

## **Richard Gilbert Tallboys, CMG, OBE**

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**A Memoir of Twenty Years with Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service**

**1968 - 1988**

**- with emphasis on commercial work -**

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**Late entrant - age 36:**

**joining at Grade 5A and retiring - age 57 at Senior Grade Salary Scale IV)**

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**Joining HM Diplomatic Service**

I started my working life within a few days of my sixteenth birthday when I set off on my first voyage to Australia as an apprentice deck officer in the merchant navy. After eight years at sea I settled ashore in Tasmania to study part-time for a Bachelor of Commerce degree while qualifying as a chartered accountant. After seven years in the accountancy profession I was offered appointment as an Australian Government Trade Commissioner. Six years later, after serving as Assistant Trade Commissioner in Africa and as Trade Commissioner in Singapore and then Indonesia, I joined the Diplomatic Service in March 1968.

My twenty years in the Diplomatic Service came about as the result of an application made in response to an advertisement headed "Late Entry into the Administrative Grades of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service", for which the key prerequisites were given as "1st class Honours Degree or equivalent and a commercial background".

At the time I was the Commercial Counsellor and Australian Government Trade Commissioner at the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. The interview process at the Civil Service Commission, then in Sackville Street, was an extremely stimulating experience. Three days of tests, interviews and mock committee proceedings, followed by a language aptitude test. I was most impressed and enjoyed the week immensely. On the third day the supervisor told the twenty or so applicants that if they were to be short-listed for the Final Selection Board then they would be so advised in a few days time. At that point I put up my hand and emphasised that I had to return to Jakarta on the Saturday. At the conclusion of the language test the following day, Thursday, I was told to appear before a Final Selection Board to be held the next day. So I had the unusual circumstance of being given my own personal Final Selection Board, set up so that I could go through the whole process in one week. That might be a record for civil service selection. I can only assume that I must have made something of a

favourable impression for the Civil Service Commission to be able to gather together the appropriate group for a final interview at such short notice!

I did not have a first class honours degree, so it must have been my test results, my commercial qualifications and background, that were the key to my recruitment to the Administrative Grades of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service. I did have a rather undistinguished bachelor degree in Commerce, with a sole distinction in Economics, earned as a part-time student at the University of Tasmania, and an almost completed London University LLB that I had been working on for six years as an external student. I was certainly a very well qualified Australian chartered accountant and had gained some good distinctions in the various accountancy examinations; but it could hardly have been my academic record that led them to assume I was the intellectual material they usually recruited for the Administrative Grades of the FO. On the other hand, my previous careers were certainly commercial and included a rather unusual mixture of experiences relevant to international trade.

The Australian Trade Commissioner Service provided me with a great deal of useful background directly relevant to commercial work in the Diplomatic Service. At the time I served in the Australian Trade Commissioner Service that service was staffed almost entirely with people from the business world, rather than by career civil servants. This resulted in the Australian business community having considerable confidence in the help that their Government Trade Commissioners could provide, even if only on the basis that Australian Trade Commissioners at least understood how business worked.

### **London: 1968-1969**

On arriving at the Office on my first day in March 1968 I expected to be put through a lengthy induction course. Not a bit of it. I was greeted with words along the lines of "Ah, Tallboys, yes, you are to be Desk Officer for Kenya, Uganda and the East African Economic Community in East Africa Department - go away and do it". This was I suppose in the best traditions of the Diplomatic Service, that seemed to work then on the principle that if a person was intelligent enough to be appointed to the Administrative Grades then he must be intelligent enough to do any job without delay. The "third room" environment of a Foreign and Commonwealth Office department was in practice a very effective "on the job" training experience. Working in the "third room", where two First Secretary desk officers and a Second Secretary, each with different but related fields of work, could discuss the issues of the day, bouncing ideas around, seemed to me to be a most effective arrangement. I enjoyed both my first and a later spell of working in the FCO in Whitehall.

My first job in the Diplomatic Service was by no means all commercial in nature but was logical enough perhaps in view of my brief Kenya experience as Acting Australian Trade Commissioner in 1962. The East African Economic Community did provide an element of commercial work, while my experience of Kenya gave me at least an appreciation of the tribal and other issues that were relevant to understanding the tensions in independent East Africa. My spell in East Africa Department was at the early stages of the Asian exodus from Uganda, when difficult decisions needed to be made about admission into Britain of Ugandan Asians, who were not wanted back in India or who certainly had no wish whatever to go there.

The Labour government of the time was having difficulty in settling a firm policy about the admission into Britain of the Asian families being driven out of East Africa. Officials were having to deal with a Mr Praful Patel and others without being able to give a clear indication as to what British government policy was to be. The subject led to heated discussions in the 'third room' of East Africa Department about immigration in general.

After eighteen months on "probation" in London, just as our funds were getting very close indeed to rock bottom, I received my first overseas posting and with it my first overseas and education allowances. By then I had sat almost two terms of dinners at Lincolns Inn, but I was so hard up by then that I felt I had no alternative but to turn in my student card in order to recover the £100 deposit.

### **Brasilia: 1969-1972**

My first overseas posting with Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service was to Brazil, and turned out to be the first of what has since seemed to me a rather unusual series of postings throughout my career in the Service. During twenty years I was never anything but either Head of Post, deputy head of mission, or Head of Mission. I have since wondered whether such a pattern was because I appeared to be a particularly responsible person who could be left to run his own "show", or just that Personnel Department thought my personality would be too difficult to fit in well in a large mission!

In Brazil my appointment was as First Secretary in charge of the British Embassy establishment in Brasilia. This was at a time when Sir David Hunt, the Ambassador, as well as all the other senior officers and the major part of the Embassy were still based in Rio de Janeiro. It became clear that Sir David and his wife Iro had every intention of staying in Rio for as long as possible.

Brasilia was a most agreeable posting for us as a family. The older children had by then started at boarding school but came for school holidays, and Brasilia had a healthy climate for the younger ones,

who were able to swim at the Yacht Club throughout the year. For me, I was not only already in charge of my own post but the job, and my establishment, grew steadily as more Brazilian ministries moved to the new capital. In addition, preparations for the inevitable move of the whole of the diplomatic corps led to me having responsibility for supervising a variety of construction work, expanding the temporary Chancery buildings, as well as direct involvement in a whole range of administrative matters that service in large posts might not have provided.

By 1969 the Presidency, the Vice-Presidency, the Congress, and two or three ministries were already established in Brasilia. In 1970 the Brazilian Foreign Ministry transferred from Rio to Brasilia, marking the occasion with a grand reception at its new headquarters, the beautifully designed Palacio d'Itamarati. By early 1972 the number of foreign embassies wholly based in the capital had increased from eight to thirteen.

The situation in Brasilia meant that I was dealing with the politics of the Congress as well as, before long, with the whole range of issues that required contact with the Foreign Ministry. Indeed, because I was so frequently in and out seeing various departments in the Foreign Ministry, the security officials at Itamarati probably knew me better than they knew some of the Brazilian diplomats. I do not recall ever being bothered to produce a security pass when I entered the building.

There was little commercial work in Brasilia at that time, though I had reason to learn quite a lot about the world coffee trade. I did once find myself - with the help of my accountancy knowledge - translating into English a Brazilian company balance sheet!

Eventually it became clear that all embassies were going to have to move to Brasilia. The Brazilians set September 1972 as the date by which all ambassadors had to transfer themselves from Rio to Brasilia. The incentive was that by that date embassies would lose their diplomatic privileges in Rio. In other words they would lose their duty-free Scotch. Rio combined with a continuing consular privilege of duty free Scotch were such an attraction that one Latin American ambassador, the Guatemalan I believe it was, had himself down-graded to Consul General so that he and his wife, together with her dress shop, could stay in Rio.

Sir David Hunt reluctantly decided he had to go through at least the formality of moving the British Embassy to Brasilia. He did not want to appear to be the last ambassador to move, so he announced that the British Embassy would move to the capital in February 1972. By then I had persuaded both

Sir David and London that there would certainly not be room for two of us in Brasilia as the Brazilians knew me so well they were referring to me as the "mini-Embaixador". I could see it would be difficult, and perhaps unhealthy career-wise, to continue in Brasilia with several more senior officers present, officers who would expect senior Brazilians to contact them rather than me; whereas the Brazilians would by inclination tend to ask always for the person they had come to know. Discretion had led me to ask for a new posting once Sir David made his transfer from Rio. Matters were arranged in a way that has always allowed me to say that I stayed in Brasilia just long enough after Sir David's formal arrival for him to give me a drink; and that my wife and I then managed to get to the airport for our departure just before Sir David and Lady Hunt got there on their way back to Rio.

In the two and a half years of my posting Sir David made only four visits to the capital. The first occasion was when he presented his credentials to President Medici; the second time was to attend the celebrations marking the transfer of the Brazilian Foreign Ministry from Rio. The third visit was, unwisely in my opinion at the time, arranged while I was on mid-tour leave. The objective was apparently to show London that he had paid a visit to conduct some diplomatic business. My recollection is that the visit, which actually took place after I was back in post, was short and that nothing worthwhile really happened. The fourth visit was on the occasion of his formal move from Rio. My explanation of these circumstances, after Sir David became Mastermind of the Year in his retirement, has been that "I always knew Sir David was brilliant - he just left everything to me!"

### **Phnom Penh: 1972-1973**

I went from Brasilia to be Head of Chancery at the Embassy in Phnom Penh. As "second-in command" the post was also what is now called "Deputy Head of Mission". Out of the eighteen months I was in Phnom Penh I was chargé d'affaires ad interim for a total of about six months. In 1972 Phnom Penh was certainly not a post at which there was any significant commercial activity. But it was an extremely interesting first "political post" for me and at times a very exciting one for the family. As time went by it also became quite a dangerous post, at least in the eyes of the Foreign Office. It was certainly a memorable experience to be on the active fringe of the Vietnam War. There were three evacuations of British wives and children between May 1972 and December 1973, each at a time when it was thought that the Khmer Rouge/Vietcong were beginning a final push to take the city. The siege of Phnom Penh got tighter as each dry season came round. It was almost a classic long-siege situation, one that endured for several years until eventually Phnom Penh became impossible to supply and hold. Each year the Viet Cong/Khmer Rouge ring around Phnom Penh got closer to the edge of the city, with increasingly frequent "fire-fights" taking place in the suburbs of the

city or in the vicinity of the airport.

The war in the countryside led to the population of the city increasing from about 250,000 to nearly 1 million as more and more rural peasants took refuge from the bombing as much as from the Khmer Rouge. It became harder and harder for the Americans to maintain supplies. Convoys of supply ships would be heavily attacked during each dry season when the navigable channel of the Mekong was narrow and attackers could simply wait for the ships to come past their hiding places in the banks of the river. During the wet season, when the river was full and the channel much wider, supplies were easier. Each year the supply situation became a little more difficult.

Our time in Cambodia coincided with the American B52 bombing in the country. The bombing was the Nixon Administration's 'illegal' bombing of Cambodia that caused so much of a problem for the US Administration when it became public knowledge. When each flight of bombers released its load the sight of the red flashes across the sky, followed a few seconds later by the noise and the shock wave, was frightening enough when it was fifteen miles away. One can only try to imagine what it must have been like for the Cambodian peasants living in the countryside much closer to the explosions.

The reaction when the bombing was discovered led to some interesting situations with the American Congress decreeing that only two hundred American "officials" should be in Cambodia at any one time. This meant, for example, that when General Haig flew in with an entourage, the American Embassy were expected to fly a group of their people out to Saigon to keep the total personnel present down to two hundred.

My wife and I must have spent hundreds of hours on our balcony watching the war in one form or the other. When we were woken up by the house shaking we could never be sure whether we had been woken by a B52 bomber dropping its load fifteen miles out of Phnom Penh, or whether it was the beginning of another incursion into the city itself.

There was at the time some argument as to whether the guerrilla warfare in the interior of Cambodia was being conducted by Khmer Rouge or by the Vietnamese. The general conclusion seemed to be that it was mostly Khmer Rouge but that Viet Cong were brought in for the more spectacular raids into the city. Some of those incursions were quite serious, especially one that took place in the vicinity of the French Embassy in 1973.

We needless to say had very few official visitors and no commercial ones. The only resident British businessman I can remember being there was Robin Stuart who was installed in the Standard Chartered Bank building. He and his Indonesian wife were really doing little more than acting as caretakers for the bank's building rather than being there because there was still some commercial banking business to be done.

There was also a group of five or six British ex-service officers who as "TCNs" worked in the logistics system that the Americans had built up to supply the Cambodian military with equipment and ammunition. The British members of the US financed team, along with a much larger number of Koreans and Filipinos, being "Third Country Nationals" did not count towards the legitimate two hundred US personnel allowed to be in the country. They were furthermore ostensibly all in Cambodia as civilians. It just happened that in addition to the British members of the team all the Koreans and Filipinos just happened to be retired colonels from their own military.

So what were we the British Embassy doing there? I am sure the answer is that the British Embassy was there almost solely so that we could be seen to supporting the American position of recognising the government of General Lon Nol. There was indeed a good political argument for there being a European diplomatic presence in Cambodia at a time when the 'domino' theory of Communist penetration of the whole of South East Asia was still current. Several other western countries had a diplomatic presence in Phnom Penh. The Germans had only a Chargé d'Affaires, but the French had a large Embassy, as one might expect, and the Australians maintained a significant embassy. The real purpose was to support and be seen to support the American position defending Cambodia against the "communists", rather than for any real British interest in Cambodia itself.

The Defence Attaché had a marvellous time. He had a real war going on outside his office. Colonel Michael Dracopoli gave us excellent military "Sitrep" briefings. They were fascinating, especially when we had ourselves seen evidence of "fire-fights" on the outskirts of Phnom Penh during the previous night.

In those days the Diplomatic Service, with the help of the Royal Air Force, maintained an executive aircraft in Bangkok. This spent six months in Bangkok, if I remember correctly, and several months based in Jakarta. For one month each year the plane went to Rangoon and to Phnom Penh for a week. When Phnom Penh's turn came round in 1973 I was Chargé. So for one week I had my own RAF twin-engine turbo-prop executive aircraft to take me to places that certainly none of my non-American

diplomatic colleagues were going to get to visit for a very long time. Siem Reap, Kompong Cham, Kompong Chnang, and the port of Sihanoukville were all visited. I took every advantage to see as much as possible of the country. It was all very sad. To me it was quite clear what the end was going to be. All that the American intervention succeeded in doing was to prolong the agony. And the prolongation of the war in Cambodia may well have contributed to the extreme violence of the reaction when the Khmer Rouge came in from the countryside to occupy Phnom Penh.

There were other interesting aspects of my time in Cambodia, but nothing that could really be described as commercial. There was one example of the problems faced by small posts dealing with commercial paperwork drawn up in a form intended to be standard for worldwide use. Towards the end of my time in Phnom Penh we received a long questionnaire from the Department of Trade and Industry asking about the automotive market in Cambodia! How many vehicles of each kind? How many tractors? What makes were they? And so on and so forth.

The Second Secretary, who included in his tasks that of dealing with such commercial correspondence as did occur, said the task was hopeless and that we should write back saying that we could not answer it. My answer to him was that that would not help. I took the view that some desk officer in the Department of Trade had been told to compile these returns for a long list of countries. If we were to write back to say we couldn't do the task it would present him with a problem in compiling his list of completed questionnaires. He would worry us with more correspondence about our failure to follow the rules. I advised that the best thing to do would be to look through the form and make a guess at the figures. Whether they were accurate or not, the numbers for Cambodia would not be in any event be significant to the totals DTI were compiling. So we simply went through the list and made guesses along the lines that there were "fifty tractors; three of which are in working order", and a variety of this, that and the other.

The only other item that I recall relating to the advancement of British exports was the receipt of a large and colourful poster promoting high performance British motorcars. At the time we were more interested in filling sandbags to place outside the ground floor windows of the Chancery building but I decided it would brighten up our working environment if I hung this bright and optimistic poster from London on the wall of the reception area. This poster in due course received a mention in John Le Carré's *The Honourable Schoolboy* in the chapter about Phnom Penh. Le Carré must have visited Cambodia a few months after my departure, but I frequently recommend that one chapter of the book as being an excellent description of what it was like in Phnom Penh in the final weeks before I left

Cambodia at the end of 1973.

In the deteriorating situation in Cambodia the Office decided that instead of sending our children out to Phnom Penh for the July 1973 school holidays my wife should instead return to London. I stayed on until December 1973. Certainly, by the time I left the situation was becoming very nasty. I have a recollection of sitting on our house terrace with a visiting BBC man having afternoon tea. As we enjoyed our tea we had my field glasses handy and were able to watch aircraft dive-bombing behind the trees not far away. We were close enough so that with the glasses we could see the bombs leave an aircraft and drop behind the trees. Fortunately, for our sense of relaxation, we knew that between us and whoever it was that was being bombed, there was the Mekong River.

On my last Sunday I went out with a Jamaican "student" on the back of his motorcycle to see the scene of a "fire-fight" that had taken place just beyond the airport boundary the night before. A very alarming and nasty experience, especially when a soldier pointed out the clumps of trees where the remnants of the Khmer Rouge band were believed to be hiding. A line of some twenty very mangled bodies were laid out on the verge beside the road where we stopped. From what I saw beside the road that Sunday I certainly came to appreciate just how fragile the human body is. I also realised then that perhaps it was certainly time for women and children to leave! What a Jamaican "student", his delightful wife and their two beautiful small children were doing in Phnom Penh at that time I did not like to ask.

Six months after leaving Phnom Penh I was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, just five years after entering the Diplomatic Service.

### **London: 1974-1976**

From Phnom Penh I returned to London to be Assistant Head of Department, first of all in Gibraltar and General Department. G & G dealt with Gibraltar and a range of matters concerning the small remnants of Empire. There was some useful application of my accounting experience in that I dealt with proposals for tax-haven status legislation that dependent territories were keen to introduce.

I was Secretary to the Selection Board picking new Governors for dependent territories; but most interesting was being Chairman of the Selection Board selecting young people for the last of the "Boys Own" type colonial jobs. In 1973 and 1974 the FCO was still offering jobs as District Officers in the South Pacific - on three year contracts - and in Hong Kong - the latter on a full career basis. As

Gibraltar and General Department also looked after "Labour" issues for the dependent territories I attended one session of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva; an experience that convinced me that the environment of such international conferences was definitely not for me. Apart from the visit to Geneva my only other official overseas travel while in G & G was to Gibraltar itself. This was at a time when almost a whole generation of Gibraltarians had grown up without ever being able to cross the causeway into Spain.

After some time in Gibraltar and General Department I really couldn't find enough to do, so I persuaded Personnel Department to move me. The move put me as Assistant Head of Information Administration Department. One of the main functions of IAD was to deal with the FCO's Information budget, to negotiate with Treasury the cuts required by the annual reviews of the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement, and also to negotiate such matters as the Foreign Office subsidy to the BBC World Service. So my commercial economic background and my accountancy came in quite useful. Indeed it taught me that the supposedly brilliant people in the Treasury sometimes make mistakes over elementary mathematics. I greatly pleased my Head of Department and the Assistant Under Secretary by negotiating an extra £400,000 out of the Treasury because they had got their elementary arithmetic wrong.

My involvement with central government budgeting was during the period of great public borrowing and spending reviews/cuts of the 70s. The subsidy to the BBC World Service was one perennial problem. How did the Foreign Office justify making a subsidy to the BBC World Service in the first place? It was I suppose a leftover from the 1939-45 War. The annual PSBR process did not begin objectively by planning from a zero budget and working out what was necessary. The process started from how much each heading of expenditure had received the year before and then tried to work out how much could be cut to meet government "across the board" percentage policy, or how much the Treasury could be persuaded to accept as the minimum on which a department could manage on in the coming year.

In the case of the BBC World Service there was no rational analysis of what the World Service was doing and what it was worth. No one wanted to say how much of the expenditure by the World Service went on little more than providing cricket scores to expatriate Brits. It was simply a case of arguing over the total amount of money. The BBC World Service might be allowed a 2.5% increase for inflation because everyone else was getting 2.5%. But beyond that general increase expenditure cuts had to be made and the task for IAD in the FCO was to persuade the BBC to accept any cuts at all.

One thing I learnt was that the BBC was very good indeed at rounding up its lobby to argue publicly that whatever else was to be cut no jobs should be lost at the World Service. It was tough to take on the BBC in those days and it wasn't easy either to take on Reuters. Both had loud and active supporters in Parliament and elsewhere. As soon as the suggestion of cuts was raised the whole BBC lobbying mechanism got to work very quickly. (I had previously learned, when in Gibraltar and General Department, that another organisation with good lobbying skills was the Falkland Islands Company, something that has since led me to wonder what part that lobbying might have played in the matter of the Falkland Islands "war".)

In the event I cannot have done too badly as I was told that my confidential report referred to me as a "good negotiator". I was promoted to Grade 4 (Counsellor grade) in 1976 for my posting to Seoul, after just eight years in Grade 5.

### **Seoul: 1976-1980**

My posting as Commercial Counsellor at Seoul in South Korea was undoubtedly the most rewarding professional experience that I have ever had from the point of view of commercial work. Once again I was in a post as "Deputy Head of Mission", so I was *chargé d'affaires ad interim* for three months each year when the Ambassador took his annual leave.

In 1976 the Korean economy was beginning to grow dramatically. The economic "miracle" was under way and for us in Seoul it was taking place "before our very eyes". I became impressed indeed with the Korean economists. I often described the situation as an economy being managed by brilliant Korean PhDs in Economics from Stanford and Harvard Universities applying the very best of entrepreneurial economics as taught in the best western universities to a disciplined Confucian society: which meant that the process worked dramatically. The Korean government in the days of President Park Chun He did not have to worry about the sensitivities of an electorate whenever they felt it necessary to change interest rates or make other changes to economic regulations.

I would pay visits to the Economic Planning Board rather as I might to a university tutorial. Their key economic planner at the time, Dr Kim Je Ik, would tell me what they were planning to do to deal with a current problem and why they were doing it. He would be frank about what their plans were, their attitude to the currency exchange rate, the admission of foreign banks, and so on. Sadly Kim Je Ik, brilliant American-educated Korean economist and a good friend, was one of those killed when the

North Koreans exploded a bomb under the dais on which many South Korean ministers and senior officials were sitting awaiting the arrival of their President during his state visit to Burma.

1976-80 was a very stimulating period for British business also. At the time I arrived in Seoul the Department of Trade and others were saying that there wasn't really much of significance in British exports to Korea. In 1976 Korea wasn't seen as really that important in trade terms. This attitude taught me that the Department of Trade did not know how to interpret their own trade statistics and how to read them in conjunction with the import statistics of other countries. I had to point out that British export figures to Korea did not tally with Korean statistics for imports from Britain. Korean statistics showed much larger figures for imports of British goods than the British statistics showed for exports to Korea. DTI's first response was that the Korean statistics could not be relied upon. The real reason for the differing statistics in such circumstances is quite simple, yet the same misunderstanding has occurred many times in connection with the value placed on British figures for exports of British goods to entrepots such as Hong Kong and Singapore. Trade officials and ministers in London repeatedly say what wonderful markets Singapore and Hong Kong are for British goods, without appreciating that a very large proportion of all British exports to those places are simply re-exported to neighbouring markets. In the case of exports to Singapore it is Indonesia, Vietnam and elsewhere in South East Asia that is most often the final destination. In the case of Hong Kong the final destinations are mostly to Korea, China, Taiwan and Vietnam.

British export statistics are based on the country to which the goods are consigned when they leave Britain. Korean import statistics - and those of most other countries - are based on the country of origin of the goods imported. Korean statistics were really much more reliable as a basis for assessing the value of British goods entering the Korean market than the Department of Trade's own assessment based on British statistics for direct exports to Korean ports. This misunderstanding unfortunately did a great deal of harm by making it extremely difficult to persuade the Department of Trade and Industry that DTI should be paying much more attention to Korea; that Korea had great potential and was rapidly becoming important as a market for British and other western industrial equipment and materials.

British exports as shown in British trade statistics were very low, even though by then Britain had supplied a great deal of equipment for the construction of the Hyundai shipyard, the Hyundai motor car factory (both of which designed by the British). Britain had already supplied the conventional power generators for Korea's first nuclear power station Kori 1.

When I arrived in Seoul 1976 there was one British bank, the Chartered Bank operating. Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank had a resident representative but he did little actual business. I remember one British company, GEC, with a resident representative. He was there to deal almost solely with GEC's business of supplying conventional power turbines for the Korean nuclear power stations.

By the time I left in 1980 we had formed a British Business Committee for the resident British businessmen. There were four British banks and two British merchant bank joint ventures. Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank still had only a representative office. Royal Insurance had established a joint venture. Exports from Britain were into the many millions and British investment in Korea was also becoming significant. It was a very rewarding posting for anyone interested in commercial work. I was heading a Commercial Department of thirteen British and local staff. We started off with an almost clean slate and were dealing with a local business culture that had almost no understanding of the way Europeans did business. Their overseas-educated economists were brilliant, but Korea did not have any businessmen who really understood Britain or the way British businessmen operated.

My previous experience in South East Asia was helpful in understanding Korean society and the business community, but that experience by no means gave me the whole story in dealing with a society which I maintain was at the time the most Confucian society on earth: a highly disciplined society at every level. In the 1970s Korea was for the majority of the population still a society where only disciplined families could be sure of surviving winter. Only a disciplined and tough society could have survived Korea's history of invasions and Japanese occupation. Confucian principles went right through society and this affected relationships within Korean companies; it affected relationships between Korean companies and their government; and it affected their attitude in dealing with Westerners such as those of us in the British Embassy.

There were during my time in Seoul several specific examples where business successes could be achieved with official help and where the commercial service could be of very real value to British exporters, both large and small. One of the cases that was a notable success was in the export of British steel to Korea; something people in London, not to mention those in what was then still a nationalised British steel industry, found hard to believe when the idea was put to them. We were competing right under the noses of the Japanese steel industry. The Korean steel industry was itself already producing the cheapest steel in the world, but was producing only a limited range of products, mostly aimed at their rapidly expanding shipbuilding and construction industries.

The success in selling British steel to Korea is an example of how officials without commercial background might well not understand that when you are talking about steel you are talking about countless different varieties within a single commodity statistical classification. There are always openings for specific specialised items within a broad general classification. The case also illustrates how well an exporter can do with the help of a commercial officer able to introduce that exporter to the right local agent and act as the intermediary in explaining what a potential agent was confident he could achieve and how he expected to be able to achieve it.

One day a Korean (Pom-Su Yi), whom I had not met or heard of before, came in to see me and said he would like to represent British Steel. First of all I thought that his idea was a lost cause if ever there was one. But then he said "No, I don't want to represent everything that British Steel produces, just one or two items where I think I know what I am doing, and where I think I can get business". He explained to me that Daewoo Group had recently taken over the huge Okpo shipyard project on the southern coast of South Korea (that I already knew, because I had been the only outsider invited to the handover ceremony when Daewoo, at the urging of the Korean government, had taken over the huge project from Korean Shipbuilding Co).

Daewoo were continuing the construction of the huge Okpo shipyard, designed to build million-tonne oil tankers (though no such vessels have actually been built at Okpo or anywhere else). Associated with the shipyards were huge warehouses. The steel required for the project was being financed through Asian Development Bank money. Daewoo had therefore been required to call tenders, under ADB rules, for a large quantity of 'H Beams' - steel beams in the shape of the letter H, to be used for holding up the roofs of the huge warehouses associated with the shipyard. My Korean contact said that he knew that on a previous tender the only people who bid were three or four Japanese companies. The Japanese steel companies were now so confident that they would be the only people who would bid again, that they would "up" the price of their steel for the H-beams on the basis that, having worked it out between them which company was going to get the business, they would have no competition (a cartel in other words). Knowing what was going on, Mr Pom-Su Yi wanted to put in a bid for British Steel.

I managed to persuade the British Steel people at Humberside to give him a price. On the day after the successful tender was announced Mr Yi came in to see me and said: "I was able to walk into the room and tell the Japanese I had got the business before they even opened the tenders. My only mistake was

that I did not put the price up high enough, because the Japanese had loaded their price." Losing the business was a terrible loss of face for the Japanese steel industry and its local representatives, especially as they had been beaten under their very noses by, of all people, the notoriously inefficient and expensive British nationalised steel industry.

My Korean friend told me that Daewoo executives were delighted. The transaction had saved them \$300,000 - and they would like to do more business with British Steel. However, Daewoo said they could not, unfortunately, order more H-beams because they didn't really need any more H-beams; but they did need T-beams: but if they wanted to order T-beams they would have to go through another Asian Development Bank tender process. As the Japanese would never risk losing face twice, the Japanese would 'give away' their steel next time just to make sure no-one else beat them. However, Daewoo Group had told Mr Pom-su Yi: "We want to do more business with British Steel rather than the Japanese - so what we can do is to order more H-beams at the same price as the previous tender, without going through a new tender process. We can then cut the H-beams in half to make T-beams". It was an extremely difficulty exercise explaining to British Steel in Humberside that Daewoo's attitude was "British Steel have done us a marvellous favour by saving us a lot of money, we are loyal customers, we would like to do more business with them, so we would like to order more H beams and then cut them in half".

I heard a couple of years later, when I met one of the British Steel people involved, that what had eventually happened was that British Steel had cut the H-beams in half for the Koreans. The business continued for some years and Mr Pom-Su Yi and his Nan-Gi Trading Co Ltd prospered as the agent for British Steel. British Steel also did excellent business in steel piling for the underground railway construction in Seoul, not just for one underground line but for several.

Asian businessmen can be extremely loyal customers when you have done them a favour. One might also say of Korea that to help a British company get into the Korean market at that time one could advise the company representatives that they should rehearse all the usual arguments for buying British machinery or equipment and then, when the potential customer had analysed all the details of the product on offer, the British salesman could add the phrase "and we would like to help you beat the Japanese". With Koreans that phrase would almost certainly guarantee a successful sale!

There are other examples of when I gained a great deal of satisfaction from helping British companies. The help one gave was not always in selling goods. Frequently the most useful help took the form of

explaining the way to approach the Korean authorities regarding licensing matters; or in suggesting the most useful way in which to approach a problem arising from a trade dispute.

On one occasion a lawyer for a large British oil company came into my office and told me that they had a terrible problem with the Hyundai shipyard. The Hyundai shipyard had contracted to supply five natural-gas carriers at a specified price. Hyundai had supplied one ship at the contract price but had then turned to the buyer and said they could not supply the other four at the same price, the price would have to go up regardless of what the contract might have said. Hyundai had told the company "Our government will not let us supply the other four ships at the same price".

What then happened was typical of the action a western company would take when faced with an apparent breach of contract. That was to send a lawyer to say "we'll sue". My advice to the British company was very clear. First of all, if they tried to get anywhere through a legalistic approach they would never get a favourable decision out of a Korean court; at the very least the process would be long and drawn out and in the end no Korean judge would want to be seen as making a decision entirely in favour of a foreign company, especially a decision that would cause his government to lose face and a major Korean industrial group to lose a lot of money.

Secondly, I said, the British company must remember that its objective was to deliver the product - i.e. the oil company had entered into a contract to deliver gas to the customer within an agreed schedule, and the ability to deliver was based on the timely supply of all five ships. Therefore the prime objective for the British company had to be to get the ships delivered in time. Furthermore, Hyundai were almost certainly genuine in claiming that their problem was that their own government would not allow them to supply the remaining four ships at the original price because of changes in inflation, exchange rates etc. I suggested the buyer had better work out what the real priorities were; that the answer might be that they should forget taking a legalistic approach insisting on the original contract price. Instead, they would certainly get their ships on time if they agreed to the escalation of the price and that the extra cost was an acceptable alternative to failing to meet their own contract to supply gas. I was told afterwards that my advice had been accepted as correct and had been acted upon.

A particular problem was the British attitude towards licensing Korean companies to manufacture British products. The general problem in Britain at the time was that British companies were inclined to turn down all requests from Korean companies wanting to be licensed to make motor car parts in particular. The Korean motor car industry was really started by the British. The Hyundai Motor

Company was given detailed advice in the design of its motor car plant and in the production of the first Hyundai car, the Pony, by George Turnbull the ex-British Leyland executive.

The Hyundai shipyard was also designed by a British firm, Appledore. The Koreans benefited at Hyundai from hundreds of years of British shipyard building experience being applied to a green field site, something which Appledore told me would never have been allowed to put into practice in the UK because of trade union opposition and planning obstacles. But Appledore did it for the Koreans and produced one of the most successful shipyards ever. British plant also featured in the first Korean steel mill, POSCO at Ulsan.

Having once started in the shipbuilding and the motor car manufacturing business Korean companies generally were being encouraged - indeed directed - by the Korean government to get into the business of manufacturing components for these industries so that parts did not have to continue to be imported. In 1978-80 Hyundai did very little else but build the steel ships' hulls with cheap Korean steel and then equip the ships with imported components, many of them from Britain. Korean requests for licensing arrangements at that time applied particularly to both marine equipment and motor car parts.

The general attitude on the part of DTI and British industry was that British companies should not give the Koreans any licences to manufacture motor car parts because the Koreans would quickly copy them. I had a great deal of trouble explaining that that wasn't quite the way things worked. First of all, if a Korean company, whether a small manufacturer or large, received a licence to manufacture a part to go in a motor car, their own government would immediately give that Korean firm a monopoly on imports of the part concerned. The monopoly would last until such time as actual manufacture began. In many cases the Korean company was not in a great hurry to manufacture the part, but if it had the licence it had the market tied up, and so did the company granting the licence. If a British company granted a licence to manufacture a product for a period of years then during that period the British company would be able to supply first of all the complete component; secondly, as the Koreans gradually got around to making bits of the part, the British company would go on supplying the more difficult parts of that component. It would be several years before the licensee could get around to actually manufacturing the really hi-tech parts, the "magic black box" essential to the working of the complete part. If the British manufacturer himself had not by then moved on to a higher level of technology then that original licensor would probably be going out of business anyway. On the other hand the British company would be in an excellent position to gain from granting a new licence for the more advanced component.

The answer was that in almost every case British manufacturers should licence the Korean company - stretching the licence arrangements out as long as possible. In any event, if the British company did not licence the Korean company the Koreans would go straight to the Americans, Germans, French, anybody in the same field, and someone else would not hesitate to grant a licence. British industry would have lost not only the immediate market but also the future market for the product. This issue of licencing applied and still applies to a great extent in Indonesia and other developing manufacturing countries, just as it did in Korea. Sometimes British companies did go ahead with a licencing arrangement and I have little doubt some did very well over a long period.

Another area where it was important to help British businessmen, if they gave you the opportunity to help them, was in the appointment of a local agent and in generally understanding the Korean businessmen they met. Sometimes a visiting businessman would call to tell me that he had appointed such and such an individual to be his company's agent. The choice not infrequently turned out to be based on the individual's ability to speak English and his amiable hospitality without any research being done as to whether the eventual major customers would be happy to deal with that individual. It is essential, especially in Asian societies, to be sure that the customer either has had a good experience of dealing with a potential agent or simply whether the agent had the right social or 'clan' connections with the customers.

British businessmen would from time to time come into the office and tell me they had met this marvellous Korean company who were excellent as potential customers or partners. They would tell me the Korean company was "manufacturing" such and such a component, to which I would reply "Oh no they are not, you must understand that whatever they are doing they are certainly not manufacturing it. They may be importing it, they may be assembling it, they may have a licence to manufacture it, they may have an intention to manufacture it, it may be that they would like to manufacture it, they may be packing it, but they are certainly not manufacturing it."

I would advise the visitor to go and look at the factory itself to see for himself just what the company was doing. There would seldom if ever be a deliberate attempt by the Koreans to mislead the foreigner. The difficulty is that Koreans, and many others in Asia, do not always appreciate the subtlety of tense in the English language. Without complete fluency in English Korean businessmen did not necessarily understand the difference between 'we manufacture', 'we will manufacture', 'we might manufacture', 'we may manufacture' and so on. In business discussions any westerner would do

well to ask the same question three times and in three different ways, to see whether he gets exactly the same answer.

Serious Korean and other Asian businessmen are seldom intending to mislead. Some will say they are almost deliberately ambiguous and that is a great problem. In any country where the language relies to a significant extent on Chinese characters each reader is translating ideograms, in effect pictures. They are not reading as westerners read English. It is often not easy to be precise in the use of Asian languages. Asians frequently also have difficulty with large numbers, sometimes getting the decimal point on the wrong place. In discussions involving large numbers the numbers should always be written down.

Another example of the difficulty for businessmen in Asia is the matter of law. I suppose the key is that China itself is a country ruled by policy, not by law. Many westerners fail to understand that the concept of the "rule of law", supremacy of the law, sanctity of contract, is a western if not an Anglo-Saxon concept. It is a concept almost completely alien to oriental societies which are based on a completely different understanding of the source of authority and where loyalties lie.

A marvellous cartoon appeared in the Korean English-language press while I was in Seoul. It was one of an American series involving two characters, "Frank and Ernest". In the first frame of the cartoon it showed one of the characters coming down from the mountain dressed as Moses and bearing two stone tablets under his arm. The caption to the first frame read "These are the law". The second frame of the cartoon showed the same character pointing to a huge pile of stone tablets in the corner. The caption to the second frame read "And these are the government guidelines". I felt that the cartoon must have been drawn especially for Korea as it was at that time.

In many societies the law as stated by formal government edict or published regulation is not as important as the unwritten or occasionally written guidelines. It is necessary to look beyond the published statement to determine what may be the real objectives of the government, rather than to read the letter of the law as people in Britain might interpret it.

Nowhere was the importance of this understanding of the underlying objectives better illustrated than in the matter of British banks wishing to establish themselves in Korea in the late 1970s. If the Korean economic planners decided that the economy needed an additional infusion of foreign capital to keep the economy growing there would be an official announcement to the effect that a certain number of

additional foreign banks would be welcomed. The Koreans were well aware that when a foreign bank opens its first branch that bank will not only bring in an immediate infusion of foreign funds but will actively encourage its clients to follow with investment in the country concerned. Once the foreign funds situation was deemed to have improved the Korean authorities would then decide that, for the time being at least, no more foreign banks would be admitted.

At one stage while I was in Seoul the Korean Ministry of Finance made a formal announcement that no licenses would be granted for additional British banks to open in Korea. Within a couple of months of that announcement Lloyds Bank representatives arrived in my office saying that they would like to set up in Korea and what if any help or advice could I give them. My immediate response was that it was unfortunate for Lloyds that the Koreans had announced that no more British banks would be admitted. However, I advised Lloyds to go to the Ministry of Finance and say to the Ministry that they, Lloyds, understood that at the beginning of the year President Park Chun He, often referred to as "Little Father", had made a declaration that Korea must export much more to South America. Lloyds could then explain to the Ministry of Finance that Lloyds, through its ownership of Bank of London and South America, had 150 years experience of doing business in South America; that Lloyds had branches throughout that continent; and that Lloyds would like to help the Koreans achieve the objective set by their President. It worked like a charm. Never mind what the published rules said, more exports to South America was what the Koreans needed to fulfil their obligation towards meeting the objective publicly set by their President. Lloyds were promptly given a banking licence.

A few months later the Koreans announced that they had reached the stage where they did not want any more foreign banks from anywhere. Almost immediately after that announcement Grindlays Bank appeared saying exactly the same thing that Lloyds had said, that they would like to open a branch in Korea. I told them that they were making it very difficult but, I said, "Go to the Ministry of Finance and explain to the Ministry that you, Grindlays, understand that President Park Chun He had announced at the beginning of the year that Korea must export much more to Africa; and that you, Grindlays Bank, have had 150 years experience of banking in Africa, that you have branches throughout Africa and you would like to help Korea achieve the objectives set by the President". In went Grindlays with a banking licence issued with no delay.

Both Lloyds and Grindlays made substantial profits in a very short time. The other side of the coin for banks opening up in Korea was that once it was noted that the foreign banks were making significant profits for two or more years, the Korean authorities changed the rules to make Seoul a less attractive

place in which to do business. "Moving the goal posts" is quite common in other countries, especially in Asia, that tend to be ruled by policy rather than by law.

For Lloyds and Grindlays in the 1970s, obtaining their licences had nothing to do with what the published regulations were, it was entirely a matter of identifying the underlying Korean objectives. I have often said since that at that time, in the 1970s, experts were giving lectures on "management by objectives" whereas what one often really needed to do is to "manage by other peoples' objectives". That principle does not apply only to doing business in Korea!

There were other commercial successes at that time in which the Commercial Department of the Embassy played a part. Korea was a very new market for British businessmen and to be able to help them was very much a matter of a Commercial Officer at the Embassy understanding the market in which the newly arrived businessmen were hoping to operate. In the Far East especially, the British businessman who comes for the first, second or even third time is visiting an alien market and doesn't really understand the way the local business community works. Businessmen will misinterpret many of the things they are told. They may, for example, completely misunderstand their local agent's proposals over the matter of agency fees, interpreting what is no more than local commercial custom requiring a higher agency fee to cover the additional costs of local hospitality customs as being perhaps more in the nature of requiring funds for what the European might consider a matter of bribery and corruption.

What a Commercial Officer at an Embassy can do is not only open doors for the British businessman but, if he is any good, explain the nature of the market in the society in which the businessman expects to operate. I would sometimes say to a newly arrived British businessman: "You must understand that in this part of the world people don't just read from right to left, they think from right to left. If you think you understand the way it works you have almost certainly been misinformed". Twenty years later, I now give lectures with the title "Through the Looking Glass", to emphasise that in Asia things are not always what they might seem to be to a western observer.

One aspect that affects business in Asia is the attitude to trademarks. It is essential in marketing in that part of the world to understand that the basic elements of Chinese culture are especially strong throughout most of the business community from Japan to Singapore and Indonesia. Members of any community relying either wholly or partly on Chinese characters are reading ideograms. They are not reading text, they are seeing and interpreting pictures; and just as they see, recognise and interpret the

symbol of an ideogram, so they will see and recognise a familiar trademark rather than read the printing on the package. To understand this is absolutely vital in the marketing of consumer goods. Many stories can be told about the importance of trademarks. It is a case of "do what you like to the product but don't change the package"; because what people recognise is the package to which they are accustomed. This is why in much of Asia you will see examples of packaging that has not changed for seventy years or eighty years. Keeping exactly the same package is how the product continues to sell. The customer loyalty stays with the product that can be identified by the picture of the trademark or by the whole package, not by reading the text printed on the label or in an advertisement.

Another important element to bear in mind in Asia is the attitude towards recognising authority and the views that authority might have towards the introduction of new ideas from foreign cultures. In Korea in the 1970s nationalism was very strong, to the extent that there was a reluctance among ordinary Koreans to show interest in anything foreign. This presented a problem when we organised the first British industrial exhibition held in Korea. Our event was indeed the first foreign industrial exhibition apart from some small events held within the American Embassy's own premises.

We were the first to hold a foreign exhibition aimed at attracting a wide audience of Korean engineers and manufacturers. Not only were we the first to hold such an exhibition but this was the first "public" exhibition to which Koreans were invited to come and see foreign products that they were being encouraged to buy for their companies. Until that time Korean-organised exhibits of foreign products had, in Korean wording, headings along the lines that "These are foreign products that Korean industry should copy". We were setting out to show them something "foreign" that they should buy, in this case British industrial equipment. For our project to be a success at all, even merely to attract an audience, meant bridging a great cultural divide, especially given the lines of authority in Korean society.

The Korean government under Park Chun He was by no means a one-man dictatorship. While anything to do with security was very tightly controlled at the top of government, in most matters Park Chun He was more a Chairman of the Board who gave his personal authority to every major decision by putting his name to any government decree once his cabinet of ministers had decided upon the course of action to take. The whole strength of Confucian ideas of the authority of the ruler over the ruled was embodied in any edict issued in the name of the President and to which the President had added his personal signature - his "chop". The ruler's authority then extended to those who had that authority clearly delegated to them by the President.

The nature of the Korean government at that time was also such that while it appeared that they were taking an inordinately long time to make a decision on a particular policy, once the President had put his signature to a decision then Ministers and their departments would proceed very rapidly to implement that decision without necessarily appreciating that other governments might not find it so easy to react at the same speed. This problem arose with the first steps to opening the Korean insurance market to foreign companies.

We were aware that the insurance market would be opened to foreign companies in the near future. So whenever a British insurer's representative called at the Embassy I encouraged him to call at the Ministry of Finance and make it known that they would be interested in entering the Korean market when the time came. I advised that their companies should if possible express their interest in writing. The time for a British insurance company to receive a licence to open in Korea came unexpectedly early and at very short notice.

I was once again chargé d'affaires when my secretary told me that the Director General of Insurance at the Ministry of Finance was on the telephone and would like me to call on him. I suggested a meeting two days later. The response to that suggestion was: "No. The matter is most urgent, could you please come the Ministry to-day?" That day was Monday.

When I called on the Director General he told me that the decision had been made to allow in two foreign insurance companies; one American and one British. He showed me the actual decree bearing the President's signature and then added that the Minister of Finance planned to make the announcement "on Friday" and would at that time name the two companies to be given licences. The Director General needed to know by Friday which British insurance company would take up the licence to be offered.

This put me in a difficult situation. I had to be careful not to be or appear to be partial to any one particular British company as compared with possible competitors. I asked the Director General which British companies had expressed to the Ministry an interest in the Korean insurance market. He showed me a list of five, of which one or two were well known brokers rather than substantial insurance companies. Of the five, only one had actually put in writing to the Ministry that they would like to open a joint venture as soon as that would be allowed. I told the Director General that I would return to the Embassy and would the following morning send to him a comparative analysis of the five

companies that had expressed interest.

I returned to the Embassy and immediately sent telexes to the five companies explaining the situation and emphasising that they had only until Thursday, London time, to reply. My recollection is that I also sent a similar message to other major insurers that I knew had visited Seoul but were not on the Director General's list. Only one company responded positively and that was the company that had been quite specific in its earlier letter to the Ministry expressing firm interest in opening up in South Korea.

I prepared my comparative analysis of British insurers by referring to the Stock Exchange year book and applying some of my accounting knowledge. As one or two of the names given to me by the Director General were of companies not quoted on the stock exchange I included details of the other largest British insurers. This would enable him to see where the one company that had been specific in their interest to open up in Korea, fitted in to the British insurance industry generally.

Fortunately the analysis of the companies that I was able to supply to the Director General, without any bias towards any company or companies, made it clear that Royal Insurance was the only major insurance company, as distinct from a broker, that had expressed a positive interest in opening in Korea, had said so in writing, and had confirmed to me that they would welcome the opportunity to be the first British insurer to receive a licence to do business in Korea.

In passing my comparative analysis of companies to the Director General, I was careful to emphasise that the decision was for him to make and that I was not recommending any one particular company. At the same time I pointed out that there was only one company that had been positive in terms that meant the Minister of Finance could be confident that, if he announced that the licence would be granted to that company, the company would indeed accept the invitation, and that that company was a very substantial British insurance company. On the Friday of that week, just four days after I had been told that the Koreans were going to invite one British insurer to enter the market, the Korean Minister of Finance announced that alongside the American Company - Home Insurance - the British company Royal Insurance would be given a licence as the one other foreign insurer to be allowed to enter the market.

In assessing market opportunities in South Korea in the late nineteen seventies, and how they might be developed, it was important to recognise that personal behaviour in the country was at that time still

very tightly controlled. Any questioning of authority, any new idea, or any show of interest in "things foreign", tended to be seen as a sign of possible disloyalty, a potential breach of national security, or at least as behaviour likely to disturb the good order of society. I recognised that in this situation we were going to have a big problem in getting Koreans to come and see the "foreign" exhibition we were planning. To attend an exhibition arranged by a foreign country would be something that ordinary Koreans might be reluctant to do for fear of being seen to be doing something not respectable in the eyes of the authorities. Much as in Soviet Russia, Koreans at that time might expect some official to take their name and number as being those of someone showing an unhealthy interest in "things foreign".

There was no point in holding our exhibition unless our British exhibitors had an audience. Fortunately I and the Commercial Department had excellent relations with senior Koreans in government and industry. I was confident we would have no trouble in getting senior Koreans to visit the exhibition. At that level they were delighted with what we were trying to do. Sure enough, I had no trouble getting the Minister of Commerce, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Federation of Korean Industry, the Chairman of Hyundai and Daewoo, about eight VIPs in total, all of whom I knew personally, to accept invitations to jointly open our exhibition. But having them open the exhibition was not going to be much help unless ordinary Koreans, engineers, managers and owners of small and medium sized manufacturing businesses, knew that the VIPs had attended and given their blessing to such a foreign exhibition.

Having got a whole group of top Korean VIPs to open the exhibition I decided it would not be sufficient just to have a photograph of them jointly cutting a ribbon. There had to be something in the photograph that would make it clear to all ordinary Koreans who might see the photograph in the local press, exactly what it was that these distinguished leaders of their own government and industry were opening. So instead of having my line-up of VIPs cutting the ribbon facing as though they were going into the exhibition, I had them on the other side of the ribbon facing as though they were actually coming out of the exhibition. That meant that when all the photographs were taken and reproduced in the press, across the top of each picture appeared the wording of the entrance sign "British Industrial Exhibition" with below the sign the picture of all the well known VIPs cutting the ribbon. The effect of the photograph was to make it clear to a wide audience that the foreign exhibition was respectable in the eyes of their own government and that it would therefore be quite in order for ordinary Koreans also to visit the same foreign exhibition.

Our exhibition presented the type of cultural problem that had to be overcome in many aspects of commercial and diplomatic life in Korea. In the case of the exhibition it didn't matter how much advertising we might have done for such an event, at that time Koreans were not going to attend unless they thought it was politically correct to do so. The event went very well for a first such effort in Korea.

Another interesting example of how British industry suffered at that time for not understanding Korean objectives and approach to business, was in the matter of shipbuilding. Hyundai were already very successful at building ships and were importing huge quantities of British marine equipment by the time I left Seoul. The export success in Korea for British manufactures of such equipment was for virtually no other reason than that the ship owners for whom the ships were being built specified British equipment, even down to the British marine paint for the hulls. On the occasion of a particularly high-powered British trade mission to Korea the Chairman of Hyundai, Chung Yu Jung, suggested a deal to the visitors. Hyundai executives pointed out that they had access to the cheapest steel in the world and very low labour costs. They suggested "We'll build the hulls. We then tow the hulls to Britain and you British can fit-out the ships with British equipment". It was undoubtedly in the fitting-out of ships with engines and other marine equipment that the real money was to be made for British industry. The Hyundai proposal made good sense at a time when it was already apparent that the British shipbuilding industry was ceasing to be competitive in world markets and the Koreans were looking for partnerships that would add strength to the marketing of their own shipbuilding industry.

Building hulls in one place and fitting them out in another is not an uncommon procedure; but the attitude in response to the Hyundai proposal was typical for the time: "We couldn't possibly do that, the unions wouldn't allow it". What inevitably happened in the years that followed the Hyundai proposal was that Hyundai and the other Korean shipbuilders soon made most of the marine equipment themselves, much of it under licence, and the major part of the Korean market for British marine equipment disappeared. That day could have at least been postponed by working with the Korean shipbuilders, making certain that as the Koreans gradually moved towards manufacturing marine equipment that they did so using only licences from British companies; in the meantime the trade in marine equipment could have gone on at a substantial level for years and years. A failure to appreciate what the Koreans could and would do, and a failure by both British industry and British trade unions to adapt, really did cost Britain many opportunities.

Korea provided many examples of where an Embassy Commercial Officer could be of real assistance to British businessmen. As I have already said in this memoir, Commercial Counsellor in Seoul in the late seventies was an extremely rewarding job for anyone interested in commercial work. But the Korean posting had an additional rather agreeable and quite novel experience in that, during one of my spells as chargé d'affaires, I signed on behalf of the United Kingdom the UK - Republic of South Korea Double Taxation Agreement. Signing an international treaty does not happen that often and I found it singularly appropriate for a chartered accountant to sign such an agreement on the subject of taxation; an opportunity that I doubt has come the way of many other chartered accountants.

From Korea I was posted, in September 1980, to Houston as Her Majesty's Consul General for Texas and five other states in the south-west USA.

### **Houston**

The obvious commercial interest in Houston for Britain was, and I am sure remains, the oil and gas industry. But it wasn't a really commercially active posting in the direct trade promotion sense. It was certainly a very different type of posting to Seoul. In Houston we were not helping British exporters in the detailed and specific way that the Commercial Department did at the Embassy in Korea. We were working more to create a favourable general environment in which British business could operate and do business with the worldwide oil and gas industry.

I arrived in Houston at the beginning of the oil boom and bust period from 1980 to 1985. When I arrived in Houston the major oil companies showed me how their future plans were based on the assumption that the price of oil would go to \$40 a barrel. By the time I left in 1985 they were talking about \$14 a barrel and the "rig count", the number of oil drilling rigs operating and the key measure of activity in the oil industry, had dropped dramatically. But in 1980 there were many opportunities opening up for British industry, not least in the great oil shale projects on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. British equipment was already quite widespread in the oil and gas industry, much of it based on the technology developed for the North Sea oil and gas fields. There were also successes in the coal mining industry, such as substantial quantities of British wire cable and sets of hydraulic pit props in the Snowmass and other coal fields.

By 1980 there had developed substantial mutual interest between US and British business in the oil and gas industry generally, not just among the major oil companies. A close relationship had developed between the oil industry communities of Aberdeen and Houston.

Much of the commercial work in Houston was directed towards facilitating British participation in the annual Offshore Technology Exhibition and generally helping newly arriving British firms to settle in to the Houston business community. It was a surprising thing that, in spite of the large number of British firms with offices in Houston by 1980, there was no local British business association. At my first lunch with several from the British business community it was clear that they were keen for me to take the lead in setting up some such organisation. I was initially reluctant to take on such a task as at all diplomatic posts it is easy to get so involved with the expatriate community that one doesn't spend enough time with the locals. However, it was agreed that I would help set up an appropriate organisation in Houston.

By being in at the beginning I was in a position to write the rules, including certain rules that I thought were essential to keep the organisation going on an active and effective basis. One such rule was to ensure that the presidency of the organisation circulated among the active British and American members and did not become the personal fief of one prominent member of the business community or just a small group of resident British businessmen. Another rule was designed to make sure that the group did not have regular monthly meetings regardless of whether or not there was any particular purpose for any particular meeting. That is to say there should be meetings only when there was an interesting speaker available. The result of such rules was that it was easier to find good people to become office bearers and committee members. Those who accepted to be Chairman, for example, knew they would not have to undertake the task for more than one year, while others who joined the Committee could see a real prospect of having a turn at being Chairman if they were interested in filling that position. At the same time busy business executives would not find their diaries occupied by regular monthly meetings that often had nothing worthwhile to discuss.

I was also determined that the organisation should not turn into another social organisation, wasting time and energy on golf meetings and such. There were many local clubs that expatriates could and should join for social and sporting "networking" activities. By having meetings only when there was an interesting speaker it was possible to make it worthwhile for busy executives to attend any particular meeting.

One privilege I enjoyed as "creator" of the organisation was to give it a name; the name I put forward was "British-American Business Association", the initials making up the word BABA. I did not explain the basis for the name at the time, but it happened that I thought it up while my wife and I were

sitting at the marvellous open air opera theatre near Santa Fe, New Mexico, watching a performance of 'The Rake's Progress'. I was fascinated by the character of the bearded lady, Baba the Turk, and decided that as a private joke I would suggest the name BABA as the name for the British business association in Houston. The name also made it clear that it was an organisation in which both American and British businessmen would participate on an equal basis, rather than being just a British business group to which Americans might belong. I was determined also that the organisation in Houston would not in any way be seen as, or thought to be, a branch office of the British Chamber of Commerce in New York.

BABA turned out to be an extremely useful body. BABA had plenty of American as well as British members who played an equal and active part in the management of the association. This meant that whenever there was a British VIP visitor to Houston I had a ready-made core audience of senior American and British businessmen. Whenever a British minister or senior official, or anyone else who would be good value for an audience, visited Texas and wanted or would welcome the opportunity to speak to an audience in Houston, it was possible to arrange a BABA meeting for a date that fitted in with the visitor's itinerary, rather than try and fit the speaker into a regular meeting date for the local group. For such visitors I had my core of a hundred people or so that I could count upon to turn up to hear the speaker. This was perhaps the main value of BABA for me as Consul General - a ready-made audience; though BABA also provided a very useful channel of communication to the resident British business community and to many of those American businessmen who had an interest in doing business with the United Kingdom.

I had some very active and helpful supporters among the British community and I encouraged them to organise a small secretariat for BABA, paid for by the members, so that all the detailed work of running it was self-contained and did not in any way become a chore that the Consulate General was expected to be involved in. I was always a great believer in avoiding asking London for any financial support for anything. We almost certainly would not have got any worthwhile financial support and there was no reason why the business community should not meet all the costs right from the start. Another early activity proposed to me as soon as I arrived in Houston was a British Festival, to be held as one of a series sponsored by the American Institute of International Education. It did seem rather a case of catching the new chap when he gets off the plane and inviting him to take on a project when he thinks the invitation to be flattering, and before he realises what is involved. I did take on the task, and in doing so very quickly learned certain things about the culture of the local business community, aspects that I might otherwise have easily overlooked. For example, I attended the final grand event of

an equivalent German Festival, held soon after my arrival, and which happened to held on a Thursday evening. I noticed that by 9 o'clock at the grand Festival Ball finale to the German week, even though the cultural performance provided by the Germans was still in progress, local guests were streaming out of the banquet hall; those leaving including among them the very senior people from a major law firm who had invited my wife and me to join their table as their guests.

I soon realised that the rather embarrassing early departures, from an event over which a great deal of trouble had been taken and expense incurred, was because in Houston business and professional people worked very long and hard. Business executives, lawyers and other professionals, especially those working in an international environment, all tended to arrive at their offices by 8 o'clock in the morning, or even earlier. That meant that from Mondays to Thursdays, no matter what the occasion, they went home promptly at 9 o'clock at night to get in a good night's sleep. They did not want to stay up partying until 11 or 12 on a weekday evening. That taught me that if we were going to have a British Festival it would be on condition that our main event was programmed to take place on a Friday night, when we could expect people to stay through the programme. The same experience taught me that to get busy local business people to a BABA or other committee meeting the only thing to do was to schedule the meeting for no later than 8 o'clock in the morning and provide breakfast!

The next question was how did we finance the British Festival. The first answer as far as I was concerned was that it was no good going to London for financial support, so why even bother to ask? By the time we spent endless trouble and energy arguing with the London bureaucracy about how much was needed and what it was going to be used for, and which department would be responsible for providing any support, the event would be over! So we started off on the basis it was all going to be locally financed with the help of the Houston branch of the Institute of International Education and the local British community.

I viewed all activities of this kind as great opportunities for image building. But that meant that all the arrangements had to be first class in all respects. I was working to create a favourable image of Britain, of the British business community. If it was possible to combine cultural activity with some business aspect so much the better. The Houston British Festival was an interesting experience of how to negotiate with people and explain to them what could be done, how one element in a programme would attract another. We ended up with a quite magnificent week of activity at no direct cost to the British taxpayer.

The central attraction for the British Festival came about as the result of a chance conversation at Houston airport with a member of the British community who happened to be an ex-officer of the Welsh Guards. He suggested that I should ask the band of the Welsh Guards if they would come to Houston for the week of the Festival. The band were keen but needed a \$50,000 guarantee to cover all their expenses for the trip and a week in Houston. This meant I had to explain to the local office of the Institute of International Education, a non-profit organisation operating with support from the US government, that they would need to put up a \$50,000 guarantee for us to get the band.

Not surprisingly the American view was that the Welsh Guards would be just another marching band. I had to work hard to explain to the local Director of IIE, Alice Pratt, that with the Welsh Guards they would be getting not only the marching band but would also get a Jazz band, a string orchestra, trios and quartets, and a "big band" dance band; music for everything. The band would provide a whole week of entertainment.

Eventually the IIE agreed to underwrite the financial commitment. The Welsh Guards made the British Festival a tremendous success, to the extent that not only were all the Festival costs covered but the IIE received a financial contribution after meeting all the costs of the band. Even I hadn't realised that in addition to the "big band" music for the Festival dinner, the audience would get a floor show of counter-marching, which was fantastic in the impression it made on the audience. I remember one of the American guests at the top table asking me "Are they all actors?"

Once we had the presence of the Welsh Guards assured, we could attract something else. My wife and I had met George Thomas, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and were well aware of his love of anything to do with Wales and Welsh music. So my wife and I asked The Speaker of the House if he would like to come to the British Festival as our VIP visitor for the week and stay with us as a guest for nine days while the Welsh Guards were in Houston. He came, and during the week spoke to many audiences. He was known as a brilliant speaker, and in Houston he was wonderful to listen to, whether talking to students, to the British American Business Association, or preaching at the principal Houston Methodist Church on Sunday: everybody loved him. He gave a superb after-dinner speech at the big Festival dinner at the end of British Week.

Attracting the Speaker of the House of Commons was not the end of it. Once it was known that George Thomas would attend, the marvellous Welsh singer and ex-member of the Goons, Sir Harry Secombe, said that he would like to come and sing with the Welsh Guards. Nor was that all. With

Harry Secombe coming to sing with the Welsh Guards and because George Thomas was going to be there, Tim Rice also came and played at the Festival dinner. They all came at no cost to the Festival. So we had the most spectacular British Festival Week with a most successful final event, without me having to bother London at all for financial support and all at no cost to the British taxpayer. I always set my objective for such projects as being to produce something that would be a hard act for my diplomatic colleagues to follow. The 1981 Houston British Week certainly did a great deal to establish a higher profile for the presence of the British Consulate General in the local community.

Before going on to other matters relating to the Houston posting I should explain for the record that my territory as Her Majesty's Consul General at Houston covered not only the whole of Texas but also the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. I have often said to people, and Americans agree with me, that there are many distinct cultures within those six states, including completely different ways of doing business. Even between Dallas and Houston there is a difference in the nature of local society and in the culture of doing business, let alone between Houston and New Orleans, or between Houston, Denver and Oklahoma City.

As soon as I could I paid courtesy calls on the Governors of each of the states to which I was accredited as Consul General. I made only one visit to Arkansas as there really wasn't any commercial activity there that warranted further visits. Long after the event I worked out that I must have called on Bill Clinton when he was a young governor of Arkansas. I have to admit that the architecture of the extraordinary Little Rock railway station made more impression on me than the Governor.

Having responsibilities through six states was a great experience and meant travelling out of Houston with considerable frequency. We were working to make the British presence felt throughout the whole area, a region larger than western Europe. In commercial and representational terms, some states were undeniably much more important than others.

Oklahoma had oil and gas, with both business opportunities and a great deal of expertise that was of interest to British companies. Colorado had some commercial interest for Britain in the oil shale projects. There were substantial British property interests in Colorado as well as straightforward commercial markets for equipment such as wire cable and hydraulic roof supports for the coal mines near the ski fields of Snowmass. I and the Director of British Trade for the USA, who was also Consul General in New York, somehow managed to find ourselves visiting the Snowmass locality in the middle of the ski season and having to stay overnight at Aspen on a Friday at the end of a business trip.

The sensible thing was clearly to stay on at Aspen for a skiing weekend.

New Orleans had useful markets for British consumer goods and there was still some shipping business there that from time to time involved the consular services of the Consulate General. The consular shipping responsibilities, much reduced from the days when Consulates were first established in the United States, and from the years when I was at sea, were still sufficient to make it useful to retain in New Orleans an Honorary Consul. But in the 1980s the Honorary Consul's most valuable services were in helping with arrangements for VIP visitors, an activity at which he excelled.

In spite of the wide geographical area covered, the centre of commercial activity for the Consulate General was nonetheless based around the oil and gas industry in Texas, though we maintained a commercial office in Dallas, headed by a Consul, that did the more direct trade promotion work centred around the Dallas Trade Centre.

To make our mark throughout such a huge territory - somewhat larger than Western Europe - I made use of everything possible, especially VIP visitors, to gain a high profile. If a visitor was coming through and part of my territory, a minister or anybody else of commercial interest, I would arrange a speech engagement to provide the visitor with an audience, taking the opportunity provided by the visit to spread the word for Britain and to spread the knowledge that I was the British Consul General representing Britain in each state. Arranging such speaking occasions was also an effective way of steadily widening my range of personal contacts throughout the whole area. In arranging speaking engagements both in Houston and elsewhere, the branches of the English Speaking Union were very helpful, though some branches were much more effective than others. The ESU in Houston were very active and could be counted upon, with BABA, to produce an audience of 200 or more for any significant British visitor.

Some of the most effective visitors I had for promoting British industry and Britain generally were members of the Royal Family. During my four and a half years in Houston I had responsibilities for visits by six members of the Royal Family, for a total of nine visits in all. One of these visits, by Princess Anne, lasted a week and involved three states. Most visits were of two or three days duration but often involved programmes in more than one state.

I liked to say at the time that I planned each visit so that not only the local people but also the visitors enjoyed the experience. I took the view that there was no point in having such visits unless they were a success from everyone's point of view.

One or two of the visits had their initial promotion by other organisations, such as a visit HRH The Duke of Edinburgh made in support of the World Wildlife Fund; but for most of the nine visits by members of the Royal Family I had full responsibility in arranging the programme. I was fortunate in having no intrusion or interference whatever from the Embassy in Washington. There were one or two occasions when a suggestion from Buckingham Palace for something to be included in an itinerary had to be firmly rejected because whoever had made the suggestion had failed to take into account local sensitivities. One example of this was when those planning the outline of a visit by HRH The Prince of Wales to New Mexico, to open the World College at Montezuma, had proposed that the visitor went direct to Montezuma and then to Albuquerque for a function before leaving the state. I had to insist that if the Prince of Wales visited New Mexico without paying at least a brief visit to the state capital, Sante Fe, most of the population of New Mexico would be offended and the visit would attract a great deal of adverse comment. The itinerary was duly amended to allow for a detour to visit the centre of Sante Fe for a short civic reception that included the New Mexico Indian communities.

The visits required many hours of careful planning. Sometimes I would have to be very firm with local people and say "You cannot ask the visitor to do that. But if you arrange it this way, or do it that way, as I suggest, then if anything goes wrong you can just blame me". It was amazing how well such visits went, though the one or two for which advance arrangements had been made without reference to me did occasionally present some problems. On such occasions members of the Royal Family were very tolerant of the tiring programmes local organisations were inclined to put together.

I know that many of my colleagues regarded such visits as something not to be encouraged in their territory because they saw them as a heavy burden on their resources. For my part I regarded them as a tremendous asset in my efforts to widen knowledge of Britain. I have no hesitation in now saying to anyone interested that my wife and I became great admirers of all those members of the Royal Family with whom we had contact. Our experience was that in their different ways they all worked very hard when they came into my territory. They were also all extremely pleasant and agreeable towards us personally.

It appears that it became known that I planned sensible programmes with some parts of a visit being genuinely enjoyable for the visitor. One example was being able to arrange for Princess Anne to ride in a western saddle for the first time, and later riding to a barbecue on the top of the hills behind the Rancho Encantado near Sante Fe, riding back to the ranch into a New Mexico sunset as the stars came

out in a cloudless sky.

We arranged for Princess Alexandra and her husband to have a picnic for six, including my wife and me, at a public picnic table in the Rockies a few miles outside Denver. On another occasion I arranged for Princess Alexandra and her party, who were making a brief stopover visit in Houston, to have lunch at a well known water side restaurant - without even the owners of the restaurant knowing. Only as we were leaving the restaurant did I tell them that they had had a member of the Royal Family lunching at their establishment.

Quite apart from the agreeable experiences provided for me and for my wife, and for many members of the local community, such visits were a tremendous asset in the promotion of my commercial and representational work. All such visits, together with those by other British VIPs, opened many additional doors for me, and gave me personal access to an ever wider range of top executives of the many American companies headquartered in my territory. When I could telephone such people on first name terms it was that much easier to obtain access on behalf of a British company wanting to talk at the highest executive levels about some business project.

Over the years I have also always accepted proposals for visits by Lords Mayor of London, not only while we were based in Houston but on an earlier occasion when we were in Seoul and I was chargé d'affaires. A Lord Mayor of London was considered by many of my colleagues to be more of a burden than a visit by a member of the Royal Family. The reason is probably that a Lord Mayor of London has just one year in which to make his mark. No matter how many overseas business visits a Lord Mayor may have made in his working life, and no matter how much experience they may have had of ceremonial occasions in London, few have experience of ceremonial representational visits overseas. They expect everybody in a foreign city to be made aware of how important they are as Lord Mayor of London. This is not so difficult in the USA, but in Korea, where the Mayor of Seoul was simply another Korean government servant without so much as a ceremonial badge to wear, it was quite difficult. I must have arranged my visits for them reasonably satisfactorily however, as when we left Houston I was made a Freeman of the City of London, proposed by a Lord Mayor who had visited us and seconded by the then Chief Commoner. I believe it is something that, if not unique, is certainly an unusual honour for a serving member of the British Diplomatic Service.

Most of the credit for the good reputation the Consulate General in Houston had with the business community at that time was due to those who ran the day-to-day detailed commercial work. I was

merely "the director of operations". My staff, including the Consul in Dallas, did most of the direct trade work assisting British companies; they were much closer to the "engine room" than I was for much of the period. But I think we ran a very good operation, very good indeed.

Quite apart from the commercial and general representational activities one of the interesting aspects of work during the Houston posting was involvement with the media. I was there from 1980 to 1985. In 1981 we had the problems of the Northern Ireland hunger strikers; in 1982 the Falkland Islands; and in 1983 the US military invasion of Grenada. These were all high profile issues attracting a lot of local attention throughout my area. It meant being very careful about what I said in public. I was always in demand to speak, or to appear on television at short notice to explain the British position on some recent development.

Whenever I travelled out of Houston the excellent locally-engaged but British Information Officer at the Consulate General, Helen Mann, would arrange for me to appear on local radio talk shows or make television appearances, many of them, throughout the whole territory. At any time while I was on a radio talk show for half an hour, I would sit there knowing that sooner or later the Irish question would come; and it always did, and it was invariably hostile. Within minutes of the hostile question there would invariably be a follow-up call from a friendly listener. I believed that to represent the British position effectively, whether it was Northern Ireland or the Falkland Islands, it was essential always to answer questions positively and in a reasonable way.

On one occasion I was invited to a television station in San Antonio for a panel discussion on the situation in Northern Ireland. The other members of the panel comprised some local personalities known to be rather unfriendly towards Britain in general and to Mrs Thatcher's government in particular. I prepared myself for a difficult time. The producer had told our Information Officer that it was not intended to have a studio audience; but upon my arrival at the studio I discovered to my surprise, and to the professed surprise of the producer, that there was indeed an audience and that the audience had been gathered together from the local Irish community. Apart from one moment when I allowed my outrage at a particularly untruthful remark to get the better of my good temper, it went very well. I like to think that I put the British point of view positively. At least I did so so positively and reasonably as to be applauded by the audience at the end of the programme, and for the leader of the Irish community to give me a lift back to the airport.

I have learned always, whether in the Diplomatic Service or elsewhere, to adopt a practice of not

responding to any single "anti" report in the press - whatever the subject. The danger of reacting to every negative report is that what might well be a single comment, that would otherwise be quickly forgotten by the public and the media, is given continued "life", importance, and double the publicity, by the attention paid to the publication of an immediate defensive response. In Houston, only if it became clear that a deliberate and perhaps co-ordinated campaign of bad publicity was getting under way, would I set the Information Section to work to counter the adverse publicity and, if appropriate arrange for me to deliver an answer to it.

On the other hand I accepted any invitation to speak in public or from the media, believing it vital to respond to such invitations - you cannot run away from the difficult issues and leave the field open to the other side. I did really enjoy that part of my work. In my view the worst possible response to a question is "no comment". Journalists are trying to do the job they are paid for and in my experience it is always worthwhile giving them something to help them fulfil their task. If they cannot get some authoritative quote - even if it is a quote that really says nothing of substance - then they may have little alternative but to make something up. The problem with the printed press often lies with the journalist's sub-editor who makes up the headline, a headline that quite often proves to bear little relevance to the actual report that follows it.

The Falklands War was especially difficult to deal with from the Houston office. One of the problems was that our communications from London were not good. London was sending huge reams of classified material to the Embassy in Washington where the Embassy had no time during the "War" to put the briefing material into a form that they could quickly pass on to Consulates General where security facilities were of a lower grade. So I had to rely throughout on my own interpretation of the public news available.

In one specific instance, the sinking of *HMS Sheffield*, a local TV station called to ask if I would go round immediately to the studio and make a statement, live. The TV station was about ten minutes away from the office. We were in a situation where I knew the disaster had happened - but we had no details whatever from official sources; nor did we have access to television in the office. However, it happened that a recently retired member of my staff was at home that morning watching the news on her television set. She was at that very time talking on the telephone to another member of the staff in the Consulate General telling her what she was seeing on television. She was seeing the latest ITN report of the problems and the tragedy.

So the situation was that what was being said and shown on ITN in London, relayed to American television, was being called out to me across the office as I walked out of the door of the Consulate General. This meant that by the time I arrived at the television station ten minutes later, I was almost as up to date as were the local commentators who were themselves watching ITN on the studio's own television set. I had also had a few minutes to consider what I might say. In so far as last minute briefing was concerned that was more or less the situation I had to rely on for all the speaking that I undertook throughout the Falklands episode. I remember being in Oklahoma to talk to the English Speaking Union right at the height of the conflict, and standing in the doorway of my hotel room closing it slowly watching CNN on the hotel room's television so that as I raced to the speaking engagement with the ESU I would be as up to date as anyone in my audience.

One important aspect about this matter of speaking for Britain on difficult issues of that time, whether it be the Northern Irish hunger strikers, the Falklands, or indeed any current subject of local interest, was that I consider my last eight years in the Diplomatic Service to have been an excellent time to be a British diplomat responsible for presenting the British view on contentious issues. That is, as far as I am concerned, that it was a very good time to be representing Britain while Mrs Thatcher was Prime Minister. This was not a matter of necessarily agreeing with every aspect of British government policy, something which was in itself irrelevant in one's position as a career diplomat whose job it was to represent the British position whatever that position might be at the time. It was, as far as I am concerned, a good time to represent Britain because of Margaret Thatcher's consistency. The Prime Minister's consistency meant that I could make a speech, I could appear on television, I could take part in a radio talk show, and I could go to bed that night knowing that when I woke up in the morning the policy of the British government would still be the same. This meant that I could speak positively and in a confident manner, knowing that my official and personal credibility would be enhanced when it became obvious that my statements could be relied upon.

Credibility with one's audience, whether that audience might be a large group or just one or two senior officials of the host country, is an essential element in diplomacy, more perhaps than in other representational activity. I am quite sure that many of my colleagues over the years, during the terms of previous governments whether Labour or Conservative, had often felt that they would do well to hedge their remarks on public occasions just in case they woke up the next morning to find that the British government, of either political party, had suddenly modified its policy and made a fool of them. A diplomat must be both personally and officially credible. I remember one Houston acquaintance coming to me after the Argentineans had been defeated in the Falklands and saying that "It happened

exactly as you said it would". Yet all I had done was little more than on numerous occasions emphatically repeated the Prime Minister's statement that "Either the Argentineans will leave peacefully or they will be made to go". It was most important to be able to make such an unequivocal statement. Such a positive attitude went down well with American audiences. Indeed it was at times embarrassing that my Argentinean colleague had a much tougher time in his presentations; though he may well have done better when talking to Hispanic audiences.

The Argentine Consul General in Houston at the time of the Falklands War had been a friendly colleague before the invasion of the Falklands. When I met him on one television occasion to which we had each been invited to put our respective side of the argument, he congratulated me for "being a gentleman" in the way I had put the British point of view. He then told me that his favourite posting had been seven years as Argentine Consul in Liverpool, and introduced me to his "British son". His successor had also had the same experience of a long posting in Britain and told me that he had a British daughter. Unfortunately it was difficult for him as a new arrival to develop a personal friendship with me, though we were always courteous towards each other when we met in the course of consular corps activity.

It can be most difficult for people who are personally good professional colleagues and friends but who then find themselves on opposite sides of a contentious issue about which it is easy to become angry. The answer is that one doesn't have to be unpleasant, one can make a great impression, perhaps a better one, without necessarily denigrating the other person and whatever he might have to say. I think the British position on the Falklands was quite well understood in my part of the United States - at least it was so after I had spent some months talking about it! The Grenada affair was a bit harder to explain to local audiences, but fortunately that was not as serious or as prolonged as the two other major issues of my time in Houston.

I stayed in Houston for four and a half years, about three and a half months longer than the standard posting to such a post. The reason was that towards the end of my stay in Houston, Margaret Thatcher, then at the height of her term as Prime Minister, was planning to make a visit to Texas. The Embassy thought that it would be sensible if I stayed on and planned all the details of the visit rather than place the visit in the hands of a newly arrived Consul General.

I had reached the stage of planning a dinner that I was to host in Dallas for the Prime Minister, and was wondering how on earth I was going to explain to many of my American Houston friends that I could

not possibly include them in the guest list. I could see my eventual departure from Houston being a little less friendly than it might have been. But, just as the visit was to become public knowledge, something awful happened to the sterling exchange rate on the very day that Margaret Thatcher was planning to announce her visit to Texas. Someone advising her in London, without in my opinion thinking very carefully, decided she should not at such a critical time for sterling make an announcement about a clearly non-essential overseas visit. So the visit was cancelled. Yet the visit was not due to take place until eight weeks later, by which time the currency issue would have settled down. It was an example of the wrong 'knee-jerk' reaction in a crisis. What should have been done is to have said nothing at all about the proposed visit for another week or so, by which time the crisis would have passed and an overseas visit by the Prime Minister would not have seemed inappropriate and might even have been seen as a strong indication of the government's confidence. For me the cancellation of the visit was a great disappointment. The outline programme had already been decided and I would have enjoyed managing the details.

Houston as a city was in itself an exciting environment in which to work. The city had a great community spirit - even the expatriate British community were positive and supportive towards the Consulate General. Being Consul General involved commercial work but that work was of a different type to the direct trade promotion work that I did in other posts. One was nevertheless able to be very helpful to British business, including those with their own representation in Houston. I like to think I was good at it. My American friends from Houston still tell me that that everybody there misses us: that the British presence has never been the same since we left. I apparently left my successors with a hard act to follow!

At a personal level my wife and I had a very agreeable time in Houston, though it could certainly be very wearing socially. Sufficient to say that my wife and I have been back to Houston almost every year to see the friends we made there.

Early in 1985 I was told I was to be promoted from Grade 4 (the Grade for Counsellors and most Consuls General) to the Senior Grade. This was a nice move, and I was very happy with it, especially as I had been in the Diplomatic Service only seventeen years. I had spent eight years in Grade 5 and nine years in Grade 4, rather less in each Grade than was usual for those who entered the Administrative Grades in the ordinary way.

I was offered the Senior Grade post of Consul General at Chicago, which offered much the same sort

of work as Houston. Chicago did have the added attraction that it might appear to be a more important centre for British business, as well as being a bigger city with a large and significant territory. The post in Chicago also had a Jaguar car to go with it, whereas in Houston as a Grade 4 I had had to provide my own vehicle. But before I could give London an answer - I had asked for 24 hours in which to discuss the matter with my wife - I had another call from the Ambassador in Washington, Sir Oliver Wright, saying the "Office" had just noticed that I had in the past expressed an interest in Vietnam. "Which would you like - Ambassador to Vietnam or Consul General Chicago?"

I had no real hesitation in deciding that we should go to Vietnam. My wife raised no objection, though she might have preferred the better shopping offered by Chicago. I was also offered a Jaguar for Hanoi, but having been in difficult hardship posts before - where local petrol supplies were often of poor quality, and knowing the poor reputation for reliability that Jaguars had at that time, my wife suggested that if we wanted a British car and it had to be diesel, then why not a London taxi? Such a vehicle might not be very comfortable, but it was British. With air conditioning, a carpet, painted white and with a flag staff on the front mudguard, the taxi proved to be very practicable. It certainly distinguished the British Ambassador from any other Ambassador driving about Hanoi!

## **Hanoi**

At the time of my posting to Hanoi, Vietnam was one blank in my Asian experience, experience that began with a first brief visit to Indonesia by sea in 1952. In 1955 I visited Singapore and Manila as an officer in the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, aboard an anti-submarine frigate on large scale SEATO naval exercises. By 1985 I had already had four Asian posts (two as Australian Trade Commissioner - Singapore and Jakarta - and two with HM Diplomatic Service - Phnom Penh and Seoul). I had also travelled extensively through much of the area, including some middle-age back-packing around Thailand and Malaysia.

In 1985 Hanoi was certainly not an active commercial post. Nor was it much of an active diplomatic post either. The Vietnamese were still in occupation of much of Cambodia, having invaded in 1979 to eject the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh; only to find that having freed the Cambodian people of that particularly nasty regime they had come under heavy criticism for remaining in occupation. Britain also had problems over the influx of 'boat people' into Hong Kong. Those two factors, plus the general British support for United States attitudes over the MIAs and for the ASEAN hostile attitude towards Vietnam's presence in Cambodia, meant that as far as Vietnam was concerned Britain was the least friendly of all the western countries that had diplomatic missions in Hanoi at the time.

When I made my first call on Nguyen Co Thach, the veteran Foreign Minister, I said to him that I was sure he would understand that “ ... as the Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher said in the House of Commons on July 27th 1979, in the course of the debate on the economic summit in Tokyo that year, and in answer to a question, ‘there will be no further assistance to Vietnam whilst present circumstances continue’”. I then added, "Those circumstances are: while Vietnam is in Cambodia; while Vietnam keeps many south Vietnamese in the 're-education' camps; and until we resolve the problem of the boat people in Hong Kong. However", I said, "there is nothing in my instructions that says that Britain and Vietnam cannot do commercial business with each other. So until circumstances change I shall devote my time here as Ambassador to developing straightforward commercial relationships between Vietnamese organisations and British business". This of course meant in practice trying to develop trade that involved no availability of credit, no special aid, nothing that is usually available to oil the wheels of commerce in developing a new market.

I have often made a joke of the fact that while my western colleagues would often provide little gestures towards the Vietnamese, tit-bits in the way of cultural visits or minor gifts, perhaps to tempt the Vietnamese into believing that their respective countries were really not as antagonistic towards them as were the British; we would not even provide so much as a pianist to play at the opera house in Hanoi, nothing. I must have been one of the few British heads of diplomatic mission who did not even have at his disposal his own small official fund of £10,000 from which to make small gifts of a charitable nature, such as the provision of minor items of equipment to a school or other local educational establishment. But there was no reason why I could not work on commercial matters with an eye to the future.

In spite of our officially unfriendly attitude, the Vietnamese treated me and the Embassy rather well. My wife and I travelled throughout the country whenever and wherever I told the Foreign Ministry I wished to go. We were not bothered with any nonsense of an official escort or a pre-arranged official programme. I suspect the Vietnamese, with limited resources for looking after foreign diplomatic missions, were rather pleased to have a foreign Ambassador who did not pester them for direct assistance with travel arrangements. All I had to do was to apply for a permit. We then made our own travel arrangements using, in the south of the country, the very competent and friendly Saigon Tourist Agency. Only once in two years was I ever asked to show my travel permit. That was on an occasion when I was making a planned "official" visit to the Vietnamese oil industry at Vung Tau and the check point on the road from Saigon had clearly been told to look out for me. My wife and I had been through the same check point at least twice previously without being stopped.

In almost all respects the two years were an extremely worthwhile experience. At the end of my posting it became clear that the Vietnamese appreciated our frankness, as I shall explain a little further on; but first I will comment on the "commercial work".

As had been the case with South Korea in 1976, the situation in Vietnam was that British goods were appearing in the country in much more significant quantities than the UK export statistics indicated. Almost all the British goods that were to be seen on the streets of Saigon and Hanoi were entering as re-exports from Singapore or Hong Kong. Castrol Oil were already, by 1985, doing one or two million dollars worth of business out of Singapore, but any British interest in that trade, direct or indirect, did not appear as British exports. Spare parts and other industrial bits and pieces turned up through Singapore. BAT's State Express 555 cigarettes were in effect the third currency in Vietnam at the time, but the Singapore factory that produced them didn't even realise they were entering Vietnam in any significant quantity. When I met with the company during a visit to Singapore it was clear that they had no idea of the status value that their brand held in Vietnam. Scotch whisky was always to be found if needed.

It soon became apparent to me that there was clearly very little business that could be done on a direct commercial basis. The Vietnamese official trading companies certainly had little money at that time. Most of the trade that did go on with the 'west' was through indirect channels involving Chinese traders in Hong Kong and Singapore, traders who could use a variety of informal and indirect channels of their own, employing in many cases their traditional contacts with the remaining Chinese community. So there was not a great deal I or my staff could do for trade promotion, especially compared with the Japanese who had a number of long term company 'resident' representatives and who at the time of my first visit to Saigon were holding their second post-1980 industrial trade exhibition under the sponsorship of the Vietnam-Japanese Trade Association. Strictly speaking there were no foreign residents in Vietnam at that time - other than diplomats. But I discovered that the Japanese companies simply remained on a series of short term visas and every three months went to Bangkok and renewed them. No major Japanese companies were however present under their own names. The trade was carried on in the name of small discreet "sister companies".

In spite of the unpromising commercial climate for British exporters during my time in Hanoi there were several specific cases where my commercial knowledge and experience came in useful. We knew the Vietnamese were going to have to open up the oil industry to foreigners - because the Russians told us that they themselves had told the Vietnamese that they would have to get Western technology for their offshore drilling programme. So, with my interest in the oil industry still fresh

from my years in Houston, I made a point of calling on the Petro-Viet offices in Saigon as soon as possible and visited Vung Tao just to see whatever I could see of activity there. I was able to develop immediately a good relationship with the oil industry by helping them out with a problem they had with obtaining delivery from Singapore of some urgently needed lubricating material. A Soviet oil-drilling ship was in Singapore for maintenance and was about to leave to return to Vietnamese waters. The Vietnamese had ordered some special lubricating material from Shell and another company but were have difficulty in getting the necessary confirmed letters of credit in time for the suppliers to agree to deliver the material to the Soviet ship before the latter sailed.

I decided that, knowing Petro-Viet really did have priority access to foreign exchange, and that the total amount involved would not bankrupt me if something went wrong, I would immediately send telex messages from the Rex Hotel to both the supplying companies, strongly recommending that the lubricants ordered be delivered to the Soviet ship. I said that the material was urgently needed but if it was not shipped aboard the Soviet vessel there would be significant delay while the Vietnamese found some other way to have the goods shipped to Vung Tao. I assured the suppliers that the explanation for the Vietnamese difficulty in getting the necessary financial documentation completed was genuine and that I was personally quite sure of their good faith. The goods were shipped, the suppliers received payment, and I developed significant credit with the Vietnamese oil industry, credit that undoubtedly helped when the time came to introduce British companies to that industry. This was not the first occasion on which I had made a quick commitment to expenditure to further official or commercial interests based on my judgment that a decision needed to be made quickly if anything was to be achieved, while if I got it wrong and subsequently had to pay the amount involved from my own pocket the amount would not ruin me financially.

I managed to persuade British Petroleum to send someone in to make initial contact with Petro-Viet. I advised BP to visit "just make a courtesy visit, talk to the Vietnamese about their oil programme, show you are interested. The only cost involved is the price of a visit for two or three days by executives based in Hong Kong or Singapore". British Petroleum did take that advice, they came in early and were one of the first western countries to get an exploration licence. I understand they found something that must have been thought worthwhile at the time, as a few years later I was invited to talk to a group of BP staff and their families who were about to be sent out to live in Vietnam. I believe that in the end the exploration results were not as good as they had at first expected, but they made their decision to try on the basis of their commercial judgment. My role was simply to show them that they should make their initial contact as early as they could and then to help with the company's first introduction to Vietnam.

Other British companies already had a good reputation. Vietnamese, like other Asians, are very loyal customers. On a visit to Haiphong my wife and I noticed a gas turbine power station just off of the road, with people working on it. We stopped to say "hello" and discovered that some of the turbines were British (others were American turbines that had been brought from the south after 1975).

The Vietnamese were, as always, friendly. They spoke very highly indeed of the British gas turbines. So I wrote to John Brown Engineering and said, "Look, this is nothing significant, but next time you have an engineer in this part of the world just provide for him to come into Vietnam for two or three days - out of Bangkok, just to make contact, just to show goodwill and to show you are interested. We will look after him and help him on his first visit". John Brown took my advice, the engineer was made most welcome and, sure enough, two or three years later John Brown Engineering sold more gas turbines to Vietnam.

At that time, when the Vietnamese were keen to redevelop contacts with the 'west', simple acts such as an exploratory visit were greatly appreciated and remembered. British companies did not have to spend much money, they didn't have to send a trade mission, just an engineer to add three days on his trip around the region.

Unfortunately James Mackie, the Belfast company that had supplied jute machinery to Vietnam and whose equipment had a tremendous reputation, simply didn't seem to register this fact, didn't seem to be interested. On the other hand an executive from a subsidiary of Unilever visited us in 1986 - we actually had him to stay because the hotels were so awful - and he not only identified a very worthwhile potential market, since substantially developed, but on his first visit, to my surprise, obtained orders for soft drink and toothpaste flavourings.

To-day "Castrol" is almost the Vietnamese word for lubricating oil. It is an example of what can happen as an unforeseen by-product of a sensible aid project if it's properly thought out to provide something of which a developing country can really make use.

During the "window" that opened up in British relations with Vietnam between 1975 when Saigon fell and 1979 when Vietnam went into Cambodia to eject the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh, Britain supplied Vietnam with two or three urgently needed merchant ships, standard merchant ships supplied on soft credit terms. These merchant ships arrived in Vietnam fully supplied, including reserves, with Castrol marine lubricating oils. Some of the oil 'leaked' out into the Vietnamese fishing fleet. By the time I arrived in Hanoi in 1985, almost the whole of the Vietnamese fishing fleet was using Castrol

marine lubricating oil imported from Singapore. The reputation the brand had earned in the marine industry then seeped into the growing automotive lubricating oil business. On a visit to Vietnam today you may well see more Castrol signs than Coca Cola or Pepsi signs. Castrol signs are everywhere, throughout Vietnam.

The Castrol situation is an excellent example of the value of a good trade mark that becomes readily recognised and can develop a life of its own. I mentioned to a Castrol executive that on a visit in the early 1990's I had seen the Castrol logo on petrol pumps. "Does Castrol also supply gasoline in Vietnam?" I asked. The answer was of course "Certainly not". Some Vietnamese, recognising that "Castrol" was such a good trade mark so closely identified with the best lubricating oil for motor cars and motor cycles, had clearly come to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to put the same sign on their petrol pumps so that people would think that the petrol was as good as the Castrol oil.

Castrol now have a lubricating oil blending plant in Vietnam which is in itself a relatively rare example of sensible foreign investment in a developing country such as Vietnam. Before making any investment in the country the product brand name already had a very well established place in the local market. What is more, the blending plant cannot operate effectively unless Castrol, and Castrol alone, supplies its own specially formulated raw materials to be blended locally; while building a blending plant - as compared to a refinery - is not that expensive or complicated for local staff to operate. By being an early foreign investor Castrol have helped to secure their existing grip on the local market for all lubricating oils, not just those that are blended in the local plant.

One example of what a diplomatic officer with a commercial background can do for British companies was unusual in the extreme. It was a situation in which not only a major British company, Cable and Wireless, but several other international commercial and government telecommunications organisations as well, were lucky that the British Ambassador in Vietnam at the time of the events concerned, happened to be not merely a diplomat but also a chartered accountant with a maritime background and a law degree. The story also shows how large commercial companies will sometimes act without considering in advance all the implications of international law in relation to what they set out to do.

One day in my second year at Hanoi I received a call summoning me to the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry. Ambassadors do not often receive a peremptory request to appear at the Foreign Ministry of their host country without some advance notice of what the problem might be. To my dismay the Vietnamese told me that they had discovered that Cable and Wireless - which they "knew to be a

company owned by the British Government" - had been laying underwater telephone cables through Vietnamese economic waters without telling the Vietnamese authorities. The Vietnamese had been told that, for some reason associated with a dispute over waters claimed by Indonesia a little further on the planned cable route, the Cable and Wireless cable-laying ship had dropped the cable in Vietnamese waters and buoyed it, planning to return and resume cable-laying later.

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry said to me that the Vietnamese government would like to discuss the matter directly with the British Government. The diplomatic point being that at that stage the British Government did not wish to talk directly to the Vietnamese government at all on any subject whatever, and always declined to agree to any direct contact at ministerial level. The Vietnamese government clearly thought they were on to a good thing over this problem, and that as Cable and Wireless was, as they thought, owned entirely by the British government then the British Government would have to talk to them if they wanted the undersea cable to continue on through Vietnamese waters. The "British Government", as the Vietnamese saw it, had laid the cable, already about a thousand miles of it from Hong Kong and worth millions of dollars, much of it in Vietnamese waters. The British government company had then left the end of the cable and its buoy in the middle of an area of great economic and security significance to Vietnam. If the cable had to be abandoned because the Vietnamese would not agree to the cable ship resuming operations, or even if there were to be extensive delays while the issue was argued at government level, the costs for Cable and Wireless and the international project as a whole would be very substantial indeed.

My seafaring days meant that I understood what Cable and Wireless had been doing and how they would have buoyed the cable in deep water pending a return to recover it when the relatively minor argument with Indonesia had been settled. I also, from my study of international law, appreciated the situation regarding the Vietnamese offshore economic zone and the significance of unauthorised maritime activity that could be said to directly affect Vietnamese economic interests, both their oil exploration activity and the extensive and economically vital fishing industry. I was also immediately able to point out from my commercial background and interest, that Cable and Wireless had indeed been a British government company but was by then a public company with many shareholders. The British government, I explained, just happened still to have some shares in Cable and Wireless. I told the Foreign Ministry Vice Minister in charge of the matter that I would go back to the Embassy immediately and would return to the Foreign Ministry within an hour or so and explain the Cable and Wireless situation in detail. Which I did.

Fortunately we did have at the Embassy a copy of a recent Stock Exchange Yearbook. I made an

extract, copying the relevant page and added explanatory notes of my own. I went back immediately to the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry to explain the situation of Cable and Wireless as a "non-government" company. The Vietnamese were clearly disappointed that they did not after all have an issue certain to get them into government to government talks. I think that it did so happen that by then the Vietnamese had come to recognise that I would be straightforward with them. They did not argue the issue of the status of the offending British company. However, I did say that I would very much like to make sure we solved the problem. I said "we" would speak to Cable and Wireless and get them to come and talk to the Vietnamese authorities. Only after I had defused the situation did I tell London what the problem had been.

This cable project was, I soon learnt, being undertaken by a consortium of major companies - Hong Kong, Japanese, Philippines, Indonesian, Singaporean - and on behalf of the consortium Cable and Wireless had been busy laying the cable through the waters of the Vietnamese economic zone without so much as a "by your leave"; nor even bothering about it when they laid a buoy in the Vietnamese economic zone - an area of great importance to the Vietnamese for both fishing and oil exploration. I was intrigued about the sudden discovery of the cable laying, which had been going on for some time. Someone had told the Vietnamese. There was no suggestion that they had come across the activity or the buoy on their own. I don't think it was the Soviets as if the Soviets had seen the cable-laying vessel they could have told the Vietnamese long before the buoy-laying took place. I wondered what all those Russian aircraft supposedly based at Cam Ranh Bay were doing if they hadn't seen a cable-laying ship operating through Vietnamese waters for days at a time. I was inclined to believe from a hint dropped by the Vietnamese that, for some obscure reason, someone on the Philippine side had tipped the Vietnamese off. The Vietnamese could of course have learned of the activity through something said about the cable-laying ship when it put in to Singapore for maintenance and to wait for the territorial issue with Indonesia to be settled.

In any event, the problem was solved. I persuaded Cable and Wireless to send a team in to Hanoi to explain to the Vietnamese what they had been doing. Cable and Wireless were very sensible about it once they realised that they'd made a mistake that could prove to be very costly: - they might never have been allowed to pick up the cable. Vietnam was in a strong position. I believe that my encouragement to Cable and Wireless to make a deal with the Vietnamese saved a lot of embarrassment and a lot of money to all concerned. I was told that settlement cost Cable and Wireless \$200,000 plus agreement that they would take five or six Vietnamese out in the cable-layer to see the process of picking the cable up whenever they were ready to continue laying the cable on to Singapore. The Cable and Wireless experience was a good example of what a "commercial" diplomat can do for

British companies by understanding aspects of the commercial world that might not come within the experience or training of even the brightest diplomat recruited directly from university. I can recall a number of other experiences along similar lines. It always helped my credibility with the business community for them to know that I was a chartered accountant with a law degree - and quite often useful to mention also that I had spent eight years at sea in cargo ships! But I must admit my background was not the usual one - even for late entrants into the Diplomatic Service.

Another commercial step forward during my time in Vietnam was to get international Mining Consultants to pay a visit. Coal, mostly anthracite, is one of the few significant valuable mineral resources that Vietnam possesses. IMC, British coal mining consultants, had undertaken a survey of the Vietnamese coal industry as a British-funded project during the open trade and aid window of 1975-79. I persuaded them to pay a visit: "Just come in and renew contact. Just show the Vietnamese you are still interested, because the country is going to open up shortly". They did pay a visit while I was there and returned several times after I had left; but I believe it was about ten years before they actually obtained a paying consultancy project. Patience is not just a virtue in Asia - it is essential! The political situation during my time in Vietnam was interesting even if unproductive in so far as British-Vietnamese relations were concerned. We really didn't talk to them at all. I am sure one reason we were represented there was much the same as the reason we stayed on in Phnom Penh for so long. In Cambodia our presence was a gesture that showed support for the United States. I am sure the Americans found it useful to have in Hanoi. We were after all the only western country to have maintained a diplomatic presence of some kind in North Vietnam continuously since 1945. At the very least we were a useful listening post. We also became a useful and friendly face for the occasional American visitor.

Twice I entertained American congressional delegations to breakfast to enable them to get a briefing from myself and my European Community colleagues. We talked about the MIA issue and current developments generally. The breakfasts themselves were much appreciated by the American delegations! Hotel catering and outside eating were very poor indeed at that time, even at the Vietnamese official guest houses at which foreign official visitors were accommodated.

It is indeed now difficult to describe just how poor living conditions were for the Vietnamese at that time. Nonetheless there was something about the Vietnamese that made me always think of Vietnamese poverty as dignified poverty rather than the abject and miserable poverty that can be seen so often in the most developed western countries.

Living conditions weren't good for the few visiting expatriates, or even for resident diplomats who had all the advantages of importing food from Bangkok. The changes since 1987 have been truly remarkable. My wife and I have been back to Vietnam several times since 1987. It is a new 'world' for ordinary Vietnamese. Vietnam and its people may still have a long way to go but, to paraphrase Harold MacMillan's words: "The Vietnamese have never had it so good, ever". Hanoi, which was unbelievably dull in our time there, with really nowhere decent for a foreigner to eat outside an embassy, has now got numerous excellent hotels and a whole range of restaurants. The superbly restored Metropole Hotel in Hanoi was a mouldering rat infested pile in our day. The representative of the International Red Cross and his wife lived for years in a two-room suite, cooking on an improvised stove in their bathroom, yet still managed to entertain us to dinner. The country has changed dramatically, not just in Hanoi but in the provincial towns and villages.

The change away from a system dominated by Soviet thinking began quite slowly with decisions made at the Communist Party of Vietnam Congress in 1986. They were certainly quite clever in justifying their Damascene conversion from being declared Marxists to being in favour of the open market. At the 1986 Congress, when they made the first declaration of an intention to change towards a market economy, the Vietnamese managed to support the change by a quotation from Lenin: "We must remember what Lenin said about the desire of ordinary people to own private property". This was like reading whatever you want into the Bible - Lenin said it so it must be all right! (I have recently been reading that Lenin himself made a similar u-turn in 1921 when he introduced the New Economic Policies to reverse the Marxist policies that were ruining the new Soviet Union. The NEPs being themselves reversed by Stalin.)

I have for long questioned the extent to which the Vietnamese, and the Chinese, were ever true Marxists. I certainly came to believe that few Asians were serious Marxists. My doubts were first raised when I was in Jakarta in 1966. At one of the first diplomatic receptions I attended there I found myself talking to a Soviet diplomat - at a time when it was not necessarily good for one's career to be seen having a private conversation with a Soviet. Indeed from the shadows at the side of the Austrian ambassador's lawn where we first spoke, I suggested we should walk into the centre of the lawn under the lights - where at least no one could accuse me of having a clandestine conversation. My conversation with my first Soviet followed the standard pattern whenever diplomats meet for the first time. I asked him "How long have you been in Jakarta?" "One month." he replied. "Where were you before?" "China." "How long were you there?" "13 years." By this time I was getting short of things that I thought it safe to say to an "enemy" colleague. So I tried "How is the Chinese Communist Party managing?" The reply began with a grunt of disgust. "Ugh! The Chinese aren't communists, they are

a nation of petty capitalists." That's thirty years ago - if the Russians didn't know the character of the Chinese at that time, who did? How much unpleasantness might have been avoided if the 'west', especially the Americans, had really understood the Vietnamese.

Ho Chi Minh was as a young fervent nationalist when he went to Europe in 1919-20 to seek support for a Vietnamese independence movement. Who would have supported an anti-European, anti-colonial, nationalist movement at that time - except the Bolsheviks! The Bolsheviks were happy to support him as part of their desire to export revolution worldwide. And as the Soviet ambassador in Hanoi pointed out in answer to a question from one of my European colleagues "we stayed with the Vietnamese ever since". That was so at least until 1985-6, when the Soviets apparently said to the Vietnamese that they could no longer afford to go on supporting Vietnam so generously. From observations on my subsequent visits it appears that the Vietnamese wasted little time before taking down the pictures of Lenin and Marx. Pictures of the trio, Ho Chi Minh, Lenin and Marx were on every official wall when I was living in Vietnam. For years from 1990 onwards I safely defied anyone to find a picture of Lenin or Marx on an office wall anywhere in Vietnam today. But like most Asians, the Vietnamese are pragmatic. It cost me \$20 for a donation to charity when, in Vung Tao in 1999, it was pointed out to me that there were portraits of Lenin and Marx on one particular street. The location of the portraits happened to be right opposite the headquarters of Sovietpetro the still-operating Russian-Vietnam joint oil exploration and production company.

In 1987 I came to the end of my two year posting to Vietnam. One could see the potential for business in the country, but it was really too early to have achieved anything really exciting in commercial terms. Certainly for a commercial diplomat there was little one could really get started and hope to see any results while still in post. My wife and I would not wish to have missed the experience. A beautiful country - and nice people. We both enjoy revisiting Vietnam for a few days at more or less annual intervals.

In my final year at Hanoi I wrote a "Guide for British Businessmen" that, in its original duplicated form, became the standard guide distributed by the DTI for some time after I left Vietnam. I read my 1987 notes over from time to time. While the pages dealing with practical issues such as travel, shipping and so on, quickly became dated, I have not found it necessary to amend in anyway the first six pages of the document, the pages in which I described Vietnam, the attitudes of the Vietnamese and their economic and business prospects.

Vietnam was my last foreign posting and when I went to say goodbye to Nguyen Co Thach, who was

still Foreign Minister, I had a most satisfying experience with which to sign-off my diplomatic career. At that final formal call I said to the Foreign Minister exactly what I had said two years earlier. That is, I repeated my remarks, word for word, to the effect that: "As Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister said in the course of a debate in the House of Commons on July 27th, 1979 etc etc ... there would be no further assistance to Vietnam while present circumstances continued; that is while Vietnam is in Cambodia, while the re-education camps continued, and until we settled the problem of the boat people in Hong Kong". Nguyen Co Thach smiled and said "We would like you to know that we respect the consistency of British policy". And then he added: "And what is more, we agree with it. We have to get out of Cambodia, we must close the re-education camps and we must settle the boat people problem." That seems to me to be almost the perfect note on which to end a diplomatic career. Credibility and respect is what being a diplomat should be all about. That is certainly what I see to be an Ambassador's personal role to establish his credibility with the authorities of the country to which he has been appointed.

I am sure that one of the reasons the Vietnamese treated me and my mission better, it seemed, than the other westerners was because we were frank, straightforward and, at least while Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, consistent. During my time in Hanoi the Vietnamese did not constantly have to weigh up whether this particular westerner meant what he was saying, or whether he would say something different the next week.

### **Some views on diplomatic and commercial work generally**

To represent a country in a distant but important foreign nation, where an Ambassador may be viewed as the image and character of the country he represents, seems to me to be just about the ultimate in public relations jobs. In such a situation the role of the individual is perhaps even more important to his country's image and standing than the personality and actions of an Ambassador in a much grander capital that is so close to "home" that much of the work is done by visiting officials flying in from London. In such countries local people are likely to form their opinions of a nation from what they see on television or in the newspapers rather than from any impression they might have of an Ambassador whom they may never hear or see. In Vietnam, as British Ambassador, I was "Britain". If I, or my staff, behaved badly then the Vietnamese image of Britain would be measured accordingly.

In spite of considerable satisfaction with my twenty years in the Diplomatic Service, and with the six previous years I spent representing Australia as a Trade Commissioner, I do have some critical views about "commercial" diplomats. My views apply generally, not only to the British Diplomatic Service but to others government commercial services also.

There is a fundamental problem with civil servants dealing with the business community. By training, by philosophy, the type of personality and objectives that a good civil servant possesses do not necessarily match up with the objectives and style of the businessman. Yet the whole point of having a government commercial trade service is the measure of the practical assistance it can give to the businessman, either directly in trade promotion or indirectly by understanding the financial, economic and trade policy issues affecting international trade, imports and well as exports, "invisibles" as well as goods. If a career diplomat does not understand what the businessman needs, if he does not understand the personal objectives of the businessman, or what motivates him, it can be difficult to know just how best to help an individual who seeks assistance for his commercial activities . By the time I joined the Diplomatic Service I at least had had fifteen years experience in the commercial world as well as six years in the Australian Trade Commissioner Service, the latter at a time when all Australian Trade Commissioners had been recruited from the business community.

My personal approach to helping any business visitor was that I would do anything for British companies that was legal and that would not risk embarrassing the British government on a diplomatic level. I would also do for one British business what I knew I could also do for any other British business that took the trouble to show interest in the market in which I was working. Indeed, from time to time I would quote the wording on my commission as Her Majesty's Consul General. This traditional wording was along the lines that as Consul General I was entrusted with the duty to give all assistance to British citizens "in their commercial and other lawful activities" The wording summarises the duties very neatly.

There is in practice a great deal that a diplomatic Commercial Officer can do for British companies. But the businessman has to be confident that the diplomat understands what he, the businessman, is trying to achieve. The businessman must for his part recognise that no matter how competent or knowledgeable the diplomat might be, that diplomat cannot actually do his business for him. I frequently pointed out that "If I was certain I knew the precise answer to your problem in this market I would not be sitting here talking to you, I would be outside making my fortune. But I will give you the best advice and assistance that I can."

It was a lot easier in the days before diplomatic missions were required to charge for the assistance they give to visiting businessmen. In my day I could simply get to work and do all that I thought was in my power to help, without needing to tell the visitor how much I would have to charge him. I could use my own judgement as to what and how much should be done for a particular British business, weighing up not just whether worthwhile trade opportunities existed for the firm but also whether the

way the firm was going about its approach to the market suggested they were serious and would work persistently at establishing a place in that market.

It could sometimes be just as useful to tell a businessman that he was wasting his time in a particular market with a particular product. I learned at a very early stage, however, not to tell a businessman that he simply could not sell at all in my area as he might well return to my office after lunch saying that he had obtained an order. The order he had obtained might be small and the only one he would ever get: the order may well have been given by a local Chinese trader who felt as a matter of courtesy the foreigner should not be sent away empty-handed and who would unload the product on others who in turn owed him an obligation - but it was an order and the visiting businessman would be satisfied that the government commercial officers did not know what they were talking about.

The benefit of active commercial work is not only for the businessman. Assisting a British company with introductions can be very useful to the diplomat as a "door-opener" into local commercial organisations and into government departments of the host country. Such contacts would often prove useful as sources of information on a whole range of matters not directly related to trade.

If representatives of a visiting company asked me to host a social function on their behalf I was always happy to help, though it usually had to be on terms that the British company would pay for the event. This included entertaining at my official residence. It would be very useful to me if I could get ten or twelve serious business people to come to my residence for a dinner party or a cocktail party, especially if I could arrange it at the businessman's suggestion and at his expense. My own official entertainment allowance was never enough to do all the entertaining that I would have liked to do - particularly so when occasions arose when I should entertain or return hospitality while travelling away from the city in which I was living. On the latter occasions the per capita cost of entertaining was always several times the per capita cost of entertaining in the official residence where, among other things, I had access to duty free liquor.

In posts such as Seoul and Houston, developing relationships with individual local businessmen was invaluable. They would always help with contacts for visiting British businessmen. I have been taught a great deal about doing business in Asia by the local Chinese, Korean and Indonesian friends that I made. That knowledge came in very useful in advising British business. Help from friends I made in the oil industry in Houston enabled me to make many VIP visits a success in a way that saved the British taxpayer a considerable amount of money.

How does a Commercial Officer measure his success? He certainly cannot measure his success by looking at the export figures; though Korea was an exception in that the figures for both British exports and British investment grew dramatically in the years while I was still there as Commercial Counsellor. Generally, what a Commercial Officer may do today will not have a measurable effect until two, three, or more years later. In the Australian Trade Commissioner Service a considerable amount of time and effort was put into filing reports of "export successes" in the previous six months or so. It was really nonsense. When I looked back, the figures for such "recent export successes" were often trivial in their amounts. In Singapore and Jakarta it was rather easier, but even there my claims for personal export success in the shape of Australian exports that would not have happened at all if I had not been Trade Commissioner, have to be limited to just two cases that I can think of. The first was the instance of arranging, at a speed that no one thought possible, the supply of 40,000 cases of Swan lager, shipped from Fremantle as the initial supply of beer for the first US officers' mess/commissary established in Vietnam. The second was in successfully helping Australian flour millers understand and take advantage of the market in Indonesia to enable them to ship and get paid for several thousand tonnes of wheat flour. But these instances of "export successes" were by no means the limit to the value of the work done as the Australian Trade Commissioner. There was always a great deal of general representational work with and for the Australian business community as well as the provision of market intelligence of longer term value.

The real measure of success for a government Commercial Officer is the regard in which he, and his Service, is held by the business community, both his own and the local business community. Are your British visitors happy with what you have been able to do for them - which in some cases may well be to convince them that they should not bother to come back? Does the Commercial Counsellor and his staff have a good reputation with the local business community? Can the Commercial Counsellor obtain ready access to the relevant host government ministers and officials?

Two of the nicest things that happened to me when I was in Korea was when a visitor from a major international company such as Ford, or a major legal firm representing British Petroleum, called on me for advice: the type of company that often says "We don't need government trade services, we're big international companies, we don't need their help".

Occasionally visiting businessmen would call because: "Our Korean contacts said we should come and see you". That has two sides to it. One side was that in Korea at that time so many British businessmen were known to rely on us that Koreans would tend to be suspicious of a British businessman who had not been to see me. But it also could mean that he was saying to his visitor: "Go

to the British Commercial Counsellor and he will explain what we Koreans are talking about." Such experiences provide real job satisfaction.

It is perhaps not surprising, with one aspect or another of international trade featuring through almost all my working life, that of all my postings I regard my three and a half years in Seoul as the most professionally rewarding of all my jobs - in or out of the Diplomatic Service. I was there at just that period when the Korean economy was beginning to take off, and because Korea was such a difficult and strange market for British businessmen I was able to be of very real assistance to a wide range of British companies, and see some results while I was still in post.

Apart from trade promotion there were other good experiences in Korea. These usually happened during the period each year when I was chargé d'affaires. There were the experiences of receiving the Royal Opera and the Royal Ballet, of getting to know Laurence Olivier and Margot Fonteyn. At other posts there were opportunities to meet and become acquainted with a whole range of famous, and some infamous, personalities. Diplomatic service provided many "tax free fringe benefits" by way of experiences that in retrospect can be considered as "beyond price".

I like to think that I saved a man's life by counting on the Korean security services to read all plain language telexes sent from the British Embassy. In the 1970s South Korea was still ruled very harshly and the Korean CIA had a fearsome reputation. The representative of the Cathay Pacific airline at that time, Hwasub Chang, was a charming individual and a very good local manager for the British Hong Kong airline. But he was in serious trouble, for the second time apparently, with the Korean security authorities. He came to see me in a very distressed state saying that the security authorities believed he had done something out of order and had hauled him in for some extremely rough questioning. He was definitely a very frightened man. He said "They don't understand that what I have been doing is normal business practice in the western airline industry". I told him what I would do, if he thought it would help. I told him that I would send a telex to my colleague the British Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong. In the telex I would explain the problem and say something about getting Cathay Pacific to help their man in Seoul explain the situation. Most importantly, I said I would send the telex message in plain language, not in code.

I was confident I could rely on the Korean security service reading the message and that when they read the content and became aware that the British Embassy was directly involved in speaking up for Hwasub Chang's "innocence", the matter might be resolved. That is of course exactly what happened. Two days later Hwasub told me that he had been told by the local authorities that he was no longer

considered suspect. I met his daughter two or three years later and she said the family were very grateful for what I'd done. Her father was quite sure my action had saved his life. In most of our posts my wife and I behaved on the assumption that we were always being listened to. Occasionally it is nice to be proved right!

There were other occasions on which it was possible to feel that one was to some extent or another responsible for saving life. In Brasilia an al fresco Saturday lunch in the delightful gardens of the temporary Chancery building was interrupted by the arrival of two Brazilian doctors, one very worried and the other definitely terrified. What had happened was that the frightened doctor had been doing some work on the body of a rabid dog and, very foolishly, doing so without wearing protective goggles. The brain of the dog burst and matter was spattered into the researcher's face and eyes. The Brazilians had come to the British Embassy because they had heard that Britain had some of the only vaccine that might save life in such a situation.

We were able to set matters in motion immediately by telex to the Resident Clerk in London, using the prefix that indicated it was a matter of "life and death". While the Brazilians sat with us in the garden the FCO tracked down first of all that the required expertise was at a centre in Paris and then, to the very obvious relief of the man who thought he might be under sentence of imminent and very unpleasant death, that the required vaccine was in fact available at a Sao Paulo research station. The patient and his colleague were able to leave the Embassy immediately with every prospect of having the lifesaving material within a matter of hours rather than days.

In Phnom Penh during a spell as chargé d'affaires close to my departure date, I was entertained by the Prime Minister to a farewell dinner at the Phnom Hotel - the hotel featured very effectively in the film "The Killing Fields". As we were leaving the dining room the Foreign Minister, Long Boret, took me aside and asked whether I thought that Douc Rasy would be acceptable as Cambodian Ambassador to London. I had no hesitation in saying that indeed I would be happy to recommend Douc Rasy to London. I knew Douc Rasy personally and was well aware that he, an honest and radical journalist, was something of a thorn in the side of the Lon Nol government. Sending him to London might be as much a convenience for the government as a measure to strengthen Cambodia's diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. Removing him from the political scene in Phnom Penh might also be good for Douc Rasy's own health. I have ever since taken pleasure that the result of my recommendation was that Douc Rasy, his beautiful wife and their seven beautiful children, were all safely in Hampstead when the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh in April 1974. Long Boret and his equally charming wife, along with Sirik Matak and many of our other Cambodian friends were sadly not among those

who escaped.

### **Diplomatic Entertainment**

In every post I have always regarded my entertainment allowance as one of my most useful "tools of the trade". Diplomatic entertainment is generally much misunderstood. Unfortunately any service includes personnel, or their wives, who are not good at "entertaining", or who just don't like doing it, or who do the minimum they can get away with and "pocket" a significant proportion of the annual allowance provided for representational activity. And in this I am not thinking of the junior officers with whom I served. I am definitely in favour of representational allowances being fully accountable. Properly managed there is no more effective form of entertainment activity as a foreign diplomat than entertaining foreigners in a diplomat's residence. The local community may well have some difficulty in assessing the quality of a foreign individual who has a completely different cultural background to their own. In such situations foreign officials and businessmen will be inclined to measure the value of the foreigner by the value that the foreigner's own government appears to place upon him. If the local authorities and business community are to take notice of a foreign diplomat then it must be seen that the diplomat lives not ostentatiously but in a first class house in a good neighbourhood. Otherwise the local community will simply lower their estimate of the diplomat's value to them if he is seen to be not very highly valued by his own country.

I am a great believer that once you have 'broken bread' with a man in his home you have a quite different personal relationship than if you simply meet him in an office or entertain him to a meal in a club or restaurant. It's a most useful thing to be able to bring into your home people you need to get to know. It is not always simple to arrange.

In Hanoi my European colleagues, and even my own deputy, took the line that it was impossible to get Vietnamese to come to a foreign diplomat's house for lunch or dinner. Or similarly that it was impossible to entertain the Soviet Ambassador to dinner. The argument was that such people would not be allowed to accept hospitality from the other side of the "iron curtain". That was in reality nonsense. I had no difficulty getting Vietnamese to come to lunch at the residence while one of the most successful diplomatic dinner parties my wife and I ever gave was when the Soviet Ambassador and his wife came to dinner. It was the first time Borisa Tchaplin and his delightful wife had been to dinner at any western embassy in the twelve years they had been in Hanoi. I included my European Community colleagues in the dinner party with the Soviet Ambassador and we all had most useful and interesting conversations about the Soviet -Vietnamese relationship.

How we persuaded the Soviet Ambassador to come to dinner also provided an example of just how

helpful it can be to have a wife who is attuned to such things. While it might have been difficult for me to simply formally ask the Soviet ambassador to his face - when he would always be accompanied by at least one of his staff, or by merely sending a printed invitation, the approach was made by my wife - who saw the exercise as a challenge - to the Soviet wife when they met in the much more informal circumstances of a meeting of diplomatic wives. Once it was clear at an informal level that an invitation would be welcomed it was easy to bring the event about.

The whole point was that you could not at that time just ask the Soviet ambassador or a Vietnamese official to lunch or dinner on his own - and expect him to accept. The way to do it was to say "Will you accept an invitation to dinner, and would you like to bring two or three of your colleagues with you". Your target guest is then able to bring with him not only an interpreter but also at least one "minder", so he could be assured that his attendance at a foreign embassy was sanctioned by his own side. I would myself have taken a serious view if I had discovered that one of my own staff had been accepting hospitality from the Soviet bloc and had not been accompanied by at least a colleague from another European Community mission.

### **Recruiting for commercial work**

The Foreign Office is still making occasional declarations of intent to become more commercially oriented, most recently - in 1999 - through the establishment of British Trade International in conjunction with the Department of Trade and Industry. In my recent travels around the world I certainly hear some good reports of my successors. I do also still hear bad reports. That is usually where an individual businessman has had a bad experience. I do not agree with the system of charging businessmen for services provided by commercial officers in difficult developing markets. The value to Britain of developing new markets in the more remote countries is far greater than the commercial value that any one business may gain. There is collateral gain.

I have strong views on recruitment. I don't think secondment from business is the answer because a secondee, almost by definition, has a divided loyalty. Is the secondee working loyally for his temporary employer or is he always looking over his shoulder at the employer he expects to return to? He may be preoccupied with concern about when and where he is going to fit in on any return to his employer at the end of the secondment - or even whether he will be taken back at all. This is certainly likely to be the case as the secondment approaches its end, which is probably also when the secondee is really beginning to understand how a diplomatic mission works and what he can most usefully be doing to help a wide spectrum of British business rather than just the single company he is used to working for. My experience of secondments proved of value to me after I left the Service. In taking

over responsibility for a commercially-based organisation I made it clear from the start that under no circumstances would I accept people seconded from any member company of the organisation.

One of the great problems in mixing career civil servants and career businessmen is that a serious and successful career civil servant will have devoted most of his working life to public service for the job satisfaction that it gives rather than for the cash salary. Such a civil servant does not necessarily understand or sympathise with the ethos of the businessman, nor how the commercial world works. I still believe that the practice of recruiting business people on worthwhile term contracts of three years or so, contracts that may well be regarded as regularly renewable, is probably the best way to build up a commercial service from people with significant business experience. By the nature of contracts, both sides accept the possibility of a return to the commercial world and a business career at some date in the future while offering the prospect of a worthwhile second career in public service if that proves to suit both parties.

While career civil servants may not always understand the business world it is equally true that not many businessmen know how their own government works. Even fewer have any idea how foreign governments work. They will think that a particular contact at a high level is valuable, not realising that the official upon whom they will really depend is more likely to be somewhere in the middle level of the bureaucratic machine. Middle level civil servants can seldom by themselves make things happen; but they can often stop them happening. This is just as true in a country such as Vietnam as it is in London.

My advice to businessmen visiting Hanoi was that they should never assume that a permit issued by central government in Hanoi meant that anything would get done at the provincial level. On a trade mission to Vietnam after I had retired from the Diplomatic Service, two senior Vietnamese officials emphasised to me that - if the local People's Committee (the local "council" in effect) did not want something to happen then nothing would happen, no matter what central government departments in Hanoi might say. It isn't really that much different in Britain.

Trade Missions are a subject in themselves. I have have often joked that those businessmen whom the Gods seek to destroy, they first send on a trade mission with their head of state or Prime Minister. Even the most senior businessmen are usually flattered at being invited to join such missions, missions that are often designed primarily to boost the ego of the leader or at least to get him some good publicity at home. At the high point of such a mission's programme, when they are all having a good time and being made a great fuss of by their foreign hosts, they feel obliged to support their leader by

announcing some major business initiative such as a significant investment in the host country. The senior businessmen then go home and pass their project down the line to other executives who have to try to fulfil the commitment.

On further analysis of the situation, and after a follow-up visit or two, executives might conclude that the company should not do anything at all. But no one wants to be the one to stand up to say that the company Chairman or Managing Director has made a foolish commitment in the company's name. Once a project begins to move it has a life of its own. No one, not the consultants doing the feasibility study, nor the lawyers drawing up the joint venture agreements, nor the bankers organising the finance, nor the engineers who are going to build the new plant, has anything to gain, and much to lose, by speaking up to say "I wouldn't do this project if I were you!".

If a company wants seriously to consider entering a difficult market, let alone investing in one, then it has to make a carefully planned approach. My advice to British companies in a market such as Vietnam was to the effect that if they were not prepared to spend £50,000 just looking at the market through a series of visits, then they should not waste money on even a single visit. Local traders in Asia will seldom take visitors seriously until a third visit. They certainly aren't going to follow up visits through difficult correspondence in a foreign language when there is a resident Japanese competitor company representative who calls on them personally one or twice a month and has been doing so for several years. If at the end of spending £50,000 the British company comes to the conclusion that it would be better off not trying further in that particular market, then that company has almost certainly been let off lightly.

I and the junior commercial staff in various parts of the world put a lot of work into arrangements for many "working" trade missions. I like to think those participating in such trade missions got good value for money. Since leaving the Diplomatic Service I have in my capacity as an independent consultant joined a couple of trade missions to Vietnam. In the right circumstances and with a sensible composition of representatives from related commercial interests trade missions can undoubtedly be of great value: especially for the first visit to a difficult market.

As a member of a well organised trade mission an individual can accomplish many times more than he could possibly do on a first solo visit, no matter how much help he might get, as an individual visitor, from a resident Embassy commercial officer. A visitor must not expect to accomplish any real business on a first visit. So often a member of a trade mission goes home full of enthusiasm and apparent determination to follow up all the contacts he is made. The Embassy commercial department

discovers some time later that the visitor has had no time to make a return visit as he is off on another trade mission to a completely different part of the world. Time effort and money has been wasted by all concerned.

Another thing that surprised me was how poor most businesses are at doing their homework before they pay a visit or join a trade mission. Many companies make the mistake of trying to do too many things at once. They will visit two or three countries in a spell of two weeks or so. They may spend a great deal of money, in time and cash, perhaps £10,000 or more on a visit, yet arrive in a strange market without even the most elementary information about the country and its trade and industry; whereas they could have saved a great deal of expensive time and money by doing some thorough desk work at home. Many business people don't seem to appreciate what is available to them in England, even in their local public library, let alone at an organisation such as the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and they often do not appreciate just how much use they can make of DTI services in the UK, or in many cases - and often better still - the foreign country's representatives in London, who may well give help with introductions and extensive information.

### **Retirement**

By the time I returned to London from Hanoi in the second half of 1987 I had only three years and a bit to go before reaching the compulsory retirement age of 60. I did not want to go anywhere else except in Asia. No Asian head of mission post was available. If the retirement age had been 65 I would have happily stayed on and accepted an interesting post anywhere with a view to a later final return to Asia where I felt I had wider experience than most others in the Service. But I certainly did not want to spend my time in any post just filling in time until I reached the age of 60. So I suggested that if the Diplomatic Service would like to retire me three years early I would go without struggling. It helped being an accountant and lawyer that I understood the distinction between "volunteering" for early retirement and "being retired early". In the circumstance the arrangement suited me very well and turned out to be the best thing the Service could have done for me.

I have always felt that I had one advantage over my colleagues who joined the Diplomatic Service from university and had had no job experience outside it. I am sure that possessing in the background a recognised profession for which I was formally well qualified - and to which I knew I could return if necessary - enabled me to adopt a more independent and occasionally perhaps adventurous approach to my diplomatic career. It was just that feeling of independence that enabled me to recognise that leaving the Service at 57 was better than at 60. At 57 there could still be time for me to revert to being an accountant for quite a few years.

In the event, early retirement turned out to be an extremely good thing for my wife and me. Within little more than a month of the end of my retirement leave, by which time I was beginning to acquire one or two professional business clients in Sydney, I was head hunted as an "Ambassador with a commercial background" to be the first Chief Executive of the international industry association for one of the world's major industries. The new career turned out to be just as international as my previous careers and to require just as much diplomacy as anything I had done before. The job was also much much better paid! It was also very hard work. I did it for five years before asking that someone else should be found to take over. I then occupied myself with a series of short term consultancy tasks that kept me busy for a further three years and took me back to South East Asia and Australia.

My wife and I had few complaints whatever about the conditions of service during my time as a member of the Diplomatic Service; though I had a rather poor opinion of some aspects of personnel management - a field in which it might have been not quite so good to follow the Service's tradition of putting "gifted amateurs" in charge.

At one stage, about five years before I retired, I did have doubts about staying on in the Service. Businessmen would from time to time say to me "Wouldn't you earn a lot more money as a chartered accountant?". My usual answer was: "And what would I spend it on, educating my four children at good schools, and travel? I do that anyhow". However, at about the age of fifty-three I really thought that I should think about another career change. My doubts were settled when I received simple advice from one of the finest public servants I think Britain has had in the post-1945 years. That was Burke Trend, Secretary to the Cabinet for twelve years.

My wife had known the Trends since 1951 and the Trends came to stay with us in Houston. I sought his advice, explaining that the life I had led meant that I had really no else to whom I could turn for serious personal advice. I showed him some calculations I had done and said "This is the arithmetic. The arithmetic suggests I should retire now and go back to a career as an accountant. Would you mind giving me your opinion?" Burke Trend's reply was: "Yes, you have got the arithmetic right; but is there anything else you would enjoy doing more than what you are doing now?" That stopped me in my tracks for five years. I had no further doubts whatever about staying on in the Diplomatic Service. I enjoyed the diplomatic experience and my wife certainly enjoyed it. Indeed from time to time I would maintain that I stayed in the Service to keep my wife amused. I was fortunate in having a wife who was prepared to go anywhere in the world at any time and who was quite content to play the supporting role to my own career. And as the life led to my wife being kissed by a list of her favourite

stars of film and stage, from Cary Grant, to Pavarotti, and to meeting more US Presidents that most Americans ever see in the flesh, why should anyone doubt that she enjoyed the experience on those grounds alone. The discomforts of Jakarta and Phnom Penh tend to be forgotten while the fascination of unusual places and excitement of unusual experiences remain in the memory. We both thought it was all very worthwhile. We like to think we made a contribution. And if I had followed the calculations I had made in 1984 and returned then to the commercial world, I would never have had the satisfaction of being one of Her Majesty's Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary - when it still meant something special.