacking British ships in the North Sea. The Ethiopian Revolution was an interesting time, and quite violent. I learned several things in political terms from that posting. When Mengistu came to power, nobody predicted he would last more than 6 months. We just felt that it was impossible that this dynasty, which had ruled Ethiopia all those years backed by the power of the church and the elders could be permanently overthrown and that this young military force would get the support of the people. We got it wrong. Mengistu stayed in power for nearly 20 years. He may not have been popular initially but he knew how to win over the people. For example, he handed out guns. It was a tradition for an Ethiopian to carry a gun. This identified him as a warrior. By doing so Mengistu restored some pride in the people. But he was also crafty. To ensure that those guns weren't turned against him he only issued a small amount of ammunition. So the warriors had their guns but they didn't have many bullets to use in any counter-revolution.

CC So that was a very interesting time in Addis and after that you went to Port of Spain.

PP I went to Port of Spain. Of course by then I was married and had three children and I had a posting as information officer. A great contrast to what I had been doing before, but I enjoyed it. The most interesting function on that job was to edit a trade magazine called

British Trade Topics, which we actually produced for the whole of the Caribbean. The idea was to promote British trade throughout the Caribbean. It was an interesting to be an editor of a magazine.

CC Yes, an example of the huge variety of jobs that there are in the Service. Then you came back to London.

PP I came back to London and while I was back on a home posting working in West African Department, I bridged. I had been promoted to Grade 6 when I was put forward for the bridging competition, which, if successful, would mean further promotion to Grade 5. Both Grade 5 and 6 were first secretary level overseas and I was therefore quite relaxed when I faced the intense 2 day bridging competition. Fortunately, I was successful and I felt that I had finally caught up with those who had come in from university. My next posting overseas was Uganda as Deputy High Commissioner. Unfortunately by then my marriage was suffering. My wife had never really enjoyed the Diplomatic Service life. It was too intrusive and did not allow one to really settle down. It was especially disruptive for the children and my wife was not happy about them having to go to boarding school. So I went off to Uganda on my own with divorce proceedings going through. That was a bit of a cloud at the start of the tour, but I immediately fell in love with Uganda. I had already enjoyed other African countries but there was something special about Uganda, which I felt almost as soon as I crossed the border. The country itself is beautiful and the people exceptional even though they were going through difficult times. I had previously visited Uganda in the 1970s when I was in Addis Ababa covering the OAU. I had attended the OAU Heads of State Conference in Kampala during Idi Amin's time but I had only stayed about 3 weeks. This time it was a real pleasure to do a full tour.

CC So this was during the second Obote regime in 1984?

PP 1984.

CC Right. And you were there from 1984 to.....

PP 1984 to 1987. Soon after I arrived, already feeling quite pleased to be the Deputy High Commissioner, the High Commissioner went off on his leave so within just a few weeks of arriving there I was Acting High Commissioner at the time when the Queen's Birthday Party came round. I had checked the invitation list as one does for the Queen's Birthday Party, a highlight of our social year, and noticed that the President was not invited. I checked with people in the office and was told the President never attends national day receptions so we didn't bother to send him an invitation. In those days there was a British secretary to President Obote whom I had got to know quite well. So I rang Joyce up and told her that as I would be sending out the invitations to the Queen's Birthday Party I would be sending one to the President, even though I knew that he never came to national day receptions, but I thought that he should at least be sent an invitation. Sure enough, a few days later, a polite reply came back declining the invitation, but I thought I had done the right thing. However, a week later Obote declared that the day on which we were holding the QBP was going to be his budget day. I knew that this was going to totally disrupt our QBP because after the budget the President held a reception in the Parliament buildings for all the government and diplomatic corps. So I saw the Chief of Protocol and I said that I am sure he and all his ministers would feel embarrassed that they would not be able to come to the Queen's Birthday Party because they would now attend the budget. Therefore, exceptionally, I was going to change the date of the Queen's Birthday Party to the next day to accommodate them and in the hope that this would mean a few of the ministers would come. So we changed all the arrangements and re-issued the invitations. On the budget day the Chief of Protocol came up to me and said you must be excited about tomorrow, Deputy High Commissioner. I said well yes, it was the Queen's Birthday Party. He looked a bit embarrassed and said haven't you been told yet? I said no. He said the President has decided that he would attend. This put us all into a bit of a tizz. Nevertheless, Obote did come for the first time, and in the African tradition, he walked all round the reception with me, hand in hand. I think many of my diplomatic colleagues must have wondered who on earth this new young British diplomat was to have enticed Obote to break with tradition and attend a national day reception. Of course, it was nothing to do with me. Obote was being criticised in the international press at the time for human rights violations and he wanted to send a message back to London that he still regarded Britain as a very close friend. And I think he had a genuine respect for Her Majesty The Queen, as do so many of the African leaders.

CC Which year was this?

PP That was in 1985.

CC So the year before he actually fell.

PP That's right. Then in 1986, sorry, it was in 1985 that he was overthrown.

CC Quite right, it was the year that he was overthrown.

PP It was only 2 months later, and I was still Acting High Commissioner when, thanks to our contacts, we heard that there was to be a coup. I immediately invited the American ambassador, the UN ambassador, and the French ambassador to my residence and warned them that there was going to be a coup that day, this was a Saturday. I then summoned all the staff together and told them that they should move to the residence, the High Commissioner's residence, because it was a bigger place where we could all stay rather than staying in our own individual houses. I told them all to take as much food as they could, so that day you could see British High Commission vehicles that morning with deep freezers stuck in the back, and we all moved to the residence. We got to the residence as the shooting started on the outskirts of the city. I went back to the office in the centre of town to send a telegram informing London that a coup was taking place in Uganda that day. While I was in the office with my communications officer the soldiers hit the streets of Kampala. We had to dive for cover in the office with shooting all around. After about an hour there was a lull and we left to get back to the residence. And then, as often happens, the soldiers went berserk. They had control of the country theoretically but they then started looting and raping and so on.

CC Could you just say briefly who carried out the coup?

PP It was carried out by the soldiers in the north led by Basilio Okello. Obote had been favouring his own tribe, the easterners against the northern tribes, particularly in terms of promotion in the Army. This annoyed them and so the army up in the north just started marching on Kampala. And Obote, as soon as he heard that they were coming, and as soon as they had crossed the bridge (there is one particular bridge in the north but I can't remember

the name) but once they had crossed that bridge Obote knew that probably no forces were going to stop this army so that is when he decided to leave the country along with most of the ministers. Chaos ensued and shooting and gun fire was going on all over the city and the radio had this drunken voice. So all this was going on and I had some 50 people under the roof at the residence and there was no sign of the new military force getting a grip on the situation. I decided I needed to go into town to try to find out exactly what was going on and who was now running the country. I got in touch with the American ambassador and the UN representative and asked them if they would like to come with me. The American ambassador, who I think somewhat foolishly had taken refuge in his embassy in the middle of town with all his staff, leaving all his families still in their homes scattered all around Kololo and other areas, so they were not in such a good situation as we were. He said he would join me if he could come with me in my bullet-proof Range Rover, which was what the High Commissioner's car was in those days. So I said OK we would go in and pick him up. This was then Sunday morning and we set off in a convoy from the residence, my Range Rover, with me in the front sitting alongside the driver, leading. In those days we had a Royal Military Police security team on the staff, so two of them were in the vehicle; the other three were in a vehicle behind. We also had a British military training team based in Jinja and some of them were up in Kampala at the time led by a very young Para captain, Captain David Limb, and they were in the third vehicle behind us. We set off to drive around the streets of Kampala looking to find out where any authority had been established. It was a pretty grim scene. We were virtually the first vehicles on the road since the soldiers had taken over the day before and there were dead bodies lying around, there were lots of vehicles strewn all over the place, lots of evidence of looting and things being vandalised. We drove to the President's office and there was no sign of anybody doing anything there. We approached the prime minister's office and couldn't find anything there. We were then driving near the Parliament building and there was an amazing scene on the roundabout near the Parliament building. There was a huge anti-aircraft gun with a young Ugandan soldier sitting astride it with a red-crash helmet on and his dark sun glasses and one leg draped over one of the barrels of the gun and a bottle of beer in the other hand. And he clearly thought he was the bees-knees. As our convoy of vehicles started approaching him he started rolling the barrels of this huge anti-aircraft gun down and as our Range Rover came to the roundabout he lowered it down until it was touching the windscreen. I was sitting in the front of the Range Rover looking down the barrel of an anti-aircraft gun and thinking to myself that I knew that

this Range Rover was bullet-proof but I didn't think it was going to stop a shell that came out of there. So I got on the radio to David Limb, the Para Captain, who was two cars back, and said, 'David, we have a bit of a problem here. I think you had better come up.' So David came out of his vehicle, came up and saw this guy who was now sitting astride this gun pointing it at us and he just shouted at him, 'What do you think you are doing here? Is this the way the new Ugandan army mounts roadblocks? Put that gun back up in the air.' And the guy immediately started winding the gun up, and there were a few other drunken soldiers just lying around. David got them standing up, 'Come on, up here, let me show you how to mount roadblocks properly.' And he started drilling 6 or 8 Ugandan soldiers. What amazed me was the way they reacted to it, just this sign of authority and discipline and they were immediately reacting to it. So we drove on. I had to call on David to leave his drill instruction for another time while we carried on looking for the government. And finally we were going past the senior police officers mess and there clearly everything was happening. There were lots of soldiers around, there were lots of APCs and jeeps and so on. Our convoy was then 4 cars because by that time we had picked up the American ambassador and we had picked up the UN ambassador. First of all what were very relaxed scenes became very tense. I think we were the first people that the soldiers had seen in a day and a half and as we stepped out of the vehicle they were clicking their guns and pointing them at us, and the air was quite electric. We tentatively walked past them up onto the long verandah outside the senior police officers mess, and we were walking along it with all these soldiers pointing their guns, as we walked along, and suddenly I saw coming towards me two Ugandans whom I knew very well. One of them had been working in the President's office, one had been working in the Prime Minister's office. I knew that they were both northerners but more particularly why I had known them was that what I used to do regularly every Friday as a way of relaxing was to go to a discotheque in Kampala called Clouds. Although it was called a discotheque because you could dance there, it was more like a restaurant. One advantage of going there was that a lot of Obote's ministers used to hang out there. If you couldn't get them in the office, and often you couldn't, you could usually catch them there. It was there that I would meet these two guys and have a drink and so on. Suddenly they were coming towards me and we were standing there hugging one another and I was saying, 'What the hell are you doing here?' They were saying to me, 'Well, we have always supported the north. We have been spying on behalf of Okello.' As soon as the rest of the soldiers saw this, suddenly the whole situation relaxed again, guns were put down, and they said to me: what

are you here for? I said I was there to try to find out who was running the country. We need to know. They said you need to see Major Balmoi. Come with us. So I was led around into this somewhat dark room in the back of the Mess and there was a group of very young Ugandan Majors and Captains all poring over a map of Kampala. They looked at me and one of my friends from the President's office just said, 'Major Balmoi, this is Peter Penfold, the Acting British High Commissioner, but don't worry about that. He is a friend of ours. We meet him at Clouds.' That is what he said. I was ushered in, the American ambassador and the UN representative were told to wait outside because they didn't go to Clouds. I sat down with Major Balmoi and I explained to him that we were very concerned about our community and there had been some terrible things happening, some of the community had been attacked, and I needed to know what was the state of the security situation, how soon were they going to get things under control, and I explained that in all likelihood I was going to evacuate the members of my community out of the country, given the state it was in. Balmoi was very good and of course he said yes, there were still things to get under control, but generally things were getting better. But what was important was that we had established a contact with the new government upon which to build. We did end up having to evacuate 2000 people including Commonwealth and European Union citizens, by road. We did that three days later which took quite a lot of planning and logistics. But what was essential was to establish the first point of contact with the new soldiers.

CC So you actually organised the evacuation with the co-operation, or at least the non-interference, anyway, of the authorities.

PP Yes, in a way, this was another lesson I was learning. As often happens in a situation like this, at the very time when you want to get some people out of the country all the borders are closed. I needed the co-operation of the authorities to get the people out of Kampala, and to get them across the border into Kenya. But equally the host people, whoever are the new people, would normally not want to see evacuations take place because it is a sign that they are not fully in control. By now the soldiers had nominated General Tito Okello to be head of state. If it can be avoided, you should never ask somebody a question because there is always a risk you are going to get the wrong answer so I wrote a letter to General Tito Okello telling him that I was planning to evacuate those members of the British, European and Commonwealth community who had been most seriously affected by all the trouble and

needed a break from the country for a short time. I assured him that the British High Commission would not be closing and indeed all members of the British High Commission would be remaining in the country, including myself. I then ended it by saying I assume therefore that your government will not do anything to hinder the evacuation I propose to undertake. I think that letter was well received by Tito in that he didn't have to reply to it. He could allow the evacuation to take place and if it worked out successfully he could claim the credit that he helped and if anything went wrong he could then say, 'but I never gave permission to do it.' Equally I was not dependent on getting a reply from him for me to go ahead. We showed copies of my letter to soldiers along the route saying I had notified the head of state. That, I think, helped. We shut off the street outside the British High Commission on the morning of the evacuation because we were sending people off in packets of ten cars. It was a beautifully orchestrated evacuation, mainly thanks to the British military being in charge of it and we had communication all the way through, the remaining British military team from Jinja acted as a midway point and were there to give the lead for refuelling and all that sort of thing and of course the British High Commission in Nairobi were up on the border. The only slightly tense situation was actually at the border. When the convoy got to the border the border was still closed but Colonel John Lowles, who was the head of the British military training team and joined the convoy from Jinja, just marched up to the border and pointed his swagger stick at the few border guards and said, 'Open the border.' Fortunately one of the soldiers on duty had been on one of the training courses in Jinja and he apparently, so I am told, said, 'That is Colonel John Lowles of BMATT. If he says we have got to open the border, we have got to open the border.' So they opened the border. They didn't allow the vehicles through but allowed every single person to walk through.

CC Just with what they could carry.

PP Yes. They got out. They didn't lose a single life. I had always told people that my main concern was to get them out of Kampala, not necessarily to get them out of Uganda, because Kampala was where all the trouble was. But if we could get them into Kenya we would. Our plan was later taken up by Consular Department as a blueprint.

CC And there was transport for them, the High Commission in Nairobi arranged transport on the other side, did they?

PP Organised transport, they even organised a mobile bank on the border, so that people were able to change money.

CC It must have been an extremely hectic time. And the British High Commission had designated people to help, hadn't they.

PP We had the wardens there, which again was invaluable, quite frankly. It did work, it worked very well indeed. The only slight problem was communications equipment, which was not of the best. We never spent enough money, I think, on our communications equipment. The other part of the problem was some of our wardens were themselves looted and attacked and the first things that got looted were the radios and so on. But on the whole the warden system did work very well, not least in just keeping the community informed about what was going on.

CC So you got them out, but you were still there and Okello was still there, but that isn't the end of the story, is it?

PP No, because Okello was trying to form a government which in my view actually was never given enough credit for the type of government it was. Tito Okello was just a figurehead head of state. He was there because he was the most senior military officer. The cadre of ministers included prime minister Waligo and were, I think, very honest and sincere people and they were truly trying to bring in all the tribes in a cabinet which represented the whole of the country. The one group which would not join them, even though they had been asked to join them right from day one was Museveni and the NRA who had been in the bush fighting Obote for all those years. Messages were sent to Museveni to join Okello as Vice-president but he refused to join them. I actually went up to Nairobi a couple of times to talk to some of Museveni's people to try to persuade them to come and join. I did it, as I said to them, for two reasons. One it seemed to me that the people of Uganda had really had enough fighting and they just didn't want any more killing and fighting and that I didn't think there was any real need for it. Already he had been promised the Vice-presidency. He knew that

Tito Okello was old and somewhat senile and that therefore he would effectively be running the country and could soon become the President. I don't think this message went down all that well with Museveni and his followers. They took umbrage, perhaps not surprisingly, because this was being said to them by a young British diplomat, who was telling them what their own people were feeling. But I am still convinced that what I was saying did truly reflect what many Ugandans were feeling at the time. They were just sick of fighting although they did want Museveni involved, whereas Museveni and a lot of his followers had been out of the country for a long time. They chose not to. They chose to fight and six months later the NRA fought their way into Kampala and we had yet a further coup. This time Museveni was made President and Okello and the northerners fled and we had the start of what has now been quite a successful government in Africa. One of the most amazing scenes I've seen in my African career was when Museveni was sworn in as President of Uganda. We had at that time a British judge, Sir Peter Allen, who was the chief justice. A very brave man, he had been a judge in Amin's time, one of the few judges to stand up to Amin. He was still a judge, and by the time the Museveni coup happened he was chief justice. Peter very bravely rang Museveni up and told him that he heard on the radio that he had declared himself President of Uganda. Did he really not realise that unless he was officially sworn in by the chief justice his position was not legal? So Museveni, being Museveni said, 'All right, come and swear me in.' So we all went along to the Parliament building...

CC Had Okello been sworn in?

PP I can't quite remember that. I think he may have, but not by Peter Allen. But Peter Allen chose to wear his full ceremonial scarlet robes with the long wig. Museveni still had his guerrilla combat things on. We all stood on the steps of the Parliament building outside in front of cheering crowds watching this amazing scene - a white chief justice swearing in a black African president. It must be the last time this is going to happen. Less than a couple of weeks later, the diplomatic corps were invited by Museveni to go to the Luwero triangle. This was the area close to Kampala where it was alleged that Obote had carried out lots of killings of the Baganda tribe. So we all trooped out to the Luwero triangle, about a three hour drive along a long, dusty road and sat in the hot sun waiting for President Museveni to arrive. He finally arrived about mid-day. We had been waiting since about 9 o'clock in the morning.

He flew in by helicopter. And we, the diplomatic corps, were clearly just being used as the backcloth for him to address his people, which I guess is something we all have to do from time to time as diplomats. But after all that, and of course the speech went on for a long time, we were then given the option. We could either then leave and all drive back to Kampala or we were offered a tour of the local hospital. I and about three or four others thought that we had come this far, we might as well get the full tour, most of the others felt they had had enough and jumped into their air-conditioned cars. So we whipped round the hospital very quickly and then sat down and were invited to a meal and who should come and join us but Museveni. Museveni came and started a conversation. He looked across the table at me, I think remembering some of the things that I had been saying up in Nairobi and elsewhere and he said, pointing and wagging his finger, 'Why didn't your government support me while I was in the bush?' And so I said, 'Well, Mr President, you understand that my government only has relations with governments. We can't support people when they are against governments whether we like them or dislike them. That is the way international diplomacy works. I can assure you that now you are President, the British government will do all it can to assist you to bring peace and prosperity to Uganda. I am sure you would not like it if we now started supporting people who are in the bush against you.' He looked at me with the logic that he had, and he said, 'That is not the same thing.' I said, 'What do you mean?' He said, 'When I was in the bush I was right, and now that I am President I am right. Those other guys were always wrong.'

CC Lovely, that's typical, very typical.

PP So that was Uganda. A country still dear to my heart and certainly one which deepened my love for Africa more and more. I tell people that I have discovered heaven on earth, and I discovered it in Uganda. As you will know well, Charles, in the middle of Uganda you have got the river Nile. Most people view the river Nile as a slow flowing river, but in the middle of Uganda there are the Murchison Falls, where the Nile is squeezed between two rocks which are just 17 feet apart, and then plunges down 120 feet and is the most spectacular view. A group of us went one day on safari to go and camp at the Falls, and it was still when things were a little bit sort of hectic, so we had to take a circuitous route to get there...

CC This was under Museveni already...

PP This was during the Okello time, so there were check points and guards all over the place... no sorry, it was under Museveni but in the early days of Museveni, when the northerners were still roaming around the north. So it took us a day and a half to get to the Falls. After a day and a half on the road I still had ice in my 'eskie' cold box – a great treat. I was putting the ice into my gin and tonic as I sat in front of this view of Murchison Falls. And I was actually sitting under a lime tree. I just reached up and cut a fresh lime and squeezed it into my gin and tonic and gazed upon this spectacular view with nothing else to distract me. I thought that was heaven on earth.

CC You wrote this song, didn't you: Uganda, my African home.

PP Yes the tradition started there. I play the guitar very badly and I had written a few songs in the past so I decided that from the Uganda posting onwards I would dedicate a song to the country from every posting that I had. So I wrote a song about Uganda, my African home, which we recorded with a very nice guy called Jimmy Katumba.

CC Whom I know well. That's amazing. Can I ask you to what extent was the British government aware of the atrocities that were being committed during the Obote II regime, and to what extent did we try to do anything about that? Afterwards it became the accepted wisdom that a very large number of people had been massacred in the Luwero triangle by Obote's people.

PP It was very much a bone of contention. What I found very difficult was to get hard evidence and hard facts about the extent of the killings. It was a very emotional subject. I remember, for example, the Americans sent out a young third secretary who produced a report on the killings in the Luwero triangle, which claimed numbers for which there was no basis of fact at all. One thing that I do recall clearly is that SCF was one of the few organisations that were going into the Luwero triangle. They told me how they were going in one day to a feeding camp. At a certain point on the way in along this track they saw a family of five people under a tree, sorry, on the way back, they had used up all their food, they said to this family of five, 'Don't worry, we will come back tomorrow and we will give you some food.' They went back along the same track the next day, when they got to that tree

there were something like 2000 people under that tree. They said it was a demonstration of how fluid the population was within the area. Therefore trying to have any estimate of how many people actually were there was almost impossible. As a result therefore, determining how many people had actually been killed was almost impossible. When we were able to go back in we started to see all these skulls for example. Nobody could tell us with any degree of certainty that a skull was one year old or ten years old or thirty years old. So the numbers game. Maybe we got caught up in it too much, but because numbers were being used and exaggerated to get attention and as a result maybe therefore not enough attention was in fact given to the fact that some killings were going on. The other debate which was going on was linked to that. It was very topical to discuss; 'was Obote II worse than Amin?' Were there more killings going on during Amin or during Obote? My feeling was that under Amin you had a clear idea of where you stood in that if Amin felt you were a threat to him you were dead. If he didn't feel you were a threat to him you were alive. Under Obote II I think he just lost control of the situation generally and those under him and around him used this lack of control from the President to carry out their own vendettas and arguments and so on. So in a way a wider cross section of people actually suffered more under Obote than they did under Amin. Certain tribes were usually pretty safe under Amin. That wasn't the case necessarily under Obote. I generally do not feel that Obote was that bad a man. I'm not saying he didn't know what was going on but I don't think he directed evil things as much as Amin had been directing evil things. He just lost control, hitting the bottle too much and so on. He did get worried. I told the story about the Queen's Birthday Party. I recall that I had to go in with a very strong message from Malcolm Rifkind when he was Foreign Secretary, to in effect read the Riot Act, to say that he had got to do something about their human rights record otherwise we would pull out. But he actually thought I had gone in to pull them out. But I just wonder whether you can still draw parallels today with what is going on maybe up in the north, and so on, where human rights violations are taking place on both sides and so on.

CC So, you then went back to London again, to the FCO on a home posting. This is in 1987.

PP Yes, 1987 to 1991 and this time I was put in what was called in those days the West Indian and Atlantic Department. In effect it was the Department covering all the Caribbean countries and the South Atlantic countries including what we called the dependent territories. The Department was divided in effect into two; the independent countries and the dependent

countries. The Head of Department, Robin Gorham, was a close friend of mine; we had actually been to school together. Robin Gorham looked after the independent countries and I looked after the dependent territories. That was a fascinating time because we were beginning to address the issue of the dependent territories. They had been considered somewhat sleepy backwaters but problems had come to a head with the Turks and Caicos Islands where in something like 1989 the chief minister of the Turks and Caicos Islands was arrested at Miami airport for drug smuggling. Suddenly we had major diplomatic incidents. He was in effect a prime minister of a British territory being arrested for drugs and cocaine smuggling. It created a constitutional crisis in the Turks and Caicos Islands and it created a bone of contention between us and the US government. Geoffrey Howe had to oversee most of this trouble and reputedly said that when he became Foreign Secretary he never realised how much time he would have to devote to the Turks and Caicos Islands. It led to a lot of policy papers and rethinking about how we dealt with the future of these territories. Whereas with other problems around the world one could always share them with friendly countries, the rest of the world made it clear that if anything happened in the British dependent territories they just looked to us, Britain, to deal with it. Amongst other things we were having problems attracting new governors. Traditionally the governors had come from the Colonial Service. That of course was now drying up apart from Hong Kong, which had a big public service. There was now no breeding ground for traditional colonial civil servants. I was involved in drafting a paper on where we would find new governors and in the paper, which was accepted, I recommended that we should look increasingly to the Diplomatic Service for governors, and that we should look to having younger governors than we had had hitherto. There had always been a tendency for a governor to be a last post before retirement. I also recommended that we should identify some training slots for governors within the Diplomatic Service. For example, there is a deputy governor in Bermuda, and that was an obvious one to be a training slot. But I also recommended that the job I was doing at that time in the Foreign Office, in other words the deputy head of this Department administering the territories was another obvious training slot for governors. All these things were accepted so much so that the next thing I found is that I was posted to be the governor of the British Virgin Islands which at the time made me the youngest serving British governor.

CC What age were you?

PP I would then have been 48. It was only when Chris Patten went to Hong Kong, he was a couple of months younger than me, that I passed on the baton to him of being the youngest serving governor. And off I went. Already my views had begun to change over these territories but once I was out there I had a totally new concept of these posts. A governor's post, I think, is one of the most fascinating jobs you can do in the Diplomatic Service. It's a combination of three jobs, you are the de facto head of state, representing the monarch of that territory, you are the head of government of that territory in that you preside over the cabinet, and you are the ambassador of Britain to that country because you are also representing the British government. This means that you can sometimes be in an impossible situation, something that I often found myself in. I should add to that, that the position itself is of course complicated by the fact that you swear an oath to the constitution of that territory, unlike, therefore, any other job that one does as a head of a diplomatic mission. I know that sometimes annoyed people back in the FCO in London. I would be sent a telegram of instructions to do something and I would reply that I couldn't do what they asked because it was against my constitution, to which I had sworn an oath. I also argued that...

CC You must have made yourself pretty unpopular...

PP ...that in order to be really effective on behalf of the British government and their interest in the territory I could be more effective if I was seen by the people of the territory to be effectively representing them back to London. Which meant therefore sometimes I would have to appear to be belligerent, to stand up for the people. To stand up for the ministers, and so on. So in terms of diplomatic skill you used as much diplomacy but almost with your own people as you did serving in a foreign country. You add into that the fact that British Virgin Islands was right in the middle of the drugs, all the cocaine, going from Colombia to the United States. We had a major drug smuggling problem. We were seizing huge amounts of cocaine, tons of it. The biggest seizures of cocaine ever had always been in the British Virgin Islands, and we were doing that literally with just one small boat and a drugs force of six officers and one plane, a plane which, incidentally, I bought. That was another interesting thing to have to do, to buy a drugs plane. We effectively turned the drugs scene round. We were the only country in the world to effectively defeat the drugs problem. Not just by catching the drugs. In fighting a drugs problem you have to fight all aspects of it, the production, the consumption of it and so on. And what was always remarkable, given the

vast amount of drugs passing through our territory, was that it did not become a drug ridden society. We had a good public education programme, and we all recognised the dangers of drugs. That was fascinating. The other thing of course with the British Virgin Islands was that we also developed an offshore financial centre. The population of the British Virgin Islands is 14,000. When I was governor the number of registered companies was up to 35,000. Now it is over 150,000, so in fact whilst I was there I brought in twice as many companies to the island as I did people. That caused concern, particularly to the Americans and to ourselves, but we introduced pretty good safeguards to ensure it was used properly. I and my fellow governors argued very forcibly to London. There was a lot of pressure on us from London to close these places down. They just felt gosh, it's risky and we are bound to have problems.

CC You mean as offshore financial centres?

PP As offshore financial centres, and closing them down was, of course, the easiest way to deal with the problem. My argument was, 'look, we are always trying to persuade these Caribbean countries to diversify their economies, to get away from bananas, and so on. Here's a little territory, and it happens to be British, which has very successfully diversified its economy by focussing on up-market tourism and registration of companies. As a result we are the fourth richest economy in the Caribbean. These are the only types of things that little territories like this can do and as long as we keep the safeguards in place and keep an eye on them we should not stop them from doing it.

CC The incentives presumably being what? A very low tax base or no taxation?

PP No taxation. You pay a renewal registration fee every year having paid the initial registration fee of the company. All the world's top companies are registered in the BVI.

CC You are conscious of the scope for all kinds of shady companies to take advantage of the situation. What kind of safeguards did you have in place?

PP The safeguards were that in applying for registration you had to list all the directors and so on and you could try to carry out the checks with intelligence services and with company

records around the world and whether anything was known against these people who were being registered. I think it is even better now than it was then. There were loop holes but part of the problem would sometimes be that the directors would not be known because it would be a company that would then be registering a company as a company and you would build up a lot of masks which it would sometimes be difficult to get right to the bottom of. But on the whole certainly there were far fewer scandals in the BVI off-shore financial centre than there were in the city of London, or in the state of Delaware in the United States, which also operated as an off-shore financial centre. But it was something that had to be constantly monitored. We set up advisers, part of this I had already started when I was in the Department before going out as governor, and that helped a great deal. We said that no governor was worth his salt if not at least one time during his tenure the people demanded he be sent home, because otherwise he was just not doing his job properly. In my case the BVI demanded I be sent home even before I got there, because, literally, the leader of the opposition stood up in Parliament and said 'we don't want this Penfold as governor. He knows too much about what is going on'. So I took that as quite a compliment. As a result I had a marvellous chief minister, the irascible Hamilton Lavity Stoutt, nearly all the time I was governor. The relationship between the governor and the chief minister was crucial to the whole relationship with the country. From time to time there had to be rows and friction, in fact you almost had to create them; he has to keep his image with his people, and the governor has to keep his image. But I said to Lavity one evening when we were having a drink on the verandah, 'Look, if you really want to get rid of me at any time I warn you that the last thing you should do is demand my withdrawal. If you do that then London will immediately think I am doing the right thing and they won't take any notice of you. If you seriously want to get rid of me, what you have to do is write to London and ask them if they will extend my term. That will get them really worried and they will soon be pulling me out.' Such was the relationship you have between the governor and the chief minister. The other constitutional crisis was just at the end of my tenure because very sadly Lavity died of a heart attack, totally unexpectedly, and this had a tremendous impact on the people. He had been the longest serving politician in the Caribbean so his death came as a huge shock. The majority of BV Islanders had not known life under any other person but Lavity. One of the first things I had to try to do as governor after his death was to stabilise the whole society. Make them realise the chief minister was now dead, but life would go on and certainly the government would continue. But it also created a constitutional crisis because, somewhat

surprisingly, given the number of territories we have all around the world, the constitution did not allow for the chief minister to die in office. There was no constitutional provision for what should happen, particularly in this case in that there were 13 seats in BVI's assembly, of which Lavity had 7 and the opposition had 6. It was quite a crucial death in that his death left a balance of power either way of six and six until somebody filled that slot. I considered things very carefully and given the need to create stability and allow government to continue I asked the deputy chief minister to become the chief minister ad interim. I created this title, which had never been heard of before. I was criticised by the opposition, not surprisingly, but London just went along with it. They didn't have any other suggestions. I believe it worked out well because, as it happened, that Chief Minister ad interim, Ralph O'Neal, continued to be re-elected as Chief Minister until this year and served his country very well indeed. One of the other things I had done as governor was to order a public inquiry into Ralph O'Neal's activities and I found that he was selling off land cheaply on one of the islands. Therefore I was not known as a particular friend of his. Anyway those were just some of the fascinating things you dealt with as a governor and I really enjoyed it. And I did not mind wearing the funny hat and the white uniform. I quite frankly deplore decisions like Chris Patten's to dispense with the uniform. Every three or four years somebody in London decided that these uniforms looked silly and that we must get rid of them because they were too old fashioned. It happened while I was governor and all the governors were approached and asked if they still wanted to keep their uniforms? What I said was that I would consult the people and see what they felt. I went round talking to people. When you've only got 14,000 people you can get to talk to quite a few of them. Their very strong view was, yes, they wanted their governor to have a uniform. They didn't really want him parading around in it every day but for special occasions such as the Queen's Birthday parade or any Royal visit or the opening of their parliament they wanted the uniform there. In fact all the time the Queen has a ceremonial robe for her state functions then they would want their governor, who is representing the Queen, to have it as well.

CC That's very logical.

PP Well, I think so. What surprised me was how many people were against it.

CC Did you have any Royal visits, any visits by members of the Royal family?

PP We had a visit by the Duke of Edinburgh, which was fascinating. He came on the Royal yacht Britannia. He was visiting all five of the territories in the Caribbean. We had a marvellous visit. I'm a very strong monarchist anyway. As a member of the Diplomatic Service I took my role of serving Her Majesty very seriously, as seriously as serving Her Majesty's Government. You certainly feel that when you are a governor. And so we were very proud of the Duke's visit, this was back in 1996, but I was just amazed then at the vitality of the man. At the end of his day's visit we all collapsed in exhaustion knowing that the next day he was going to be doing the whole thing somewhere else. And a great sense of humour as well.

CC Did you want to say anything about the citizenship question at all? Was that a large issue during your time or was that rather afterwards?

PP I think that in representing the interests of your people one of the things that many of them were very concerned about was this feeling of being treated as second class British citizens. The very title dependent territories was I think quite frankly awful. I proposed in a paper that they should at the very least be called British overseas territories. I also proposed that they should all be treated the same in terms of their right of entry into the UK and right of abode, which was not then the case. For example, following the Falklands, Margaret Thatcher decided that the Falkland islanders would have right of access and right of abode in the UK. But the other territories were not given the same degree of access. The people of Gibraltar of course have that because they form a part of the European Union. The argument was that if they passed legislation to allow for that we would be swamped with millions of Hong Kong citizens but already we knew at the time that Hong Kong was on the countdown to being handed back to China and we could have easily have left Hong Kong out of the equation. When Hong Kong was removed from the equation you were only left with something like 160,000 people altogether. This showed itself I think in many ways. When the volcano blew up on Montserrat and there was uproar about the way Britain dealt with that, I think that some of the animosity that came back from Montserratians against the British government arose because of this feeling that they weren't being treated properly as British citizens, that they couldn't even fly to Britain. I remember the chief minister of Montserrat, John Osborne, telling me how embarrassed he would feel when he flew to

Heathrow on an official visit as the prime minister of this little British territory and he had to queue up with the aliens, while, to rub salt into the wound, he would see the taxi driver from Guadeloupe who may have driven him around from time to time, in the EU passport holders line because the taxi driver came from a French territory; the French territories were considered part of metropolitan France. Fortunately, things have changed. It has taken a little while, they are now called overseas territories and, as I understand it, all British overseas territories' citizens have access to Britain. But it took a long time for people to realise that.

CC So that was a rather unique, not exactly an interlude, a unique stage and something that very few of us have had the privilege to do, to actually be a governor of a British overseas territory. After that when did you leave?

PP I left in 1995. I should say that by then I was married again. I had met my present wife, Celia, in Uganda when she was working with the World Bank. We actually got married while I was serving in the British Virgin Islands. In fact as Celia came from Trinidad, I was the first serving governor to get married whilst serving in the territory, and Celia became the first West Indian national to marry a British governor. So it was all rather nice. It certainly helped my job a great deal having Celia there by my side. The other thing which was nice was that I learned to fly while I was in BVI. I got myself a private pilot's license which made it very easy to fly around so in fact if I wanted to visit my colleague governor in Anguilla I would just ring him up and see if he was free for lunch and what would take a day using commercial flights I could do in a couple of hours. And so I actually left BVI in my plane. I literally flew myself out with my wife. After that the Office didn't quite know what to do with me. The whole postings scene was beginning to get very cumbersome. You seemed to have to plan so far in advance what you wanted to do and where you wanted to go and you had to be around to get it. The nice old days of someone ringing up and saying go to Kaduna, or something, had certainly disappeared. They didn't seem to have much going so a job was created for me as the special drugs adviser to the Caribbean which actually was very interesting. Amongst other things, I was then part of the European Union team of drugs experts which went around the Caribbean and we actually devised a blueprint policy for all the Caribbean governments on fighting drugs. And then I was out giving speeches on drugs

and all sorts of things like that. It was an interesting time. But it had to be almost artificially created by the Foreign Office.

CC No doubt as a consequence of your success in fighting drugs in BVI.

PP Yes. I wanted to go back to Africa. I saw that the High Commissioner's post in Namibia was coming up and Celia and I had always fancied going to Namibia so we applied for that and then as luck would have it I think the inspectors had been to Windhoek and downgraded the High Commissioner's post and so that fell through. So then I was asked whether I would like to go to Sierra Leone and although in the Jesp rating, as they call it, it was a lower ranking post than the British Virgin Islands it was back in Africa. I wanted to go back to Africa and I was assured that it would no way affect what would be my posting after Sierra Leone. I said, 'fine, I'll go there.' So we prepared to go to Sierra Leone.

CC This was in...

PP This was in March 1997. Celia by now had enrolled in a course of theology at Oxford so it was agreed I would go out first. I decided that I would like to go overland so I bought my Land Rover, a new Discovery, which I thought would be the ideal vehicle to go overland in and I drove to Tilbury and got on board an Italian freighter at Tilbury docks, the only passenger on this freighter, and when it got to Senegal, Dakar, got off with my Land Rover. A good chum of mine, whom I had known since my BVI days, flew from New York and met me in Senegal and the two of us drove along the West African coast and literally drove into Sierra Leone. As you know, when one arrives at post one sends a telegram saying, 'I have assumed charge.' So my telegram read something like, 'I crossed the Guinea - Sierra Leone border yesterday having driven 2000 kilometres and have now assumed charge in Sierra Leone.' I presented credentials to President Kabbah. In my remarks to President Kabbah I noted that I had served in Nigeria in the 1960s during the civil war, in Ethiopia in the 1970s during the revolution, in Uganda in the 1980s during two coups and therefore how nice it was to at last come to a peaceful African country. Six weeks later the coup happened in Sierra Leone. My previous experience, particularly the experience in Uganda, stood me in good stead with regard to how we handled the Sierra Leone situation. I don't think the Office generally has given enough credibility to accepting people who have African experience. We

seem to want to develop experts in the Middle East or whatever, in Europe and so on. Africa is always the place where anybody can do it so long as they have average intelligence. I'm not claiming that we have to be super intelligent and so on, but I do maintain that experience of dealing with African situations will stand you in good stead, and probably ensure that you do not make the same sort of mistakes as someone coming fresh to it is more likely to make. Why not therefore acknowledge that? At the very least, it gives you a good inkling of what to do. You may not know what is the right thing to do but you certainly know what's the wrong thing to do. When it came to the coup in Sierra Leone the lesson I learnt about getting all the staff under one roof, including all the families and so on, I think was invaluable because once you have got everybody under one roof you don't then have to worry about sending people out to rescue them. Your own staff can focus on what they are trying to do and don't have to be worried about their wife or kids and so on. It may be a bit uncomfortable but at least you get a team spirit going better as well. So that's what I did again as soon as we heard the shooting going on in Freetown.

CC Did the coup come out of the blue or were you, as in Uganda, aware that there was going to be a coup?

PP We were aware of the troubles brewing and in fact, as I think is reasonably public knowledge, the week before the coup the American ambassador, the UN special envoy, and I asked to see President Kabbah. We went up to his home, and we warned him there that we had picked up rumours that there was discontent amongst the army which could lead to a coup. We weren't time specific but we did warn him. He was a bit too dismissive of it. His answer was, 'I'll have a few of the soldiers round and talk to them.' That it happened was not a surprise. When it happened did catch us a bit by surprise. I don't think anybody, certainly in the international community, was expecting it to happen that Sunday morning. So nobody was that prepared for it. Again we had scenes, even worse than Uganda, of the army out of control just looting and robbing. Interestingly enough, it is important to bear in mind in terms of the historical context of Sierra Leone this had nothing to do with the rebels, the RUF, the group that had been waging civil war all that time. This was the army and it was just a small section of the army. And, curiously, we with our military training assistance programme at the time probably had something to do with the coup in that we had flown in a two-man British military team whose task was to train two battalions of the Sierra Leone Army. They

were assisted by Sierra Leone counter parts on our team and a team of US marines. This had been planned for months and months. Then, at the last minute, the major, who was heading our team, Lincoln Jopp, a very fine officer, came to me and said that they were supposed to start training the following Monday with 600 men, but the chief of the defence staff had suddenly announced that he couldn't find 600 men to train. I went to see the chief of defence staff immediately because this was a vital part of the overall British government programme for Sierra Leone, and said I didn't quite understand why an army of 15,000, and that was the number of salaries that the army was drawing every month, and more importantly the number of rice rations drawn every month, couldn't spare 600 men to do this training. He first of all said, 'Well, it's a security situation.' To which I replied, 'Well, I know there are still some pockets of resistance from the rebels,' which there were, but only in three isolated areas. But, I said, 'I'm clearly misreading the security situation if it's as serious as this, and I will need to reflect this in my reporting back to London.' He then said that it was not as bad as that. I said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'Well, the thing is we haven't got 15,000 men.' I said, 'Well, how many men do you have?' And he said, 'In terms of a fighting force I have 6,000, with probably 2,000 administrative, so 8,000.' Armed with that information I then went and saw the Deputy Minister for Defence, Sam Norman, who then took me immediately to the Vice-president. Sam Norman, when he heard these figures, blew the roof. He said that as Deputy Minister for Defence this was the first time he had heard how many soldiers there were in the army. We had a meeting with the President and I explained that, in the terms of the British government programme, if this training didn't start it could have an impact on our other assistance programmes. So the Chief of Defence Staff backed down and said well, perhaps they could spare 300 men but they would need new uniforms, because they hadn't got any uniforms. I said they didn't need uniforms to start training; we would give them uniforms at the end of the training. So we agreed to start the training programme. But President Kabbah, hearing the extent of the corruption going on, said at the very least they had got to do something about the rice rations, because there was a rice shortage in the country. The way that the rice ration was done in the Sierra Leone army was that it depended on what rank you were how many bags of rice you got. An ordinary private got 1 bag of rice a month, and then it went up to a full colonel who would get 31 bags of rice a month. So in effect the officers were rice traders. But the CDS instead of reducing the officers' rice allocation, told the privates they would only get half a bag of rice a month. That was what provoked the attack. It was a group of men who were disgruntled about the cut in their rice ration. I'm not saying

there weren't other things going on but that is what encapsulated it and sparked the whole thing off. Then once the shooting started, the senior officers went to ground because they realised they had provoked this revolt, and the rest of the army joined in. There was nobody to stop them other than Sam Norman, the one minister who tried to stand up to them. President Kabbah was immediately whisked out of the country by his Nigerian bodyguards because they had no concept of the political consequences. With hindsight he should have stayed in the country and just gone to another town somewhere in Sierra Leone. A Corporal Gborie, and others, shot their way into the radio station, and hearing that President Kabbah had flown the country, announced in a drunken state: 'We have taken over the country and taken over the government.' They broke into the prison to free Johnnie Paul Koroma, who could read and write, most of these guys who had taken over couldn't, and they chose him to be their leader. He became Chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. As in Uganda, the situation spiralled out of control. I rang Koroma, Johnnie Paul Koroma, the new president, although he called himself chairman, and invited him and all the people who had just taken part in the coup to my residence. This was on the Monday. The coup happened on the Sunday. I'm saying invited, but it was almost a summons. The remarkable thing is that they came. And what this demonstrated was that in Sierra Leone the role of the British High Commissioner was by far the most important international position there was, far more than, say, the American ambassador or the UN ambassador or whatever. It is just the way it was. I think sometimes London felt awkward about this. They felt it was too much of a colonial hangover. But you don't create these things. It is just the way the people feel. And this really epitomised it. I obviously invited the Nigerian High Commissioner, the Dean of the Corps to sit with me, and the UN ambassador and the American chargé, because the American ambassador was out, and these guys turned up. They had been fighting all night and all day; they hadn't had any sleep, they came in with their huge machine guns, and I invited them all into my dining room with my nicely polished table. In fact I said to them, would they mind leaving their guns outside the dining room because I didn't want them to scratch my table. And they said, of course, sorry High Commissioner and put their guns down. First of all, they were very full of themselves and so I started talking to them, backed by the UN ambassador and the Nigerian ambassador, about the concern we had. We had already had some international women raped, the Lebanese had lost 2 lives, and these things were still going on. I said we have great concerns for the security of our communities. You have got to get a grip of the security situation. We may again need to evacuate people. I said

I needed to evacuate those members of the British community who had suffered most of all and therefore I said that they must open the airport, which they had shut, so that we could bring in a plane to take them out.

CC What was the size of the British community, roughly?

PP About 2,000.

CC About the same as in Uganda.

PP Well, it was 800 in Uganda plus others. In Sierra Leone it was 2,000 plus. It went up to 5,000 because in Sierra Leone we had a lot of British protected persons, British overseas citizens of Asian origin. Essentially it was about 2,000 that we were going to have to be responsible for moving. And so I said that they needed to open the airport. He said they would open it in a few days time. I said that wasn't good enough. I said I couldn't tell mothers who had had their homes looted, had got no food, no furniture, and were literally just sitting in empty shells to sit around for three days waiting for them to decide when to open the airport. I said if you don't open the airport tomorrow I will go on the BBC World Service and announce the total evacuation of all the international community from Sierra Leone because of the lack of security. I said if you open the airport we don't have to announce that, just evacuate the young, the old and those who had been affected. Koroma had a huddled conversation with Victor King alongside him and said OK, we will open the airport tomorrow. Which they did, for a while, and we got our planes in. In that same conversation I then asked Koroma what was going to happen next? "Are you going to form a government?" He looked very puzzled. He had brought a chaplain with him, and the chaplain said I expect the chairman will be announcing the formation of a government soon. And then Koroma said he had done this in the cause of democracy. That really got me. I asked him what he meant. He said that he supported democracy in Sierra Leone. I asked him what made him feel that he was a supporter of democracy? He replied, "well, I voted at the last election". So I said to him, 'Listen here, there is far more to democracy than just voting in the last election. And one of the essences of democracy is that if you find that you have an inefficient, corrupt government, or whatever, and you need to change it then you change it peacefully by the ballot box, not change it by the gun. What you and your soldiers did yesterday has set back

democracy in this country several years.' We finished on that but we then agreed to meet again and we continued discussions all that week with Koroma and his team. Interestingly enough Koroma and the original coup party increasingly sent others to represent them, such as the colonels who were being rehabilitated. It didn't surprise me. They felt uncomfortable negotiating with diplomats. By the end of that week they had agreed to stand down. I had said to them that it seemed to me that however much their dissatisfaction, in trying to meet their grievances, and some of them might be justified, until we redressed the first mistake they had made and brought back the legitimate government we would never get anywhere, and they would never get the support of the international community. Clearly out on the streets they were not getting the support of the people, the people were against them. I argued that the changes which they wished to see could be made within the existing constitution. They did not need to abolish the constitution. As a sweetener, I said that the very fact that they had made this attempted coup had highlighted and brought to the fore the various problems within the army and therefore we, the international community, could lobby the government to address these problems because it was in our interest for long term security. So they had a face saver that all that they had done had not been in vain. So they agreed to stand down and say that Kabbah could come back. We even drafted the statement that would be issued on the radio announcing their decision. During the course of the week, The UN and the Americans had evacuated and closed their missions, so it left just the Nigerians and ourselves to do all this.

CC And you had the entire British staff in the residence whilst you were carrying out these negotiations...

PP No. We had all moved to the office, which was on the compound. I had evacuated the residence but I came up to it every day for these negotiations. One benefit of that was that we were able to provide some food and drink. My domestic staff had remained at the residence and I told Osman, my cook, 'we are going to have some people up here, you had better do some sandwiches'. When I produced the sandwiches and soft drinks that first day, the soldiers wolfed them down. They had not eaten or drunk at all since the start of the coup. The negotiations were very difficult and dragged on. We kept going over the same ground and getting bogged down. At the end of the week I said to Colonel Anderson, who was now leading their team, 'look, quite frankly, this is the last time I am prepared to come back up to

the residence; we have done this since Monday; we have gone over the ground and then you come back the next day and say we don't agree to that.' I said, 'Either you are serious about this or not. This is the last time I am prepared to come to the residence. What I expect is when I leave here I will have the radio on and listen to the announcement.' At that Anderson, fingered the gun he had on his belt, looked at me and said, 'Well, perhaps we had better not let you leave the residence.' It was a tense moment but I broke the ice by saying, 'You'll have to let me go because they are waiting lunch on me back at the office. They can't eat their lunch until the High Commissioner gets back.' And that broke the tension. Anyway, they went off. That evening they rang up because they were going to make the announcement that night, and they said that they couldn't find the Chairman, Johnnie Paul Koroma to make the announcement and asked whether somebody else could make it. I said, No, I didn't think that would be appropriate, it wouldn't have the same validity. It was the Chairman who had been appointed Chairman and had spoken on behalf of them all. To have someone else saying they were standing down would lack credibility. They must keep looking for the Chairman. They came back later saying they still couldn't find the Chairman and by then it was 10 o'clock at night. I said, 'Look, this is getting ridiculous, if you are seriously going to do this and it's just a question of finding where the Chairman is you had better put out an announcement now telling people to stay up because there is going to be an important announcement later on'. Anyway, nothing ever happened. We found out why later. What the soldiers had done during that week as soon as they assumed power was to invite the RUF, the rebels, to come and join them in Freetown. This was something the rebels had been trying to do ever since they started fighting in 1991 and had never succeeded, partly of course because of the firm Executive Outcomes stopping them. Now the back door was opened to them by the soldiers saying come in. So all these rebels came, really nasty people, and when they heard that the soldiers were about to hand back power to Kabbah of course they literally put guns to Koroma's head and said no way. You have got all the loot in the first few days, we have just arrived, there is no way now we are going to withdraw. So the opportunity to nip the coup in the bud was lost. It then dragged on for 10 months. But it was a fascinating time. It's one of the reasons why Britain is held in high esteem in Sierra Leone and why I am associated with it. Every day during that week of negotiations as I drove up from my office to the residence the streets would be lined with people with a look of hope and anticipation on their faces; hoping an agreement would be reached. We were not issuing any statements but the word got around about what was going on. The people could see who was coming and

going and we were very much part of this ongoing scene of hope and aspiration. When it didn't come about there was huge disappointment and of course then the shooting started. We then had a very serious incident at the Mammy Yoko hotel. I had been advising members of the international community that they should effectively stay in their own homes, but if they didn't feel safe there they should move to an area where the Mammy Yoko hotel was because that's where there was a force of Nigerian soldiers providing a perimeter line. So there were something like 800 civilians crammed into the basement of the Mammy Yoko hotel when the rebels and soldiers started to open fire on the Nigerian soldiers at the hotel. We were witnessing this up on the hill where the office was and also we had Lincoln Jopp, our major, and this other guy, Will Scully down at the Mammy Yoko hotel. Those two in effect took over the defence of the Mammy Yoko and as a result got awards for it because they undoubtedly saved lives. After a while, the Nigerians had clearly run out of ammunition but still the rebels continued to fire on the hotel. Fire broke out. The 800 civilians were trapped in the basement, I was in touch by radio with them and talking to them, so I rang defence headquarters, talked to one of the majors there and told him he had got to stop this shooting at the hotel, or there was going to be a major human catastrophe. He first of all said, 'We are not shooting at the hotel.' I said, 'I am watching it right now from my office. I can see what is happening. You have got to stop it'. He knew there was an American warship just off the coast, and I said, 'if you do not stop, I will get in touch with the American warship, and I will advise them that you are firing on and killing innocent American and British citizens and tell them to deploy their marines immediately.' He said, 'I'll get back to you in 10 minutes.' Sure enough he got back to me in 10 minutes and said OK, we have told them all to stop firing. And indeed they had, all the firing had stopped. However, you're never absolutely certain so my very brave defence adviser, Andrew Gale, volunteered to jump into his Land Rover, with the biggest Union jack we could find, and he drove down the hill and around to the four places where the soldiers had mounted machine guns and mortars firing at the hotel to ensure that the orders that defence headquarters had sent out had been heard on the ground. He went round to each of the four of them, spoke to them, then bravely went into the Mammy Yoko hotel and brought out the head of the Nigerian forces and his number two to drive them back to defence headquarters and negotiate the terms on how to extricate everybody. At which point, as soon as Andrew and the two Nigerians got into defence headquarters, they were pushed up against the wall and they were going to be shot. Andrew saying by now, 'Look, we have come here under a flag of truce, what is going on?'

Anyway, he calmed things down. He took some wounded Nigerian soldiers to the hospital and then reappeared at our office. In the meantime I had been in touch with the American warship. My statement of course had been a bluff. I couldn't call on the American marines, but at least we had stopped the massacre. I told the Americans that we needed to get the people out of the hotel. It was getting dark by then. The Americans said, 'We can't pick up people at night. Tell them to walk along the beach and wait there or we will pick them up in the morning.' This did not sound sensible to me but I passed on the message to Will Scully. He let off a few expletives and said you're joking. Where they were going to be sitting was literally between where the warship was and defence headquarters so we agreed that was nonsense. Fortunately we had another former defence adviser, who was also in the area, in one of the other hotels. He came through on the radio, thus proving the value of wardens and radios, and said that the other hotel, the Cape Sierra hotel, was pretty safe and that those in the Mammy Yoko could walk out of the back of the hotel without being seen and get to the Cape Sierra. I had also argued from the defence headquarters when I was telling them to stop fighting, that they should allow the ICRC to go in to negotiate getting people out which they also agreed. So the ICRC representative went in to the hotel but he said he wanted to walk all of them out of the hotel and across the bridge, which meant going right past the RUF rebel position and particularly the British people there were very concerned about what would happen when they passed the rebel positions. The ICRC rep said that this was the undertaking he had given the soldiers. Will Scully argued against this option. In the end half the people moved across the bridge, which was mainly the Lebanese and the Sierra Leonean community, the Brits and the Europeans came out the back. And then the next morning the USS Kearsage came in and sent its helicopters in and we evacuated people.

CC From the beach...

PP From the beach. We evacuated on that morning 2,700 people. It was the fastest helicopter evacuation ever...

CC And the ship must have been hopelessly overcrowded, all to the Kearsage?

PP All on the Kearsage. And in the middle of all that London told me I had to be on the Kearsage with the remaining members of the mission. I had already slimmed down our team

to 5, all the wives and junior staff had gone so it was just the 5 of us. This was the minimum I required for the negotiations and the evacuation, but I was not ready to move. I felt the security situation was such that we could stay at least another couple of days and leave in good order. I accepted we would have to leave but I also brought in the European Commission delegate for safekeeping into the office and he had a direct link to a helicopter standing by in Liberia, so I knew I could always get that to lift us out. But no, I was overruled by London, no, you must leave on the Kearsage. What was annoying about that was that it didn't give us any time to close the mission properly and deal with our local staff. We had over 100 locally engaged staff in Freetown. We had huge premises and so on. So it was all very hurried but we did it. I handed over to Solomon Lebbey, our senior management officer with the words, 'See you in a couple of weeks.' Once on the Kearsage, we were taken round to Conakry because Kabbah was there. I would remain in Conakry alongside him thus demonstrating that we continued to recognise Kabbah's government as the legitimate government of Sierra Leone. As things then panned out it was decided, not by me but with my agreement, by the Under-Secretary in London, that as President Kabbah was there... (end side three)

Let me just say something about why I had the strong commitment to Sierra Leone that permeates the rest of the tour. The remarkable thing that happened in Sierra Leone in 1996 was that democratic elections took place; after years of corrupt and inefficient governments, military and others, and with a lot of pressure from the international community the people decided to embrace democracy, and they had genuine civilian democratic elections for the first time persuading the illegal military government to stand down. So in a way they achieved two major pluses. They showed how to remove an illegal military government peacefully and to usher in a democratic civilian government. People made great sacrifices. One story had a major impact on my thinking. As we know in Africa, it's not all that sophisticated, after a person has voted they usually have the back of their hand marked with indelible ink. If the rebels found anybody with that mark on the back of their hand they chopped the hand or their finger off. One person who had had his hand chopped off by the rebels because he had voted was asked how he now felt about democracy and about voting. And he waved the other hand and said, 'I have got this hand, I can use this one next time to vote.' When I heard that it had an incredible impact on me. It made me wonder just how many people back in Britain, for example, would bother to vote if they had to fear losing a hand. It therefore gave a sense of how important democracy was to these so-called illiterate,

uneducated people. It embraced the fundamentals of what democracy is in a way that I found staggering. I therefore was fully committed to the struggle to ensure that this fledgling democracy did not wither and perish. While we were in Conakry we thought we were only going to be there for a few weeks. It took 10 months. For 10 months the people of Sierra Leone remarkably refused to acknowledge the military junta government. All the banks remained closed, many businesses remained closed, all the children refused to go to school, sanctions were imposed on the country so life became miserable, there was very little food, water, electricity, but the people held out because they did not want this bunch of soldiers taking over. Matched with that was the attitude of the international community in which Britain led the way. The international community refused to acknowledge the junta as a legitimate government, we maintained still that President Kabbah's government was the legitimate government of Sierra Leone. Not one country, not even Libya or Cuba, broke ranks over that, so it was a very remarkable time. And those of us who were in Conakry during this time, and doing all that we could to support the people in Sierra Leone to ensure that people still recognised President Kabbah's government, felt that we were fighting the cause, not just for the restoration of democracy in Sierra Leone, we felt we were fighting the cause for the last military coup in Africa. We wanted to feel that we were sending a signal that if any other bunch of soldiers in any other country in Africa suddenly decided they wanted to take over they would face the same reaction. So they were very heady days, very emotional days. As part of the plan to prop up of President Kabbah's government, we helped to establish his government in Conakry. I had a budget of about £150,000 and with that I rented an old Chinese restaurant and turned that into the government of Sierra Leone's offices. We ran programmes out of that office involved with looking after the refugees, ensuring the international meetings were attended by the foreign minister, for example, even things like when Princess Diana died I told President Kabbah that he should send a message of sympathy to the Queen.

CC So he was also there in Conakry.

PP He was there all the time as well. He was living on a villa compound provided by President Conte of Guinea, but he was somewhat shut off from his people, in fact sadly this compound was literally opposite the Sierra Leone embassy in Conakry, he never once went across to the embassy where thousands of Sierra Leoneans gathered, because many of them

fled. I was close by in the Camayenne hotel, in room 523. I ended up having that room for 276 nights, and I ran the mission, this little mission in Freetown from that room in Conakry. I was in touch every day with the staff there. We found all sorts of ingenious ways to smuggle money and food into Sierra Leone. We continued to pay all of our staff. We were one of the few organisation or missions to continue to do that. Knowing full well, as one does with the African system, that for every staff member that we were managing to pay there were something like 20 other people depending on that one person, so for the hundred people we were paying we were keeping at least 2,000 people alive. This had quite an impact. We set up a clandestine radio station throughout the time we were in Conakry. The international airport at Lungi, in Sierra Leone remained under the control of ECOMOG. The Nigerian forces never let it fall into the hands of the rebel soldiers. We got some funds through DFID (the Department for International Development). DFID were brilliant in helping me with all these programmes and we literally walked into a Tandy store in New York and bought a radio station off the shelf, flew it out to Lungi. Dr Julius Spencer, a Sierra Leonean academic, flew from the States and he and two others set up this radio station in a tent at Lungi airport which we called Radio Democracy 98.1, and through that radio station broadcast to the people of Freetown, just to keep democracy alive. For example, I and others would speak to the people of Sierra Leone. Julius would telephone me in my room in Conakry from Lungi and I would speak back to him on the mobile phone and he would put it onto the radio and I would be sending messages to the people of Sierra Leone that they should not lose hope, that the international community was still fully committed to seeing the restoration of their legitimate government, we were doing all that we could. If people were found listening to this radio station by the soldiers they were immediately shot. And so people would go to bed and put their radios under their pillow to muffle the sound and literally go to sleep listening to radio democracy. It was the first time that DFID had ever done this. It has now become the thing to do elsewhere, showing the power of the radio. But it had a huge impact. Britain continued to lead the way in the international field. Nigeria continued to lead the way in ECOMOG, and finally a force in February 1998, the ECOMOG forces, made a push on Freetown. They removed the rebels and President Kabbah was returned. I went back in on a British warship taking the Sierra Leone foreign minister with me at the beginning of March and then a week later President Kabbah flew back with President Abacha of Nigeria and we had a huge reception at the national football stadium with the people welcoming back their President. Along the route going in from where we

landed at Hastings airport people lined the streets and when they saw the Union Jack flying on my Land Rover they cheered. To them the heroes of their government's restoration were Nigeria and Britain. In the stadium the two biggest cheers were for Khobe, who was head of the Nigerian forces, and for Radio98.1. It was a remarkable time.

CC Khobe was in command of the Nigerian forces at the airport at...

PP At ECOMOG, yes. He was in charge of the ECOMOG forces. They were largely Nigerian but they still had Ghanaian, a few Guinean and a few Malian troops. It was an historic day for Africa. The first time ever that a democratic government which had been deposed in a coup was restored. We all felt very pleased with ourselves. Britain's standing was as high as it had ever been and yet in the midst of this I was being pestered by the FCO about papers about Sandline. The background to Sandline is as follows: at one of my tête à tête meetings with President Kabbah in December of 1997, just as I was about to take one of my first breaks for six months and actually spend Christmas with my wife whom I hadn't seen for some time, as I bid farewell, Kabbah told me that he had been approached by a firm called Sandline who were prepared to provide training and equipment for his loyal forces who were still at Lungi. Some of the army and the police had fled to Lungi at the time of the coup and had remained there, loyal to Kabbah. But they hadn't got any equipment. What should he do? He showed me a draft contract. I neither encouraged or discouraged him but I said Sandline was seemingly an offshoot of Executive Outcomes, who had a very high reputation in Sierra Leone. They were regarded by the Sierra Leone people as the force which had helped stop the rebels taking over a few years back, and kept the place stable.

CC Was that largely South African?

PP Yes. I told Kabbah that it was clearly his decision whether to sign the contract or not but he would be aware of the international controversy that surrounded Executive Outcomes and therefore Sandline International, and I was aware particularly of the position being adopted by Mandela in South Africa against the firm. At a time when Kabbah was trying to ensure he had good relations with all the African leaders, particularly South Africa, he must be wary. If he did decide to do it he would need to explain to them why he was doing it. Back in the UK during that holiday, Tim Spicer of Sandline invited me for lunch at which he spelt out in

more detail what the proposal was. He had done that because Kabbah had rung him and asked him to brief me on this. I then had a further meeting with Spicer, not primarily to discuss his contract but Spicer had some of his employees actually based at Lungi airport, and one of the problems we had throughout this period of time was that Nigeria clearly was the key country involved in ECOMOG and so on, but it was a time when, if you recall, the relationship between Britain and Nigeria was very fraught. There was even a ban on our military talking to Nigerian military. But to understand fully what the security situation in Sierra Leone was it was vital to know what the Nigerians were doing. Spicer and his Sandline people at Lungi provided an inroad for me to find that out, because they were literally working alongside them, some of them were actually flying them around, so I saw my contacts with Spicer as mainly doing that. Spicer was having regular contact with officials in the Foreign Office and therefore I wasn't breaking new ground. Although there was a certain amount of controversy about mercenaries and so on there were no rules or guidelines in the Foreign Office at all about dealing with these companies. So I had no problems with that and in fact they provided quite useful information. After Kabbah's restoration, I was asked to return to the UK ostensibly, as I understood it, to discuss where do we go from here with Sierra Leone, which seemed to be absolutely right. We have got Kabbah back, what do we do, how do we consolidate the achievement? Somewhat curiously, the day before I was due to fly back, I was told to bring with me any papers on Sandline that I had. So I dug up whatever papers we had on file, which were not many, and put them in my briefcase. I got back, went straight to my home in Abingdon and I was telephoned there from somebody in Personnel Department who told me I must not go into the Office, I must not have any contact with anybody in the African Departments and that I would be required to give a statement under caution to HM Customs and Excise. I asked what all this was about and they said it was about allegations of a breach of sanctions by Sandline. I found all this somewhat puzzling. I was not quite certain what 'under caution' meant, but it sounded as if I needed legal assistance. I asked if the Office would therefore provide me with a Foreign Office legal adviser to sit with me when I was interviewed by Customs. They said they couldn't do that. They said you can use your own lawyer. I said I hadn't got a lawyer. I had never had a lawyer but if I got a lawyer would they pay for it? So they got back to me and said yes, they were prepared to pay. I then said, look I still have no lawyer. Could they advise me whom I should get? Fortunately they put me in touch with another section of the Foreign Office which had dealt with the Matrix Churchill case and they had used lawyers

there and they give me the name of someone who turned out to be a very eminent QC in London, Stephen Pollard, who happened at that time to be finishing defending Nick Leeson, and it proved quite helpful to have somebody of his calibre. I also found out that what 'under caution' meant was that I was liable, if I said the wrong things, to be charged with a crime which could have left me facing 7 years in prison. So I then went to see Stephen Pollard and we tried to start piecing together where all this had come from. The thing had been sparked off because Spicer had sent a letter to Robin Cook refuting all these allegations and claiming that knowledge of their contract was well known by the High Commissioner and other members of the Foreign Office and therefore the accusation was that I had encouraged them to do this and was therefore guilty of breaching UK sanctions. As we now know, this became a big fuss and there was a lot of publicity about it. As far as I, President Kabbah, and many others were concerned, the Sandline contract did not breach UN sanctions. None of my discussions with colleagues in the FCO led me to believe otherwise, and indeed the Legal Department of the UN were later to confirm that this was their understanding. However, to put a UN sanctions legislation order into UK legislation, an Order in Council had to be made, and it had to be written into the UK administration procedure. And in transposing the UN sanctions order into the UK Order, mistakes were made in my view. The legal draftsmen in the FCO tried to use an "off the shelf" sanctions order, e.g. Angola – just cross out Angola and put in Sierra Leone. They then, supposedly being helpful, tried to define what was meant by "Sierra Leone". They prepared a list of definitions of Sierra Leone relevant to whom the sanctions order applied. In the list, the first category was "the government of Sierra Leone", believing it to be the illegal junta. Now our whole diplomatic stance had been that the government of Sierra Leone was in fact President Kabbah's government. That had been the bedrock of our policy. In fact, if you look down the definitions, the AFRC junta is not even mentioned by name, although there was a "catch-all" phrase like "and anyone else in Sierra Leone". President Kabbah's government, of course, wasn't in Sierra Leone. The result was that, yes, if one looked at the UK Order, there would have appeared to have been a breach of sanctions. However, there were strong grounds for arguing that the UK Order in Council was ultra vires because it had failed to correctly interpret the UN sanctions order. Everything I had done had been done with the full knowledge of the Foreign Office. In fact, for example, after that December meeting when I was then going over to Canada for a couple of weeks, the first holiday I'd had since all the troubles, I wrote a letter to Ann Grant, the Under-Secretary, confirming that I had spoken to Spicer, that Spicer had confirmed the contract had been

signed and the equipment would be sent, and so on. For some reason that letter never arrived in the Foreign Office even though I posted it in the post box around the corner, the FO claimed it went missing, and it has never come to light. Fortunately I had made a copy of it because...

CC You wrote the letter at home?

PP I wrote it from home in manuscript prior to flying to Canada. I'd added something at the bottom about honours and it was mainly for this reason that I had kept a copy. I had recommended my deputy, Colin Glass and the consul, Dai Harris, both with the OBE and the MBE, Lincoln Jopp with the Military Cross, for his heroic actions and Andrew Gale for the Queen's Gallantry Medal for his actions. They were the other 4 members of our 5 man team which I was heading. All those nominations were accepted and they got their awards in the New Year's Honours. But they rang to say they were embarrassed because I had not received an award. The FCO had not put me up for anything. I mentioned my team's views in my letter. My letter was only going to Ann Grant in the African Department but I thought that because she might copy it to other people such as the Honours Section, I had better make sure to remember what I had said. That's why I kept a copy of it. It was fairly easy, my telephone machine has a photocopy facility. But the letter went missing. Even the full report that I prepared on all my Sandline contacts took three weeks to emerge out of people's in trays and so on...

CC But that was a telegram...

PP No, this was a minute which I had been specifically asked to write in the UK, so all sorts of funny things happened. The Customs and Excise of course decided to drop the case. They said it was not in the public interest to pursue this, as soon as I started revealing some of these things, but of course that didn't satisfy Robin Cook. Robin Cook insisted on having an inquiry. They set up an inquiry but the inquiry, as Diane Abbott in the House pointed out, had nothing to do with whether there had been a breach of sanctions. It was to do with whether ministers knew what was being approved, just to cover their backs. The result of that inquiry was that I received a reprimand from the Permanent Under-Secretary.

CC For what?

PP It was said that I could have been more judicious in my meetings with Spicer and I could have reported a bit more fully or something. It failed to reprimand all the other officials in the Foreign Office although they had been meeting with Spicer quite regularly.

CC Were you aware at the time you were meeting them that there was any kind of a UN sanctions order anyway that might possibly affect the position? Did you even know about it?

PP I knew about the UN sanctions order, because I had seen that in telegrams, but I had never seen the UK Order in Council. That was never sent to me. The first time I saw that was in my lawyer's office, and as soon as I saw it in the lawyer's office I realised where some of this trouble was coming from.

CC Now, don't answer if you don't want to, but who do you think was responsible for this attempt, as it were, to put you in the frame as being responsible for this embarrassment, as far as there was any embarrassment? Somebody must have... maybe that's an injudicious question.

PP Some things came out in the Legg Inquiry. The report refers to a particular meeting between Spicer and two officials in the Foreign Office about which Legg says it is not possible to reconcile the two differing accounts of what was said at the meeting by those present. I think it is also pertinent that the section within the FCO responsible for drafting the ill-fated UK Order in Council was the very same department which was initially advising Robin Cook what to say and do, i.e. the Foreign Office Legal Advisers.

CC Is it your view, again you may not want to comment, but I'm not sure what the inquiry finally came up with, like so many of these things they tend to disappear into the sands, but is it your view that the ministers, shall we just say 'ministers', were aware of what was going on at the time? They were aware of contacts with Sandline. Robin Cook's claim particularly is that he wasn't aware of them, is that right?

PP They were aware of some of the contacts because there were other papers which were going up to ministers to be referred to them. It didn't end there. Parliament itself found that was a bit of a whitewash because the Select Committee for Foreign Affairs insisted that they have their own thing as well. The Legg Inquiry had said that it had no problem with my returning to post. I then went back to Sierra Leone and was summoned back to face the Select Committee, so I had 4 hours of grilling on television in front of the Select Committee. The issue was getting caught up in the politics. Whilst all this was happening in the UK, a total contrast was taking place in Sierra Leone. The people of Sierra Leone just couldn't understand what was going on. Indeed the more that I was seemingly denigrated by the Foreign Office and so on, the more I became a hero to the Sierra Leone people. When I arrived at the airport in Sierra Leone after the Legg Inquiry, I was made an honorary Paramount Chief. This is a very high honour – since independence only the Queen and Prince Philip have been made honorary Paramount Chiefs. I was carried through the streets of Freetown in a hammock with thousands of people cheering. Everybody the night before had made their own Union Jacks out of paper and crayons. There were probably more Union Jacks being waved that day than during colonial times. Even before I got back, when I was facing the Legg Inquiry in the UK, a demonstration of 20,000 people took to the streets of Sierra Leone, the biggest demonstration ever seen, demanding I should be returned. Placards were carried, some supporting Tony Blair and attacking people like Lord Avebury and others saying things like "God bless Penfold Tenfold" and "Penfold Saviour of Democracy". It was amazing. Finally the dust started to settle but I think there are two abiding things I feel about this. First of all in terms of how it was handled. To this day I can't understand why Robin Cook, when he heard that accusations were being made about one of his High Commissioners, didn't first of all just call me back and ask me to explain what the hell was going on. That never happened. In fact, exactly the opposite. I was not allowed to actually talk to anybody. That is baffling and in fact to this day I have never been debriefed on the Sandline issue by anybody in the Foreign Office. Their answer is I had the board of inquiry. The other thing which is of greater concern to me, because it then backfired, at the very time when we should have then been doing things to help Sierra Leone, we had just got Kabbah back, things were still fragile, this was when we needed a massive amount of international assistance to really embed this democratic government, where was the attention of the leading member of the international community? It was all caught up in the Sandline issue. Robin Cook proudly told the House of Commons that he had doubled the number of people working

in Sierra Leone. What he didn't say was that all the extra people were working on the Sandline case; they weren't actually helping Sierra Leone. I feel that quite frankly in 1997, even more in 1998, that if we had not been distracted by the Sandline case, if we had been able to get the Foreign Office, and Foreign Office ministers, to focus more on the real needs of Sierra Leone then the subsequent events of January 1999 and later would not have occurred. I made this point to Parliament when I was questioned there. I said I didn't understand why they were spending so much time on all this, which was a peripheral issue to the real problems of Sierra Leone. But Sierra Leone became a political football in UK politics, and for me personally it was very nasty. My wife and I were under intense pressure; we had the media camped out at our house. We had to slip out through the garage to go shopping. Quite frankly, we had very little support from the Foreign Office. I had tremendous support from individual colleagues, but from the African Department and Personnel Department, two key departments, support was minimal.

CC Very sorry to hear that.

PP So anyway, what then did happen of course is that we did start to try to rebuild Sierra Leone, but events had by then moved on, not least owing to the fact that Charles Taylor in Liberia had by then significantly increased his support for the RUF. He had always been godfather to them, and his active support transformed the RUF into a much more effective fighting force because in return for diamonds he provided arms, ammunition and mercenaries and the RUF were then able to make inroads, not least because the Nigerian forces were also getting pretty bored, fed up with being stuck in Sierra Leone for so long. They started pushing back Akemon and all this culminated in January 1999. Trouble was beginning to brew, we could see things were happening 50 or 60 kilometres away from Freetown. We were coming up to Christmas. Christmas is an important time in diplomatic life overseas, certainly important for committed Christians like my wife and myself, and an important time for a Christian country like Sierra Leone. Suddenly two days before Christmas I was told we were going to evacuate the British community. I argued that I didn't think it was necessary at that time. I didn't say never, and I accepted that things were beginning to get difficult but part of my argument was that the fact that we were seen to be evacuating would precipitate more problems, and the rebels would use that as an excuse. It would be far better to have a proper phased evacuation, removing dependents, unnecessary people and so on, as one

normally does in a contingency plan. But I was over-ruled. This was then the 8th evacuation of my career. It was the first time that my views were not taken into account. I couldn't help but feel an element in all this was that because it was Christmas the guys back in London didn't want their Christmas disrupted and thought let's sort out Sierra Leone now, without giving any real thought to the consequences. We were criticised for over-reacting and most of the remaining British community refused to leave. We evacuated the BHC UK staff but I managed to persuade the Office to let me stay on with just the RMP team. An ECOWAS meeting had been convened in Abidjan to deal with this growing crisis, and I suggested that I went to that, which I did. But once I had left Sierra Leone, the Office would not let me return. So for the New Year I found myself back in room 523 of the Camayenne Hotel in Conakry, again. As predicted, our evacuation encouraged the rebels and they attacked Freetown on 6 January. It was awful. In a period of 10 days 7,000 people were murdered, half the city was destroyed, thousands of girls were raped, tens of thousands of people were made homeless. It was really awful. The ECOMOG forces were unable to stop it. It was only thanks to the bravery of some of the Sierra Leoneans under Khobe's leadership that the rebels were stopped and started to be pushed back. I was champing at the bit to get back as soon as possible. London agreed to send a warship out and I was allowed to live on the warship. I used to fly in by helicopter every day to see President Kabbah and keep his confidence up and to try to start helping the people who were in desperate straits. But this was an example; international humanitarian help was very slow in coming. It is a difficult issue this, and I have discussed it at great length with people. The NGOs for example wouldn't come back because they thought the security situation was too risky. I accept that the life of humanitarian aid officials is important but when one is dealing with the problems arising from a security situation I think one has to be a bit more flexible in providing humanitarian assistance. It is not the same when dealing with an earthquake or a famine or a flood. The time when we really needed the assistance was at the end of January but it was not until March that we started to see assistance coming in. I'm not saying thousands of people died as a result of that but certainly some people died and certainly life was made even more miserable for a long time. The only assistance that was given was from us, the British High Commission, the Christian Council of Churches, UNICEF and World Vision. The government had again all but collapsed and it was civil society, which was really running Freetown in a remarkable way. We helped them. All this UK assistance again had quite an

impact and again Britain's reputation was very high. Again we were seen to be the first country to provide assistance. Finally I left in April 2000.

CC Was that before or after the British army had actually undertaken the rescue operation? I can't quite remember when that happened.

PP We started to get some British forces in when we went back in January 1999 and then of course the UN force started to be re-established. We then went through the Lomé peace negotiations which I was denied permission to attend. Although my American ambassador colleague was up there I was deliberately kept away from the Lomé peace negotiations because of my views. The Sierra Leone people had clearly said that they did not want a power sharing agreement with Sankoh and the rebels. I supported their views in my reports, but the international community led by the US and UK forced through the agreement. It proved to be a mistake. Sankoh came back and proved to be totally untrustworthy. The tension was building up again. In my final months, three events happened at the same time. Khobe, the great hero, the Nigerian general who was then heading the Sierra Leone forces was dying, the ECOMOG forces were being withdrawn and, although the UN forces were supposed to be coming in to replace them, there was a gap, a vacuum. Then it was announced that I was leaving. And those three factors we now know precipitated an avoidable tragedy. I had argued that they should defer my leaving and also bring in a senior British military adviser to fill the gap caused by Khobe's death, just as a temporary measure. London refused to do that. So I left on 30 April, and on 5 May fighting broke out which led to British forces having to come in to restore order. This in turn led to the assembly of the largest UN force ever to carry out peace operations. Afterwards, eventually, it led to the stabilisation of Sierra Leone. Again I think there were atrocities that could have been avoided.

CC You think that could have been avoided?

PP Yes, I think so.

CC You left in April 2000.

PP The whole experience of course was very moving and one became very committed to it. It was clear that at times the Foreign Office felt uneasy about my role there and I understood that. It was not a position that I sought. I never wanted to be the hero or the villain. But I think it was an inevitable outcome of the circumstances. Circumstances like this arise in African countries like Sierra Leone where the role and importance of an individual is far bigger than it is here in the UK. Here you have systems and organisations, which tend to diminish the impact of individuals. There, you don't have a system. It is individuals who have to play a role one way or the other. One of the nicest remarks passed about me was when I was made a second Paramount Chief to the southern tribes. The minister who introduced me said something along the lines that in Sierra Leone's history Britain had sent two great British people to their country. In the last century they sent us governor Clarkson, who was one of the most famous of their colonial governors, who gave us a prayer and, indeed, the Clarkson prayer is still read out every morning on the Sierra Leone radio. And, he said, in this century they sent us High Commissioner Penfold, who gave us hope. That was the most moving thing I ever heard. I think I can understand what he was saying because when people lose everything, as the Sierra Leoneans did, all they have left to cling onto is hope. I just happened to be fortunate. I happened to represent Britain at a time when Britain was in a position to play a key role in Sierra Leone.

I came back from Sierra Leone and I applied for 16 different posts and was turned down for all of them. I kept on being asked to take early retirement. I wasn't averse in principle but I wanted it to be of my own choosing. So, because I had developed a very good relationship with Clare Short and DFID, I spent the last year of my career as a conflict adviser to DFID. Looking back, it was a fantastic career. It was just a little bit sour at the end. I had hoped to have a last posting, hopefully to a somewhat quieter place where, for example, I could just have enjoyed living with my wife. As a career, I think it was marvellous in the early days. I don't think it is the same sort of Service now. I'm not sure whether I would feel as happy with it as I did in the early days. I think there is far too much micromanagement from London. I think they still attract very good people but with modern instantaneous communications they are not allowed to exercise proper responsibility and judgement.