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(Born 30 November 1928)

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Andrew Stuart CMG interviewed by Jimmy Jamieson on 10 September 2002.

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JJ Andrew, your father was Anglican Bishop of Uganda, you grew up there and then went to Public School and to Cambridge. What did you do between 1949 and '53?

AS That was my Cambridge time. Between 1947 when I left school and 1949 I was in the Navy doing National Service. 1949 to '53 was three years at Cambridge then one year of what they called the First Devonshire course, which was the training course for colonial civil servants.

JJ And then you joined fully in 1953 and continued until 1965. What attracted you to the Colonial Service at that time when it was a flourishing business, so to speak?

AS I was obviously attracted to working in Africa because I had been brought up there. It was, I suppose, my home. Luganda, which is the local language of Uganda was probably my first language because we spoke it at home. I wanted to work in Africa anyway. I am not, unfortunately, a missionary by inclination and it seemed to me that there was a job to be done in the Colonial Service. We were thoroughly misled when I joined about the career expectations of the Colonial Service. While I was doing the course in London, a Minister came and said to us that he couldn't tell how long the colonial period was going to last, but that if any of us had sons who were interested in working in the Colonial Service we should encourage them to apply. And that was only ten years before the independence of Uganda. So clearly the government hadn't a real idea of what was going to happen.

JJ So you went more or less straight out to Uganda. You didn't serve in the Colonial Office in London?

AS No, unlike the Foreign Office the Colonial Office and the Colonial Service were different. You could go on secondment to the Colonial Office but by and large your expectation was that you would serve the whole of your time in the field. You didn't, on the whole, unless you became a Governor, change colonies. You tended to stay the whole of your career in one territory, which actually makes sense because in an administrative job you

need the language and you need the direct experience of the particular place. It's not like being a diplomat where you can move and carry the experience easily from one place to another.

JJ And of course it does have that long term advantage whereas with the Diplomatic Service you are just getting your feet under the table and getting to know everybody when you are switched off to somewhere totally different.

AS Well I sometimes had the feeling that with the Foreign Office they didn't actually want you to know very much about the country because you might go native. Certainly, as far as I was concerned, in theory I was recruited as an expert on Africa but my first posting was to Finland. I don't suppose that was deliberate, but nevertheless I never in the whole of my time in the Diplomatic Service served in Africa.

JJ So when you were a young Colonial Officer was there much contact with the Colonial Office? How did that work? What was the communication like?

AS I think not very good. In the Foreign Office I think it was a real advantage that people would spend a couple of tours abroad and then one tour in the Foreign Office, because it meant that you knew what abroad was like, knew a lot of people, they were your colleagues and friends, whereas in the Colonial Service we had the theory that the desk that dealt with Uganda didn't actually exist because we would send stuff home and never hear any more about it. So we reckoned the name of the officer that we were dealing with in the Colonial Office was probably a euphemism for the office waste paper basket.

JJ Did the staff at the Colonial Office not make systematic or fairly regular visits to people in the field to discuss what was going on, to discuss policies or whatever?

AS Yes, I think they did to headquarters in Kampala and Entebbe, but I as a District Officer working in the field never saw anyone from the Colonial Office in the whole time I was in Uganda.

JJ So how did you keep in touch with the Governor and his team of District Commissioners, or whatever they were called? Was there a lot of contact in that way or were you more or less left to plough your own field?

AS I think each district was autonomous to a very large extent. There was a District Commissioner and two or three Assistant District Commissioners who were responsible for the administration of one district which usually was coterminous with a tribe so we would tend to work for and with a given tribe for two or three years. Of course the parameters of administration were laid down from headquarters but what you actually did on the ground I think was very much a matter of interaction between the District Commissioner and the local African government rather than outside.

JJ And the Governor made a sort of annual visit did he, just to show the troops in the field?

AS Yes, Governors vary. Some very rarely went out. There was one who was actually a home civil servant, Sir Andrew Cohen, who came from what is now the DFID or ODM. He did spend a lot of time in the field, rather bizarrely. He wasn't really a field man, he was a big, pear-shaped man, and pushing him up mountains so that he could say that he got to the top was a fairly bizarre experience. But he wasn't very good at what is now described as human relations. He didn't have any small talk and his interaction with African politicians was hilarious usually, for the lack of communication. He was a brilliant ideas person but was not a person man.

JJ You mentioned a moment ago the chain of command and the local African government; so the Colonial Service was at arms length from the local structure which was based on the tribe?

AS Yes, Uganda was the place where Captain Lugard, who became Lord Lugard in Nigeria, first developed his theory of Indirect Rule. When he first arrived in Uganda he found an existing government of Buganda, the central province of Uganda, which was really a very hierarchical and organised structure. It wasn't primitive in any sense at all. It had a hierarchy of chiefs and it had a king. Basically therefore the Colonial Officials were advisers to Buganda, and to a certain extent to the rest of Uganda, rather than direct administrators. The

crucial relationship was that between the District Commissioner and the Prime Minister or Secretary General of the local government.

You are quite right that the issue of the local government and the tribe actually became crucial later on. I don't know if people had thought it through properly, but the reality of the thing was that the more power you gave to the local government in pursuance of the development of democracy, the more power you were actually handing over to the tribe, to the point where the local population saw the development of an independent Uganda as the resurgence of the power of the tribe. For example, in one district I worked in, the local name for the central government was Gavumenti ey'Engereza, meaning the English government, and the local government was Gavumenti e'yaffe, meaning Our government. So they saw the central government as withering away as the British withdrew, leaving all power behind with the tribes. That of course merely exacerbated the problems that happened after independence where tribalism became the real issue, which is unresolved to this day.

JJ You describe that in your book "Of Cargoes, Colonies and Kings" very well with Obote, Amin and King Freddie and so on. But this couldn't have been what the Colonial Office envisaged, that it would revert to the tribal structure rather than a government on western democratic lines. As you said yourself, African society was becoming, or was always essentially authoritarian rather than democratic as seen from the western context.

AS Yes it was democratic in a very different sense. Nyerere in Tanganyika described it as African socialism and there was definitely a kind of social compact between the chiefs and the people but nevertheless the idea of one man one vote and having a government and an opposition, and the opposition having a right to its views was a Westminster model which was imposed far too keenly on African society and was I think one of the tragedies of the colonial period. Another was perhaps that the heyday of the creation of the colonies was the nineteenth century, which was also the heyday of the Nation State in Europe. The original colonisers thought that by drawing a boundary line around a particular area of country, which might have a vast number of tribes, you would create a country, but as far as the local population was concerned that country and those boundaries very often had no meaning at all. In Uganda, for example, there is a huge ethnic split along the middle of the country, the south and the west is fertile agricultural country and the tribes there are all Bantu tribes. The

Bantu and their tribal group run all the way down to South Africa. But north of the Nile are the Nilotics who speak an entirely different group of languages. They have basically a pastoral tradition of cattle because it is much drier. The whole history of the problems of Uganda, and many other African countries, has revolved around that split.

JJ There was really nothing that Whitehall or Westminster could do about that in the end.

AS In the end because the pattern was set. But I think if from the beginning we had realised - after all Europe has just woken up to the reality of what we call ethnicity, in the Balkans, for example, (and ethnicity is really another name for tribalism). But by ignoring that throughout the creation of the colonies I think we sowed the seeds of a lot of problems. The consequence of that was seen, for example, in the Biafran war in Nigeria, where the Organisation of African Unity, the OAU, was dead set against the independence of Biafra from Nigeria mainly because they saw that once one African country started to split apart on ethnic tribal lines there would be no end to the process and the whole of Africa would split up into pieces.

JJ But I served in Lagos myself before the civil war broke out but HMG I think didn't want it to be broken up either, there was the religious and ethnic aspect but the aspect of the oil, Biafra's oil, and the fact that the Federal government wanted all revenues and then dish it out as it thought fit was one of the major aspects of the start of the war.

AS True enough and possibly, paradoxically, one of the few people who recognised the problem was Nkrumah in Ghana. He at one stage offered to delay the independence of Ghana in order to facilitate the creation of the United States of Africa because he saw this problem coming. It wasn't real, it wasn't possible. The idea of, for example, an East African Federation was created at one stage but by that stage it was too late so I think by the time independence came there was nothing to be done. Those countries had to live with the consequences of ethnicity, or tribalism, just as we have had to live with it in Europe.

JJ Can we go into a bit more detail of your job when you first went out there as Assistant District Officer at the youthful age of twenty-three. I think you had quite a lot of responsibilities and a large area of land and people to cover.

AS Yes it was great fun, probably rather bad for you, gives you exalted ideas of your own importance really but certainly , for example, in the East of Uganda where I worked for a while, I was given a part of the district with a mountain and a plain and told to get on with it. It could mean anything really from building a road to building a school, literally building sometimes with a bulldozer and one's hands. Setting up councils and creating health centres and checking on the tax returns and acting as a court of appeal to native groups. By and large, rather like India, it was based on a kind of Indian rope trick of confidence and trust and if anyone had really tried to defy our authority we wouldn't have had a hope. It was accepted by and large. For a young man I think it is a terrific experience. One of the problems for me when I later became a diplomat was that a) you don't have an identifiable end product, (you can't say, 'I built that school, I built that road, or I mended that Land Rover,' or whatever), and b) you don't have any authority. You are just observing and, if you like, discussing and negotiating. You can't say, 'Do this.'

JJ Representing, observing and reporting, the basic rules of diplomacy.

AS That's right, and therefore all those functions are not really measurable. You can't have a concrete measure of whether you are doing a good job or not.

JJ You had the advantage of speaking one of the local languages, Luganda I think you said it was, when you went to Uganda. It must have been an enormous advantage which perhaps some of your colleagues didn't have, that you could in a sense set up personal relationships, with local authorities, local courts or whatever and get the job done in an easier fashion.

AS Yes, up to a point. All District Officers were supposed to learn the local language and to use it.

JJ How did they do that, how did they set about that?

AS Well, we had a course year in London before we went out and we had to study the language then. But I have to say that some people were better at it than others. I think it was very important. I well remember one occasion where I was posted to a district. I was new

and people didn't know that I actually understood the local language rather well and I attended a meeting of my boss, the District Commissioner, who didn't speak the local language properly and he therefore had an interpreter. My boss said in English, 'We have decided we have to acquire some land for building a railway,' and the interpreter said, in the local language, 'This Englishman has said he is going to steal our land.' There was uproar and of course my boss didn't know that this was being done under his nose so it was...

JJ Did you intervene at that point?

AS Yes I did. I told my boss what was actually being said. It's another story altogether but I have just been back to Uganda in the last couple of months for the burial of my mother's ashes in the local cathedral and the fact that I was able to address a congregation of five hundred people in the local language seemed to have the most astonishing effect, because nowadays, of course, all the diplomats and the aid people who go out, they can't speak a word, they are totally dependent on English speaking local people or on interpreters.

JJ After Uganda's independence in 1962 you became Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Tourism in Kampala. That must have been quite a strain to be on the other side of the fence, what was it like working for the new native government, as it were?

AS Well, it was terrific. I think that in all these countries in Africa there's always been a honeymoon period, things may go wrong later on for a variety of reasons but for the first few years there's a feeling almost of, 'bliss it was it that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven,' because you had African officers taking positions of responsibility for which they could never have any expectation of doing during the colonial period.

JJ No training?

AS Well, training is there and for a few years it makes you very optimistic of the human condition because you see how people rise to the challenge if they are confronted with it, and for those few years that I was there, (which was before things began to go very wrong), it was most exhilarating. We achieved an enormous amount, and the other thing was of course that

it was before donor fatigue set in in the West and there was also competition of course between the West and the Soviet Union. We could get almost anything by going to the Americans and saying, 'we want a new hospital,' and they said, 'maybe not.' So we would go to the Russians and say that the Americans are very interested and they would say, 'well perhaps we will do it,' and you go back to the Americans and say, 'if you don't give us the hospital the Russians will.' We exploited it thoroughly. I was a servant of the local government and it was my business to get the best deals for them that I could. Frankly, the problems for the ex-colonialists who were still in positions of authority were not internal problems between colleagues, African colleagues and European colleagues, they were problems of perception vis-à-vis people coming in from outside who saw a white face in a position of presumed authority in a Ministry and who therefore assumed that it was neo-colonialism, that you were administering for Britain. But you weren't, and relationships between people like me and the incoming diplomats, including the British High Commission, were not very good.

JJ I was going to ask you about how they regarded you?

AS They didn't regard me at all. Although they knew I was joining the Foreign Office, I was never invited to the High Commission for any formal or social function at all. There is a story in my book about an African colleague of mine who came back after having been invited, because they were frequently invited to the High Commission. He had been approached by one of the diplomats in the High Commission who said to him, 'Please understand, we are not like these wicked people who have been oppressing you all these years, we are your friends.' My African colleague thought that it was a mixture between a joke and an insult, because it wasn't like that. The relationship wasn't of master and servant or slave or whatever, certainly in Uganda, which didn't have the problems that some other colonies had of a settler population, it was a relationship of co-operation.

JJ You mentioned aid programmes, there were always changes of policy of what should be done and how it should be done, how did you view the British government's aid programme for Uganda and how much involvement did you have when you were in the local government?

AS Well, I had quite a lot, obviously, because Uganda, although it was quite rich and didn't have budgetary aid at any stage, still relied for major development upon outside assistance, and I don't think the donor countries, or indeed the local countries, have solved the problem to this day of how to give aid without strings but in such a way that your overall objectives are achieved. And of course new problems creep in all the time of corruption and so on and I am still involved to this day in the administration of aid programmes in the developing world including Africa, because my company is actually a contractor to the British government to manage aid in various east African countries. I think the new bureaucrats are still making the same mistakes that we made fifty years ago of trying to fine tune in Whitehall the details of programmes happening thousands of miles away in an entirely different situation.

JJ Whitehall knows best. There is now an army of technical experts at the ODA or whatever it is now called who are always sending out and writing papers, going into the field to administer these programmes, is there not?

AS That's true, but frankly this creates a feeling of cynicism in people like me. I'll give you one example. Just recently my company got involved for the DFID, the British Aid Ministry, in setting up a programme for putting in teacher resource centres in every district in Uganda to help the local secondary schools with their development. Whoever designed that programme in Whitehall had located those teacher resource centres on a map, and as far as I can see had never been anywhere near the places because some of the resource centres that he had located were in the geographical centres of the district concerned in the middle of a desert, and there wasn't anyway for anyone to get there. That was a matter of about ten million pounds. Moreover the people who had designed that programme had not thought through the implications of the future running and control of those resource centres and the factual situation is that now, three years after the programme was completed and the centres were built, they are all closed. I find it shameful that we are still doing that after so many years. We still haven't learned how to operate aid programmes in the interests of the local people.

JJ Some years ago, I think under Douglas Hurd, the government decided that there should be a human rights element to the giving of aid, i.e. that they should have some basis of developing human rights; has this worked at all or could it work, do you think?

AS Yes, it has worked up to a point. The current shibboleth, if you like, under Clare Short, is actually 'Poverty Reduction' and that's fine because what the aid givers have felt is that too much aid in the past has gone to bolster the power structures rather than the people as a whole. The main problem is that even those who seek honourably to concentrate on eliminating poverty have their own definitions of what it is that they are trying to eliminate. So what has happened is that, for example, in several countries they want to use some of their aid money to develop a knowledge of English for perfectly valid reasons, (sometimes they want to develop it as a national language and sometimes for commerce). But the DFID have set their face against English language education as a valid aim for aid programmes and when the local government and local people say, 'But we want English language for our own purposes,' the answer is, 'I'm sorry, we don't consider that a good aid thing so you can't have it, whether you want it or not.'

JJ Is it not possible to bring the British Council in on that?

AS Well, the British Council has fared very badly in the last three or four years from the cutting of their budget. I think what it is, is that the present administration have seen what happened under the Conservatives, when aid was sold to Parliament as a means of promoting Britain and British exports. I think Clare Short and others have taken the view that that was neo-colonialism and that you should get away from it, and you shouldn't encourage links with Britain. I think that's a mistake, frankly.

JJ Getting back to internal problems in Uganda on which you reflected briefly earlier and which you went into in some detail in your book, there was nothing that outsiders could do about that, I suppose. In the end it was a struggle for power and it was tribally based to a large degree?

AS Yes, unfortunately there was a great deal of manoeuvring to be in power at the time of independence because the old joke about one man, one vote, one election has some truth in it. Undoubtedly Obote, who was a northerner, tricked the Baganda, tricked the Kabaka of Buganda into supporting him and his government at the time of independence, while intending to destroy the power of Buganda once he was firmly in the saddle, which he did. I

actually, because I was friends with the Baganda, and with the Kabaka of Buganda who I had been brought up with...

JJ That was King Freddie...

AS King Freddie, I did do my best to warn him and his ministers that this was a dangerous thing to do but I couldn't tell them why I knew it was dangerous. The real reason was because immediately before independence I had been asked by the Governor to listen to Obote's telephone conversations, because I understood the language and you obviously couldn't ask an African officer to do that. So I knew what he was planning and I did try to warn them but I couldn't tell them why I knew. The history of Buganda is like a Greek tragedy really. It's a history of great ability, great arrogance, great stupidity and some people who thought that they were the bosses and they would control Obote. But it was actually the other way round, and as soon as Obote had lured sufficient numbers of Baganda into his government, so that he could change the constitution, he did, to make himself a dictator and when the Kabaka objected he used Idi Amin to destroy him. He didn't kill him because the Kabaka escaped, rather like Bonny Prince Charlie and went into exile. That had been on the cards from the beginning because Obote was determined to be the sole centre of power. As I say, there was an element of Greek tragedy in the whole thing. You could see it was coming but you couldn't do anything to stop it.

JJ Andrew, could you tell us something about the East African Asian problem in Uganda which hit the headlines for quite a time and the problem of letting them come to the UK and so on. Were you involved in that at all?

AS I was actually in the Foreign Office by that time and I was called in to the discussions about what to do about it. What happened was that Idi Amin, having come in as a sort of favourite son of everyone outside to get rid of Obote, including the British, eventually needed, as most dictators do, somebody for his people to hate, to distract them from hating him. The Asians were an obvious target because they had always been regarded as the exploiters of the Africans. They were the local traders and they made profits out of local

people. So he decided to throw out the Asians from Uganda and at the same time to satisfy the need for an enemy and also to have some businesses to hand over to his officers so that they could take them on and either use them to trade or sell the profits and drink them. I think the difficulty was that there had been a discussion at the time of independence about what to do about the Asians...

JJ A discussion in Whitehall...

AS In Whitehall, and we were extremely naive, or Whitehall was, because it was decided to leave the Asians where they were but to give them British nationality, but not in any expectation at all that they would ever come to Britain. This was before the period really of substantial immigration and before the Immigration Act.

JJ Did this mean that their passports were defined as belonging to overseas Brits, who could not actually, on their passport, come into the UK?

AS No, because pre-1962, as you will remember, people with those passports could. And it wasn't until the Immigration Act, which I think was in 1963 or 64 that the distinction was made, so literally the original agreement was that they had full British passports. But the assumption was that they would stay where they were and that their passports would give them immunity against maltreatment within Uganda. Rather like St. Paul: "I'm a Roman citizen therefore you can't touch me". And I think what people did assume was...

JJ Civis Britannicus sum?

AS That's right. Amin wanted to get rid of them. He was able to say, 'Sorry, you aren't Ugandans, you're British, off you go.' We sat around in the Foreign Secretary's office in the FCO wondering what to do, and somebody said, 'Oh well, I'll ring up Amin and tell him not to do it.' And somebody else said, 'Well, why not call in the Aga Khan, who has a lot of Ismailis in Uganda, and get him to intervene with his fellow Moslems,' but it was a waste of time and in they came. There wasn't anything the British could do about it at that stage but I think there was a huge fuss about it at the time because it was a big chunk of people coming

in at the same time, but I think, if I remember rightly, about 20 or 30 thousand people, which by modern standards of trans-migration is not huge...

JJ It seemed a lot at the time...

AS It did, but of course the implications were substantial because behind those 20 or 30 thousand East African Uganda Asians loomed things like the Chinese population of Hong Kong with half the 4 million people of Hong Kong holding British passports.

JJ Andrew, in 1965 after you had been called to the Bar you joined the Diplomatic Service and spent three years in London. Was this so that the Office could train you in its ways, Diplomatic ways, as opposed to Colonial ways?

AS Clearly, yes. I don't think it was just the ex-colonials. But the Diplomatic Service is the Diplomatic Service and certainly the reception of the 'retreads', as we were called, was extremely cautious when we joined the Office, and probably rightly so because diplomacy is not, no matter what people say nowadays, is not a thing that anybody can do at the drop of a hat. The Office combines a real expertise with a fairly arrogant attitude to those outside it. Certainly when, after three years I had my first posting as Head of Chancery in Helsinki there was a great discussion about whether this weird creature from outer space could be trusted with real diplomatic activity in a foreign service post. So even after three years it was a matter of discussion and of course it did continue throughout. It wasn't just the ex-colonials, the tension between ex-CRO and ex-Foreign Office people was visible for ten or fifteen years after the amalgamation.

JJ The Foreign Office looked down its nose at CRO people, as I know myself.

AS Yes though the CRO was not guiltless, because undoubtedly what had happened before the amalgamation was that the CRO had promoted a lot of people rather rapidly and I think the Foreign Office therefore felt that there were people who were not, as it were, up to their grade, who were suddenly forced on them from the CRO. The other thing was that the Foreign Office, when they had to deal with the remaining Colonial territories, including Hong Kong, (that's why I probably went there), felt very uncomfortable with the processes of direct

administration because ideas are their stock in trade and not actually doing things. So the remaining dependent territories were very much regarded as things that nobody who wanted to be in the real, real fast stream, wished to be involved in. So in the FCO, it took me some time to get used to it, and I am sure it took them a long time to get used to me. I had a lot of rather traumatic experiences at the beginning, particularly in the way that actual words became so important. I remember someone said to me, the Assistant Head of Department I think, I'd like you to draft a telegram to Geneva So I drafted it and sent it off. It nearly caused a riot because I hadn't submitted it, it hadn't been changed, the red pencil hadn't been run over it. Fair enough, but it was a different way of doing things.

JJ You went to Helsinki subsequently and then came back in 1971. Did you notice any changes then in the Office, or their attitudes to old colonial re-treads, for that matter?

AS Well, I think by that time I had understood the game a bit better. It is a game in a sense, every Department is fighting its corner and when later I became the head of Hong Kong Department, which had its own special interests, (for example, in markets like textiles in which it was, to some extent, in conflict with the European Departments of the Office), I had to fight for Hong Kong. Often I took a leaf out of the book of the Legal Advisers in the Office. Because most diplomats don't have a legal training, what I realised was that a lot of the Legal Advisers were giving political advice in the guise of legal opinions and using legal jargon to get their political way. So I started doing the same thing. I had that background and the one thing no diplomat will ever admit is that he doesn't understand the words you are using. So if you say, 'Well, of course under the rules of Ryland and Fletcher you can't do that,' they wouldn't admit that they didn't know what Ryland and Fletcher was. It is a legitimate way of getting your way in the diplomatic game.

JJ Do you think more members of the Diplomatic Service should have some legal training, or is a little knowledge a dangerous thing?

AS I have often wondered about that. I think the British Diplomatic Service has huge advantages of flexibility of mind and the ability to see the picture as a whole, whereas a lot of the other foreign diplomatic services like the Germans and the Americans have post graduate

degrees very often in law. Sometimes they get tangled up in the minutiae of a situation and can't see the picture as a whole.

JJ Your first posting abroad as a diplomat was to Helsinki. You went there as Head of Chancery in 1968 during the Cold War. Can you tell us about that and how the Cold war and the presence of the Russian Bear next door affected your work?

AS Yes, and undoubtedly it did. 1968, as you remember, was the time of the Prague Spring when the Czechs were trying as it were to extract themselves from the bear hug and when that failed undoubtedly the Finns were extremely nervous that the next in line might be them. Their situation was not identical at all with the Czechs because Finland was not occupied, had not been occupied by the Soviet Union, but they had the same kind of regard all the time, (they had to), for the interests and the views of the Soviet Union. That was extremely important for the Finns, as was their trade too, (at one stage 30% of Finland's trade was with the Soviet Union). It affected us of course because Finland was a sort of listening post into the Soviet Union, (not because Finland was a Soviet satellite but really because of the juxtaposition of the two), so most of our reporting back from Finland in my first spell as Head of Chancery was on the pure Soviet and on the Fenno-Soviet aspects of what was going on there.

JJ Although as you say Finland was not occupied there must have been a very heavy physical presence of Soviet officials and so-called businessmen and so on at that time.

AS Yes, there were a lot of people in the Soviet embassy in Helsinki and at one stage we concluded that there were more Russians in the Soviet embassy looking at the diplomats of the British embassy than there were diplomats in the British embassy as a whole. Undoubtedly the Finns made a joke of it. All the important Finns would have his assigned Russian, known as his Koti Russa, and a Finn would say to his friends, 'I have the first secretary in the Soviet embassy who looks after me and you only have a third secretary.' The fact that the third secretary might actually be more important...

JJ A KGB colonel...

AS Exactly. Undoubtedly everything that the Finnish government did and said in terms of international politics was done with a view to its effect on the Fenno-Soviet relationship. And the result was that the Finns spoke all the time in a kind of code and you had to decypher the code in order to understand what it was that they were really saying. And this upset the more simple-minded, if you like, cold warriors in the west because they would hear the Finns talking about the importance of the friendship with their great Soviet neighbours. The Finns were always insistent that they were neutral and for example when I had military people coming out to look at the military situation in Finland they would attend a briefing by the Finnish generals on Finnish defence policy and always the actual briefing would be based on the assumption that Finland might be attacked from the West and might have to defend itself against a NATO attack. But when you look at where their defence forces actually were they were on the East to defend against Russia.

JJ That was the official briefing, presumably there were unofficial briefings in the sauna where different aspects of the job were looked at?

AS Yes, as I think you know, Jimmy, you develop a kind of courtesy. You don't challenge statements. Like the Potemkin villages of Russia under Catherine the Great, you never say 'those aren't real villages' because to do so would merely embarrass people. So, even with your friends, you might permit yourself a smile and they themselves a smile but you would never actually say, 'Of course this is all rubbish, isn't it?' Because it would be difficult for them to reply.

JJ So President Kekkonen managed this delicate relationship balance pretty well, did he?

AS I think he did. Funnily enough I went to a conference of Finnish historians last year about the relationships between Finland and the West and I was astonished to find, rather like the current myth about colonial imperialism in academic circles in Britain, that in Finland the current myth is the wickedness of President Kekkonen. All the young academics who were there were saying how he was a Soviet agent and he had in effect betrayed his own people. I found myself getting up, as a dinosaur from the past who was actually there at the time and saying, 'Hang on, no matter what you think about Kekkonen, the truth of the matter is that he preserved Finnish independence in extremely difficult circumstances and that Finland never

did become a Soviet satellite, and even though it is true that he certainly used the Soviet connection to bolster his own personal and political position in Finland, at the same time he kept Finland free and democratic, and that is no small achievement..

JJ Was he almost a one man band at the time?

AS Yes, he over-shadowed Finnish politics in an astonishing way. After the war there were a group of very strong, rough, sometimes rather brutal, Finnish leaders of which Kekkonen is a supreme example. And you challenged them at your peril. But again that was to my mind the sort of person that the Soviet relationship required.

JJ And the question of Finland joining the European Communities as it then was, that was presumably one that could not be considered seriously, because of the Soviet influence?

AS Well, indeed I don't think at that stage (I am talking of the late '60's) that was an issue. What was an issue, and it showed very clearly the realities of power, was that the Finns were negotiating to join a Nordic economic grouping called NORDEK, and the then prime minister (MaunoKoivisto, who later became President), was negotiating in good faith with the other Nordic partners to join this NORDEK agreement. But Kekkonen and Kariainen, who was the foreign minister, simply pulled the plug on him and said no on the instructions of, or at least after discussing it with the Soviet Union. It nearly destroyed Koivisto. I saw him immediately after and I thought he would never rise again.

JJ When was that?

AS That must have been I suppose probably 1971.

JJ But the Nordic Council was separate, wasn't it?

AS Yes.

JJ And Finland was a member of that.

AS That's true. But that was a talking-shop, frankly. NORDEK would have been a real economic group that would have had some reality...

JJ But the Nordic Council didn't do... I mean it was a political party, was it not?

AS Yes, but without power. I think the Finnish situation at that time (their main objective all the time) was to get somebody to use the word 'neutral'. That was almost the limit of their ambitions. In any communiqué after any meeting the Finns would insert the word 'neutral' several times.

JJ And you were able to go back to Finland as Ambassador in 1980. A lot must have changed in those 10 years?

AS Yes and no. Kekkonen was still President when I first returned. He didn't start to lose his authority and his physical health, well, he was declining but he was still in charge. And of course in 1980 it was long before the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union so the game was still there in the same sense. But Finland was growing in economic strength and self-confidence all the time and as far as I was concerned it was a very easy job to go back into because as you know Finns are good friends once you know them. It takes a bit of time and I had friends and colleagues who had not been important when I had been there as Head of Chancery, who had become the head of the armed forces or ministers or whatever and I found it extremely easy to not to have to go through the rigmarole as everyone does when you go to a new country where you have stately and formal conversations which mean nothing.

JJ And at that time the Finns were able to be a bit more relaxed about their contacts with the West and the British government, presumably?

AS Yes, there was still a huge amount of misunderstanding. While I was there as Ambassador some British general made a speech saying that the Finns had built two strategic roads across the north of Finland to facilitate an attack by Russia on NATO Norway, which is a complete nonsense. I've been up there and there are no such roads. The perception of neutrality being immoral was still there in the councils of NATO and the Finns themselves

were still very worried about the relationship with the Soviet Union. What they were anxious above all to avoid was any pretext for the Russians to demand military discussions and co-operation under their Friendship Treaty, because the treaty obliged Finland to come to the assistance of the Soviet Union in the event of an attack or threat of an attack by Germany or her allies. I remember very clearly (this is the second time while I was ambassador), the Chief of the Defence Staff from Britain came out and was taken up to Lapland, as the Finns would say, for a jolly holiday in the sauna and the forests. At the time the Finns were very worried about the implications of cruise missiles because the cruise missiles that might have hit Leningrad would have obviously passed over Finnish airspace, quite low, and therefore could have triggered a demand by the Russians, for example, for the stationing of radar within Finland to detect NATO cruise missiles on the grounds that it was a threat coming to the Soviet Union through Finland. In that very relaxed journey up to the north, at midnight, after we had drunk quite a lot of whisky, we went out to look at the midnight-sun over the local hill and the Chief of the Finnish Defence Forces said to the CDS of the time, who was Admiral Lewin, 'I want to talk about cruise missiles', Lewin just couldn't believe that serious political military discussions would be held on a Finnish hill at midnight when they were all half drunk. I had to kick him in the leg and say, 'Excuse me, but this general has been waiting for all this time until he felt sufficiently relaxed to have this serious discussion with you. What they want, what the Finns want, is some formula that you can propose to them which will enable them to resist a Russian demand for consultations.' We finally cooked up something which said that the cruise missiles were essentially a second strike weapon, not a first strike weapon and therefore the threat didn't exist, except in the circumstances of an actual war, and therefore the treaty didn't apply. Again, we were relaxed to the point that we were able to have those sort of discussions with them but in a very guarded and confidential way.

JJ Presumably that formula which as you say was cooked up was probably looked at very carefully over a period of time in London before that formula was finally agreed.

AS No, it was cooked up by the Chief of Defence Staff and me, because it was patently true. It was not something that we were going to say, but something that the Finns could use on their own initiative to protect themselves against Soviet demands if they wished. I'll give you another example, the Finnish Peace Treaty, to which Britain was a Party with the Soviet

Union (because we declared war on Finland during the Continuation War), said that Finland must have no more than 60 front line aircraft, which they already had but they wanted some more. We were able to negotiate with them and interpret the peace treaty, because we were parties to it, in such a way that we were able also to sell the Finns 60 Hawk aircraft because the Hawk aircraft were ostensibly trainers. The fact that they had things hanging under the wings was neither here nor there and was not referred to. So in a way what we were by that time was, as it were, covert allies in Finnish defence policy. But it was never made explicit of course.

JJ That must have been highly appreciated by the Finns nevertheless, that we went so far as that and perhaps other Western countries were not so privileged, if that's the right word?

AS I think the Finns (this was part of the pleasure of being a British Ambassador in Finland) genuinely did trust the British. They weren't allowed to trust the Germans, they were afraid a bit of American influence (certainly because of the Soviets), they didn't speak French and so the British were there and on the whole we were trusted and consulted.

JJ Despite not being really on their side during the Winter War?

AS During the Winter War we supported them, at least morally. It was during the Continuation War that we finally declared war against Finland. Well, nobody fired a shot in anger against each other. What happened was that Churchill said to Marshal Mannerheim, please do not advance beyond the old borders of Finland when you are advancing towards the East, because if you do you risk cutting the Murmansk railway. So please stay within the old borders. And Mannerheim said in effect I can't, it's not a defensible border, we have got to go on. So Churchill very reluctantly declared war on Finland. Nothing ever happened about it and the story, which may be a myth or may not, is that Mannerheim collected his officers together and said, 'Gentlemen, from tomorrow morning we shall be at war with gentlemen, the British, so from now on I require you to wear ties.'

JJ Finland now, domestically, has become a hi-tech, very modern society. When I went to Helsinki in 1981 the people were telling me about the wooden houses that constituted Helsinki in the fairly near past. They have made quite a leap in a short space of time from

perhaps being a partly agrarian society to a very modern forward-looking one. How did they manage that?

AS Yes, it is true up to a point but within the parameters of its industry and agriculture Finland has always been high-tech in a sense. They overtook Britain in GDP per head in 1968. People forget that and if you looked at the machinery for example of their wood working industry, if you went into a Finnish factory and compared it with a British factory, their technology was very advanced and their machinery was terrific. Even going back to the Crimean war for example, one of the books written at the time about what the British found in Finland when they attacked the Russian Fortress at Bomarsund, (because Finland was a Russian colony at the time), they found the ordinary Finns well educated, books in their houses, very clean, well developed with little plots of land that they cultivated and good ships. And you must remember for example, if you take ships, even in the '60's some of the best yachts in the world were built in Finland, and designed in Finland too. I think the people now see Nokia as a symbol of the new Finland but it's actually a continuation of a very highly developed technical industry base, partly because their education system has been good for a long time. The technical university in Otaniemi, which is the source from which all this technology at Nokia has been developed, has been at least the equivalent of any American or British university for years and years.

JJ So Andrew, when you came back to London in 1971 you became the Assistant, i.e. deputy head of South Asia department and then you moved swiftly the next year to be head of Hong Kong and Indian Ocean Department. That was a quick move, perhaps unusual, why was that?

AS Just by chance. I was still labelled when I came back as a re-tread, but it just so happened that the South Asia Department when I was there as Assistant became, for a short time the focus of interest in the FCO because it was the time when the Bangladesh war happened before separating Bangladesh from Pakistan. This was two Commonwealth countries fighting each other and Ministers became very interested in it, so I was inevitably brought to the attention of Ministers. It so happened that Hong Kong Department needed a new Head and it was promotion as far as I was concerned. So I got rather rapid promotion to Counsellor. Also, of course, as I said earlier, colonies were not something, (even Hong

Kong, important though it was), which the brightest and best of the Foreign Office struggled to have a job in.

JJ So as far as the Bangladesh war and so on was concerned you didn't have time really to get deeply involved in it, for it went on for quite a long time, didn't it?

AS We had to get deeply involved because it was two Commonwealth countries fighting each other and the whole business of managing relationships between India and Pakistan became very difficult for a while. I actually was responsible for sending Sheikh Mujib, who was the leader of Bangladesh who had been imprisoned in Pakistan, back to Bangladesh. I was rung up at 4 o'clock in the morning and they said Sheikh Mujib is arriving in London in 2 hours time, and I said, 'pull the other one.' But he was. Bhutto had sent him out of the country. So we rapidly rang up the RAF and said could they provide a plane to take him back to his own country. Mrs Gandhi tried to hijack him on the way through India. Hijack in the sense that she got on to him on the plane and said it would be quite inappropriate for him to land in a British plane in Dhakar in Bangladesh and would he please land in Delhi instead and fly on in an Indian plane. So I also spoke to him while he was on the plane and asked him what he wanted to do. He said "frankly I am very comfortable where I am. I'd like to go on this plane to Bangladesh." The main problem was we didn't know what the state of the airfield in Bangladesh was and whether the RAF Comet could land there or not. So I had to swallow and say I'm sure it will be all right and on it went. So he landed in an RAF plane in his new country and was rapturously received. Whether that was a useful bit of diplomacy or not I don't know.

JJ So you became head of Hong Kong and Indian Ocean Department and presumably one of the main dossiers on the table was Hong Kong's eventual return to China?

AS It was never on the table. It was always hidden in the safe, because the truth of the matter was that in those days in the '70's there were still 25 years to run and I think people were just hoping that things would go away. There was, as I said in my book, a comfortable theory around that you could do nothing, that you didn't have to do anything, because all the treaties by which Britain acquired Hong Kong were in the Chinese eyes unequal treaties, and illegal treaties therefore...

JJ Unequal in what sense?

AS Against the Chinese. The Chinese regarded them as having been forced out of them (which they were) and therefore that they were illegal treaties. The theory was that if every treaty, including the hundred years lease of the new territories, was illegal we were in Chinese eyes in illegal occupation now and we would equally be in illegal occupation if we stayed after 1997 and therefore we need do nothing. So we could just stay, because we wouldn't be in Chinese eyes breaking treaties any more if we stayed. But that ignored the confidence factor in Hong Kong, which Murray MacLehose, the Governor, was very conscious of and we realised we would have to do something as 1997 approached, otherwise confidence could just evaporate and the whole thing would collapse. So the sort of preliminary work for the Hong Kong agreement of 1984 was being done at the time, but that was still 10 years away. I think what happened was that in 1984, (which was before Tiananmen Square), Mrs Thatcher, probably rightly, judged that the moment was right to try and get the best agreement that we could. But I had gone by that time.

JJ So by the time it became a serious front page issue you were not involved. But looking back on it how do you view our eventual retreat and so on. Was it the best possible thing that we could have achieved?

AS No, it wasn't the best possible but it was the best practical. What intervened after 1984 of course was Tiananmen Square. At the time in the early '80's I think people looked forward to the gradual democratisation of the Chinese government and the withering of the communist dictatorship. That hope or expectation was upset by Tiananmen Square and of course by the end undoubtedly Chris Patten was trying to do things that were too late to change the pattern at that time. (That's not supposed to be a pun). People say that he was misled by the Foreign Office and he didn't know that promises had been made to the Chinese, but whether that is true or not I don't know. What I do know is that the governor of Hong Kong when I was there, who was Murray MacLehose, had been private secretary to the Secretary of State and was therefore a diplomat not a colonial official. People attacked him subsequently but I think he was terrific. He really fought Hong Kong's corner in Whitehall, because he knew how the levers of power in Whitehall were handled, and he used it to do his

job, which every colonial governor has always had to do, which is to defend the interests of his own territory.

JJ So after that you went to Jakarta in 1972. What were your responsibilities and concerns there?

AS Jakarta was in some ways the only pure diplomatic post I have ever had. I was concerned as Counsellor and Head of Chancery with relationships between Britain and Indonesia. It so happened that it coincided with the problem of East Timor which happened while I was there, which of course has become a very major issue since then. So there was quite a lot of political to-ing and fro-ing to be done and also there was the issue of political prisoners in Indonesia because there were a lot of prisoners who had been sent to Baru Island without trial ever since 1965 when the attempted Communist uprising happened. So it was a busy time politically and quite interesting but it wasn't at that time at the centre of Britain's diplomatic interest.

JJ Could you expand on the East Timor problem?

AS Yes, East Timor was one of these extraordinary hangovers of the Portuguese empire scattered around the globe, like Macao and Goa and East Timor and Mozambique, where, after the fall of the dictatorship in Portugal, the Portuguese just got up and ran. Frankly, they just abandoned them all except Macao, where the Chinese told them that they must not go. And the Portuguese had really done nothing to prepare any of their colonies for independence and their local structures, and development of people, were poorly made. So what happened in East Timor was that the Portuguese in effect just scarpered. There was a very chaotic situation left behind them undoubtedly. One of the East Timor political parties FRETILIN was certainly leftist in its politics, some said Communist, and it was the hey-day of the domino theory when anything Communist was supposed to be a domino which would knock over all the rest. I think the Indonesians then judged that it would be a centre of instability within their geographical area and so they decided that the best solution was to take the government over. I don't say that the West encouraged them because I know they didn't but there was certainly no huge outcry against the Indonesians at the time. What happened then was that Indonesia blew it. Instead of taking over the country peaceably as for example the

Indians did in Goa and treating the inhabitants reasonably, the Indonesians certainly used a tremendous amount of brutality in East Timor, right up to the most recent troubles that have caused East Timor's independence. Of course East Timor is different from Goa in that it is a very mountainous country and even during the second world war when the Australians were fighting in East Timor, they were able to hold out against the Japanese for the whole of the war. FRETILIN and the East Timor independence movements did the same, so the Indonesians have always had the guerrilla movement against them throughout their administration. And they reacted extremely brutally and killed an awful lot of people. But the oddity is that eventually one of the leaders of FRETILIN, Ramos Horta was given the Nobel peace prize along with Bishop Bello (who probably deserved it). Ramos Horta was himself responsible for a great deal of the chaos that existed in East Timor right at the beginning and whether he should have been given the Peace Prize I guess is very questionable. The other thing that happened at the time was that it became an internal political issue in Australia between the Australian political parties and they started using confidential telegrams from the Australian embassy in Jakarta as a political football for blackening each administration as it took over.

JJ Not having any intrinsic interest in East Timor?

AS Not really. But it was a stick to beat the opponent's party with. And confidential telegrams from the Australian embassy in Jakarta to Canberra and vice versa were published in the Australian press in the course of which it quoted "Mr Stuart in the British embassy." I got into a bit of difficulty with London over that.

JJ You weren't to know that your remarks were going to be published.

AS No, but it was a complicated situation and we did not always want our reports published in the press. Indonesia has always had a problem in that it is not a homogeneous country. It is an imperialism by the Javanese over all these other islands and the only justification really for Java ruling Sumatra and Borneo and Irian Jaya has been that they were all part of the Dutch East Indian empire. The first President Sukarno (rather like Idi Amin) felt that in order to maintain his power he had to give his people someone to hate. Taking over Irian Jaya and fighting the Dutch was enough for a while, and then he had Konfrontasi with the British and

the Malaysians when he tried to take over Sabah, Brunei and Sarawak as well. This was really rampant imperialism because the Javanese have little in common with most of the other islands in the Indonesian archipelago.

JJ Was there an Islamic compulsion as well?

AS Yes, in a sense. But the prime enemy of Sukarno and Suharto was the Communists and the Chinese. But Sukarno and his successor Suharto were always faced with what they regarded as a threat from Islam and Moslem fundamentalism as well, and there are pockets of really strong Muslim fanaticism in parts of Indonesia, up in Ache in the north of Sumatra in particular. The whole of Suharto's reign, if you like, was based on trying to sustain the power of the army as a counterweight to the power of Islam until corruption became so intense that he fell because of the corruption of himself and his family. Up to that point he was fairly successful.

JJ Were you and your staff in the embassy able to get around all this scattering of islands? Were you able to get out from under the paperwork in the embassy to actually make the odd political contact across Indonesia?

AS Yes, I was fortunate. I had an ambassador, John Ford, who was I think a colonialist at heart. He enjoyed travelling around and he allowed me to do the same and I did visit every province of Indonesia apart from East Timor (which we didn't recognise as having been taken over). It was fascinating because Jakarta itself, the capital, is a huge, horrible, dirty, depressing place but the islands are terrific. I was able to kid myself I was actually doing the DC touring safari thing. I thoroughly enjoyed it and I thoroughly enjoyed the Indonesians and so did Pat, my wife, enjoy the contact with Indonesian civilisation and society.

JJ What message were you bringing on behalf of the British government to the islands?

AS I think that they were not much visited because they felt like colonies. They appreciated the fact that foreigners they regarded as dignitaries were interested enough to go and visit them. Nevertheless I think we probably had, as almost all diplomats do, an inflated view of our own importance and relevance. I remember a meeting of ambassadors in Jakarta where

we were cross with the Indonesian government about something they had done, and the Spanish ambassador, who was at the time the Doyen, got up and said 'The Indonesian government treat us as if we were ordinary men, but we are not ordinary men.' So diplomats tend to think that everyone really wants to see them, whether they do or not.

JJ We had no particular message to Indonesia at that time, did we?

AS No.

JJ We were a passive onlooker rather than pursuing a particular active policy?

AS No, the Americans were undoubtedly the main foreign players, and to some extent the Australians, but certainly the Americans because in a sense the Americans had bolstered the Indonesian regime originally in getting rid of the Dutch and subsequently in defeating the Communists' attempt to take over in 1965. It was a very mixed political history in Indonesia. There was a memorial in the Anglican church in Jakarta which said 'in memory of those who died for the restoration of peace and justice in Indonesia.' It didn't say whose peace or whose justice. The whole business of the relationship between the Indonesians and, for example, the Japanese was very complicated because they saw to some extent the Japanese as the people who had helped them to get rid of the Dutch and we helped the Dutch at one stage when the British army actually fought to help the Dutch for a while to maintain their colonial power in Indonesia. But you are right. While I was there in the '70's we had no real vital interests to protect in Indonesia.

JJ Moving on then, back in a sense to colonial powers, you went to the New Hebrides. When were you actually there?

AS I was there from 1978 to 1980, so it was actually less than two years. It seems like a century. I was sent there with one mandate and one only which was to achieve independence for the New Hebrides. So everything that I did was focussed on that.

JJ That was a specific task, fraught with difficulties, not least because of the French I suppose. Were they as keen or was that part of their political agenda to wind it all down and move out?

AS No, I think if they had been left to themselves, if it had not been a condominium, I think it is very possible that the New Hebrides would have remained as a French colony to this day, just as New Caledonia next door has and French Polynesia, Tahiti and Muroroa, their nuclear testing ground. The French start from the position that to be French is the highest state of civilisation and therefore for them really independence is illogical because you are moving from the highest state of civilisation to a lesser one. The problem in the New Hebrides was that because the Anglophone education system in particular had been more active than the French; there were more Anglophones than Francophones. So the form of government which they adopted on independence was not just an independent one, it was actually Anglophone, more like the British system than the French. And for the French that's not just one step down, it's two steps down.

JJ That's unusual for the French not to have put a lot into education.

AS Not really. Their concentration in education throughout their colonial territories has always been on the elite. If you look at the ex-French African colonies, Senegal for example, people like Senghor who were really African Frenchmen, were the objective of French educational policy. So they concentrated on the top end, whereas the British concentrated a great deal more on primary education. And the result was of course that when it came to the counting of heads there were more anglophones and always had been and also the Protestant missionaries did a lot for education.

JJ The New Hebrides is a condominium with three administrations, I think you said in your book, the British, the French and a joint administration, that must have been very complicated.

AS Well, there were actually four at the end because there was also an embryo Independence administration that would take on the lot, so it was chaotic really. The whole thing was absurd. It was known locally as the pandemonium rather than the condominium and I had

never realised how differently the French administered their colonies from the British experience.

JJ What was the main difference?

AS There is a much more dirigiste system. Everything is laid down according to a system, like the French schools, the French bac (baccalaureate) studying the same book at the same time in every part of the world. And of course the basis of administration being law, the French throughout their time there were administering Civil Law, which is Napoleonic law, and we were administering Common Law. Two totally different concepts. So their basis of administration was different. Nobody ever really tried to unify. For example, there were two District Officers in every district, very often working against each other. A supreme example, which I think I mentioned in my book, was the High Court. You had a French judge and a British judge but there had to be a single conclusion to any case obviously, and the only way that they could reach that single conclusion was that in 1914 they established a neutral chairman, so-called, who would be appointed by the King of Spain. So you had the French judge and the British judge and the Spanish judge all applying different laws but with the Spanish judge making the final decision. This was all right until 1936 when Franco came on the scene and the King of Spain disappeared. And so 40 years later when I arrived the procedure was still followed, which was that the French judge and British judge were there with an empty seat between them. When they had given their contrasting judgements they would then do what the constitution required which was to turn inwards and say, 'What is your opinion Mr Chairman.' Mr Chairman had no opinion because he hadn't been there for forty years, so they adjourned the case for the opinion of the chairman, and there had been cases that had been adjourned for forty years as a result. That was a sort of symbol of the way that the condominium didn't actually work.

JJ Did it matter that there were no judgements and what sort of cases were you dealing with?

AS Every kind of case. But it mattered, for example, in land cases because people would claim that it was their piece of land and somebody else would claim the opposite and there was no adjudication between them. Even that, you could live with, but for the unfortunate

inhabitants who were technically stateless (because they couldn't be French and they couldn't be British), they didn't actually belong anywhere. That is very disorientating for anybody. And then, of course, at the end we had a revolt going on in one of the islands, against a central government after all the final elections had been carried out, and certainly French unofficials were supporting the rebellion because they wanted that island to remain separate from the independent country and to remain French.

JJ Which island was that?

AS It was an island called Santo up in the north. And there was a sort of pantomime local leader called Jimmy Stevens, who was trying to head up the rebellion. There was no way that we, the British, could deal with the situation on our own because it would have meant hitting some Frenchmen on the head. So although we had the Royal Marines and the French Paras there, we couldn't actually deal with the rebellion because the French weren't anxious to hit their own nationals on the head and we couldn't. So right at the end of the condominium, on independence day, there was still an active rebellion going on in one part of the islands and although the Royal Marines and the French Paras were there under French command, the French colonel's instructions were simply to guard the flagpole on which the flag of the independent country was raised, while the rebellion was still going on all around them and the rebel flag was flying a hundred yards away. Which was a bit irritating for the Royal Marines who of course could have dealt with the rebellion, as eventually it was dealt with, not by us but by the Papua New Guinea forces within 24 hours after they came in.

So it was pretty unhappy, really, the end of that experiment in joint administration. And when subsequently, at the time of the Falklands, people asked me about the possibility, or what I would think about joint administration or joint sovereignty with the Argentinians, I had then to say, (and I have since said to the British government over Gibraltar), that I only had one piece of advice on any proposal for joint sovereignty and that is, 'don't. It doesn't work.'

The thing about the New Hebrides was that it was a tiny place, and totally unimportant in the world balance of politics. Nevertheless for a while it became quite a serious item in the Anglo French relationship. Undoubtedly the FCO just wished the whole thing would go

away and while all this trouble was going on with the rebellion not put down because of French influence and the British trying to get out of the colonial situation with honour, the Foreign Office kept on sending out my under-secretary-level colleagues with the unspoken brief that the whole thing must be being made a complete mess of by Stuart, the man on the spot, and would they sort it out in double quick time. All of them had a go at solving it and went away shaking their heads, because in fact there was no easy or possible solution to it without confronting the different priorities of France and Britain. So it was a fairly unhappy time and I had moments when I wasn't quite sure I was going to have the full support of my colleagues in London. But to be fair to them, Mrs Thatcher actually was the one who sent out the Royal Marines, which the French had never expected. It was a couple of years before the Falklands and I think if Argentina had studied her reactions at the time to what she saw as a defiance of British colonial objectives, it might perhaps have made them think twice about invading the Falklands.

JJ Many colleagues have said that they had always found diplomatic life much harder on their wives and children when they go abroad, not only those who have to give up worthwhile careers at home but others who have to contend with difficult geographical, physical situations, not having anything to do, contending with a domestic servant, all that sort of thing. How did you find it, how did you and Pat and your children find diplomatic life generally?

AS I think I am the wrong person to ask the question because I came from a background where, or my generation if you like, wives tended to pack and follow and didn't so strongly insist on having independent careers as spouses do these days. As for the inconveniences and hardships of life, honestly, compared with the colonial service, where when I first joined we got leave every three years, and there were no passages for children from school at all, we found that the Foreign Office was incredibly generous. When I was Head of Chancery and therefore had to deal with the problems of members of staff, and they came and complained, for example, about their housing in Helsinki or elsewhere, I just couldn't stop myself from saying, 'Well, when I was your age I lived in a mud hut with a grass roof with a dung floor, so what are you complaining about.' It didn't do any good. They just looked at me and said, 'Well, what the hell has that got to do with it?' I think that the rigours of diplomatic life are being overstressed, frankly. I think we were well treated, well paid, we had comfortable

houses and good allowances, and by the end of my time in the Foreign Office we had three passages a year for our children to come back to visit us from boarding school, and boarding school allowances. I am really not sure what more the Foreign Office could have done.

JJ I agree that those sort of terms and conditions have improved, not least in order to be able to retain the officers, to encourage them to stay on in the service rather than go to greener fields and perhaps better paid ones.

AS The other thing that I used to feel is that to say you have sent me to a horrible post, when you are only going to be there for a couple or three years, is pretty feeble. If you can't find something of interest to intrigue you and enthrall you in a country for such a short time, I don't know why one joins the Foreign Office. Hardship posts may have sort of physical drawbacks but they usually have extraordinarily interesting histories, geography, background and people. You have got to be pretty unimaginative to not to feel you are being paid to live an extraordinarily full and interesting life.

JJ Yes, I'm sure that is right. One thing I found was that the problem of having to pack the children off to boarding school was difficult for many families. If only we had a British school here. Do you think we should, the British government should, help finance British schools abroad the way the French do?

AS Yes, possibly, and nowadays there are very good international schools around, some of which, following something like the international baccalaureate are of good standard. I can see that there are great advantages in keeping your children with you. On the other hand, as far as we were concerned, we found, by comparison for example with the Americans, who had their children with them all the time, a lot of those children were seriously neglected by their parents because they were out every night at cocktail parties or whatever and the children were left to moulder in albeit comfortable surroundings but looked after by servants. Whereas as far as we were concerned, I suppose we came from a background that both of us went to boarding schools and took it as the norm. So while the children were away in boarding school we did our duty as diplomats and we went out and we attended all the receptions and dinner parties and then when they came back for holidays we shut off to some extent our diplomatic life, and we took them and involved them in things that have fascinated

them ever since. Travelling through the archipelago in Indonesia, or skiing up in Lapland in Finland are chances for young people which the ordinary child in school in Britain, often with no interests apart from what is on the 'telly, could only dream about. We had a weird situation where one of our children was asked when he got back at the beginning of term to write about what he had done during his holidays, and he talked about water skiing, scuba diving, coral reefs and so on, and at the end of the term we got a report from his English teacher who said that the child wrote very interesting essays but he must learn to curb his vivid imagination. And it was true. We talk to our children quite often about whether they missed not having roots in a particular society in Britain, and they say, well, of course to some extent people who live here all the time have their friends and they go out, have parties in the holidays and they feel that they belong. Our children, as I guess yours and all diplomatic children, don't belong anywhere but they have an enrichment in their life that actually they find very valuable.

JJ Perhaps we can finish this by asking for your thoughts about the Diplomatic Service of the day. There have recently been cases of some ambassadors complaining about so much paperwork, so much concentration on management and not enough on policy, operational work and so on. What are your views about the Service now?

AS I think it's probably true although obviously I don't know how it works out in practice, but I think it is probably true that we've got hung up on what used to be called management by objectives and the sort of business MBA talk that now applies to businesses world-wide. The trouble with diplomacy is that, whereas in a business it's easy to set objectives which usually relate to the bottom line, (are you making so much return on your capital employed) diplomacy is not so simple. As I said earlier the difficulty with diplomacy is that you can never actually measure your achievement. I think this has led to some strain in the planning of the FCO, that they have tried to tighten up and formalise the purposes of diplomacy at the behest of management consultants, and this affects even the nomenclature and the jargon that people use. Nowadays what used to be called divisions are called commands (the "Asian command", what a weird title to use for a diplomat, who are we commanding?). And I think in the process it must be true that some of the eccentricities of the service have disappeared. It's probably a good thing that some of those have gone. I don't think people would tolerate nowadays the kind of way-out ambassadors that some of us have suffered from in our early

days where personalities became all and product became nothing. But in the process I think we've tried to Americanise a non-quantifiable objective of service. And the other thing I think that must be the case is that I wonder who listens nowadays to the views of ambassadors and diplomats as a whole. In the current example of the situation in the Middle East, it used to be said that the Arabists actually controlled the Foreign Office. What are the Arabists doing now? What influence do people who actually know what they are talking about, through their own experience, have on the formation of British government policy? I suspect very little. And that must be frustrating for people who are actually working in the field because one wonders what the function of an ambassador actually is these days. It's not just a matter of the improvement of communications, though obviously they are much better than they used to be. I think it's a question of the centralisation of power, not even within the FCO. Who makes foreign policy in our government today? I don't think it's the FCO side of Downing Street. I think it's No. 10.

JJ I agree with that. You have only to look at the magazines they put out. It's full of emphasis on IT, and fun days paint-balling to raise morale of the staff and this sort of thing, almost nothing about foreign policy, operational tasks.

AS I don't know what qualities they are looking for in recruiting diplomats these days. I was one of the Chairmen of the Civil Service Selection Board for a while and we were always saying that we wanted more red-brick scientists to be selected for the administrative service of the Foreign Office and the Home civil service. But that was a kind of lip service in those days. The actual structures of selection still favoured the Oxbridge generalist. This had many defects to it but whether they have gone too far in the other direction and whether they really are recruiting technocrats and technicians now, I don't know. Certainly the other bit of the modern myth, which was actually stated by ministers, is that you could and should recruit not just diplomats but ambassadors from outside the diplomatic service, because it is not necessary to have diplomatic experience to be a good ambassador.

JJ Like the Americans do.

AS Like the Americans and you can see what that does to the conduct of their foreign policy. I can speak as an incomer to the Diplomatic Service that I didn't understand what diplomacy

was for until I had at least some experience in the field. And I think a businessman would have the same difficulty. In Finland, the Americans had an ambassador who was a potato farmer from Idaho. I remember he was questioning President Kekkonen about his recent visit to Moscow and he got the name of the current Russian leader wrong. I think it was Chernenko and he said Mr Brezhnev, or whatever. That doesn't help diplomacy, nor does it help the reputation of the country from which you come.

JJ The Office I think tried to recruit more people from the commercial world on short contracts to help our commercial export promotion effort. What did you think about that?

AS I never did a commercial job in the whole of my time in the Foreign Office so I don't really know. I suppose it goes right back to the Duncan Report and their emphasis on the area of concentration in the Foreign Office. It is probably true that to put an arts graduate from Oxbridge in to do a commercial job without training wasn't as efficient as it should have been. It was also true, I'm afraid, that among the commercial community there used to be the belief that only the really lame ducks of British industry would bother to go to the embassy. Those who were any good would do the legwork for themselves. I hope that no longer is true. Nevertheless, a lot of businessmen I know and work with nowadays may be very skilled in their field but they are not always very sensible. A strange thing to say but, as my final statement on the Diplomatic Service, I believe the system, with all its faults, did produce people who, at the best, were really wise people, who understood human nature and who understood politics, and who, in their doubtless egotistical way, served their country well.

JJ A good note to end on. Thank you very much, Andrew Stuart.