



**SCRAPBOOK
of a
Roving
Highlander**

**80 years round
Asia and back**

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CMG*

First Published 2002 by Acorn
Publications, Newark

ISBN: 1 903263 54 9

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**Scrapbook of a Roving Highlander:
80 Years through Asia and Back**

DEDICATION

To Annie who got me started.
To Fiona who always reminded me 'to save'.
To Heather who encouraged.
To Rory critic extraordinaire.
To Sally who patiently endured the lengthy gestation
period.
To Diana who kindly proofread the document.
To Colonel David Rose who cheered me on.
To all my friends, of many races and religions, who
encouraged me throughout a longish life with kindness,
wisdom, trust and friendship.
To Heather Hooker without whom this book would
never have been completed, who turned the dog's
breakfast into useable text.

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PREFACE

Every day at Broich I walk past two large black-lacquered wooden plaques that hang beside the front door. There are gold Chinese characters engraved on the boards. They have been hung with great difficulty, because of their immense weight, in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Manila, Hanoi and London. Visitors seldom notice these bizarre wall decorations; some wag asked which restaurant they came from and a Sinologue, who should have known better, asked in which antique shop I had bought them.

Of all our guests, only Professor Wang Gungwu has ever paused to read the inscriptions. They are, in fact, farewell presents given to me by the Chinese of Malacca in 1954: one reads "Good at Treeing People", in other words, a good educationalist, and the other, "Everyone Loves and Respects". Both are inscribed as being given to Szeto Bailan, which is the transliteration of my name, which was chosen in the Chinese Secretariat in Singapore in 1947. They are a vivid reminder of the many interesting years spent on things Chinese.

This scrapbook, started in the year 2000, has been written between visits to Rory in his diplomatic posts in Jakarta and Montenegro, and on his post-diplomatic walk; and between bouts of frantic building and clearing in the grounds of Broich, helped by the indefatigable Raul, driver/ batman extraordinary and friend, who came back with us from Hong Kong, and Josefina whose housekeeping skills and wonderful support to Fiona have made it possible for the family to operate normally and for us to enjoy considerable freedom. The whole family owes them both a deep debt of gratitude.

My life has spanned most of what Eric Hobsbawn has described as "The Age of Extremes", others as the most terrible century in human experience. By the time I was in my teens, the League of Nations had proved to be a toothless tiger; Hitler was girding his loins; the Germans were re-arming in defiance of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Mussolini was loose in North Africa; Spain was aflame in a civil war

which gave the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe live firing ranges in which to test their latest weapons, and the Japanese had invaded China. Soon the Nazis were swaggering through Europe; then came the claim to the Sudetenland, the Anschluss with Austria, the annexation of Czechoslovakia, and, finally, the attack on Poland. Then six years of World War II.

All this before I was 23 years old; and I had barely started a career in the Malayan Civil Service when the Malayan Communist Party declared war, while France and Holland struggled unsuccessfully to re-establish a viable relationship with their Asian colonies. Meanwhile, Cold War was upon us: Communism everywhere on the march ready to bury the capitalist imperialists.

The "Interesting Times" of the proverbial Chinese curse, continued unabated after I joined Her Majesty's Government. The Burmese were involved in a civil war; China was suffering from endless political campaigns, culminating in the awful Cultural Revolution; the Philippines were plagued by insurrections; Indonesia attacked Malaysia in Konfrontasi; Hong Kong was holding its breath about its relationship with China, and the Vietnamese War was hotting up. In Whitehall, apart from the concerns with the missile and other Communist threats, we had the eruption of Northern Ireland to add to the excitement. Interesting times indeed. (See Chronology).

This has been a period when man's inhumanity to man has been ferociously displayed throughout the globe: casualties have been greater than ever before as civilians have become involved in total war; the weapons of war have become ever more powerful, and ethnic cleansing has taken place on an unprecedented scale.

It has given me immense pleasure to dredge up the pictures of the past through my memory. Although like all memories they are selective, I think that the pictures I have selected are accurate. There may be elements of *suppressio veri*, but there is not, I hope, any *suggestio falsi*.

I do not suppose that any of us really knows himself, but I have long appreciated the force of the Greek phrase inscribed in stone at Delphi, *Gnothi Seauton* "Know Thyself", to which the much loved Charles Miller, my house and classics master at Glenalmond, first introduced me. He also introduced *Meden Agan*, "Nothing in Excess", which coincides neatly with the Confucian concept of the Doctrine of the Mean.

I am, as my family know to their cost, partial to mottos. I greatly approve of *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit*, literally "No one provokes me with impunity" or in Scots "Wha daur meddle wi me", and the second Queensbury Rule, "Do unto others before they do you." But I suppose that at the centre of my rules of conduct lies the Golden Rule "Do as you would be done by", which seems to cater for most situations in life. Granny was very fond of quoting it. However, when I proposed the Golden Rule to an Irish Jesuit, as a good basis for Business Ethics, he replied, "That's all very well provided you don't meet a sadomasochist!" I have plenty of other useful tags up my sleeve such as *Suaviter in modo, Fortiter in re* which was translated into US English as "Speak softly but wield a big stick", and I believe firmly in courtesy, charity and the early bird catching the worm. I do not pretend that my philosophy has ever included turning the other cheek; the males in my family have a strong aversion to bullies.

The idea of writing something about my varied careers around Asia and the UK have long been in my mind: but the form, and even the title, have never been easy to determine. Such headings as "Nomad" and "Jock of all Trades" have come to mind.

I left Scotland for Oxford in 1940 and never lived in Scotland again until I retired in 1998, aged 76. In the course of my life I have been a soldier, a forester, a diplomat, a businessman, an academic, a consultant, a director of a plantation association, a policeman, a colonial civil servant, a Whitehall warrior, a Chinese language interpreter and adviser on China, a teacher and even an intelligence officer. None of these jobs were specifically related to my educational

qualifications. I was a product of the educational philosophy that considered that character was as important as book learning; and learning how to think and to study, more important than the actual subject of study. Whether or not the approach was right or wrong, clearly there was no university course that could have catered for so wide a variety of jobs. Each one had to be learned and the only constant was the people factor. The more one learned about people the easier it was to produce results, whatever the job.

For half of my working life Britain was still an imperial power and indeed Hong Kong, the last serious colony, only reverted to Chinese sovereignty one year before I retired. I am proud to have served Her Majesty over the years, proud to be a Scot and to be British and grateful for the opportunities that I have enjoyed over a long life to work in interesting and, I hope, useful jobs. This book reflects that pride. It is also a tribute to family, friends, and colleagues of all ranks and many races, who have never let me down.

I am much addicted to the old maxim "Do not let the best be the enemy of the good". I do not apologise for the fact that this scrapbook is rough and ready. I could have spent the rest of my life polishing it. I prefer to print it now, despite its manifest imperfections.

Finally, a word about letters and limericks. Rory wanted me to put in many more letters from the boxes full of family correspondence. This would be a mammoth, and quite different task, but I have put in some.

As to limericks, they too are Rory's fault: he wanted more jokes.

*The limerick seldom stays clean
Unless kept in most strict quarantine
She will slip back to type
Displaying appetites ripe
And showing her character mean*

or *The good ones seen seldom are clean*

PART I EARLY DAYS

"Och No!" screeched Betsy. She had good reason to cry out since, for some reason I had thought it amusing to fill the kindly cook's shoes full of milk. Perhaps I had heard some tale of champagne in ladies' slippers. The only other thing I remember about Betsy was her skill as a maker of delicious treacle toffee, which she produced in a large copper pan on top of the coal-burning cooker.

Kirriemuir

I saw a lot more of Janet the maid, a farmer's daughter who was full of amusing pawky Angus sayings, and who gave me a large vocabulary of Scottish words which have afforded me great delight ever since.

If asked what she was doing, Janet might remark, "Fules and bairns should never see half done work"; or if I made an unwelcome observation "I'm no as green as I'm cabbage looking, Master Brian." It may be that she also was responsible for my determination to keep my "Rs". Sally was amused when we first met to discover that the device that was used in Wimbledon to smooth clothes after they had been washed was called an "irron" not an "iyen".

From Janet I absorbed a great deal of country lore and such useful concepts as asking rather than guessing. "Dinna be afraid to spier, Master Brian," was her phrase. Alas, few people seem to have the courage to admit ignorance and to "spier" accordingly. The world might be a better place if more people adopted Janet's philosophy.

The third member of our domestic staff was a handsome Eurasian lady from Ooty, the hill station in South India. She came home with us from Calcutta in 1924 as nanny and then became governess and, when mother returned to India, took over the household management. She was an excellent teacher, and good at inventing games. I liked her very much,

particularly since I was her favourite. She stayed on as housekeeper and general help to granny long after we went to school, but all ended in tears because of the inevitable tensions that arose when my mother returned from India to take over her household and her sons.

My most dramatic memory of this period is of an occasion when I lost my temper with my brother and bashed his head against a brick wall. The sight of blood pouring from George's forehead terrified me: I thought that I had killed him. George was much bigger than me; he was also much gentler. I hope that I made up for my bad habits in later years when I defended him at prep school against would-be bullies.

George and I had many happy times in and around Kirriemuir: walking, golfing, shooting, sledging, cycling. We were a self-contained very happy two-man club and seldom met others during holiday time.

When not at school or university, we spent our holidays in the family's red stone Victorian house on the outskirts of Kirriemuir, a small town at the bottom of the Angus glens that lead northwards to the Grampians. The town was probably only known outside Angus for its association with Sir J.M. Barrie who wrote about it in a *Window in Thrums*, and, for the less literary minded, for the bawdy song called *The Ball of Kirriemuir*. I doubt if the ladies of my family even knew the tune. I am certain they did not know the words that made the inhabitants of Kirrie seem over-sexed, promiscuous and highly inventive.

Colonel David Rose, who commanded the Black Watch in Korea, has told me that he was once present at a Sergeants' Mess party when his hosts managed 24 verses, each one more bawdy than the one before. The words of the chorus will suffice to give a flavour of the song: -

*The Ball, The Ball, The Ball of Kirriemuir!
There wasing in the Haystacks
anding in the Ricks
and you could nae hear the music
for the swishing, o' the ..cks!*

Enough said!

I never discovered why Kirrie earned this extraordinary reputation for sexual athleticism and imagination. But generations of soldiers kept adding verses in the great traditions of Eskimo Nell and other such ditties. The present generation, however, seems not to have heard of this Ball.

Our family had been in Angus for as long as any of my Stewarts could remember, but as the saying goes, "A Stewarts are nae sibh to the King" and we did not claim a close relationship with the Pretenders to the Scottish and English thrones. It may be that we migrated east after the miserable debacle at Culloden Moor, where the Stewart Regiment suffered hundreds of casualties. Sadly, the family bible disappeared before I had studied it. We seem to have been well established in Kirrie by mid-Victorian times, with the men doing their duty in the territorial Black Watch of their day.

Kirrie had plenty to offer for anyone interested in country life. As we owned no land, shooting was an irregular sport; but we walked the hills or golfed most days. Walking is definitely part of the Stewart tradition. Rory is walking round the world, and I have discovered a John Stewart, known as Walking Stewart born in 1749, who walked round most of the world.

My mother whose family had included many engineers, was determined that we should be able to use our hands as well as our brains, and we attended regularly at a local carpenter's shop to learn about woodwork. The school tuck boxes that we made in that period are still in good order.

My most dramatic, (and clandestine) hobby was an attempt to manufacture gunpowder to use in my antique pistols.

Fortunately, I never succeeded in producing an explosion.

We built a railway in the garden with a Forth bridge made of Meccano and a pond for it to span. It was highly satisfactory to watch the trains chugging across the bridge and through the tunnels. We built aeroplanes and model boats. I had a superb clockwork tank that clanked noisily across the lawn while I shot at it with my air rifle. Indoors, there was a lot of singing round the piano and lots of reading. Gas lamps lighted the house. Wireless was in its infant crystal set stage with cat's whiskers for tuning and the gramophones were clockwork driven.

We would visit Dundee and the cinema where a mighty Wurlitzer organ, covered with coloured lights, would emerge from the floor to entertain us during the interval. The films were, of course, black and white; Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin were favourites. I particularly remember an early King Kong which was full of terrifying scenes, although I thought that the gorilla's performance against a tyrannosaurus rex was a bit over the top. We were highly opposed to romantic scenes, and the cinema would resound to catcalls and hisses if the boys in the audience found themselves faced with pictures of lovers in a clinch. Action, not soppy romance, was what we wanted.

Childhood, as far as my memory goes, was a happy time and unremarkable. I was blessed with a loving father and mother, who although they were based in India and therefore absent for most of the time, nevertheless provided all that anyone could ask for in terms of support. I visited India aged one, and have the photographs to prove that I was to be found in the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta from time to time, wearing a large sun-hat, and attended by an Indian Ayah. I appeared to be enjoying the experience, but have no means of telling whether the cherubic smile on the two-year old's face was artificially produced by Ayah planting a touch of opium in my mouth, as it is alleged was sometimes the local remedy for fractious children; or whether, as my mother claimed, I had a sunny nature. The journey home is also recorded in sepia tint;

the passenger a good deal smaller than his baggage, with a huge pith helmet on his head. I am told that I made the most of the Italian love for children and had the run of the Lloyd Tristino ship; apparently the trip was marred only by my tendency to over indulge my passion for riding the electric horse, a habit that tended to play havoc with my digestive system.

School Days

"Educate men without religion and you make them but clever devils."

Duke of Wellington

At the age of seven, fortunately in the company of my elder brother George, I was handed over to Dalhousie Castle, as a boarder. This was, of course, a very memorable, perhaps even traumatic experience to a seven-year old. The Castle looked very big, and felt very cold, but the staff were kind. It was a perfect playground for small boys, with bottle dungeons, battlements, spacious parks and trees, and redolent with history. The dining room and the hall were hung with huge portraits of some of the great Dalhousies of the past in military attire and viceregal robes. It would have been a poor spirit that did not derive some stimulation from this scene. The park provided magnificent trees, well suited to the building of tree houses, and a wonderful space for flying the rubber-powered model aeroplanes, which were one of the schoolboy crazes of those days. The craze gave me the opportunity for the only commercial "killing" of my life. One week I was the proprietor of the only spare rubber bands in the whole school, and anyone whose rubber bands broke had to buy from Stewart, at exorbitant prices. The monopoly did not last long, but it was highly satisfactory while it did.

I was in no danger of forgetting religion. From the age of 7 to 17, every day of my student life included a morning and an evening service. If nothing else, these years ensured a memory filled with the words of the King James Bible and Prayer Book and a huge repertory of hymn tunes and Psalm chants. George

and I excelled in the Divinity classes and enjoyed the choir work.

Letters of the Dalhousie and Glenalmond period are all of the "Played X at rugger: we won 15 nil and I scored a try" variety, with occasional additions on bruises and abrasions caused by the icy ground. From Oxford came more lively letters, enthusiastic about a mass of new activities; talking of dons, friends and much music making and girls.

School reports were patchy: History was marked as weak, but no one accused me of not working hard. By 1937 I was getting "Goods" and "Very Goods" for most subjects, but maths and physics were a disaster area. 1938 started well but the Warden was gloomy. "I could wish that some career would appeal to him which would give scope to his talents: Engineering requires just those subjects on which he is least good." All was not lost, however: the summer term ended with an injunction to indulge in lots of general reading and avoid history books during the holiday.

Finally in Lent term 1940, it appears I fell ill and was sent home. I have forgotten the whole thing but I got a good chit from my headmaster finishing with "His judgements sometimes show too narrow a view, but that will correct itself with experience."

Meanwhile, happily, I had won an open History Exhibition to Worcester College so somewhere along the line I had learnt to perform adequately in examinations.

My brother and I fitted into the school system without difficulty. I had few problems with bullying, nor indeed was there anything very serious of that sort. Like Rory, I was a shrimp at prep school; and, like him, I made sure that would-be bullies were made aware that size should not be equated with cowardice or defencelessness. I tended to act as bodyguard for my big brother, who had a poetic, less belligerent nature. In such paramilitary activity I was helped by the boxing lessons that were part of our education, and stood me in good stead for the rest of my life. They gave confidence, doubtless misplaced, but comforting, that one

could look after oneself physically as well as mentally. My principal problem was that the Headmaster, a military type, had just lost a son my age and looked upon me as a surrogate. This was all very well until my academic performance began to flag and the reports began to complain that Brian could have done better had he tried harder. So my last year was marred as a consequence of the Headmaster's disappointment and disapproval.

The move to Trinity College, Glenalmond was an easy transition, particularly since my brother went ahead. This time there were no complications about special relations and I finished a four-year stint, having achieved an adequate standard in everything that I attempted, except javelin throwing, which for some reason eluded me. Head of House, Captain of the Second Fifteen, Corporal Drummer in the Pipe Band and a History Exhibition to Worcester College, Oxford. In short, never the very top, always the second rung; although I did win the largest trophy I have ever earned for the top marks in the Officer Cadet Training Unit, a lot of Divinity prizes and the Gladstone Memorial Essay prize. Whatever else Glenalmond taught me, and that included a further session along the Dalhousie lines of becoming inured to cold and becoming self-reliant, it gave me an excellent musical training. This was the basis for much pleasure throughout life, particularly since participation as treble, alto, tenor and bass in turn, in Gilbert and Sullivan's operas, armed me with a deeply etched memory of music and words. A short brush with the first Double Bass of the Dundee Orchestra gave me a basis for string playing, which also opened the way to pleasures round the world, in orchestras and chamber groups. Three years with the Pipe Band gave me another mental shelf full of tunes, marches, laments, and dances underpinned by the rattle of the side drums that I commanded as Corporal Drummer.

Whether the public school regime is a desirable one is clearly not a question upon which all are agreed. To our US cousins, particularly the females, the system seems barbaric. Now that so many schools have admitted girls, one principal

objection has been removed; but I must say that I never observed that the monastic life imposed in term time hampered our relationships with the fair sex on holiday, or thereafter. The boarding school life could, of course, give rise to sexual problems, but we were not troubled by any scandal in my time, except the expulsion of one boy who seduced a chambermaid. As for the cold baths, I remember them with affection. Once you had endured that morning spartan drill the rest of life seemed comfortable by comparison. The cold bath also gave the House Prefect one of his great privileges: I did not have to stand shivering in a queue as the cold water was being run into the bath, but could go from bed straight to bath. There were other aspects of public school life that have long been controversial; corporal punishment is one, but I saw no sign of sadism, or other abuse in the system. Beatings were part of the system, accepted by all, inflicted sparingly and administered under strict rules. Having both beaten and been beaten when caught out, I find the critics' views bizarre.

The following paragraph is the end of the Gladstone Memorial Essay, for which I was given the prize more as a reward for finishing the course than for the merit of the composition. The Essay was entitled "*How Far can there be said to be any Continuity of British Foreign Policy in the First Half of the 19 Century.*" I doubt very much if I understood what I wrote but it sounds all right.

Since the reign of Henry VIII, British statesmen, even the conservative constitutionalists, have set themselves against the overweening growth of any nation.

None of our ministers have been willing to intervene in the internal affairs of others without good cause: all have to a greater or lesser extent supervised the oppressed, while even Wellington had something of the Liberal behind his mask of constitutionalism. Indeed, there has been a great deal of continuity of ideals, despite apparently contradictory actions, as Palmerston's deliberate rupture with France, or Canning's destruction of the Congress system. The exact degree of continuity is difficult to assess; it is however certain that there was

something of the dislike, prevalent today, of a dictatorial hegemony dominating Europe and suppressing all constitutional principles.

Oxford

Oxford, by comparison, was a paradise of freedom, with almost limitless opportunity to pursue one's own interests, and develop the skills learnt at school. For me this was a time to make new friendships, and to develop musical skills, while enjoying a great deal of sport and games, which included judo and fencing. Girls took up a lot of time as well, not only in Scottish and other dancing, but also in more serious relationships. My preparations for joining the Army, a year away, included the courtship of a young lady generally agreed to be one of the best lookers in Oxford. She was still a schoolgirl and lived with her parents at the top of Boar's Hill. We met as part of the cast in an opera produced in the Oxford Playhouse, and paired off to sing together and dance minuets. Soon I was commuting frequently to the top of Boar's Hill by bus, after a visit to theatre or cinema with my girlfriend. But the journey back to Worcester was made on foot. The journey was about six miles, done at a fast trot and finishing up with an assault course across various walls and a clandestine entry into the main gardens, by way of a swing past the barbed wire barricade projecting over the lake. This was an excellent training for the rigours of Officer Cadet Training Unit and, indeed, for Battle Schools and Montgomery's morning runs thereafter. Sometimes the run back to bed was repeated in military days, in analogous circumstances, but without the assault course element, since the sentries would be ready to salute an officer returning to barracks, not challenge him for being out late. Such nocturnal ramblings ensured that my stamina was considerably greater than that of most of my fellow officers.

Nothing that I heard, read or wrote during my Oxford days struck so deep a chord that it resonates clearly sixty years later, although doubtless there are many strands in my thinking

that derive from that period. One conclusion that I reached in the course of the study of economics was that it could never be a science, since the human element was unpredictable. As the Marxists and many others have discovered, man is not merely an economic animal, and the un-quantifiable human element operates in every sphere: marketing, selling, management, as the classical economist's land, labour and capital. I have long enjoyed the story of the discussion in a senior common room where one don said to another, "Astrology turned into astronomy, alchemy turned into medicine, I wonder what economics will turn into?"

My main academic contacts were renowned for their musical talents: one collected carols, and the other wrote operas. Neither had wide international reputations, nor indeed did any of our tutors have doctorates, but they were good tutors, and widened my horizons. What the Glenalmond staff had started was consolidated and my opera-composing tutor introduced me to the joys of playing in a string quartet. Altogether these were halcyon days. With military service just round the corner, and no time to take a full degree, there was every excuse to enjoy Oxford without need to worry about what class of degree one might achieve. I could take comfort from the easy run I had in Pass Moderations, when it was clear that Glenalmond had already taught me all I needed to deal with the early parts of an Oxford course; and I had already achieved an Open Exhibition. So no one will ever know whether I would have got a bare Pass or a First. In fact I was granted a War Degree since I did not return to student life.

So far, I had been lucky: fitting into the school and university environments, and blessed all the way with teachers whom I usually liked and respected. My next leap was going to be into a very different world. I had a reasonably good feel for what lay ahead since, once again, big brother had gone before me. He had just completed his five-month course at the Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) in Dunbar; it remained to be seen what my luck would be like at my OCTU in Wales. I could only hope that I would succeed as my brother had.

If the account so far is rosy, the reason is presumably that I had been lucky with family, school, college and friends. There doubtless were moments when I was unhappy, but I do not remember them. I can, of course, dredge up uncomfortable moments; but these were more physical than mental. It is still easy to imagine the cold as the wind howled across the rugged pitch on a snowy day, and I, slight of build, frozen of finger, stood in the three-quarter line of our First Fifteen facing a team of the Scottish Horse, twice my size and several years older. The anticipation was unpleasant; above all that the frozen fingers would drop a pass. Or, at Oxford, the misery of standing around on a winter's day, on a military tactical exercise without troops, peering at maps and attempting to mark them, hands and feet frozen. Or the misery of learning to swim in the cold over-chlorinated waters of the Portobello baths. This inauspicious beginning was only overcome when I hit Madras and discovered the joys of warm tropical seas. But these are minor matters.

George: In Memoriam

As George grew older there was more and more about music in his letters, and at Oxford he was developing a magnificent singing technique under instruction by Arthur Cranmer. His renderings of Schubert were magical, and even fifty-five years later I cannot hear *An Musik* without deep emotion, recalling the sound of George's beautiful voice.

His letters are also a reminder of his interest in becoming a writer, even a poet, and deep concern with the wrongs of modern society.

Like me, he kept up a steady stream of correspondence from the field: George's comments on El Alamein and after make interesting reading.

31st July 1942 (at sea in a troopship en route to Egypt with the Highland Division:

To me)

I promised to say something about myself. I have to admit that I had looked forward to a lazy few weeks on a sea cruise. But now I am well used to the routine that, quite rightly, keeps us busy until teatime. Although I was not best pleased when I heard about our destination I soon calmed down. Then there was the question of ideals. Sidney was endlessly harping on about how he would rather have stayed in Britain as an instructor, and I started out thinking I was only here because I had to be, but that sort of thinking gets you nowhere. You must believe or you will be more concerned with protecting yourself than with hitting the enemy. I have cleared away a lot of half digested ideas on pacifism, wars leading to more wars and so on, and concluded that to be happy, one must live according to one's ideals and since the Nazis would certainly not allow us to continue on our own sweet way we must fight, and as the propagandists say, "We are fighting for our lives." That may not sound very clear but mental attitude means a lot. You cannot train people to fight if you do not believe in what you are doing; you will not be able to be alive and interesting. I suppose that a horizon is always necessary. At the beginning I did not connect necessity and ideals, but only dull, stupid, people live contentedly in the present alone.

These philosophical meanderings do not mean that I am becoming introspective. I've proved to myself that I have never been happier than I am now, in the Army, with a clear objective.

13th October 1942: To me

Sitting in my slit trench, in reserve. The Jerry shells are aimed at the gunners not at us, so it's pretty quiet locally. Platoon HQ, consisting of a Batman and Runner is feeding well, augmenting rations with the tins of fruit and soup I have scrounged.

Learnt to my cost that although the sun is behind the clouds it can still burn badly. The flies are a misery.

The only warlike things I have done so far have been night recon patrols where we snoop about and report on whatever you can see.

I have seen George's reports of his recon which by some curious miracle are to be found in the Public Relations Office (PRO) in the file entitled War Diary 5th Bn B.W. They were clearly scary, entailing many hours beyond our Front Line, amidst minefields.

27th October 1942 (Scottish hospital MEFI: To me)

I hope you took the cable "Injury not serious" at face value. It is an ankle wound. I was hit at lunchtime, got on gauze dressing and attended to a tin of peaches I had just bought from a passing sapper. My batman helped me hobble back to the Aid Post, from there by truck and then by ambulance through the three German minefields we had marched through on the way to the battle. I am alongside a cheery young Irish Tank Commander, and pooling our knowledge we are absolutely convinced that Jerry is getting a very bloody nose.

What struck me about the battle was how normally everyone was acting, as if it was just another practice 'scheme'. There was one odd incident of miscommunication. After the first of our attacks as we continued our advance along the white tapes the message came from behind, "Halt! Colonel's orders." I turned back in disbelief to check with the Colonel who confirmed that he had given no such order.

We were soon dug in on our objective, reasonably protected by sand bags, but the shelling and mortaring caused many casualties; fortunately few killed. I was sorry to leave the lads; they were grand. I hope to get back soon to join them, but they will probably be in Tripoli by then.

After Alamein

George wrote an undated essay encapsulating his memories of the great battle.

"Sort yourselves out, said my sergeant" who then started fussing around with a lot of lanterns, as we prepared to start our attempt to lead the Battalion in the middle of the night into 'No Man's Land' and beyond, through passages cleared through German minefields. I was horrified to find that we had a new boy with us, who had not got a clue. I had walked the route before, laying down white tape. We were already well

on the way to our start point but my webbing was still tight as a result of a fine supper. Everything quiet except for a Bofors gun firing tracer along our flank, to help our navigation. Nothing to see except tanks camouflaged as trucks, and the dugouts of various HQs. Half-an-hour to go to H Hour. I idly wondered whether the Jocks' approach, to treat everything as another 'scheme' was psychologically sound.

I wandered round seeking the navigators. Where the hell is Donald? Soon we were in good order. I had selected a star to help everyone keep broadly on track. The rifle companies appeared around us and we settled down for the dramatic moment when the gunners would start their barrage.

As I wondered about the family and what they knew about our circumstances, the barrage started and grew in intensity, minute by minute; rolling and rumbling along the front. The waiting time gave unwanted opportunity for unwelcome thoughts. Now it seemed that all the guns in the world must be drawn up, wheel to wheel, to produce this ear-splitting sound. Then the Germans responded, and we were treated to pyrotechnics as ammunition dumps blew up.

We started to move forward at 10 p.m. Our progress was jerky. Sometimes the drums of tape stuck, and we had to stop every 250 yards to light the hurricane lamps that would guide the Battalion forward. At first advance was as effortless as if we were on yet another exercise, but soon we came under shellfire, and I became aware that these mushrooms of black smoke were producing unmanly feelings in my innards. What would it feel like to be at the point of impact? But there was no remedy; we could try to seek cover by lying prone, but the shells arrived before you heard them. I began to take comfort from the fact that there was a great deal of land not occupied by me, and my immediate companions, which was the destination of the German shells. So we marched on unscathed; line of guiding lanterns, growing longer behind us.

I had been endlessly shouting to the Jocks to spread out, but the comfort of close human contact outweighed all else. I was becoming hoarse. Now the shell bursts were behind and the Spandau bullets were singing round our ears. The clatter of small arms fire and grenades indicated that there was close quarter fighting ahead. There was the sound of men charging with the bayonet, and the skirl of the pipes. We reached the German wire, painfully conscious of a struggle in which we

were not directly involved.

A tall figure moved across to us. It was our CO who seemed to be completely oblivious to the bullets and shrapnel flying around. He was looking for our Reserve Company, which was sliding off course, towards another Highland Regiment who were also filling the air with pipe music. A small party of our own Battalion blundered across our front. They had lost their way. I redirected them and on we went towards the sound of the Spandaus and the mortar bombs. There was no sign of our victorious Jocks, or of the retreating enemy. Then I saw a cautious Company Commander revolver at the ready, he did not shoot but carried on to report to Battalion HQ that they had reached their objectives.

My next experience was not so cheerful. A company had been badly cut up in the attack, and only a dozen men and one officer were left making their way to the objective. I took precautions accordingly, forming a fighting patrol from our tape carriers.

The Navigating Officer found us again, but his records were almost as vague as mine. My star had kept me on course but I had no idea whether we had moved two miles or three.

The problem of where to stop was solved when we found the remnants of A Company digging in, and they told us that our creeping barrage was moving ahead of his position. We stopped.

We were now well into the middle of the enemies defences. The next Battalion was coming up behind, and ready to move through. We had done our bit, and the transport and the tanks were moving forward so that by first light they would be through the minefields and on their way to open warfare. We could not fail now!

11th May 1943

George received a letter from the sorrowing sister of his Platoon Sergeant who was killed in action at Wadi Akarit.

"It is impossible to imagine that we shall never see him in this world again. Your letter helped to soften the blow very considerably by the mere thought that someone who cared was with him when he died. No words can ever be uttered which will thank you enough for the wonderfully comforting letter you have written."

Three months later, George's brother soldiers were doing their best to write comforting letters to his inconsolable family.

17th July 1943 (in Valetta)

You will already have heard on the Radio of the Eighth Army Landings. We have been busy changing money for the Jocks, and doling out beer chits to them and getting gin for the officers. The city is very attractive.

21st July 1943, Wednesday

Our Landing in Sicily was unopposed. We took some prisoners. A day of rest in reserve ended with a night advance into the hills, where we bumped into some light tanks. Fortunately, the enemy did not realise that they were only up against a Company. Our Bren guns, rifles and the 2-inch mortar shifted them out.

The next night we continued the advance and since then things have been uncomfortable. We're pretty tired with long marches, and the heat during the day, and there is a lot of enemy shell and mortar fire.

We had a hand-to-hand street fight in a town yesterday, but finished up amongst figs, plums and apple trees. I gorged myself but got away with it.

24th August 1943 – Cable

The telegraph boy brought the awful cable to my mother. "Deeply regret to inform you of report dated 19th August 1943 that Lt. GRHB Stewart, the Black Watch, was killed in action on 23rd July. The Army Council desire to offer you their sincere sympathy." Signed Under Secretary for State.

His Commanding Officer wrote: "George had behaved with great gallantry a few nights before when we captured Sferro Bridge. It is a great loss for me, of a fine officer. For you it will mean far more. He was a magnificent fighting soldier, quite without fear, and a tremendous example to his Platoon, who loved him. I never saw him worried or afraid. He died doing his duty; his conduct in the Regiment has been an inspiration to us all".

His Company Commander wrote: "I cannot begin to tell you how shattered we all are by George's death. I have lost not only the best Platoon Commander in the Battalion, but a great friend; our friendship cemented by all the dangers we have been through together in this filthy war. I always had such a feeling of confidence in action when George was about. I well remember the last scrap in which we were involved before George's death, his Platoon was pushing forward in bright moonlight after a successful attack on a German-held farm, and had run into what seemed to be devastating machine gun fire. I went forward to see what was going on to find George and his lads taking on the German tanks with their Brens, and rifles, and George directing the battle and personally firing the 2-inch mortar. The Germans withdrew in the face of this fusillade, although I need not tell you that the Platoon's weapons would hardly have dented the German armour plate. George's confidence was an inspiration to his Platoon and to me. How terribly I miss him, his cheerful confidence and experienced leadership. He should have earned a distinction long ago."

His Platoon Sergeant wrote: "He was a grand leader and we had for him the greatest admiration and affection. We feel his loss very much indeed and we would like you to know that his memory will always remain dear to us. We will do our best to avenge his death."

Staff of Glenalmond and Dons at Worcester wrote in equally glowing, but different terms.

The Warden wrote: "I think you know what we at Glenalmond thought of George."

I found this snippet in his effects:

*Remember me when I am gone away
Gone far away into the silent land
When you can no more hold me by the hand
Nor I half turn to you to go, yet turning stay
Remember me when no more day-by day
You tell me of the future that you planned
Only to remember me you understand
It will be late to counsel or command
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember do not grieve
For if the darkness and corruption leave
Some vestige of the thoughts that once I had
Better by far that you forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.*

PART II MILITARY DAYS

Joining Up

"For the second time in history a British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honour."

Chamberlain on his return from Munich in 1938

*Mortars and 88s playing their overtures
Spandaus and Schmeissers all waiting, set up
Tellermines, S mines a mushroom the slope
Tiger Tanks, Panzerfausts blasting our carriers
Airbursts exploding like bubbles of soap*

I felt a pinprick in my left thigh but did not trouble to look down to see the cause. I was engrossed in briefing my Company Commander about my Anti-Tank Platoon that had been heavily engaged since dawn against invading Panzers, and had already suffered about fifty percent casualties; many were in need of more expert medical attention than we had been able to give them, and the guns were running short of ammunition. I had been on the way back in my carrier to seek medical support and drum up ammunition when the Company Commander, also in a carrier, stopped me in the middle of a field a few hundred yards behind the front line, and asked me to brief him. Briefing finished I saluted and continued on my way to Regimental HQ where I hoped to ginger up medical support and ammunition supplies. I got no further than the medical post when I looked down at my thigh, and to my astonishment saw it was gushing blood. The MO ordered me out of the battle and I lay on my stretcher reflecting on the un-wisdom of conducting briefing sessions in the middle of an open field within easy range of enemy artillery, and on the fact that had I not been standing up, the wound would have been in my head, not my thigh.

I had always been interested in military matters, and, unlike many of my companions, who came with me to the OCTU at

Barmouth on the Welsh coast, had spent quite a lot of time on military study. The Black Watch Territorial Company's drill hall was just down the road, and there had been plenty of reminders at Glenalmond and in the houses of friends and families of the heroism and sacrifices made by the previous generation in the First World War. When war broke out my brother George and I were on the verge of setting out on our annual hill walk along Jock's Road and through the Lairig Ghru, from Angus to Inverness-shire. We wondered what the effect must be on families who had lost their sons only twenty years before when about 30% of Europe's young men were lost, and who now saw their grandsons marching off once more in their kilts, to the tunes of glory. We had a lot to talk about, conscious of the fact that all private plans were now in abeyance, and that for the foreseeable future the army would take over our lives. Alas, in George's case, as with so many of that generation from Glenalmond and Worcester, the war once more took the flower of the nation. Over all, of course, the casualties were far fewer in the Allied Forces; if one accepts and, the Russians far less, but the numbers recorded on the memorial plaques of schools and colleges which tended to supply the junior officers for teeth arms, show how large the casualties were amongst them.

Now at last I, too, was off to war; or at least to be a full time soldier; and, I hoped, to earn a commission in the Black Watch, the regiment I had known all my life. Being less philosophically inclined than George, I had no difficulty in concentrating totally on my new life. It took him some time to come to terms with the fact that we were, for the duration, simply required to turn ourselves into the best soldiers that we could be.

I remember with awful clarity the moment when my Commanding Officer sent for me and broke the news of George's death. I was concerned for my mother. I had lost a well-loved brother, but she had lost her first born to whom she was utterly devoted. He was the sort of son that any mother would want, and his death in action I fear overshadowed the

rest of her life. The tragedy was also great for my father, who was away in India, and who, having seen little of us over the years, was now denied the chance to get to know his elder son. We were not unique in our family tragedy; some mothers lost several sons. The human misery that resulted from such casualties is incalculable. So much for the story of George, who, like so many others, was killed before he could put his ideals into practice.

Barmouth

"I'll teach you to pick up your feet."

The journey from Scotland to Wales was long, and gloomy since train and stations were blacked out, and the dim blue lights at the stations along the way did not lift the spirits on a cold January night as we trundled south in a crowded train. Our reception at Barmouth raised no false hopes about the comforts of a seaside holiday town. We were left in no doubt of our humble status and, indeed, it soon became apparent that my Company, nearly all straight from university, were looked upon with particular disfavour as representatives of a pampered section of the community. The permanent staff made it clear that we would have to earn our spurs the hard way. I say this without resentment since the pressure gave those of us who survived confidence in our qualifications to train others, and in my case, probably contributed significantly to my selection within months of getting my commission, to become a Battle School Instructor. Almost half of my fellow Cadets of my "University" Company were RTU'd (Returned to Unit), having failed to impress the gimlet-eyed instructors of Barmouth with their military potential, and this high attrition rate certainly sharpened my determination.

It was a hectic five months of ceaseless activity and minimal sleep, since there was always rifle and kit to be cleaned before falling into bed, anticipating the early rise for the first, dark, freezing and often wet parade at 0655 on the seafloor. I decided that the only way I could ensure that the

folded edges of my blanket would be sufficiently neat to pass daily kit inspections was to avoid using the blankets at all. With the aid of a friendly fellow Cadet who had come to us not from university but from the Guards Depot, and knew a thing or two about spit, polish, and bullshit, I was able to create a permanent blanket package, which remained unopened and immaculate for five-months while I used a sleeping bag.

The nightly sessions, polishing, and cleaning, though wearing in terms of sleep deferred, were cheerful occasions for gossip and grumbles with one's fellow Cadets. The blanket trick saved me five minutes each morning and ensured that my bed would always pass the kit inspection. The whole ordeal was, of course, extremely salutary. For those who had been at day schools it must have been traumatic. It may, of course, be argued that all this "bull" was a waste of time, but it certainly ensured attention to detail, and capacity to work on a minimum of sleep.

Every minute of the day seemed to be filled to overflowing. We always "doubled" (trotted) from each parade or lecture to the next. Failures and transgressions were punished by extra drills, which included rapid change from one dress order to another. All was, no doubt, very good for the soul. Certainly, like boarding school, it made everything that came afterwards seem comparatively easy and comfortable.

The memories of OCTU include marching for innumerable miles, singing the jolly songs of the day to revive our flagging spirits; (*You Are My Sunshine* and *She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain* were the top of our pops), and boxing matches where the unfortunates who had not had the privilege of my spartan upbringing, nor the advantages of my long reach, bled like stuck pigs as they attempted to exhibit their manly qualities to the watching staff. I also remember the exhaustion and protesting muscles as we clambered up the Welsh mountains in full battle kit carrying weapons and ammunition. Later, one realised what an easy life we had led compared with

Marine, Commando, and SAS training, but at least we were fit to do fifty miles in twenty-four hours, which is enough for most purposes.

We were blessed, or cursed according to perspective, with a formidable Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) from the Coldstream Guards; he was a merciless "Drill" man and put the fear of God into us. He did not need to remind us of the classic formula, "You call me Sir, and I call you Sir, but the difference is that you mean it." We were in awe of the tall, smart, figure with his pace stick. I had several unhappy encounters with him; since, wearing a Highland Bonnet, I was an easy target for cracks that started "You with the funny hat on." One memorable grey rainy first parade the great man appeared behind us and growled to our Platoon Sergeant: "Alright Sarnt, I'll take them!" He then proceeded to march us straight into the sea, remarking as he ordered us to mark time, "I'll teach you to pick up your feet!" The end of this incident was the sight, out of the corner of my eye, of the RSM being confronted by an incensed old lady, brandishing her umbrella and saying, "You wicked old man, being so cruel to those poor young men." But the RSM was in the great tradition, and I suspect that most of us respected his talents.

I heard the great Guards RSM Britain one morning on the radio dealing beautifully with a languid interviewer who asked him why there was so much shouting in the army. The RSM said something like "Well you see Sir, it's like this Sir, if there's a battle going on and you shout Fire! You don't want the soldiers saying "What? Sir!" As far as I am concerned there is much to be said for drill, and bull, to give soldiers pride in themselves and their profession. But as I discovered in battle where individual initiative and personal courage is required, excellence on the parade ground does not guarantee excellence in combat. The smartest drill Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) may be the worst combat NCO.

The pay was enough to buy a bun and a cup of tea (char and a wad) in the canteen. There are several special memories from that period. The generous hospitality of a Welsh

farmwife for example, who responded to a dawn knock on her farmhouse door with a wonderful breakfast, as we wended our way wet, cold, and exhausted after a night in the hills, back to camp.

My most dramatic experience was writing off a motorcycle. I had succeeded during our first motorcycle lesson in keeping my engine going, so since most of the class stalled and failed to restart, I was promoted to the cross-country squad. Alas, I was far from ready for promotion. As I wobbled along a sand track approaching a steep ascent to the platform of the local station determined to keep my engine running at all costs, I revved up, charged up the ramp, careered off the platform, and landed in a nasty heap in the middle of the rails. It was a spectacular performance; the bike was written off, and I limped back to barracks, and to the beginner's class.

There are many other less exotic memories. As with the motorcycle school so with the truck class, it was a case of "Here are the controls, now drive." I do not think that people should be let loose like that on any public road, still less a Welsh hill road with stone walls either side. We survived, and I did not crash a truck, but it was a nightmare learning the controls while negotiating the bends; I can still picture that scene 60 years later with absolute clarity.

The Forty-Twa!

I was lucky to get the regiment of my choice, the Black Watch. I was not posted to the 5th Battalion where my brother was, but to the Tyneside Scottish. The Battalion had been badly mauled in France in 1940, reconstituted, sent to Iceland, and was now under canvas in Herefordshire, as part of the 49th (the Polar Bear) Division. I arrived in my brand new uniform to find a less than smart sentry at the gate, and a soggy camp of tents and marquees, spread over a large expanse of mud and grass. The Mess welcome was warmer than the weather.

I was posted to 'A' Company, commanded by Major Macgregor, who had been an NCO in Palestine, and

commissioned from the ranks during the war. He was a tough and efficient soldier, but he had little love for the Territorial Army Officers around him, nor was he persuaded that the new intake of subalterns, university types who had managed to pass out of OCTU, were up to his standards. His character and performance closely resembled the main character in the film *Tunes of Glory*. I settled down to make the most of my command of a rifle platoon under this demanding taskmaster and tried to persuade Major Mac that I was up to the job. Happily, this was not very difficult since I was fighting fit, and well trained.

My earliest brush with the ogre was a conversation when he said "You're no a marksman laddie: gae doon to the range every night until you become one!" This was no hardship, nor was it time wasted: I became a marksman with the .303 rifle. My next memorable encounter with Mac was when he congratulated me on winning the Platoon competition for a twenty-mile cross-country hike, with full kit and weapons. We got the prize having dismantled the heavy weapons, the clumsy Anti-Tank Rifle, the Brens and the 2-inch Mortar so that the weight could be distributed throughout the Platoon. There were squeals of protest from the losers, but Mac was delighted.

Shortly after I joined the Battalion it was decided that that the infantry should be given the 2pdr Anti-Tank guns discarded by the Artillery. Each battalion was to have six guns and Portee vans to match. I was selected, I know not on what grounds, to take over the new task, and sent off to train accordingly. This gave my mother the opportunity to join me at Netheravon, where I was initiated into the mysteries of Anti-Tank gunnery. So I found myself, not for the last time in my life, a specialist in a general profession.

Battle School

Soon another challenge, in the shape of the Battle School, arose. This time it was easy to guess the reason for selecting 2/

Lt Stewart for the job. There were no volunteers from the older officers to attend a course which was advertised as a means of subjecting every officer to some hard and uncomfortable experiences of battle conditions, including assault courses, and other forms of torture. So I and the other latest joined subaltern, Ken Buchanan, were sent off to the first course at the Divisional Battle School at Presteigne Manor. It was easy for Ken and me, having just left OCTU, but miserable for the older officers. Within a few weeks I was back at Presteigne as an Acting Captain, and Instructor. Although the compliment was huge, the embarrassment was considerable in the sense that aged twenty, and brand new 2/Lts, we were instructing people ten or more years older, and considerably senior to us: 2/Lts teaching Majors.

11th February 1943 (49th Division Battle School: to George)

Now 10pm have been at it all day with night movement after dinner. I do enjoy lecturing. It's glorified school mastering with a disciplined audience. I have earned notoriety for the rate of RTUs from my section. Three have been sent down already.

I am not sure that the Radio Times is a good idea; it is frustrating to know that I am missing a good concert when setting out on a night patrol.

The new Commandant of the school seems to be scared stiff since a Major in my section was killed by a misdirected 2inch mortar smoke bomb. Did I tell you that I was two feet away from the Major when it happened?

What on earth do you mean by saying that you were not meant to be a soldier? You make a damned good attempt at it anyway. And as to my worries at Barmouth that I might be RTU'd, they were not, I think, signs of an inferiority complex, but a fear that the OCTU might make a mistake! Neither of us was brilliant in the OTC but we seem to have made a reasonable impression doing the real thing.

I hope you get the Adjutant job; you have the brain and the temperament. I would prefer to stick with my training and shooting. I have another box of .38 revolver ammunition to fire off tomorrow.

Another bloody steeplechase this morning; the slow pace gets me

down. I overcome it by stopping to encourage the stragglers and then sprinting to take the lead. Double, Double, Toil and Trouble, indeed.

It was at times more than exciting: on one night patrol exercise, I lost a pupil who had been shot in the back of the head by a careless handler of a Very pistol. The pistol, designed to project a flare into the sky for signal purposes, was of course lethal at point blank range. I lost two more pupils during my stint as an instructor. One was hit by a 2-inch mortar smoke bomb, misdirected by the section attacking us. Another, most tragic of all, was a Major who was not prepared to admit to himself, still less to the instructing staff, that he could not cope with heights. On the cliff descent exercise, he lowered himself bravely off the top and then lost his grip on the rope and dropped to his death at the bottom of the cliff. But we had no casualties, in my time, caused by faulty planning or mistakes by the school staff. It may sound heartless to suggest that the Battle School idea was justified. In my view, however, it was. Our soldiers, totally un-bloodied in battle, were preparing to take on the battle-hardened soldiers of the German Army and we needed to be as tough as they were.

My letters to George from the Battle School days are a reminder of this extraordinary period when as a new 2/Lt I was catapulted to unpaid Acting Captain, Instructor.

"One bloke became paralysed with fright at the top of the ladder..." I had the 12ft wall to scramble up and sat on top like some malicious parrot screaming, Hurry up: don't keep them waiting."

"Three of my Section of students have been returned to their Units and I have a reputation as a severe judge. Unfortunately, it is sometimes the keenest who have a physical problem which cannot be overcome."

In 1941 I wrote, as a student, *we have the most extraordinary instructor in charge of my Section. His voice as he rants and raves goes from Cockney to Irish to Belgravia. "Are we fighting fit, Gentlemen?" is his morning greeting. Unfortunately, few of the Section are fit. He*

leaps and whoops at the laggards: amongst which I was to be found yesterday carrying a case of mortar bombs.

The students were stretched physically: crawling under barbed wire as Bren guns fired live rounds above them on fixed line; jumping into ditches; clambering over ten-foot walls; crossing rivers on ropes, clambering up and down cliffs. To keep the noise level up, we fired lots of blank cartridges and threw firecrackers known as "thunder flashes"; the air was filled with smoke and noise. The instructors, unlike the students, were not burdened with weapons and equipment, as we galloped about shouting encouragement to our weary sections. Occasionally there were lectures on fire and movement, or even the new weapon, the 2pdr, on which I had to lecture.

The Battle School training syllabus was modelled on the Commando courses. But we did not have the Commando luxury of selection of the fittest. Achnacarry expected 35 miles in 14 hours but we were content with 5 miles an hour with full kit. We practised night fighting but not twelve ways of killing a man without weapons.

We taught explosives and the crossing of barbed wire by the front man throwing himself on the wire providing a human bridge for the rest to dash across. Like the Commandos we tried to provide battle inoculation by firing live ammunition and detonating minor explosions.

We followed the Commando invention of Battle Drills meant to provide a reflex response to enemy fire. Down! Locate Fire! Engage enemy and try to keep his head down while one Section moved to the flank to infiltrate into the enemy position. It worked well on exercises but I never saw anyone carry out the drill in Normandy: perhaps it was too demanding of ordinary infantrymen; and only practical with an elite force, all men of action initiative, and courage. Unfortunately, experience suggests that in any group of twenty-four there will be six leaders, twelve followers, and six who will avoid the battle if possible.

We also taught people that they would not hear the bullet

"that had their name on it"; the crack of the bullet that missed was unimportant, but the sound of the gun that fired it was the sound to focus on in order to locate the enemy position.

On reflection, we should, I think, have laid much more emphasis on snap shooting, at short range, from the hip. The emphasis on Bisley-style marksmanship at long range, static targets, seems in retrospect to have been an aberration. Fine for snipers but of little relevance in fast moving battles, at close quarters.

Back to the Anti-Tank Platoon

The Mess was certainly not intellectual but there was plenty of good humour. The jokes were prep school level, and dog Latin was the nearest we got to foreign languages. The two great slogans were Nil Carborundum, a translation of "Don't let the buggers grind you down" and "Expelle navem, insum", or "Push out the boat, I am in." I suppose that we were much like many other wartime Battalion Messes, based originally on a territorial cadre, but overtaken by the arrival of strangers. In our case the new intake were young Scots who had applied to the Black Watch and found themselves, to their surprise, in the Tyneside Scottish. A similar Scottish invasion had taken place throughout the ranks, but the mix seemed to be a good one, and I for one, enjoyed the Geordie Jocks.

After the hyperactive months at Battle School, it would have been anticlimactic, to return to the command of a rifle platoon. I returned to the Anti-Tank Platoon, where as the only officer in the Battalion who knew anything about the subject, I had a very free hand devising exercises, sub-calibre ranges, and expeditions designed to ensure that the Jocks were proficient navigators as well as skilled gunners. We worked hard on emergency stops, unlimbering in a hurry, and engaging enemy armour in unexpected encounters. Such drills had hardly been a possibility with the 2pdr guns, carried in a vehicle the size and shape of a small furniture van. I never discovered why those responsible had thought it sensible to

move guns around in small furniture vans that, apart from sticking out like sore thumbs on a battlefield, had in any case no cross-country capability. Fortunately by the time I returned to the Battalion the ridiculous Portee, as it was called, and its accompanying 2pdr peashooter had been replaced by the 6pdr, which was towed behind tracked "carriers". The 2pdr, although more spectacular from the point of view of gun drill since the wheels had to be removed before action, was hopeless in terms of capability to penetrate the latest German armour. The 6pdr had been designed in 1938 but had not gone into production until 1941. The reason apparently was a fear that a change of model would lead to an unacceptable reduction in volume of production. A curious line of reasoning since the 6pdr was a much simpler gun to manufacture and took half the time to produce.

There was a lot to be learned about the new weapon, but the principles were familiar. The gun detachment opened the legs of the gun, and swung the gun towards the target, the layer then fine-tuned his aim through the telescope in accord with the gun commander's estimates of range and speed, and pulled the trigger. This was the sequence that we practised over and over again in all weathers and conditions, with blank cartridges, possibly laying down smoke from our 2-inch mortars to cover the deployment and digging in, if we had time. This was not sophisticated gunnery; it required no mathematics but quick reactions and good judgement of the range and speed of the enemy armour, shooting through telescopic sights to hit rapidly moving tanks before they or their mates had spotted your position. The effectiveness of the first shots would be crucial, and the core objective of all our training was to beat the enemy to the draw.

One of my earliest memories of Anti-Tank days was of a cold morning in a Herefordshire field drilling my Platoon. One aspect of gun drill was that every movement had to be carried out at the double and I noticed that one of the Jocks was taking it easy. When I summoned him he said in a strong Glasgow accent, "I only double in the glasshouse" (slang for military

prison). I sent him straight off parade and in short order he was back to his glasshouse. I never had any further trouble of that particular sort, and if any of my new Platoon thought of indulging in dumb insolence or other such tricks, whatever they thought about their young, "toffee-nosed talking" Commander, they preserved the decencies.

Of course, the Rifle Companies did not volunteer to send all their best men to my newly formed Platoon; we had a mix, which turned out in action, however, to be capable of putting on a good show. The Platoon included miners, butchers, farm-workers, and even a Terrazzo polisher. Whatever their motivation, they certainly performed well in battle; isolated and firing independently. They could easily have kept their heads down and done the minimum, but they fought courageously.

Our new 6pdrs, although a great advance on the 2pdr, were still no match for the enemies' thickest frontal armour, but if we hit the enemy tanks on the side, we could penetrate them. Fortunately, just before we embarked for the invasion of Normandy, we were issued with exotic new ammunition called Sabot. This consisted of a tungsten dart encased in an alloy sleeve that disintegrated when the dart left the muzzle at twice the speed of the traditional round, thus making shooting at a moving target much easier, and providing greater penetration power.

Meanwhile, all I could do was to give the Jocks the maximum practice in handling and firing the guns. I think they enjoyed the opportunities to play an adult version of Cowboys and Indians. But we worked hard. The Battalion moved frequently in the two years before D Day. We were stationed in Wales, in Hamilton Race Course, in Lowestoft, in St Felix Girls' School in Southwold, and finally in Thetford, in Suffolk. Sometimes we were in Nissen Huts, those curious buildings made of a semicircle of corrugated iron constituting roof and walls. I remember with great clarity the early mornings when the duty batman came in to light the stove and bring the subalterns mugs of tea. The smell of the spluttering

stove was accompanied by the acrid smell of the cigarettes being lit by some of my companions, who, for reasons that I could never understand, found this a good way to start the day. The coughs of my fag-puffing companions completed the atmospheric of reveille in a cold Nissen Hut.

Every Thursday we maintained the tradition of Mess Night, with male guests, and reels and jigs after dinner. For some reason I was Officer in Charge (OC) Scottish Dancing. Perhaps it was because I had been dancing the full repertoire since the age of seven, starting with instruction from two ladies in black dresses at Dalhousie Castle who, in addition to the Highland steps, taught us ballroom basics. The refrain "slow, slow, quick quick, slow", is an abiding memory of those days. Anyway, in the Mess it was my duty to ensure that the latest-joined subalterns could perform a creditable foursome reel, and if they failed they had to buy the OC Scottish Dancing a whisky. On one memorable night we had the Brigadier to dinner, and foolishly, since he was not a very popular officer, he allowed himself to be persuaded to join us in a *Strip the Willow*, I fear that he must have been a very stiff Brigadier the next day, since he bounced many times against the wall as he was whirled from arm to arm in a wild jig.

Hamilton gave me the opportunity to visit Motherwell Hospital where my Great Aunt Mary had been recalled to the colours and was the matron in charge. It was amusing to see the terror she inspired in her staff as she passed through the hospital on her rounds.

Our stay in St Felix School in Southwold, apart from the corny old joke about notices to be found in the St Felix dormitories which read "If you want a mistress in the night ring the bell", left memories of a most impressive CO, Colonel (later Field Marshal), Cassells. He was much admired and respected but unfortunately moved rapidly on to command a Brigade.

Another memory of that period was finding myself as the officer responsible for the safe custody of a fellow subaltern who had taken a week's extra leave without permission and

was under close arrest. The prisoner was, in Civvy Street, a Border farmer. He was about twice my size, so I wondered how, if he decided to make a break for it, I would be able to restrain him. Fortunately he remained tame.

About this time I, too, finished up under arrest. The facts were that having arrived at Hamilton with the advance party, and done my duty, I charged over to Glasgow on my motorcycle, to meet Mama, whom I had summoned from Kirriemuir earlier in the day. Unbeknownst to me, however, I had been nominated as Duty Officer, and therefore the next day had to explain my absence from camp. It seemed to me best to pretend that I had merely gone down to Glasgow for a night out; and after a short spell, which included my twenty-first birthday, I was released with a reprimand. I was not contrite since it was hardly my fault that the orders of the day had been posted after dinner.

My only other run-in with authority took place at the Battle School where, in the course of an exercise, my truck had damaged its canopy in the branches of an overhanging tree when travelling along the shortest track to the rendezvous. The Court of Enquiry attempted to pin the blame for the damage onto me, and to seek compensation. I argued that since there was no way of telling from the map that there was an overhanging tree, and I was not driving, this was unreasonable. I therefore elected to go before a Court Martial. This aggressive defence had the desired effect; the whole matter was dropped.

I regret that during this period I did nothing outside the military sphere; although there was time to read more widely, to improve languages, and instrumental playing. On duty I concentrated on training what I hoped was the best Anti-Tank Platoon in the allied forces; but off duty I was coasting. Like George, I found the job satisfying.

The most satisfactory off-duty hours were spent in the Battle School, with my fellow Highlander, Ken Buchanan. Many a duet took place at the top of the Manor House. Pipes, fiddles and even a clarinet were brought into play, while the

rest of the residents were in the bar, three floors down. Come dinnertime, it was a matter of war-time Mess Dress (in our case tartan trews), a good dinner and then freedom if there was no official duty to perform, such as a night exercise.

In the battalion, the Anti-Tank training round was full of job satisfaction. We formed an increasingly expert team and beat every record we encountered. One happy example was a visit to an Anti-Tank Range where I discovered that the record for moving a 6pdr around their assault course was held by the Scots Guards. The course consisted of a series of obstacles, rail embankments, ditches, and so on, all designed to test the visitors' skill and efficiency in manhandling a 6pdr across country. I told the Jocks about this and said, "You know what to do." The idea of the lordly Guards holding the record was enough. A picked gun detachment of the Tyneside Scottish set off at a gallop. Disregarding the complicated manoeuvres set out in the Drill Book and taking each obstacle head-on at full tilt, they beat the record by a handsome margin.

We were not always so easily triumphant. On one occasion we had a narrow squeak. We were engaged in training to waterproof our gun tractors, and the final test was to drive them through water, about five feet deep. One of our tractors started to cough and splutter when it was in the middle of the water, but before it ground to an ignominious halt, the detachment jumped into the water and dragged the ensemble out of the trough where the engine recovered its rhythm, allowing the detachment to complete the course, and thus, by the skin of our teeth, to get all our carriers through the water to the finishing line. This was the sort of exercise where the team displayed, what I fondly believed, was a family spirit. Fortunately, when later we disembarked in six feet of water off Sword Beach in Normandy, every vehicle performed valiantly and chugged up on to dry land without the need for such heroics.

In order to get in as much firing practice as possible we did not rely on the authorities, but filled in the gaps by creating our own sub-calibre ranges in the countryside, making use of

Bren Guns fixed to the barrel of the 6pdr and fired by the 6pdr trigger. Although no substitute for full calibre firing on official ranges, this was a good test of most of the skills of an Anti-Tank Gunner. Accompanied by Ken Buchanan, who was now Commander of the 3-inch Mortar Platoon, I had many a happy reconnaissance party, to beaches and moors in the remoter parts of Britain, seeking suitable ranges. Ken Buchanan, who also had a motorcycle allocated to him, accompanied me several times when our cross-country rides took us to dine in elegant houses, where our hostesses, conscious perhaps of the fact that they were feeding those who might be about to die, provided us with generous entertainment.

Several weekends were spent in summer camps by the sea, where we towed targets along the beaches and practised firing at rapidly moving targets. The camps provided a morale boost for the Platoon. This was not unimportant since quarters were drab, the local girls tended to favour the officers, and generally there was little for the Jocks to do off parade. I fear that my fellows in the Rifle Companies were somewhat jealous of our weekend excursions. My advantage was that the training pretext was entirely valid. All I had to do was to get permission to take the Platoon out on a live-firing exercise and the rest was up to me.

As we prepared for the invasion of Normandy there were many memorable experiences. Exercise Spartan held in the Oxfordshire area was typical. We were sleeping rough, cold and wet. The opposition were the famous Desert Rats, an Armoured Division which had successfully attended to the destruction of Rommel's Army. We, the un-bloodied, were facing a Division which had more than earned its spurs in action and no doubt saw the exercise as a profound bore. We were dug in and serious while they were swanning about with turrets open and the tank commanders' heads up, thus giving them a view of the battlefield to which they were not entitled. When my complaints to the umpires proved ineffective I took to direct action. Borrowing a 2-inch mortar from one of our detachments I lobbed a smoke bomb across the front of the

advancing tanks. The Desert Rats got the message, heads went down and we had no more nonsense.

One of the joys of the Anti-Tank job was my entitlement to a motorcycle. The Barmouth disaster was well behind me and I greatly enjoyed the rush of wind, the surge of power, and not least the independence. Sometimes I roared up and down Britain as we moved from camp to camp, assisting in the disciplining and controlling of long convoys. At other times the broad rubric of reconnaissance covered a lot of local exploration; and, of course, there was good reason to perfect my cross-country skills so that the motorcycle could be used effectively to enable me to keep in touch with six guns spread out on the ground along the Battalion front. In fact I damaged three more motorcycles during this period. One of the accidents was not my fault. I had volunteered to convey a written message on a dark and stormy night, and as I was riding quite slowly along a mountain road a truck came the other way, showing its tiny blue headlights, (designed to deny comfort to enemy bombers). Since I, too, had only the minimal headlights, I could not see the shape and size of the lorry I was passing and as I wobbled past I bumped into the tail of what turned out to be a vast RAF lorry towing a lengthy trailer. Fortunately, no serious damage was done, but the journey was finished without the benefit of lights.

The second accident was my fault. After my stint at Battle School and therefore woefully out of practice, I took over a motorcycle at the start of Exercise Spartan, and drove it straight into a tree. My third motorcycle mishap might have had much graver consequences. The night before we moved out of Thetford to our south coast embarkation camps, I rode down to dine with my mother who was living close by. After dinner when I tried to kick start, the engine burst spectacularly into flames. By the time I had extinguished the fire with earth from the rose bed, the engine wiring was finished. Happily Corporal Pozzi, the Platoon's mechanical wizard, was contactable by phone. We returned safely to camp in the Platoon truck.

During the preparations for the invasion of Normandy the same training programme continued. There was little difficulty in finding country backwaters where we could practice the arts of Anti-Tank gunnery using Bren Guns on top of a 6pdr. Firing at targets towed across the front of the guns was not as dangerous as it may sound, if the range control and discipline were strict. The targets were mounted on sledges pulled on very long cables. There were also practice sessions in our own miniature range, using .22 rifles attached to a gun barrel. Such devices gave detachment commanders practice in command and control, and gun-layers practice in responding to orders such as "Up 200," or "Down 400," the crude but effective methods of bracketing our targets until we scored a direct hit. And they were a lot more fun than gun drills.

I have no idea what the other Anti-Tank Platoon Commanders of Montgomery's Army were doing, but I doubt if most of them had as much training in firing, and moving, and deploying their guns as my Jocks. We had over two years to perfect our act, and we worked hard at it. I take comfort from the idea that we must have done something right about training, if only because when the Battle of Rauray (see page 56) ended, according to Field Marshall Montgomery's memoirs, there were 32 "dead" German tanks in our Battalion area. Also, much to my delight, sergeants and privates of those days still keep in touch, from as far away as Australia.

And what about the fairer sex? We were, of course, in a strong position: the kilted soldier has an advantage over the drab khaki-clad English soldier, and wherever we were billeted there was no shortage of female company. I did not get entangled in any serious fashion until during beach landing exercises in Rothesay, Isle of Bute. There I met a Wren who, much to my poor mother's dismay, became my fiancée. This little foray did not outlast the Normandy campaign. By the time I returned, the lady had decided that a blonde Adonis in the Fleet Air Arm was more suitable, and I was thus relieved of further responsibilities. There was also the delightful and wealthy young lass in the Hamilton days, but we never took

that relationship to the next stage. From my point of view Hamilton was, in physical terms, a rerun of my Oxford affair with the beauty of Boars Hill. Since the lady in question lived about five miles away from camp, there was a lot of trotting back to camp in time for the first parade, which consisted of another run, since Monty had decided that his Army was not fit, and that all ranks must run before breakfast. If anyone in my family ever wonders why grandpa is still pretty good at walking, the answer must be that I had been running and walking long distances all my life until I left the army.

Letters from a Black Watch Subaltern

March 1943 (to Father)

Last week we had a fine Mess night. Super menu. The 'Brigadier, an Englishman, was seriously winded by the end of 'Strip the Willow' and "Eightsome'. Ken, two others, and myself performed a 'Foursome'. Three guesses for whom we had to be on parade at 'sparrows' and stand around until 0945? It was Monty; he spoke well but the stuff that goes down so well in the papers does not, I fear, come across quite so well to the troops. Still, he has a steady eye, and speaks with the voice of experience. Surprisingly small man.

Remember Findlay at Coll? His sister came to a dance and I discovered the Coll connection, and by 2230 we were well away. She is extremely handsome (like her Mama) and excellent company. Her mama is not so sure about this liaison but her father seems delighted.

8th April 1943 (Llanelli: to George)

Back to the Battalion. There is inevitably a magic circle of the pre-war territorial officers, and one feels outside it. Frustrating returning as 2/1c to the Platoon I set up, and difficult to get it back on the right footing after four months of mismanagement.

A lot of new 2/Lts have joined. Pleasant enough but they won't set the Thames on fire. There are still six subalterns between a captaincy and me, but I seem to be in favour with the CO. Rumour has it that we are about to go overseas so I have cancelled my order for a new tunic.

1st May 1943 (Hamilton: to George)

Why are you refusing to ask for my transfer to the 5th Battalion? I know that it would be tough on Mum but we seem to be stuck here, and it would be wonderful to be with you again; you are the only one of the old gang that I have any chance to be with.

Gun drill going well. Hamilton has many advantages, not least the proximity to Mama, about whom I worry. I only got a mild ticking off for my AWOL to visit her in Glasgow and two extra Duty Officer stints which was no great hardship. I rather enjoy the lugubrious sound of Donald Blue as the Duty Piper plays 'Lights Out'. It is not as if I am missing some amazing tamasha in the great city.

You seem to have totally missed the news that I was once a Captain; (but no longer) and have no prospects as second in command of the Anti-Tank Platoon where, although I am more expert, my Platoon Commander has ten years' seniority. I was away for four months at Battle School and they have, understandably, given the command to the man who supervised the Platoon in my absence; although he made a balls of it as far as I'm concerned.

10th May 1943 (to George)

The Adjutant has been very ill, at death's door. We were all anxious to push him through.

Raining all day so spent the time on boring maintenance in gloomy garage and my miniature range (for .22 sub-calibre shooting) could not be completed.

12th May 1943 (to George)

Thanks for the interesting account of fighting Jerry and 'Eyties. What about me compiling your stories into an article? It seems extraordinary that you are engaged in shooting to kill, and being shot at.

So little time for training by the time the Jocks have attended RSM's parades, Padre's lectures and carried out maintenance etc. I am agin education when it interferes with my training programmes. Our specialists are nothing like fully trained yet. My new lassie is going to make me some toffee; there's luck for you.

16th May 1943 (to George)

This is the third to you this week, but now that the fighting in Tunisia is over, you will be lower on my priority list. Since I have no news I will describe my day. 0850 Church Parade; extremely voluble but indistinct Welsh preacher. 1000 Adjutant's Parade. Then writing pamphlet on 6pdr. I want to have something to pin up after my lectures for the Jocks to study.

Training on my miniature range is producing encouraging results. A very smart Corporal has just joined us from the Depot and the Platoon will suffer on the Drill Square. I am not so sure, however, whether he will make a good gun commander in action. Fortunately, the Platoon Commander leaves me to get on with the training, while he does the paperwork. Mozart Horn Concerto after dinner. Pleasant life. Yesterday spent on Range Recce with Ken Buchanan; countryside looking very beautiful.

18th May 1943 (to George)

Only ten gunners available to train! All the rest on leave, at Battle School or carrying out maintenance.

I am surprised that after all you have gone through you can still get a thrill from firing 2-inch mortars.

Got hilarious letter from Gordon (Hunt) describing life on a troopship crossing the equator. He disapproves of the tropical environment for amorous experiment; moon too bright, lipstick melts, bodies steam.

21st May 1943 (on leave from Velindre: to George)

The victory parade in Tunis sounds very smart, but I doubt if our Jocks would appreciate all the bullshit that you seem to have in the Highland Division.

24th May 1943 (on leave: to George)

I have been playing my fiddle and remembering all the happy times we had here at Kirrie and Oxford making music. We must get a modern gramophone after the war, when we can pile on ten records at a time and sit back for a complete symphony.

Just had lunch with Charles, back from Gib and telling me stories of the problems his Battalion (the 4th) had with Jocks misbehaving down town.

This was the Battalion that produced the famous Black Watch joke about the sentry who, unimpressed with three wide gold stripes, did not salute a passing Admiral of the Fleet. It is alleged that when the Admiral expostulated "Do you not know who I am?" the Jock replied, "Well, you're no a Sergeant in the Black Watch anyway!"

I liked your description of the Battle of Alamein. The atmospheric were good and I could imagine it well in the light of my own experience.

31st May 1943

Off to Harlech Artillery Range. I intend to call on RSM Copp and to enjoy being a free man in Barmouth. In between the hard work and misery there, I had some good times with kindred spirits, which I miss. The best exercise at Harlech was battle practice, with tanks popping up all over the place, and eventually charging almost to the muzzle of the guns. I lost my temper this afternoon at teatime with Major Mac and Harry Boyne, who were criticising the performance of the Anti-Tank Platoon. I suggested that if they knew a better method of training they should take the job, and nothing more was said.

My Platoon Commander is very ponderous. I wonder whether we shall get on better or worse after he has attended a gunnery course.

3rd June 1943 (to George)

Last night, down town, I was accosted by a very drunken Durham Sergeant who said "Hello Sir, remember the Battle School? Double, Double, Double. Have a drink." and fell down flat at my feet. So that is how I am remembered by one of the sergeants in the Durhams.

Duty Dog again. I have just supervised the mounting of a most comical guard of new boys. It is meant to be an impressive ceremony, but our new boys cannot even fix bayonets: a pantomime.

It is frustrating to have a Platoon Commander who knows nothing about gunners; I would be much better off with a 2/ic who knew nothing. The wireless is being good to me. I am living now completely

on my own resources; no kindred spirits in the Mess.

15th December 1943 (to Mother)

I am off the hook with Audrey's family; they are all sick so do not want me to go there on leave. It is irritating to have the prisoner in my room, so that I cannot have privacy to play my fiddle.

New CO (Cassells) is descending next week for a thorough admin inspection, so I am flat out. Immaculate paintwork everywhere. The week spent crawling under my twenty vehicles to check lubrication and cleanliness.

I never met my fellow officers en masse again once we left Thetford. The officers were a mix of Tynesiders, of pre-war territorial vintage, and Scots, mostly of my vintage. Although the youngsters were nearly all public school boys, and doubtless classified by the Jocks as toffs, nevertheless this was not a snob Mess: we represented a broad spectrum of the middle classes. There were only three regular soldiers amongst us: one regular major, who was Second-in-Command of the Battalion. He kept himself to himself and made little impression on me; I suspect that he may not have found this heterogeneous collection entirely to his taste. The second, Major Mac has already been described; a good fighting soldier and a good storyteller, with a flow of colourful language. My last recollection of him as my Company Commander was an occasion when, after a long, wet, cold exercise, I heard from my neighbouring company that the exercise was over and marched my Platoon back to Company H.Q. where Major Mac was having breakfast in style in the farm building which he had appropriated. The dialogue that ensued was as follows, Mac, "What are you doing here Laddie?" BS, "I was told that the exercise was over, sir!" Mac, "I did not tell you. Get back where you came from, Laddie!" So BS and his Platoon trudged back five miles in the rain to await Mac's orders. My final glimpse of Major Mac was of a bloody figure, being carried back on a stretcher after an unsuccessful attack in one of our first skirmishes.

The third regular soldier was the Captain Quarter Master, formerly a Black Watch RSM; he was an effective QM, and good company; but I never discovered what he thought of his Territorial and wartime commissioned Mess mates, many from university, but none from the great families of Scotland.

Normandy

The pre-D-Day embarkation went remarkably smoothly. Our Support Company, anti-tank, mortar and carrier platoons embarked with their tracked carriers, lorries, motorcycles, weapons and ammunition, and we sailed across the channel in an impressive armada. The naval contribution ranged from Battleships to Corvettes.

At sea, we settled down at Ken Buchanan's suggestion to a game of poker and in the circumstances there seemed to be no point in sticking to my normal "no gambling" stance. Ken took me to the cleaners and received an IOU accordingly.

Before embarkation, our vehicles had all been waterproofed in preparation for the plunge into the sea. This entailed putting waterproof tape over every vulnerable point of the engine and adding a vertical exhaust pipe extension. The final waterproofing had to be added just before leaving the ship since in the final stage the engine could not run for more than a few minutes. So, as the Captain gave the order to prepare to disembark, the drivers put the finishing touches to the sealing off process, started engines and began to move forward towards the ramp. Although the Germans had been cleared off our beachhead, we had another enemy to contend with. Our Captain, anxious no doubt to ensure that he was able to depart as soon as possible, had erred seriously on the side of caution. We were anchored so far out that each carrier disappeared under water; only the drivers' heads and the exhaust pipes were to be seen above the water line. I watched appalled as each carrier plunged in; but, happily, each emerged and ground its way onto dry land.

At this stage, my orders were to follow Division Brigade

and then Battalion signs in order to find our rendezvous point; I had no map reference. So we proceeded, carriers and six 6pdrs, led by BS on a motorcycle. Soon we had passed the Divisional and Brigade signs, but the Battalion sign was not to be seen. We continued to clatter along the road to Caen, the strategic town that the Germans were defending vigorously. I soon came to a sharp corner where Canadian troops stopped us and remarked, "Well, if you go round the corner you will meet the Germans." The Germans would have been as surprised as we had our cavalcade rounded that corner. We turned about smartly. Reading much later about Monty's plans, I was amused to discover that his original timetable included the immediate capture of Caen.

Since we were in reserve, the first few days were something of a picnic. The German Air Force only troubled us once, when a cheeky Messerschmidt swooped down upon a group of us as we studied maps and plans. The speed with which officers of all ages sprinted for cover was impressive. Overhead, sped heavy shells of the naval guns bombarding the German positions. These sounded like express trains, and I was glad that I was not on the receiving end.

Before our Platoon became seriously engaged in battle, the holiday atmosphere continued with visits to Norman farms, now liberated from "Les sales Boches", I had some memorable suppers of rabbit stew washed down with Calvados.

During this waiting period my Platoon had two mishaps. The first, when shortly after we landed one of the ammunition carriers burst into spectacular flame and pyrotechnics, presumably because sea water had penetrated into the electrics, and caused a short circuit. The second was a tragic accident when one of the Jocks, impatient to get his fire going for the evening brew up of tea, poured petrol on to his recalcitrant fire, and was fatally burnt as the flame jumped back, exploded his petrol can, and engulfed him in flame.

Meanwhile the Rifle Companies had carried out three attacks in the Bocage hedgerows, and two of these attacks

were unsuccessful. A hull-down Panzer in defence, concealed behind the hedges, was a formidable opponent, and our casualties, tank and infantry, were high. My Platoon was not involved directly in such forays, but on one occasion I was invited by a Rifle Company to dislodge a Panzer that was taking advantage of the cover provided by an orchard wall in front of them and making their lives miserable. We manhandled one of our 6pdrs into position and destroyed the offending wall with a few well-placed explosive shells. The Rifle Company was suitably grateful until the Germans, having withdrawn their tank, stonked the company positions with a massive mortar bombardment. Fortunately there were no casualties; we, of course, had long since manhandled our gun back to base.

There were other occasions when the battle was a lot nearer. I have a vivid memory of a dawn attack by German infantry, wearing captured British uniforms, breaking through our front. They were supported by a heavy mortar bombardment, using what we knew as "moaning minnies". These came over in sequences of six; and if the first bomb landed nearby it was an unpleasant business waiting for the other five. On this occasion, after their initial breakthrough, the German Infantry were beaten off and the Brens and rifles of the Anti-Tank Platoon contributed to the firefight.

Other moments remain etched in the memory: such as the prickly feeling as we advanced along farm tracks, conscious of the possibilities of snipers, and of booby traps. Leading a Platoon in these circumstances was an uncomfortable experience as one dismounted to open a gate, hoping that there was no booby trap.

But after several weeks, we had yet to put our training to the test in battle. Our moment came on the morning of the 1st of July. Shortly before midnight we were summoned to an Orders Group where the Battalion Commander explained that we had been ordered to take over and defend a position against an expected dawn attack. I later learnt that this salient jutting out from the British line was a prime target for the

Wehrmacht's counter offensive. We hurried back to choose gun positions as best we could from the map, since there was no time for personal reconnaissance. Nor was there time to dig effective gun pits by hand so, contrary to the rule-book, I told the gun commanders that they could use their Anti-Tank mines to blow gun pits so that the guns would be "hull down" when the attack came.

At first light we could hear the rumblings of the approaching Panzers. As I went round the six gun positions I found the Jocks in good heart. This was the set piece battle for which we had been training for over two years. The guns were deployed in the classic pattern: each gun facing obliquely across the front, so that it could aim at the side not the massive frontal armour of the enemy tanks and give mutual support to its neighbouring 6pdrs. On this occasion, because we had no time to walk the ground, some of the gun positions were less than ideal but we were at least in position, "hull down" before the battle started.

In this Section my memory has been assisted by commentaries from members of the Platoon whom I have met over the years after the event, and in working on a book called *The Defence of Rauray*. My personal recollections include such highlights as helping to bandage a badly wounded corporal; when my normal dislike of blood was entirely forgotten. I also remember how, obsessed with my job, I was not conscious of any fear of the enemy, as I moved between the guns. By the end of the day there were 32 "dead" German tanks on our battalion front. We claimed 12 "kills" for the Anti-Tank Platoon. The Battalion suffered so many casualties that it was never brought back up to strength, and soon those who survived were posted to other Highland Battalions as reinforcements. This was a battle that the Jocks of the Anti-Tank Platoon still fight in retrospect, with justifiable pride. Few of them are left, but the experience lives on when they meet at Regimental Reunions.

My part in the battle was brought to an abrupt end with a wound received from an unfriendly Panzer. So I did not see

the end of the action, which earned a commendation from our General, and a Military Medal for one of my sergeants and a Battle Honour. I was immensely proud of them, and they were proud of themselves. It was a great performance, in the best traditions of the Highlanders, and the Geordie Jocks.

The period after I was wounded passed in a haze as I moved by ambulance, into tented hospitals with angels of mercy kindly attending to us. I was soon evacuated by air, after a short stay in a tented hospital in Normandy, and eventually to Oxford. There for many weeks, I shared a ward with a badly wounded officer, whose body was encased in plaster. The poor man naturally stank from the putrefaction inside the plaster but we did our best to ignore this. My wound responded well to the latest drugs. I was pronounced fit for duty after about three months.

11th June 1944 (to Mother)

At sea, on a Merchant ship. I would have preferred the ship-shapeness of a naval craft. The battle seems to be going well and we are looking forward to contributing to the destruction of the Panzers. The Channel is an amazing sight with ships as far as the eye can see in every direction, the sky filled with barrage balloons and armadas of our aircraft endlessly flying overhead.

15th June 1944

We sat for a long time in our non-luxurious ship, waiting for the moment to disembark. It was not at all like the life George described on his way out to Egypt with the 51st. We have now linked up with the main body on shore.

The sunny beach where we landed seemed extraordinarily peaceful; although the debris on the shore gave ample evidence of the hard fighting that took place on D Day. The roads are scruffy and the dust incredible, but the countryside and the houses, if they still stand, look very like our own. Just time between urgent military matters, to read all the mail that awaited us.

17th June 1944

Not the endless threat of shot and shell that we had anticipated, but a horrendous noise from artillery and bombs. We have to be pretty careful where we tread for fear of mines. I am enjoying the visits to the nearby farms where my schoolboy French has proved to be more than enough to get me by, provided that they are talking to me, not to each other. I give them my chocolate ration and they feed me glorious rabbits stewed in Cider, and Calvados that tastes remarkably like Drambuie. I have decided that there is little need to bother with the finer points of French Grammar. It's remarkable what you can do without conjugating verbs; the infinitive is pretty effective; although our teachers would wince, the farmers do not seem to care, and they certainly understand me.

18th June 1944

Short of sleep, and soaking wet with the endless rain. I thought for a happy moment that everyone had tacitly agreed on a temporary ceasefire while we built shelters, but the battle has recommenced. We are about two miles from the front line.

21st June 1944

My shelter has worked well and I was delighted to hear a visitor saying that mine was the first dry encampment he had seen. Nevertheless, I would prefer your roof to my tarpaulin and your carpets to my earth floor. Spent the usual sort of day in reserve. Enough alarms and excursions to make it difficult to find time for serious matters, like reading and writing.

I am bored with having Jerry planes making an occasional pass over us and am biding my time to find a Jerry machine-gun and ammunition so that I can set up a private A/A post at my front door, and retaliate.

23rd June 1944 (same foxhole existence)

I enjoy being the only officer who seems to be able to communicate in French. I refuse to interpret if people start making cracks about the unmarried man present. The farmers are generous to us.

I am sleeping in a slit trench three feet deep that provides excellent

protection against all but a direct hit, and I have a tarpaulin rigged up as a tent-like roof. The joys of being in a Platoon that has its own transport.

Yesterday saw my Platoon's first casualty. A Jock killed by a stray shell when sitting writing to his pregnant wife; very sad.

Newspapers give us lots to laugh about in their amazingly inaccurate stories of the war.

All my laundry hanging out to dry in hot sun. We are using petrol and earth cookers, made from tins, for brewing up. Very effective.

Late June 1944

Major Mac badly wounded by a mortar bomb during an unsuccessful attack by A Company and poor old McDowall (the Old Glenalmond) killed. I was lying behind a bank, awaiting orders to move forward behind the Company, but the Germans were too well dug in for our armour. I found to my great relief that when there was need for me to move about I was not greatly bothered by the crump of the mortar bombs and the rattle of the Spandaus.

27th June 1944 (to Mother)

Russian or Turkish cigarettes would be much appreciated if you can get them. But my real need is for a propelling pencil. No time to read!

We are very much in contact with Jerry now. The last battle was not much fun; our first real taste of Jerry firepower, and since we were on the move we felt very vulnerable to snipers. I spent this morning potting at potential Jerry sniper points, using one of their sniper rifles and their tracer ammunition. Our blokes are very irritated with the Jerries' habit of staying up trees long after they have been defeated. Now that we have had our baptism of fire, I am more confident. Only one casualty in my Platoon. Although the advance is slow there is no doubt who is winning.

It is raining heavily. I am wet sitting in my slit trench, with our tanks milling around.

1st July 1944 (evening)

This is the first of a new series. I am truly out of the battle I had a disagreement with what was I think an 88 shell in the middle of the morning, and was wounded in the thigh. Now in a most comfortable bed in an airy tent. Drowsy. Sounds of war continue, but only ack-ack guns and aeroplanes.

At dawn today, Jerry brought a heavy barrage crashing down on our battalion positions. Mac was wounded at the beginning of the battle so I took over command of the Platoon. There was a furious battle going on between our guns and the Panzers and the Jocks were doing well. I was wounded in the middle of the morning while moving in my carrier between HQ and the guns.

Early July 1944 (Swansea Hospital)

Hole in thigh being dressed four times a day, which is unpleasant but bearable, and naturally I hobble rather painfully to nature's appointments. No sign of infection and no permanent damage expected. But I will not be back in Kirrie for some time. The journey home was slower than expected. Because of bad weather the Dakotas could not fly, and we were off-loaded. The stretcher, which for a short spell seemed like heaven, became uncomfortable. I glued my eyes to the windows as we flew into England, and thought I was in real luck when I saw Oxford below us. But we were immediately loaded into a train.

I am not yet resigned to having missed the end of the battle, and cursing that I was unable to persuade our MO to let me go back to my guns. My thoughts are still with the Battalion, although I have accepted what is, in normal terms, my good fortune.

The nursing staff is a lot better than the military administration. We are being asked to pay for new battledress and kit, although our kit has either been destroyed by enemy action or lost by the British Army. We will go on strike!

7th July 1944

You are thirsting for news, so I will try to describe the battle again.

I suppose in our short time in the battle zone we experienced most kinds of action. Sniped at, shelled by artillery and tanks, mortared by the six-barrelled Moaning Minnies, machine-gunned and grenaded.

The Jocks fought well. By the time I left them they had been fighting for several hours. They were dog-tired, but my Platoon, in its first battle shoot, had done extremely well; perhaps because the tanks were so close! Using the Platoon HQ carrier I moved back to Battalion HQ looking for information and ammunition and learnt that we were under heavy attack on all sides of the salient that we were defending. When I returned to B Section, which was commanded by Sergeant Watson, I found that he and his two guns were in a sort of no man's land, surrounded by an extraordinary number of wrecked German tanks which he had destroyed since the beginning of the German counter attack. Like 'B' Company, the Rifle Company, which they were supporting, Watson's gun had fired all its ammunition. I doubled off to see how Sergeant Swaddle and A Section were faring, and found that he had already knocked out two Panzers with his gun when the Jerries had tried to come round our left flank. I found both Sections in good heart, despite the hail of shot, shell and mortar bombs, and justifiably proud of their marksmanship.

But Corporal Drysdale commanding No2 gun was badly injured; I sprinted back to my carrier, found a medical wallah and returned to try and improve Drysdale's situation (he eventually lost an arm). I called in on our Regimental HQ on the way to beg for more ammunition. 'C' Section's guns that had been sited by MacLagan were not yet in action and Corporal Frame's gun was disabled.

We dared not move Drysdale without a stretcher but I took two other wounded Jocks from his gun detachment in my carrier to the Regimental Aid Post. On the way, a shell, I think from a Panzer gun, exploded near my carrier and as I later discovered had nullified all my earlier efforts to evade enemy fire by sprinting and dodging. I was never allowed to leave the hands of the medics once I delivered the casualties; they bound my legs together, poured on sulphur powder, and that was the end of my battle experience. We won, but at heavy cost.

8th July 1944

You were thanking Providence that I had only been wounded, and not severely. Perhaps by the time I return to the battle it will have opened up. The Press is as usual talking nonsense about the state of the battle but we are winning.

The days before the battle Ken Buchanan's mortars did some good work, but there were no targets for our guns. We were bemoaning the fact that Jerry would not come out to fight with his tanks, but kept them hidden in defence behind the Bocage hedges. The Tyneside Scottish suffered a lot of casualties, but made some limited progress. On Friday we took over from another Battalion (Durham Light Infantry). It was tricky moving into position at night, under fire; we kept our transport back about a mile, and manhandled the guns into position. By dawn we were in the thick of a major counter attack; Panzers everywhere and ammunition running low. I was too busy tending to all six guns, to have time to watch the skills of any particular gun detachment. MacLagan had been wounded early on and I was rushing about, sometimes crawling to avoid the flying muck, binding up the wounded, and making encouraging noises. Three of our guns were knocked out but as far as I can discover the other three claimed they got fifteen tanks between them. The Anti-Tank Platoon suffered about fifty percent casualties, but fortunately few were killed.

I have no picture of the overall battle scene; I was no doubt enveloped in typical Fog of War.

You asked if I minded talking about the battle. It was hair-raising and incredible, but only horrible because of the sight of dead cattle. The dead Jerries did not bother me; we had some of their infantry coming in close but our Bren Guns sorted them out. On our side there was tragedy and sadness but not horror.

You asked about the newspaper reports of the battle. Our earlier battles had been at Tessel Breteville and Le Manoir, where in late June we attacked but did not reach Rauray.

They slapped sulphur drugs on to my wound and left it alone for three days.

14 July 1944

I hope you realise that my wound is not very serious. I was only evacuated because they were anxious about infection.

What a bore for you sorting out my kit, but I do need a uniform down here. I shall probably get my kit together again just in time to set off once more to Normandy.

13th July 1944

There is considerable improvement in the wound, only being dressed once a day now, hopefully it will soon be sewing up time. The buzz bombs are causing a great nuisance.

I am wondering whether to try politics after the war to try to put some justice into the pay system in the forces. Fighting soldiers dying in their thousands in the teeth arms while staff officers behind the lines get special allowances.

23 July 1944 (Oxford)

Wound closing up well. Thinking about politics and the French performance in this war, and the fact that it was private, not government aircraft designers who produced our most successful fighters.

This is a 40-bed ward so no chance to indulge my taste in music. I eagerly await discharge.

The TS are now very under strength and I hope to hurry back to them and, perhaps get the Captaincy which the 88mm shell denied me.

Northern Ireland

This time I was posted to a battalion called the Liverpool Scottish. It was an affiliate of the Cameron Highlanders. The tribulations of my first CO who expected us to wear Tyneside rather than Black Watch insignia were as nothing to the problems of my new CO. He was probably the only person from Liverpool in the whole camp. The rest of us were Scots who were trying to return to our own regiments, Black Watch,

Gordons, Argylls and Cameron. The Liverpool badge and tartan was conspicuous by its absence, and I was sorry for the CO.

The Liverpool Scottish was part of a Training Brigade, stationed in Northern Ireland; I was given the job of OC Brigade Anti-Tank Platoon, which carried the rank of Captain, and once again enjoyed considerable independence as a specialist. It was something of a reunion with members of my first platoon, since many of them were posted to Ireland after recovering from their wounds. We had no difficulty in forming a good team. Now, however, we were training foreign students, officers and NCOs of the Belgian, and other European armies, as the tide of battle flowed towards Germany. The French speaking forces were not agreed about words of command in French. Bicycle troops, artillery, cavalry and infantry all used different words of command, so I decided to stick to English.

The Continental officers were charming, but it soon became clear that they had not been brought up on our philosophy that we should not ask the Jocks to do anything we could not do ourselves. There was one classic instance. Our gun detachment gave an excellent demonstration of how a 6pdr could be manhandled over the obstacle course. I then invited five Belgian officers to take over the gun and perform the same exercise but the gun did not move. I then reduced the demonstration team to three Jocks, who showed how easily a gun could be manhandled with three men. Once again the Belgians were handed the ropes and once again the gun did not move. We were up against a fundamental clash of cultures that was not going to be overcome by any amount of demonstration, or persuasion. Clearly Belgian Army Officers did not do manual labour.

There is not much more to be said about my military experiences. I never managed to get back into the fight. Banbridge, County Down, was a very cushy billet indeed. For the first time in my military life we were in purpose-built barracks, and the natives were extremely friendly, both in

town and the countryside. A well-to-do Quaker family with a large house, lots of land and horses to ride, adopted me and most weekends after Saturday parades were over, I cycled off to their house. It was a very hospitable household indeed, and since their men folk had gone off to war there was plenty of room for a guest. The ladies of the house were both musicians so that helped to cement the relationship. When I went on leave I was able to take Granny a vast quantity of the butter, eggs and meat that she could not get on her ration book in Scotland.

By the end of 1944, I realised that I was not going to get back into the fight. I had applied to join the Glider Regiment but had failed my medical on the grounds that my hearing was impaired. I seemed to be in a backwater, so I applied my mind to post-war plans and managed to synchronise one Army Council instruction seeking Staff Officers for Malaya and another ACI seeking candidates for the post-war Colonial Service.

The interview with the Colonial Office was daunting in the sense that I knew nothing about the Colonial Service. I later discovered that I was in good company, since according to academic research, most candidates tended to have been influenced by the film *Sanders of the River*: not by a deep study of the Service.

Now I found myself destined, at some unknown time in the future, for the Malayan Civil Service (MCS). It all looked very uncertain ground for an Infantry Captain who was a specialist Anti-Tank man and a Battle School Instructor, but at least I had secured a paymaster for the post-war years.

I had thought of, but rejected, the idea of seeking a regular commission in the Black Watch since I had no private income.

I was in Ireland when the Germans surrendered, and was able to contribute something to the local celebrations from my stock of 2-inch mortar parachute flares, and Verey lights. But soon I was in London preparing to invade Japanese-occupied Malaya.

PART III EASTWARD HO!

Journey to Penang

We travelled East in leisurely fashion, flying in Dakotas. The plane was fitted to carry airborne troops, with canvas benches running along each wall of the cabin. It was sufficiently comfortable to enable me to read the whole of *War and Peace* during the five-day journey to Karachi. After a short stay at Poona, where we played snooker and marvelled at the luxurious Mess, we set off on the railway across India to Madras. The Indian rail system was impressive. Every few hours we would stop for a meal at some station; the journey was hot and took three days.

Once in Madras, we were shunted off to a tented camp. Each officer had his own Bell Tent. It was red hot during the day. Our principal duties were to study Malay; the afternoons were free and gave me the opportunity to discover that swimming, and more importantly swimming under water, and diving, were fun. Until then the cold waters of Scotland had not encouraged me to learn sophisticated techniques; now I was actually enjoying the water, and it was a most satisfactory breakthrough, which paved the way for me to start all my children off as natural swimmers from their earliest months.

We took to the sea for the last lap of our journey. Singapore was pretty drab at this time, the scars of war everywhere. We were the last batch of Civil Affairs Officers to arrive and there were few jobs left. Amongst those jobs mentioned was one in the Refugee and Displaced Persons Department in Penang. Although this did not sound very exciting, at least Penang was an island; so I volunteered and the next day was on the train which limped north stopping frequently to find wood for the boiler. The journey, mainly through rubber and jungle, was an education. We were able to brew up frequently with boiling water from the engine, and to supplement our rations with bananas, pineapple and eggs,

which were sold at every stop by sarong-clad girls. The fourth day we finished up at Butterworth, across the water from Penang, and by midnight I was sleeping comfortably on my bedroll on the Railway Pier at Penang.

The next day I reported to Police Headquarters, where I was told to take over the camp on Pulau Jerejak Island; and so I set off, with my own launch, to my first independent command.

Pulau Jerejak was six miles from George Town; it had a magnificent view across the channel to Penang and to the North. The camp had been a pre-war immigration camp. At the southern end of the island there was a leper colony. My house was a tiny two-roomed cottage on a hill beside the jetty. Before the war it had been the house for the local Dresser, a cross between a male nurse and a chemist. The camp was already adequately staffed and administered, and needed little active intervention on my part. We had a Police Force of six Sikhs, whose turnout would have been approved at the Guards' Depot. They would have impressed me more had I not been conscious of the Sikh record during the Japanese occupation when some of them had become enthusiastic tools of the Japanese and taken delight in tormenting the allied POWs. The crashing salutes and servile speech served only as a reminder that "all that glistens is not gold".

The camp was a crossroads for Asian refugees from all over the region, and my knowledge of Asia improved rapidly as I sought ways of returning the inmates to their homes. Additionally, there was plenty of opportunity to use my Malay, since a large part of the refugee population hailed from the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia). I was delighted to find that none of the other officers in the R and D Department wanted my job, so I remained as king of my small island paradise for some months before, very reluctantly, I decided that I must agitate for a main line civil service job, as a District Officer (DO).

During this period I met my first wife, Peggy, who had come out as a member of the Women's Voluntary Service to

work on welfare for the troops. On one of my regular visits to George Town I spotted this Grace Kelly-like lovely, and managed to make her acquaintance. She was a jolly companion as well as a ravishing beauty and we had a lot of fun together.

On my island I created projects, including road building, to keep the inmates from brooding. There were no incidents to disturb our peaceful camp; until one day three Dutch Colonial Officers in military uniform, stepped on to my jetty. I had summoned the two Indonesian Headmen to meet the visitors, and to my astonishment and fury the Dutch ordered the Indonesians to squat and proceeded to harangue them. I cut the visit as short as I decently could, but in hindsight have often regretted that I did not send the visitors packing immediately. My only defence is that I was totally taken by surprise at their boorish behaviour; and, aged 23, too inexperienced to find an immediate riposte.

There were two consequences of this visit; the first was that my admirable Indonesian Headmen, having been reminded in so brutal a fashion of the colonialism that their fellow countrymen were fighting against, abandoned me. I presume they went off to fight with the Indonesian rebels against the Dutch. The second consequence was that, ever after, I had a clear vision of what the Indonesian rebels were fighting against. The Dutch attitude was in stark contrast to that of British officials in Malaya. Unfortunately in the West, all colonial civil servants have been tarred with the same brush.

There was plenty of time in this idyllic island life for language study, swimming, and canoeing. I used to paddle round my island for exercise, enjoying the basilisk stare of iguanas on the rocks, the antics of porpoises in the straits, and the beauty all around me. On calm nights, a balmy tropical breeze complemented a starlit and moonlit sky. On stormy nights, the waves lashed the jetty and one was hard pressed to paddle home.

Magical Malaya

*Hutang mas boleh dibayar
Hutang budi di bawa mati
A debt of gold can be repaid
A debt of the heart will always remain*

A huge moon bathed the sea in silver, so that each stroke of my paddle made a phosphorescent track in the wake of my kolek, and phosphorus dripped off the paddle blade.

Behind me my little island and a mile ahead a white beach, gently lapping waves, and palm trees. I had the sea to myself. I was on my way to a wedding feast where the local Malay Police Chief was celebrating the marriage of his daughter.

I dragged my canoe up the beach and joined my first Malay kenduri: the feast was, like the scene, magical and unforgettable and the whole evening, still clear in my mind after almost sixty years, epitomised the generosity, friendship and goodwill which characterised relationships in that tolerant society.

The feast was simple, but generous, and everyone was in his or her best clothes, sarongs of silk and gold and silver threads. The entertainment included a shadow play, and a gamelan orchestra, and dancing too. Not, of course, the decadent West's libidinous coupling but the swaying of partners, flirting by eye not by touch. This was the first time that I enjoyed the Malay version of Macbeth. It was a story they could easily relate to.

In April I said farewell to my life as a Staff Officer Civil Affairs in the Military Government and crossed the channel between Penang and Province Wellesley to act as DO Bukit Mertajam.

Before I left the Refugee Department I got this charming letter from some of my "clients".

Sir,

We, the Canton Refugees and Displaced Persons of Sungei Pinang, would like to take this opportunity in expressing our heart-felt thanks for your kindness and generosity rendered to us at this time of our departure, we will carry the pleasant memories of your good quality and keen interest in looking after our welfare, of which we will remember for ever and ever.

Once more we thank you and we wish you in every success in your career.

We your humble refugees

I rather like this letter. All the courtesy of the East even if the flattery is overdone. It is very heart-warming.

The Colonial Service

At the time of my Colonial Office interview I knew little of the Colonial Service I later worked out that it did not look for "Firsts", but for character. The Kipling ideal of wisdom, strength and courtesy perhaps sums it up. The handbook for interviewing officers advised "Look at physical appearance, cut of face, presence, eyes and mouth. Weakness may lurk in a flabby lip or averted gaze...an even temperament counts as well as a sound physique as a bulwark against the strains of a tropical or a solitary existence." Confidential files on interviews contained such phrases as "Heart definitely better than head"; "Speaks in a clear even voice". It was probably just as well that I knew nothing of all this when I went before Furze the Chief recruiter, or I might have been nervous.

Since few of my readers will know anything from personal experience of the Colonial Service, I shall divert for a moment. Our Service, unlike the French Colonial Service, was elite, overwhelmingly public school and Oxbridge. No one in my time would have said, as did one Director of the French Ecole Colonial, "I am asked a propos of recruits to the French Service, What crime must he have committed? From what corpse is he fleeing?" We differed from the French in our

philosophy of training. We had no Ecole Colonial but adopted the Aristotelian principle that the best way to learn to play a flute is to play one.

One other reflection; the Furze System of commonsense interview and careful use of referees, seems to have worked at least as well as the latest Whitehall systems of complex examinations, using batteries of psychologists, with a dash of social engineering thrown in. At least the Colonial Service had no one like the ghastly Shayler of MI5 slipping in. Without benefit of lie detectors and gimmicks, Furze had done well in selecting men for the Colonial Service who did not become traitors or corrupt. I digress, but I make the point because there was little understanding of the Colonial Service in Whitehall, although in my opinion we gave more devoted service for less pay and in less salubrious conditions, than many of our Whitehall colleagues, and did a much better job than the home public could understand. In any case we were determined to do the best we could for the local people, and gave minimal thought to the whims, fashions, and prejudices of Whitehall. How far we succeeded is quite another matter, but we were certainly not, as Whitehall imagined, persona non grata, in our former colonies. I went back to post-Colonial Malaya in two different jobs and on each occasion was welcomed as a long lost friend who knew their history, culture and languages unlike the modern birds of passage in diplomacy and commerce.

Cadet, Malayan Civil Service

*They grumbled a lot in Penang
There was no crime here under Japan
But the Police and DO
And the Magistrate too
Successfully banished the gangs*

Although I left my island paradise with regret, the time had come to start work in an MCS, not a military, job.

There is no need to describe the work of a DO since it has

been described in innumerable novels and more serious works. Like the rest of the post-war intake, I had no training whatsoever for the job, and no help except that of my subordinates. Fortunately we were all on the same side; we wanted the District of Bukit Mertajam to flourish.

I was infuriated at an early stage when my local Councillors, mostly Chinese, remarked that the crime situation had been better in Jap time. I took this as an intolerable slight on British administration. I was at the time Magistrate as well as DO and the local Chief of Police had accepted my invitation to stay in my large bungalow. We therefore had a wonderful natural forum for plotting the downfall of the local banditry. Many a night was spent in ambush, and the sentences meted out were severe; and very soon Bukit Mertajam was a lot more peaceful. I suppose that the banditti found it more comfortable to operate in some less ruthlessly administered District. I fear that the purists would not have approved of the Executive and the Judiciary being quite so close. The public, however, were happy. But all too soon my education in land revenue, tropical crops and so on came to an end. My elderly (30-year old) predecessor returned and I was posted to another job.

This time it was the unfortunate Resident Commissioner Johore who found himself landed with an enthusiastic but inexperienced neophyte. The job and the ambience were quite different. I stayed in the Residency and worked in the Secretariat. No more independent command and pre-breakfast raids on the market to keep the sanitary inspectors up to the mark, and no more ambush parties.

I was lucky in having a superior whom I respected, and to whom I could relate. The job was a mishmash: all the way from organising rice rationing to arranging dinner parties. All the papers passed through my hands and there was plenty to do; I had to rely heavily on the advice of the Malay State Secretary. Fortunately, he was an excellent teacher and a good friend.

I was by this time married, but very conscious of the fact

that I was in breach of Regulations; so Peggy stayed in Kuala Lumpur while I lived in Johore.

When the Civil Administration took over in April 1946, I had long since given up soldiering; I had learnt to be my own quartermaster and to live independently. Nevertheless, the formal transition to the civilian payroll was quite a shock. Suddenly there were a lot of bills to be paid for overheads. One allowance that I was going to miss was the Indian Army Fodder Allowance for my non-existent horse. I had one dust-up with the babus of the pay office in India. I had written to warn the pay office that I would be leaving the Army on March 30th and begging them to make sure that they did not pay me anything to which I was not entitled beyond that date. But soon we were in rancorous correspondence about money that they wanted me to repay. The sum of money was not great, but the principle seemed important. They never got their money.

My first civilian experience as DO Bukit Mertajam was financially painful. The house was large and expensive to run. It had been designed to house a senior DO and his family, not a bachelor cadet trying to live on a pre-war pittance, which might have been enough to sustain a junior bachelor officer sharing overheads with fellow Cadets in a Mess, but was ludicrously inadequate for my circumstances. I struggled to run the show on my shoestring with one cook 'boy'. He was a delightful Malay steward from the Penang Club whom I had persuaded to accompany me, but sadly Mohamed never learned the managerial skills required for his new, more complex, job. The financial contribution of my houseguest, the local Police Chief, helped, but even so it was difficult to stay within budget. The contrast between that reality and the myths about the colonial officials living high on the hog has been a source of irritation to me ever after. It was intensified when, during my post-colonial job hunt, a lady at the Labour Exchange in London told me that I would be very lucky to get a decently paid job since people in Britain thought we were a lot of loafers, sitting around drinking all day in the shade of

the tropical palms.

My irritation was not diminished when I discovered the shortness of the leisurely office hours of many of the London office wallahs, not to mention their vastly greater pay. Coming from a world where we were at the beck and call of government and the general public seven days a week if necessary, it was not amusing to discover the shortcomings of those who so falsely caricatured us.

My resentment about ignorant smears on the Colonial Service was further fuelled when I discovered that the Whitehall Warriors seemed to believe that we deserved the label bestowed on us by the Marxist Leninists, "Colonial Imperialist Oppressors"). The truth, as we shall see, was very different. Long before the race relations industry was created we were working with the locals in a spirit of mutual respect. If we were paternalistic at least we were friendly paters.

My finances became manageable when I moved down to Johore and stayed in the Residence. There was an excellent Chinese cook to whom the Resident and I both paid an agreed sum per diem: for which cookie contracted to feed us. This was an effective arrangement; cookie could make as much profit as he liked provided we were satisfied with our food, and there was no need for boring inquisitions into the prices paid.

The Residence was a fine classic colonial building set on a hillock with rolling lawns and superb views. The trees and flowers, frangipani, and canna lilies, coconut palms and so on, were familiar, but the well-tended grass and beds were in stark contrast to my previous shabby establishment. There were wide verandahs all round the house, my bedroom was spacious, and the high ceilings and large ceiling fans kept us cool. This was the only time in my colonial career when I lived in a style that would reasonably have led to envy in Suburbia. I was sharing the house of a minor Governor but for the lower ranks in the Service, housing was at best no more than adequate. Since amenities such as refrigerators and air conditioners were as yet almost unknown, we sweated it out in

office and house, and particularly in our mosquito nets at night.

The Public Works Department provided utility furniture made of ginger coloured teak or bamboo, and unless one had rugs and ornaments the quarters looked dismal. Since we were birds of passage (I occupied nine different quarters in eleven years), there was little incentive to work seriously on gardens. In any case, the poor soil would have required considerable enrichment, and the local gardeners were grass cutters not horticulturists. We could, however, always sit on our verandahs and, mosquitoes permitting, enjoy nature's bounty in the shape of the jungle plants around, even if the flowerbeds were unimpressive. After the short stay in Johore I never again enjoyed such elegance during my Asian postings; except in an occasional stay in Government House in Hong Kong. Consul General Shanghai gave me the space, but house and grounds were under-maintained; and the CG's house in Hanoi was in a very different league and scruffy to boot.

In the Johore job, I had, for a very short time, one delightful perk in the form of a beautiful, pre-war Jaguar two-seater open sports car. It was racing green, had deep leather seats, an impressively long bonnet, huge headlights and an engine that growled and roared most satisfactorily. The substantive Secretary returned all too soon and so I reverted to a humble motorcycle, fun on a fine sunny day but less so in a monsoon. I did not scramble back to the heights of the Jag until, aged almost fifty, I acquired a similarly impractical but highly satisfactory third-hand Aston Martin.

No doubt the Resident was relieved to have an experienced officer in the job again, and I was not unhappy to become Assistant Secretary. Although I think I did not drop any clangers, I was conscious that I was woefully short of experience and knowledge. The only job I remember getting a grip on was the organisation of a rice ration to combat the high prices created by the scarcity of rice in Asia. We got little thanks for this exercise since Asians have strong views on the quality of their rice, and our cheap imports were not

appreciated.

These few months provided a golden opportunity for me to pick the brains of my seniors who had been in Malaya before the war and could illuminate events such as the rise of Malay Nationalism, and personalities such as Dato Onn, the leader of the Malay Nationalist Movement. I also had the privilege of working with some first-class Malay officers whose knowledge and advice were freely made available to me. But, before long, I was summoned to Kuala Lumpur to sit a Chinese language test. I ignored the gloomy prognostication of my Malay-speaking seniors that I would ruin my career if I became part of the small, minority Chinese cadre, and their advice that I should fail the tests. I played fair and passed. Of course, as things turned out, my specialisation proved to be a lucky break. When I returned to Malaya two and a half years later, having passed my Chinese exams, knowledge of Chinese was, because of the Emergency, at a premium; my newly acquired language skills could be put to good use in a variety of new tasks, and earned me accelerated promotion. Later, when I had to find a new career, the language gave me a head start on other MCS officers who could only offer Malay. The moral of this tale is that one should make the most of whatever one is asked to do, rather than trying to predict the future. My seniors' well-meant advice assumed that I would have a career in Malaya and that Malaya would remain at peace. Both assumptions were wrong. So, having already learned enough Malay for practical purposes, including swotting over the Arabic script, I now embarked on Chinese studies.

Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Singapore

In late 1946 I was posted to Singapore as Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs (ASCA). Although we occupied offices in the old Chinese Protectorate building, we were but a small, pale reflection of the pre-war Protectorate. As a result of wartime policy decisions, (presumably based on the argument that the Protectorate was an anachronism, and that moreover,

it was anomalous to have a Chinese Affairs Department in a country dedicated to the advancement of the Malays), the Protectorate had been all but abolished. The Protectorate had been so called because one of its central functions was to administer the Protection of Women and Girls Ordinance, a law designed to protect immigrant Chinese women from prostitution rackets, child slavery and other evil practices associated with immigration from China. The Department had originally been born in the 19th Century to deal with the excesses of the Chinese Secret Societies (popularly known as Triads) that were creating havoc in Chinese communities throughout the region. A Mr Pickering was seconded from Hong Kong to investigate and make recommendations. He started from the point that the Hung Secret Societies had been a patriotic outgrowth of Ming supporters rallying against the Manchu usurpers of the Dragon throne in the 17th Century and were now basically welfare organisations which should be registered. He changed his mind rapidly when attacked in his office by a hatchet man who did not like the idea of barbarians attempting to control the societies. Mr Pickering's second draft outlawed the secret societies.

By the beginning of World War II the Protectorate had become involved in many fields, wielded considerable power and commanded the respect of the Chinese community accordingly. They did not, of course, command much respect from their Malay-speaking colleagues who tended to see them as mad eccentrics, outside the mainstream of government.

Under the new post-war dispensation, the principal powers of the Protectorate had been distributed to the Departments of Labour, Immigration, Education, Trade Union, Customs, Police, Registrars of Societies, Social Welfare and so on. We were left with little except our language expertise and a general advisory function, which was seldom used and probably of doubtful value since we had been cut off from most of our root sources. Otherwise, we were responsible only for such minor matters as monitoring Chinese imported publications, banishment enquiry and marriage disputes. I had

come to a backwater, but it seemed to me a viable base from which to pursue my language studies; and since, as the youngest post-war recruit in the MCS, I was unlikely to be allowed to command a District, I cheerfully accepted my posting to the minute Chinese Affairs Department.

Peggy came down to join me in Singapore where we were allocated one room in a large old dilapidated house, which had been split into four improvised flats. Our kitchen was in the back hall and the verandah was our dining and sitting room. It was hardly habitable when the monsoons raged. We had a Malay Amah (domestic help) to look after us. She delivered herself one day of the extraordinary line "A very rich Tuan (literally "Lord", the polite term used to address superiors) has come to live next door." When asked to explain how she knew that the new Tuan had "Banyak Wang" (lots of money), she replied, "He works in the Treasury." This was a pleasing reminder of the complete lack of understanding of our system. The idea that an MCS officer could just help himself to the money in the Treasury at will was doubtless a reflection of the flexible systems of old Malaya, before our bureaucratic approach was imposed.

We led a simple life. I was working hard on my Chinese; there was little social activity except the occasional film or drinks with a neighbour, and the Club was out of the question for financial reasons. Weekends were spent visiting the beaches in my ancient banger. I sang, as did my boss, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, in the Cathedral Choir.

The time flew. My job gave me the morning for language study, and the afternoon for duties concerned with the residual functions of the post-war Protectorate, particularly arbitration in marriage disputes, and Banishment Enquiries. It was all a great eye-opener. The marriage disputes arose basically because there was no registration of Chinese marriages, and so self-styled widows frequently disputed wills. The subject was enlivened by the fact that in 1926 the British Courts had ruled in a famous case known as the "Six Widows Case" that, according to Chinese custom, a Chinese man could have more

than one wife. The relationships were distinguished between first wife, secondary wife and mistress; it was our job to unravel the evidence. The cases that came before us for arbitration could engender considerable heat, and on occasion physical violence. I managed to avoid injury from any outraged lady.

One subject I dealt with was particularly difficult. In 1941, as the Japanese advanced triumphantly down the Peninsula, a Colonel Dally, then Head of the CID, had recruited a small anti-Japanese force from amongst Communist, anti-Japanese Chinese. By the time that I became involved, "Dalforce" had tired of asking for minor compensation and escalated their claim to a demand for full pay for the whole period of the war. The War Office had as yet offered nothing. I found myself frequently visited by Dalforce's leaders, seeking help. One day the delegation came to see me and suggested that, since I seemed to understand their point of view, it would be appropriate for me to lead their delegation to Government House. I declined politely. Meanwhile tempers were rising, and we had to walk in and out of our offices through increasingly hostile mobs. Eventually the mob got out of hand and there was confrontation with the Police in front of the office. I watched the proceedings with interest from my verandah, accompanied by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs; and Colonel Dally; both seemed very worried, and I had to calm them by supplying them with cheroots.

The moral of this tale, as far as I was concerned, was that one should follow the Latin motto, "Bis dat qui cito dat," or "He who gives immediately, gives twice." The cost to the British taxpayer would probably have been slight if a small, ex-gratia payment had been made when Dalforce made its first demands.

Investigations into Secret Society cases, and interviews with prisoners earmarked for banishment back to the land of their fathers, taught me the Chinese for "I do not know" in every Chinese dialect. It was remarkable what they did not know, but frequently they over did it and tripped themselves

up. These activities in the afternoons provided a useful addition to my formal studies as I listened to the interpreters at work. The interpreters were an excellent lot, and most valuable instructors, both on language and on Chinese culture; they were also good companions.

The language lessons were primitive. Every morning my teacher, wearing the traditional silk gown, would arrive in my office. He neither spoke nor read English and so, from the very first, conversation if any, had to be conducted in Cantonese, and written messages could only be transmitted in Chinese characters. For the first few weeks we were confined to lessons based on textbooks written in both languages. Each session always started with the repetition of tables designed to practice Chinese phonetics, and, of course, the fiendish tones. To begin with, I was totally mystified when teacher said anything. "Jo Sun" ("Good Morning") was not a phrase I recognised for some days. However, the method when supplemented by a reasonable amount of homework, was extremely effective. By the end of my allotted six-months, pronunciation and tones were automatic and I was able to talk comfortably to strangers in Cantonese, and fifty years on my tones and pronunciation have stood the test of time.

The written language could have been much better taught. I wasted a lot of time learning by rote (the Chinese way), when there were, in fact, many shortcuts which could have been used to speed up the process. I am eternally grateful, however, to the Secretary of Chinese Affairs (SCA) of the day who insisted that Cadets must use the Chinese brush and ink, not pencils, for written work. Although this slowed me down, it gave me a feel for Chinese calligraphy and painting that I might never otherwise have acquired.

The only project that I can claim as my own for the period in the Chinese Secretariat, was a book to standardise the Romanisation of Chinese surnames, so that non-Chinese civil servants could make a better job of recording names in official documents. The book was still in use in the 1960s in Singapore so it must have had some validity. The reason for

the book was that Chinese dialects can provide totally different phonetics for the same Chinese written character; thus Mr Ng (Cantonese), comes out in Hokkien as Mr Goh, and in Mandarin as Mr Wu. These differences, exaggerated by non-standard spellings, could lead to great confusion and worse.

Shortly after I had passed my first exam I was told, to my delight, that I would be sent to Macau to finish the job. The choice of Macau, a Portuguese Colony, puzzled many people, but it was a sensible one. Canton, the pre-war Cadet base was a shambles; and in Hong Kong there would have been a strong temptation to socialise in English-speaking circles. In Macau, however, you had to speak Cantonese or Portuguese, or stay silent.

Before leaving for Macau we managed to fit in a trip to Calcutta to visit my parents in their flat. It was fascinating to observe them in their Indian milieu. Father was what in Hong Kong would have been called a taipan, and very much the doyen of the jute wallahs, and mother was running an effective household with a traditionally large Indian staff, which seemed extraordinarily numerous in comparison with Malayan habits.

This was just before India became independent and there seemed to be a rising tension in the air. The most impressive performance was mother's charity shop downtown, from where she and a strong committee of ladies sold the arts and crafts of the hill folk to the Calcutta Mem Sahibs.

A Digression on the Chinese Language

The only serious problem posed by the written language is the time it takes to learn several thousand characters. But the logic of the structure is usually discernible, and the characters are clearly different in appearance. Thus for example: -

A **person** (a body and two legs, matchstick style))

To follow (one **person** following another)

A crowd (three persons)

Working on this basis I have often been able to teach enthusiastic beginners a hundred characters or more in an afternoon and to send them off happily, no longer totally "blind".

But the principal problem about learning Chinese is that the Chinese spoken language consists of single syllable words, most of which are homophones. Only context and tone will enable a listener to work out which of the homophones is being used.

We do, of course, have homophones in English as well, eg. to, two, too, which sound exactly the same but look different, or reign and rain, plane and plain, bow and bough, and so on. But in English such similarities of sound are not the rule but the exception. In Chinese, however, such ambiguities of sound are the norm. For example, my Chinese dictionary gives 97 words under the Romanised heading "JI".

The monosyllable "JI" can mean HUNGRY in the 1st tone, LUCKY in the 2nd tone, LOUSE in the 3rd tone and PROSTITUTE in the 4th tone.

Mandarin (now known as Putonghua) has basically four tones, but Cantonese has at least nine, which makes those of us who think in Cantonese not in Mandarin, sound like opera singers when we speak Putonghua in Beijing. Hilarious for the locals, but frustrating for the visitors. Quite a problem!

There is much scope for misunderstanding, amusement, or offence if the foreigner muddles up the tones.

The so-called "dialects" can be as far apart in idiom and sound as French and Portuguese. According to my last count there were over eighty officially recognised in China.

To illustrate the gulf between the dialects, "Where are you going?" comes out in colloquial Mandarin as "Qu na'r?" in Cantonese as "Hui pin shu?" and in Hokkien as "Keeta lu?" these seem rather greater differences than the dialectal differences we have in Britain when the Scot might ask

"Whaur" rather than "Where" or say "Hoor" instead of "Whore".

Father Ricci, the Jesuit, who was the first European to master Chinese, said in 1583, "In speaking there is so much ambiguity that many words (monosyllables) can signify a thousand things...there are more than seventy thousand of these words...but, it is helpful that they have no articles, cases, number, gender, tense or mood. They solve their problems with certain adverbial forms." Like Ricci I appreciated the simplicity, "Yesterday I go, today I go and tomorrow I go" are perfectly understandable.

Non-Chinese find it difficult to understand the phenomenon of a non-alphabetic language where every Chinese who is literate can communicate in writing, but often cannot understand the speech of a fellow countryman.

The best analogy I know is Europeans using Arabic numerals. We can all recognise 1, 2, 3, 4 but an English speaker says one, two, etc., a Frenchman un, deux etc and a German ein, zwei etc. Everyone with minimum education recognises the symbol, but each reads it with a different sound.

Macau: Sleepy Hollow

*Learning is like rowing against the stream:
You will go backwards, unless you work hard.*

Chinese Proverb

*In cheerful days there shall I feel less sad.
Contented too when all in gloom is clad.*

*The Portuguese poet Camoens,
writing about the grotto in Macau*

Hoi! Then silence and a palpable shiver went through the crowd, pressed around the table. For many it was a terrible moment: ruin staring them in the face. We were in one of

Macau's innumerable gambling joints, and the croupier was about to reveal the dice. The faces of the Chinese gamblers were desperate: many had been playing all day, and had already pawned everything they possessed in the shops conveniently placed outside. This time they might recoup their losses, or finally go under. Excitement, despair, triumph, relief, misery; all these were written on the faces of the crowd as the dice were revealed. "Sze Lok!" (Death!) says one as disaster looms. "Ho Ye!" (Good Show!) says another as his choice is proved right.

Life in Macau was uneventful. We would wander round the old cobbled alleyways and streets in the afternoons, window-shopping mostly since a cadet's salary did not allow for shopping sprees. The shopkeepers were happy to chat; and the artefacts in antique shops and the craftsmen in the furniture and ivory carving shops were all of interest.

Heather and Anne, my first two daughters, used to complain when they were little, that my sitting rooms were always like museums of Chinese art; but they too succumbed in later years, and Rory, who was an enthusiast from an early age, still buys pots with an alleged ancient lineage. All of us have enjoyed the chase for Chinoiserie. No one visiting any of the Stewart houses would need three guesses to arrive at the conclusion that we had all spent a lot of time in China.

Perhaps I would have been better served attached to a language school; but I certainly enjoyed the chance to get to know so many individual teachers, and thus becoming accustomed to variations in vocabulary, tone, pronunciation and voice. However, the system relied heavily on the self-discipline of the cadets. We were given a "Teacher Allowance" to spend on teachers, and I managed to hire five teachers under this dispensation. The first, Leung Himpo, was over 70: he had migrated from Canton where before the war he had taught Malayan cadets. He was a "character" and lessons with him were a delight. His brother, Ah Baak, was a puritanical pedant extraordinarily unlike his raffish elder

brother. This was useful since Himpo had no interest in the details of the syllabus. Then there was the solidly built, tall and dignified Mr Suen, whose father had been the Manchu General in command of the garrison in Canton before the revolution. He was neither a wag nor a pedant but a pleasant companion. Finally, there were two delightful ladies in the team, the daughters of Ah Baak, who fortunately did not share their father's pedantry.

With these five people I was able to pursue an interesting, and usually amusing, study of Cantonese. The system worked well in my case and called in question the conviction of our predecessors that the "sleeping dictionary" was an essential part of the education. Whenever I joined my bachelor colleagues in a bar, nightclub or dance hall in Macau, I found it easy to compete. I had the vocabulary, whereas their dictionaries were always open at the same page.

I am not sure how well-read Himpo was since we never got any further in our conversations than discussions on current affairs and society; and my written Chinese, although I could read perhaps eight thousand Chinese characters, was never good enough for me to tackle unseens with ease. The ripeness of Himpo's language reflected the breadth of his experience of the seamier sides of Chinese life. Whenever there was a knock on his front door he would shout, "Diu Na Ma, Bin Koh!" roughly translated, "Have sexual relations with your mother! Who is it?" I suggested that the "Who is it?" should precede rather than follow the ruderies, but he remained unpersuaded. His splendid flow of barrack-room invective stood me in excellent stead in later life if I met a Police Officer who assumed that we cadet students had only learnt to speak "posh" while they had learnt the real thing on the streets. On one occasion, late at night in my hotel bedroom in Beijing, an ex-Policeman, somewhat the worse for drink, made the mistake of suggesting that I only knew the posh language; a few minutes-worth of some of Himpo's choicest invective corrected his misapprehension. One amusing experience in Macau was the sound of the angelic little children of my

married colleagues conversing in the most extraordinary barrack-room style with the local Police at the entrance to their flats. Their parents, who were being taught by less colourful teachers than Himpo, had no idea what their children were saying; and I thought it better not to enlighten them.

One of my most memorable student expeditions was a two-day voyage on a traditional working junk that was part of the large fleet to be seen from our house every day. I had often watched the junks fishing; or lying at anchor in a huge arc on the horizon at dawn and dusk; sometimes gliding mysteriously through swirling mist, at other times their rusty red sails illuminated by the sun. Mr Suen managed to fix the introduction and I set off from the harbour one evening. The junk journey was uncomfortable in the extreme; the plank bed had no mattress, and the deck was very close above my head. When I crawled out of the sleeping compartment, stiff and sore the next morning, I was surprised to find that because of a heavy fog we were at anchor within a stone's throw of my house. The experience was certainly evocative. These were the typical all-purpose junks that pirates as well as every other sort of sailor had been using since time immemorial; the captain and his crew of horny-handed Cantonese fishermen were friendly, and happy to chat to the "red-headed devil" (Hungmokwai) who had invaded their junk.

The term "job satisfaction" was not yet part of my vocabulary, but I think that I would have been happy to accept such a description of my student days in Macau. The sense of history was ever present, while I revelled in learning a language with thousands of years' tradition and delving into Chinese culture with my Chinese teachers. I was determined to make the most of the opportunity to qualify as a Chinese linguist, although uncertain of the uses to which my new skills might be put. We were paid a pittance compared with our contemporaries in the business world, but it was a very considerable privilege to be given such an opportunity to soak, undisturbed by other responsibilities, in Chinese language and society.

Chinese aphorisms and proverbs provided a rich quarry from which to draw conversational advantage. On one occasion, talking to the millionaire father-in-law of my teacher, I raised my glass and tried out a newly learnt toast, "Doh Fook, Doh Nam Jai," which translates as "Much luck, and many male children," before moving on to discuss the difficulty of finding Shandong silk in Macau. The next day I found, to my astonishment, that a bale of Shandong silk had been delivered to my house. Since I was not in Macau as an official I had no need to spurn the kindly gesture, and I rushed off with the silk to a tailor, whose creation lasted me many years as my best tropical suit.

The Macau/China Border was less than three miles from our house, and since the Border guards were disinterested in visas and immigration matters, we could walk or bus into Zhong Shan County whenever we wanted. Not far into China there was a charming little walled village that looked much as it must have looked since Ming time, or even earlier. We were always welcome in the village of Tsin Shan, perhaps because the Portuguese never took Sunday afternoon walks into Chinese territory.

At Chinese New Year we set off to Canton as guests of a tobacco millionaire and enjoyed the privilege of celebrating the festival in a Chinese family. The food was, of course, wonderful, since the Cantonese have the best cuisine in China. We also experienced something of pre-Communist Canton, luxurious for the wealthy but miserable for the majority. The reality of galloping inflation was made clear when, as our boat docked, my host handed me a large bundle of Chinese paper money which, despite the many noughts to be seen on the notes, was only just enough to pay off my rickshaw puller for the short journey to the hotel.

These were days when every Chinese I knew had decided that anything must be better than the corruption, nepotism and incompetence of the Nationalist (KMT) Government of Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek. He had been a poor ally against the Japanese during World War II since he was more

concerned with fighting the Communists than the Japanese invaders; and the US's General Stilwell (Vinegar Joe), who had been appointed to work with Chiang, was totally frustrated by his performance. His unfortunate troops were badly led, badly trained, ill paid and miserably fed. None of my Chinese friends and acquaintances was pro-Communist; but all were totally fed-up with the Nationalists. In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that the Communists won, despite their unpalatable dogma. The Kuomintang (literally the party of the people of the nation) had, to use an old Chinese expression, "lost the mandate of heaven".

I cannot pretend, however, to have anticipated the Communist victory since I did not attempt to make a study of the political, military, economic scene, but concentrated instead single-mindedly on the task of learning Chinese. This approach may seem blinkered, but no one would have thanked me for an amateur intelligence assessment.

After every six-month's exam I set off on a trip to some part of the southern Chinese hinterland from which the Overseas Chinese of Malaya had migrated. These travels in the south paid handsome dividends when I was back in Malaya since I could speak from first-hand experience of their ancestral areas and thus strike a sympathetic chord with Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and Hakka alike.

Much of my travel was by aged buses, held together by ingenuity and wire; the tyres so patched that they seemed square when the bus stopped. The Chinese were unfailingly courteous; and always gave the front seat to the Gwailo (old devil) so that he could see the scenery as we rattled along the miserable country roads. The countryside was fascinating. There were waterwheels, rice fields, temples, and fishermen with their trained cormorants; and, in Gueilin, magnificent scenery of the classic Chinese variety with sharp limestone peaks all round. The hotels would not have rated even one star and were deficient in every respect, including fans and mosquito nets, although the hospitality was exemplary, and the simple food palatable; I fed on boiled rice, fresh vegetables,

and country soups. It was only at breakfast, where rice porridge was the staple, that I longed for bread.

When not travelling by train, bus or bicycle, I travelled on riverboats. These were extraordinary vessels. At a distance they looked like little liners with two decks. On close acquaintance, however, it turned out that the two decks were only four feet apart. There was no privacy of any sort. The passengers had a space on the shelf that ran the length of the boat, and it was a matter of chance whether you found yourself curled up alongside a smelly peasant or a pretty lady. These voyages gave excellent opportunities to widen my vocabulary and broaden my experience of Chinese rural society. A visit to Gueilin was my first experience of travel in China outside Cantonese-speaking areas; it was a revelation. My only means of communication was in writing; every literate person could read Chinese characters, but we could not converse: they only spoke Mandarin and I only spoke Cantonese. And when I made a journey to Fujian Province, calling on my colleagues who had been sent to study Hokkien in Amoy, I was struck by the fact that the Coltons' excellent Hokkien ceased to be any use as soon as we left Amoy town. The local sub-dialects were mutually incomprehensible.

In Amoy, the cadets were mired in administrative problems as a result of galloping inflation. Every day the value of the local currency fell dramatically so the withdrawal of cash from the bank and subsequent shopping had to be meticulously planned. I did not envy my Hokkien-speaking colleagues their administrative headaches; the decision to send the Cantonese students to Macau seemed eminently sensible.

Journey through South China

DIARY: Sunday, 19th Sept. 1948

The rain has come. My kit consists of a small army haversack containing spare shirt, shorts and socks and a pair of grass slippers. Toilet kit, a bottle of iodine, sticking plaster and now a plastic raincoat. Slung round my neck, the most important piece of equipment,

my camera; since the aim of the journey is to reach South China's most famous scenic spot, Guilin. The boat is what is called in Chinese a "Dragged Boat" commonly known by us as a "tow". It is a huge wooden barge strung with flags, chicken coops, pigs, monkeys and all sorts of livestock and food on the deck and roof. The centre of the barge is a huge cabin lined with double tiers of bunks down both sides. The modern conveniences are there though not quite in the European form and one does not need to be able to read the Chinese signs to find them! There is even a wireless that gives us Chinese and European music at odd moments. There is a lower passenger deck distinguished only from the 1st-class by an increased gloom and more food. In times of frequent piracy on the river the lower deck is the coveted place to sleep since the bullets fly mainly into the 1st-class. Private guards armed in the Wild West style guard the boat; we even have an American quick firer on our tub. I am seen off by wife and some of my companions, all very amused by the proximity of my berth to that of a glamorous Cantonese girl, dressed in the local most popular summer garb, black shiny silk pyjamas. On this boat the partition between the passengers is a plank of wood four inches high - hence the merriment.

3.30 p.m. we pull out. At first we are towed from the side since there is too much traffic and we move in crab fashion 2 miles to the Chinese Customs where we stop for search. Never a dull moment. First the ship's guards search us in case we carry arms, then we are searched by the Customs in case we smuggle. After about two hour's wait in the queue of "tows" we get off up river, our tug about 100 yards in front of us. The tug incidentally burns nothing but firewood, which is cheap in China; the rate of consumption is something terrific. They say it burns 100 piculs of firewood per hour, at 30 cents per picul. But I take this with a grain of salt. The river is about 100 yards wide, rice colouring the ground on all sides, the occasional picturesque village peeps out - no foreign influence or twentieth century buildings there. Each little village has its own watchtower or tower and its own little jetty or perhaps the entrance is up a creek filled with fishing boats of all shapes and sizes.

7.00 p.m. another of this rash of searchings. A small sampan pulls along side and a Weary Willie of the Salt Bureau comes along to see if we are smuggling salt. He looks as if he does not really care any way, and after about 10 minutes disappears unostentatiously in his little

sampan. It is now nearly dark, I have been practising my Cantonese on the ship's guards and they seem amused by the presence of a foreigner who can speak their language with any accuracy. The headman has been all over the Indies and seems to be genuinely fond of the British and very tired of his own government. All the other passengers I talk to seem equally aggravated by their government and complimentary about ours, although they do not like the sound of our rationing system.

A VIP Visits

Soon after I had settled into my Macau routine, the Daiyan (great man) came to visit me. Daiyan, Secretary of Chinese Affairs, Federation of Malaya, was the most senior Chinese Affairs Officer in the MCS; he was, I suppose, in his early fifties, and a good twenty years away from his days as a language student in Canton. When I brought him and our senior teacher Leung Himpo together for tea in my house the meeting turned into a nightmare since teacher chose to speak only in Cantonese, and it soon became clear that Daiyan understood nothing of what was being said. I do not know whether Himpo was deliberately manipulating the situation, or merely giving face to a senior official. The situation was highly embarrassing; every one of Himpo's demands was acknowledged by Daiyan with a bland "Mocho" (no mistake). Increased pay, cost of living allowance, and transport allowance were all Mocho'd. Finally teacher said "And you know I am an opium smoker, and unless I smoke expensive opium my muscles twitch, so I need an opium allowance." This too was Mocho'd. I could think of no way of correcting the situation without confronting Daiyan with the embarrassing fact that the cadet understood, while he did not.

When Daiyan left I was aware that he had left behind a time bomb, which might explode if Himpo seriously thought that the succession of Mocho's represented promises to pay. Next morning the bomb exploded. When I went to the door to welcome teacher after his usual morning visit to my next-door neighbour Alan Pugh, I found a furious little figure careering down the hill, silk gown flying behind. I asked what was

wrong. His slippered feet screeched to a halt and he said, "I am never going to teach an MCS cadet again! When I told Mr Pugh about all the things that Daiyan had promised me, he said, "Balls!"

It took some time to calm Himpo down. Finally, I offered to travel to his house and thus save his travelling expenses. Face was restored and we returned to our usual cordial relationship. Alan Pugh, whose normal hangover was, no doubt, responsible for his blunt reply, also managed to mend fences and, indeed, finished up living at the top of Himpo's little terraced house.

This storm in a teacup provided two useful lessons for life. The first that if one does not understand, one should not pretend, regardless of loss of face; the second that having passed one's language exams, one needs to keep practising. Daiyan clearly had learnt neither of these lessons, but they were now burnt into my mind. It was, of course, all too easy to rely on interpreters and translators and thus to lose one's hard won Cantonese through lack of practice.

When fifteen years later I went to China, as a diplomat, I was delighted to find that in official meetings, regardless of the language skills of the principals, both sides always fielded interpreters. In the business world, however, I observed that few businessmen understood the potential problems of "interpretation": most just assumed that adequate interpretation would somehow be forthcoming. Since neither they nor their Chinese interlocutors were in a position to monitor the standard of interpretation there must have been many a serious misunderstanding. I was able to persuade Rascal that we should build a team of expert interpreters, but most foreign companies failed to recognise the linguistic minefield.

In foreign negotiations when the Chinese side provided the interpreters, some unfortunate would be dragged out from written translation work to interpret on a subject and about a product of which he knew nothing. All, except the unfortunate victim, tended to be under the delusion that a four-year

language course in a Chinese Language Institute would suffice. In fact the best English speakers of my acquaintance were not the product of language schools or university courses, but self-taught people who had determined to learn English as a working tool. The language schools produced graduates who knew, at best, written English. It is surprising how many contractual negotiations succeeded despite this amateurish approach to interpretation.

Macau Experience

There were many lessons to be learnt in Macau. One was about the evil effects of unrestricted gambling. Amongst the cadets, Alan Pugh was the only real gambler. He would stake his monthly pay on the tables without hesitation, some months winning handsomely. At other times when the luck ran out he would lose his shirt and have to live on credit for a month.

Since I am not a gambler by nature my approach was different. I sometimes made an occasional foray into the gambling saloons, walking from one to another, rather as if playing holes on a golf course. There were over forty licensed gaming houses; the biggest a floating palace in the inner harbour, glittering with lights and mirrors, and crawling with gaudy dragons. Bouncers stood at the doors to keep out undesirables. The smallest were dingy rooms, badly lit and frequented by the very poor hoping to turn their misery into happiness by a lucky bet. In all the gambling houses the din was incredible and the atmosphere charged with excitement. Nearby, thriving pawnshops provided a reminder that while some were making a fortune, others were losing their shirts.

The most popular gambling game was Sikjai. Three dice lay inside a glass dome, which was covered by a black bowl. The croupier shook the bowl; the players guessed how the dice had fallen and placed their bets accordingly. Their simplest choice was Dai (big), ten or more, or Siu (small), eight or less; there were many other permutations and combinations to bet on. When all bets had been placed the croupier would shout

"Hoi!" (Open), lift off the black bowl, and then loudly declare "Dai!" or "Siu!" as appropriate.

Fantan was the other well-known game. This was a game where the croupier placed a rice bowl on top of a pile of beads, drew the beads to one side, and then used a chopstick to count them out, four by four. The players had to guess whether the count would find a remainder of 1, 2, 3 or 4 beads and make their bets accordingly. The simplest bet was "odds" or "evens". The excitement was tremendous as the croupier swiftly separated out the fours.

My system, if it can be honoured with such a title, was simple in the extreme. I would study the form, determine the run of the Sikjai (dice), or Fantan Beads, and start to play when there had been a run of three similar throws. I enjoyed the puzzled looks of the local gamblers who observed the Gwailo walking off with his winnings. If I won I walked on to the next gambling saloon; if I lost my predetermined sum I gave up gambling for the day. My approach to gambling was akin to my approach to smoking; I was in no danger of becoming an addict.

The first-hand experience of Chinese gambling dens was relevant to my Malayan duties. Unlike the Portuguese, whose Treasury relied heavily on the revenue from these dens, the British tried to control the notorious Chinese passion for gambling that could lead to terrible social misery and crime. Macau's little gambling saloons were amusing to the casual visitor like myself, but their effect could be catastrophic for families whose fathers would pawn all their possessions if need be, in the hope of winning a fortune.

Many years later Sally and I travelled to Macau on the overnight ferryboat and, arriving at dawn, went to the main casino since it was the only place open for breakfast. Round the tables were ashen-faced Chinese, male and female, who had been up all night, hoping for a last lucky bet. There were all ages and all types, some well dressed others in poor clothes; and all were desperate. The scene was Hogarthian.

After Daiyan's visit, I pedalled or walked daily to Himpo

for my lesson with him.

I got to know him better. His little house was dingy and undistinguished, but comfortable for our purpose. He slept downstairs in a tiny cell behind the front room that led straight onto the street. This little room had a small round marble-topped table and four marble-topped stools to match. This was traditional ornate Cantonese Blackwood furniture not designed for comfort. Guests had to sit up straight. Lessons always started with a tea ceremony where teacher brewed up in a glass retort, heated over a spirit lamp. Lessons were conversational since Himpo believed in leaving such boring subjects as set books to his colleagues. We spent much of our time discussing his pre-war life in the West end of Canton in Cantonese. He had led the exotic life of a rich well-educated gentleman; dandy, gourmet, connoisseur, and man about town. He had never married, although interested in the fair sex, and his tales of the high life were, to put it mildly, racy. There was little resemblance between Himpo and my gentlemen scholar tutors at Oxford, except a love of life.

A little Mui Tsai (slave girl) attended to Himpo's domestic needs, which included the preparation of his opium pipe twice a day, to be smoked in bed. Until he had his morning pipe he was not fit for conversation, and until he had smoked his afternoon pipe, after his siesta, he was not good company. However, provided that he had his two puffs on time he was an excellent companion and a lot less trouble to everyone than some alcoholics I have known.

I often reflected afterwards on the opium question. The developed world is convinced that the whole opium business was evil and the Chinese were convinced that the British had deliberately encouraged opium smoking in China to debilitate their nation (hence for example the Opium War, which preceded our annexation of Hong Kong). But in practice, taken in moderation, it did not seem to be any more harmful than an addiction to alcohol. Himpo and many other smokers lived to a contented old age; while labourers found solace in opium much as labourers in the West might take a few pints

every night. Moreover, after indulging, smokers drift off immediately to sleep; unlike heavy drinkers who may move through belligerence and violence before they pass out. The contrast between Alan Pugh's alcoholic reactions and Himpo's opium reactions was a vivid illustration of the point. I kept such thoughts to myself since they were anathema to any modern Chinese.

I did not try smoking opium until, the day before my Chinese finals in Hong Kong, I was afflicted with laryngitis and became almost voiceless. This would have been a nuisance whatever the language being examined, but it was a disaster when dealing with Cantonese and its umpteen tones. Himpo proclaimed that a puff of opium would be a certain cure. He was right. My voice came back immediately. The smoke tasted acrid but, disappointingly, produced no interesting side effects.

I could not help reflecting that the pre-war system, whereby Government sold high quality opium to registered smokers, had a lot to commend it; by driving the trade underground, we had made the drug exorbitantly expensive for the smoker, and provided a lucrative trade for opium smugglers, fat pickings for the secret society men in their protection rackets, and temptation to Police and Customs. We had signally failed to stop the trade.

The situation was somewhat analogous to the situation created by banning brothels, and making prostitution illegal. Society felt better; but the trade continued outside the law, to the great profit of pimps and secret society protection racketeers, while the risk to public health was much greater because the brothels and the prostitutes were no longer subject to licence and health checks. No doubt closing down the dens and making opium prohibitively expensive satisfied the consciences of the chattering classes, but no one found satisfactory alternative solutions. In Penang, our Buddhist-related efforts to help the addicts to rehabilitation hardly touched the problem. It is little comfort to reflect that all round the world the drug problem continues to present apparently

insuperable practical and legal issues.

It is easy to legislate for abolition and prohibition, but difficult to change human nature. The US experience of abolition of alcohol was a striking example of the gap between law and reality. The lesson did not, however, seem to have been in the minds of those who ordained the post-war colonial legislation, and Malaya suffered throughout my time in the MCS from the gap between theory and practice; the well-meaning attempts to abolish one evil served mainly to provide new opportunities for criminals. Such philosophical reflections were for the future. For the present, I took note that Macau society, which lived largely on gambling, sex, and smuggling and vice, did not present a pretty sight.

There was a major drama the week before my final exam. The small flying boat, which travelled daily between Hong Kong and Macau, was hijacked halfway to Macao by pirates; and after a shoot-out in the cockpit, the plane had crashed into the sea. The plane was, as usual, carrying a handful of passengers and a cargo of gold (I never understood precisely why but presumed it was to do with the needs of the Nationalist Government and their cronies in Canton). On this occasion most of the passengers were pirates. It was thought that there were no survivors but one of the pirates had survived, and his pretence that he was a shipwrecked mariner soon crumbled in the face of energetic interrogation by the Macau Police.

The pirate confessed all. The plan, which had unwisely assumed that the pilot would meekly surrender to the gunmen, had been to steer the plane to a lake in Kwangtung Province and steal the gold. This air piracy (perhaps the first in the world) was a relative of the piracies which had been endemic on the China coast from time immemorial, but because it was an air hijack it was the main topic of conversation in Macau for many days, and at all my lessons we discussed the latest information about the crime. Thus, when I appeared before the Hong Kong examiners for my final oral exam and they asked me to discuss the hijack, I was in clover. I had learnt all sorts

of new vocabulary about aircraft, and piracy and was able to give the board a fluent account of the affair. The examiners, much to the irritation of my pre-war colleagues, gave me the highest marks ever given to a cadet and a "great commendation". My older colleagues said that they thought this was something only awarded at a flower show. Their judgement that only bachelors should be sent as language students had been proved wrong; in fact, all the married students did better than the bachelors during my time!

Having been given such high marks in the oral exam, I was emboldened to correspond with the Chief Examiner, a highly respected Cantonese scholar, on the complicated subject of tones. I said that I had developed a theory during my two years of study that for practical purposes it was only necessary to use four tones; the rest would vary from person to person, and according to local custom. I explained that I had adopted this theory in my own studies, and was therefore surprised to find that I was commended for accuracy of pronunciation in the exam although using only four tones. The examiner assured me that although I might have thought I was only using four in fact I had been using thirteen.

I managed to persuade the Malayan Establishment Office to let me stay on for an extra six weeks after my finals, on the specious grounds that the house might be lost to the cadet fraternity if I did not remain in occupation until a successor arrived. My plan was to spend a few weeks on a self-designed crash course in Mandarin. My "quick fix" conversion course from Cantonese to Mandarin was based on an analysis of the basic changes in the phonetics. Although the system worked, my Mandarin pronunciation was never perfect. Because I had not spent a month on its tones and phonetics, I was never more than an adequate Mandarin speaker.

*Portuguese used to rule in Macau
'Cos they were prepared to kowtow
And great profit was made
From China Coast Trade
But Hong Kong took that trade from Macau*

For centuries Macau and Canton shared a monopoly on trade with China. Hong Kong did to Portuguese Macau what Singapore did to Malacca. The history of the Portuguese occupation of Macau was very different from the British occupation of Hong Kong. Throughout their four centuries the Portuguese frequently bowed the knee to the Chinese who treated them as tenants occupying Macau by favour of the Chinese.

The Colony had an Indian summer during the war, when Japan allowed Portugal to maintain its neutral status; but once Hong Kong was free, Macau returned to its somnolent state, and an economy based on vice and gambling, rather than trade or manufacturing. I reflected often during my stay in Macau on the sad fate of this once great outpost of the Portuguese Empire, and wondered whether a similar fate awaited the jewels in Britain's Imperial Crown.

Return of the Wanderer

*Oh wad some power the giftie
gie us to see oorsels as others see us*

Rabbie Burns

The Customs Officer at Dover looked askance at the thin, sunburnt young man with a British passport and dressed in a long fur-lined Chinese silk robe. Was this a monk, or a priest with only a haversack for baggage? "Where have you come from?" "Singapore!" was the answer, and the Customs Officer proceeded to go through the contents of the haversack with a fine toothcomb. He was not used to respectable travellers without serious luggage. Reluctantly, he gave me back my passport and waved me through.

*Grim visaged war has smoothed his wrinkled front.
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber to the lascivious playing
of a lute.*

Shakespeare Richard III

But this was only a temporary respite from the Dogs of War.

I had left China's Civil War behind; the World War was finished, but now in Malaya a vicious civil war (known as "The Emergency") had erupted. Communist, mainly Chinese, armed terrorists versus the rest. Objective: boot out the British, destroy the Malay establishment, and impose Communism on a plural society, mainly Muslim, but including Hindu, Buddhist and Christian.

Fifty years ago we took it for granted that a tour of duty overseas would last for four years or more. Of course, until the advent of the modern passenger aircraft there was not much option if leaves were not to totally disrupt business. During the course of my fifty-five years of overseas service I went from three-week voyages by sea to twelve-hour flights by Jumbo Jet, and from four-year separations from my parents, to meetings six times a year with Rory. When I first joined the Foreign Office, the tours were already shorter and split into two halves, and the children flew out once a year at Government expense.

Although the benefits in family terms were immense, we inevitably became less absorbed, involved and probably less expert in local affairs, as visits to the UK became ever easier. The shorter tours, and the frequent switch from country to country spelt the end of detailed knowledge of territory and language that was the natural hallmark of the Colonial Civil Service. And since the Consular service had been abolished, there was no longer a corps of Foreign Service officers whose whole careers were spent in one region.

The changes were good for families but not for the breeding of experts. The broad generalist was the convenient model, not the regional or the country specialist.

It is widely accepted that a sea change took place in the

relationships between the British and the locals in India once British wives came on the scene. Senior officers like General Ochterlony, with a harem of thirteen Indian wives who paraded behind him on elephants as he took his evening ride, were no longer *comme il faut*. The Indian Mutiny had added to the problem, and the aeroplane took the process a stage further by allowing parents to become commuters. Asia was no longer home. They had less interest in the society in which they lived. *Eheu fugaces! Oh tempora, oh mores!*

My last sea journey was in 1960. After that, although still technically entitled to travel by sea, I never used the privilege: sea voyages hardly fitted the image of the keen officer putting duty first. But there were many advantages to sea voyages. You arrived fresh, having had time to read in and study a new language. Alas, such unquantifiable benefits could not weigh in the balance against speed of air travel.

ASCA Singapore Again

After leaving Macau, we spent a few happy months living in the old Coq D'or Hotel in Singapore, while I worked once again as ASCA. I bought my first car for about £100; it was a minute 500cc Fiat Topolino, into which four people could squeeze, provided everyone was young and a contortionist. It was a most effective little car.

We then sailed home on a cargo passenger ship. The voyage was a joy for anyone who liked the sounds, smells and sights of the sea; flying fish, dolphins, white bow waves, technicolor sunrises and sunsets; the food, the swimming pool and library excellent. Being a good sailor, I enjoyed eating a hearty breakfast in the empty dining saloon when the weather was bad. In short I enjoyed every moment of my first long sea voyage.

Our first stop was Ceylon, already independent. There seemed to be lots of Ceylonese speaking most excellent English, and nostalgic for the well-ordered days of the Raj. I fell in love with Ceylon; it had all the charm of Malaya, and a

great deal more history.

In Egypt, I remember the embarrassment of being accosted by an urchin who offered me his sister, brother, "feelthy pictures", which he produced proudly from the pocket of his grubby nightgown, and finally "Spanish Fly". I was nonplussed when the sweet, unworldly vicar's wife in our party asked for an explanation of what was on offer. I took cowardly refuge in pretended ignorance.

I had been studying Italian during the voyage in the optimistic hope that I might be able to get by linguistically when we landed in Naples. I soon discovered that book knowledge did not constitute a basis for conversation. The Italians had no difficulty in understanding my questions but I had the greatest difficulty in understanding their answers. But at least I was not, as the Chinese would have said, "blind". I could read signboards and something of the newspapers.

The arrival in Italy was an exotic experience for a backwoodsman who had never been anywhere in Europe, except to Normandy as a soldier. Now I found myself in a cradle of Western civilisation. We made the most of Pompeii and Herculaneum, as well as Rome itself. We then entrained for Milan, where we visited the Opera House.

In London I picked up a Standard Vanguard car, a roomy and effective vehicle of so unlovely a shape that the Chinese likened it to a coffin. I employed an AA driver to drive me out of the strange metropolis to the suburbs and then drove past Whippsnade, to Aspley Guise, where my parents, when they came home from India, had bought Aspley House; a Queen Anne gem set in an idyllic small park, with ha-ha and cows to the front and the village church spire peeping over the top of a ten foot wall at the back. This was a delightful homecoming. The parents were well dug in, the furnishings reflecting my mother's unerring good taste and many years of collecting rugs and other oriental artefacts. The garden was in fine shape; orchard, trees, herbaceous border all tended by two gardeners under my mother's expert supervision.

I did not know, however, that a financial time bomb had

been planted in this apparent paradise. Father had been persuaded to invest in the property, (cost, *mirabile dictu*, £10,000) by the plausible husband of a close friend. The idea was that the friend and his wife would occupy one wing of the house, and the husband would work with my father to run a market garden that would pay for the gardeners and general overheads. The cost of production in the newly erected, expensive greenhouses, had been correctly calculated at sixpence each cucumber, and the consumer in Covent Garden was, indeed, paying two shillings and sixpence. But the middlemen took two shillings. This was cloud cuckoo land. If my father was already aware of the gloomy financial implications for the future, he did not spoil paradise by telling my mother or myself. As before, when he was in bad financial trouble during the slump, he did not involve us in his worries.

Part of my leave was spent in Oxford, on a short course called the Second Devonshire which had been devised to give a broad brush education in Colonial matters to the post-war entry. As always on such courses there was as much benefit to be derived from discussion with fellow students as from the lectures. I managed to persuade the Director that my special subject should be law, and was thus able to start studying for the Bar. I never finished my studies because I found on return to Malaya that the Emergency and the irregular hours entailed were not conducive to academic study, but knowledge of the jargon of the law and its principles came in useful later in many situations. I particularly enjoyed the curiosities of the law of tort.

The return to Oxford after nearly ten years was a great joy; playing in the university orchestra, fencing and introducing Peggy to the university, and I took my M.A. degree basically to amuse the parents with the great ceremony, conscious, of course, of the fact that I had not passed my Finals. I had a "War" Degree!

The time flew and we were soon packing for our return to Malaya.

Kuala Lumpur (1950)
Pride comes before a fall!

"Will you interpret for Li Lihua?" "Of course: delighted." Thus unwittingly I dug myself into a deep hole at a lunch party for a very lovely Chinese film star, Li Lihua. My Chinese friends had invited me to sit next to the guest of honour, and seeing that I was happily conversing with her in Cantonese, proposed that I should act as interpreter when she spoke after lunch. I agreed without hesitation to this flattering invitation. This was a disastrous experience. The courtesies were easy enough to translate, but as soon as Lihua moved on to discuss her profession and the finer points of the film industry I was lost. The vocabulary was totally outside my experience and I was forced to fall back on such useful phrases as "Dui m ju, Teng m do" ("Sorry I did not hear that"). Fortunately, the kindly Lihua twigged and helped me as best she could. This was indeed a lesson for life. The Macau incident, when Daiyan pretended to understand Himpo had taught me one lesson, and now I had learnt that interpreting was a specialist job, for which one's normal language training did not necessarily provide an adequate qualification. I never again attempted extempore interpretation.

The return journey to Malaya had been a disaster. Peggy was pregnant and the sea voyage made her very sick so I took her ashore in Bombay where Doctors ordered that she should travel the rest of the way by air. We set off in a Flying Boat, stopping in Madras en route, before finally touching down in Singapore.

Once we were settled in the old Majestic Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Heather, for it was she, ceased to make her mother violently sick. The hotel sat across the road from the famous Railway Station built by the Public Works Department (PWD) in ornate Islamic style and backed on to the Lake Gardens. Our room overlooked the gardens, and we had to be careful about opening windows, or the monkeys would join us and pinch

whatever they could. The standard menu in the Majestic was a British breakfast but starting with a slice of papaya; at lunch and dinner, mulligatawny soup or Brown Windsor followed by fried fish or curried chicken. There were two puddings, Gula Malacca (sago and coconut milk with brown sugar sauce), or caramel custard.

During my absence on the Devonshire Course, my fellow language students were scattered round the country, working on resettlement to remove the Chinese farmers from the jungle fringes. This was a huge programme designed to separate the 12,000 armed Chinese Communist Terrorists (CTs) in the jungle from the rural Chinese who, whether voluntarily or through fear, were providing food, medicine, and supplies to the CTs. Naturally the rural Chinese did not much enjoy being removed from their farms and market gardens and put into New Villages and it was easy for critics, such as Victor Purcell, a retired senior pre-war Chinese Protectorate Officer, and the popular pro-Communist writer Han Suyin, to take the line that the New Villages were concentration camps. The Chinese-speaking MCS Officers had to try to change the climate of opinion and persuade the New Villagers that the programme, however unpleasant in the short term, was for their ultimate good. Since the CTs had no doubt that the programme was strangling their supply lines and opposed resettlement with every means at their disposal, the Resettlement Officers had their work cut out, faced with the natural resentment of farmers removed from their land and forced to live in cramped conditions in New Villages. While the programme was in its infancy, with schools, medical centres, and trees yet to come, the villages surrounded by barbed wire, and the villagers subject to curfew and food controls, the Communist propagandists had a relatively easy task.

My first job was not at the centre of the maelstrom. I had been posted to the Selangor State Labour Department as Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Chinese). My principal responsibilities were to monitor labour conditions and labour

relations, to enforce the Workman's Compensation Ordinance and to arbitrate in labour disputes. One of my jobs was to adjudicate between angry Chinese Amahs and their dissatisfied Mensahibs. This was singularly unrewarding. But settling industrial disputes was worthwhile. I have Press cuttings to prove that in several strikes I succeeded in persuading the two parties to compromise. I well remember the statement of one of the Chinese employers who told me that he was prepared to improve wages, but not to operate at a loss, and this was the principle on which I adjudicated in the light of common sense.

Of all my tasks, Workman's Compensation was the most rewarding. Most of the employers seemed determined to delay or, better still, refuse payment of compensation to injured employees; I was determined to change their attitude. After a few ding-dong battles in the courts, the employers began to realise that it was cheaper to pay up than to fight the Assistant Commissioner. Of course, the employee was not always right, but more often than not the big battalions were using their weight unfairly to reject reasonable claims. My campaign did not make me any friends amongst the rich Chinese, or, indeed, the European managers, but I did not need friends in those quarters. I derived great satisfaction from seeing that justice was done, and hoping that workmen would spread the word that this part of the colonial legal system was not rigged in favour of the "Capitalists".

Although my work was not directly concerned with the Emergency, my visits to tin mines and rubber estates enabled me to contribute something to the general intelligence picture. I travelled frequently along the rural roads, but I had no brushes with the CTs, either because I never told anyone in advance of my plans, or because the CTs had more important targets. But I was champing at the bit to move from Labour affairs to Emergency issues. My immediate superior, the Deputy Commissioner for Labour Selangor, was one of the pre-war MCS cadre who had been sent to Madras to learn Tamil, in order to deal with the small but important Tamil community that supplied most of Malaya's rubber estate labourers. He was not a ball of fire, indeed, his nickname was Pehahan pehahan (slowly, slowly) and he did not

seem to be greatly concerned with the Emergency; perhaps he saw it as the concern of the Chinese cadre. However, he did not object to my activist habits, and did not interfere. On the first floor above my office, the panjandrums of the Federal Labour Department were to be found. The Commissioner, another Tamil speaker, was to be seen drafting lengthy documents, but there was no sign that he was any more engaged in the Emergency than my master downstairs. The Federal Deputy Commissioner, however, was a fellow Scot, David Grey, whose temperament was more akin to mine. He was interested in the Emergency and I recruited him, so to speak, as an ally. We became good friends, amongst other things regular golf partners, and I was thus able to bypass the Tamil speaking hierarchy and let it be known to the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, a Northern Irishman called Bingham, that I was anxious to join his team.

The Labour job was not without interest. On one occasion I was able to join the Hearts and Minds campaign, when the RAF accidentally dropped a bomb on a block of labour lines in Selangor. Since these were Tamil labourers they did not strictly come within my purview, but I sensed that Pehahan pehahan was not going to make any waves about the disaster, and would be content to leave action to the central bureaucracy. Although the bomb had killed and injured Tamil labourers, there seemed to be no sense of urgency in Government about paying compensation. The accident was, of course, meat and drink to the enemy propagandists and played into their hands, but the bureaucrats were letting the matter fester. The Secretary for Defence of the day, Watherstone, gave me audience despite my junior rank, and to my delight authorised me to pay the Tamils some *ex gratia* compensation immediately and I was able to carry out a useful major propaganda exercise, with the Press present to watch me paying the Tamils. Apart from the satisfaction of having persuaded Government to help the labourers, I was particularly pleased to have been able to prevent a recurrence of the Dalforce type fiasco. The Latin motto "Bis dat qui cito dat" (He gives twice who gives quickly) proved right as usual.

ASCA Federation

After a few months, I was rescued from my Labour backwater and posted as Assistant Secretary for Chinese Affairs (Federation). Although the title was the same as in Singapore, the job was totally different. Indeed there was no routine task. The SCA gave me no guidance and I found that my predecessor had spent most of his time in the field, engaged on resettlement programmes around the Federation.

Thus I found myself with an office, a desk, and a telephone, but no charter. I decided that my core objective should be to try to bring together the scattered elements of the fledgling, reborn, Chinese Affairs Department. It had grown like Topsy in response to ad hoc emergency requirements; but the Federal SCA with his tiny Chinese staff of translators and interpreters, had not concerned himself with organising a Political Intelligence Service to capitalise on the growing expertise of the MCS officers in the field, who were spending their days amongst the Chinese community.

My first initiative was to call for monthly reports from the senior Chinese Affairs Officer in each State. I wanted to establish a system so that the SCA's advice might be well based. Bingham did not disagree with my ideas and so, for the first time since the war, there was a monthly Chinese Affairs Report. I was, however, aware of the political minefield in which we were operating, and the need to avoid clashes with the State Governments, who were less than enthusiastic about the re-establishment of a Chinese Affairs Department. The officers in the field had titles like Assistant State Secretary or Resettlement Officers; these titles hardly had the ring of the pre-war Daiyan (big man) Protector of Chinese, and most State Governments liked to keep it that way. However, it was difficult for even the most unregenerate anti-Chinese State official to challenge the idea that the Chinese-speaking cadre should provide intelligence to the Federal Government.

I had, of course, put a rod in pickle for my own back, because the production of a monthly Federal Chinese Affairs Report was a major chore. I could only deal with it by laying aside the weekend at the end of each month and incarcerating myself in a small room on the top of my garage, surrounded by all the reports and any other relevant raw material. I added to my workload by commissioning a Press Clipping Service on developments in China, and started to study Chinese Communism. I have no idea whether anyone ever read my monthly reports, but the work gave us a solid base from which to advise the Government on developments in the Chinese community. I have no doubt that this was pretty turgid stuff but, since I have been unable to find any copies in the PRO, the exercise remains in the mists of time. Anyway, it was good for my education. My colleagues in the field were not entirely pleased to be forced into monthly reporting, but it was clearly nonsense that the Federal Government should be denied access to this unique source of political intelligence, so I persevered. The SCA could now speak with more authority on Chinese Affairs.

Probably the most useful task I carried out was orchestrating the establishment of the Chinese Language School that we set up in the Cameron Highlands (the premier Malayan hill Station), to remedy the almost total lack of Chinese speakers in the Government Services. I was involved in finding teachers and planning the syllabus. It was highly satisfactory to hear classes of non-Chinese chanting most authentically, after a few weeks' instruction; some of our pupils went on to become considerable Sinologists.

Social life was quiet, but by some happy chance I became involved with two members of the Establishment Office with whom I played regularly in a string trio. Laird was the pianist and Mowat the cellist while I provided an uncertain violin line.

I had brought with me to Kuala Lumpur the Webster wire

recorder, which I had bought in Macau, on the pretext that it would significantly enhance my progress in Mandarin. I did not increase the sum of human happiness when I introduced my wire recorder to our trio. The wire recorder was good at reproducing speech, but a disaster for music. It seemed to be extremely accurate in pinpointing every inaccuracy in our performance, while incapable of reproducing any warmth of tone. The pianist and cellist looked pretty glum when they heard the recording and I did not try that technical experiment again.

Malacca: Not such a Sleepy Hollow Running dogs and Colonial Imperialist Oppressors

The SCA was enjoying the ride back in his open sports car, the wind in his face countering the searing heat of the afternoon sun. It had been a good day in the New Village; construction was going well, and the villagers were cooperative. He was travelling along the narrow road out of the village; it was a typical un-metalled Malayan side road, wending its way through rubber trees, the verges covered in tall lallang grass. As Gerald Jolly slowed down at a corner, a section of men in jungle green emerged from the ditch and opened fire. Gerald slumped dead across the wheel and the car careered off the road. He was an obvious target for the terrorists; they did not want Chinese speaking MCS officers making friends with the rural Chinese population; and he was an easy target since he could not have done his job if he had waited for an armed escort every time he visited a New Village.

When Gerald Jolly was killed in the ambush, I readily volunteered to take his place and was soon posted to Malacca.

We drove from Kuala Lumpur in our car to Malacca Rest House, with baby Heather occupying the back seat in a basket. I was delighted to be in Malacca for many reasons. It was my first semi-independent field job since the Bukit Mertajam

days; Malacca was full of history, indeed it was the earliest of the European settlements in Malaya, and above all I could now contribute directly to the fight against Communism. I got the maps out immediately to study the resettlement situation that would dominate my programmes.

The Rest House was a pleasant old-style single-storey building, fronting onto the Padang (grassy square). Our roomy bedroom and verandah looked across the Padang to the Malacca Straits. Although the seafront was muddy and unexciting the old city was charming. The roofs presented a sea of faded red tile above ancient shop houses and merchants' mansions. In the centre the old walls were red. The old Stadt Haus, now the Secretariat, and the remains of the Fort stood at the bottom of Malacca Hill facing the Protestant Church across the square. The Hill was topped by a ruined church and was surrounded by the remains of the Fort, originally built by the Portuguese, then captured by the Dutch, then blown up by the British at the end of the Napoleonic War before being temporarily handed back to the Dutch. Malacca had once been an important Islamic entrepôt commanding the Straits; now the other Straits Settlements, Singapore and Penang, had totally overshadowed it. My office was a huge, cool, room in the Dutch State House.

We were able to occupy a small, 18th Century house on the back of the Hill very quickly, because there was little competition for old houses. And so I walked every day to and from my office across the Hill, enjoying the panorama, which included the waters of the Straits. The roofless church on the hilltop which I walked past as I came and went to my office contained the remains of St Francis Xavier; against its walls lay the gravestones of the Portuguese conquistadores, but the Portuguese names had been obliterated, and now the stones commemorated the Dutch. At the south west of the hill just to the right of my house, stood the remains of the 16th Century gate to the fort. It would have been a dull dog indeed who did not sense the history in these surroundings.

From my office I could see the remains of the harbour and

look across the old bridge and the river towards Jonker and Heeren Streets where, centuries before, wealthy Chinese families had built roomy mansions in the Chinese style, backing onto the shore of the Malacca Straits. Across the square lay the Protestant Church and the roofs of the old town. A fine view indeed; fortunately, I had to get up from my desk to look out of the window or I should have been seriously distracted.

Once again I had no charter although an obvious priority was the New Villages. I was very conscious of the fact that my predecessor had been killed in an ambush after visiting a New Village, and determined to ensure that I did not give the CTs an easy target. My visits were either unannounced; or, if I had to attend some ceremony, I went with an escort. Sometimes I visited around curfew time and stayed the night to show the flag and a spirit of solidarity. The CTs never knew when to expect the SCA, and I never travelled without my revolver, fully loaded, by my side. This was a controversial practice: many were of the opinion that there was no point in carrying a weapon, but I saw no reason to travel unarmed. There were frequent reminders of the CTs' ambushes in the shape of burnt out vehicles lying by the road, and it was difficult to be sure whether a patrol on the brow of the next hill was friend or foe; but I was never ambushed, so never had the opportunity to test my military skills against the CTs.

For the first few weeks I spent a lot of time in the New Villages. It was no one's fault that they were lacking greenery at this early stage, however the lack of schools troubled me.

I had yet to discover the attitude of my Resident Commissioner to the rebirth of the Chinese Affairs Department and to persuade him that if I was to make any serious impact on the Chinese community I needed the title, and status, of Secretary for Chinese Affairs, not, like my predecessor, the title of Assistant Secretary (C). I soon recruited the RC to my cause, and had not only the title of SCA, but also a place at the "Head Table" as a member of the Municipal and Settlement Councils.

Having raised the profile of the SCA, I set about identifying friend and foe amongst my colleagues. The Chief Police Officer was not well disposed but the rest of his senior staff were on side. The OC CID rapidly became a close ally, partly because I interpreted for him in his most sensitive cases. Before my arrival there had been a serious language problem if Chinese agents, whose Malay was almost non-existent, insisted on being handled by expatriates.

But close relations with the Security forces were not enough. I needed the goodwill of the DOs too. By great good fortune Jonathan Cave, who was in charge of the three Districts in the Settlement, had been a fellow student on my Oxford Devonshire course, so I started with one friend.

This cultivation of fellow officials and their recruitment to my cause may sound cynical, but it must be remembered that as SCA I had no executive powers. Even by the end of my stint as SCA the signboard outside my office still only mustered a few Poo Bah titles such as Registrar of Adoptions, or Protector of Women and Girls, which were hardly the stuff to suggest that the SCA had any authority. Any influence had to come from persuasion, using "mirrors and smoke" to disguise the lack of legal sanctions. We were "paper tigers" as far as executive powers were concerned.

Malacca was a small Settlement and I could reach any of the villages within about an hour. I drove constantly around my territory in my new Standard Vanguard to meet the rural leaders, encouraging them to think positively about the government's plans. I listened sympathetically to the country folk's aspirations and difficulties. It was not difficult to empathise. Naturally the farmers were displeased to be taken off their land, subjected to curfew, food regulation, and forced to make a long journey to and from their fields every day. Many of them probably found the CT tax by way of demands for supplies less irksome than the daily long march we imposed on them; and promises of future improvements in education and healthcare probably sounded like pie in the sky.

Rural leaders were terrified, knowing that if they were

thought to be actively supporting the government they would certainly be killed by the CTs. I was very conscious of their dilemma. Nevertheless, somehow I had to persuade our rural Chinese that their best hope for the future was to help us to root out the Communists. It is easy to criticise the Chinese community for sitting on the fence, but important to remember the special risks we were asking them to take.

While I was cultivating the government officials and rural Chinese, I also had to study the Chinese leaders of Malacca Town. The principal Chinese groupings were related to the ancestral home in China. Each place had its own Huiguan (Association Hall), clan, or district association. There was also a Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Chinese Trade and Guild Groups, and schools and temples had their leaders and organisations too. My wide travel in South China as a language student paid handsome dividends. I had been to their homelands, sometimes to their hometowns.

There was a lot to learn while seeking to identify which of my prime targets were influential in their community, and which were most likely to respond to my overtures. The ice was thin: over-selling of the government line would make me no friends amongst the Chinese, while over-enthusiastic presentation of Chinese ideas would lose me credibility in government circles.

Fortunately the ice held and, since the Malacca Chinese gave me two huge blackwood boards as a farewell present (the boards were the traditional presents to Chinese officials in China) and later I got accelerated promotion to Penang, perhaps I got the balance about right. I derive much pleasure from the fact that I do not know any other non-Chinese who has been given such boards as a farewell present.

Apart from the traditional Chinese organisations there was the newly formed Malayan Chinese Association. This was an organisation encouraged by the Government to bring the Chinese under one umbrella in order to fight the CTs. The leader of the Federal MCA, Tan Chenglock (later knighted as Sir Chenglock Tan), was a patriarchal figure, from one of the

oldest Straits Chinese families. He lived in a large mansion in Heeren Street when not travelling around the Federation drumming up support for the anti-insurgency campaign. His son, Siewsin, later a Minister of Finance, was Secretary of the local MCA.

The MCA was clearly a prime target for me. Although I had no difficulty in forging close links with their leadership, there were plenty of bones of contention in a society where most Police were Malay, the Government Malay, or Malay oriented, and the Chinese were seen as rich interlopers, who were not pulling their weight. I had to listen to plenty of complaints which the Chinese leaders never attempted to investigate before passing them on to the "mother and father official". Twice in Malacca, Chinese complaints led to major rows, when the officials concerned accused me of "Always taking the Chinese side", but most colleagues accepted that I would be doing less than my duty if I did not pass on allegations of Government malfeasance for them to investigate. The Chinese squatters were a major source of difficulty; they liked to move through the jungle slashing and burning to clear well-fertilised plots; and then, having taken all the goodness from the soil, and eroded the hillsides, move on to clear another hillside.

Some of the Chinese leaders like Tan Chenglock were courageous and interested in teamwork for the public benefit. Splinters from a CT bomb launched while he was addressing an inaugural meeting of the MCA had wounded Chenglock and some of his colleagues.

I suspect that we tended to underestimate the amount of moral and physical courage that was required for a Chinese to take a strong public stand against Communism. Chenglock and his colleagues in the towns survived. Some leaders in the countryside, who daily ran greater risks, were less lucky.

Chenglock was a good man, but severely handicapped by his Baba (Straits Chinese) background. What little Chinese he knew had been learnt from household servants, and he could not read Chinese, so he was at a serious disadvantage when

facing recent immigrants with scant knowledge of English or Malay. In the English-speaking world I concentrated on the Tans, father and son, but most of my closest Chinese contacts were non-English speakers.

Sir Chenglock accepted me as a friend and adviser, and I frequently helped him compose his speeches: (a fact that I did not disclose to my superiors). It was almost a relationship of Private Secretary and Party Chief. There were, of course, limits to what I could persuade him to put in his speeches. I failed, for example, to persuade him to fight the stupidities of extremist Chinese educationalists. It needed a Lee Kuan Yew to attack such sacred cows.

The posting to Malacca was a watershed in my Colonial service career. From now on, I was working in a quasi-independent role, with the opportunity to use whatever experience, linguistic, cultural, bureaucratic, and military I had acquired. My Chinese Affairs role was closer to the world of the Indian Political Service than that of the MCS. It was a political intelligence, not an administrative job; but it was Chinese chieftains not tribal chiefs of the North West Frontier that had to be wooed.

I had minimal administration since my budget was tiny, and no elected politicians to answer to, or committee work requiring endless paper. Having later had a spell in Whitehall where everything had to be committed and subject to second-guessing by senior mandarins and by politicians, I realise how fortunate we were to have had such freedom. Of course, the critics of colonialism complain that we had too much power. But the Mother of Parliaments was the ultimate arbiter of what we did and how we did it. We were, I hope, a species of benevolent despot, controlled by a strict rule book; and the system seemed to work well enough, so long as the Colonial Services recruited the right sort for the job. And there were enough Britons prepared to work overseas for little pay but getting enough job satisfaction. The system certainly worked a lot better in terms of the development of the local people than most of the post-Colonial systems, which were devised as

analogues of Westminster parliamentary democracy, but generally turned into one party dictatorships where the rule of law ceased to exist, and corruption, nepotism and cronyism conquered all.

This was my eighth job in eight years; Refugee Department in Penang, DO Bukit Mertajam, Secretary to the Resident Johore, ASCA Singapore, Language Student, Assistant Commissioner for Labour Department and ASCA Federation. All these jobs contributed to a sense that I was no longer flying blind.

I adopted a policy of not bothering my superiors: I informed them rather than asking them for decisions. I had, I suppose, already sensed the fundamental truth that there are three possible answers to a request for permission; "No," "Perhaps" and "Yes," and that therefore, if one asked, the odds were two to one against. My policy seemed to work well enough; my seniors were spared the burden of unnecessary decision-making. Action was expedited without the obstructionism of committees, where the members are unlikely to know or care as much about a scheme as its author, whose personal reputation is at stake.

I was not what the Whitehall establishment would have called a "sound officer" in the terms of the trilogy: "I am sound;" "You are making waves" and "He is rocking the boat". I did not automatically accept the received wisdom. Of course one had to proceed with extreme caution when challenging the system. I was, later in my government service, encouraged in my philosophy by a chief who said, "I will back you a hundred per cent provided that you can show me that your actions were based on adequate homework; I am fed up with officers who always want me to do their thinking for them."

My Malacca time was heavily influenced by the arrival, as High Commissioner, of General Templer. Although he was not Churchill's first choice for the job, I doubt if anyone could have done it better. I have seen in the PRO files a copy of his letter of acceptance of a job that many would have seen as a

poisoned chalice; his only stipulation was the eminently reasonable one that he needed a clear brief about Britain's future political intentions. He was a remarkable character, full of energy, with a mass of varied experience behind him; military, political, intelligence, and bureaucratic. A gifted leader with a keen sense of humour, but a hard taskmaster for those who did not measure up to his high standards.

He certainly had "fire in his belly", as a burglar who tried to invade his neighbour's house in London found out many years later to his cost. Templer, long since retired, charged out to counter attack. The story ends, perhaps apocryphally, with the whimpering burglar asking for police protection.

Harold MacMillan described Templer as: "A man of genius, an Elizabethan character, full of romance and charm mixed with command. One of those rare men whose presence filled the room, so that it seemed that there was no one else in it when he was there." Templer's meeting with his senior officials, immediately after his arrival, typified this style. "I thought you had better have a good look at me and I at you." He pretended to be a simple soldier talking to experienced civilians. However by the time he had told them of his tour as Military Governor in Germany; his time as Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) and Vice Chief of the General Staff (VCGS); his familiarity with Cabinet meetings; and his days with Churchill, the audience had not the slightest doubt that their new chief was a highly experienced and sophisticated officer who could and would act decisively with the full backing of the Prime Minister.

Templer had decided three priorities: (i) Intelligence, (ii) Reorganisation of the Police, and (iii) Public Relations, telling the people what the Government was doing. Field Marshal Montgomery's contribution to the appointment had been a pompous minute to the Colonial Secretary Lyttelton, "We must have a plan: secondly a man. When we have plan and man we shall succeed: not otherwise." Lyttelton remarked, "I too had thought of this."

Templer was the right man. His arrival was a breath of

fresh air to youngsters like me, not long out of the Army, who were interested in action. Officials were expected to find immediate answers to problems, not to proffer excuses; and action was required immediately not "in the fullness of time". He was greatly welcomed and respected by my generation, and I continue to be a hero worshipper. Years later whenever I met Sir Gerald in London, usually on Sunday mornings at the Guards Chapel, there was always warm recognition. My last encounter with this wonderful warrior was at an MCS dinner in 1978, when I was about to take over my plantations job in Kuala Lumpur. Sir Gerald greeted me with, "Hear you're going back to Malaya Brian! Lucky Devil!" That seemed to me to epitomise the man. We had a High Commissioner who was interested in everything, including his junior officers.

Sir Gerald recognised the difficulties, as well as the importance, of finding a formula that would bring the Chinese on side, without alienating the Malays. Somehow the Hearts and Minds campaign had to engage not only Malay hearts but Chinese hearts as well. I was lucky that my posting to Malacca coincided with the arrival of General Templer. He immediately saw the need to do more to bring the Chinese into the team, and so appreciated the potential of the Chinese Affairs Department.

Templer introduced many new measures. One of them was to recruit Psychological Warfare (Psywar) experts to complement the tasks of the Information Department. Although the Malacca Psywar man was not strictly under my command, since we had the local experience and knowledge that he lacked, he quickly became a member of my Chinese Affairs team. Together we worked hard, alongside Police and Military, to attack morale, induce confusion and encourage surrenders in the enemy camp.

We had considerable success in inducing surrenders. All the leaflets promised the bearer safe conduct. The surrender leaflet would often contain a picture of the latest surrendered CT feasting cheerfully in the bosom of his family. This type of message was directed at miserable CTs, ill fed, unpaid, poorly

clad, short of medical supplies and out of touch. It was particularly effective if the happy guzzling Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP) was a former senior Communist who had been exhorting his comrades to make sacrifices for "the cause". The leaders of the CTs were sufficiently worried by our surrender leaflets to make possession of a leaflet a capital offence.

In pursuit of our propaganda and Psywar objectives I founded a Chinese language monthly, *The Fortress*. This was hard labour and, of course, there was no certainty about the efficacy of my journal, but we tried everything. A more important Psywar gambit, for which I claim credit, was what became known as the White Area Policy. It seemed to me that since the Security Forces were gradually winning the battle and the terrorists were gradually losing their strength, we had an opportunity to reconsider the need to bring further rural areas under the full panoply of the Emergency restrictions (food control, curfews and so on). When the Security Forces wanted to bring Central Malacca District into line I suggested that we should instead announce that, because of their loyal co-operation, the people of Central District would be spared, and that other Districts could earn their freedom by similar co-operation.

Predictably, the Military and Police members of the War Executive committees were not enamoured with my proposals. Of course they found it easier to work in an area where the restrictions were in force; moreover, they complained that it was not true that the people of Central had earned their freedom by cooperating. However, I suggested that there was little to lose by leaving Central alone temporarily and making a propaganda point to confuse the enemy and their secret supporters. When I mentioned my idea to General Templar he saw the point immediately and directed that we carry out the experiment.

After he visited Malacca in September 1953 to declare Central District "white", he wrote to Whitehall, "The concept has been a great success." Six months later half of Malaya had

been declared 'white'. I have noted with amusement that several people have claimed credit for the White Area idea: success has indeed many parents.

At an early stage I had decided to do something to improve the horrendous state of the rural Chinese schools. The system was basically that Government paid for Malay schools and a few English language schools, while the Chinese community funded the Chinese language schools. In Malacca many rural Chinese schools were a disgrace: makeshifts cramped above village shop houses. I had noted this as I drove around Malacca in my early days and determined to do something to improve the situation, not only because it sat ill with our efforts to woo Chinese Hearts and Minds, but also, I must confess, because I thought our education policy was fundamentally flawed. It seemed clearly wrong and, indeed, dangerous, to adopt so cavalier an attitude to the education of thirty-five per cent of the population. There was nothing I could do to change the policy but I could at least try to improve the Chinese schools in my bailiwick.

I had no difficulty in exploiting the Chinese culture card to persuade the leaders of the Chinese community that something should be done. They proposed a Chinese Education Fund that would derive its revenue from a voluntary cess levied on all rubber and rice leaving Malacca Settlement. Only one company, East Asiatic, objected on the reasonable ground that they were already paying their official taxes; they came to heel, however, when the Chinese heavies reasoned with them.

The Chinese culture card, plus the offer of a name-board for patrons made it easy to get land out of Chinese rubber estate owners. In short order we had all the pieces in place for a major drive to provide new school buildings and playing fields throughout rural Malacca. With the help of the Education Department and the PWD, we drew up plans for a standard classroom module. The concept was simple and would have won no prizes in a design competition, but it allowed us to build at a fraction of the cost of the normal buildings. (It cost under a hundred pounds per classroom).

Aesthetics only affected the subject of roofs. I had a strong objection to rusty corrugated iron roofs, so the choice was either aluminium, or asbestos sheets dyed the Malacca terracotta colour. There were no ceilings; pillars and walls were concrete, and the windows were wire mesh. Primitive indeed but effective. There were no cost overruns or delays. Our only disaster was with one aluminium roof that was partly torn away by a tropical storm. We learnt a lesson about cutting costs by using light gauge aluminium. Over ten years later, it was highly satisfying to return to find our schools maturing gracefully, playing fields in action, and lush Malayan plants all round.

I did not bother either the Resident Commissioner or the SCA Federation with any details of this operation. I informed them that the Chinese community had decided to raise a Chinese Education Fund and that in the interests of the Hearts and Minds campaign I would help them to replace their scruffy schools.

There was an amusing coda. Many years later I revisited Malacca and called on my old friend, mentor, and assistant Wong Koonyuen, who had, of course, played a major part in the project from its very beginnings. When I asked him about our Fund, he said "Oh, I recently burnt the books because Special Branch sent a team down from Kuala Lumpur to investigate what they called "The Communist" Education Fund. They asked me whether I could remember how it all started."

In fact the Fund had closed down long before because it had accomplished its objectives. The Special Branch approach was a reflection of a very common attitude towards Chinese educational matters; they were easily seen as troublesome and probably Communist sympathising Chinese educationalists. Few paused to wonder whether it might not be sensible to take a more constructive attitude to Chinese education. Premier Lee Kuan Yew bit on this bullet in Singapore insisting that all communities should share in a common education system.

Another of the SCA Malacca's contributions to the Hearts

and Minds Campaign was a series of civics courses designed to bring some understanding of government philosophy and policy to Chinese leaders at village level. Villagers were assembled for a week's residential course in Malacca town where they met Heads of Departments, were lectured by Chinese staff and were housed and fed at the expense of the MCA in Association buildings. The finale of these courses was a visit to Kuala Lumpur to take tea with Lady Templar at King's House.

I am not certain how I got away with this ploy, but it was yet another example of the amazing enthusiasm of the Templars. Whatever else we achieved with these courses, we made it difficult for the subversives to claim that the Colonial Government was anti-Chinese, and no doubt the villagers dined out on their experiences, even if their understanding of the government process was, perhaps, lacking in depth. It was a good thing that I was operating outside the normal government channels since any committee would have given such ideas short shift, with objections about setting precedents and questions about how to deal with jealousies outside Malacca or, indeed, amongst non-Chinese. The General agreed without consulting any committees.

Another SCA Malacca initiative was to seek some means of inducing Chinese to volunteer for the Police Force. The lack of Chinese in the uniformed ranks was an old problem. The uniformed rank and file Mata Mata (eyes) were overwhelmingly Malay; the Chinese were commissioned officers or plain-clothes detectives. This did not matter much in peaceful times but the Malays were justifiably incensed that their sons should be risking their lives fighting the predominantly Chinese terrorists, while the young Chinese continued to go safely and profitably about their normal business.

My initial appeals to the Chinese community met with the bland response that Chinese tradition was opposed to service in the armed forces. They quoted the old proverb "You do not use good steel to make nails or good sons to be soldiers." I

told them that I knew that proverb well but nevertheless, a solution must be found. I continued to badger the MCA about this and eventually they changed tack and said that police pay was inadequate. This gave me the chance to say, "If low pay is the root of the problem, surely you can subsidise the families of those who volunteer?" To my delight the MCA reacted immediately to the idea that families might be persuaded to forget the old proverb if they were subsidised; no doubt my idea carried historical undertones of the old Chinese system where conscripts paid poor men to take their place in the Army. The MCA eventually promised to subsidise the families of every Chinese from Malacca who became a Police Constable. When the next recruiting team came down to Malacca they were astonished to find many Chinese applicants. The team commander asked if I could explain this strange phenomenon. I contented myself tongue well in cheek with, "This is after all a Straits Settlement and these are the Queen's loyal Chinese."

The MCA solution had two useful effects. Firstly, it was discomforting for the Communists to see a sizeable number of Chinese, whatever their motivation or calibre, volunteering to serve in the security forces; secondly, it took some of the heat out of Malay resentment. As far as I know the "powers that be" never discovered the real reason for the newly found enthusiasm of Malacca's young Chinese for uniformed service, and I did not enlighten them.

All was not serious work. On one occasion I found myself in charge of Malacca's contribution to an Exhibition of Arts and Crafts in Kuala Lumpur. Alas, the ancient Settlement was singularly lacking in such things. Unlike Java and Sumatra across the Straits, Malacca no longer gloried in a rich local tradition of carving in wood and stone, weaving and dyeing cloth, painting and so on. Nor did we have silversmiths and kite makers. I scoured the Settlement for suitable exhibits without success. It was clear that I would have to invent a Malacca handicraft or our stand would look very empty. I decided to go for models of traditional boats, and no one in

Kuala Lumpur challenged me as to the provenance, or guessed that they were "one-offs" made for the occasion to the order of the SCA by friendly Chinese boat builders. I wonder where these beautiful models finished up.

During the Coronation celebrations I had the opportunity to watch a tug-of-war team of Malacca stevedores in action. They were short, broad and as strong as oxen and were pitted against a team of guardsmen, tall, excellently drilled but less muscled. There was no contest; the stevedores just turned round, put the rope over their shoulders, and walked away. The unfortunate Guards, heels dug in, rope held in front and commanded to "Heave!" slid inexorably forward to defeat. I was reminded of the performance in earlier days of my diminutive but tough Jocks who behaved in much the same fashion when, throwing the drill book to the winds, they ran the 6pdr straight over each obstacle.

Social and Family Affairs

We had little private social life, but there were many formal occasions since I was now a Settlement Councillor. My first dinner party at Tan Chenglock's house was highly embarrassing. I had not received a card to inform me about the dress code and turned up in the shirtsleeve order that was "de rigueur" in Kuala Lumpur, to find everyone else in dinner jackets. For the rest of my life I have adopted a policy of over dressing; one can always remove tie and jacket.

One of the guests at this first dinner was Tengku (prince) Abdul Rahman, head of UMNO the comparatively newly formed United Malay National Organisation, and the future Prime Minister of Malaya. Tengku was a well-known "card"; he had spent many years in the UK preparing for his bar exams. According to the wags, "fast girls and slow horses" had impeded his academic progress. Whatever the truth of these allegations, there was no doubt about Tengku's charm and urbanity. He was a Muslim of course, but not of the strictest variety. To my delight I found myself sitting beside

him at dinner. We had met briefly in Kuala Lumpur when he was a junior in the Attorney General's Department. During a lull in the conversation, I asked him about the exact words used in the Koran about alcohol, knowing full well that he was no teetotaler, "Ah! Brian," he replied, "It's really quite simple; the Koran says you must not drink intoxicating liquor, so as long as you do not become intoxicated you can drink what you like." Encouraged by this Jesuitical observation, I asked him to comment on the Muslim view of dogs. Having observed that many town Malays seemed to be allergic to dogs, "Ah! Brian," said the Tengku, "It is not true that dogs are considered to be unclean animals. There is a story of a prostitute who gave a drink to a dog lying by the roadside who was dying of thirst and she was rewarded for her good deed by a place in Heaven." There was a third question I should have like to ask him since I knew that he had acquired a taste for bacon and eggs during his prolonged stay in Britain, but I thought I had better not push my luck on the subject of the eating of pork.

Such opportunities to meet the great and the good came often since Chenglock as the leader of the MCA played host to a stream of VIPs.

The European community was not large. Most of them were planters living outside in the Districts. The Swimming Club, an offshoot of the Malacca Club, was our social meeting place. It was a primitive but friendly little thatched affair near Tanjong Pagar (fenced promontory) some miles up the coast. Its parent, the Malacca Club, was a two-storied traditional colonial-style building between two Padangs (open spaces), sitting only a stone's throw from my little Dutch house. The town club was seldom used except for parties such as St Andrew's Night.

Some of us tried hard to change the Club Rules so that locals could become members but the majority were determinedly opposed to reform. I managed to bring Asian guests to St Andrew's Night celebrations when I was Chieftain over the objections of some of the old lags, but I made no dent

in the general determination to keep the Club for expatriates only. A meeting called to debate the issue filled the Club to overflowing with backwoodsmen and the heat generated by the conservative opposition was a lot stronger than that generated in the Athenaeum about proposals to allow lady members. General Templer was so incensed by racist rules in the Lake Club in Kuala Lumpur that, when he was told that he could not bring Asian guests to dinner, he issued an ultimatum: "Change the rules in twenty-four hours or close down."

Our house was small and even with the assistance of the PWD who built an extra bathroom in the hillside garden, it was a tight squeeze with two small children; but I preferred the sense of history and the convenience of the walk across the hill to my office, to a larger house in the expatriate ghetto outside the town. We were two minutes' walk from the Padang and five from Malacca's central square. I moved in the second half of my tour to a slightly larger single-storied bungalow further along the bottom of the hill, but we were never tempted to move out to the ghetto.

We had a Chinese couple from Hainan to look after us. Cookie was no saint, but he was a masterly presenter of Western food. He was wasted on us since we were not in the business of formal entertainment. His wife was a saint; she had a brood of her own, and we never understood how this angelic creature found the energy to look after our household as well as her own, since her husband, the cook, never lifted a finger beyond kitchen and dining room duties. Another puzzle was how this incredibly hardworking lady managed to preserve her beautiful Madonna-like looks. The Madonna, whose name I have long since forgotten, came down to Singapore to see us off on our leave boat, and there was a most harrowing scene when she bade my two little angels farewell. Tears streamed down Amah's face and I suspect I had a lump in my throat too.

Annie had now joined the party, born in Malacca. Occasionally, as I walked about the town during office hours, I

would bump into my trio: Peggy pushing Annie in her pushchair with Heather toddling alongside. Most evenings we would drive to the Swimming Club and I took great pleasure in teaching the girls to swim. The children were put in the paddling pool where they splashed, crawled and learned to put their heads under water. As soon as they were confident under water, I took them to the big pool with air tubes round their arms, as I thought rubber rings dangerous, because children can slip through them and they inhibit free arm movements. We soon had two water babies in the family. The only teaching required was to persuade the submariners to come up occasionally for breath. I was particularly interested in helping the girls across the "underwater barrier", which had so limited my enjoyment of swimming until I came East.

These were idyllic times for the little girls and as far as I can remember, no one had any serious illness. The only difficulty I remember concerned my attempt to give baby Anne a larger playpen. I fenced in the whole verandah surrounding the sitting area so that she could romp without being involved in the complexities of the sitting room. Anne would have none of it; she jumped up and down behind her fence and complained loudly until she was allowed to join the adults.

It was a very satisfactory posting and, as usual, I was sorry to say goodbye.

*The merchants of ancient Malacca
Prospered greatly and grew ever fatter
But as Singapore thrived
After Raffles arrived
Poor Malacca quite ceased to matter*

*Once the Sultan controlled the whole Straits
And all shipping paid tax at his gates
But now brash Singapore
Not Malacca of yore
Is the paramount power in the Straits*

Malacca gradually lost its domination of this maritime trade route between East and West, and when Sir Stamford Raffles, against the wishes of London, established the Settlement of Singapore, Malacca became a backwater.

Home again to Aspley (1954)

"A first rate country for second-rate people."

I had now learnt that this quotation, attributed to Noel Coward, and the entertaining stories told by Somerset Maugham were as far as most Britons' knowledge of Malaya went. Back in Britain, except in conversation with my parents who had tropical experience, I knew better than to talk about Malaya. Already the British scribes saw our role in pejorative terms: oppressors, occupiers and exploiters. This sort of uninformed view would have been less irritating had post-war Britain shown itself more capable of truly democratic and social progress. It seemed to me that we were doing a job of which we could be proud. We were not ashamed of being Colonial Civil Servants.

This was the first leave with "foals at foot" as Juliet Allen would have put it. We travelled back on the Dutch passenger ship *Oranje*, and a tip to the chief steward secured us considerably better cabins than the Malayan Government had paid for. We wended our way through the Suez Canal, called in on Aden and managed to avoid bumping into our sister ship the *Willem Ruys* that we passed going the other way in the Mediterranean; and all too soon, the cruise was over and we were disembarking on a cold grey day in Southampton. Heather and Anne were not at all used to winter clothes and at an early stage, when I was conferring with customs officers about our baggage, they whipped their woollies off and I found them nearly naked on the quay.

My parents were delighted to catch their first glimpse of their granddaughters and had made all snug at Aspley for

them. Arrangements included the hiring of a fully starched Norland Nanny, Miss Nelson, who took immediate charge and brought extraordinary order to life in the nursery. The daily walks with her two little charges were an amusing sight. Miss 'N' knew exactly how to maintain good order and military discipline apparently without effort, and her small charges slept in extraordinarily calm fashion in their beds. On Miss N's day off however, the little angels returned to a more boisterous life. The beds became crumpled and nursery meals noisy.

I did not know at the time that this was our last time at Aspley. Father was still putting a brave face on the economics of the market garden upon which the running expenses of the place depended, but the writing was on the wall. Granny had made a very beautiful garden and house but the market garden was a commercial flop. It was a comfortable country house lifestyle and I enjoyed helping father in the garden and making things in the outside workshop. Peggy I fear did not much enjoy the long stay with her mother-in-law. They had very different interests and philosophies and I was conscious of the tension, which I could do nothing about except to take Peggy away from time to time.

Before I left Malacca, I had registered an interest in Penang, with my seniors. With Singapore and Malacca under my belt I was better qualified for a Hokkien-speaking, Straits Settlement posting, than any of my contemporaries in Malaya, and I promised to spend time studying Hokkien on my wire recorder during my leave.

I studied every morning in the drawing room at Aspley, chanting imitations of the Hokkien sounds, which my interpreter in Macau had recorded for me on my faithful old Webster recorder. Although I did not get very far with the language sitting in rural England, to my delight I was posted to Penang as SCA, and jumped up a rung or two on the promotion ladder.

SCA Penang

The students were pouring out from the Penang school in panic, boys shouting, girls screaming; all with streaming eyes and noses. The riot squad, after due warning, had on the order of the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, tossed tear gas into the school hall. The student leaders, overage young thugs with Communist leanings and anti-colonial sentiments to fuel their teenage rebelliousness, had organised a sit-in strike. All morning government officials and community leaders had tried to persuade the students to back down; but the thugs were determined to emulate the revolutionary feats of their rioting fellow students in Singapore. I was equally determined that there would not be a replay of the Singapore riots, so we added tear gas to sweet reason, the Police did their duty, and soon the school was empty. There were those predictably who pilloried the SCA as Butcher of Penang; complaining of undue force, and choosing to ignore the bloody riots that had erupted two years before in Singapore when students had been allowed to sit in for days.

The Butcher slept easy however, content that there had been no riot in the Pearl of the Orient, and that the only damage done had been to the face of the thugs.

The voyage back to Malaya was much as before and, once again, I secured berths on the Dutch Nederland Lloyd Line leaving the boring P&O to less devious or, perhaps, less energetic, colleagues who had obeyed the Establishment injunction to travel on P&O. Heather and Anne were good travellers and we had another very happy cruise.

My arrival in Penang was very different to my arrival on the jetty almost ten years before as a soldier. This time I had a wife and family, a relatively senior job and a house; the Resident Commissioner was my old boss Bingham. I knew the Settlement Secretary, and my job was already established in the Penang hierarchy. My office looked out onto the Malacca Straits. It was an attractive 18th Century building, formerly a

Magistrates' Court, with high ceilings and a flat roof that leaked in the monsoon. It was typical of the East India Company structures of that period with a vast pillared entrance. Outside, sitting under the trees, were letter-writers to help illiterates to compose petitions; more usefully from our office point of view, there was a "char wallah" to produce tea or thick black Sumatran coffee (Kopi O).

SCA Penang was the second most senior Chinese Affairs job in Malaya. The job carried with it membership of the Penang Executive Council, Settlement Council and Municipal Council. Not bad at the age of 32. But the job gave me less satisfaction than the Malacca job. Too many committees, too few operational involvements. It was a plum post, in a beautiful place, and ideal for the upbringing of the two little girls, but it lacked the operational buzz and accompanying flow of adrenalin of the Malacca job. As the Security Forces tightened their grip there was little inducement for terrorists to hang about in Penang. Our jungle areas were small, and central Malaya offered them much more secure havens. In these circumstances it was natural that neither the SCA nor the Chinese leaders of Penang were much involved in the Emergency. The tide had turned with a vengeance and the George Town population, cut off from the mainland by a sizeable strip of sea, felt little involvement in the Emergency. There were still mopping-up operations to be carried out in Penang but there was not the sense of urgency amongst the MCA leaders that I had known in Malacca.

By now the Police had largely overcome their language problems through our Cameron Highlands language school, so my Chinese was no longer in demand, and my relationships were less operational. The list of titles on my Poo Bah notice board was no longer or more impressive than in Malacca. Registrar of Marriages, Adoptions, Births and Deaths were hardly the stuff of action. The marriage function gave me too many Chinese banquet invitations. I adopted an approach of two or three-courses at several feasts each Saturday night in order to spread "face".

I acquired the job of President of the Rent Tribunal. That was interesting. Once a week I sat facing a battery of lawyers who were pleading the cases of their clients in arguments about rents and evictions and, since it was the only branch of law that I attended to, I became reasonably expert. I soon knew more about the law and the precedents than my learned friends who had to master many different subjects. The arguments used by the plaintiffs were often hilarious.

Another job I acquired was Superintendent of Chinese Schools. This was a lot closer to my central interests. I had resolved to ensure that we did not have the sort of disgraceful breakdown of civil discipline that had happened in Singapore, triggered by trouble in a Chinese secondary school. This was an ambitious aim since I had no executive authority, but I succeeded in persuading Bingham and the Settlement Executive Council that we should draw up a contingency plan to nip trouble in the bud and, in the air-conditioned comfort of the Council Chamber, my contingency plan was agreed. It consisted of a series of actions, which would be triggered immediately there was any sign of trouble in a school. The plan was an escalation starting from a visit by the Superintendent of Chinese Schools, next the Inspector of Chinese Schools, then the Chinese School Committee, followed by the Chinese leaders of Penang and, finally, our local Minister for Education. If all these visitors failed to persuade the pupils to get back to their classrooms, then the riot squad would be called in to clear the school.

My contingency plan lay untouched for two years but in 1956 the pupils of our biggest Chinese school went on strike. The pupils demanded, amongst other things, that the Disciplinary Dean be sacked. I sat in my office orchestrating the responses, in accordance with the plan. By lunchtime every student was gathered in the assembly hall, marshalled by the nineteen year-old thugs who had started the strike. The stream of ever more senior visitors to the school had failed to move the thugs and the juniors were cowed into obedience.

I telephoned Bingham to tell him that the time had come

for the riot squad. There was a pregnant pause, "Are you sure Brian?" Said the RC. "Absolutely Sir!" and I called in the riot squad. The Police warned the boys that if they did not leave the premises within fifteen minutes they would use tear gas. The thugs, of course, full of bravado refused to budge or let anyone else leave. The Police did their duty and soon the school was empty.

The SCA's previous reputation as a sympathetic figure in the Chinese education world suffered severe damage. The critics, of course, took the line that we had used undue force; they chose not to remember the confrontation in Singapore where the authorities had allowed the pupils to stay on strike, in the school, while agitators whipped up violence on the streets, which finished with people being murdered, cars set on fire and general mayhem. However, when thirty years later I met a student who had been involved in the sit-in, he did not seem to bear us any ill will.

The job of Director of the Po Leung Kuk; the "Institute for the Preservation of Virtue", had survived the abolition of the Chinese Protectorate in Penang. The PLK had been set up in the 19th Century to provide a home, an education and, eventually, a husband for young Chinese girls who had been lured into prostitution. The committee of Chinese elder statesmen who presided over the home, much enjoyed the "face" that it gave them but made little contribution to managing the Institute. When I tried to broaden our commercial activities from laundry and sewing to puppet making, the committee gave no help. The hand puppets the PLK made and of which I was rather proud, represented the "famous four", Monk, Monkey, Piggie and their companion, who were the central figures from one of the best known of the Chinese classics called *Journey to the West*. Sadly, no sample of the puppet quartet has survived my nomadic life.

Although the puppets were a considerable success artistically and technically, the local shopkeepers were disinterested, partly, no doubt, because of the strangeness of the concept. Penang lacked the equivalent of my mother's

highly successful shop in Calcutta that promoted the handicrafts produced by the hill tribes under Western guidance. So the colourful puppets dressed in silks in authentic opera costumes remained on the shelves and the tourists never saw them.

There were some amusing moments connected with the PLK. On one occasion when I was out of town, the Penang newspaper carried the headline "Protector leaves Penang and Girls Run Away from Po Leung Kuk". Another memorable PLK incident was an interview with a young girl who told a familiar tale that she had come to "visit her aunty", whose name and address she had forgotten. When I described the delights of the PLK where she would be offered a home-from-home, she burst into a flood of tears and sobbed, "But I was getting good pay from my boyfriend."

My function as Registrar of Marriages posed few problems. Most Chinese were as disinterested in the finer points of the law relating to Civil Marriage, Western style, as they were in any other aspect of Barbarian law, so I did not treat the exercise as a major ceremony. We refined the procedures until we achieved a throughput of one couple every five minutes, thus enabling the clients to move on to the photographs and banqueting, which were their priorities. I did, however, emphasise Section 494 of the Penal Code, which described severe penalties for bigamy. Normally the exercise went smoothly and once the marriage clerk had explained the procedure to the applicants, both parties would declare that they understood what I had told them and sign the Register. However, one day a bride refused to say "I do" and continued to refuse most vehemently and tearfully despite the mutterings and scowls of the rest of her marriage party. Since she was not volunteering, I had no option but to dismiss the wedding party. I felt sorry for the unfortunate who must have been given hell by her family when she got home.

Some waggish Western friend started a correspondence in the local paper about the opportunities for making more of the ceremony in the Old Magistrates' Court. The correspondent

who had experienced the cold efficiency of my operation, wrote suggesting that the office should be refurbished and the ceremonial aspect given more scope and finished with. "It is not generally known that the Secretary for Chinese Affairs plays the violin; how appropriate it would be if he played for the happy couples." But the registration ceremony continued to be low key, my office remained unadorned and there was no music!

During my time in Penang, a separate Registration of Marriages Ordinance was put on the statute books to help women who claimed to have been married according to custom. We were anxious to publicise this new Ordinance as widely as possible in the hope that widows, concubines and mistresses might have a less troublesome time when their protectors died, as they usually did, intestate.

I found strong support for the new ordinance amongst the younger generation of Chinese leaders and one, Dr Lim Chong Eu, who later became Chief Minister of Penang, sportingly agreed to persuade his mother and father to register. The dignified old couple appeared before me and made the appropriate declaration. This was a great success as a publicity stunt but the Press wanted to discuss the detail, and in particular, whether I would be prepared to register a declaration where the husband already had another wife. The Law Officers were not able to give me any guidance so I had to devise my own formula. I told the Press that my job was to register people's declaration that they had been married according to custom, not to rule upon the validity of their customs. The ensuing press articles made the most of the implications that the SCA would be registering second wives, concubines and mistresses, and the Chinese ladies of Penang nearly lynched me at a cocktail party. As far as they were concerned I was encouraging polygamy. As it happened, very few Chinese availed themselves of the opportunity to register and my interpretation was never tested in the courts.

The staff of the SCA's office in Penang was larger than that in Malacca, reflecting a bigger bureaucratic role; control

of subversive publications, PLK, Secret Society work, Registration of Citizenship, and such subjects as vice and opium. I had an excellent Chinese Chief Clerk who made sure that our procedures were in good order and two senior Chinese Affairs Officers, both excellent advisers. One was an expert on Secret Societies and the other on Penang History. I also had four Assistant Chinese Affairs Officers, seconded to the rural districts. There was also a Court Interpreter to deal with general duties and the marriage business. He helped me finish off my book on Chinese Proverbs, which I had started in Malacca.

I set up a section to deal with the controversial subject of Registration of Citizenship. Many Malays were, for obvious reasons, opposed to giving citizenship to Chinese, and most Chinese were disinterested in a subject that, as long as the British were in charge, appeared to them to be of academic interest. It seemed to me, however, that it was our duty to give Chinese, who had been in Malaya for many years, the opportunity to register as citizens so that they would have some legal status after Independence.

We did not waste time on discussing the concept of citizenship with our Chinese clients; the purpose was to ensure that they had a bit of paper to prove that they had been in Malaya a long time and thus to reduce the potential for friction in the future.

My least successful effort was the establishment of a cheap Housing Estate. Unlike the Malacca education experiment, this operation was commercial and my only input was ideas and supervision. The construction of the houses went according to plan and great excitement was generated. In order to try to ensure that the houses went to really deserving people, we eliminated applicants who already had houses, and drew lots at a public ceremony. So far so good; however, when I visited the estate a month after the houses had been handed over, I found that all the original owners had already sold their houses, taken their profit and gone back to their squalor.

A more successful venture was the invention of the Penang Water Festival, which I was amused to find many years later was billed as the "Traditional" Penang Festival. I thought that it was a scandal that our seacoast was underused, and found a lot of support for the idea that we should experiment with a Water Festival. The committee work was hard going, but eventually I succeeded in finding enough enthusiasts to run specialist sub-committees to cover all our subjects. The crux of the idea that I did not reveal to anyone, lest the SCA should be accused of having "gone native", was that we should reinvent the Chinese Dragon Boat Races as the central item on our programme. The Malayan Chinese had forgotten how to make dragon boats but they soon became enthusiastic and expert. The enthusiasm was such that the neighbouring State of Perak selected a team, half of whom were left-handed, and won the race.

On the beach we had grandstands and loudspeakers belting out Strauss and other popular classics. The finale of the day's sport was a water-borne procession of illuminated floats on barges, drawn by every launch we could commandeer and every amateur orchestra in Penang at sea on barges playing Handel's Water Music and Firework Music as they sailed past the grandstand. Admittedly, with the wind blowing in the wrong direction only the cognoscenti could actually hear what was being played, but it looked good.

Finally, there was a fireworks display. This was a near disaster. I had delegated this to the Navy on the grounds that they had boats and should know something about explosives, but the naval officer concerned had not done his homework on the local charts and only decided at the last minute that he could not sail close in shore in case he hit a cable. The fireworks looked rather small. However, all had a good time; the Festival made a profit and it continues to flourish forty-five years on.

There were several other memorable exercises during the Penang years. On one occasion I persuaded all concerned to mount a citywide raid on suspected opium dens in order to try

to establish the profile of the modern smokers. They turned out to be of all ages and all types, and all explained their addiction by reference to pain of some sort. Opium, before the war, had been treated in British colonies in Asia as a controlled drug. Registered smokers could buy their opium from licensed "Chandu" shops, at government-fixed prices. In the 1940s however, London decided to ban opium with the inevitable result that smugglers replaced the Government suppliers; people continued to smoke; the price rocketed; the quality deteriorated and the only beneficiaries of the new policy were criminals and smugglers. We tried to help the addicts to break their habit by providing drying-out centres run by Buddhists, but the rate of success was poor indeed.

Prostitution was another subject that troubled Penang society, since, as in other parts of the world, human nature was stronger than the law. Once there were no licensed brothels, there was plenty of extra scope for criminal activity, and plenty of VD. We tried to deal with the disease through free clinics, but there was little to be done about illegal prostitution. As with the opium ban, the main beneficiaries of our high-minded moral policy were the criminals: pimps, panders and secret society men running protection rackets. This was a natural breeding ground for corruption.

The control of publications was one of my duties. We scanned all incoming publications for Communist propaganda and pornography alike, and offending literature was destroyed before it reached the bookshops. The definition of subversive literature was not difficult to arrive at, and we never suffered a defeat on appeal. The only problem I remember was caused by a Special Branch request that the English language copies of Communist classics by Marx and Engels should be removed from the public library. I had little difficulty in persuading them that this turgid Germanic prose was unlikely to be a source of contamination of the minds of Chinese students who barely knew English.

One function that we recovered from pre-war days was that of providing expertise on Chinese Secret Societies. Although

the Secret Societies were no longer the power in the land that they had been in the 19th Century, they were sufficiently bothersome for us to establish an interdepartmental committee, of which I was Chairman, to monitor them. My knowledge was based on reading, on the experience of my Chinese Affairs Officers, and on interaction with the Police. The Societies had been a great nuisance in Singapore and Malaya since the 19th Century, and indeed were still a great nuisance in Hong Kong and Macau when those two colonies reverted to Chinese rule at the end of the 20th Century. In Malaya, in my time, although their power had been greatly reduced, they continued to use fancy names for their gangs and office bearers such as "Grass Sandal" for their detectives and esoteric rituals including cutting off cocks' heads, drinking mingled blood, tattooing and swearing horrible oaths of loyalty and secrecy. All this mumbo jumbo made it easier for us to prosecute the petty gangsters involved and when a gangster was convicted the next step was likely to be a Banishment Enquiry by the SCA and the deportation of the criminal to mother China.

Riots and Secret Societies

Just before I left Penang we had a serious riot that was caused by the hooligans of the Secret Societies. The occasion was the granting of city status to George Town and the Mayor had decided to celebrate in a big way. The principal item on the programme was two days of processions wending their way through the city. The Police were worried about the size and composition of the procession that was predominantly Chinese, and the Secret Society Committee added to their worries by remarking that there were many elements in the procession that might give cover to gangster elements. We also did not much like the idea of a procession including a mass of young Chinese armed with the classic temple weapons such as halberds. But, since we had no hard evidence that they were planning trouble, there were no grounds to urge the

Mayor to call off the march.

On the first day, the Chinese elders led the procession and all went smoothly. On the second day however, the elders left it to their juniors to lead the procession through the heat of the day. Some time in the afternoon a radio message was transmitted from Police HQ to the Police van leading the procession. The message, which was overheard by people at the front of the procession, was to the effect that "The Malays are attacking the column." In fact there had been no such attack, but the message travelled swiftly down the procession.

The Police ordered that the procession should be abandoned and the crowds began to disperse peacefully. However, one party of young Chinese decided to respond to the rumour by seeking Malay targets. Espying a group of innocent Malay onlookers nearby they charged across the Padang brandishing their weapons. A gallant Chinese police officer in plain clothes managed to interpose himself between the Malays and the thugs, drew out his revolver and ordered them to stop. The gang, however, had its blood up and continued their charge. The Police officer opened fire, and one of the Chinese hooligans was killed.

Now the fat was in the fire with a vengeance. There was one dead Chinese, and the fact that it was a Chinese gangster shot by a Chinese police officer was irrelevant. Violence spread through the city like wild fire. Soon there were Malays seeking vengeance against the Chinese and not long after there were Indians too as temples and mosques came under Chinese hooligan attacks. Soon Penang was in precisely the state which I had tried to avoid in the context of Chinese school strikes.

We set up an emergency committee consisting of Police, Military and SCA. By the second day the violence was, if anything, increasing. The Chief Police Officer was still contending that we must not impose a curfew or call in the military, because such moves "Would have a bad effect on public morale." I suggested, as diplomatically as possible, that public morale was more likely to be adversely affected by a continuation of the violence than by strong measures to restore

law and order. A curfew and military support soon did the trick.

My principal contribution to the party was to put pressure on the reputed leaders of the Chinese Mafia. I summoned the two principal leaders, on whom of course we did not have enough evidence for a criminal prosecution, to Police HQ and said to each in turn that I hoped that he was using all his influence to persuade the Chinese gangsters to behave. Both protested that they knew nothing of gang matters to which I replied, "Unfortunately Mr X many people in Penang think otherwise, and if, as a result of these riots you are accused of secret society connections, and held partly to blame, you will probably be the object of a Banishment Enquiry. I am the local Banishment Enquiry Officer, and I must warn you that if there is a Banishment Enquiry I may have to recommend banishment because of the overwhelming weight of allegations against you. I hope, therefore, that you will do your best to help us to restore law and order."

I shall never know whether my warning had any useful effect, since it coincided with our imposition of curfew; but since the gangs soon ceased their violence, there was no need for a Banishment Enquiry.

There was a curious sequel to the Penang riots. In November 2001 I received a copy of the letter that follows, which I had never seen before since I left Malaya in early January, and so I never knew the end of that story.

SECRET and PERSONAL letter from John Davis, Actg. SCA Federation of Malaya, to BTW Stewart, Secretary for Chinese Affairs, Penang, 12 January 1957.

"... Some very astonishing allegations have been made in Kuala Lumpur regarding the background of the recent riots and the backing of the Secret Societies, which you will hear all about when you come down to KL. These allegations would appear to be well founded. The Director of Intelligence must make an appreciation of the situation very urgently and it is essential that in doing so he should have the advice of a person

who knows Penang well and was present during the happenings, otherwise he fears his appreciation might well be unbalanced.

You are the obvious person who can help him; hence the rush call on you, which I do hope, is not too inconvenient for you at this time. Machin-Cook has been told to get in touch with you.

Pearl of the Orient, Farewell!

Although Penang provided less operational satisfaction than Malacca, there was always enough to do, good colleagues surrounded me, and the leaders of the Chinese community were friendly, if less dynamic than their opposite numbers in Malacca. There were several memorable personalities amongst them. The local MCA chief was a Cantonese millionaire who was a civil engineer by training. He was a difficult man to persuade to sign a cheque and his care with money had led him to be his own architect and clerk of works when he built a new palatial mansion. I stayed with him many years later in this palace: there was a cocktail cabinet which could rise from the parquet floor at the touch of a switch, a dining table with electrically operated revolving centre upon which sat flowers, and a bedroom where the lights were mounted on the bed and projected onto the ceiling in an ever changing pattern as the bed twirled slowly round. This technical wizardry contrasted starkly with the sounds of a Bach Chaconne, emanating from another bedroom. My host's son, who had fallen under the spell of the Western classics, was playing on a Stradivarius.

Another of my millionaire acquaintances was a Hainanese, Heah Joo Seang. He was a controversial figure who had risen from rags to riches. He had made many enemies during the Japanese occupation when acting as a go-between with the Japanese. His admirers saw him as an intermediary who had reduced the misery, his detractors saw him as a traitor.

A visit to Joo Seang's office was an amazing experience. He had the smallest, most unpretentious office imaginable. It was provided with five small desks and a few telephones, manned by Joo Seang, his three sons and a clerk, but it

operated an effective rubber brokering system. The contrast between this tiny office, amassing a huge fortune, and the Burmese State Rubber Bureau a few hundred miles up the coast at Moulmein, making a huge loss, was grotesque. The Burmese were employing hundreds of people, but their bureaucratic system was quite incapable of tracking rubber market trends in a timely fashion, and the Burmese economy suffered accordingly.

Joo Seang, too, built a palatial mansion and I enjoyed his hospitality in his palace. There were no technological delights to be seen, but the front hall was the size of a museum and filled with glass cases, all displaying Chinese artefacts. Unfortunately the objects had not been chosen individually but had been supplied on contract by some merchant in Hong Kong, so volume not quality was the hallmark.

This leads me to the point that my much-appreciated Chinese friends throughout Malaya seemed to have minimum interest in Chinese art. Of course they were immensely busy men. Nevertheless, it seemed strange that when they became rich they did not emulate their fellow merchants in China and attempt to create a traditional gentleman's house. Leung, in Macau, had little money but he knew what constituted a good pot, a good painting or a good carving. My Malayan friends were not interested. I concluded that the problem was that, cut off from the mainland, they had no example to follow.

Our main luxury was membership of the Penang Swimming Club, a simple structure built at the bottom of a crag by the seaside about five miles from the city. The pool was large, the company pleasant, and the children happy. The girls attended a friendly kindergarten and learnt the three Rs painlessly, and I saw a lot of them since I was often home for lunch. On the European front, apart from colleagues, I had one or two good friends in the commercial world, but as always, my main interests were in the local community, not the expatriate.

We made very close friends with the two US diplomats in Penang: the Consul and the USIS man. This was my first

experience of the pleasures of the so-called special relationship.

The girls were by now very competent swimmers, and I ensured that they were a lot stronger than their contemporaries by insisting on two fast lengths every day before they were allowed to splash around with friends. As a result both of them always won first prize in their age group.

On the health front, however, all was not plain sailing. Annie, who had suffered no problems in our hot little house in Malacca, contracted dreadful prickly heat when we returned from leave. After two or three sessions in hospital to deal with the awful rash, the doctor announced that I must take her back to Britain. This did not seem a very helpful suggestion so I adopted an engineering solution by buying a second-hand air conditioner, installing it in the smallest room in the house (the driver's room) and putting the girls to bed in air-conditioned luxury, afternoon and night time. There was no further problem.

Heather had a more complicated problem. She had started to complain of a pain in her leg, but the doctors could find nothing and the suggestion was that it was imagination. One day, however, when she was clearly in great pain we rushed her to hospital, where they found a cyst inside the calf. Poor Heather!

Peggy had no health troubles but at one point I started getting migraines when I was commuting between offices at either end of the town, covering an educational job as well as my own. Although it was amusing to correspond with myself, as SCA and Superintendent of Chinese Schools, I was glad when a fulltime incumbent took over the schools post, but it had, no doubt, helped me to understand the Education Department and the Chinese schools.

I celebrated my promotion to Penang by buying an old, very beautiful Armstrong Siddeley coupé, open top, red leather seats, walnut fascia etc. The car was under-engined, but it did us well, despite a near catastrophe on the main road south when I was driving quite fast, and a bus came straight

off a side road without warning. A "racing" change down into bottom gear stopped me just in time but stripped the gears.

I was lucky to have Bingham and then David Grey as my Resident Commissioners. One was an Irishman, and one a Scot; our temperaments were well suited, and when I saw them on business it was easy to find a consensus. The Police and Army chiefs and other senior officials were all easy to work with too, and I had no sense of the Malacca problem where the CPO had found it impossible to accept that the SCA was only doing his job, if he reported Chinese allegations of police impropriety.

My closest operational liaison was with Special Branch and the Education Department in efforts to pre-empt trouble in the Chinese "Middle" schools. I have already described the riot that we nipped in the bud by use of the riot squad, but there was always danger of subversive infiltration. The slogan "Defend Chinese Culture" could easily inflame student tempers.

On one occasion a party of subversive Singapore Chinese students visited Penang by bus; we knew that the principal object was not to enjoy the glories of our scenery, but to inflame our students. We could not stop the buses entering Penang but we were determined that they should have the minimum opportunity to foment trouble.

We planned the students' programme in Penang with military precision. At the Border we relieved them of their subversive literature, thereafter entertained them royally, and conducted them around Penang on a busy programme. We housed them free of charge. The week passed without incident but we knew that they planned a mass picnic for their last evening. Since there was no justification for banning the picnic, I decided to ensure that they were too tired to cause trouble on their last night. We commandeered every launch available and sailed the students around Penang Island for a day, having briefed the Malay coxswains to make the journeys as rough as possible. The students were extremely sea sick, and their evening picnic was a flop.

I was also engaged in constructive educational affairs such as an attempt to bring some decent, trained teachers from Hong Kong; who, having had personal experience of the evils of Communism, might be a good anti-Communist influence in the schools. The Education Department was unenthusiastic. They disliked nationalist politics as much as they disliked Communist subversion.

I also did some teaching of English in the two big Middle Schools to show the flag and to demonstrate that when not tossing tear gas at the ill-behaved, I was positively interested in furthering their education.

At this time we were trying to persuade the Chinese schools to accept fully trained teachers of English free of charge. Although the curriculum would have remained unchanged the familiar cry, "Defend Chinese Culture" defeated commonsense, and all, except one Roman Catholic secondary school, looked the gift horse in the mouth. One afternoon when the intransigence of the Chinese leaders was becoming ever more clear, I had the opportunity to meet all the local committee members. I found that although they were refusing to accept free help to improve English standards in their own schools, they had all sent their own children to English language schools. Hypocrisy was, indeed, alive and well amongst the Chinese leaders of Penang.

During this tour I converted from violin to viola player in order to form a string quartet. The other three players were from one of the Chinese Middle Schools, but happily the political troubles did not mar our enjoyment of Haydn and Mozart.

We left Penang in good heart, although very conscious that there was no long-term future for the Stewarts in the Malayan Civil Service. The voyage this time took five weeks since the Suez Canal was closed. It ended in tears because someone had brought measles on board. By the time we had arrived in London both Heather and Anne had succumbed and so the first few days were spent in quarantine. We then went off to Worthing, where the grandparents had borrowed a flat after

selling Aspley House. Worthing was not a great success because the girls, weakened, no doubt, by their measles and unused to the cold winds of February, soon contracted flu, and had to take to their beds. Tropical Penang was far away; and we were starting on a new unpredictable life, where it was by no means clear how I was going to earn the family's bread.

*The Chinese in old Singapore
Were allowed up to six wives or more
The Court of Appeal
Ruled that's no big deal
'Twas the custom in China before*

I doubt if our marriage legislation made much difference to Chinese society. When I left Hong Kong in 1998 the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments were trying unsuccessfully to persuade Hong Kong men to stop setting up second or even third families across the Border. Customs die hard in China.

PART IV ALL CHANGE (1957)

"Send for the gardener and tell him to hose down his daughter."

"A prophet has no honour in his own country."

These two sentences come to mind when I think of 1957. I could not find anyone interested in the returning Asia hand, and the image of a colonial, if anyone thought about us at all, seemed to be: "A lucky, idle chap, with a sinecure of a job, usually to be found lounging in a cane chair, on his verandah, enjoying a balmy, tropical climate and the wind in the palm trees with a glass full of whisky in his hand; occasionally bestirring himself to ask his butler to tell the gardener to hose down his daughter, so that the Tuan can enjoy his droit de seigneur." Well it wasn't quite like that; we worked much longer hours than the city of London and we were on call twenty-four hours a day.

For my generation, which had served in the armed forces in the war and then been involved in the Malayan Emergency for almost ten years, this parody of our lifestyles was so laughable that we could (almost) ignore it. But the image, however grotesquely false, constituted a serious problem for a colonial backwoodsman trying to break into the British job market.

Job Hunting

My main preoccupation was to find a job and the job hunt proved to be depressing as well as unsuccessful. Letters to prospective employers were seldom even acknowledged, and none of my limited official contacts had any useful suggestions to make. When I called on the Permanent Under Secretary at the Commonwealth Relations Office he made it clear that there was no room at that inn, and suggested that it was much better to make a fresh start outside Government service. I found this advice pretty cheeky since he was ex-Indian Civil Service and he and the rest of his service had been absorbed into the Foreign Office and Commonwealth Office. Clearly they were operating on my old Battalion motto "Expelle navem insum." "Push out the boat, I am in."

It took a very long time for the girls to recover from their measles and flu. This was sad since the long sea voyage had given me a marvellous opportunity to work with them every day on their three Rs. Since the children were too young to remember any of this, I have no idea whether they found father's educational methods palatable or not, but at least the programme ensured that they were never bored unlike some of the whining brats on the ship. There were always child menaces on such voyages, whose parents had not spent enough time with their children in Malaya, and therefore could not handle the withdrawal symptoms of children used to the spoiling of a doting Amah. Heather and Anne did not suffer from that problem since our Amah's job was housekeeping not nannying, and our social life had been sufficiently uncluttered

for us to see a great deal of the girls in the evenings.

I progressed to an interview with a Civil Service Board looking for Factory Inspectors. All went well to begin with as I entertained the Board with stories of life in the Labour Department in Malaya, however, the atmosphere soured when the Trade Union Representative said "You must understand that everyone must start at the bottom of the Inspectorate career structure." I retorted, "On the contrary I had assumed that there would be some recognition of age and experience," and marched out saying, "Gentlemen, we are wasting each other's time." The salary at the bottom of the ladder would have put the Stewarts near the bread line. I was glad to observe many years later that the Inspectorate had overcome its constipated ways and was prepared to offer more to late entrants.

The job hunt would have been more depressing had I not been on paid leave. I had no contacts in the UK and the network of organisations that were eventually established to help ex-colonials to find a job had yet to be created. It soon became apparent that the commercial world only operated on the basis of personal introductions and, since after university I had spent the whole of my time overseas, working with locals not with British business, I had no entrée.

It was also apparent that Whitehall and others in the UK had little regard for the Colonial Service. I did not forget the lady in the employment bureau who said, "You know what they think about people like you; you have been sitting around under the palm trees drinking whisky." Aged thirty-five, with five years' military and eleven years' Colonial Service, three oriental languages, and considerable practical as well as bureaucratic experience behind me, it was not amusing to discover that no one was interested in giving me a chance and that my previous profession was despised. The outside world, of course, imagined that we could slide neatly from Colonial to Whitehall service, taking our pensions and seniority with us. Unfortunately this was not the case: we had been on the payroll of our overseas territory, not on Whitehall's.

*Most Mandarins ruling Whitehall
Found Colonial colleagues a bore
Dangerous chaps, fond of action
Even guilty of passion
Not at all comme il faut for Whitehall!*

Eventually I found a corner of Whitehall that was interested in oriental experience and knowledge. It was a great relief to see light at the end of the job tunnel. I hired a caravan for the three months before starting work. We toured Scotland and England; I think we all enjoyed the gypsy life.

The reader may wonder why I was so determined to change horses. The answer is simple. Although post-Independence Malaya could offer accelerated promotion, clearly it could not offer me a lifetime career. So a return to Malaya seemed to me like burying the head, ostrich-like, in the sand. It seemed best to make the uncomfortable break immediately rather than trust to luck. There was a colonial option; the Colonial Office might have offered me employment in other colonies but hopping from one colony to another, as each became independent, was not my idea of a career. I noted years later that those coming to Hong Kong after service in other colonies usually showed all too clearly the effect of having left their "first love" behind. For them Hong Kong was just a job, and few of the newcomers became interested in Chinese language and culture.

I had already tried, during a visit to Hong Kong from Penang, to discover the possibilities of a transfer to the Hong Kong service. This seemed to be a sensible idea since the Hong Kong Government had failed to give full time Chinese language training to any of their post-war entry and they were woefully short of Chinese language expertise. But when I called on the Malay-speaking ex-MCS officer who was the Colonial Secretary of the day, he was discouraging. It was some years before the Hong Kong Establishment Office saw the light and began to consider the Chinese expertise and experience of the MCS, by which time most of the more

energetic officers had found something else to do.

The prospect of starting again at the bottom of the ladder was daunting and I was going into an unknown world inhabited by experienced Whitehall warriors. I need not have worried; plenty of overtime made up for deficiencies in experience. Peggy and I settled into a dilapidated private hotel in Richmond, and the girls became weekly boarders in a school in the Park. My parents moved up to Richmond too. I was posted almost immediately as a Second Secretary in our Embassy in Burma.

This was indeed a happy outcome. I was particularly pleased that my new masters seemed to have listened to my plea to be allowed to stick to Asia, rather than to join the queue waiting for a posting in the inner circle. I never served overseas anywhere to the west of Rangoon. I believe that HMG benefited, since I was able to add considerably to my stock of Asian expertise and contacts as the years rolled on, and the commonalities of Asian cultures, crossovers of religions and common attitudes all made it easy for me to relate to the Asians in whatever country I was posted.

The Road to Mandalay (1958)

"For the wind is in the palm trees and the temple bells they play."

"Can we no get away from they bloody Buddhists?" asked a senior Scottish Whitehall warrior when I told him that one of my duties was the study of Buddhism in Burma. I could understand his frustration. From Rangoon to Hanoi "They bloody Buddhists" were proving to be a disturbing factor in countries where governments bore little resemblance to our Westminster parliamentary democracy. We had to accept the reality of militant monks, interfering constantly in the body politic.

The run up to the Burma posting seemed very different to the end of leave periods before return to Malaya. This time we

were setting off to terra incognita, geographically as well as metaphorically since I had never been to Burma nor worked as a diplomat. I had no feel for what the future held in store. On a more mundane level there were preparations for a foreign posting that included new outfits for us both, and the acquisition of crockery, glass and wine. The Malayan service had not expected us to entertain; now we were on parade socially.

The long sea passage provided a golden opportunity for me to read up on Burma, and luckily we had a likeable and companionable young Burmese student as a fellow passenger. Although we spent every morning together studying Burmese, progress was dishearteningly slow, and the language seemed elusive. Burmese had none of the conveniences of Malay, which has no tones, is easy for a Briton to pronounce, and was increasingly using Rumi (Latin) script instead of Arabic: for the beginner a uniquely forgiving language. Burmese shared none of these happy characteristics. The language had tones but Maung Aye's attempts to describe them left me confused; the written language using letters based on circles derived from Pali, looked, to the untutored eye, like a piece of knitting produced by a clumsy beginner. The rules for spelling would have suited Shakespeare; there seemed to be no consistency. I soon realised that this study was not going to be as successful as my forays into Malay and Chinese; I was clearly not going to be able to step off the boat ready for serious conversation, but at least Maung Aye gave me a decent pronunciation, and a grasp of the courtesies, and some feel for the Burmese language and for Burmese traditions and culture. Moreover, I had learnt enough of the written language to ensure that I would not be entirely "blind" when faced with signs covered in "knitting".

In any case, I enjoyed Maung Aye's company and my relationship with him was the closest I was ever able to achieve with a Burman. Sadly, however, once we left the ship we seldom saw Maung Aye again; perhaps he was warned to stay clear of the Embassy, or perhaps he just could not be

bothered. Whatever the reason, Maung Aye's attitude provided a salutary reminder of the difficulty of making Burman friends. I had noted in my readings that the British seemed to have more friends amongst the minorities than amongst the Burmans, and had sworn that I would not fall into the same trap. My experience with Maung Aye suggested that it was not only the natural British interest in the hill tribes and minorities that was the cause of the problem. The educated Burmans seemed to be much less interested than the other races in having foreign contacts. While the Malays, Chinese and Indians with whom I had consorted in colonial days were easy going and sociable; the Burmans seemed aloof.

Burma had been given Independence immediately after the war, before the damage caused by four years of war had been put right. Their ten years of Independence had not been a success in political or economic terms. Although abject poverty was avoided in the countryside because of the skills of the rice growing peasantry, Rangoon and the other cities were a sorry sight, and looked as if there had been no maintenance since 1941. It was difficult to believe that pre-war Burma had been the economic star of South East Asia.

Half of the 20 million people in the Union were Burman; they occupied the plains that formed the centre of the country. A mix of dissident minorities inhabited the plateaus and hills that lay around the frontier lands, bordering on Bangladesh, China, India, and Thailand. The divisions between Burman and minorities were deeply rooted. During British times there had been a separate part of the administration to deal with the frontier people, but the Burmans had no intention of allowing the minorities to exercise their constitutional right to secede from the Union. The Burmans had taken the lead in demanding independence, and many of them had collaborated enthusiastically with the Japanese; the minorities, on the other hand, had often given loyal support to the British at considerable risk to themselves. While Naga head hunters, Kachins, Karens, Shans and others had been our allies, the Burmans had tended to treat the Japanese as liberators, and it

was a Japanese trained team which led the independence movement and from which the first government of the Union was formed.

Independence increased communal tensions. The minorities resented the domineering attitude of the Burmans and religious divisions were also sources of trouble. While most Burmans were practising Buddhists, many of the minorities were Animists, Christians or Muslims. And there was also the familiar envy of the economically successful Chinese and Indian immigrants. All these tensions proved too much for the fledgling state, and even now, over fifty years since independence, the civil war smoulders on while the economic effects of the expulsion of the Chinese and Indian merchants have yet to be overcome.

Meanwhile, political freedom is a dirty word for the Burmese Junta. The political history of the Union has been disastrous. Shortly after Independence, submachine gun carrying dissidents attacked and killed the Cabinet, thus depriving Burma of its "first eleven". The various second and third elevels, civil and military, which have tried to govern Burma since, have failed; we shall never know whether Brigadier Aung Gyi and his team would have done any better, but so far the "Burmese way to socialism" has failed to deliver.

One of our fellow shipboard passengers, the wife of the First Secretary (Commercial) in our Embassy, was Spanish. She readily agreed to teach my Burmese friend and me and our afternoon lessons were pure joy. We concentrated on learning Spanish poetry, songs and dances. Unlike the languages learnt laboriously in slow time at school, my Spanish was quickly absorbed and never forgotten.

The voyage took two extra weeks because of harbour strikes en route. The first was at Port Sudan. My main memory, apart from the heat, is of highly successful fishing trips within the harbour when I found that fish in a Moslem harbour become ecstatic when offered the forbidden pork as bait. My catch was amazing.

In Colombo, a port strike gave us the opportunity to travel inland. The British, contrary to the received wisdom of Westminster and Whitehall, still seemed to be most welcome. It was embarrassing to find so many Ceylonese bewailing the fact that the place had been better run in our time. I was reminded of Tan Siewsin's favourite saying about independence; "Even a dog would prefer to starve in freedom than to remain in chains." Perhaps, but not all the inhabitants of our former colonies seemed to share his view. The relative fairness of the British administration was something that tended to be rapidly lost in post imperial times. Perhaps it was only top dogs who were so enthusiastic about the departure of the Colonial government.

The First Secretary in Chancery met us on arrival and settled us into the Strand, the pre-war hotel that sat on the waterfront by the side of the British Embassy. This was familiar territory; there were similar hotels throughout the former British Empire. The next morning, I paraded before the Ambassador, dressed in my new tropical suit. The Ambassador, Richard Allen, was most affable. After a few pleasantries His Excellency (H.E.) said, "I like my staff to remember that Rangoon is only a small part of Burma, and I hope you will get out and about as much as possible." This was a most welcome doctrine and I made the most of H.E.'s dictum. I spent half my time on tour.

Sir Richard was, of course, twenty years older than me, but we had many interests in common and he had been in the Navy and in the Palestine Government before he became a diplomat. I soon discovered also that I had known his father who had been the Professor of Music in my time at Oxford. It was not going to be difficult to serve this Head of Mission whose temperament was close to my own, and there was an added bonus in the shape of the Ambassador's wife, who was equally charming and uncomplicated. I do not suppose that my colleagues in the Embassy were pleased to find the newcomer so rapidly becoming ADC to the Ambassador, but that was how things turned out on the social front; we became a very

close team, and friends for life.

Although I missed the direct action of colonial days there was plenty of interest to be had in studying Burma in all its aspects. Although, of course, there was a lot to be said for travelling alone, my escort duties opened up senior contacts that would have been denied to a Second Secretary. I cannot claim to have visited every corner of Burma during my tour of duty, but I managed to visit the main minority areas.

We soon left the Strand for our own house. This was an undistinguished little bungalow, in need of a coat of paint, and not at all up to the standard of the Honorable SCA Penang. I spent my first night assembling the kayak that I had brought out with me. It was hot work, on a steamy Rangoon night, and I drank so much beer as I worked on the canoe that I was half-seas over by the time I went to bed. The canoe was a success: we had some happy sails on nearby Inya Lake, and I remember a dramatic dawn, with the sun coming up in Kiplingesque fashion as I paddled across the Irrawaddy accompanied by the Third Secretary, our Burmese language student.

The Embassy was an old-style building on the waterfront. The staff was large by modern standards, no doubt because we were still trying hard to keep up some sort of useful relationship with this former jewel in the Imperial Crown. It was not difficult to settle down in Chancery, although I was very conscious of the fact that, for the first time in my overseas service, I had no operational function. However, there was plenty to do.

We essayed our first dinner party a week after we moved into the house. Our cook, the classic Mug from Chittagong, was not brilliant but the party seemed to go off well enough, although the only Burmese we invited, Maung Aye, did not turn up. We soon discovered that the Burmans saw no reason to answer invitations. As far as they were concerned they came if they felt like it; after all as one said to me, when I asked if he was coming to one of our parties "I might get a more important invitation." I was amused some years later in

China when the Burmese Ambassador came scuttling into a reception in our Embassy and, when I asked him why he was looking so harassed, said: "We had a big reception this evening, and we were never told by the Chinese who their representatives would be. It was most embarrassing, I have learnt my lesson and will never again behave like that when I am back in Burma."

In Rangoon there were some interesting Britons. One young British Council academic was doing a wonderful job in the university; plays, symphony concerts, and teaching all combined to make him a most influential British representative. My only contribution to this remarkable performance was to play the viola in his orchestra, while I marvelled at the degree to which he had succeeded in getting himself accepted by the Burmese. He seemed to me as effective a representative for Britain as many of our professionals. His job, of course, gave him special access to Burmese society that we, as diplomats, could not match.

Another of the Britons was a bachelor who had settled in Burma and become a Buddhist. His knowledge was profound but I found it difficult to relate to his philosophy, particularly to the theoretical picture of the devout, charitable, peace loving Buddhist to the reality of violent Burmese politicians, bullying their opponents, and generally behaving like gangsters.

Although there was still a sprinkling of British bankers and businessmen, to a large extent the British presence had gone. The expatriate community was mainly diplomatic. The Socialist countries had strong presences, and they seemed to be winning by adopting the easy position of critics of the ex-colonial power, while offering fraternal assistance to the Burmese Socialist Government. The situation could hardly have been less like that of Malaya, where even twenty five years after independence there were massive British investments, and many British managers, and planters still working in the country. Unfortunately for the Burmese people, the gifts and assistance of the Soviet Bloc and the Chinese

were ill devised, and worse applied.

For me, however, this was a good posting. We were soon able to move into a more spacious bungalow not far from the Inya Lake, and were well prepared for the arrival of Heather and Anne on their first school holiday, which was made possible by the introduction of the Comet jet airliner. The Stewart family soon had its usual menagerie, Siamese cats, dogs, a monkey, and finally a honey bear. The bear cub was not part of my plan, but arrived, unsolicited, accompanying a friendly Lt/Col of the Kachin Rifles who called upon me for breakfast. It seemed churlish to refuse this unexpected addition to the zoo. Bruno was a jolly little chap, and liked to tease us by clambering to the top of a tall tree in the garden. I frequently arrived home for lunch to be greeted by the cry "Daddy! Bruno is up the tree again" whereupon I would have to climb up the tree with a baby's bottle to entice him down. Inevitably he soon outgrew our garden, and sadly we handed him over to the Zoo, where conditions would have appalled the RSPCA.

We were not the only diplomats with a menagerie in the garden. Our good friends the Arthur Hummels in the US Embassy who, like me, had a close interest in "things Chinese", had a cub (a tiger I think), which they used to bring onto their lawn at cocktail parties. The cub was most photogenic and cuddlesome, but many a cooing lady found out at Hummel receptions, that the cub's claws were a serious threat to silk stockings. (Hummel finished up as US Ambassador in China in my Racial days).

The contrast between colonial and diplomatic social life was extreme. We had come from a society where, apart from the Queen's Birthday, there was little general entertainment, to one where National Days alone ensured that there would be innumerable parties, quite apart from the many special occasions when visiting VIPs or delegations required entertainment. To the outsider, of course, this sounds like "the life of Riley"; one long round of endless cocktail parties and dinners and buffets. But these were not private parties

designed for the amusement of host and guests. They were duties and could be hard labour. For most of us a regime of one, or worse still two, parties a night was a form of torture rather than a pleasure, and a quiet night at home became a treasured luxury. The formal dinners were the most potentially dangerous form of diplomatic nightlife. The dining rooms were not air-conditioned and a two-hour session seated between the taciturn, the boring, or the incomprehensible, could hardly be described as fun. Many of my colleagues complained loudly about the cocktail party receptions, but at least there one could be selective and leave promptly; the dinner party was a four-hour ritual and left no room for manoeuvre since no one could leave before the senior guest.

We managed to bring the girls out on holiday twice a year, and I was able to arrange my travel and work programme so that I could see plenty of them. The Kokine Swimming Club provided a useful rendezvous, and they both continued to swim most satisfactorily. Heather by now was a cherubic looking seven year old, endowed with the habit of blurting out the truth. This led to some embarrassment when I took her to tea with a senior Burmese officer who asked Heather what she thought of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda. Her response was, "It's very dirty." She was, of course, justified in her reaction: the pagoda was a magnificent sight if one avoided looking at the filth on the ground. The golden stupa rose dramatically above the scruffy city, but the steps and the temple yard were indeed filthy, and since "foot wearing" was prohibited, it was the filth that had struck Heather. Fortunately my Burmese friend had a sense of humour and was not too deeply offended. There was another memorable Heather bon mot, this time when I emerged from the Club swimming pool one Sunday morning after swimming many lengths, deep in conversation with the Soviet Military Attaché. As I climbed out of the pool, Heather greeted me, in her piping treble, with "Daddy, I thought you told me that the Russians were our enemies." Fortunately my Russian friend was under water when she spoke.

Anne did not cause problems with embarrassing truths but she gave us a medical scare when during her first holiday she had a problem with an ankle. The local doctor decided that she was suffering from some dreaded bone disease, so we went off to Hong Kong for a second opinion. When Queen Mary's hospital had finished their examination I heard the Chinese doctor saying in Cantonese to his nurse, "That doctor in Rangoon must be nuts, she has a sprained ankle."

There were many comic moments as the girls came up against unfamiliar local customs. On one occasion I took them out to lunch in a Chinese restaurant where, as was the Burmese custom, a huge pot of boiled rice was set on the table for guests to help themselves as they wished. I suddenly realised that the girls thought that good manners required them to finish the rice, and they were making a gallant attempt to chomp their way through the huge pile of rice. They were greatly relieved to be told that manners did not require them to finish the lot.

It was, of course, a delight to have the girls out with us. Although at that time the diplomatic service only paid for one air journey per year, we were able to scrape up the money to fly them out every holiday. Despite Heather's occasional excess of veracity, the girls were a diplomatic asset since they had been brought up in Malaya to mingle with different races, and unlike many of their contemporaries, had learnt to behave sensibly in adult company. The holidays flew by, and try as I might there was a severe limit to the amount of time that I could share with the girls because of the obligatory diplomatic social round in Rangoon. But at least I was able to take the girls with me when I went on tour.

I once persuaded Maung Aye to join us on a tour of the North, but he proved to be a poor travelling companion. He was a late riser, was not fond of walking, and had little interest in the flora and fauna or the antiquities or, indeed, of the history of his country. The hundreds of dusty, hot miles in our Ford car through the Burma plains to Mandalay and the Shan States must have seemed very long for two little girls;

plaintive cries of "Are we nearly there yet?" started early in the long, hot, journey.

Peggy whose back was beginning to give her some trouble, very wisely cried off these bumpy rural rides. One of the oddities of the situation was that Embassy staff, who had never before served in Asia, always got stomach problems when they went on tour. They tried hard to stay away from local food and water, but sooner or later encountered local food, and then invariably fell foul of Montezuma's revenge. The Stewart family, who ate local food and drank boiled water, did not suffer. Perhaps we had built up immunities in our Malayan days. Of course the conditions of the restaurants, and roadside stalls were such that any UK sanitary inspector would have had a fit; he would not have recognised that the important point was that the food was freshly cooked. My experience suggests that the foreign visitor is most likely to suffer from western style food, cooked and probably left lying about in an hotel than from food cooked freshly in a street market. In my Racial days in China I only ever suffered from western-style restaurants.

Maung Aye did us one great favour by introducing us to an exceptionally charming and interesting Burman family. Their daughter and prospective son-in-law were two of the most delightful people I have ever met, and the girl was a ravishing beauty to boot. They, in turn, introduced me to many aspects of Rangoon life most notably to the Water Festival (famous or infamous according to one's perspective), when Burma celebrates the end of the dry season with water games. Maung Aye's friends introduced me to a group of university students who invited me to join them in their truck in which they planned to weave their way through the Rangoon crowds sloshing buckets of water at the bystanders. The crowds retaliated enthusiastically with buckets of water and hosepipes. I wondered what the locals thought the lone foreigner was doing in the truck with the students.

I certainly enjoyed the water festival more than Juliet Allen, who complained that as she entered a Minister's house

elegantly dressed and coiffed, her hostess had anointed her with a bucket of water. Unlike our Ambassador's wife I was off parade, and suitably dressed, so I thoroughly enjoyed the day. One of our targets was the Film Institute; the nubile students in their sopping wet clothes were a sight for sore eyes. The memory of these students came back to me when I read years later of the Military Government of Burma blowing up students in the Student Union in order to discourage democratic movements.

My touring took me all round Burma; to the hills, and the plateaus and the jungles. Sometimes the journeys started as ambassadorial tours which I organised, but which I would extend, after HE had flown back to Rangoon. On one memorable occasion I took the Allens down to Penang. The two-night sea journey, stopping occasionally in small ports with exotic names redolent of history, was particularly successful. But I went alone on my visits to frontier tribes, most often to the Shans and Kachins in the northeast. The local chiefs were most hospitable and so were the local people. One happy recurring experience was breakfast at first light in the local market places. Strong, sweet "Sergeant Major's tea" accompanied by fried eggs and unleavened bread made a fine beginning to the day. At lunch time there was usually a primitive Chinese restaurant to be found, offering a three-dish menu of superb pork soup, white rice and green vegetables; a bottle of local beer made a more appropriate accompaniment than any fine wine, and the cost of this Lucullan feast was derisory. The last time I tested this system was in Macau circa 1998, when a similar meal in a tiny hole-in-the-corner restaurant, cost me the equivalent of one British pound. Sadly, my colleagues, brought up on the carefully controlled sanitation and health of the West, did not follow my system and suffered accordingly.

On the northeast frontiers of Burma, near Lashio, I sometimes stood looking wistfully across the Border into China's Yunnan Province and the Hsipsong Panna notorious for its bandits and drug production, wondering if I would ever

have the chance to go back to China. In those days, unless one had an official reason for visiting, there was no hope of a visa. The whole of this Border area, the Golden Triangle, and the bordering parts of Thailand, Laos, and China is, of course, a wonderland for those interested in tribes. The giraffe necked Palaungs, whose women put a series of brass rings round their necks, were probably the most exotic. The Shans were the least colourful; they wore off-white Chinese-style flappy trousers and tunics: a most comfortable house-wear in a hot climate. The Burmese, who mostly lived in the lowlands, wore the Longyi, (the same garment as the Malay sarong, a tube of cloth that wrapped round the waist.) The top half of this dress was an ingyi jacket, much the same as the Shans, and on their heads was an amazing creation called a Kownbaung, a sort of turban wrapped around a bamboo frame. Unfortunately, these potentially colourful traditional clothes were usually only worn at parties; the man in the street dressed in drab Western shirt and trousers.

My routine, when I was not on tour, was to leave home at dawn before the sun had begun to roast the air, and drive to the Embassy with a bacon and egg sandwich and a thermos of coffee by my side. In this fashion I gained a head start on the rest of my colleagues who, having breakfasted at home, arrived about eight o'clock. The early start became part of my routine for the rest of my working life: it is, of course, the best part of the tropical day. It enabled me to avoid the searing heat but more importantly, to read the press and incoming telegrams and to be ready for action with a tidy desk before my seniors arrived to interrupt. It was not, of course, a formula that was calculated to endear me to my colleagues, but then they were not necessarily conscious that swot Stewart had given himself a two-hour start. It was a particularly effective programme in terms of providing time to record anything of importance that had emerged during the social round. I perfected this system over the years wherever I was. The discipline of early rising and early work became second nature.

My Burma tour should have been for three years, and I would have been very content to complete my tour. I had many friends in and out of the diplomatic circle; it was a happy Embassy where the Ambassador and his wife made a good team to work for and Burma was certainly a fascinating country. However, in the middle of my tour I was cross-posted to Beijing. This probably had a dramatic impact on my career prospects. I was delighted, since I had not been back to China since 1949, and had retained the hope that I might one day be able to visit China again to see the changes wrought by Communism, and to visit the many parts of China which time and money had denied me as a student. My good fortune compensated for the sadness of having to say goodbye to Burma, and our friendly Embassy.

The rest of my career in the FCO consisted of truncated postings. This formula provided infinite challenge and interest, but made me feel increasingly guilty about embarking upon new friendships that were likely to be short-lived. Twenty years later in Malaysia and Hong Kong, Sally and I found ourselves at the other end of this process. We had become the long-term residents, meeting an ever-changing collection of diplomats, who seemed to be posted away almost as soon as we had met them.

As a junior officer it was no part of my duty to write a valedictory. Had I done so, I would probably have dwelt on the sadness of watching a once great country, full of charming people, sliding down a slippery economic and political slope. I might also have commented that Britain, the ex-Colonial power, seemed to have little influence. It was the USA, the USSR, the Socialist camp, and the Third World who were in favour. I derived what satisfaction I could from the fact that it was foreign material aid rather than foreign advice that interested the Burmese. Meanwhile, the Burmese politicians proudly claimed, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that they had found a new and better system of government called, "The Burmese Way to Socialism". The officials took great pleasure in playing off East versus West but seemed to be

more interested in the game itself, rather than in the quantum of benefit to Burma. The inefficiency of socialist aid was well illustrated in the oft-repeated story of a Soviet gift of cement, which was dumped in the open in Rangoon Port. Under the monsoon rain, this gift rapidly became an embarrassment to both donor and recipient, as the cement hardened in paper sacks on the quayside.

I was not in Burma long enough to find any meaningful answer to the question of why, from time to time, the disciples of so gentle a religion as Buddhism became so violent. Subsequent experience in Vietnam and Cambodia left me further puzzled; there seemed to be no relationship between the peaceful nature of the religion they professed, and the brutal realities of their societies. But then I suppose one might make the same point about Christians over the ages, and indeed even today, for example, in the Balkans and in Northern Ireland where the violent actions of extremists and zealots brandishing Christian banners have mocked the religion they profess. Religious labels seem to have little relationship to the reality of man's inhumanity to man.

Adieu Burma. I went back once but I did not enjoy observing the continuing deterioration of a once fine country.

*When Burma was ruled by Thebaw
His subjects were all filled with awe
If he lost his rag
He'd put men in a bag
Then his elephants trampled them raw!*

King Thebaw was the last of a line of cruel and belligerent despots. He started his reign in 1878 by executing many of the royal family by the trampling method, graciously ruling that since they were Royal, velvet should be used to make the bags for the gruesome ceremony. In 1886, after the capture of Mandalay, he was deposed and sent off to exile in India, having incurred the wrath of the Raj for exhorting his subjects to "Drive the British into the sea."

It had taken three Burma Wars (1825, 1852, 1885) to pacify the country.

Barbarian Diplomat in China

"BU DONG!" ("Don't move!") said the soldier as he pointed his bayonet at the tummy of the head of the British Diplomatic Service. And no amount of polite language would persuade him to lower his bayonet and let us go on our way. It was mid-afternoon, the sun was setting over the Western hills, and the Permanent Under Secretary and his party were stuck and running out of time. The soldier did not know the Chinese for protocol or diplomatic immunity, nor indeed did he care about the status of the long-nosed barbarian in front of him. We were definitely out of bounds, just above the Chinese equivalent of Sandhurst, and he knew his duty. "They would not pass!"

Although I was sorry to leave Burma my interest in the Chinese posting ensured that there were no withdrawal symptoms. One problem, which weighed heavily on my mind, but was not, of course, in the minds of those who had decided on my cross posting, was the fact that my "do it yourself" approach to Mandarin, had given me a Mandarin standard far below my Cantonese. My Chancery colleagues had all spent years on full time study of Mandarin. I could only console myself with the fact that I had more experience of working with Chinese in the field than anyone else in our diplomatic mission. I took some comfort too from the fact that I had read widely on Chinese history, although I had no first hand experience of the politics and economics of Maoist China.

The sea voyage to London provided an excellent opportunity for language study, although I had no doubt that I had a long road to cover to bring my Mandarin up to scratch. I had at least maintained my ability to read Chinese, although even here there was a problem since the Chinese Government had now introduced many new "simplified" characters.

Attempts during UK leave to upgrade my Mandarin were unsuccessful since there were no classes designed to deal with a Cantonese speaker seeking a crash conversion course. I could only hope that hard work, once I arrived in China, would do the trick.

After leave and a short spell in the Third Room in the Foreign Office where, with other juniors I read and helped to action papers about China, I flew to Hong Kong. Alas the days of leisurely travel by sea were over. I was soon walking across the bridge at Lowu, between Hong Kong and China. I came to know that bridge well over the years ahead but the walk from capitalist British Colonial Hong Kong into Communist territory always produced a frisson. Visa formalities were quickly completed and the Chinese train chuffed off to the sound of DONG FANG HONG, a Communist song claiming that the "East was Red", across the Pearl River Delta to Canton, through the ageless scenery of Guangdong Province; walled villages, and tower houses designed to give refuge from bandits and pirates. It was difficult to judge whether Communism had changed much in the Delta. One thing struck me as new: the appearance of trees on the previously barren hills.

After a night in Canton, staying in the old Oi Kwan (Love the Masses) Hotel, I boarded the train for Beijing. Most of the journey was through unfamiliar territory and so I could not compare new with old. After two nights on the train, with a four-berth sleeping compartment to myself since Chinese were not allowed to share with foreigners lest they be contaminated, I rolled across the arid North China plain into Beijing. As the Embassy driver took me to my quarters through three kilometres of drabness I wondered what had happened to the magical city I had read about. Soviet advice and Chairman Mao's wish to see factories everywhere had prevailed over history.

We drove along the dusty, grimy Boulevard of Eternal Peace that the triumphant Communists had hacked out, by knocking down city walls and gates and innumerable single-

storey houses large and small. The only thing that was impressive about the Boulevard was that it was wide enough to land aeroplanes. Some revolting Soviet style concrete apartment blocks squatted along the wayside amongst the detritus of old Beijing. The scene was unattractive in the extreme and my flat in the newly created Embassy Quarter was of a piece with the other horrible modern buildings. The Residence too was an unlovely modern building, but our chief, Michael Stewart, and his wife Damaris were both highly artistic and creative, and the inside of the Residence was a delight.

I embarked upon my new life with some trepidation, since I could hardly expect to find my new Head of Mission and his wife as friendly as the delightful Ambassadorial team in Rangoon. But these Stewarts turned out to be just as simpatico as the Allens. We had an immediate rapport based on a shared interest in Chinese art; Michael had been an Assistant Curator in the V&A Museum before the war, and so it was natural that we should form a partnership where I supplied the Chinese language skills and he provided the ceramics expertise. Damaris was also a keen student of Chinese culture; her specialisations being jade and temples. The Stewart clan spent many happy afternoons on the hunt. I still have pieces in my collections that were acquired with Michael's expert advice, and one piece of Ming porcelain that was mended with golden rivets by Michael himself.

The Stewarts gave me a warm welcome; and it was as if we had known each other for years. Within twenty-four hours of my arrival I had been entrusted with the keys to Michael's Land Rover to ferry guests to their hotel after dinner. I was less than happy about my knowledge of the Land Rover, and unhappier still about the state of my knowledge of Beijing. However, I had a map and clearly this was no moment for wimpish protest.

I was by now 38, and I suppose that my fourteen years' experience in Asia gave me a practical edge over the rest of Chancery, who had spent less time on the ground and in any

case had never worked with Chinese. The Counsellor was not in competition since he was not a Chinese speaker. I was agreeably surprised to find that, as in Rangoon, my Ambassador appeared to respect my judgement; and I found myself on the inside track. But there was considerable talent in the political section, and my colleagues provided plenty of competition. The Head of Chancery, later to become Governor of Hong Kong, was Teddy Youde; Percy Craddock, later Ambassador to Beijing and afterwards Mrs Thatcher's adviser on foreign affairs, was a fellow First Secretary, and Robin McLaren (later Ambassador to Beijing), a Third Secretary, joined us fresh from language school.

I saw little of Youde, who tended to be immersed in administration, but had many a debate with Percy, and with Robin I played violin duets. A jolly, gregarious Scotsman, Ken Ritchie was First Secretary, Commercial. Since there was no Defence Attaché, and Chancery had to maintain a watching brief on military matters, Michael gave me that portfolio, presumably because I had the best military pedigree amongst his Chancery Officers. Our knowledge of the Chinese military machine was scanty in the extreme; we only saw the army on parade on National Day and never met their officers. It was, however, interesting to study what little information was available in the newspapers, and I managed to cobble together a despatch on the state of the Defence Forces. I remember being incredulous about the policy of no badges of rank, and the idea that the generals should spend one month a year as private soldiers. It all seemed a little unrealistic. Whenever we flew out of Beijing, Chinese MIG's and bombers were to be seen sitting forlornly along the side of the runways. We could only guess at the efficiency of this vast mass of men in uniform, with their obsolete weaponry, and little chance to exercise.

As a student of Mao's successful campaigns against the Nationalists, I concluded, that this was a formidable Home Guard, but that they posed no serious threat to the world, in view of their lack of modern equipment. Their palsied

performance when they invaded Vietnam to "teach them a lesson" confirmed my view. In any case, I could not see how they could operate in a fast moving sophisticated air or sea battle, when their Communist system discouraged generals from using their initiative. Thirty years on as an amateur observer I continued to hold the same opinion; they were in no position to take the offensive against a sophisticated force.

Our office was one of the many unlovely buildings in the new Embassy Quarter. Previously we had occupied a delightful old Prince's Palace in the centre of the old diplomatic quarter: the same Legation that we had occupied since the middle of the 19th Century, where the British Minister had coordinated the defence of the Legation Quarter against the Boxers. Now we were in an undistinguished two-storied building. The view from my office window was of an equally boring twin building which housed the Albanians.

My immediate priority was to find domestic staff and teachers. Staff could only be recruited through the Diplomatic Service Agency, a body not renowned for efficiency or cooperation. Many years later I worked so closely with them, in a search for staff for the Racial Office, that they paid me the compliment of making me an honorary adviser. But at this stage, I knew nothing about them, except horror stories about the quality of the staff they provided, and the difficulty of sacking staff that proved unsatisfactory.

Contrary to expectation, however, the domestic staff offered to me by the Bureau were excellent. The cook/butler Bao Shan was a cheerful, sturdy middle-aged Northerner, whose first training had been with the Royal Scots Fusiliers, as a mess waiter. He was friendly, obliging and efficient and his response to any request was a crisp "shih" (yes) that sounded very like a military "Sir!" We got on like a house on fire, so much so that he happily agreed to accompany me to Shanghai when I took over the Consulate General in 1961. Unfortunately, he was criticised for that decision, presumably because it showed an excessively friendly relationship with a barbarian capitalist imperialist. Happily he survived and the

last time I saw him, he had been made Chief Instructor in the Bureau's training school. He did not, of course, speak much English, which suited me rather better than it suited Peggy. Once more, as in Macau, she and the domestic staff had a language problem.

On the teacher front, the Bureau also served me well. I was offered two middle-aged teachers and organised a schedule whereby teacher "One" arrived at 0700 for breakfast and newspaper reading, and teacher "Two" arrived at 1300 for lunch and conversation practice. They had somehow both managed to survive the endless campaigns of the Communist regime without losing their sense of humour. They were two very different types and so, as in Macau, by discussing the same topics with my two teachers I greatly improved my comprehension. They were good company. My studies continued in the office with the help of our chief interpreter, another good companion. The early morning lesson schedule was a bore if I had been out late the night before, but the system paid handsome dividends. The breakfast session provided me with a daily preview of the Chinese Press before I arrived in the office, and gave me an edge over colleagues, whose language skills were greater, but whose mornings started in more orthodox style.

Letter Home

One of my Chinese friends has managed to keep his little house and I have enjoyed several good evenings there, half suffocated by the fumes of the coke stove, half anaesthetised against the cold with Bai Ger, the local vodka which he prefers to whisky. The harsh beauty of Beijing's deserted streets covered in snow bathed in moonlight is unforgettable. I continue to count my blessings; it is a unique privilege to be here.

We were denied any serious opportunity to get to know Chinese people, whether official or unofficial. We were foreign capitalists, to be kept at arm's length, and we assumed that any Chinese contacts would have to report on us to the

Public Security Bureau. However, this assumption did not poison the atmosphere as far as I was concerned. Nor did the severe limitation on travel outside the centre of Beijing spoil my stay; there was plenty to do and to see within the limits.

I made some good friends in the Diplomatic Corps, and time flew since I was anxious to cover Beijing as thoroughly as possible. The great monuments, antique shops, bookshops, markets, Chinese Opera and so on filled my spare time. I was sorry for those who, without an interest in things Chinese, tended to be unhappy in a city lacking almost all Western facilities, where a difficult language made communication difficult. For me this was a lucky posting, since China was closed to foreigners except diplomats and official visitors; even journalists were rare birds. Cycling was a pleasant and convenient way of touring the city through the Hutongs (lanes) that wended their way between the remaining ancient walls and buildings. The main roads and streets were easy to navigate since the city had been established on a grid leading out from the Imperial City to north, south, east and west.

My bachelor routine was changed for two weeks in September by the arrival of Dick and Juliet Allen. They were excellent guests, interested in everything, and I was sorry to see them go.

Peggy had stayed at home to keep the girls company and did not come out until the end of the year. She told me that as her ship docked in Tianjin she did not recognise me standing on the quayside in my blue quilted coat. I suppose I had been driving myself hard and lost a lot of weight in the process. The early morning teacher session was more demanding than my sessions in Malaya when my Munshi used to join me on the verandah before breakfast.

Peggy approved of the furnishing of our rather small flat. I had thrown out the official furniture and replaced it with Chinese cabinets, altar tables and so on. The walls were hung with attractive old scrolls, and the floors covered with Chinese rugs. Although I was not in competition with the Residence at least I did not have to live surrounded by government

furnishings. The joys of the antique hunt were greatly increased by the fact that the prices were ludicrously low and the officials charged with control of antiques incredibly ignorant.

Peggy liked the staff, except for our driver. He was a nasty reminder of the misery that could result from Communist teaching. Having been brought up to hate capitalists, and to despise any form of service, he loathed his job. He saw himself as a proletarian driver mechanic, not as a member of our staff. It took me several visits to the Service Bureau before I could persuade them to let me have a replacement. They started from the proposition that if there was a problem it must be that my attitude was wrong, and that I should be more patient. The replacement was not a very good driver but at least he did not so obviously hate serving barbarians.

In mid-December I went down to Hong Kong to meet Heather and Anne coming in by plane from England. This was a great thrill. The train journey from Canton to Beijing was, however, sadly marred when Annie contracted asthma halfway along the journey. The fuggy hot carriage was impossible to freshen or cool. Heather and I were greatly relieved when Annie got her breath back in Beijing.

We enrolled the girls in the Catholic Sacred Heart School, the only English language school remaining in the whole of China. It was a fine old style 3Rs school where sinners were made to wear dunce's caps and marks were awarded for good and bad behaviour. We had a lot of fun visiting the Ming Tombs, the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Hunting Park and Kunming Lake at the Summer Palace, where we skated in winter, swam and boated in summer. The girls were even polite enough to profess an interest in Daddy's endless visits to antique shops. If they were bored by the life in Beijing they did not show it.

Letter Home

Yesterday we skated across the frozen lake in the Summer Palace, across which we had swum and rowed in summer. The Palace looks magical in winter with snow decorating the tiled roofs and trees, and ice on the lake. The scene was enlivened by the sight of young soldiers learning to skate and tumbling about in their thick quilted coats and fur hats, looking like a pack of gambolling puppies.

After skating we retreated to the peace of the Ming Tombs for our usual Sunday picnic, and since we too had quilted overcoats, the bitter cold did not bother us.

Picnics were the order of the day on Sundays, usually in the Ming Tombs area, and frequently we made up a party with the other Stewarts and their children. I did not, of course, give up all work once the girls came out, but after six months of overtime I no longer needed to work quite so hard. I had established a network of friendly colleagues, convinced my Ambassador that I was a useful member of his team, and brought my Chinese language up to standard.

A lot of office time was spent on analysing the Chinese newspapers, trying to work out what had been left out and reading between and behind the lines in the mode of the Kremlinologists. The prose was so repetitive that it made reading easy. I remember identifying Deng Xiaoping, at that time Secretary General of the Communist Party, as a likely leader of China in the years to come. My prediction was right, but my crystal ball did not foretell that he would be rusticated twice during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution before finally being anointed as Chairman Mao's successor.

Since I had been in China before the "Liberation" I was in the happy position of being able to make comparisons between pre and post Liberation circumstances, and it seemed to me that although there were many things wrong with Communist society the masses were significantly better off than they had been under the Nationalists. At least they had something to eat. The bourgeoisie, the intellectuals and industrialists and

businessmen were, of course, infinitely worse off. Their lives had been ruined. The entrepreneurs had been relieved of their factories and businesses, the intellectuals cowed into silence, and anyone with capital was well advised to give most of it away. The earlier tolerant view of bourgeoisie and landlords had been replaced with increasingly vicious campaigns, including the attack on the intellectuals who had naively assumed that the Party actually wanted to hear criticism. The formation of Rural and Urban Communes, the socialisation of agriculture and many other forms of social and economic reform had caused a great deal of misery.

But the Communists had not succeeded in changing human nature. As a Serb Communist General said to me many years later, "Communism is good in theory but bad in practice; people work for themselves and their families not for the state." Just before my arrival the "Great Leap Forward" campaign did much economic damage. There had been tragic famines in the countryside and one did not need to be a Nobel Prize winning economist to understand the point made by my Serbian friend. The Party had developed no magic wand with which to motivate peasants in a communal agricultural system. In 1959 Marshall Peng Dehuai had found himself in serious trouble when he had the courage to tell Chairman Mao, "The Emperor has no clothes." The air was full of such stupid slogans as "Better Red than Expert".

My posting to China coincided with a period of comparative calm that later turned out to be the lull before the storm: the dreadful cataclysmic campaign known as the Cultural Revolution, when Mao made a last desperate attempt to so revolutionise society that it would never revert to its old Capitalist ways.

I had arrived after the Great Leap period, with its nonsenses such as a steel making plant in every village and communal feeding. Although there were no major economic campaigns in my time, we had the excitement of watching the break up of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Some doubted the seriousness of the breach. I did not, having watched thousands

of Soviet advisers and their families moving out through Beijing Railway Station. We soon learnt how little genuine friendship there had been, when the Soviet "experts" walked out of their half-finished projects taking their blueprints with them. The Chinese in the street were delighted to see the back of the fat, greedy, ill-mannered barbarians, whose patronising airs had been annoying them ever since "Liberation".

The China tour seemed particularly short because of my switch to Shanghai in mid-tour, but there was probably not much more to experience in view of the restrictive security system. I had been fortunate in breaking out of the Beijing and Shanghai perimeters on many occasions, sometimes as a courier carrying diplomatic bags to Hong Kong. On the bag run there were always two officers to guard the bags. We had our four-berth sleeping carriage to ourselves, and although the food was primitive, with a bottle of Chinese beer, a book and the Chinese landscape rolling by the thirty-hour journey to Canton was a pleasant one.

Since Michael Stewart had, like Dick Allen, decided to use me as his ADC cum dragoman, I had several opportunities to travel that would not otherwise have come my way. One memorable tour was a Stewart clan visit to Hangchow, a city famous in Chinese history as a sort of Venice: rich and populous, renowned for its silk industry. It was a busy trip for me; an early morning walk to orientate myself before breakfast followed by an antique hunt, and when Michael had retired to write, Damaris and I toured temples. Hangchow was an attractive place provided one half closed the eyes to blot out modern squalor, focussed on the hills and temples which surrounded the West Lake, and thought of the famous poems about the lake.

On one occasion Michael took me along as his ADC on the annual diplomatic tour, when ambassadors were taken to see the countryside. During lunch in the village where Chairman Mao was brought up, our minders, at the juniors' table where I sat, tried to make us drink Mao Tai, the strong tasting Chinese grain spirit, while they drank their Ganbei (Dry Glass!) toasts

in Chinese tea. I suggested to my Dutch colleague that we should insist that it was impolite to drink if one's host was abstaining. The Policemen fell for this ploy and soon they were "well awa". They went to sleep in the coach after lunch. This was not the only time that I had occasion to turn the tables when our hosts insisted on trying to make the barbarians drunk. It was a particularly stupid habit, since we were usually bigger and much more accustomed to drinking than they were.

The juniors were in a separate coach. The Dutch and Egyptian juniors, kindred spirits whom I already knew quite well, shared my compartment with me. We had a jolly trip unencumbered by protocol, and we particularly enjoyed the spectacle of the ambassadorial coaches being mobbed by astonished peasants who were entranced by this barbarian circus that included Africans in their coloured robes. We heard delighted non-P.C. shrieks from the crowd, the politest of which was, "Look at those foreign devils."

My Dutch friend tried to get permission to visit Gueilin, famous for its bizarrely shaped hills and river. The officials in Beijing told him that he must apply again in Canton, and when he got there the officials denied that there was a river. When my friend pointed the river out on a map he was told that they would "Kou lu" (consider). The third day he was brushed off with the familiar "Bu fang bian" (not convenient) the catchall Chinese Communist formula for "No." The Chinese speakers amongst us spent a lot of time applying with scant success for permission to travel. The Public Security Bureau was disinterested in our cultural objectives. Nine times out of ten the answer was "Bu fang bian."

When I asked the Shanghai PSB for permission to spend a weekend in Soochow, they delayed their reply until midday on Saturday presumably assuming that it would be too late for me to use their permit. The PSB did not know me very well; I was out of the office and down to the railway station in a trice and spent a happy weekend walking the streets of Soochow where I seemed to be the only barbarian in town. The famous ancient gardens were indeed attractive. I liked the joke hidden within

the title of the garden known as "the humble administrator", the official, who had built this huge complex had been posted to Soochow to root out corruption and having fulfilled his task, set about plundering the local pockets in order to build the biggest garden in the city. There was much to see in Soochow apart from gardens; it was clear for example from reading the many Court notices about the latest criminal cases that a liberal use of capital punishment had not rooted out crime in Communist China. These were not matters discussed in the Chinese papers, nor were such notices on display in Beijing where foreigners would see them. The ability to read Chinese could be more useful than the ability to speak.

Once a year the Chinese relaxed the "Bu fang bian" policy to allow diplomats to travel by train to Beidaihe, the seaside resort favoured by the Communist leaders for their annual conferences. We were lucky to have a week by the sea in summer. I had a memorable week since a famous actor and his wife accepted my invitation to join us. They were a lovely couple; and I was delighted twenty years later to hear a familiar voice on Hong Kong Radio and to discover that my friend had been made Vice Minister for Culture. I was privileged to meet him again forty years later during a visit to Beijing when we went into a bear hug, like long lost brothers.

Our antique hunting during the Diplomatic tour was not very successful since many of Michael's fellow ambassadors seemed to be wholesale traders, rather than connoisseurs. On one occasion by the time that we arrived at our target shop we were greeted by the Egyptian Ambassador spreading his arms out in front of the two biggest cabinets, announcing gleefully "I have bought all these things." I got my own back unintentionally later on the trip when the same Ambassador, who knew as little about cameras as he did about antiques, asked me to help him with an over complex camera he had just bought. Having instructed him in the intricacies of his expensive new toy I was amused, a few minutes later, to see him being arrested for trying to take a picture of the local reservoir, which was no doubt classified as a sensitive target

by the paranoid Communists. I managed to persuade the goons to let my friend go free. This sort of incident was not uncommon; naïve Ambassadors taking photos without permission were frequently arrested, and lost their films to enthusiastic vigilantes. Since "Their Excellencies" did not speak Chinese, they found it difficult to persuade their tormentors of their exalted status.

During this diplomatic jamboree the Swiss Ambassador, who had once spent a Sunday under peasant arrest for taking photographs of a dilapidated temple, got into trouble for another reason. The diplomats were staying in cottages scattered around a mountain resort, and the Swiss Ambassador had been invited down to the British bungalow to share our whisky. The atmosphere was convivial and he stayed late. When he arrived back at his cottage he found himself locked out, I performed my usual role as interpreter/rescuer.

The British Embassy was uniquely well staffed with Chinese speakers in a diplomatic corps that was mostly deaf, dumb, and blind in respect of the Chinese language. My linguistic ability was put to a severe test when Sir Harold Caccia, then Head of the Foreign Office, visited Beijing. Michael warned me that our illustrious visitor wished to visit the Temple in the Western hills, which he had used as a summer cottage in the 1930s when he was a Third Secretary. I reported that Sir Harold's temple was clearly outside our permitted travel zone, so Michael agreed that we should arrange our programme so that there would be no time for a long walk into the hills. On the appointed day we set off for a general tour and had a good fête champêtre in the Ming Tombs, but Sir Harold, despite his well-lubricated lunch, insisted that we should try to visit his temple. He brushed aside my warning that we would be out of bounds if we did so, and was unimpressed when after a few steps up the hill path I pointed out a stone inscribed in Chinese characters "Entry Forbidden!"

As we arrived at the first crest I remarked that we were now looking down onto the Chinese Military Academy, and

persuaded Sir Harold that we should go no further. I sweetened the pill by promising that my telephoto lens would capture a picture of his temple, which we could see ahead of us. Having taken my photos I moved rapidly down the hill with Damaris, in the hope that the rest of the party would hurry after us.

But our luck did not hold; not long after I heard a shout and looking back saw a tableau vivant silhouetted against the sky. The tableau consisted of Michael, Sir Harold and a Chinese soldier whose bayonet was pointing towards his two prisoners. I trotted back up the hill, explained who we were, and that we were simply having an afternoon walk, and suggested that we should be allowed to continue on our way back to our cars. The sentry would have none of it. "BU DONG" ("Don't move!") was his only response. I then persuaded him to summon a senior officer, promising that we would not move. He returned bringing a Sergeant who was equally disinclined to engage in a dialogue with me. Once again "BU DONG!" was all I could elicit from him, so once again I asked that a senior officer be summoned. This time a Captain appeared, and before he had time to launch into the "BU DONG!" mantra, I showed him a clipping from *The People's Daily* reporting that Marshal Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister, had invited Sir Harold to be his guest at a banquet that evening. I pointed out that unless we were allowed to return to our cars immediately we would be late for the banquet, and remarked that I was glad that I would not be the officer responsible for ruining the Marshal's dinner party. To my huge relief the Captain got the message and let us go. It was, of course, a near miracle that I had the clipping in my pocket. I reflected that if the Captain had not seen reason my senior officers would probably have had selective memories about my earlier warnings; certainly I would have got no marks if the Head of our Diplomatic Service had been arrested.

*Said a scholarly Sinologue; how
Can I teach you the meaning of TAO?
It is more and it's none
It has come and it's gone
I hope it's all clear to you now*

The Chinese philosophers were not all as difficult to comprehend as the Taoists. The Confucians and Legalists were concerned with the relationship of man to the State, not with metaphysics.

I have often thought that Taoism, which amongst other things, preaches the virtues of inaction, could just as well have been the invention of a wily Whitehall warrior; minimum action, avoidance of responsibility and reluctance to make decisions sit well with Taoism.

*Chairman Mao was a great politician
And renowned as a clever tactician
But his post-war campaigns
Brought losses, not gains
Deng Xiaoping was the economagician*

Mao won the Civil War and threw the Nationalists out of China, but his frenzied attempts at social engineering, concluding with the ten-year disaster of the Cultural Revolution, stultified China's economy. Deng Xiaoping had to wait until Mao's death before he could put economics in command.

Shanghai Days

LI TONG WAI GUO (conspirator with foreign countries) were the words on the "big character poster" on the gate. Inside, the young Red Guards were searching, looting and wrecking Nien Cheng's elegant house. Males and females wielding whips and sticks struck her and forced her to kneel, shouting, "Class enemy; counter revolutionary; running dog of Anglo-

Calcutta



Kirriemuir



George



Kirriemuir



Ah Paat

MACAU



Mr Suen



KUALA LUMPUR

*Greetings from
Li Lihua,
1950*



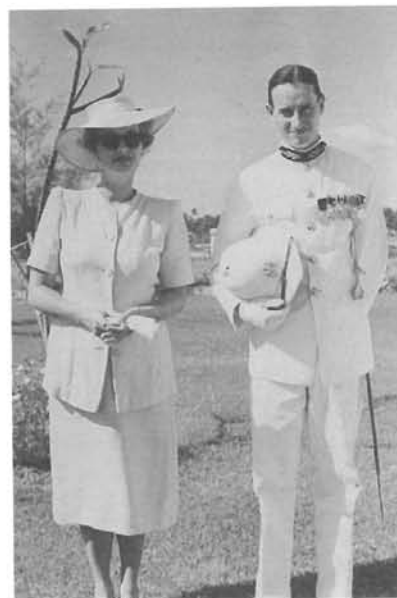
Malacca Christening



School Opening

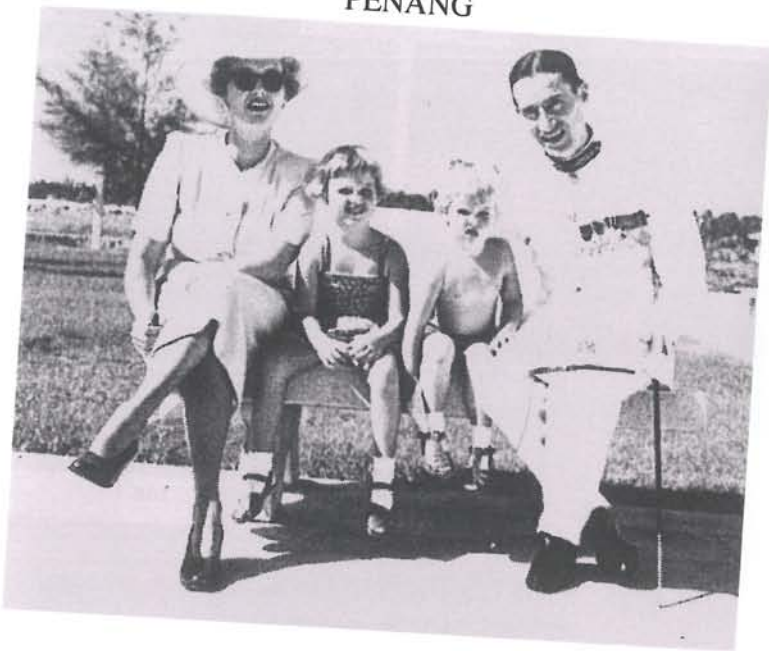


Ballot Box



PENANG

PENANG



RANGOON



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GHAI



Staff of the
CG's
Residence



Nien
Cheng
at a
Banquet

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Heather, Anne, Peggy, Bess and grandparents at Aspley House



Two little angels from their Convent School



Heather and Anne



Anne's Wedding



Chieftain greeting Minister at St Andrew's Ball



RGA days



Whose
Business
Values?



Central Committee
School



Farewell to China



With President
Jiang Zemin



PLA Generals

HM The Queen Mother
(BW Dinner)



With Colonel Rose



The whole family, 2006



Normandy Reunion



Off to the Ball

Grandson
Gordon,
2006



The family,
2006





Rory
enjoying
my
Aston
Martin



Rory
and
Granny
Rose



Martial Arts
in Kunming

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Mid Iran walk

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Summer in Broich: Cadas, Torquil and Diana (Sally's siter)



Fiona and Rory enjoying Christmas in Hong Kong

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Fiona celebrates her 21st Birthday
"manning" the ancient Gatling in Darjeeling



Gordon looks suspiciously at Uncle Rory

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Sally, Fiona and the Chinese aristocrats



The whole family in Hong Kong for Christmas

American Imperialists, foreign spy!" Nien was a prime target for any revolutionary witch hunters. She was an aristocrat, appreciated Tang poetry; collected Ming paintings and her jade and porcelain were superb. Her whole lifestyle was unsuitable for China in 1961, but she had stayed on in China to look after her beloved daughter Mei Ping. Now she was the victim of the Cultural Revolution, China's worst convulsion since 1949. For the next seven years she paid a terrible penalty; solitary confinement, miserable conditions, poor health and brutality. She survived with unbelievable courage and her indomitable will unbroken.

In the summer of 1961, Michael Stewart sent me to hold the fort in Shanghai while the Consul General took his leave. This was a most exciting and indeed flattering, prospect since I had only been in the service for about three years. There was an additional challenge involved; Michael had asked me to consider the future of the post, and the possibilities for economy.

The junior Stewarts set off by train to Shanghai with the faithful Bao Shan, and I prepared to take charge of a sizeable residence, previously the house of the No 2 in the golden days of the pre-war Consulate General, and the seventy-two roomed office building, in a compound of seven acres. The incumbent was not very welcoming; perhaps Michael had told him of my remit; in any case we had nothing in common since he was not a "China hand" and gave every sign of disliking his posting. Whereas I thought it a privilege to be able to look at the billion Chinese, he seemed to find it uncomfortable that they were looking at him. He was reading Hansard while I was reading the People's Daily and there was no meeting of minds.

This complex was very expensive to run, since we had about thirty-five Chinese staff ranging from interpreters, clerks and accountants to gardeners and gatekeepers. Clearly economies were required if, as we all hoped, the place was to be kept open.

We enjoyed Shanghai immensely. It had few famous

monuments of consummate interest but the old city had not been destroyed, the old Great World Amusement Park was going strong, and we had more local contacts than in Beijing. In September Peggy and the girls set off homewards by sea; Peggy re-occupying the cottage we had bought by Richmond Park, and the girls preparing for their first term at Great Oaks, the prep school for St Mary's, Wantage. I hoped that the China interlude had not been too disruptive; it had been a great joy to me to have my two cheerful and loving little girls around. Their sea journey en route to Hong Kong was somewhat fraught since a typhoon brewed up as they sailed through the Taiwan Straits. Now I was once more alone, without family distraction, and able to put in as much overtime as I liked.

My job as Acting Consul General was not demanding in terms of routine business. The Chinese staff knew the ropes well, and since my only British staff was one very young Attaché there was none of the depth of debate about China that was the staple of Chancery work in Beijing. My top priority was to finish my report for Michael on reasons for keeping this window into China open. I had little difficulty with the question since clearly Shanghai was important; its life and politics very different from the Beijing scene and, apart from the Swiss who, happily, were of the positive neutrality school, we were the only Western consulate in Shanghai, the rest of the consular corps being from the socialist camp. The means of economising also appeared to be easy since gardeners, gatekeepers, clerks, cleaners, accountants and interpreters were over generously supplied. My report recommended a cut of about thirty per cent in numbers.

When Michael sent me as Consul General to carry out the reforms that I had suggested, I soon found that my formula, however logical, was going to be opposed tooth and nail. There were many disagreeable sessions in my palatial office, when the workers' delegation, clothed in drab blue Mao tunics and wearing their blue caps, would sit belligerently before my desk, rebuking me for my attitude; in other words complaining that I was insisting that we had somehow to reduce staff

numbers.

My senior Chinese staff whose jobs would, of course, disappear if we closed the office, were privately on my side; and with their help I eventually succeeded in getting oral agreement for redundancies about a month before the end of my tour. I then issued invitations to all our Chinese staff for a banquet to say farewell to those who were leaving. My euphoria was short lived. The day before the banquet I was told that there would be no one attending my banquet. It began to become clear that the fly in the ointment was a young office cleaner, the most recently joined member of staff, who outranked the rest of the staff as Party Secretary of our office. I decided that in his case the last in first out principle should be waived; clearly his office cleaning skills were vital to the well being of the office. *Mirabile dictu*, once the cleaner's name had been struck off the redundancy list all was sweetness and light. The redundancy agreement was signed the day before I left Shanghai. I asked my Chinese allies to explain why there had been this last minute concession: their answer was, "Better the devil we know."

Although the long drawn out negotiation wasted a lot of time, it did not seriously mar my pleasure in the post. There was plenty to write about and I had enough contacts to make for an interesting social life. As in Beijing of course, any Chinese who had social dealings with us were liable to interrogation by the Security authorities, and I often wondered why my Chinese friends found the risk worthwhile. Sadly, many of them suffered during the agonies of the Cultural Revolution time when they were easy targets, "running dogs and spies" of the Imperialists. But this was all for the future; I arranged cinema shows, receptions, and had tête-à-têtes over lunch and supper, and no doubt my servants and the gate guards and my visitors reported on every meeting. I could only take comfort from the fact that my visitors knew far better than I what risks they were running.

There were a few old stagers left in the European community, and European managers running the vestigial

remnants of the Hong Kong Bank and the Chartered Bank and Shell. For the golfers I laid out a pitch-and-putt course around my seven acres, and we had badminton and Scottish dancing.

I had some memorable houseguests including "Squeak", wife of Murray Macle hose then Political Adviser and later Governor of Hong Kong, and the Stewarts who came down on an official visit. This was a most successful affair, when I managed to persuade the authorities to let us have our old launch for the day so that we could picnic with our Chinese colleagues as we cruised along the Yangtze.

I commemorated Armistice Day with a poignant service in the compound; Chinese and Western friends attended and a surprising number of people turned up for familiar hymns and prayers. There was no priest available so I took the service.

The social piece de resistance of my time in Shanghai was a Scottish Ball in the compound where I had thirty-two dancers on the floor for the Eightsome Reel. The Soviet Consul General was one of my guests on this occasion; he made my evening by asking, as he left, "Tell me Mr Stewart; in Scotland are zees ze dances of ze nobles or ze peasants." I replied, "In my country Mr Consul General there are no classes."

This same Russian had been causing me trouble by insisting on trying to drink me under the table every time we met. I asked a Chinese doctor friend who had no love for Russians, whether he could suggest a defence. He came up with a revolting, but highly successful remedy, consisting of cream cheese followed by black coffee, and accompanied by aspirin, to be ingested just before I called on my Soviet colleague. The results were most gratifying and the Russian ceased to be a nuisance. The recipe stood me in good stead twenty years later when, as Chieftain of the St Andrew's Society in Kuala Lumpur, I was required by tradition to drink a quai ch of neat whisky with each of the ten tables in the room. This meant drinking a bottle and a half of neat Scotch in the space of about ten minutes. I knew that all my predecessors, much bigger men than me, had been carried out.

I was determined that the honour of the Stewarts should be upheld, and using the Shanghai recipe was able to stay upright throughout the evening. The next day, of course, was a very different matter; the hangover was monumental.

Amongst my small coterie of Chinese friends were the daughter of the last Anglican Bishop of Shanghai, and the amazing Nien Cheng, whose book *Life and Death in Shanghai* has been a best seller for many years. When I met her, Nien was adviser to the rump of the Shell Company. Her late husband had been a diplomat in the pre-Liberation, Nationalist service, when they had been a very successful and popular couple on the diplomatic circuit. Like many other patriotic Chinese they had returned to their native country to offer their services in the work of reconstruction after the ravages of civil war and Japanese occupation, and like many others they soon found that it was impossible to work with the uncouth and inexperienced proles who had taken over.

Nien's husband then joined Shell and, when he died of cancer, Shell gave Nien the job of adviser. Nien's daughter Mei Ping was a delightful student who was attending the Shanghai Film Institute. She was always ready to help me polish diction, pronunciation and delivery whenever I had a speech to make. In retrospect I am not sure whether I earned too many marks from the proles for these polished performances, since the Shanghai mafia tended to speak a horribly mangled version of the national language. But my friends enjoyed my performances even if the Mayor did not.

The harrowing tale that is unfolded in Nien's book is a testament to incredible courage. She refused to bow to the guttersnipes who took command during the Cultural Revolution. Although she was humiliated, tortured, ill and subjected to solitary confinement, she maintained her morale largely through a determination to see her daughter again or to find out what had happened to her. She survived despite the fact that she had only one kidney. Finally, she refused to leave prison until her jailers gave her a written apology acknowledging that she had been wrongly imprisoned. Mei

Ping was of the same calibre; she was beaten cruelly, refused to bear false witness against her mother, and died when she threw herself, or was thrown, out of a window.

I asked Nien just before I left Shanghai why on earth she did not leave China. I suggested that her haut bourgeois background, perfect command of English, Western friends, cultured habits, and lifestyle all combined to make her an obvious target in any campaign, and that therefore she was likely to get into serious trouble. I suggested that she should take the opportunity offered by her annual holiday in Hong Kong to leave China for good. She replied, "I cannot leave while my mother is still alive, and while Mei Ping is unmarried, but if things go wrong I will kill myself. Better a broken jade than a cracked tile." On that proud but gloomy note we parted company and the next I heard of Nien was that she had become a victim of the vicious Cultural Revolution, accused of being a Kuomintang spy, a Western agent and a counter revolutionary. The fact that she was none of these things was irrelevant: she was anathema to the Red Guards.

The Bishop's daughter was not imprisoned; she had been marvellously ingenious in persuading the authorities that her son was an imbecile, and that she would be doing China a favour if she took the useless mouth to a capitalist country. The "imbecile" went on to become the head of his school. It was an extraordinary privilege to know such cultivated and resolute dragon ladies.

Twenty years on when the Cultural Revolution was officially over I made new friends in China whose experiences, while less dramatic and tragic than Nien's, were such as to make many an ordinary mortal give up the struggle. A professor sweeping the streets at less than half the pay of the lowest labourer in the freezing cold of a Chinese winter; another professor shut up for many years in a broom cupboard. Their amazing resilience, and tolerance is extraordinary.

I found, in the PRO files in Kew, a copy of the Beijing Embassy's covering letter forwarding my valedictory despatch from Shanghai. The cover included the following gratifying

paragraphs. It was nice to know that someone had approved.

Although, as Mr Stewart reports, the tiny foreign Consular and business communities are dwindling still further and the obstacles to contact with the Chinese population are increasing, it nevertheless remains true that an energetic observer in Shanghai can obtain considerably more first-hand information about ordinary Chinese life and thought than the diplomatists can from their carefully-isolated suburb on the outskirts of Peking. In his short tour of duty, Mr Stewart has performed excellent service in this respect.

Extracts from my Valedictory: -

- 5 *In the domestic sector of the economy, the authorities in Shanghai are still experimenting with the various attempts at rationing systems. The grain ration remains unchanged although to a city of rice eaters the over high proportion of wheat in their ration is a matter for considerable displeasure. The oil and fat ration is now so small as to be derisory. On the other hand, the introduction of industrial coupons for commodities other than food has had the desired effect of establishing some sort of order in the local market for everyday household goods. The cloth ration remains sufficient to make little more than one shirt for the year. The flourishing free market, which was suppressed in December, grew again into a glorious black market and thieves' market in spring and has been once again suppressed.*
- 6 *On the other hand, in order to bid for support from the intellectuals and the deposed capitalists, considerable changes have been made in the restaurant system to provide an outlet for their cash which continues to flow from their investments and overseas remittances, and the gap between the standard of living of the ex-capitalists and intellectuals and the man in the street is glaring and increasing. This gap is reflected in an increased crime rate. The increase in crime*

is a matter of common knowledge in Shanghai, which causes the ordinary citizen to think twice before travelling on public transport or alone after dark with any valuables. That this is not a matter of rumour by those ill-disposed to the present regime is testified, by the appearance from time-to-time on the walls, of court notices, recording the trial and sentencing of criminals who have indulged in crimes of violence in various parts of the city.

- 13 *Despite the stagnation and indeed retrogression of the economy, the reduction of the number of universities, the shoddy clothes, the increase of crime, it would be a grave error to imagine that there is any serious breakdown in political control and security. The Party and its auxiliaries are still in control and the street committees continue to provide an effective machine for surveillance. The crime situation provides a useful pointer in this direction. The Police and others concerned have shown a considerable degree of efficiency in dealing with the upsurge of crime and shown once again that when they wish to grapple with a problem the social and administrative structure is still capable of asserting full control.*
- 15 *For the man in the street this is, as far as one can judge from the limited contact available to us, a time of little hope or expectation of immediate improvement. For the majority it is, as so often in Chinese history, a time for the individual to avoid trouble and seek in whatever limited ways are available to him to preserve the fabric of his own immediate circle. The appeal for unity in adversity and patriotic endeavour may ring bells with the Party, but the tocsin has little effect on the broad masses: even the mass propaganda warning the public of an expected invasion from Taiwan falls largely on deaf ears.*

I did not foresee the Cultural Revolution: but then no one else, not even the Chinese, anticipated that cataclysmic event. That

came four years later. I was sorry to say goodbye to China in mid-1962, and hoped that they would find a formula that would permit progress without chaos: but that took another twenty years to find.

*The gowns they once wore in Shanghai
Cheongsams, were a sight for sore eyes
When the ladies petite
Went out on the street
Men would often utter a sigh*

During my time in Shanghai the Cheongsam was not to be seen on the streets but the matrons of my acquaintance still dressed up for parties in sheath-like garments, made of silk.

This was precisely the sort of feminine demonstration which infuriated the Red Guards, who revelled in pudding basin hairstyles and scruffy clothes, and hounded anyone who dared to make up or dress up.

Mongolian Side Show

National Day in Ulan Bator; parade is over, vast quantities of the national drinks have been consumed, and I find myself arm-in-arm with extremely friendly members of the Mongolian Politburo, dancing cheerfully in celebration of the independent ways of the descendants of Genghis Khan. The square is full of people.

I left China at the end of my tour on the Trans Siberian train to Ulan Bator and thence to Moscow. This was a fascinating journey. At the Border our carriages had to be lifted up for a change of bogeys to fit the wider Soviet gauge rail tracks. Here the comic security men insisted that passengers should not leave their carriages to observe this arcane ritual.

From then onwards we were in the hands of Mongolian staff; the food was greasy stew and little else. I spent about ten days in Ulan Bator meeting many officials, riding Mongol

horses, visiting Gers (Yurt in Russian), the local equivalent of the Red Indian tepee, and generally trying to get a feel for this landlocked area that was largely unknown to the West.

The country, previously Outer Mongolia, broke away from China after the Russian Revolution, and had sat uncomfortably between its two giant neighbours ever since. There was not a Westerner to be seen: Soviets and Chinese were the only visible foreigners. As I write, forty years on, Mongolia has become a popular tourist destination.

My Mongolian minder was a bore, but since he knocked off at 4.00 p.m. every day, I was free to roam every evening. The senior Mongols were extremely friendly and I was royally entertained by the Politburo who invited me to join them for the national day celebrations. The parade was not impressive, but the generous offerings of Khumis, (fermented mare's milk) and Arx, (the local grain spirit) ensured that the reception was a real party. It was a surprise to find myself marching arm in arm with members of the Politburo around the main square, after our junketing, and particularly odd after two years of formality in China. The contrast with the stuffy Communists of Beijing was extreme.

I recently found a copy of the long report I wrote after the visit in which I supported the idea that we should open up diplomatic relations. The extract from my report gives some flavour of the visit. I was delighted to discover in the PRO file that someone had commented "This excellent report adds much needed detail to our knowledge of Mongolia." I was even more delighted not long after to hear that it had been decided to open an Embassy, and that the first incumbents would be my old friends from Oxford days, the Hibberts. I have never been back but Rory and others I know have reported favourably on progress, now that the Soviet juggernaut has lost its power.

Extracts from Mongolian Report

In the City only the women maintain the traditional dress; I was told by one intellectual who wore a Western suit but possessed his own Del (gown), that the Del persisted in the countryside but was under steady pressure from the Party modernists, all of whom affected Western clothes. The Ger (tent) and the horse as symbols of the pastoral nomadic economy of the past are also under attack and in the City will soon become matters of tourist interest rather than everyday life. In the museums, on the stage and in the arts, two regular villain classes are portrayed: the Chinese rulers and merchants of Manchu times and the Lamas. For the rest, although the Party pays lip-service to the Bloc rallying cries against Imperialism, there seems to be little popular xenophobia. The Nation seems proud of the manifestations of Mongolian progress and interested in the achievements of the USSR in science and space: Gagarin and Titov's photographs were to be seen everywhere, in parades, houses, and tents.

I noticed that many Mongolians were anxious to protest, before one even mentioned the subject, that their country had no real desert; otherwise there was no obvious national chip on the shoulder.

Language reform by way of change from the old vertical script to Cyrillic took place in 1946. Not a single official, however, took notes in Cyrillic in my presence: all used the old script. But the modern language is riddled with Russian words and there seems to be no resistance to this process; for modern ideas, scientific, political and economic, the natural and easy way has been taken of adopting Russian rather than attempting to invent Mongolian equivalents.

It seems to me, watching the nonchalant and leisurely air with which the Mongolian goes about his capital or sets about mundane tasks, that apart from a relatively small minority of zealous Party men, the nation still adopts the happy casualness of children of a bountiful nature, whose priorities and demands are not those of the pushing west, or the ambitious socialist. That so many bonuses have to be paid, even to university students, tells its own story in this context. The psychological make-up of the man in the street is perhaps still that of the herdsman with limited demands for food, shelter, clothes and animals and, once these are satisfied, no particular urge to spend on

other luxuries. The contrast with the bustling Chinese, or even the Bloc representatives, is startling as the crowds move around the town.

12 Administrative Standards

My only direct personal experience of the Mongolian administration was in relation to the organisation of tourism, hotel and shop keeping, banking, ineffective programming and information work. In all these branches the administrative standards, even judged against Communist bureaucracy or oriental underdeveloped territories, were lamentably low. The simplest accounts took hours to prepare, my railway berth had been sold to another person as well as myself, no one could be found for a whole day to answer enquiries at the railway station – an almost endless list of inefficiencies experienced by myself and other travellers could be drawn up.

I had considerable difficulty in claiming a berth on the train for Moscow; the Mongols clearly had no interest in segregating foreigners or in giving them special privileges, but I managed eventually to find a berth and continued on my journey to Lake Baikal. Once across the Soviet Border, staff and food became Russian. For a while the food was an improvement on Mongolian fare, but by the time we had arrived in Moscow, six days later, there was nothing left except vodka and black bread. I thought wistfully of the relatively organised Chinese restaurant cars. Although it was interesting to be aboard the Trans Siberian train, much of the scenery is boring. However, perhaps because I had entered Russia by train from Mongolia, or perhaps through sheer incompetence on the part of the KGB, I was not subjected to solitary confinement in my Victorian sleeping compartment as we rolled through the fir forests and the plains, and chugged ponderously through Omsk and Tomsk. Although there were language problems I had some interesting encounters that would not have been possible in China.

I did not stay long in Russia because the KGB's behaviour obsessed the Embassy with the notion that one should never travel alone in Russia for fear of entrapment. So, having done

Moscow's sights, I caught a plane to Vienna, and revelled in Baroque architecture, Mozart, and freedom. My short experience of the Soviet Union convinced me that I was lucky to be a China hand rather than a Kremlinologist. China's ancient civilisation had a much longer pedigree than the Russian.

*The Mongolian spirit's called ARX
And when tipling they forget about Marx
Talk no more about "Party"
And become very hearty
So Marxism's quite vanquished by ARX*

Unfortunately in later years, none of my commercial clients had any interest in Mongolia so I never returned, but the Mongols I have met since have all had the same jolly charm.. My most bizarre encounter was with the President of the Mongolian Wrestling Association. We exchanged cards on an aeroplane but he had been assassinated before Rory could call on him in Mongolia.

Home Posting 1962

I returned from China to become, for the first time in my life, a householder, living in a London suburb. Our Regency cottage, alongside Richmond Park, was at the Kingston Gate, not the smart but intolerably expensive Richmond Gate, where we had lived temporarily in a rundown hotel in 1957. It soon became apparent that my choice of location made little sense. For me the commuting was a misery; although the distance as the crow flew was less than that between Richmond and Whitehall, the journey took twice as long. This would have been tolerable had the family been making full use of the spacious deer park at their front door, but they did not, so I decided to look for something near the centre. When we put the cottage on the market we soon had offers from people who, like us, had been bedazzled by the closeness of

Richmond Park. I told the Estate Agent and the three prospective purchasers that I was not concerned with offers "subject to contract", which were no more than statements of interest. I wanted someone to sign an irrevocable contract to purchase. The Estate Agent was appalled by my heretical approach but I persisted, and said to each prospective buyer "There are others in the race and the first person to sign a binding contract will win." This galvanised all three prospective buyers and they moved their surveyors and lawyers to unwonted speed of action.

We moved first to a flat at the top of Sir Richard Allen's house in Wellington Square. Like many people who had spent their lives in the service of the Crown, he needed to augment his pension, and so rented out both top floor and basement. The flat was small, but adequate for a family with children at boarding school. We enjoyed living at a central address, convenient both for commuting to the office and for the house hunt.

It was a delight to be with the Allens again. At this time, Sir Richard was writing a book on Malaysia (*Prospect and Retrospect*) and we had many a debate about his script. He had a fluent writing style, and his Ambassadorial experience in neighbouring Burma had given him a feel for South East Asia. His work for the Palestine Government gave him a good perspective. He was kind enough to say that I had helped, but in any case I enjoyed collaborating with him on the book. I was flattered when he offered to dedicate the book to me, but suggested that we had better use my initials only. Thirty years later when I had joined the ranks of associate academics and started writing something other than letters and reports, I appreciated more fully how skilful his writing methods had been. We left the Allens with considerable regret; but clearly a small flat in Wellington Square, however convenient and economical, could not be a long-term solution to the Stewarts' accommodation needs.

After some months we found a run-down house in Pimlico with twelve rooms. The building was in a corner of a cul-de-

sac, built on a curious L-shaped plan, which provided three small rooms on each floor. I plunged enthusiastically into conversion and refurbishing, and the family gave energetic support in the DIY work which was essential in order to keep costs within budget. Churton Place, our new home, had previously been a "rooming house", with sink and gas rings in every "bed sit", and minimal bath and loo facilities. We had to convert it into a home.

The most exciting DIY effort was an assault by pickaxe on the wall between sitting room and dining room. The Irish builders who were helping me were appalled and insisted that the dreaded reinforced steel joint should be fixed across the gap to take the load. The rest of our work was less dramatic: scraping, painting, floor tiling and the like. Many years later I was reminded of my experiments in DIY when Annie's father-in-law, Lord Carver, plumbed a bathroom for her new house in Brixton. Unfortunately, the skills he had acquired on a military course in DIY for officers about to retire proved inadequate. The plumbing leaked on Lady Carver. I reflected that it was probably best for the amateurs to stay away from water.

The girls were very good about helping us to remake the house. They applauded my use of the pickaxe, and joined heartily in the arduous task of scraping off old wallpaper and paint. I quickly re-learnt the lessons, which I had learnt when my mother had apprenticed us to carpenters and decorators in school holidays, that it takes three times as long to prepare a surface as to paint it. We devised a useful shortcut for laying parquet tiles: working inwards, not as the instructions demanded working outwards from the centre. Our method was much quicker but always left a small-uncovered space in the middle of the floor to be concealed under fitted carpet or bed. I often wondered what later owners of Churton Place did about the holes in the middle of the bedrooms' parquet floors.

Philippines Interlude

"Pay the ransom or we will kill the ladies," was the message passed to the Embassy by the Police; so the Ambassador, understandably worried by the possibility that there were indeed two English ladies in the custody of some bandits, summoned the Malay speaker on his staff to go down and sort it out.

So I was flying in the Defence Attaché's plane above the Sulu Sea. Zamboanga behind us to the east, Jolo Jolo, the capital of the Sulu Archipelago, with the Naval Base at Tawi Tawi as our objective. This area had been a refuge for pirates, smugglers and dissidents since time immemorial. These were the "Bad Lands" in a "Wild West", where Muslim rebels continued to defy the government and demand autonomy. We had an escort of armoured cars fore and aft to take us to Police HQ, where the Chief of Police made my day when he explained that the hundreds of photographs adorning the boards around the building were of missing people. I was glad to have my revolver and that I had deposited my bag of ransom money, £30,000 in cash, in the Constabulary safe in Zamboanga.

In early 1963 I was sent to reinforce the Manila Embassy, which had suddenly found itself faced with an unexpected and unwelcome change in the diplomatic relations between our two countries as a result of Konfrontasi. This was an undeclared war against Malaysia intended to wreck the fledgling state that had been created by bringing together four ex-British colonies: Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo. Sukarno, President of Indonesia, had several reasons for his opposition to Malaysia. One was that Sarawak and North Borneo (now Sabah) were situated a thousand miles east of Malaya, and there were no historical links between East and West Malaysia other than the British connection. Another, that Sarawak and Sabah were situated on the Northern half of a vast island which the Indonesians called Kalimantan and

which Sukarno considered to be within the Indonesian sphere of influence. He was, in any case, vehemently opposed to the enlargement of Malaya. It was a particular affront since the world could see that Malaya was much better governed and more successful than its giant neighbour suffering from twenty years of Bung Sukarno's personality cult, sloganeering, incompetence and corruption. Lastly, Sumatra and Java, which were much bigger than Malaya, had historically been her big brothers culturally and economically, so Sukarno was displeased to find little brother succeeding.

Indonesia had sponsored an unsuccessful rebellion in Brunei, dropped parachutists in south Malaya, attacked a Malay battalion in south Sabah, and engaged in frequent cross border raids into Kalimantan Utara (North Kalimantan), and piratical activities in the Straits of Malacca. Now supported by the Philippines, it was questioning the legal basis of Sabah's southern Border by resurrecting the claims of the long since defunct Sultanate of Sulu.

I did not know at the time, nor I presume did Sukarno, that the British Government was extremely hard pressed to maintain our military presence in Asia. We had intended, having given up our imperial responsibilities, a rapid military withdrawal from our expensive overseas commitments and Konfrontasi had badly upset the plan.

Sukarno was eventually forced to abandon Konfrontasi because of the skilful efforts of the British armed forces in partnership with the Malaysian Forces waging a limited, partly clandestine, war against Indonesia.

I found my new Ambassador, John Pilcher, extraordinarily like a younger version of Sir Richard Allen. He was small, cheerful, kindly, spoke numerous languages and, just like Sir Richard, would draft telegrams using the hunt and peck technique on a portable typewriter as we sat round his desk. For the third time I had "hit the jackpot" with a Head of Mission with whom I shared many interests, and an Ambassadors who was charming and fun to work for. And once again since I was the longest serving Asia hand in

Chancery, I took on the role of resident Asia hand; the role performed before the war by members of the consular services who spent their lives overseas and thus had acquired local language and knowledge denied to the peripatetic diplomats. Although I did not know Tagalog, at least I knew Malay and Chinese.

Letter Home

I spent last weekend "comme tourist", sampling volcanoes, rice terraces and waterfalls. I also tried the bamboo dance where you dance your pas de basque between bamboo poles that are moved in time to the quickening rhythm of a local orchestra. I managed to avoid a sharp crack on the ankles, which is the penalty for missing a step, helped perhaps by old memories of sword dancing.

Many years later when both of us had long since retired from government service, Lord Maclehoze said: "You were immensely lucky, Brian, with your first three Heads of Mission." I replied, "Fortunately my luck continued when I had you as Ambassador in Saigon while I sat in Hanoi, and as Governor when I came to Hong Kong."

One day John Pilcher sent me down to investigate a report from Filipino sources that two British ladies had been kidnapped by pirates from Sabah and were being held for ransom, and that the kidnapers were threatening to kill the ladies unless we produced £30,000. I was convinced that the report was a fraud but HE brushed my assessment aside saying "It's all very well for you Brian, but I, not you, will carry the can if the report turns out to be true." So I set off on what I expected to be a wild goose chase, but I took Sulu's reputation for lawlessness seriously, and borrowed a .45 revolver, and took the Vice Consul along as escort.

This cock and bull tale of British hostages captured by pirates gave me an unexpected opportunity to visit the Sulu Archipelago; a region where the US and Philippine Governments and the Spaniards before them during their four

hundred years of colonial rule, had all failed to impose law and order. The people, over the centuries, refused to see themselves as part of the Christian state to the north; and to this day the Moros (Moors) still present the central government with severe problems. These Moros have always been fanatical warriors, and the American Marines found to their discomfort that the normal .38 calibre bullet was not heavy enough to stop a charging Moro. They had to invent heavy-duty .45 ammunition to solve the problem. Several reasons have been advanced to explain the astonishing ability of the Moros to continue to charge when severely wounded. An exotic explanation is that, just before they charged, they tied wet bindings around their private parts so that the excruciating pain in their groin vastly exceeded the pain of an enemy bullet. Whatever the explanation, the Moros appear to have perfected a technique that made their battle charge even more effective than that of the Scottish Highlanders.

We could get no useful intelligence out of the Police at Jolo Jolo so we flew on to Tawi Tawi, the last, most westerly island of the chain that leads from Zamboanga to the coast of Sabah. I was billeted in the naval barracks, and found that I had been allotted the room normally occupied by the Indonesian Naval Liaison Officer. It seemed to me that I was being treated as an ally, and that the Philippine armed forces were out of sympathy with the unholy alliance that their Foreign Secretary had formed with the Indonesians. We spent some fruitless days visiting islands where it was rumoured the British captives had been seen. My knowledge of Malay came in handy since my Filipino escort spoke only Tagalog and the locals only Malay. We found many people who claimed to know where the ladies were, but no one who had actually seen them. I had a particularly memorable meeting with the Headman of Tawi Tawi who described the wondrous peacefulness of his township where, he assured me, anyone could sleep in the street unmolested. He was certain that no pirates had ever been there.

I grew ever more certain that the ladies did not exist, and

returned to Manila to report accordingly. The British press were swarming in Manila and London papers were telephoning the Embassy; all were seeking comment from Stewart. I thought it best to stay out of their way.

The closest we ever got to any sort of circumstantial evidence supporting the rumours of kidnap was the sight, from our aircraft, of a pirated motor launch that had been driven aground after a police chase. The launch had been stolen from Sabah but there was no evidence to show that our ladies had been on board. We never discovered who had been responsible for the hoax; presumably it was some bright spark who thought we would be naïve enough to hand over money without any proof of the ladies' existence. For my part I was grateful for a unique opportunity to explore the archipelago.

While I was staying with the Philippine Navy at Tawi Tawi I was invited to lunch on board their flagship. After lunch the Admiral launched into a complaint about extensive cigarette smuggling being carried out by motorboats based in Sabah. The boats, he said, were too fast for the Philippine patrols. It was impossible to cover so vast an area of sea so the Philippine Government hoped that the Sabah authorities would do something to stem the flood of contraband cigarettes. I listened sympathetically but pointed out that we were no longer the paramount power in Sabah, and that in any case it was not normally considered to be the job of a customs service to prevent smuggling into someone else's country. Here was another classic case of a government losing revenue, while providing smugglers with a good living, because tax was too high on imports. I promised to pass on the Admiral's complaints.

Many years later, I was amused to read a press report to the effect that the Malaysians had agreed to stamp out this wholesale smuggling. I "hae ma doots" that they succeeded and later experience on the China coast showed how difficult it is to deal with determined smugglers using amazingly fast boats for their nefarious trade.

I greatly enjoyed the Philippine posting. My overriding

memory, reinforced by later experiences, is of the exceptionally jolly and kindly nature of the Filipinos. They are always smiling, and make the most of life. Anyone who has seen the Filipinos congregating in the centre of Hong Kong on their Sunday holiday could hardly fail to be impressed with their character. They share with the Malays an old fashioned charm.

Josefina and Raul, who accompanied us back to Broich, have demonstrated over many years the wonderful resilience, energy and capability of the Filipinos, allied in our case with great kindness and love for Fiona.

*The Moros of old Zamboanga
Are terribly easy to anger
If one runs amok
It's best that you duck
Or you might lose your head to his Panga.*

There are still cases of men running amok in South East Asia. Unfortunately, the local sword, the Parang, does not fit the rhyme, so I have imported a Panga from Africa to take its place.

*In Sulu's renowned Archipelago
Priests and Mullahs clashed six hundred years ago
Despite years of jaw jaw
There's no end to the war
The Moros continue to "have-a-go"*

The Sulu Region marked the limit of Catholic conversion from Spain and Islamic conversion from Mecca.

The Moros (so called by the Spaniards in reference to the Islamic invasion of Spain from Morocco) continue to seek autonomy within a Christian state.

The Philippines remains a much more religious society than most modern West European societies.

*Kept in a Spanish convent they say
Then ruled by the US of A
But democracy reigns
Despite all the pains
Although Hollywood tends to hold sway*

There is a well known "bon mot" that Philippines' society could be explained by the fact that they had spent "400 years in a Spanish Convent and 50 years in Hollywood."

Very witty: but at least they are a democracy and the rule of law has some meaning when Estrada, their President, can be put in jail for misappropriating £50 million, despite his popularity as a movie actor.

Home Posting 1963

I could hardly complain that after five years' service, in Burma, China, and the Philippines, I was chained to a desk in Whitehall to shuffle paper. And the home posting gave me a chance to get to know people in the office. But compared with other 'postings' this was unexciting stuff: necessary but dull.

After the extraordinary interlude in the Philippines I settled down in London. We had said goodbye to Kingston and moved via Wellington Square to what was intended to be a permanent home in Pimlico. The financial base of the Stewart family, the salary of a middle-rank Government servant, was not strong. And the only capital I had was derived from the "lead bowler" that Malaya gave me on retirement, which provided the seed corn for my property deals. But mortgage, insurance and school fees took a heavy toll from salary; there were no surpluses in my budget.

During this period Heather and Anne moved from their prep school to St Mary's Wantage. They were still good companions and had not yet become bolshie 1960s teenagers. Annie seemed to be more suited to school disciplines and mores than Heather. She had been Head Girl at Great Oaks and gave the impression of enjoying it all. Heather, however,

fell out with the nuns. We decided to take them away since the nuns had shown remarkable disinterest in the girls' academic standards. The last straw was a remark by a nun to Annie: "Your father must be very ambitious for you." This was in response to my insistence that Annie should be given special tuition until she could pass her "O" Level Maths exam. Annie's problem with maths was in the best traditions of the Stewart family, since in Scotland George had earned the highest marks in English and the lowest marks in Maths in his school days. I could not help Annie since I did not understand the "New" maths.

I think that the main problem with St Mary's, apart from a lack of ambition on the academic front, was that most of the nuns of the Order were overseas converting the natives, instead of at home converting the British heathen. The Head was a most impressive lady but she did not seem to be able to attract very high calibre lay staff to this rural backwater. Also, perhaps, there were too many pupils whose parents did not expect their children to earn their own living. So we marched off to Cheltenham Ladies' College. Annie was admitted forthwith, but the Headmistress decided, understandably, that Heather's obvious disinterest in education ("What period in history am I studying Annie?") made her unsuitable material for Cheltenham. So poor Annie was condemned to jolly hockey sticks and hard labour while Heather led the "Life of Riley" at an "A" level college in Oxford, reading English and Spanish. Of course in later life Annie's hard labour paid handsome dividends, preparing her for Cambridge, law exams and ultimately a successful academic career in Hong Kong. Although Heather never really found her way back into the main stream of education, over the years, she has acquired more degrees and diplomas than anyone else in the family, but no career.

In Whitehall I was again working on Asian affairs. What with China limbering up for the dreadful Cultural Revolution, and throwing its weight about in Africa (Chou Enlai was reported as saying that, "The revolutionary situation was

excellent"); Indonesia's Konfrontasi campaign against Malaysia, and the war in Vietnam, there was plenty to think about.

When we left Kingston my parents started a house hunt in Scotland, where I suspect that my father had always wanted to settle. By some miracle, they found Broich and agreed with the owner Bruce Murray, who was living alone in the house at the time, that they would lease the top half of the 18th Century mansion. The conversion was easily done, and the parents were soon comfortably installed. Their flat, on what used to be the bedroom floor, gave them superb views and plenty of rooms. Of course, it never crossed my mind at the time that we would eventually buy Broich, but I was content that we seemed to have found a good solution for the parents. Unfortunately, the post-war economic situation had not favoured father and, combined with the incompetence of his stockbroker and the failure of his Aspley market gardening venture, had left him with little capital. My slender financial resources did not allow me to provide generous subsidies, so their last years in Broich were perforce very quiet. I made a firm resolution to keep working as long as possible, in order to postpone a similar fate. Happily my association with Racial and others enabled me to keep working to the age of 75.

In London we, too, led a very quiet life, very different from the hectic life of a diplomat overseas. I was content to have it that way since there was so much to be done on the domestic front. One of the great compensations of a home posting was that we could see the girls during term time. Our summer holidays were spent in Broich; when in order to spare Mama we always went out for lunch, rain or shine. Cycling provided one outlet for energy but I fear these were dull holidays for the girls, although Mama's cuisine was of the highest order. We managed several winter holidays on the Austrian ski slopes; by now the girls were competent skiers. We had one amusing jaunt to La Escala, Spain, just across the Border from the wonderful mediaeval walled city of Carcassonne. Travel was rough since my car was a minivan, the cheapest vehicle I

could find. It was an economical little beast, but not too comfortable for the back passengers, who had no windows. Poor girls, having an indigent father sweeping up to St Mary's in his minivan. I remember taking it also to Eton one day where Juliet Allen, who did not drive, had asked us to join her in visiting her son. He too must have been appalled.

I indulged in one luxury in the shape of an old clinker-built ship's lifeboat that had been beautifully converted into a cabin cruiser. All was mahogany wood and brass; there was no plastic to be seen on my boat. I found a mooring for the boat at Abingdon Lock, so we had an effective floating cottage as a base for visiting St Mary's at weekends, and entertaining the girls and their friends. The only snag with the boat was that since it was clinker-built it needed special handling when being put back into the water in spring. Unfortunately, my boatyard never remembered her special needs, and despite my careful briefings in two successive springs they treated her like the rest of the boats in the yard, dumping her unceremoniously into the Thames, where she would immediately sink because her wooden hull had not been given time to swell and become watertight again. Apart from this costly, annual disaster, the boat was a success. Whether in rain or sun it was always a joy to glide along the Thames, and we enjoyed living on the boat and waking up surrounded by the greenery of Oxfordshire fields, and pastoral scenes.

In 1964, I was posted to the High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. At last I would be able to put my MCS experience to full use. I was delighted at the prospect of a return to what was now Malaysia, not least because of the opportunity to disprove the received wisdom of Whitehall warriors that we ex-colonials would be unwelcome in our former colonies.

Once again we started the preparations for a foreign posting, including the purchase of a car, this time a Triumph Vitesse Tourer. It was a good deal less glamorous than my Armstrong Siddeley of Penang days, but it was rather less boring than the saloons by which we were surrounded in the High Commission car park.

Diplomat in Kuala Lumpur

"You know very well that if we had to spend the rest of our lives in a Colony, you would not live in a German one nor I in a French one, we'd both choose an English one." said Chancellor von Bülow speaking to the French Ambassador.

I had come back almost ten years after Independence to an ex-British protectorate, which I was quite certain, had been a better Colony than Germans, French, Dutch, Portuguese, Belgians or Spaniards had ever created; von Bülow was quite right. I looked forward to returning to this beautiful country and its friendly people and to confirming my expectation that this former "Colonial Imperialist Oppressor" would be welcome.

Peggy stayed at home to let the house, and I set off by air to Kuala Lumpur, this time as a Counsellor in the High Commission. We took over a lovely old-fashioned two-storied house overlooking the racecourse. I had barely arrived before the Allens came to town, visiting Malaysia so that Dick could carry out interviews in the context of his book. Since Peggy was not yet with me and I had room to spare, I insisted that they should abandon their hotel room and join me. And although I saw little of them since I was busy re-establishing myself in Malaysian society, it was great fun to have them with me again. Since Juliet had nothing to occupy her time, I proposed that she should refresh her skills as an artist and start to make the rounds of the great and the good in Kuala Lumpur with her drawing pad. She was an accomplished artist. Alas, I do not know what happened to her sketches of Malaysians. The ploy was certainly successful in that it gave her immediate access to the highest echelons of Malaysian society, and thus helped Dick in his work.

Letter Home

Last week I flew to Penang in a little monoplane. The views were spectacular; each hilly, jungle-covered, dark green island looked like a jewel set in three concentric rings, the inner of golden sand, the second the emerald green of the lagoon and the third the brilliant white of the waves breaking on the coral. Enchanting!

The exigencies of the service required an occasional visit to East Malaysia where Sukarno's army was, I think rather half-heartedly, confronting Sabah, formerly British North Borneo, and Sarawak, in the north of what they called Kalimantan.

These were exotic trips into jungles, mountains and plains inhabited by a colourful mix of headhunting Dayaks, horse riding Bajus, and a host of different tribes. Since most of the journeys were by helicopter, I covered a lot of the jungles of North Kalimantan. I never had time to linger there; but I could well see why British residents had fallen in love with these delightful couthie, lively and friendly people. I should have liked to dally and learn the use of their blowpipes, traps, and bows and arrows. As in Burma, so here in Kalimantan, the Japanese had found to their cost that the locals were more likely to side with the British than with the Japanese invader; the Indonesians were finding the same problem. The reason of course was that, contrary to the received wisdom of most of the modern media and academics, the British rapport with the minorities was often very close indeed. What is described pejoratively by the Western commentator as paternalism was appreciated by aborigines, hill tribes and the like who were used to being treated with contempt by Asian majorities. Those who can be bothered to read the books such as *Elephant Bill* on Burma, or *Land Below the Winds* on Kalimantan, will find that there is a quite different version of the relationships between British and "natives" to the one that is taught.

By the time Peggy came out to join me, I was well dug in. As I had expected, the Whitehall view that ex-Colonials would be persona non grata in their former territories, was proved to

be total nonsense. I was welcomed with open arms by Malays and Chinese whether old friends or new. It was a most rewarding experience. Of course, the circumstances were particularly propitious since we, the ex-Colonial power, were actively and successfully engaged as Malaysia's ally in the defence of their new state against Indonesian aggression. But in any case the Malaysians seemed to appreciate an "old hand" who knew a good deal more of their history and languages than most transient diplomats.

Kuala Lumpur had not changed radically since Independence. It was still a small town, a garden city bounded to the north by the vast, lovely Lake Gardens. The traffic was not yet totally out of hand, and the High Commission, housed in a new fourteen-storey building, was conveniently placed beside China Town close to my old haunts. Every day I passed my old offices and the temple which housed the Chinese Language School, and often lunch was in one of the small, noisy, cheerful Chinese restaurants where a Lucullan meal of beer, rice and soup cost peanuts, and the conditions would have appalled any British Sanitary Inspector.

Letter Home

I took the night train down to Singapore last week but I did not see much of my sleeping compartment since I found the Minister of Education in the bar and spent several hours swapping stories with him. It seems extraordinary that a Cabinet Minister can be so unpompous with a relatively junior foreign diplomat. I wonder how many other countries there are in the world where such happy informality exists? Of course, I have the advantage of long service in the area, but that is hardly a sufficient explanation. The Malays really are a delightful people.

At work, it was highly satisfactory to be working in close collaboration with Malaysian officials in a partnership against Sukarno's mad schemes. The successful outcome of the battle against Sukarno was a gratifying encore to our previous

successful partnership against the Communists in the 1950s; and like the 1950 victory, a unique partnership of Asian and European.

There was plenty of work, given a sense of special urgency perhaps because of Konfrontasi, but there was also time to revisit old friends. The girls seemed to enjoy their holidays, but we were in despair by the end of the summer hols in 1966, when teenagerism had taken over and they showed little interest in anything except pop music, boyfriends and the Swimming Club, where all the teenaged school children were to be found lolling by the poolside. Sally Rose, a lecturer at the university, took them on a tour of Malaysia with her students, and I took over the German Ambassador's seaside bungalow near Port Dixon to get everyone out of town at weekends; but it was hard unrewarding labour trying to break the teenage spell and Peggy and I breathed a sigh of relief when the holiday ended.

Mid-tour leave gave me a chance to visit Iran on the way home; a very worthwhile detour. I bussed my way to the well-known sites, Persepolis, Isfahan and so on. The architecture attracted me more than the society.

My parents were enjoying a spell near Cannes, on the sea front, living in a small flat. Annie joined me there and we spent a happy week sampling French food. Attempts to ski were not very successful, the snow was not good and the brilliant spring sunshine burnt our eyeballs. It was a good holiday however, particularly since it gave Mama a break from her isolation in Scotland.

I had barely returned from leave when I was cross-posted to Hanoi, as Consul General. This was a blow since I was enjoying the Kuala Lumpur job and the Malaysian scene. However, there was clearly no point in kicking against the pricks, and the new job was something of a compliment. I had only been in the service for eight years. However, I knew little about the Vietnam scene, knew no Vietnamese, and my French was rusty; a challenge indeed. Since this was an unaccompanied posting into a war zone, Peggy took the

opportunity to visit the US where her mother and her sister were living.

I only had one month's notice so preparations for departure from Kuala Lumpur to Hanoi were rudimentary; I took a few clothes and some books but little else.

Letter Home

It's been a traumatic return from leave. I have been asked to accept an immediate posting to Hanoi, so now I am already mentally in Vietnam, and within a month I shall be there physically. There is no time for serious reading in, still less for language study. Fortunately the Vietnamese use French. I wish that I had more knowledge of Vietnam. Although to you Malaysia and Vietnam may look close on the world map, they are not part of the same world to us. Indonesia and Thailand and the Philippines, yes; but French Indo China, no.

It was sad saying good-bye to Malaysia again. I cut the social embarrassment to the minimum by not announcing my departure until the very last moment when I swept all my friends and acquaintances up in one huge farewell party and apologised for the short notice; giving them no time to organise a round of farewell parties.

War Time in Hanoi - 1967

The fiery tropical sunset ahead was more cheerful than the dusty fields and pot-holed road that I was travelling along on the way to Hanoi. I was almost the only Briton in the country; and I had no illusions that the natives were friendly since we were seen as allies of the Americans who were engaged in a heavy air bombardment of their country. Soon we arrived at a battered bridge that looked like a poor man's version of the Forth Bridge. It had been frequently knocked about by US bombs and as frequently repaired in makeshift fashion. At the river bank there were two large posters announcing in Chinese and Vietnamese, that the Chinese Army had repaired

the damage done by the American imperialist aggressors, and that the friendship between the Vietnamese and Chinese was as close as lips and teeth. I was sceptical about the lips and teeth point; although I did not anticipate that ten years later a Chinese Army would be invading Vietnam to "teach them a lesson". However, I was duly grateful to the Chinese engineers. The bridge was our lifeline to the outside world.

The limited reading for which I had time before my hurried departure from Kuala Lumpur suggested the following scenario. For a variety of reasons the French Colonial Government had never regained the initiative after the war; despite heavy injections of US aid amounting at the end to 80% of the budget. The French had pulled out in 1954, after the debacle of Dien Bien Phu. This had been a traumatic disaster; the fortress in the mountains had been designed to demonstrate to the Communists that the French Army could control the hinterland. Instead it became a death trap when General Giap hauled his guns up theoretically impassable mountains. The gallant garrison was forced to surrender; its airfield, airspace and fortress having been totally dominated by Giap's artillery. So the French gave up their attempt to pacify Vietnam and an agreement signed in Geneva divided Vietnam into North (Communist) and South (non-Communist) along the 17th parallel and established a demilitarised zone (DMZ) between the two halves of the country. An International Control Commission (ICC), consisting of Canadians, Poles and Indians was set up in order to monitor the truce, but the truce was a farce; in no time the Communists were hard at it, infiltrating troops into the South. Meanwhile the US had taken on the mantle of the French, protesting loudly of course that they were only there in support of the South Vietnamese Government, and, perish the thought, had no colonial ambitions. By the time that I arrived in Hanoi not only had the truce become a dead letter, but the US presence had grown from a few thousand "advisers" to nearly half a million troops. On the other side of the DMZ the Communists

were receiving vast support from the Communist camp. This was a major war, and there was no obvious end in sight.

I started my journey to Hanoi from Singapore, ex-British Colony, notorious for its rigid discipline and tidiness, and finished the first leg of my journey in Saigon, a city that differed in almost every aspect from the "Nanny State", which I had left that morning. Saigon had the brash Hollywood veneer and snarled up traffic of Bangkok, but at least many women were still wearing traditional clothes. As a visitor being wafted about by official car, I could enjoy the colourful chaos. The willowy maidens were a delight to the eye, dressed in diaphanous Ao Dai (gowns) over elegant white silk trousers, their long hair dressed in traditional style. Their choice was a great improvement on the dowdy modern dress and short permed hair that their overseas Chinese cousins had adopted in Singapore. The French could take credit for fashion which synthesised oriental tradition and French chic.

Saigon's chaotic mix of cultures reflected its recent history; French colonialism reluctantly replaced by an avowedly non-colonial, but rapidly increasing US presence. As in the Philippines, the Latin colonialists and their US successors had produced a strange amalgam; only Cholon, the semi-autonomous enclave inhabited by Overseas Chinese, seemed familiar: it was a typical "China Town".

My first official call was on Murray Maclehorse, now our Ambassador in Saigon. Although he was not my ambassador, his Embassy was my support base and it was a comfort to have him next door, albeit across the DMZ.

Our relationship with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) Government was even stranger than our relationship had been with China. At least the two parts of China, the mainland and Taiwan, were not engaged in active warfare. Although I held Her Majesty's Commission as Consul General, Hanoi, the DRV did not recognise it. To them I was not HM Consul General but plain Mr Stewart, and entitled to no diplomatic, consular or other official status and, certainly, to no diplomatic immunity. I would, therefore, have to rely on

good luck, not protocol, for protection from the whims of the DRV Security Services.

There were many consequences of our lack of diplomatic status. We had no diplomatic wireless communications; so all our communications went through the Hanoi Post Office. We were allowed to receive enciphered traffic but could only send "en clair". We had no diplomatic bag. So far we had been allowed to take hand-carried baggage un-searched, as we passed through customs at the airport, but this privilege had no legal backing. We had no access to the diplomatic shop, a useful source of food and drink: we were not provided with an air raid shelter, and even bicycles were denied to us.

The lack of diplomatic communications seemed to me to be the most serious consequence of our unofficial status, and I resolved to reduce the nuisance as far as possible by arranging that either I or my Attaché would fly in and out carrying a bag at frequent intervals. Although a poor substitute for enciphered telegrams and regular bag service by courier, my system would put us in a better position than our 19th Century predecessors who had to rely on ships for their communications. Our cipher privileges had been withdrawn in my predecessor's time without explanation, but the withdrawal coincided with the start of heavy bombing raids, so the cause was probably a wish to deny us the means of reporting on the effect of the raids. The main snag in my plan was that, since we only had one flight a week, every "courier" run took one of our two-man team out of Hanoi for a whole week; so we would be a one-man post for a lot of the time. This seemed to me to be a lesser evil than having two men sitting in Hanoi virtually incommunicado; and since the "courier" could catch up on reading and report writing during his week's absence, waiting time need not be wasted.

After two days of briefing in Saigon, I flew on to Hanoi on the ageing, four-engined, prop-driven Constellation, which was our only means of travel. The ICC ran the Constellation flight. Although the Commission had become increasingly irrelevant as the war escalated on land, sea and air, we were

very grateful for the weekly air service that was run in order to support the ICC mission in Hanoi.

Once a week the ICC plane visited Cambodia and Laos en route before landing in Hanoi in the evening for a quick turn round and immediate departure to Vientiane. But there were many reasons for aborting the flight; the weather might be impossible, the trigger-happy Pathet Lao in a bad temper, or the DRV concerned to make some point about air raids, particularly that US aircraft were using the safety envelope granted to the ICC plane for hostile purposes. In short, a weekly flight was by no means guaranteed. This time the flight proceeded according to plan. My predecessor was on the tarmac to welcome me, doubtless relieved to bring his tour to a tidy conclusion. Since the turnaround time for the Constellation was extremely short, we barely managed a ceremonial clinking of champagne glasses before he left me to board the plane.

There were other ways of travelling in and out of North Vietnam, but they were not relevant to a non-person like Mr Stewart. There were boats from Haiphong, trains to China and planes to Moscow. For me it was either the ICC plane or a clandestine escape. I often discussed with the Canadians what we should do if the war escalated to the stage that there was no more ICC and we had to find our own route out. We concluded that a boat trip to the sea was the answer.

By the time I had arrived at the Consulate General the sun had set; but I made use of the twilight to beat the bounds around the house. The surroundings were scruffy and there was a general air of dilapidation, although little sign of bomb damage. The streets were deserted. I marched back to my house in contemplative mood, humming a favourite pipe tune, very conscious of the fact that I was alone in what, for practical purposes, was enemy territory.

I woke early next morning. Dong, our Vietnamese cook, was friendly but I soon discovered he was no Baoshan of happy Beijing memory. He had only five dishes in his repertoire, the omelette, the soup, the fried fish, the stew and

the sorbet. I taught him to produce an acceptable four-course meal by adding sherry to the soup, white wine to the fish, red wine to the stew and brandy to the sorbet. This formula proved highly successful with all races and cultures, and I was particularly pleased when one of my somewhat puritanical Third World colleagues left my house after a lunch party, full of the joys of spring and praising the excellence of my cuisine.

Our office building across the road from the Residence was a dilapidated two-storied building about the same size as my house and even worse furnished. There were two local staff, an interpreter and a cleaner. My Attaché had a flat above the "shop". Any comparison with my former Shanghai residence and office was, of course, odious. This was no seventy-two room colonial Governor-style palace in spacious grounds with a large staff to match. But, more importantly, I did not know the Vietnamese language: I was deaf, dumb and almost blind as far as the local language was concerned.

I set against such gloomy thoughts the comforting reflection that my position was even more special than it had been in Shanghai. In Hanoi, the only other Western representative was the French Delegate General, and since the French attitude was anti-US, his reports had to be treated with some scepticism. Since the North Vietnamese allowed no Western visitors in unless they were "on side", however limited my opportunities, I had a privileged position as an observer.

The US had a huge military and intelligence machine in the South with a mass of photographs and statistics upon which to make assessments in what came to be known as "the numbers game": analysis based on the counting of ammunition expended, raids carried out, installations damaged and enemy casualties. I was not alone in my scepticism about the validity of "the numbers game". It was a pseudo science, and of no use as a basis for assessment of morale and intention. Air photography could tell the US a great deal about the effects of bombing, but the best photo analysis can give no help towards an analysis of the mind of the people.

I hoped that our window in Hanoi might make a valid contribution, however small, to an understanding of the DRV position in the Vietnam War. But two things seemed crystal clear; it was going to be difficult for my one-man band to compete against the massed civil, military and intelligence staffs outside the DRV, and my conclusions would get short shrift if they differed dramatically from those of the staff in Saigon, Singapore and Washington.

By 1960 there were an estimated 10,000 Vietcong (Vietnamese Communist) troops operating south of the DMZ. Despite the steadily increasing US military presence and generous support for the Southern Army, the South Vietnamese troops, for the most part, remained ineffective and unenthusiastic warriors. In 1964 the US started to bomb North Vietnam on the pretext that a US destroyer had been attacked in the Tonkin Gulf by a DRV torpedo boat. By 1965 there were 81,400 US troops on the ground, by 1967 there were 500,000.

There had always been a few senior dissident voices in the USA. In 1961, for example, Ambassador Galbraith reporting to Kennedy called Vietnam "a can of worms", and judged that President Diem would never carry out effective reforms. In 1962 Senator Mansfield told the Senate, "Seven years and \$2 billion US aid later, South Vietnam seems to be less not more stable." But cognitive dissonance ruled. Officials who predicted the downfall of Diem and a conflict lasting for decades courted the sort of damage to their careers which fifteen years before had been suffered by US diplomats who correctly predicted that Generalissimo Chiang Kaishek's Nationalists would be defeated by Mao's Communists in China. In both cases, the pessimists were proved right and the optimists guilty of wishful thinking and a disregard of history and recent events in Asia.

Thirty years later the former US Secretary for Defence, Robert McNamara, explained in his autobiography how eventually he had realised that the US effort was doomed. Despite his undoubted intelligence, it took McNamara a long

time to see the light. His reliance on the "numbers game" had been based on a typical accountant's view that everything can and must be quantified, and that judgements made upon the basis of questionable numbers must somehow be more reliable than judgements based on any other methods. The fallacious nature of such views is self-evident. Even if all the numbers are correct, which they frequently are not, they cannot possibly provide certainty about such subjects as morale and intention. These can only be the subjects of educated guesswork, since the human mind does not necessarily follow the logic of statistical analysis and modelling.

My first official call was not on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to whom we were not accredited, but on the Foreign Affairs Bureau of Hanoi Municipality, our only official point of contact in the DRV. Although the young Vietnamese who received me was courteous, I wondered what he really thought about me at a time when the US was flinging ever more troops into the war and dropping an increasing weight of bombs upon them. However, if he saw me as a forward observation officer for the US, he did not allow this view to colour our formal relations. I was delighted to discover that my French was adequate for our purposes. Only comprehension, not pronunciation or grammar, mattered. The common international language in Hanoi was "Communicators" French, not the language of a Paris salon. I found that one could go a long way using the infinitive rather than worrying about conjugations.

One consequence of our lack of official status was that we were never allowed to set foot in the Foreign Ministry. Thus, when our Secretary of State wished to send a message through me to his opposite number in the DRV, I could not just march into the Ministry to carry out my duty. My predecessor had been graciously allowed to stand at the back gate to the Ministry and deliver an envelope to a lowly peon. I decided that it would be less humiliating to find some unglamorous excuse, such as the state of my drains, for a visit to my contact, and at the end of the meeting to produce my envelope

and ask my interlocutor to pass it on to the Ministry. The system seemed to work, but I never described the "Drain" route to Whitehall. All they got was an en clair telegram confirming that their message had been received and passed on to the Ministry.

Throughout my stay, the standard of our facilities remained well below that of our diplomatic colleagues. For example, at one stage our petrol ration was stopped so that I was reduced to borrowing petrol from my friends in the French and Indonesian missions and bringing it home in old gin bottles. One comic but irritating DRV restriction was their consistent refusal to allow us to use bicycles. The Vietnamese stock refusal, a relative of the Chinese "Not convenient", was "Too dangerous." My friendly official always managed to keep a straight face when producing this nonsensical answer.

I established a rigid regime to guard against any temptation to sloth in a post where, with minimal communications, and minimal regular work, there was only my conscience to keep me "on parade". My routine for six days a week was 0630 reveille and exercise; 0700 BBC news; 0730 breakfast; 0800 office, skimming local newspapers and correspondence, 1000 official calls or receiving callers; 1300 close office. In the afternoons I walked or played tennis; there was nowhere to drive to and in any case petrol for us was scarce. Usually I supped at home, often entertaining my Attaché. Sometimes I timed my evening walk so that I could sit by the Petit Lac drinking a glass of their dreadful beer, and, with the sun setting behind the trees, see some beauty in Hanoi. Sometimes we went out to the only Vietnamese restaurant available and enjoyed a standard menu of soup, rice and vegetables. Although this may sound a very dreary programme, in fact time flew since I spent a lot of time learning Vietnamese and studying Vietnamese history.

Our nearest foreign neighbours were the Canadian element of the ICC and the ICC wireless station, run by Indian Army Signallers. I probably should have ingratiated myself with the Indians, who no doubt made a mean curry, but I feared that the

protocol conscious Indian Ambassador would not have approved of a diplomat consorting with Indian other ranks.

I got on well with the Canadian soldiers; amongst them to my delight I found a Sergeant Major of the Canadian Black Watch, but my official relations with the Canadians were complicated. The Canadian Ambassador in Saigon had asked me to keep an eye on them, but of course I had no *locus standi*; they provided a friendly Mess across the road where there was always beer, and they were kind enough to help us with supplies from the outside world, such as wine. Since there was no work for them to do and they were not political animals, there was always a serious danger that the devil would find work for idle hands. The Canadian mission in fact only got into trouble when a young diplomat replaced the military commander, on the grounds that a diplomat would be better able to cope with the delicate political situation in Hanoi. Not surprisingly, the young man found it hard to "command" his two soldiers, and predictably did not seek avuncular advice from the Brit across the road. In short order he was at loggerheads with the Vietnamese, told them that the food was lousy, and issued an ultimatum that unless the food improved he would stop using the Vietnamese catering services and feed his detachment on tinned rations flown in by the ICC plane. The young man having severed diplomatic ties on the food front very soon found that feeding his team independently was not so easy, and it was not long before he had to climb down: the status quo was restored, and the Canadians once more got their food from the Vietnamese. There was one other case of friction when a Canadian soldier, a little too happy after drinking a lot of beer, decided to act in the spirit of "Good Will to All Men" at Christmas time by offering a "sweetie" to the Vietnam sentry outside the door. The sentry's response was to advance his bayonet towards the Canadian. Sweetie refused!

Since the British were not on the diplomatic social list we seldom had official evening engagements. Occasionally, however, we were invited to DRV national occasions. These

parties gave me a chance to meet the Politburo, however briefly and formally; and because our lowly status put us at the end of the protocol list, I always found myself sitting down to eat opposite the leaders of the Politburo. While I cannot claim to have had much conversation with Premier Pham and General Giap, I had at least the opportunity to observe them at close quarters.

There was not much gaiety, song and dance in Hanoi. There were even fewer amenities available to us than we had in China: no cinema, theatre, concerts, opera or ballet or ancient monuments, and we were only allowed to leave central Hanoi to visit the airport.

As the months rolled by, it became ever more clear that my judgements were out of line with those of the vast assessment machine outside. Foreigners could hardly believe that the scruffy little peasant soldiers, poorly armed and fed, with limited artillery, few tanks and no air support, could successfully survive the pounding of the vast sophisticated war machine of the US. Since generals and politicians alike had staked their reputations on victory, any US analyst who suggested that the Emperor had no clothes was likely to be dismissed as a defeatist or even condemned as a traitor.

I found myself on the same side as the critics. My starting point for disagreement was the tendency to equate the US's involvement in the Vietnam War with Britain's successful anti-insurgent campaign in Malaya. The only significant factors common to both campaigns were that they were in South East Asia, and the enemy was Communism. Otherwise, the circumstances were dramatically different.

In Malaya, the British had been the colonial power; in Vietnam the US were not. Because Malaya was a British colony, we had much experience and a cadre of knowledgeable officials, all of whom were required to know the local languages. In Vietnam the US was starting from scratch, it was not responsible for the government nor did it have experienced staff.

In Malaya the Muslim Malays needed little persuasion to

fight Communists who were in any case almost all Chinese. In Vietnam there was no such clear-cut divide between friend and foe. It seemed to me to be highly dangerous to rely on the Malayan analogy, since the two situations were so very different.

I had another problem with the received wisdom of the Western military staffs. The lessons of the Japanese victory in Malaya were apparently forgotten. There the Japanese had advanced through rubber plantations, on bicycles, with few tanks, and defeated the conventional, more numerous British Army trained to fight a conventional war. A sharp, pointed bamboo spike, hidden on a path could put a man out of action as surely as, and more silently than, an explosive booby trap. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me, astonishing though it might seem to the West, that DRV morale was not cracking and that we should expect the "ragged assed" army to fight on until the US invaders grew tired, as the French and other foreign invaders before them, had grown tired. Nothing I saw supported the optimistic assessment that the DRV was being pounded into submission.

The US Army Commanders appeared to have learnt nothing from the comparatively recent successes of Japanese Imperial and Chinese Communist forces against superior numbers: the Japanese defeating the British, and the Communist Chinese defeating the Nationalists in China. They seemed to be blissfully unaware that determination, skill and morale are as important as sophisticated weaponry, particularly in jungle warfare, where soldiers cannot be deployed in large groups, and need the courage to fight alone. The US staff remained obsessed with the weight of shells, bombs and bullets that they were throwing at the enemy.

Meanwhile, I was making friends with kindred spirits in the few diplomatic missions that were on speaking terms with us. The French became good friends socially. Ambassador de Quirielle and I played tennis; and three times a week I had tea with Madame de Quirielle while we worked on a book called *Les Faux Amis*. Sadly, the book was never finished; but the tea

was excellent and the research exercise was good for my French as we thumbed our way through *Littré*, seeking words that might have much the same spelling in both languages but very different meanings. Friendship blossomed lower down the line too since the Cultural Attaché was a Breton with whom, as a Scotsman, I could play the "Cercle Celtique" card and the Counsellor was an ex-member of the French Colonial Service in Vietnam, so we had much to talk about. The Auld Alliance was in good shape in Hanoi and they were, indeed, "Chers Collegues". We agreed, however, to differ about the US.

The Indonesians were amongst my best diplomatic friends. Ambassador Nugroho was a highly civilised Javanese lawyer and since he had never served before as a diplomat, still less in a Communist country, he seemed delighted to find a friendly British neighbour with the experience he lacked. Our relationship became very close. We met frequently to exchange views and added a dimension to our relationship by using his staff and his car to conduct hunts in antique shops. We were able to buy some interesting pieces of 19th Century blue and white from the best known antique shop owner nicknamed "Le Grand Voleur", whose famous comment on every piece was, "C'est le vrai Ming, monsieur!" Nug and I had a regular meeting every Monday when, after professional exchanges and a slug or two of Campari and tonic, we would leap into his large limousine and pursue the hunt.

The Nugrohos were very good to Heather when she was in Jakarta, although Nug's matchmaking did not work as Heather was not attracted to the splendid young Scotsman whom Nug introduced. Thirty years later when visiting Rory in Jakarta, I found that Madam Nugroho, now sadly widowed, was living a stone's throw away from Rory. She was as friendly and welcoming as ever. My relationship with Nug was based on a lot more than friendly conversation and shared hobbies. Since I had no staff to speak of but he had quite a number, in effect we formed a team, combining my experience and his manpower, to make the most of all our resources. I

doubt if there have been many more successful liaisons of this sort, based not on formal alliance but on reciprocity and mutual respect.

My memories of the Hanoi period are deeply etched. I was totally absorbed in my independent post, working in a country engaged in a major war and, for the first time in my life, I was not merely contributing to drafts but was responsible for the final version of despatches to the office and direct correspondence with the Secretary of State. However, I was ever conscious of the fact that I was trying to produce bricks with very little straw: a one-man-band competing with huge organisations, while cut off almost entirely from outside information.

The air-raid sirens were a frequent reminder that this was not a phoney war. Their sound would herald the crack of anti-aircraft guns, the whoosh of surface to air missiles (SAM), the crash of bombs and the explosion of airborne rockets. Puffs of white smoke, looking like balls of cotton wool, would spatter the sky as anti-aircraft shells missed their targets and exploded in mid-air. The SAMs of Soviet origin provided a different sort of pyrotechnic effect as they exploded in mid-air. Sometimes an orange fireball signalled a direct hit on some unlucky plane and, if the pilot had managed to eject, a parachute would emerge from the smoke. We had a grandstand view of all this since the US war planes often flew right over us, sweeping across at what felt like rooftop level, making a noise like an express train and rattling windows and tiles as they went.

Owing, perhaps, to a combination of military experience, philosophy and faith in the US and the skill of their pilots, I was not bothered by the air raids. I did not share my diplomatic colleagues' fears that we were all about to be killed. I was also able to exploit the fact that my hearing had been impaired during World War II by the sharp crack of our 6pdrs, so that by putting my deaf ear to the sky I was able to sleep soundly through the heaviest raids. In any case there is nothing to be done about the bullet that "has your name on it".

Many of my colleagues, however, were badly shaken by the frequent air raids. In fact there were some casualties amongst the foreign community. Indian signallers were killed when a rocket hit the ICC station across the road from our office, the Soviet Military Attaché was also killed and the French Delegation was hit; but these unhappy incidents hardly suggested that the US planes were targeting central Hanoi. The offending missiles might have been strays fired from damaged planes, or rogues fired by the defenders. All things considered, the damage in the centre was slight indeed. The raids only troubled us when bombs put power stations out of action or knocked down part of the bridge and thus cut us off from the airport.

But my colleagues did not share my insouciance, and it dawned upon me that my visitors were seriously unhappy about the absence of an air-raid shelter in my house. Even the experienced Cuban scurried away when the sirens sounded. Clearly, "something must be done" if I were not to become a pariah, shunned by the rest of the diplomatic community. Since there was not the slightest hope that the DRV would provide me with a concrete bunker, I decided to create a notional shelter by putting a few chairs under the staircase. Thereafter, whenever the sirens sounded, I could invite my guests to my "shelter". The charade worked; my guests stopped looking at their watches and inventing appointments whenever the sirens sounded.

With the help of my interpreter, I made good progress in my studies of the written language. Vietnamese and Chinese had many words and phrases in common, including the ghastly but familiar Marxist Leninist jargon. One example will suffice to illustrate the point; "Gong chan dang" the Chinese for Communist party becomes "Dang gong chan" in Vietnamese. It does not require an Einstein to spot the similarity and the inversion. I ceased to be totally "blind", and my growing ability to decipher posters, notices and newspapers put me "one up" on colleagues who were entirely dependent on their interpreters.

The rocket that had hit the ICC radio station had also shattered many of our windows, so we asked the Ministry of Works to send us some plastic sheeting for temporary DIY repairs. Unfortunately, by the time that our sheeting arrived in Saigon ready for despatch to Hanoi by air, our Embassy in Saigon had also lost many of its windowpanes during the Tet offensive. Shamelessly, and without so much as a by your leave, the Embassy appropriated our sheeting in order to mend their windows and we continued to shiver in the cold and damp of the "crachin". I might have said, if nanny had not taught me otherwise, "Not fair", but there was nothing to be done: stiff upper lip was the order of the day.

Letter Home

Two weeks without an ICC plane so no mail and food and drink supplies are running low, and the situation is not helped by the presence of visiting diplomats from Saigon who seem singularly uninterested in the fact that they are rapidly consuming all our carefully hoarded stores of food and drink. We residents of Hanoi noted with amusement that the gaiety with which they approached their jaunt to the front line, faded during the second week. The conveniences of la vie diplomatique in Saigon began to look very appealing as the uncertainties of life in Hanoi became more obtrusive.

The floors weep and the air conditioners struggle in this revolting humidity. The Attaché has just returned from a two-week absence, I was very glad to see him back to help with the chores, such as deciphering. He is an excellent DIY hand, so we are in good shape for the lights to festoon the Residence for the Queen's Birthday Party.

Joke Department: Scene: Fête champêtre by river near Hanoi. Dramatis personae; small emaciated Vietnamese urchin, a well-covered French Chef de Mission and his stately wife. Dialogue: Boy (in halting French) "Vous...mangez...beaucoup!"

The Vietcong offensive during the Tet Holiday in 1968 was, in my view, a turning point in the war. The Communist troops penetrated to the gates of the US Embassy in Saigon and, for a

short while, captured and held the ancient capital of Hue. Although the Vietcong had not attained their final objectives, their success had been enough to boost morale in the North and to dent it in the South, and the Communist propagandists made the most of it. The South Vietnamese reflected that if the Vietcong could succeed in this fashion when there was a massive US military presence, their chances of survival were slim indeed when the US pulled out.

Subsequent published US studies of the Tet offensive told of individual heroism, but also of the US command being caught off guard. There were undertones of the Pearl Harbor syndrome: of underestimation of the capabilities of the enemy. At Pearl Harbor it had been partly a matter of seeing the Japanese as derisory cartoon figures, bandy-legged, bespectacled dwarves who could not conceivably take on the mighty US. The fact that the Japanese Navy had blown the Chinese and Russian fleets out of the water fifty years before seemed to have been totally forgotten. This time it was the ragged army of Vietnamese, under-equipped but resolute and hardened soldiers, who were underestimated.

And as at Pearl Harbor, the US forces were enjoying a holiday, blissfully ignorant of imminent attack; this time by pyjama-clad Vietcong in gym shoes. Although US Intelligence had reported increasing numbers of enemy troops around Saigon, and increasing supplies of weapons and ammunition, the assessors shied away from the possibility of an intention to attack Saigon, even ignoring a captured document which contained details of plans and targets for such an attack. So 50% of the South Vietnamese troops had been allowed to go home on leave during the Tet holiday period.

The assessment problem was compounded by the military refusal to include the irregulars (120,000 by CIA's estimate) in the tally of enemy forces. But the fundamental problem was the familiar one of cognitive dissonance: a refusal to accept inconvenient information. The intelligence collectors had produced the facts, but the military leaders refused to face them. Since they consistently underestimated their enemy,

they could not believe that Giap intended to attack the capital.

There were other contributing reasons for the failure to anticipate the offensive. Wirtz (1991) in a book subtitled *Intelligence Failure* suggests that the US Command was successfully deceived by General Giap's widespread attacks around the Border and coastal areas into discounting any threat to major cities. Also, General Giap's disappearance from the public eye before the offensive had been wrongly attributed to a fall from grace; whereas, in fact, he had withdrawn in order to finalise the plan for the general offensive.

Shortly after the Tet offensive Reg Hibbert, my old friend from Worcester College days who was at that time Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee in Singapore, invited Murray Macle hose and me to come down to Singapore to contribute to a seminar on Vietnam. On the plane to Singapore, I began to get very cold feet. I would be appearing before a large, expert, audience who had regular access to a mass of intelligence material to which I had no access; and my opponent in the debate, Murray Macle hose, was a senior Ambassador, while I was a mere Consul General. In short, I was seriously outgunned. I decided, therefore, to open by presenting a paper entitled *Notional Appreciation of the War Situation by the Hanoi Politburo* (April 1968). In it I painted a picture of a Politburo heartened by their success in the Tet offensive, and waiting patiently for the US to grow tired. But as I had expected, the assembly roundly rejected the Stewart line (which it seems to me was proved to be correct by subsequent events). I argued that the important question was not whether Hanoi had achieved total success in the Tet offensive, but what effect their successes had produced on the minds of the Vietnamese people North and South of the DMZ. My analysis was rejected by all present, from Murray downward. They had been brainwashed by the mass of optimistic material emanating from the US staff in Saigon. I could only comfort myself with the thought that I had forced my audience to listen to another point of view.

I wish I had known at the time that in 1966 a group of 47 non-government specialists, hired by the Institute of Defence Analysis in the USA, had concluded, as I had, that the bombing had not seriously affected the Northern economy or its will to fight.

Probably the most useful commentary on the wrong, one might even say wrong-headed US assessments, is provided by McNamara (1995). He listed the misjudgements as follows: -

- (a) Misjudgement of the geopolitical intentions of the adversaries;
- (b) Naively judging the character of the people of South Vietnam in terms of the US experience, and expecting them to share a determination to fight for freedom and democracy;
- (c) Totally misjudging the political forces in the country;
- (d) Underestimating the forces of Nationalism;
- (e) Misjudgement of friend and foe alike, reflecting the profound ignorance in the US of the history, culture and politics of people in the area, and the personalities and habits of their leaders;
- (f) Failing to recognise the limitations of modern, high tech, military equipment, doctrine and forces in confronting unconventional forces.

This catalogue reads like a summary of what I was writing and saying throughout my time in Hanoi; but at that time US officials who shared my views were a cautious minority.

Letter Home

A great welcome from my colleagues when I came back from Singapore with suitcases full of goodies for them.

It was comforting to find that my reports are read but I am under no illusion that my assessments will prevail against the received wisdom in Saigon and Washington.

Most visitors avoid us lest they be contaminated in the eyes of the DRV authorities. Happily the Scandinavians are more robust, and I am much enjoying the company of a Swede who visits Hanoi regularly on behalf of his Prime Minister, and provides me with a courier service on the side.

No excitements. Only the occasional sound of the air raid sirens and the sight of an unpiloted reconnaissance plane swooping across the sky pursued by exploding anti-aircraft shells.

On Buddha's birthday I visited three temples: all were packed with worshippers.

Cookie is proving with the food packets that I have imported that there is no such thing as "foolproof". Fortunately Madame de Quirielle is lending me her staff to cater for the Queen's Birthday Party.

I returned to Hanoi from the Singapore Seminar to continue my Cassandra-like role; while the US military returned to Saigon, maintaining stoutly that if only they could have more US troops they could win the war. I derived no pleasure from this role since I believed in the "domino" theory: the theory that if Indo China fell to the Communists, the infant independent states of South East Asia might fall too. I wanted the US cavalry to win, but I could find no grounds for optimism. Later generations have been persuaded that the domino theory was nonsense and point out that when the Communists won in Vietnam, there was no domino effect. This argument fails on two counts. Firstly, you cannot prove a negative: the dominoes did not fall but we cannot be certain why. Secondly, it ignores the fact that the gallant, protracted and costly US effort bought a decade of breathing space to the Asian nations. To most of my generation the global threat

posed by Communism seemed real enough and the need to combat it seemed equally clear. Communism was on the march throughout the Third World; the whole of Eastern Europe was under Soviet domination, Khrushchev had promised to "bury us" and the Soviet Union's policies reflected his stance. Chou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, was publicly proclaiming that "The revolutionary situation in Africa was excellent," and China, although engulfed in the Cultural Revolution was continuing to do its best to subvert ex-colonial territories throughout the Third World.

My generation, which had gone to war to prevent the Nazis taking over the world, was not amused to find our wartime allies, the Communists, launching a new takeover bid. Those who have grown up since the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the break-up of the Soviet Empire and the de-communisation of China, may find it hard to understand that for us the "evil empire" loomed large, as a serious threat to the world we had fought for. Although the 20:20 vision of hindsight makes it easy to suggest that the Soviet giant had feet of clay, at the time the sheer size of the Communist camp's forces, the sheer number of their ships, submarines, tanks, missiles, made them look like a formidable threat. Their weaknesses were not perceived, since there was no war in which the numbers game could be tested against performance. Such matters as technical inferiority, poor fuel performance, inefficient maintenance cycles, lack of training, poor morale, were given little weight. The West was mesmerised by the size of the belligerent Russian Bear.

Heather, who had never shown much interest in international politics, was embarrassed when she found her casual comment at a party relayed in the *Daily Express* as follows: -

Heather's Surprise for Our Man in Hanoi

Brian Stewart, the British Consul in Hanoi, will be surprised to hear that although his 17-year-old daughter, Heather, says she "tries to stand back" from the political issues of the Vietnam War, she confessed to some rather surprising views about it.

*"I support Ho Chi Minh," she says. "But that's something I haven't yet admitted to my family." Despite her views, she is hoping to go to America at the end of the present term, to take a summer course at Harvard. Then she will return to England to read either English or History at Oxford. She is already helping to run *Underground*, a poetry magazine, there.*

Heather explains: "it's not very safe for women and children to go to Vietnam, so it seems an opportunity to go to the States."

On Christmas Eve 1967, I decided to attend a small church instead of going to the well-known Cathedral that was regularly exploited by the DRV for propaganda purposes: I wanted to know what was going on in churches that were not on the international beat. As I was walking to my chosen church, I found myself surrounded by a band of red-scarved young Vietnamese who insisted that I accompany them to the nearest Police Station. When we arrived, since the Police were more frightened of the Red Guards than they were of me, they escorted me, despite my protests, to a cell. I sat there for what seemed to be a long time, very conscious that I did not have diplomatic immunity and that none of my friends would know that I had been arrested. It was particularly galling that I had been arrested on a main thoroughfare close to the centre of the city; a road frequented by foreigners during daytime.

Eventually the Red Guards reappeared carrying a Vietnamese document that they wanted me to sign. The gist of the document was that I had been in a prohibited area, spying on bomb damage. I refused, of course, to have anything to do with the document and was left once more to my own devices,

in the cold and gloomy cell. Sometime around midnight I was brought before a Captain in army uniform who claimed to be the officer commanding the Police District. A diminutive, French-speaking interpreter accompanied him. The Captain repeated the allegations made by the Red Guards. I refuted them, remarking that I had been arrested on a main thoroughfare, in central Hanoi, and that it was ridiculous to suggest that I would have any interest in walking around the city looking at bomb-damaged houses, since I had plenty of them to examine, if I wanted to, in my own District. My tormentor then changed tack and asked "Then what were you doing there?" I replied, "Going to church!" When the so-called Officer Commanding the Police District, displaying singular ignorance about his District retorted, "There is no church there" his interpreter corrected him in a whispered aside. The Captain then returned to the accusation that I had been "out of bounds"; and we spent another hour or so sparring. Finally, we agreed to differ and signed a document recording our disagreements. Around 0200 hours I was released to walk home into the frosty night, along the road that was allegedly out of bounds. I must admit that I left that Police Station with considerable relief. I tried, but of course failed, to extract an apology from the DRV authorities, or to persuade them to clarify their view on the "bounds" for foreigners.

Letter Home

Excellent dinner with the French. The menu included Poulet Stuart, a dish of chicken flambéed in Drambuie, which my hostess had invented in my honour. Madame was displeased with her other guests who had not addressed the fine food with proper gusto.

Most of the ambassadors have gone on leave to avoid the revolting weather.

Our film shows are proving very popular (shades of Shanghai) but the films are not always suitable for an international audience. Our Communist colleagues had some problems with a film about the Northwest Frontier in the time of the Raj, but my Indian colleague took it in good part.

I saw little of the Soviets, and was surprised one morning to receive a formal visit from the Soviet Consul General. He had called to complain that Soviet sailors had been ambushed, attacked, and beaten-up by British sailors in the port of Haiphong. It transpired that the "British" sailors in question were, in fact, the Chinese crew of a Hong Kong based ship. Enraged perhaps by some racist Russian insult and emboldened no doubt by the xenophobia and spirit of misrule encouraged by the Cultural Revolution in China, the "British" sailors had beaten-up some Soviet sailors outside the Seamen's Club. I listened solemnly to this comic tale and promised to investigate. The complaint gave me an excuse to apply for permission to visit Haiphong but, predictably, the DRV authorities did not approve my application.

In the middle of my tour a young 2nd Secretary arrived acting as the Egyptian Chargé d'Affaires. When he called, I offered the hand of friendship and was amused to be told that since he was a Head of Mission, he did not expect that we would meet very often. Although I did not attempt to disabuse him of his folies de grandeur, I doubted that the notoriously protocolaire Communist ambassadors would give much time to a humble Second Secretary. Our Egyptian friend soon learnt that Second Secretaries cut no ice in a Communist society: where ambassadors' delight in pompously starting each sentence off with a "Your Excellency." He soon returned to us, tail between legs, grateful for a friendly port of call.

When I called on him to say goodbye, he said at the end of my visit "You must come and meet my girlfriend; she is in my flat upstairs." He had already regaled me with unlikely tales of this lovely girlfriend and how he smuggled her past the guards in his car so that the Vietnamese knew nothing of his liaison. To my astonishment I found that there was a most beautiful Vietnamese girl in his sitting room. I did not linger, but beat a hasty retreat downstairs since, unlike my host, I did not believe that Mata Hari's liaison was unknown to the DRV security service.

Letter Home

I am becoming very tired indeed of being lectured by representatives of the third world, who can see all the moles in our eyes and none of the beams in their own.

Yesterday I had a comic lunch party. The newly arrived Egyptian Secretary, a cocky young man who looks like a poor man's King Farouk, lectured us on the superiority of Islamic government over other systems. Since my guests included the Indians this was a trifle brash.

I continue to be irritated by gentlemen from the subcontinent who lecture us on race relations, apparently oblivious of the record in their own part of the world where Hindus and Muslims murdered each other with extreme brutality in the last days of the Raj. The wanton cruelty of that time makes our little peccadilloes in Britain look like a tea party.

Halfway through my tour, I paid a duty visit to London where I discovered to my consternation that there was no replacement in the pipeline; nor did there seem to be a queue of eager candidates for my job, which was not particularly appealing to those with conventional tastes. Clearly, since I was the only person with a strong personal motive for finding a new Consul General, it behoved me to indulge in a bout of self-help if I were not to find my tour inconveniently extended. There was some urgency in the situation since the DRV was taking six months to process visas.

I took advantage of the grey English weather to seek out old friends who might enjoy the prospect of a posting to a sunnier clime. My first candidate was, indeed, tired of the English winter and much taken with my carefully selected photographs of Hanoi: the Petit Lac rosy in the twilight and the Residence bathed in sunshine, its unprepossessing appearance disguised by bunting, and a general air of festivity occasioned by the celebration of the Queen's Birthday. So my friend volunteered; but, since he never spoke to me again after his posting to Hanoi, I fear that he was disappointed.

Letter Home

After a week visiting you in Scotland and the Secretary of State in Whitehall, it seems odd to be once more alone in a world dominated by war, and to find that in my absence most of our windows have been blown out.

The attempt to keep fit by playing tennis strenuously every day has ended in disaster. I feel as if there is sand under my kneecaps. Thanks to the ministrations and medicine chest of Madame the French Ambassadors, a bout of cystitis has been cured.

Hanoi would have been a pretty miserable place had it not been for my French friends, who were generous in the extreme with every sort of help.

Letter Home

My knee is giving me hell. The local docs have bound it up so tight that I fear it will be permanently damaged.

The DRV seem hell bent on sacrificing themselves to the twin gods of Mars and Marx. Will they compromise sufficiently to save US face?

A fine French National Day reception, champagne flowing, and an impressive rhetorical effort by the French Chef de Mission. The speech sounded as if it had been written by a DRV propagandist.

One of my close friends in Hanoi was the First Secretary in the Indian Embassy; he played excellent tennis, spoke excellent French, and was a good companion. He had a proper appreciation of the place of whisky in social exchange and our relationship was very different to the formal one that I had with his Ambassador, a puritanical socialist. Ranjit and I had only one serious disagreement; late one night he remarked that the British had never been interested in Indian culture. He flatly refused to listen to my catalogue of British scholarship and conservation in India. Clearly he had been fed a solid diet of anti-British material at school; and a short session over the whisky bottle was not going to overcome a decade of

brainwashing. His charm and ability later took him to the top of the Indian diplomatic service.

I have no memory of my handover to my successor at the airport. I celebrated my freedom by making a tour of South Vietnam, courtesy of the US Air Force. My abiding memory was of a large number of impressive young US officers, civilian and military, trying their best but, unfortunately, for all the reasons which I have set out above, engaged on "Mission Impossible". Perhaps the single most important problem was in the realm of "Hearts and Minds". No way had been found to motivate the South Vietnamese and to persuade them to participate actively in the anti-Communist struggle. The US emphasis on the temporary nature of their presence did not help. There were few locals who fancied their chances once the US forces pulled out and left the South Vietnamese to their own devices.

I said goodbye to Vietnam without great regret. It had been a fascinating job, but I felt no emotional attachment to the country or its people. I continued to applaud the purpose of the US efforts while remaining convinced that they could not win.

From Saigon I flew to Hong Kong and then took a boat via Japan to the US, finishing up with a train journey across the US. Few of my fellow passengers knew much about South East Asia, but all seemed to be unhappy about the war. In the US I found society in a turmoil over the Vietnam issue and my view that they could not win was reinforced by the reports of student unrest and demonstrations, which were, *mirabile dictu*, attended by serving government officers from State, Defence, CIA and other government departments. I did not enjoy watching US society tearing itself apart over the Vietnam issue.

I often thought as I sat in Hanoi how much safer I was, although in the midst of a war, than my unfortunate colleagues in Beijing. They were at the mercy of violent, xenophobic Chinese mobs, unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. I had my windows blasted out, but their Embassy had been burnt and staff had been severely manhandled by the mob, while the

Police stood idly by. In such circumstances the concept of diplomatic immunity had little value to the diplomat on the ground.

The Vietnam War did not end for another four years. But by then China no longer looked as if it was a threat to its neighbours and the domino theory was dead. Many years later I read a published account of Kissinger's unsuccessful attempts to enlist the aid of the Soviet Union and China to persuade their client state to accept a compromise, which would allow the US to withdraw without total loss of face.

There will always be military hawks to claim that the US could have won the war had they not had their hands tied. At the extreme right of this spectrum lay the "Bomb them into the stone ages" fraternity, but such opinions ignore the fact that the object was not to destroy Vietnam but to foil the Communists.

The following extracts from my valedictory report give a broad picture of my assessment of the situation as I left Hanoi.

SUMMARY

Mr B T W Stewart to Mr Stewart

Hanoi 18 October 1968

- 3 *There is no sign of a break in the will of the party or the spirit of the people, which might justify hope of significant concessions to bring the bombing to an end or to achieve an early peace. (Paragraphs 6-8)*
- 4 *The items for the agenda at peace talks have not changed and it seems that the withdrawal of foreign troops is at the top of the list. It is difficult to see how this item can be dealt with on a reciprocal basis without the early participation of the NLF. (Paragraph 9))*
- 5 *The intentions of the Politburo as seen from Hanoi, give little reason for optimism. (Paragraph 10)*
- 6 *The best hope for peace seems to be that, without reaching complete agreement round a conference table, the Communists will allow the war to simmer down if the United States commences to withdraw its troops after strengthening*

the South Vietnamese Army. This ending, which can be most euphemistically described as fade out, seems to be the only immediate alternative to a continuation of the war. (Paragraph 11)

TEXT

1 It would be possible to produce, as many a visiting journalist has done, a short book on the DRV, but the content, like that of most of the books, would add little to the state of knowledge on the central questions of war and peace: still less on the true state of Hanoi's complicated position in relation to its two main suppliers and supporters, Moscow and Peking. I have therefore confined myself to an overall impression

3 The change in bombing policy has had several consequences. The population can sleep soundly at night and carry on with business undisturbed during the day; doubtless the opportunity to rebuild the Paul Doumer Bridge in peace, and to abandon the ferry and pontoon substitutes, has made the life of the planners and administrators easier.

4 In parallel there have been more manifestations of party and bureaucratic interference in everyday life. Either because they have more time, or because of an understandable fear that, in the less tense and immediate spirit of the post-bombing period, the people are more likely to stray from the party line, there have been new drives to enforce minor rules, accusations of anti-social activities by private entrepreneurs, and of improper conduct by youth. My Socialist colleagues are inclined to interpret the measures as prophylactic. There have also been increased restrictions on foreigners' travel within the City, although permits to visit the seaside have been forthcoming for those who, unlike the British office, qualify for recognition.

5 But there has been no improvement in the standard of living or rations of the man in the street. The City continues to look like a vast and mouldering slum, pitted with air-raid shelters, large and small, dishevelled and uncared for, littered

with crates and stores. New building in the small area in which we can move unmolested is confined to unimaginative small brick buildings, filling in empty spaces alongside the classic facades of former French architects, or an occasional air-raid shelter.

6 The general comments which I made in my despatch on first impressions in October last year, seem still to be valid. Although Hanoi is no longer being bombed and the United States and the DRV delegations face each other weekly in Paris, exchanging vituperative polemics, there is still no sign that the DRV is willing to give any significant concessions to bring the bombing to a halt.

11 In my view the best hope for peace is that the Communists may allow the war to simmer down, if, after a halt in the bombing, the line suggested by Vice-President Humphrey and other United States political figures prevails and the United States commences a gradual military withdrawal, in step with their military strengthening of the South Vietnamese Army. This policy, variously described as fade out, pull out, or sell out, according to the philosophy of the individual commentator, is the only one which looks like producing an early major change. The alternative seems to me to be a continuation of the war for the foreseeable future. The ingredients of the war will continue to be a mixture of phase two and phase three, using those elements available, whether military or political, which seem most suitable to the moment: in effect this can only mean guerrilla war if the present trends continue.

*In Vietnam ladies wore Ao Dais
Silk gowns slit right up to the thighs
Which made girls in Cheong Sams
Look quite like dowdy school marms
And were far greater fun for the guys*

*The US that fought the Vietcong
Met an enemy tenacious and strong
The US intention
Was a swift intervention
But events proved them terribly wrong*

I have already explained why, in my view, the US was not likely to win, and how McNamara eventually saw the light.

It was odd that so much emphasis was put on the Malayan analogy. It was much more odd that the lessons of history had not been learnt: bias, complacency, exaggerated reliance on technology all played their part, but ignorance of history seems to have been a major cause of failure. A nation that had beaten the British Regular Army in the 18th Century to win Independence was guilty two hundred years later of the same inability to perceive the potential of an irregular force.

Cabinet Office Days

One Scotsman entitled a book about Whitehall, "Masters of Indecision", but it is not indecision but the deafening sound of departmental axes that epitomises Whitehall for me. A PUNCH cartoon showing a tourist asking a Policeman "Which side is the Foreign Office on?" to be told "On our side I hope Madame" makes the point.

But it would be a dull dog indeed that got no frisson from and was not proud of being in the Cabinet Office. I had been invited into a Club headed by distinguished Civil and Military Knights and their staffs. A challenge indeed for a forty-seven year old who knew a great deal more about Asia than about Whitehall.

When I visited her in the USA on the way back from Hanoi, Peggy and I had agreed to part company. We had grown far apart over the years as I had become ever more involved in language study and the penetration of new societies, while she remained a popular hostess, but never prepared to study. Our

parting was amicable and since she had mother, sister and a job in the USA, she was reasonably well set to start a new life. But I was worried about the girls, who I hoped were mature enough to understand. At least they had been settled at school in Britain for some time, were accustomed to lengthy parental absences, and I was going to be home for some years to provide them with fatherly support. In any case, they were both becoming very independent teenagers, and boyfriends took precedence over parents.

I arrived home in Broich in early December, and had barely unpacked before being summoned to report to the Secretary of the Cabinet, Sir Burke Trend, for an interview as a possible candidate for the post of Secretary of the Joint Intelligence Committee. I got the job without having much idea what it entailed. I could only hope that enthusiasm, hard work, and native wit would carry me through.

My predecessor made it clear that the job had changed dramatically in his time, after the creation of a considerable Assessment Staff and the appointment of an Intelligence Coordinator. For me it was all unknown territory. My successor, Michael Herman, gives a good account of the atmosphere of the Cabinet Office in his note *Cabinet Office Impressions* (1997, Frank Cass), where he recalls that when he said to me "I still have no idea who is my boss." I replied, "You nominally have three masters, but our loyalty is to the machine and our job is to get things done." But that vision was not immediately clear to me; nor did I consider all three masters were of equal importance. My master was the Secretary of the Cabinet. The other two Knights, the Chairman and the Coordinator, were senior officers who were *primus inter pares* amongst the other members of my Committee.

But it was clear that the reform of 1968 had radically changed the Secretary's position. I could have meekly accepted a role as manager of the committee business, treating the job as a sinecure and a sabbatical. In view of the excellence of the supporting staff, this would have been an easy course to adopt. I wanted, however, to make some real

contribution.

In the Secretariat we took pride in our ability to produce an immediate record at high speed, distilling hours of debate into a few pages. Very occasionally some member of the Committee would challenge the minutes; but we had little difficulty in fending off challenges since we never had less than two Secretaries of Colonel, or equivalent civilian rank, attending each meeting, and I insisted that our notebooks were filled with copious notes that we could produce if selective memories caused trouble. The few complaints received in my time were from members who wanted their statements to be given more space, or once (quelle horreur!), wanted us to breach convention by naming a speaker.

In Working Parties that I chaired, I avoided arguments by attaching all departmental submissions as appendices. I suspect that these appendices were only read by the author and, perhaps by his departmental colleagues, but my system ensured that no one could complain that any of his points had been inadequately covered.

In post Cabinet Office life I was amused by the horror with which businessmen observed my habit of taking notes and recording decisions. It was not their way; they like oral discussion, without written records showing who was responsible for a decision or, indeed, what the decision was. My successor described the process of minute writing as an art form of seductive elegance. I would not go so far, but it was an interesting challenge requiring us to invent an introduction and summing up to put in the mouth of the Chairman, to catch the sense of the meeting. Sometimes after particularly turbulent debate, we were forced to minute what we thought the members intended to say, rather than what they actually said. Since the minutes had to go out within twenty-four hours, there was no time to check them with members or Chairman before despatch, so the Secretariat had to take full responsibility for the content.

The Director General of Intelligence (DGI), an amusing and shrewd Irishman once grumbled, jocularly, that the

minutes did not describe any meeting which he had attended, but he did not demand a rewrite; like the rest of the committee he well understood that the purpose of the minutes was to produce a reflection of the spirit and consensus, not to indulge the amour propre of individual members.

Service in the Cabinet Office was a great eye opener. For the first time in my life I understood the meaning of the phrase "Vested Interests". While I was becoming accustomed to the sound of the grinding of departmental axes, I found myself once again fortunate to have a chief whom I liked and admired. Sir Burke Trend was the best of the Mandarin breed. The massive turnout at Lord Trend's funeral in Westminster Abbey demonstrated the deep respect in which he was held by all who knew him. He was a most satisfying man to work for; full of ideas and knowledge, whose enthusiasm and sense of humour was unaffected by the astonishingly long hours which he worked. His obituarist in *The Times* remarked, "I admired him more than any other public servant I ever met." I am sure that most of us who worked for him felt the same.

I decided at an early stage that I would, if possible, never bother Sir Burke during office hours, but would wait to be summoned by the Private Secretary at close of play, when the hurly-burly of his incredibly busy life had momentarily died down. I took care to bring with me a proposed solution to any problem, so business went smoothly. Our sessions were extraordinarily relaxed: usually the great man asked me to have a glass of whisky while he put his feet up. When Lord Trend retired to become Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, I was amused to hear his comments on the college committee system, where instead of the well-oiled Rolls Royce that we had run for him in the Cabinet Office, he found himself with a collection of contentious dons and not even the shadow of a secretariat. A different world indeed. I heard the same sort of grumble from all my old colleagues who became Heads of Colleges, but the shock must have been worse for an ex-Secretary of the Cabinet.

One memory of this time is of my secretary who flounced

grumpily about the office and said, "I am not used to working for a man." I suggested that if she did not like the set-up she should arrange a transfer: I was sorry, but I did not have time for tantrums. We soon learnt to work together. I was amused thirty years later when I received a request for a contribution to a leaving present for my erstwhile sparring partner.

Anyone who wants to know something of the working of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) will find interesting comments in Sir Percy Cradock's book *In Pursuit of British Interests* (1997). Sir Percy was Chief of Assessments in my time and later Chairman of the JIC. He wrote that wearing a JIC hat when visiting the US he felt "less than at any other time that sense of inequality that descends on British Government representatives in those parts." I had the same feeling in my lowlier role. My successor, Michael Herman, has also written about the machine in some detail in his book *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (1996).

Letter Home

I am staying with the US Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) who has been generous with access to his Intelligence. The air photographs of the Ho Chi Minh Trail show in great detail how the trace is perpetually changing. Every time the track is bombed a new trace is cut through the jungle to circumvent the damage. They do not bother with repairs.

My host and his wife had a very personal interest in Hanoi, since their naval pilot son had been shot down and imprisoned in the "Hanoi Hilton". I was not able to give them much comfort.

The prisoner later became a US Senator and Presidential candidate. A brave survivor, whose style I enjoyed when I saw him on CNN during the Iraq War.

All committees tend to produce somewhat "grey" material: the JIC was no exception. Assessments ended frequently with something of the "on the one hand, but on the other hand"

variety. However, I remember with great pleasure one occasion when the Chairman of the day, my favourite Irishman, introduced a discordant note into one of our discussions on a beautifully crafted, and well balanced assessment of the "two-handed" variety by saying "I think X is finished." When I suggested that we ought to rewrite the conclusion accordingly, he replied "No! It is only a feeling in my water." However, within three weeks X was indeed finished. Alas, I never found a means of testing the feeling in the great man's water but his gut feelings based on masses of experience seemed to be the nearest thing to a crystal ball that we were ever likely to find.

I found an analogous, but rather more significant incident in the history books. At the time of the Cuban crisis, the Director of the CIA, McCone, a lone voice in the US Cabinet, said that he was convinced, although he had no factual evidence to substantiate his gut feeling, that the Soviets were planning to install intercontinental ballistic missiles in Cuba. Soon aerial photography proved that his gut feeling was right.

As I was learning, and enjoying, my new job, the girls were growing up fast. Heather was at Oxford in an "A" Level College, doing minimum work but having maximum fun. She had a large male fan club, some rich, and some intellectual, some aristocratic and all amusing in their different ways. Fortunately, I was never asked to approve a choice of partner for life since she did not become engaged.

Annie was leading a very different life at Cheltenham Ladies' College where hard work was the order of the day. No doubt Annie felt that it was unfair that she should be shut up in a nunnery while Heather was enjoying the freedoms of Oxford, but of course her hard work paid off with a place at Cambridge and afterwards a legal qualification, which led to great success in Hong Kong University. Heather paid dearly for her years of lotus eating; by the time she returned to the world of books and exams she had forgotten her academic skills. Accordingly, when she went to the School of Oriental and African studies to study Indonesian and Anthropology,

she found it very difficult. Fortunately we knew Heather's professor and were able to persuade him to give her a year off to study in Indonesia. Today, of course, a year in one's country of study is commonplace, but in 1970 it was unheard of for an undergraduate. The remedy worked, and she got a good degree.

I sent Annie off to study in Japan during her gap year. By some extraordinary luck I managed to get an invitation from the Japanese Royal Family to send her to live in the No.2 Palace. They were very kind to her, and I enjoyed a parental visit to tea in the Palace, but the arrangement did not last since Annie found Palace life too confining. She slipped the royal leash and went off to private life, much to the disappointment of my old friend Sir John Pilcher the Ambassador who had greatly approved of the ploy. The experiment worked as far as language was concerned, but Annie did not take to Japanese society. You can take a horse to water ...!

When I visited the girls overseas it was a joy to discover how well they were coping with the local languages. Heather entered wholeheartedly into Indonesian society and became enthusiastic about their art and culture with the help of the Nugrohos, my old friends from Hanoi days. Sadly, Annie, although her colloquial Japanese was impressive, did not become absorbed by Japanese arts.

Letter Home

I have just been to tea with Annie's host, the Emperor's brother and his consort. They were very easy to talk to but I was very conscious of the fact that I was probably dropping endless clangers in the context of Royal etiquette. Annie likes them, but finds the protocol stifling; they cannot visit a shop unless it has been closed for their visit.

I still find myself meeting people wringing their hands over the fact that we dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese. I have no sympathy with their point of view. The atomic bomb saved a lot of lives on both sides.

Letter Home

Heather's Indonesian is excellent and her knowledge of the museums and monuments impressive. The first night was on the train to Jogjakarta, (no sleepers of course), excellent grub along the way from vendors poking delicacies through the windows. Then into a modest pension in Jogja, hiring a motorcycle and off to Borobodur. By midday I was exhausted, and took a siesta while the indefatigable Heather continued her studies. Sometimes we were unlucky with heavy rain, but in the sunshine it has been extremely pleasant wafting our way through the lush green padi fields of Central Java framed by the volcanic hills behind.

My social life in London was much enlivened by the presence of Sally Rose who had been one of our circle of friends in Kuala Lumpur but had left Malaya and Singapore behind her, and was now Head of the Meetings Department at Chatham House. This was a job that suited her talents admirably. She was, in effect, running an intellectual salon for senior diplomats, academics and politicians who were interested in International Affairs, and in attending talks and seminars. The talks usually had titles such as *After Mao Tsetung What?* It was Sally's job to think up the topics, find prestigious speakers, and to make all the arrangements, including guest lists and sandwich lunch. She frequently asked me as a lunch guest and my ex-ambassadors were puzzled by the frequency of my appearance: they only got an invitation if the topic was relevant to their former posts but I had a standing invitation.

I remember with particular clarity a talk by Conor Cruise O'Brien. His topic was *Whither Europe* and when discussing the analogy of membership of a club, he told us the joke about Groucho Marx who had rejected an invitation to join some club with the words "I would not join any club that would have me as a member!" The Chinese Embassy party, with whom I was sitting, asked me to explain the reference to Karl Marx. I thought it best to pretend that I had missed the reference, rather than to attempt a dissertation on the Marx

Brothers, and the joke.

In those days I continued to wear the old Whitehall uniform of pin striped trousers, black jacket, bowler hat and umbrella. It was smart, convenient and economical. But since the bowler hat and umbrella were also de rigueur for Guards Officers, I frequently found myself being greeted with a stamp and a flourish from the sentries at Horse Guards.

Heather's Indonesian studies ended when Greg Letterman, an American lawyer, swept her away to marriage and to the United States. Now it was Cambridge's turn, and I spent many happy weekends in New Hall, Annie's College. Andrew Carver, whom she met at the very beginning, decided that this was the girl for him, and she married him before she left the university. So by the mid-1970s both girls had flown the coop, although when Sally and I set up house at 19 South Terrace, Kensington, we were able to provide the young Carvers with an independent flat in the basement, and so we saw them often, before Annie finished her law exams and set off to Africa with her husband.

Sally and I married just before I left London for Hong Kong, and we made the most of my leave entitlements to indulge in an exotic, delightful and most memorable honeymoon, which took us to Hong Kong via Paris, Athens, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

Letter Home

Nairobi

What an amazing honeymoon this has been. For both of us Ethiopia and Africa were terra incognita, and full of excitements. At times we have stayed luxuriously with colleagues, and at other times in primitive grass huts.

Sri Lanka

Alas the honeymoon is nearly over. I suppose that this will be the last time that I can take advantage of my entitlements to travel in leisurely fashion by land and sea.

I have been here before but this is the first time I have got any further than Colombo and Kandy. We have been to every major monument and each was a fascinating memorial to the changing dynasties of the island.

Although the place is sadly run down, and bedevilled by the Tamil rebels, it is still a fabulous country.

Sally had some doubts about the Ceylon railway when she found that our carriage had lost its door.

I suggested to Sally some years later that we should take advantage of the Sri Lankan Government's tax concessions to buy a seaside cottage in Serendip but she was put off by the horrendous traffic on the coast road.

I must have done something right as de jure Secretary of the JIC and de facto Personal Assistant to the Intelligence Coordinator, since I was invited to extend my stay. But I wanted another spell overseas not least in order to pacify my bank manager and so, although flattered, I declined the honour.

In 1969 the New Year Honours List included my name as a recipient of a CMG. I asked to be invested at Holyrood not Buckingham Palace so, in the middle of the year, accompanied by a proud mother and father, I paraded in Edinburgh in my kilt. There was only one other kilt in the Palace; a Lava Lava worn by the Chief Minister of Fiji, who proved to be an amiable companion. I appreciated the Queen's kind words about my time in Hanoi.

*A Scotsman when called to Whitehall
To his friends said, "I'm frankly appalled,
No more extra bawbees
And so full of grandees"
And what's worse I don't know them at all*

Note for the Sassenach: The bawbee means money, and a London posting meant cessation of my foreign allowances

Digression on the Art of Intelligence Assessment and the use of Intelligence

My JIC job introduced me to the subject of Intelligence Assessment and its use by senior customers. Twenty years later, when I had long since ceased to be on Her Majesty's payroll and had some time on my hands, I started to study the growing body of literature on Intelligence matters to see how these two aspects of Intelligence had been covered. I read widely; autobiographies and biographies of spymasters, politicians, senior officials and many other relevant books. The books I found most satisfactory were written by that great all-rounder, Professor R V Jones. He knew the Intelligence world from collection through analysis to committee.

Failures of assessment at strategic level are legion. In Indochina the French, who as the colonial Power had less excuse than the US for ignorance, underestimated General Giap and his irregulars. In the American War of Independence, the British underestimated George Washington and his civilian army (the despatch of six frigates and a Brigade was thought to be quite sufficient to snuff out revolt). The Western nations woefully underestimated the Japanese capability. Hitler said that waging war on Russia would be as easy as "smashing down a rotten door". Stalin absolutely refused to countenance the idea that Germany might attack Russia, and all intelligence which contradicted him on this matter was dismissed, usually as "British provocation".

But faulty assessment is not the monopoly of the West. It is

equally easy to find apposite tales in Asia. In the 19th Century it took three wars before the Burmese finally decided that the British Army was a foe to be reckoned with.

The literature on this topic suggests that there are many common factors in such faulty assessments. They include: bias, prejudice, ignorance, complacency, conservatism, arrogance, lack of humility, closed mind sets, group thinking, lack of moral courage, fear of harming career or losing friends amongst peers, and instinctive stereotyping of other races.

Hun, Kraut, Frog, Wop, Wog, Yid, Chink, Gook, Jap are all very well in the barrack room and propaganda warfare, but the irrational concepts that go with such stereotypes should not form a serious part in the assessment process. It is extraordinary, for example, to read a report that General MacArthur when told of the successful Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor said, "They must have hired mercenary pilots."

Arrogance, allied with courage and skill, can, of course, make a braw fighter. I doubt whether Colonel Stewart, the gallant and effective commander of the Argyles during the British retreat down the Malayan Peninsula, had a very PC view about the "Japs" but he paid them the compliment of treating them as a serious foe, and outfought them.

Another distinguished soldier, Colonel Spencer Chapman who "stayed behind" in Malaya, provides written evidence of his non-PC views in his book, *The Jungle is Neutral*. Thus, "These were the first enemy Japs I had observed at close quarters, little, evil, blustering, spectacled popinjays, with huge ears, projecting front teeth, toothbrush moustaches, wearing high-peaked jockey caps and untidy uniforms." But his scornful view did not hinder effective operations. Indeed, one might surmise that it gave him conviction, when captured, that he would undoubtedly be able to escape. But he also knew his jungle far better than his captors. A healthy dose of confidence and arrogance may help the fighting soldiers' morale, but bias and prejudice should be eschewed in strategic assessment.

And then, there is the whole range of factors that can be

subsumed under the rubric of cognitive dissonance, which, amongst other things, disposes commanders to reject any inconvenient information that clashes with their assumptions.

I found numerous examples of senior military officers refusing to accept unpalatable facts. The most dramatic examples included the Chiefs of the British and German Navies, both asserting at the turn of the century that the newly invented submarine was an irrelevance, and generals, dismissing the tank as a temporary phenomenon. These were simple illustrations of the closed mind, prisoner of its own experience. Clearly however good the assessment machinery, the end product will be of little use to such a mind unless it confirms preconceptions.

One theme that emerged from my reading was a recurring tendency to complacency, related to gross underestimation of the enemy. The disaster at Pearl Harbor fell into this category. Before Pearl Harbor, the US did not expect "bandy-legged yellow dwarves with bad eyesight" to pose a serious threat.

So it seemed that customers welcomed Intelligence that supported their own opinions, but seldom found it possible to swallow their pride. Stalin's refusal to believe the excellent Intelligence about the imminent German attack must take the palm in this context. Hitler too was a leading member of the "don't confuse me with the facts my mind's made up already" school. Sometimes the messenger would literally be shot; and always the inconvenient information would be rejected. President Johnson was another Head of State who did not like being presented with inconvenient information. He once complained to his Cabinet that Intelligence Officers reminded him of Bessie, a cow which he used to milk when he was young. "If you were not careful," he said, "she would swish her tail across the pail and spoil all the milk. Intelligence Officers can be just as dangerous."

However, my reading suggested that the most successful commanders had all been Intelligence aficionados. The Duke of Wellington, Field Marshal Wavell, Templer, Churchill, Roosevelt and General Eisenhower were all enthusiasts;

George Washington spent 12% of his budget on Intelligence during the War of Independence. Sun Zi the 3rd Century BC Chinese strategist devoted one whole chapter to Intelligence out of the thirteen chapters in his book *The Art of War*. Machiavelli's *Art of War* followed the same line as Sun Zi. Only one famous soldier was out of step. Carl von Clausewitz in *Der Krieg* (War) dismissed Intelligence out of hand, but then he had never commanded a victorious army.

Another theme emerged. The customer tends to expect the Intelligence community to have some unique magic crystal ball able to predict the future with certainty. This is nonsense: no one has a crystal ball; and, it has been well said that crystal balls usually prove to be more balls than crystal. The Intelligence community can be required to provide educated guesstimates, based on all the evidence available. But certainty about the future belongs only to God. Professor Hobsbawm, the historian, suggested in his book, *The Age of Extremes*, that only governments and economic research units pretend to have much faith in forecasts, and that their record is getting worse.

Robert Gates, a lifetime professional Intelligence Analyst, said that when he became DCI he kept on his desk the maxim, "The best way to achieve complete surprise is to commit an act that makes no sense or is even self-destructive".

And then there is the difficulty of determining intention. Photography can unmask the enemies' forces. Signals Intelligence (Sigint) may tell you what the commanders are saying, but even if you have the Minutes of the latest Politburo meeting they do not tell you what the final decision of the Chairman will be. The literature on the Cuban missile crisis makes it clear that Khrushchev did not know what he was going to do until the last minute when he "blinked" in the face of Kennedy's blockade. Indeed thirty years on, despite innumerable seminars and the release of many official papers, we still do not know precisely how Khrushchev arrived at his decisions first to taunt Kennedy and later to back down.

As one CIA Director pointed out, there are some subjects that will always be mysteries, hidden from even the very best

Intelligence machine. Although the means of collection of raw Intelligence become ever more sophisticated, they still cannot reveal the innermost secrets of the human mind.

Finally, I noted how difficult it was for assessors to get inside the minds of people from different backgrounds and cultures. By Western norms Russia should not have invaded Czechoslovakia, and Galtieri should not have attacked the Falklands. But in neither case was the leadership interested in Western public opinion. The shock horror expressed in the West (including Hong Kong) when China brutally assaulted students around Tiananmen Square was another case in point. The world was outraged, but should not have been surprised.

Few senior customers, either side of the Atlantic, have ever taken time to look seriously at the fundamental problems which face an Intelligence community. If they consider themselves well-served they are content, if they consider themselves ill-served they are unlikely to give deep thought to the causes of their disappointment. The simple verdict is likely to be "Intelligence failure", but such an omnibus label obscures the fact that failures may be of very different sorts; failure of requirement setting, failure of the collectors, faulty analysis, or failure of the end users of Intelligence to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest. Pinpointing the fault in a detailed post mortem requires a great deal more time than most senior officers are willing to spare, nor, as Lord Franks' Enquiry showed, do such post mortems necessarily find clear answers to so complex a subject.

Sir Reginald Hibbert, looking at the contribution of secret Intelligence to the overall picture once wrote, "It confirms in an authentic way assessments which have been reached from non-secret sources." But what if assessments are correct but inconvenient? And challenge the received wisdom? The product of the Intelligence community is, in many ways, like that of a quality newspaper. Hopefully it presents accurate information, but there can be no guarantee that the information will be read, still less that it will be given due weight by its readers.

Fragrant Harbour - 1972

"You have treated my instructions like wastepaper," said Palmerston to Elliot the Briton who signed the treaty ceding Hong Kong to Britain.

"You have ignored my instructions: tremble and obey" said the Chinese Emperor to Commissioner Lin, the Chinese signatory.

Both were banished.

Palmerston had called Hong Kong a "barren rock" but now the rock was an Asian giant in financial terms. A colony Britain could be proud of.

It was good to be back in the China region, and to have some use for my Cantonese. But I was starting from scratch as far as Hong Kong was concerned: the only person I knew in the Colony was the Governor.

This was a very different place from the Colony that I had been part of in 1947, and even in the 1960s. The harbour, busier than ever, had lost its picturesque sailing junks, and its swarm of little sampans propelled by a single sweep at the stern, and handled by a sturdy Chinese girl in black pyjamas. Now there were motorboats of every shape and size criss-crossing the water. Nor were there any old-style passenger ships in the harbour; their function had been taken over by a stream of aircraft flying in and out of Kai Tak, where new runways, capable of taking the largest planes, had been built. In Central, hundreds of luxurious skyscrapers and thousands of workaday concrete buildings had replaced the palatial 19th and early 20th Century edifices that used to house the great trading houses (Honges), and foreign banks. The rows of traditional 19th Century shop-houses and warehouses were fast disappearing, while major reclamation projects were changing the line of the waterfront. Unfortunately few of the new

buildings had much to commend them except their cost effectiveness.

The term "little dragons" (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea) had yet to be coined, but Hong Kong certainly qualified for inclusion in the quartet. The reasons for their phenomenal economic growth were the subject of endless debate. It was widely held that their success should be attributed to a shared Confucian background, which underpinned family discipline and respect for tradition, authority, and education, and gave them a work ethic, reminiscent of the Protestant work ethic in Victorian Britain. This explanation was of course widely approved by Asians as they watched the unravelling of Western society. But it was only a part of the story. Sally and I pointed out later in academic papers and seminars that there was much more to it than the Confucian values. For example, all the little dragons had been colonised, the first two by the British, the second two by the Japanese, thus their legal and administrative systems were very different from those of China, the biggest Dragon of all. They were unencumbered by large state funded health and social welfare systems and unemployment schemes, nor were they greatly worried about human rights, or about democracy. To put it crudely, they were non-PC, and not very "caring" societies. Also most of them had something of the refugee mentality that tends to produce hard work.

It has been said jokingly that Hong Kong's motto is "If it moves eat it, if it does not move, then knock it down and build anew". The joke is a little harsh since not every Hong Konger habitually eats Pangolin or the brains of live monkeys scooped from their skulls, or even dogs. The second part of the motto, however, has the ring of truth. Few Hong Kongers showed any interest in conservation or, indeed, in aesthetics. Profit reigned supreme. So anyone interested in seeing old buildings had to go down to sleepy Macau, where there had not yet been enough money to support a major rebuilding programme. And even when their boom started, although they ruined their seafront, the Praia Grande, and allowed cars and motor cycles

to take over the pavements, Macau did preserve a considerable part of their architectural heritage.

When the grand old Hong Kong Post Office was about to bite the dust, Sally asked the Governor why it could not be preserved. He replied, "My dear, you presumably do not know just how much that site is worth." His answer was a reminder of the Government's dependence on the auctioning of land to the highest bidder, for a substantial part of its revenue. A system that enabled the Financial Secretary to keep income tax below 20%.

Considering the rapid increase in the number of vehicles on the roads and the limitations imposed by the topography of the island, it was a triumph that the traffic flowed at all. The cross-harbour road tunnels, and mass transit railway system were impressive, and Hong Kong was now a modern, thrusting city that made London look old and inefficient by comparison. Happily, Hong Kong's tram system had survived the global post-war fashion of replacing clean, electrically driven trams with buses pouring carbon fumes into the atmosphere. The Star Ferry had also resisted change; the familiar ferryboats still chugged across between Hong Kong and Kowloon. These must be, by any standards, two of the world's most useful and pleasant forms of urban mass transport. The Peak Tram too continued to clank up and down the hill.

Letter Home

It is less than a week since we took over our splendid flat half way up the Peak. Today the stunning views across the harbour have been replaced by menacing storm clouds and torrential rain sweeping horizontally across the sky. The road between the hillside and us has turned into a river, as Hong Kong experiences the fury of a full-scale typhoon.

Yesterday one of the "High Rise" blocks slid down the hill. Nature has not taken kindly to the Hong Kong practice of carving out large building plots on its precipitous slopes.

My circumstances had changed almost as dramatically as Hong Kong's. I was no longer an impecunious language

student but a relatively senior member of society: no longer a denizen of a small concrete, semi-furnished box in Macau, but living half-way up the Peak in a flat with superb views across the harbour. I reminded myself frequently of our good fortune and tried not to become blasé.

Once again I was lucky with my local chief. This time it was Murray Macle hose, now Governor of Hong Kong. His appointment had not been universally approved, since he had come from the diplomatic, not the colonial, stable. The critics discovered that this was no softly, softly Whitehall committeeman; if he wore kid gloves they concealed an iron fist. Murray had started life as an MCS Chinese Cadet, worked as an Intelligence Officer behind the Japanese lines in the War, and then joined the Diplomatic Service. As a diplomat he had acquired a lot of Asian experience, having been Political Adviser in Hong Kong, and Ambassador in Vietnam. Although I could understand the disappointment of the rump of the Colonial Service, this seemed to me an excellent choice. He shared some of General Templer's characteristics. He had imagination, drive, and an imposing presence. He expected action, and got things done.

It was not difficult to make friends amongst the Hong Kong Government, since I shared with them a common experience of Colonial Service. But I had to be careful not to make invidious comparisons with the Malayan Civil Service. The tasks of the two services were for the most part very different. Hong Kong was a city-state and so most of the civil service were "pen pushers" whereas most of the MCS were in the field. I noted, but of course did not remark upon, the fact that the Hong Kong Service's linguistic standards compared unfavourably with those of the MCS. After the war the MCS had continued to insist that no officer could be confirmed until he had passed his language exams and the system of sparing officers for two years of Chinese language training had been maintained. Hong Kong, however, took the view that they could no longer spare officers for lengthy language courses, and as a result the Hong Kong Civil Service's knowledge of

"Things Chinese" had been impaired. Gone were the days when Singapore would turn to Hong Kong for Chinese expertise; the boot was now on the other foot.

The arrival of a stream of retreads from other colonies did nothing to improve the situation. These officers, now in mid-career, having previously immersed themselves in the study of the language and culture of their "first love" found it hard to generate the same enthusiasm for their new urban clients. They were efficient and honest but many found it difficult to develop a close rapport with the Chinese. Their desk-bound jobs must have seemed a poor substitute for the job of a District Commissioner in the wide-open spaces of Africa.

I had some sympathy for the retreads. During my MCS days I had already discovered from personal experience how different Colonial Service was in Hong Kong. When, as SCA Penang, I visited the SCA Hong Kong in the hope of fruitful discussions on mutual problems, politics, recruitment of Chinese teachers, subversive literature, secret societies, and so on, I found that I was talking to someone who was in effect the Chief Social Welfare Officer and had no remit to deal with the matters which filled my life. We had only two things in common; we both ran a Po Leung Kuk, to preserve the virtue of young Chinese ladies, and we had both passed the Cantonese exams.

I remembered with some amusement that when I had offered my services to Hong Kong in 1956 I had been told that there was no room at the inn. By the time that the Colonial Office had woken up, most of the younger MCS had already found a new career. I sometimes wondered what sort of a career I would have had in the Hong Kong Civil Service. By now the Colony was finding it increasingly difficult to recruit enough administrators for its ever-expanding services, and Murray invited me to join the Hong Kong Civil Service. However, I doubted that the Hong Kong Civil Service would welcome the intrusion of a 50-year-old diplomat and, without Murray as a patron, did not think that my position would be tenable in the long run. I declined the honour.

Sally soon had our flat running smoothly. Two splendid Chinese assisted her. The old school "black and white" Amah, Ah Ho, was of a certain age but endowed with considerable stamina, energy and experience. She wore the traditional uniform of white tunic, black silk trousers and her black hair in a bun, and sported green jade earrings. The "cook-boy" called Ah Yee was a former small landlord. Both of them had fled from China before the worst excesses of the revolution had started; and like most refugees they counted their blessings, saved every penny, and worked very hard. Ah Yee was a natural cook, who had become a professional after trying his hand at barbering, a trade at which he was not very good. Although neither spoke much English, Sally managed well.

We did a lot of entertaining and had many visitors to stay, including both Heather and Annie. I was a member of the Military Mess, which had a fine swimming pool, and of the Hong Kong Club; both were within easy walking distance of my office.

In no time we found ourselves witnessing a major typhoon from our new flat. There were no circus elephants chained to colonnades to give colour to the proceedings, as there had been in Macau, but it was an awesome sight. The rain sweeping horizontally across the sky, ships desperately trying to keep their position in the harbour, and behind us, water rising dramatically along the hill road. Although we survived unscathed, landslides caused many tragedies in the territory.

It was a good life; I had an interesting job and plenty to do, and we were, for once, not broke. I had indulged in a fancy motorcar, a third-hand Aston Martin DB6. It was a beautiful beast; singularly ill suited of course to urban life, but of wondrous grace and power, and in good weather with the roof down, it gave us considerable pleasure. We also had access to a motorised junk for Sunday sailing.

Working once more with Sir Murray was, I suppose, the greatest bonus of all. We had many an interesting debate about the options for 1997 when the Hong Kong lease ran out. I did

some research at his request into the Macau analogies and the legal relationship between Portugal and China. The Portuguese had, centuries earlier, been allowed to occupy Macau in a loose sort of grace and favour relationship based on Chinese gratitude for Portuguese help against local pirates. The Portuguese Senate had been in the position of tenants without a written lease. Macau paid various taxes to the local Chinese Mandarins, and when occasionally the Leal Senado attempted to assert its independence by disobeying a Chinese command, the Mandarins would order all Chinese to leave the city and cut off food supplies until the Barbarians came to their senses.

Our situation in Hong Kong could hardly have been more different. The island and the tip of Kowloon had been ceded to us in perpetuity, by Treaty, in the wake of the Opium War when the British Navy had punished the Chinese in retaliation for their seizure and burning of the opium stocks of the British merchants in Canton. Although the Treaty mightily displeased both Britain and China, to the delight of foreign traders the treaty stood; and allowed them the opportunity to create, under the British Flag, a flourishing entrepôt port, no longer subject to the whims of the Mandarins.

The boundaries of Hong Kong had been considerably expanded in 1897. The hundred-year lease of the New Territories granted us a sizeable piece of land on the mainland, and all the islands immediately around Hong Kong. 1997, the fateful year when the New Territories lease would run out, was still twenty-five years ahead and the Chinese of Hong Kong showed no wish to substitute a Chinese cangue for the British colonial yoke. Their ancestors and later generations had voted with their feet to live under the Union Jack, and only a few Communist or Nationalist ideologues wanted to exchange the good order and prosperity of Hong Kong for the unknowns of the People's Republic.

It seemed self-evident to most of us that the colony would be unviable if China took back the New Territories in 1997; and that since the days of gunboat diplomacy were over, the Dragon not the British Bulldog could call the tune. In later

years when the 1997 agreements were under public scrutiny it was fashionable to accuse the British of selling Hong Kong down the river. If anyone said this to me I asked him or her whether if Britain decided to make a fight for it, the world would back us.

There were many reasons why perpetuity was impractical; for example, we depended on China for water and fresh food, and our air and sea routes passed through Chinese jurisdictions. Therefore, unless China was willing to renew the lease, Hong Kong would find itself in a state of siege, and the likelihood that China would offer us a renewal was slim indeed. Sir Murray looked ahead to 1997, although clearly he would have long since ceased to have any responsibility for Hong Kong by the time that the question of the lease became a public issue. It was too early to broach the matter with the Chinese, and the public would not have thanked us for opening a public debate on the matter; but it was not too early to study the options.

The debate was in full swing when we returned in 1982. There were few foolish enough to imagine that Britain could force a solution on China; but there was no crystal ball to tell us about the mindset of the Chinese leadership in 1997, so the debate was highly speculative. But whoever the Chinese leaders were, they would not want to be seen as soft on colonialism and thus to offer an easy target for any rabble rousing xenophobe. We had already seen during the Cultural Revolution how easy it was for agitators to stir up mobs in China and in Hong Kong against the "British Colonial Imperialist Oppressors" who were portrayed in their history books as the leading villains in plots to dismember China and to humiliate the Qing Dynasty in the 19th Century. The only British cards were economic; but China was quite capable of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs, if politics demanded it.

One school of thought suggested that we should do nothing and wait for the Chinese to make the first move. Some thought we should take the initiative and seek an extension of the

lease. Others that we should offer to hand back sovereignty, but continue to run the administration on the lines of a Treaty Port, such as Shanghai had been. A few flat earthers pretended that it would be possible to keep the colony going without change once the New Territories had returned to China.

Old Mao, although on his last legs, was still the paramount leader supported by that smooth, diplomat and skilled survivor, Chou Enlai. My candidate for the leadership had always been Deng Xiaoping, but he had fallen out of favour. We should have to wait and see how the leadership developed. Deng had not yet published his aphorisms, which included the famous statement that it did not matter what colour a cat was as long as it caught mice. He was no ideologue, but a skilled political fighter, more interested in results than Marxism.

Sir Murray who was affectionately known as "Jock the Sock" by his admirers, and by rather less endearing epithets by his detractors, initiated many major programmes. Appalled by the shortage of houses for the less well off, he created a housing authority and built satellite towns with basic but decent high-rise apartments. He created country parks and encouraged walking trails. He set in motion a Hong Kong Arts Festival and promoted the development of the arts in general. His most courageous initiative was an attempt to cure the endemic corruption in Hong Kong by setting up an anti-Corruption Commission (ICAC), independent of the Police. In short, he was a dynamic and effective Governor.

Rory was born in the Military Hospital on January 3. Heather and I rushed across the harbour to see this miracle, stopping on the way to buy a comb and a toothbrush that Heather thought might be necessary. But he needed neither, and looked like a cherubic, bald Winston Churchill. Rory was a happy baby except when he had colic, and Ah Ho was very good at soothing him. I must confess that I saw little of him; my sharpest memories of him in Hong Kong were of a small chap, cradled in Amah's arms, as she stood at the door of the flat to welcome visitors, proudly displaying the young prince. This did not add to the efficiency of the drinks service but it

was a charming reminder of Chinese traditional views of the importance of the male child. Rory was barely one year old when we left Hong Kong so we had yet to forge the friendship which I enjoyed as he grew in mental and physical stature.

Our farewell bash was an all day Boxing Day party in the flat in 1973, when we said goodbye to the large number of friends we had accumulated in our year-and-a-half in Hong Kong. Once again I was moved on before completing my tour, this time for a job in Whitehall. I am not sure why I had so many postings truncated; perhaps I was less bolshie about moving than some of my colleagues.

We did not go straight home, but diverted en-route to Villars, the Swiss ski-resort, and spent a happy two weeks in a chalet near the cog railway. For family skiers Villars was a delight. In the morning we would ski down to the station to be transported up to the mountains for the day, and when the day was over ski back to our own front door.

Ah Yee had agreed to stay with us although I had warned him that I could not increase his wages, so we had the luxury of his support in our Chalet. We thought that he probably stayed with us because he thought we would be incompetent with the young prince. Whatever his reasons we were delighted. Rory did not think much of the snow; Ah Yee and I tried our best to interest him in sledging, but there were no smiles to be seen inside his fur hood, and no pointers to the fearless skier of the future.

*The diplomat said, "It's a bore
Home posting to London's a chore
Packers all round
While farewells abound
And overdrafts mounting once more."*

Packing up and farewells did not get easier with practice; I had moved 22 times in 40 years and I enjoyed the moves less

and less. Worst of all was a home posting when all allowances ceased, accommodation had to be found, and reduced income was not matched by reduced expenditure.

End of an Era

"We shall fly to all our main communication bases," said Khalid, the Prince's Staff Officer, "so that you will remember more of Saudi than Jeddah, Riyadh, and the road between."

It was my last official visit to Saudi and they were being, as they always had been, courteous and hospitable, even if their ideas of time were not the same as mine. We flew off early the next morning in the Prince's personal plane, and were soon eating the first gargantuan meal of lamb and accoutrements, sitting cross-legged on the carpet. By the time we had stopped at three more airstrips, and had three more gargantuan feasts, I was beginning to wish that Bedouin hospitality, a relic of the days of travel by camel, had been modified to suit jet travel. It was not easy to go through the motions at the last meal. Fortunately, conversation was not required; throughout the meal we had a film of King Kong to entertain us.

I went back to London without great enthusiasm. We had been enjoying Hong Kong and I had little knowledge of what the next job entailed. As usual, however, the job turned out to be full of interest and introduced me to many new colleagues whose company I enjoyed.

We returned to live in Sally's family house in Longbridge Deverill, near Warminster, where Sally's sister Diana and her husband soon joined us with their baby, Jessica. I lived in the basement of 19 South Terrace during the week and travelled to and fro at weekends. Although I have many happy memories of Longbridge, I did not much enjoy the commuting. The presence of Ah Yee made it possible for Sally to run the house for her mother; and the size of the house gave us all independent quarters, so it was an effective arrangement for

three family units, with plenty of space. Sadly, Sally's mother died soon after we came home, so the house was sold and we took up residence in South Terrace.

Sally, despite her foal at foot, was able to go back to work in her Meeting Secretary role, this time at the English Speaking Union. She performed as usual magnificently, but the ESU is not Chatham House, and its location was "North of the Park", so I saw a lot less of her at lunchtime. She continued to work there until Fiona was due to arrive.

Fiona's birth was a traumatic affair. Sally telephoned on a Friday afternoon to ask me to hurry home and take her to hospital. There was no driver and car standing by as there had been in Hong Kong, and by the time I had picked her up, and started along Cromwell Road, we were in the middle of the weekend exodus. Sally, brave and uncomplaining said, "I think the baby is coming," so I rushed into the nearest hospital, to be told that they did casualties, not births: we managed to get Sally into a hospital just in time.

The baby was born without further drama, but Sally recognised instinctively that our daughter had Down's Syndrome. Domestic life became a lot more complicated, but with Sally's usual skill she managed to find a delightful "Nursie" to do everything possible to help the little morsel who clearly needed a great deal more attention than Rory had ever needed.

By now Rory was attending a pre-kindergarten group that included the son of Charles Guthrie, who later became Chief of Defence Staff and a good friend. Rory and I saw a lot of each other. When he awoke, at about six, he would creep quietly into our room and poke me, careful not to disturb his mother who disapproved of such early rising. I would then roll stealthily out of bed and join Rory for our morning sessions. In good weather we would trot up to Hyde Park and kick and pass, play hide-and seek and so on. We practised fencing with toy rubber swords and boxing and judo. In wet weather we played soldiers in the nursery and built Lego. By 0800 we were at breakfast, where my task was to make up stories, and

by 0900 he was in school and I was on my way to the office. It was a good routine as far as I was concerned, and Rory seemed to like it well enough although, of course, he does not remember the schedule. I seldom saw him in the evening because his mother had strong views on bedtime. At the weekends we practised drawing and on Sunday, the Guards Chapel provided a lively service, supported by a good choir, an excellent organist and a military band. In good weather we flew kites in the park, and on Saturdays I taught him to swim.

The indefatigable Sally, although no longer able to go out to work, did some tutoring at home. Some of her students were from Iran, and I was the beneficiary of large jars of caviar presented to teacher by her grateful pupils.

There was plenty to do in the office, and also quite a lot of travelling, including opportunities to become acquainted with the Middle East. The Arab culture was totally new to me and I enjoyed discovering something about it. But the Saudi culture took a lot of getting used to. There were no business hours, meetings were often after dinner, and you might have to wait three or four hours before being ushered into a princely presence. I managed to find some useful openings for British business during my forays into the Arab world, and my visits to Saudi were particularly pleasant because our Ambassador in Jeddah had been my contemporary at Worcester.

In 1978 I decided that the time had come to hunt for a long-term job. This time the job hunt was a lot less painful than it had been in 1957, since I was no longer a new boy without contacts, and by the middle of the year I had accepted an offer in London. However, when we were just about to set off for a long summer holiday, an old friend, James Fulton, mentioned the untimely death of Sir Claude Fenner, who had been the Special Representative (SR) of the Rubber Growers' Association (RGA), based in Kuala Lumpur, and asked me if I would like to be considered for the RGA job, I said something like "Yes! I never understood what Claude's job entailed, but I would like to return to Malaya." I added that obviously I would have to do the job differently since I could not match

the clout and contacts of Claude who had been Inspector General of Police. However, I stipulated that the RGA must make its mind up fast since I did not intend to spend the rest of the year waiting for their decision.

James accepted my terms and asked for a CV but, unfortunately, the only CV that I had at home, emphasised my Chinese experience. It was one of six different CVs that I had used in my job hunt, emphasising different areas of expertise, Chinese, Malay, Diplomacy, and so on. I later discovered that although it was well received by the RGA, it nearly lost me the job when it was shown to a senior Malay, who did not know me and did not like the Chinese flavour. I was saved because people like Ghazali Shafie, Foreign Minister, spoke for me.

While the RGA was making up its mind, Sally, Rory and I were enjoying a wonderful holiday with Heather and Greg in the Dominican Republic where Heather showed every sign of emulating her grandmother as a household manager: she was most autocratic on tidiness and punctuality. This was "rich" coming from my ex-teenager who had never acknowledged the need for systems in my house. But she was a good hostess.

Santo Domingo, at one time the regional HQ for Christopher Columbus, had many fine old buildings that had been skilfully preserved downtown by leasing them to commercial organisations on condition that the facades were maintained. Most effective.

We managed a side trip to Haiti, as exotic a place as ever we have visited; vibrant colours and primitive economy are the two overriding memories of that journey. We saw nothing of the sinister Ton Ton Macout (Secret Police) or of voodoo.

To my delight James telephoned me within three weeks to say that the RGA wanted to offer me the job, and when I returned to London we shook hands and agreed that I would set off in January 1979, on the basis they would not pauperise me. I gathered some time afterwards from my new colleagues that there had, in fact, been an attempt to pay me less than they had paid Claude, but good sense prevailed. I suppose I was in

a pretty strong position, since there were not many ex-MCS officers of my age who were likely to be prepared to up-sticks, and the same was true of ex-diplomats with knowledge of Malaysia like Tony Duff, former Deputy High Commissioner, whose wife would not entertain the idea. So perhaps I should have bargained. But the pay was adequate and we had a pleasant house on "Nobs Hill", Bukit Tengku.

We spent our Christmas with Rory in an Austrian ski-resort and this was a great success, plenty of snow and *gemutlichkeit* and a good sack-full of toys from Santa. We were not sorry to leave London behind on a cold January morning. Khotib, the Indonesian houseman who had helped to keep the household going over the previous two years, came with us, en-route to his homeland. I had a ten-year contract in my pocket and looked forward to a return to Malaysia, although I was sorry to say goodbye to my colleagues, and worried about my mother. Financially it was a great boon to be going overseas again and my bank manager was, no doubt, as relieved as I was that I could pay off my debts.

We left Heather to take over the house and keep an eye on my mother. It was a curious feeling; setting off not on a foreign posting but as a private citizen, preparing to make a new life in Malaysia. Sadly, during this period my father died. He had been tolerating some sort of bowel discomfort for years and eventually decided that it was time for the surgeon's knife. He did not discuss his decision with me but set off to hospital, and never recovered. He had been a good father, although I did not know him well because of the long separations. He represented the finest type of Scot of his time; honest as the day was long, hardworking, modest, trustworthy. His death was a terrible blow to my mother, and since we could find no one suitable to keep her company in Broich, we brought her south to London, where at least we could visit her frequently and bring her over to our house at weekends. She too died soon after, bravely and comforted I know by her faith. So this really was the end of an era for me. Now I was the senior Stewart, and Broich was my responsibility.

This seems to be the appropriate place to sum up my reflections on four decades of government service. The military part had marked me, I am sure, for life, and given me a confidence and experience that is not in the gift of any civilian profession. The contrast between the Colonial Service and the Whitehall service was perhaps as great as that between military and civilian service. The Colonial Service expected action, whereas a diplomat must stay aloof from the country in which he is serving, and Whitehall does not want over zealous activists muddying the waters. I had enjoyed these services immensely because of the calibre of my colleagues and my chiefs, and because of the satisfaction to be derived from learning about new countries and new jobs. God had been immensely kind, and being of a sanguine nature, I remember the good, not the bad.

In the army I had been far too junior to be concerned with the quality of my seniors; I was content so long as they allowed me to get on with my job, training the best Anti-Tank Platoon in the British Army. To a large extent the same considerations applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to my civilian jobs. If there were seniors for whom I had less than total respect, it did not matter greatly so long as they did not prevent me from getting on with my job.

Now the time had come to steal away, grateful for the past, but determined not to cling to it. There would always be a residue of the government servant in my thought processes: one would be a strange being indeed to be able to slough off completely the habits of mind acquired over forty years. I was now determined not to hang around in London nostalgically clinging to the edges of the old club, but to make a break. The RGA made it easy for me. I have never regretted that decision.

But, as the Indian Army used to say, "I had eaten Her Majesty's salt", and I remained her servant: I would continue to do what I could for Britain. This may sound corny to my readers; I assure them, however, that it is true.

*"Home posting" he cried "what a chore
No house, debts increase, what a bore
There are packers around
Farewell parties abound
Gypsy life's not for me anymore."*

*Forty-years innings not bad
So one shouldn't feel terribly sad
There's still quite a chance
Of gaiety, song even dance
And also perhaps of finance*

I was, of course, sorry to say goodbye to a lot of very congenial colleagues and friends, but I was ready to start again as a private citizen, and anxious to repair my finances, and looking forward to learning about the non-government world.

After years of overseas service, which had entailed changing dwelling on average once every 18 months, I was glad to get off the merry-go-round. Coming home had always been painful financially with loss of overseas allowances not matched by loss of expenditure. The Home Civil Service envied us our overseas postings but they never experienced the downside of the gypsy life.

PART V
PARADISE REGAINED - 1979

Return to Malaya

The Malays have a delightful form of four-line verse called the Pantun.

*Pisang mas di kapal belayar
Masak sedap di atas peti
Hutang mas boleh dibayar
Hutang budi di dibawa mati*

*Golden bananas on a sailing ship
Ripening deliciously on a box
A debt of gold can be repaid
A debt of the heart is carried to the grave*

I learnt this Pantun in 1945 and the last line matches my memories of Malaya: I owe her a deep debt of gratitude.

A lovely morning. Brilliant tropical blue sky, sparkling white clouds. Luxuriant tropical trees lining the road. Against the greenery, the flame of the forest trees showed off their plumage; red, purple, mauve and yellow Bougainvillea and Hibiscus bushes displayed their glories, and the Frangipani trees competed with their white, yellow and pink flowers. However, I was not thinking about aesthetics or botany as Chalid wafted me through the Lake Gardens, but about the courtesy call I was about to pay on Tan Sri Haniff, Inspector General of the Malaysian Police.

My predecessor, Sir Claude Fenner, had created an Auxiliary Police Force 2,500 strong and I was not at all sure that Haniff would be content to allow this extraordinary scheme to continue under another ex-Colonial, who was not even an ex-Policeman, twenty-five years after Merdeka (Independence). But if Haniff decided to bring the

arrangement to an end it would be a serious blow. It would show that their new SR did not have the clout, which Fenner had possessed, and I did not want that point brutally underlined. I was preparing for the worst.

The sentry at Bluff Road waved us through and I was escorted up to the IG's suite. Haniff, who happily I had known in the past, came out of his office and said, "Welcome back Brian!" "Haniff!" I said, "You allowed Claude to raise an Auxiliary Police Force for the RGA. I don't suppose you want an ex-MCS Officer running such a show?" "Nonsense, Brian!" he said "Carry on!" I was back amongst friends.

Plantation Wallah

The journey to Malaysia was painless, and Sally had produced a near miracle in our house by putting Ah Keng, her Amah from the mid 1960s, back on her payroll with instructions to unpack and sort the house out before we arrived. So, much to the amazement of our RGA colleagues, we were up and running in our own house within twenty-four hours of arrival. It was a two-storied modern house, the garden small but large enough to give us privacy; the view to the blue hills on the horizon was spectacular, and we had a private swimming pool that the RGA had built in order that my predecessor should keep fit.

My title of SR reflected the fact that I was not the Director of a Malaysian Association, but the representative of a London-based, international, RGA. The quasi-ambassadorial title and concept had been dreamt up before Independence when the post was created in 1954 to underline the importance of the Plantation Industry to the Malayan economy. The first SR was an ex-Chief Secretary, with a place on the Legislative Council. The second was a former Secretary for Defence, Singapore. The third was an ex-Inspector General of Police, Malaysia. I was the fourth.

When I went to my office, in Bangunan Getah Asli (The Natural Rubber Building) I was disappointed in my search for

records of the activities of my predecessors. I never discovered why the cupboards were bare. I could understand that my immediate predecessor, a man of action with an aversion to paper, had few records, but it was strange that there was nothing left of the earlier period. So I found myself without records and, since none of the local RGA members were able to help, I was flying blind.

The RGA office staff consisted of a Chinese lady, a young Malay peon (messenger boy), a part-time, and singularly unwelcoming British ex-Police Officer, and our ageing Malay driver, Chalid, a most loyal and dependable retainer.

I realised in short order that the RGA had some thorny problems. The Malays, although as always courteous, were beginning to flex their muscles about foreign domination of their plantation industry. Although the Malaysian Government, unlike most of our former Imperial Territories, had not ruined their plantations by rushing into nationalisation, they now wanted to take control, albeit in a gentlemanly way and at market prices. Sime Darby had already been "Malayanised", Guthrie's had just been acquired, and the writing was on the wall for the rest of my traditional constituents. So the RGA, historically an expatriate club, would change its character, as Malaysians took over the reins. I wondered how the concept of an expatriate SR fitted these changing circumstances and, indeed, why the Malays had blessed the appointment of a new SR. I kept such uncomfortable thoughts to myself.

Although the RGA had no formal or legal status in Malaysia, Claude had initiated monthly meetings of the local RGA members. These meetings provided a useful way of keeping in touch and a forum for interchange of ideas and information. But Claude had taken informality to extremes. There were no records of his meetings.

Members were horrified when I said that I intended to make a note of the main points discussed; however, they relaxed when they saw my first record, which was brief in the extreme. But the record was essential since we were often

dealing with detail, such as the finance and Establishment matters for the RGA's Auxiliary Police Force Scheme.

One of my few administrative functions was to monitor and umpire a scheme that Claude had brokered whereby RGA expatriate staff would decline by 13% every year. By 1979 the RGA members were beginning to compete over this diminishing pool of expertise, but we usually arrived at a consensus without difficulty, and the Malaysians accepted my recommendations.

In the weeks before my first meeting I called on members to try to find out their interests and foibles, and what they expected from the RGA. They were, without exception, amicably disposed, but none had any vision of the RGA in the round. Apart from grumbles about London's delusions of grandeur, there seemed to be no common theme.

My calls on Malaysian leaders were equally unsatisfactory in terms of finding out what they expected from the RGA. Those I knew already were warm and welcoming, but the RGA and the plantation industry were not part of their interests: those I did not know were courteous but uninformative. So it began to look as if I had what Chairman Mao used to describe as a "blank sheet of paper" upon which to formulate my plans.

The most interesting of my initial calls was on Tan Sri Haniff, Inspector General of Police, to discuss the future of the RGA Police; by now over 2,000 strong. The Auxiliary Police (AP) were armed with shotguns and uniformed, and trained by the Police; although legally they were under Police orders, each Estate Manager commanded his own section as far as day-to-day deployment was concerned. Claude had recruited a dozen Area Security Advisers (ASA), ex-Police Officers ranging in rank from ex-Deputy Commissioner to Superintendent, to advise the planters and liaise with the police.

I have often recalled Haniff's instant "Carry on Brian!" as a dramatic example of the goodwill and trust that existed between the leaders of independent Malaya and their erstwhile

Colonial masters. It was extraordinary that an expatriate, whether ex-Police or ex-MCS, should be given such power in an independent Malaya. It was even more extraordinary that Haniff decided to let me take over without a moment's hesitation.

The reality on the ground bore no resemblance to the misconceptions in Britain about the relationships between the former Colonial "masters" and their erstwhile "subjects". One might also wish that in modern Britain there were Police Officers like Haniff with authority to take immediate decisions. It is of course, unthinkable, unfortunately, that such an additional, auxiliary force could be set up to provide security in rural areas in Britain.

I soon began to realise that the relationship between the London Council and my local RGA Group was in tatters. At the beginning of the century, London-based rubber companies had set up the RGA to further the interest of plantation owners worldwide. The Association had developed into a powerful international organisation, and throughout two world wars the RGA had been a name to conjure with as governments sought its help in finding the sinews of war. But eighty years later the situation had changed dramatically. Even the name had become an anachronism since the members had diversified into palm oil and many other plantation crops.

But the change that had affected the RGA most was the post-imperial nationalisation of RGA estates. Now that the Association had to rely almost exclusively on Malaysian acres for its revenue, the local RGA members were, naturally, champing at the bit. They saw no reason why London should call the tune when Malaysia was paying the piper. I reminded the malcontents that the RGA's privileged position in Malaysia stemmed from the fact that it was seen as an international body, with international links of value to Malaysia. If the members insisted on a fight with London they would undoubtedly win, but it was likely to be a Pyrrhic victory. Clearly there was an urgent need to find a formula that would appease my local members without infuriating the

London Council to the point that they would decide to abolish the RGA. I had, of course, a strong personal interest in this matter since my ten-year contract with the RGA Council in London would be worthless if there was no RGA to honour it.

I had half solved the problem by the end of my time, constructing a façade whereby my title changed from SR to Director, without changing the constitution. I fudged the issue as to which of the two Directors was in charge, but when a new Director was appointed in London, I had little difficulty in persuading him to remember that my constituents held most of the cards, so for the second half of my RGA time I, not the Londoner, was in charge. I was careful, however, not to force the London Council members to recognise their de facto demotion. This charade was maintained until I left but there were increasing tensions, particularly as locals, as part of Malayanisation, replaced expatriate members of the RGA.

My "fudge" held for another decade, largely because of the sterling work of my friend Charles Letts who had opted to live in Singapore, not Malaysia; he was a director of many companies but not a plantation owner, had more independence than the rest of my members, and was the only one who gave significant thought to the evolution of the RGA. I owe him a great deal. We met every time he came to Kuala Lumpur, and afterwards every time he came to Hong Kong. He was a "rara avis", steeped in Asian experience from before World War II, bon vivant, businessman extraordinary, and dynamic entrepreneur. He was also a good friend. Together we shared many experiences as he generously introduced me to his impressive circle of Asian friends.

Although the job and the people connected with the Plantation Industry were new to me I had many friends, such as Guzz (Ghazali Shafie), the Foreign Minister, Tan Siewsin, ex-Finance Minister and other Ministers past and present, whom I had known in earlier days. Both Guzz and Siewsin had recommended my appointment as SR when my "Chinese Affairs" CV had been floated. Siewsin had done his best but his "Oh yes! That's my old friend the Scottish Chinese Affairs

Officer" was not perhaps very helpful.

The Director's Job: A Pretty Happy One

I found myself with a full diary attending numerous Councils, Associations and Institutions where, by twenty-five years' tradition, the SR had an ex-officio place at the high table. The list included the Rubber and Palm Oil Research Institutes, the Palm Oil Growers Council, the Planters' Association and the Estate Owners' Association. There were plenty of ad hoc working parties to attend, where we debated such matters as local and international duty structures, labour problems, and the international prices of our commodities, and how to boost them.

Palm oil faced competition from many other vegetable oils, and natural rubber was in direct competition with the vast synthetic industry. The US soya bean industry spent millions trying to persuade consumers that Malaysian palm oil would give them heart disease, and the synthetic industry tried to prove that their artificial product was more effective than natural rubber. On the cocoa front we faced constant criticism that our product did not taste as good as the West African variety. In short, there were plenty of major issues for us to discuss.

I enjoyed representing Malaysia at international meetings in London, although I was never certain that these jamborees accomplished very much. However, attendance was good for RGA face; it also allowed me to keep in touch with London and with Rory who was at school in Britain.

I got my main job satisfaction from local affairs such as the fight for permission to import Indonesian labour to fill the gap in our labour force. The Government of course resisted vigorously, and had to be moved slowly from "There is no labour shortage" to "Well! If there is a shortage it is because you are bad employers." I won the first round by bombarding the bureaucrats with reports based on computer printouts, detailing the growing shortages. The survey proved nothing

new, but since it looked so scientific because of the use of computers, the authorities accepted the fact that there was a growing labour shortage.

The plain truth was that from their very creation, at the turn of the century, the Malayan estates had depended on immigrant Indian (Tamil) labour, and it was hardly surprising that few of the third generation Tamils intended to spend their lives on rubber estates. The tapper's job was a hard and smelly one; 0500 hours muster parade, and then trudge off to tap the trees, and later to collect the latex from the cups; by mid-day the job was over. Amongst the second generation, many of Ramasamy's Tamils sons had moved from fieldwork to office work, and many of Ramasamy's grandsons, possibly graduates and married to graduates, lived in towns. Even the Manager's job, appealing as it might be to some second son of a Scottish farmer who liked the country life, did not appeal much to the new generation of town educated Tamils. The bureaucrats, however, did not accept this rather obvious picture. They remained convinced that if we paid more and improved the amenities, there would be plenty of young Ramasamys to pick up the tapping knife. Since the Malays and the Chinese were not interested in working as regular estate labourers there was no local non-Tamil labour pool to fill the gap.

The effects of Ramasamy's gradual defection from the labour force could only be remedied by bringing in more immigrant labour, and there were plenty of Indonesian Muslims across the Straits of Malacca who longed to work for Malaysian wages on our estates. In fact the law of supply and demand had already brought a stream of illegal immigrants into the country to fill the vacuum. We had to be careful of course, lest we be accused of condoning breaches of the law. Although our managers could plead ignorance, since subcontractors employed the illegal labour, the Police were well aware of the situation, and that the illegal status of the immigrants made them a danger in society. But arresting and expelling the illegals was a Sisyphean task; it was too easy for those who were repatriated to return immediately across the

narrow Malacca Straits.

But it was not only the rubber estates that were in trouble: all plantations, whether palm, coconut, cocoa or tea were finding it increasingly difficult to persuade Malaysians to work as estate labour. We never succeeded in changing the naïve official assessment that all would be well if we were better employers. In fact, the RGA estates were well ahead of the average, but we had found that good conditions made little difference, and there was of course a severe limit on how high we could go with wages if we were to remain competitive against Indonesia and Thailand.

The bureaucrats also clung to the theory that we could alleviate the problem by making the industry less labour intensive. We racked the best brains in the industry, in and out of Malaysia, to find ways of mechanising, but no one came up with significant answers. Satisfactory substitutes for the skills and strengths of human beings were never found. The RRI invented an electric tapping knife but, at best, this could only help estates to employ less skilled labour; the knife still needed a hand to hold it. The tea sector could find no mechanical devices to pluck the leaves from the bushes, which usually grew on steep slopes. The palm oil estates could find no viable mechanical technique to pluck the fruits from the top of the tall palm trees. The only advances were in the development of ever more effective cultivars; we could increase yields, not reduce the labour requirement. Eventually the Malaysian Government saw the light and substituted legal for illegal immigration.

The palm oil estates were faced with particular problems, as the palm trees grew ever taller, and thus more difficult to harvest. The buffalo remained the best technical aid; it travelled very slowly, at just the right speed for the harvester to fill his cart, and the beast was difficult to steal since its plodding gait made it almost impossible for a thief to remove it from the scene of the crime. Moreover, it provided manure. My colleagues and I derived amusement from presenting the buffalo at seminars as the white-hot edge of modern

technology. It was the only effective labour saving aid that we could find, but the bureaucrats were disappointed.

An unintentional amusement arose in connection with palm oil research. The Commonwealth Research Institute in West Africa had identified a "weevil", which they claimed would pollinate the palm trees more efficiently, and thus dramatically increase productivity of each tree. The Malaysian scientists understandably did not want to let the weevil loose until they had conducted their own tests and my attempts to persuade the officials to let us use an island for an RGA experiment were unsuccessful. The officials stuck to their guns; they would carry out official experiments for themselves. One evening two of my RGA colleagues invited me to the Lake Gardens, and gleefully showed me one of the "weevils" at work on a tree in the garden. The weevil had escaped from the Government's experimental station in the Lake Gardens. Eventually, long after I had left the RGA, the weevils, having multiplied exceedingly, had indeed increased productivity. But after a few years nature took its revenge. The palm trees, exhausted by their over active sex life, went into a decline and production slumped.

I had good colleagues and a friendly government to work with. Since I had no operational responsibilities, I was able to order my own priorities. If I wanted a change from my office, I could become a temporary policeman, and attend parades, range practices, or join in plots to foil the criminals, or visit estates and research institutes. Indeed, never a dull moment. I hope that I gave the RGA value for money, but I certainly did not give them twenty-four hours a day of my time. The RGA was a most extraordinary body to work for. The members had no wish to turn it into a serious working organisation. The Council in London were happy I was flying their flag in Malaysia; and the members in Malaysia, all chairmen of large plantation companies, were equally content so long as I flew the flag. I determined priorities and my members left it to me to represent them as I thought fit. A perfect job: where the paymasters gave me carte blanche.

The SR hat gave me privileged entry to all levels of the plantation world, locally, and internationally. On one occasion Sally and I visited Sri Lanka in order to look at the effect of thirty years of the Sri Lankan way to socialism on former RGA estates. We found a warm welcome, but a sad economy, and a miserable plantation industry. The Minister concerned and his officials seemed to know little about the plantation industry for which they were responsible, and the nationalised estates seemed to be in the hands of the trade unions not the managers. The estates we visited were sorely lacking the efficient hand of the Scots planters who were still operating in Malaysia, and were later to continue their good work in Indonesia. The Minister's office was magnificent; but this Emperor had no clothes!

The highlight of my overseas visits as SR was as a partner to the wealthy doyen of the Malaysian palm oil industry, Dato Bek Nielsen. We were arguing in Europe that the extra duty they imposed on processed (as opposed to raw) palm oil was unjust: "You are treating us like peasants" said the noble Dane. The Europeans were taken aback.

Using the RGA Police Scheme we had a full-scale blitz against theft of rubber and palm oil from tankers. There were ambush parties, covert surveillance, and clever schemes to mark our crops so that "fences" could be caught; and so on, but I fear that we had little effect on the baddies.

It proved impossible to recruit Malay ex-senior officers for the Area Security Adviser (ASA) job, and my Malay Police friends used to tease me asking, "How is your Indian Police Force, Brian?" We had one Malay ex-Brigadier as an ASA but that did not work, and sadly he insisted on making a racist issue out of his dismissal. This might have been embarrassing but Haniff knew perfectly well that, although we had an open door, senior Malays had better job offers under the Bumiputra Policy that required non-Malay organisations to employ Malay directors. The RGA pay for ASAs could not compete with salaries and perks on offer by the commercial world.

My ASAs were excellent companions. The odd man out

was Middleton, the British ex-Police Officer. Trying to get positive help or information from him was like drawing teeth. I do not know the reason; perhaps he disliked me personally, or thought that he should have had my job. He had once been married to a Malay Princess who was a police officer, and before that to someone in England. His secretiveness led to trouble when he died. Sally and I had been visiting him in hospital, but had not been able to prevail on him to let us help. When he died, I had to guess his religion. This was important since if he were a Muslim he would have to be buried in twenty-four hours, and since he had been married to a Malay there was a strong possibility that he had become a Muslim. The Muslims would have been extremely upset if he had indeed "Masok Islam" and we had buried him as a Christian, so I left the funeral arrangements to the police who did him proud. The evening scene at the Muslim cemetery was not a pretty one. The monsoon rain was pouring down while the body, in its soaking white wrap, lay beside the unfinished grave, torches shining on the muddy hillside.

Middleton's daughter flew out from England just in time for the funeral. We had her to stay and did our best to comfort her, but she was of the same mould as her father, and we never penetrated the outer shell. She was distressed no doubt to find her father being buried as a Muslim, but probably more distressed that she had not seen him for years.

It was a great privilege to be allowed to participate for four years in the development of Malaysia. Sometimes it was frustrating: for example, the officials who asked for advice on the restructuring of their government-sponsored rubber producing organisation did not want to hear that they were employing twice as many "Directors" as the private sector, but paying them less than half, and therefore unlikely to be able to attract the necessary talent.

At times I worked in national think tanks where the private sector was invited to contribute ideas for the future. One committee was horrified by my heretical suggestion that there was no God given rule that telecommunications should be part

of the Post Office, or part of government. Ten years later telecomms was privatised.

Politics and Diplomacy

We kept in close touch with the High Commission throughout our RGA stint, partly I suppose because, after a lifetime in government service I still thought of myself, loosely speaking, as working for the Queen: partly because participating in the diplomatic world was a habit. We were lucky to find Sir Donald Hawley en-poste as High Commissioner; he and his wife Ruth became good friends and, fortunately, their son Christopher and Rory, who were almost the same age, got on well together too. The fact that Donald had been in the Sudan Political Service before joining the Foreign Service made it particularly easy for us to strike up a rapport. Our friendship, unlike so many struck up overseas, has stood the test of time.

Bill Bentley, whom I had known quite well in the mid 1960s, took over as High Commissioner in 1981. He was unlucky. Dr Mahathir, the Prime Minister, was feeling his oats, and when Bill started his new job by making a statement about how much the British had helped Malaysia, and about the British blood that had been spilt in the Emergency and during Konfrontasi, Mahathir pretended to be outraged. He characterised Bill's words as patronising and neo-colonialist, and directed his officials to boycott British goods. Bill immediately flew home for consultations, and many of the British community complained that the Captain should have stayed with his ship since it was difficult to see what was to be accomplished in Whitehall.

I read the newspaper reports on Mahathir's vitriolic response to Bentley's speech as I was breakfasting one Sunday morning amongst the palm trees in an east coast hotel, "Don't buy British even if you have to buy second best" was the headline, which rudely destroyed my holiday mood. Incensed by this singularly un-Malayan outburst, I abandoned my weekend, and drove furiously back to Kuala Lumpur to see

what I could do to help. Of course, strictly speaking, I had no "locus standi"! Mahathir had not attacked the Plantation Industry, and I was no longer in British Government Service. However, as an ex-MCS Officer whose service in Malaya dated back to 1945, and whose experience had encompassed the benign Premierships of Tengku Abdul Rahman and of the courteous Razak and Hussein, I found it unacceptable that Mahathir should behave in this fashion.

I soon discovered that neither the High Commission nor the British commercial community were making any effort to deal with the situation. The High Commission was taking the line that this was a commercial not a political matter and therefore it was the business of the British commercial community to sort it out. Meanwhile the Chairman of the puny British Trade Association, which was all we had to represent British trade interests, took the view that this was a political not a commercial matter and, therefore, one for the High Commission to resolve. The image of headless chickens came to my mind.

Clearly putting our heads in the sand was not a useful option. Although there was no hope of finding an instant remedy, in my view we should, at least, be trying to work out what precisely lay behind the Mahathir outburst, and establish a dialogue. However wrong-headed we might think him, it was important to demonstrate that we were not ignoring him.

The first three Malayan Prime Ministers had all been Malay aristocrats, and had trained in Britain as lawyers. Mahathir, the fourth Premier, was from a very different background. His father was an immigrant Indian schoolmaster who presumably carried with him anti-British prejudices of the Indian Independence movement; and Mahathir himself had been a dedicated politician since his undergraduate days at Singapore University, where he had mocked his contemporaries for their juvenile "student" politics. Unlike his predecessors, he had not been trained in Britain and soaked in the concept of the rule of law; he was a Doctor of Medicine.

Whether or not he was a good doctor of medicine he

certainly was an effective politician. He had written a polemical book in the 1960s called *The Malay Dilemma* and the book had revealed a lot about him, rather as Mein Kampf had about Hitler. This was no heir to the consensus style politics of his predecessors, but a potential rabble-rouser. Tengku Abdul Rahman had booted him out of his Cabinet in the 1960s for his confrontational style, but now he was the Prime Minister.

I remembered what Tengku, never one for the PC style, had once said to me a propos of Indian characteristics; "One Indian will start a newspaper, two will form a trade union, and three will form a political party." Now that he was Prime Minister Mahathir intended to ensure that the British paid attention. His appeal to anti-colonial sentiment, which until then had played little part in Malaysian politics, inevitably struck a chord with some sections of the public.

Since we seemed to have a Prima Donna on our hands, and since neither the High Commission nor the British Trade Association seemed prepared to stick their necks out, I decided to try my hand at listing all the anti-British grievances real or imaginary, large and small, of which I was aware. Few of the points were of major significance taken in isolation. But it was a largish list and there was a discernible thread of resentment that Britain had been taking couthie Malaysia for granted, while other noisy, troublesome, chippy ex-British Colonies got all the attention.

With list in hand, I called on several Ministerial friends to seek their interpretation of the reality behind Mahathir's venom: they confirmed the items on my list. Although my friends did not necessarily approve of Mahathir's crude methodology, there was underlying sympathy for the theme that we had been taking their friendship for granted, and had not given them enough "face". Perhaps it paid to be stropy!

One Minister made this point by showing me the many large silver-framed pictures in his room recording meetings with Prime Ministers, Presidents and Crowned Heads. He remarked that there was no British picture in his collection

because when he visited London he had never met anyone above the rank of Under Secretary. I presented my findings to the High Commission and to the British Trade Association. Neither organisation was greatly pleased. This exercise was a fine example of our old friend "cognitive dissonance". My interlocutors did not want to be confronted with unpleasant facts. Anyway, as my Irish ancestors would have said "I'd done me best."

I followed up by suggesting that Britain should try to seize back some initiative by establishing a scholarship fund for Malaysian students who wished to attend British Universities, and creating a British Malaysia Association which could seek ways of developing our relations to our mutual benefit. The idea of a scholarship fund was not enthusiastically received but since no one could think of anything better, a fund was set up. In the fullness of time the Mahathir embargo on British goods faded away.

The incident highlighted the need for a British Chamber of Commerce to stand up for British commercial interests. In Malaysia, as in other ex-British Colonies, the British had coasted complacently after Independence, relying on membership of the General Chamber without any consideration of the fact that it was no longer a British show but a Chamber representing all local commercial interests. Meanwhile, the Germans, the French et al had their own national chambers of commerce. Britain alone of all the major trading partners had no Chamber of its own.

When I moved to Hong Kong I recounted this experience to the Trade Commissioner, Christian Adams, and urged that we should not make the same mistake in Hong Kong. The senior British Taipans (British heads of trading organisations) were of course hugely uninterested in this proposition; they still ran the General Chamber and were not interested in establishing a rival; as for posterity, that could look after itself. To my great delight however, Christian saw the point immediately, and a fledgling British Chamber was established. The fledgling took flight when a thrusting young retired

Brigadier became the second director and by the time that Hong Kong reverted to China in 1997 there was a thriving British Chamber of Commerce.

Bill Bentley never, I fear, really recovered from this row; and of course any British business that failed to win a contract found it convenient to have him as a scapegoat. I never discovered what had prompted Bill to make his inflammatory statements. Having served in Malaysia ten years before, he was perhaps over confident. His words, of course, had been true, but it is usually better to leave it to the host to thank the guests, than for the guests to blow their own trumpets.

I often wondered what pretext Mahathir would have found to start an anti-British campaign if Bill had not given him this excuse, and I noted that Mahathir had waited until Donald Hawley, an older man and an Arabic and Malay speaker, had left Malaysia before launching his attack.

Life in Kuala Lumpur

The pressures of social life were worse than anything I had known as a diplomat; we usually attended two parties a night. I seldom had time to visit the Golf Club, but we spent many happy hours at the Lake Club enjoying their vast open-air swimming pool complex and the tennis and squash courts. I was also a member of the Polo Club, where I had a half share in a polo pony: Rory and I frequently rode before breakfast.

My most onerous social duty was Chieftain of the St Andrew's Society. My duties included presiding over the Burns Supper and the St Andrew's Ball. Burns Night entailed the recitation from memory of the Bard's *Ode to the Haggis*. This was relatively easy but the ceremony after supper posed a problem. I had to go round each table in the room, accompanied by a cupbearer who proffered me a quaich full of whisky, which I had to down by way of a toast. The ceremony thus entailed the consumption of about a litre of neat whisky in about ten minutes. Not even the largest of my large predecessors had managed to walk out unaided. I was

determined to stay on my feet, and happily the old Shanghai formula of butter, black coffee and aspirins worked its magic. However the Shanghai remedy was only a prophylactic against inebriation; it did not prevent the hangover the next day. It was twenty-four hours before the alcoholic poison had dissipated.

Our St Andrew's Night was a famously formal and complicated occasion. We worked from a drill book many pages long detailing every move, and there were several past Chieftains around to ensure that we followed the book. In fact I took two liberties by introducing *Hieland Laddie* as the first pipe tune, and inviting two private guests, a Cabinet Minister and his wife, in addition to our patron the Sultan of Selangor and the British High Commissioner to the top table.

The family settled in well. Sally, as usual, did brilliantly in finding herself a job; this time as a research economist in the Palm Oil Research Institute. This was quite an achievement when work permits for foreigners were almost impossible to come by. Her research post was a convenient base from which to prepare a paper on the effects of tax and duty, which she was later able to recycle as a thesis for the MSc Degree that she took in Oxford in 1982. Her second degree came in handy when she applied for a teaching post at Hong Kong University later that year. There was an additional benefit: Sally and I were both involved in the plantation industry and could support each other. It was a great joy to be able to invite Sally to my office and share office subjects with her.

Rory was enlisted in the British Army School. He enjoyed the vast sports fields and swimming pool. He also enjoyed the informal classrooms that had abandoned the familiar rows of students facing a blackboard, in favour of four pupils at tables for four. The system was perfectly suited to Rory's gregarious nature since the pupils were allowed to wander freely around the room to see how others were faring. I never saw Rory at his table when I passed by his classroom, so it was probably fortunate that the Army School closed in time for Rory to join a more conventional establishment before he had to take entrance examinations for prep school.

Rory was a wonderful companion. After morning exercise, we would return to breakfast on the verandah, where we continued with the story-telling tradition. We then drove out to the road and listened to taped music while waiting for the school bus. He was still very small, but a tough and enthusiastic playmate. Our most memorable early morning expeditions were to Templer Park where, after the usual clandestine escape from the house before Mummy awoke, we arrived before dawn, walked into the jungle, built bamboo rafts upon which we could float down the river, and chomped our way through bacon and egg sandwiches at first light. He seemed to thoroughly enjoy all that Malaya had to offer by way of beach and hill holidays.

One week in Templer Park, Rory spotted a tiger as our boat battled up river, but we were less lucky with pre-dawn expeditions to see other animals; the wild boars feeding from the dustbins was as near as we got to jungle fauna. On Fraser's Hill there were monkeys and wild pig to see.

On the beach at Port Dickson we used full-sized spades to build massive sand castles and river works of considerable size.

By now Fiona was a toddler; slow to learn but a cheerful little soul who had only two moods. She was either happy or sad, but never cross. We kept Fiona busy in a kindergarten, and taught her to swim, but she made little progress in the three Rs.

At the beginning of our RGA tour Heather and Greg had taken over our house in London while Greg tried to establish himself as an independent lawyer and Heather found work with Asprey's in the interior design business. This scenario had several advantages from my point of view. I could stay in my own house whenever I was in London; and if I needed a car I could borrow my Beetle back from Greg. More importantly, it was a great relief to have Heather in London to keep an eye on Granny. Sadly, Granny did not long survive our departure to Malaysia. About a year later, when I was in London on one of my frequent visits, I went as always to take

her out to Sunday lunch. To my surprise she was in bed and said that she was not feeling up to going out. This was the understatement of the year; for when we summoned the doctor he discovered that she had fallen and broken a bone. Heaven knows how much pain she had been in. Poor Granny, a brave lady indeed, who maintained the highest standards to the very end despite growing infirmities, so now I was, like Sally, parentless.

Annie who was in Kenya invited us for Christmas. This was a fascinating holiday since we hardly knew Africa, and Annie was a very good hostess. We visited game parks, and elephant sanctuaries, and thoroughly enjoyed the contrast with our Malaysian life.

One spring, Sally sent Rory and me off for a "boys" holiday in the French Alps. We had a super time, despite a slight hiccup on the road to the resort when for once Rory's normally iron constitution let him down, as we zigzagged up the hill. The door of our hotel room opened onto the ski slopes, and we spent most of the daylight hours drilling outside, but for the first week he made little progress. The second week he suddenly took off in the "child's crouch" almost sitting on his skis and braking by falling over if the spirit moved him. No longer was I ahead coaching and coaxing, now I had a different problem; he was going faster than me and I never caught him again. It was a wonderful thing to see him whizzing down with such obvious joy. In a few years he was infinitely better than me, and later made the Oxford team.

When not skiing, munching, or sleeping we read Asterix in French together, and enjoyed such luxuries as ice cold chocolate, made from the milk that sat outside on the snow. We did not, I fear, keep to a regime that his mother would have approved of. We discussed such weighty philosophical matters as the proofs of the existence of God. I was greatly encouraged when Rory demonstrated as we were debating philosophical ideas, that he shared my practical approach. Alas, when he went up to Oxford all my hard work was

undone, and he returned to philosophy, which in my view is a fine subject for academics but a dangerous one for normal mortals.

I did, of course, not match Rory's triumphal progress in the physical arts. He was on the way up, and I was on the way down. One night after a particularly long day in the snow, I woke with appalling cramp in both legs. I tried to arouse my comrade to give me a hand by massaging the offending limbs, but he was so tired that all I got was a sleepy "Good night Daddy." and I struggled alone. I was very conscious of my good fortune in having Rory for a son; it was a joy to teach him and then to stand back and watch him excel.

The Dragon School, Oxford, turned out to be a good choice; Rory seemed to revel in the environment, lots of small boys with whom to play and fight, but enough work to stimulate. I had assumed that with the advent of prep school our relationship would change radically. To my delight it did not. We seemed to be able to pick up the old relationship immediately whenever we were together.

I derived great satisfaction from observing when I visited Oxford during his first term that our early games together had paid off; Rory seemed to be the only small boy on the rugby field who tackled low, and passed the ball. When he went on to Eton, I was delighted to find that the fencing skills that I had imparted had been developed into a formidable technique that won him every bout.

Amongst many of the happy memories of this period were family visits from Annie, Sally's sister Diana and Heather. We evolved a tradition of Sunday lunch by the pool, after Matins, with the vicar and his wife as guests. These two, Geoffrey Mowat and his wife Louise had been friends in my MCS days when we scraped our way happily through Beethoven trios. Geoffrey had "turned his collar" after leaving the MCS and was now in charge of St Mary's, Kuala Lumpur, the little Victorian church which was also the diocesan Cathedral.

Sunday lunches were a great joy. They were not of the roast beef variety, but consisted of Chinese Dim Sum (tit-bits)

that we collected in the market after church. Delicious food; Baus (steamed buns filled with pork), Ha Kau (shrimps in a pasta envelope), and so on. How little most people know of Chinese food if they have only eaten the travesties offered by the Chinese takeaways in Britain.

St Mary's Cathedral was not without its problems. The previous vicar, an Indian of the highest caste, having failed in a bid to become the local Bishop and infuriated that the post had been given to a man of lower caste, had divided the congregation, most of whom were Indian, into two warring camps. Despite promotion to Canon and an offer of a church elsewhere, he had hung around in the vicar's house, claiming that he was too ill to move. So the poor Mowats had to slum it. I was delighted when God struck the Canon's house with a bolt of lightning.

When we arrived in Kuala Lumpur the congregation were about to throw away their pipe organ, the oldest in South East Asia, and to substitute for it an electronic organ. I was just in time to rally the troops in the cause of conservation; we raised the money and mended the old organ.

We had many friends in Malaysia of all races. One of our closest friendships was with the Moggies; Leo, ex-Civil Service from Sarawak, but now a Cabinet Minister. His wife Liz came from New Zealand. We continue to exchange visits. Dato Lee Moggie, an Iban from Sarawak, has been a Minister in the Malaysian Cabinet since 1979.

Then there was the inimitable Guzz, Ghazali Shafie, formerly Minister for Foreign Affairs, and now Minister for Home Affairs. I had first met Guzz in the 1960s, when Konfrontasi was our common subject. He had lived life to the full. SOE agent in World War II, Welsh speaking graduate of the University of Wales, Permanent Secretary and then Minister for Foreign Affairs, and now Home Minister. The last time I saw him was in Beijing when a large black limousine pulled up alongside my bicycle and a familiar voice shouted "Brian!"

Just before I left the RGA he was nearly killed in a plane

crash in the jungle, as he was dashing across the jungle-clad mountains on the way to his constituency in Ulu Pahang. The plane crashed, and stuck in the top of a gigantic tree, Guzz managed to climb down somehow, but his Security Guard and the Chief Instructor of the flying club died. The Press had a field day; there were allegations that Guzz had pulled rank and insisted on the pilot taking a short cut across the top of the mountains instead of through the usual pass, and criticism that he had abandoned the other two. I visited Guzz in hospital and heard his version of events. He was a lucky man indeed, and particularly lucky that no surviving Communist terrorist had found the Minister of Home Affairs wandering through their jungle patch.

Bombshell in Paradise

"My wife will probably kill me"

Our paradise was disturbed by an invitation from old friends in the Racal Electronics Group to spearhead a Racal drive into China. Racal knew me from Whitehall days when we had been discussing the development of a new communications system, and indeed had offered me a job. I had sought permission to join Racal as a matter of principle. I saw no reason why, if senior Whitehall warriors were allowed to take high profile "City" jobs, lowlier mortals should not be allowed to take on practical jobs in Industry. However I did not want to become a broker between Racal and Whitehall; so, having extracted permissions, I declined the invitation.

This new Racal proposal was, of course, a very different proposition. This time I would be working with the Chinese, not with Whitehall. But my first reaction was, "My wife will probably kill me if I suggest uprooting us from Kuala Lumpur."

Although Sally did not kill me, she was not enthusiastic about the idea of moving from couthie, familiar Malaysia to hard relatively unfamiliar China. I would, in almost every sense, be starting from scratch. Racal no doubt thought of me

as an ex-diplomat who would have some sort of magic wand. "Open Sesame!" and the door to China would fly open. But I had not been in China for twenty years, and my few contacts had vanished in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, I was not an electronics engineer and had no business experience. However, the idea was interesting. Provided Sally could put up with it, I was happy to return to China again and find a use for my hard-earned Chinese language knowledge.

I left it to Sally to cast the vote. I would be taking on a new and exotic job, while she would be venturing into the unknown. In the end we agreed that pleasant as our lives were in Malaysia, it was sensible to recognise that the SR job would become less and less viable as the Malayanisation process developed, so we decided to accept the Racal challenge.

Of course I could not join them immediately. I promised, however, to start studying the China market, and working out how best we could tackle it before coming aboard in October 1982.

There were problems, inevitably, about finding a successor. I decided that there was no point in seeking another Orang Puteh (white man) from the UK to take on the job. The director would be answering more and more to Malaysians, not Britons. But of course there were few Malay candidates. The lot fell to one of my ASAs, retired General Ibrahim, who successfully nursed the RGA for another fifteen years.

Racal was a notoriously hard-headed business organisation with a reputation for producing wonderful results for their shareholders. I was determined that the shareholders should not benefit at the expense of the Stewart family, so I worked carefully over the draft contract. The negotiation was simple, I merely insisted that Racal should match the RGA terms and add something to compensate for the considerable inconvenience of a move, in mid-contract, from Malaya to China. I had one amusing moment during the drafting of the contract when the Racal Finance Director's draft dropped a nought off the RGA pension contribution. He was taken aback

to discover that the RGA put £8,000, not £800 a year into my Pension Fund.

This was a very different culture to that of the RGA: there were two questions to be resolved. What should my title be and where would we live? We settled on Director of Operations (China). The question of location was less easily resolved. Racial had loosely thought of renting a large house in Shanghai, to match the BP house in the old Kadoorie country estate there, where I could perhaps even have been Honorary Consul. I rejected the Shanghai solution for several reasons. My public objections were that I intended to cover the whole of China not merely Shanghai and that since internal travel was primitive, I could fly around China more easily from Hong Kong. Secondly, that the proposed solution would prove to be so expensive that long before we had done any business the accountants would be urging that the Chinese operation should be closed down. But privately I had the strongest objection to a solution that put Sally and the family at the mercy of the Chinese system; she would not have been able to get a job, heaven knows how Fiona would have fared, and the logistics of school holiday trips did not bear thinking about. I did not intend to subject the family to the inconveniences of that primitive economy and Communist bureaucracy.

So my counter proposal was that we should base ourselves in Hong Kong, and set up a modest family home there while I travelled in and out of China, or to Britain as the job required. I was gambling that under the "Open Door" Policy I could persuade the Chinese to grant me entry visas whenever I wanted to travel. As to the question of air and train tickets, in Hong Kong at least there would be experienced travel agents to help me. Racial agreed to my proposals. I now had the best part of a year in which to find a house and to work out my logistics, particularly to find a system for visas, and for accommodation in China, which was still in the dark ages as far as hotels were concerned, and enmeshed in bureaucracy of every sort. Deng Xiaoping's clarion call to open China's doors to the world had not yet been heard by China's bureaucrats;

logistics were a nightmare.

Meanwhile we settled down to make the most of our last year in Malaysia. I had particularly enjoyed the opportunity to work once again with the Malaysians, rather than being an outsider, as one inevitably is in a diplomatic role, and had also enjoyed learning a new trade as a "Plantation Wallah".

It was a wonderful time, surrounded by good colleagues, good friends, and happy smiling people. The job was extraordinarily independent and my family were well and happy. Serendipity indeed! We counted our blessings and accepted that such a perfect way of life could not go on forever.

I recently had occasion to look up the guest list for our farewell party: it was four pages long. Apart from the RGA and other plantation interests, there were businessmen, academics, generals, civil servants, professionals and some friends from the past. We were sad indeed to say goodbye, but I am certain that we made the right decision.

*The rubber barons' club, RGA
Packed a powerful punch, so they say
But their acres galore
Now like Empires no more
So the RGA's faded away*

When I took over in 1979 the big names in Malaysia, such as Harrison, Guthrie, Dunlop, Unilever and the like, were all members of the RGA but within the next decade their ownership and management were localised. Newcomers found little interest in this atypical Plantation Association; there were many others in Malaya to represent management, planters, or research. Charles Letts worked hard behind the scenes to help the RGA to adjust, but it did not survive into the 21st Century, and our decision to move on seems in retrospect to have been well timed. I would not have enjoyed presiding over the demise of a once great Association.

PART VI LAST LAP

The Dragon Awakes

It was the middle of the night. I woke with a start to the rattle of small arms fire, the rumbling of heavy engines, the squeal of tank treads on Chang An Da Jie (Eternal Peace Boulevard) and the screams of the crowd. I leapt out of bed and saw from my hotel window crowds streaming away from Tian An Men (Heavenly Peace Gate) Square. I could see the muzzle flashes of personal weapons and machine guns, and masses of panic-stricken people trying to escape the indiscriminate fire of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Politburo having lost great face during three weeks of demonstrations that had brought the capital to a standstill, had ordered the PLA to clear the centre; and now it was mercilessly carrying out its orders. An earlier soft approach by the PLA had failed; now a second wave, unmoved by appeals for comradely solidarity, was smashing its way through the student camp, while the soldiers hosed down the surrounding area with bullets and the tanks rampaged through the tents. The PLA were behaving like Czarist cavalry.

It was a tragic affair. For weeks Western observers had been reporting optimistically about the march of democracy in China, but they had, as so often, misinterpreted the situation. The Politburo was not in the business of political reform, and the PLA had never heard of the doctrine of minimum force. The reformists were now described as criminals, and their leaders had become fugitives. As I had predicted, it had all ended in tears.

The China to which I had returned as Chinese Adviser to Racial, was very different to the China I had previously known. As a language student in the late 1940s I had experienced the courtesy and hospitality of the Chinese, and galloping inflation and general chaos. In the early 1960s I had seen the results

of fifteen years of a Communist regime: the Chinese people, for the most part, keeping their heads below the parapet, battered by endless campaigns against "class enemies", landlords, entrepreneurs and intellectuals, and bemused by the Great Leap Forward and the Commune Movement, and subjected to famine.

Later I read with horror of the revolting excesses of the Great Cultural Revolution (GCR) when Chairman Mao Tsetung decided that it was time to stir China society up lest the younger generation should slip back into the old petty bourgeois, capitalist ways. His chosen weapon was the school children of China who were encouraged, as Red Guards, to attack their teachers, their parents, the older generation, every institution and every remnant of old China. Many children accepted this invitation to take over the country, to challenge the old, waving Mao's little red book as their authority and to give up boring studies at school. The GCR soon got thoroughly out of hand, and did huge damage to China's economy, while awful indignities and miseries were inflicted on individuals.

The GCR, described by Deng Xiaoping as years of chaos and disaster, did not really come to an end until the early 1970s. By the mid-1970s Deng Xiaoping's star was once more in the ascendant and preparing for a fundamental change in Chinese policy: a form of market Leninism which would approve of the profit motive, allow interest on bank deposits, permit individual economic initiatives, and open wide the door to investment by foreigners in joint ventures and the like. This was a dramatic change from the stodgy idiocies of the Maoist regime where profit was a dirty word, private enterprise forbidden, foreign trade minimal and foreign investment taboo.

The world had been astonished by this volte-face but, of course, the new policies did not bite immediately. The old Communist cadres, entrenched throughout society, had little sympathy for these newfangled notions, which challenged the very foundations of the world to which they were accustomed.

As I noted earlier, Deng's philosophy was summed up in the famous aphorism "It matters not whether the cat is black or white so long as it catches mice." But it took him a long time to persuade the majority of the Communist Party to give up their comfortable, constipated, idle ways and grapple with pragmatic policies and market forces.

It was this suddenly awakening, modern China that I was invited to "get Racal into" and, fortunately for me, Deng's determination that the huge sleepy Communist dragon should join the modern world paid off.

This section has proved to be the most difficult of all to compose, partly because it covers fifteen years, a wide range of activities, and constant travel. In short an endlessly moving kaleidoscope.

This was an extraordinary period in my working life. I had paymasters, but no manager to answer to. And since my role was advisory, not operational, I was spared endless messages from HQ. Unlike my Racal colleagues I was not glued to phone and e-mail, and had almost unlimited freedom to make my own priorities and programmes. I had already experienced a considerable measure of freedom in the RGA job, but there were quite a few regular commitments; with Racal there were none.

It was a great privilege to be back in China; the more so because the Racal job gave me carte blanche to travel anywhere I liked in China. And more importantly, perhaps, it gave me an opportunity to work with Chinese colleagues; an opportunity not open to me as a foreign diplomat. I had already enjoyed a taste of the pleasures of non-official status in my RGA days in Malaysia, but the difference was dramatic in the new job. In the 1960s close contact between foreigners and Chinese had been, to put it mildly, discouraged. Now I was working with Chinese officials towards common objectives. Socialising was allowed: Westerners were no longer treated as the enemy.

Better still, the Racal job gave me entrée to the Chinese

official world from Mr Jiang Zemin downwards and I made the most of my opportunities to develop friendships, oiling the wheels with many a jolly meal, where Tsing Tao beer and Maotai flowed freely.

Although, with the exception of Racal Chubb, all our business was related to electronics, the span of activity was wide. In the marine field, we dealt with both naval and civil requirements. Discussions included a joint venture on the Stewart model (i.e. a co-production partnership which did not entail sharing finances and management) to take over a chunk of the world marine market for 60 metre craft, using the cheap Chinese hulls, but fitting our electronics. Alas, although we produced excellent models and literature, our lances were blunted by the conservatism of Chinese officials.

In our first co-production deal we set up a radar production line, which, had it not been for the lethargy of the factory chairman, and the failure of the Chinese authorities to discipline the national shipping corporation, could have enabled us to corner most of the Chinese domestic market for our marine electronics.

In the aviation field we responded to both civil and military requirements and supplied a nationwide ground navigation system using the Stewart co-production method.

In the military field we supplied radios, collaborated with the Chinese Signal Corps to produce an electronic warfare system and set up a co-production line for military radios.

There were many other projects. We sold hundreds of professional recorders and many thousands of modems to a variety of civil and military customers, and even succeeded in involving Vodafone and Shanghai in talks about cellular radiotelephone.

And in between times we organised technical seminars and set up our stall at exhibitions.

I would have been swamped by the number of projects generated long before my Racal contract was up, had I not been allowed to recruit Chinese staff to take over the day to day liaison, leaving me to orchestrate the campaign and to

pace myself.

There was never a dull moment. Plenty to do, plenty to learn and good company, on both the Racal and the Chinese side. The mix became even richer, when I branched out into freelancing. Fascinating times, which encompassed far more than I can cover in detail in the last quarter of this book.

Racal Who?

Racal contributed to my "rice bowl" for fifteen years after I left the RGA.

The next section provides some descriptions of Racal, its organisation strengths, weaknesses, and ethos.

I enjoyed my education into the world of business, and am grateful for the opportunity they gave me to become involved in China's modernisation. Of course, I did not agree with all of their habits, but I made many friends.

Racal was like every organisation, imperfect, but their overall performance was magnificent. Shabash! to Sir Ernest and his colleagues who exported so successfully for Britain.

"Racal, the biggest company you have never heard of"

This was the slogan used on a TV advertisement when Racal was engaged on launching Vodafone, because the Racal name was unknown to the general public. The Company was paternalistic, autocratic, haphazard, short termist but brilliantly successful commercially. When I joined the Racal Group it had about 35 operating companies, large and small with about 35,000 employees. It was a post-war upstart, competing in Britain with Marconi, Plessey and Pye to whom it was known as "Ernie's Barrow Boys". It was originally a small radio company selling refurbished military high frequency radios, now it was selling military radios all round the world, the heir to Decca's marine business, and a major player in many other electronic fields. Soon it would acquire Chubb; bringing a new range of subjects concerned with physical security. The upstart

was no minnow.

"Bean counters of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your markets"

This may seem a little extreme but I never met an accountant in Racal who seemed to understand that unless there were men out there actively selling, there would be no sales figures for the bean counters to analyse. For the accountants, the balance sheet seemed to be an end in itself, unrelated to the market place. The constant updating of sales estimates and predicted profits seemed to take priority over selling.

At the beginning of my Racal adventure I discovered that my landlord, Vyv Hoyle, the manager of Racal's Marine Office, had no authority to finish off the decoration of new premises in Sun House, and since the Hong Kong custom was to tear out everything before leasing to a new tenant, we were camping without ceilings, carpets, or fittings. This was not an encouraging experience. At least in government service or the RGA it was recognised that the signing of a lease for an office would be accompanied by expenditure on fitting it out. In Racal expense accounts seemed to be generous in the extreme, everyone was flying business class, staying in the best hotels, and eating and drinking luxuriously in the first half of the year, then the tap would be turned off and all travel banned. This feast or famine approach made for problems.

I suspect that the basic reason was that the accountants also travelled and enjoyed the "Life of Riley" but since they were not involved in marketing and sales operations, had no feel for the need for regular expenditure on cultivating customers.

The all-pervasive negative power of the accountants was frightening. Alas, the imagination and communicating skills of the Chairman and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) were not reflected in the ranks of the bean counters who earned their promotion by cutting costs. I was careful to keep expenses to the minimum, so as to offer the smallest possible target to the accountants who seemed to make their reputations by slash

and burn tactics. Since I did not sell anything, my office was a sitting duck for any bright young man. The financial system could not have been less like the one I had been accustomed to in government. There I presented a budget, and thereafter kept within the limits authorised. Working for Racal I never had an authorised budget and had to subsidise my office by persuading colleagues in visiting Racal teams to dip into their expense accounts on our behalf.

Racal Management Style

The Chairman, Sir Ernest Harrison, was an accountant but also a brilliant operator, full of ideas and a natural entrepreneur. He had done well managing the original, small, radio company where he knew everyone by their first name, and would be found helping to make the tea when they were working overtime on a Friday night. But further skills were required to manage this large conglomerate. I had spotted this potential problem when a friendly Racal Director remarked complacently, before the Decca acquisition, that there were plenty of good Racal managers to take over the reins. This was clearly nonsense, (unless Racal was grossly overstaffed, which it was not.) In the event Racal had to bring in many non-Racal managers to run the Decca companies. Thus they compounded the problems of differing corporate cultures. Racal men were in the chair, but often Plessey or Marconi men were at the next level, while ex-Decca or ex-Chubb staff simmered below. Racal was superb at setting something up from scratch, like the amazing Vodafone cellular telephone operation, or the Camelot Lottery; it was less impressive at "managing change".

I noted as my association with Sally's management studies progressed, that Racal would not have got many marks in an MBA exam paper. There were plenty of good electronics engineers and ex-military salesmen but there was little interest in management. Indeed Sir Ernest, when he bowed out, admitted in a press interview that he had never been a manager. I do not think there was one MBA to be found

anywhere in the Group. The family business atmosphere of the original radio company was not entirely suitable for a huge conglomerate and General "ad hoc", who had stood them so well in the early days, was no longer an appropriate commander.

I soon realised I was cutting right across the whole ethos of the Group. I was employed to construct a long-term strategy to "Get us into China" while the Managing Directors, upon whom I depended, were engaged on a short-term exercise. My long-term market was of limited interest to a Managing Director who had accountants breathing down his neck seeking immediate increased sales. I could only offer soothing descriptions of the size of the China market. This was not merely the hoary old vision of 1 billion customers, but of a vast Defence Force and expanding Civilian Marine and Air Transport Systems, and infrastructure of every sort, all desperately in need of modern electronics. But I could not offer immediate sales.

It became increasingly clear that unless I produced the prospect of a large contract, the Managing Directors would soon lose interest. I would have my diplomatic skills tested to the full in trying to satisfy the Chinese that Racal was seeking long-term partnership while satisfying Racal's demand for immediate profit.

Racal claimed to spend 7% of its resources on Research and Development, and had a high reputation for inventiveness, but there was a tendency to close down research companies if they did not quickly turn research into profit. I began to realise that to everyone, except the salesman who earned his bonuses from sales, the customer was seen as a necessary nuisance not as a valued client whose needs should be consulted when design and development were afoot. Racal knew best. My friends the Chinese became unpopular, because they were always challenging design philosophy. A Racal friend once complained to me that it was only in the Chinese world that he was bombarded with questions about design philosophy.

These comments should not be read as an indictment of my

paymasters, but their management style seemed to me to yaw between the "country house" and the "autocratic". Decca and Plessey went to the wall because they were pachyderms, with too much research not put to commercial use, too many layers of management, too much tradition, and too much dependence on HMG. Racal grew large and prosperous by avoiding those particular faults, but they had others. No doubt Plessey had too big a central staff. But it seemed to me bizarre that Racal had no central staff at all to follow through on directives, monitor implementation, and report back to the Main Board.

I worked hard to persuade the Racal men that this Oxford Arts Graduate, ex-Infantry Officer and ex-Diplomat, brought something useful to the party. I was very much an oddity in Racal; an organisation run by accountants, staffed by engineers and scientists, with a sprinkling of ex-Navy in the marine companies, a few ex-Royal Signals in the radio company, and nary a Scot to be seen. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the company of the Racal men. My relations with the Managing Directors were inevitably more distant, since we spent little time together, and I was trying to persuade them to divert resources from their traditional targets. But we all got on well.

Hiring Wizards

During my last years with Racal, I had a ringside seat watching the Main Board attempt, after a decade of failure, to reinvigorate one of their ailing companies, and bring it back into profit. This US-based satellite had been under-performing for as long as I had known it, and a series of senior Racal Directors had blunted their lances in attempts to change the company's culture.

The case would have made a fine Harvard Case Study on the lines of what Chairman Mao would have called "Teaching by Negative Example". Having failed for many years to impose Racal management on this US company, they called in the head-hunters to find an American CEO, a local wizard

whose wand would transform the company. A candidate "wizard" was found who promised that he could turn the whole thing round within a year, reorganising, shedding staff, and developing a new series of products that would sweep the market. I was astonished. All my instincts and experience told me that this had to be nonsense. This was a large, complicated business, and trying to change everything overnight in a frenzy was hardly a recipe for success. To start with, morale would plummet; high-grade new managers would cost more than old; redundant employees would be expensive to pay off, and marketing, hiring of new sales agents, and research, development, and production of new products would all take time. It was a profound mystery to me how anyone could get away with this cloud cuckoo land promise.

However, Racal hired the "wizard" and I watched with fascination as he started squandering money on a glamorous new office in Hong Kong, and the recruitment of a raft of expensive new Vice Presidents to staff it. It was very much a question of all Chiefs and no Indians, and all were busy communicating within Racal, rather than getting out on the street looking for new customers and encouraging their agents. Every VP seemed to be chained to his laptop computer. As the year rolled on, new products were always just round the corner, but somehow never quite materialised. Costs soared, and sales dropped.

At the end of the first year the "wizard" came out to address a sales conference attended by staff and agents from the whole Asia Pacific Region. He gave a bravura performance describing plans, prospects and reorganisations, but was taken aback to be assaulted by the agents present, who said, roughly speaking, "Never mind all that, we need new products to sell now." The gulf between the reality in the market place and the theory in the CEO's plan was unbridgeable. Sir Ernest managed to sell the Company by some good PR work, the "wizard" used his golden parachute, and that was the end of the story.

Perhaps Sir Ernest knew perfectly well that the "wizard's"

promises were unlikely to be fulfilled, but saw the exercise as a ploy which would enable him to get a good price from some unworldly buyer prepared to accept promises of jam tomorrow. If so, he certainly succeeded.

Racal in China

I often pondered Racal's reasoning behind the decision to enter this unknown, and difficult market. I think the trigger was the acquisition of Decca, which had for some time been embroiled in a British bid for a contract to modernise China's destroyer fleet. By the time I joined Racal the British consortium had spent two years on the negotiation. But the goal posts had been moved and the contract was now for one destroyer, not for the fleet. The Embassy told me in December 1982 that China had signed the contract. Four months later when the Embassy enquired where the matter stood, their Chinese contact said blandly "Oh! Haven't you heard; the new Minister of Defence has decided not to ratify." So there was not even a small contract to show for all the effort, and the critics could point out that the Chinese Intelligence Services had been having a ball learning about our naval equipment.

For me there was a silver lining in the cloud. The more that China frightened off our competitors, the more grateful the Chinese were to have a new friend; and although enthusiasm had been eroded at working level in Racal as the story of this debacle spread, I believed that we could do a lot better than neophytes, with stars in their eyes, and no experience of China.

The grand title of Director of Operations (China) concealed the fact that I directed nothing except my own small staff. The Racal companies were not quite sure how much authority I had since my title did not fit into the Racal hierarchy. But they did know that I had been hired by the Chairman to "Get us into China", and that I continued to have a direct line to him and to the CEO. The Chinese on the other hand, knew that I had been a relatively senior official in the British Government

and assumed that I was one of Racal's top brass.

My position was, in many respects, like it had been in my Chinese Affairs days in Malaya. I had a grandiose title but no power, and once again, I balanced on a tightrope trying to maintain the trust and respect of both the West and the East. My task was to educate both sides in order to produce a proper Confucian reciprocity.

By the mid-1980s I began to be confident that I had got Racal on the inside track and that, provided they maintained the momentum, our market would expand as China's economy expanded. But in the aftermath of the Tiananmen massacre, HMG refused us licences to sell anything with a remotely military flavour: thus denying us our traditional strong suit. This would have been less aggravating had our NATO competitors abided by the rules; but, of course, while the cricket players of Whitehall maintained the ban, the USA, French and others continued to sell to China.

My problems were seldom with the Chinese; and Racal never failed to get a contract when we put our minds to it. Racal was soon seen as a major player in the China market, and China trusted us, but there were severe limitations to what I could achieve. China Liaison Division was a minute tail trying to wag a very large and often recalcitrant Racal dog.

It took several years to persuade Racal companies to post salesmen to Hong Kong. The normal Racal style was to base everyone in the UK. The system had worked effectively in the relatively unsophisticated markets of Africa and the Middle East, where Racal used well-connected people with political clout as their agents. The China market was more complicated. My customers expected a debate with the would-be supplier. Infrequent visits from Britain and the USA by salesmen jet-lagged and weary after their long journeys, was not the best way to get business in China. But it proved difficult to persuade managing directors to bear the cost of posting salesmen to Hong Kong. Eventually, I stung the Managing Director of the Marine Company and the Vice President of the Datacomms Company into action by saying, "There is no

point in our discussing this topic; you always promise and never perform." The insult worked and by the late 1980s we had representatives of both companies on the ground and, to my considerable satisfaction, my new Hong Kong colleagues rapidly expanded their market for Racal products.

By the mid-1990s we had four Racal offices in Hong Kong and two offices in China. But Professor Parkinson's Law, that when organisations get their office buildings right they are already on the way out, proved to be correct. Within three years of the establishment of the Shanghai office, Racal had sold off all the companies concerned, thus bringing Racal's "China attack" to nought.

*Racal's shareholders always enjoyed
Splendid gains and joy unalloyed
Since Ernie greatly impressed
City journalist guests
Racal's shares were always up buoyed*

Racal's shareholders continued to be happy but for someone used to less volatile organisations, where such old fashioned concepts as esprit de corps still had some meaning, it seemed sad that the conglomerate had ceased to exist.

Planning the Approach

"You O King, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilisation have despatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial. To show your devotion you have also sent offerings of your country's produce. The humble terms in which your memorial is couched reveal a respectful humility on your part. We have accepted the gifts solely out of consideration for the spirit which prompted their despatch. We possess all things. We set no value on objects strange and ingenious and have no use for your country's manufactures.

It behoves you O King to respect my sentiments and to display even greater devotion and loyalty in future."

Thus wrote the Emperor Quian Long to King George III in the context of Britain's fruitless attempts to open up trade with China. But now the doors were open and it was my task to find us customers in the land of the dragon.

Times had changed dramatically since Quian Long wrote to George III, and indeed since Victorian times when China, unlike Japan, was more worried about danger from insidious foreign influence than about its need for foreign technology. I wondered whether they would be prepared to pay an adequate price for our technology, and also to what extent our Chinese interlocutors would be able to overcome the effects of thirty years of Communist indoctrination and their traditional certainties that Chinese civilisation was superior to that of the Western Barbarians.

I intended to adopt and adapt all China's sententious phraseology about mutual benefit, equality, and so on. But would they be prepared to act in accordance with these fine phrases and join us in partnership to achieve common goals? Or would they find it impossible to trust us? Meanwhile I had to educate Racal and their lawyers to accept Stewart's flowery "Letters of Intent" and to understand that when I talked of trust and partnership, I was talking of human beings sharing a common purpose, not of legal concepts! I also had to persuade Racal lawyers to use Chinese standard contracts as the basis for agreement rather than insisting on imposing Western formats.

On my first visit to China, the Vice Minister for Electronics, Mr Jiang Zemin, who later became Head of State, entertained us. Mr Jiang was most affable, gave me several introductions, invited me to call whenever I wanted to, and remained a Racal friend as he climbed up the ladder. His welcome was a great encouragement.

Letter Home

My first trip as a businessman in China. I have been feeling my way gingerly in respect of their feelings about the Cultural Revolution. Some want to talk about it, others seem anxious to forget. Only one person pretended that there was anything good to be said for that disastrous period in Chinese history.

The Blueprint for the China Attack

During my last RGA year I spent a lot of time studying everything I could find about doing business in post-Mao China. The picture that emerged was that Deng's China had opened the door to foreign investment and was keen to acquire foreign technology and capital in the form of Equity Joint Ventures. I did not expect that Mr Deng had succeeded in persuading all his underlings to adjust to the winds of change. They had advanced under the banner of Marxist Leninism, when profit and market forces were dirty words, and under the Maoist doctrine that it was more important to be "Red than Expert". Now they were required to become expert, and ideological purity alone would not be enough.

There was plenty of published material such as newspapers, the Five Year Plan, and legislation, to provide guidance on China's requirements and priorities. It was not difficult to match our products to these theoretical requirements, but finding out who had an adequate budget would require time on the ground.

The Chinese, the Embassies and the Business Consultants were all singing the "joint venture song"; but the concept did not fit Racal's desire to "keep it simple", and to ensure a profit in the short term. Racal's shareholders expected their jam today not tomorrow.

I resolved to adapt the language of new China, but to translate it into Racalese by developing the concept of the Racal co-production package. This could be presented as a quasi-joint venture, offering technological transfer, managerial

know-how, and long-term partnership, but it avoided the legal, managerial and cultural minefields of a fully blown joint venture.

I suspect that the finer points of the Stewart solution were never fully understood by either the celestials or the barbarians. The key words were partnership, co-operation, joint objective, mutual benefit, respect, equality, trust and reciprocity and technology transfer. Like motherhood and apple pie they were undeniably "good things", but broad enough in their definitions to allow a great deal of flexibility. It was a package that met the Chinese halfway. While paying lip service to the long term, we would get immediate payment in hard currency.

Looking back on the fifteen years of our "China Attack", I think that this approach worked well for both sides. Racal always complained about poor profit margins, and China always complained that our prices were too high; but Racal achieved market penetration and China acquired high-tech and managerial skills so, in management text book terms, this was a "win win" situation. The theory that my package should be seen as a painless introductory stage on the way to a manufacturing joint venture was never put to the test, because our Chinese partners never came up with a viable proposal for stage two, full-scale joint venture.

I suppose we could hardly have failed to get business since we were the only large company who had appointed someone like me to develop their business; a Chinese-speaking ex-diplomat, grey haired and apparently senior saying "Here is our range of high tech products, you can have anything you like, provided we can get export licences; and we will consider all forms of business partnership." This was not the sort of language that they heard from their normal business visitors. I had not, of course, rehearsed my lines with Racal. There were plenty of sceptics, particularly those who had been brainwashed by the likes of our Defence Attaché in Beijing into thinking that China would only buy samples in order to copy them. To such cynics I posed the question "Is it really

true that our state of the art products are so easy to copy?" I had enough technical background to know that the products on offer would have taken several years from formulation of the requirement, to Breadboard model, "A" model, "B" model before production. Clearly in the unlikely event that the Chinese succeeded in copying our equipment, they would still be years behind us.

In fact during my fifteen years in the China market I never came across a single instance of copying of our products. When I left Racal, the Fourth Radio Factory in Shanghai was still churning out the same radars that we had agreed to supply for assembly in China, fifteen years before. The Chinese factory was happy to stick with Racal and its old design. We carried the can for quality and they could relax. I would have preferred a more genuine partnership, with some Chinese engineering input. They preferred the quiet life. The unfortunate Chinese Navy, which used our navigation radars on all their main vessels, was the principal sufferer from this idleness, but Racal also suffered because it became increasingly difficult to source components for models which we no longer produced.

Logistics

My immediate requirement in 1982 was to find administrative support in China for visas, hotel rooms, and air and rail tickets. Happily, at an early stage I met a likely lad in the Ministry of Foreign Trade; he was Director of their Marketing Research Institute. I threw myself on Mr Xu's mercy, and asked if he could suggest a consultant to work with me. As I had hoped, he offered the services of his Institute, and so for the modest sum of \$4,000 per year I had accomplished my first objective; I now had a representative in Beijing and, moreover, a special relationship with a Ministry. From then onwards every time I wanted to go to China I only needed to send Mr Xu a telegram and all would be arranged. I do not suppose that many people would have had the cheek to make the proposition, but then I

had the advantage of long service in tropical stations. Ten years later, when I had become a freelance consultant, I worked with Mr Xu's successor, by which time there were many foreign companies on their list of clients; I liked to think that I had invented the system.

The question of setting up a Racal Office in Beijing was never far from my thoughts. The Chinese, of course, wanted it, but I knew that the cost would seem unjustified to Racal Group until we had procured serious business. I fobbed off the Chinese, and everyone else with the argument that China was so large a country that in the preliminary stage we had to travel about according to the needs of the moment: the time for permanent offices would be later. I had, of course, a hidden agenda, which was that I had no intention of becoming a Beijing resident and becoming a glorified interpreter/travel agent. I intended to keep my independent position and access to all the conveniences that Hong Kong offered.

After a few months, Racal's CEO convened a meeting of the salesmen involved in the China market to discuss progress and the way ahead. So far I had sought no support staff; I was determined that no one in Racal would be able to accuse me of being a pampered Whitehall warrior, incapable of operating without lavish support. When the CEO suggested that it was time for me to have some support, I thanked him but said that I assumed that he meant salesmen from the UK and that in my view that solution would be so expensive that, long before we had achieved an adequate level of business, the accountants would be arguing that we cost too much. I made a counter suggestion that I should be allowed to recruit Chinese staff. The CEO agreed, although he had reservations about security. The security point was daft. There were no secrets in my office and the Chinese were more than welcome to all my information about Racal products.

So, within six-months of starting the Racal job, I had a green light to recruit four Chinese staff and established an office in Hong Kong and a liaison point in Beijing. The CEO also agreed that my office should be called China Liaison

Division (CLD), and that I could set up an informal Racial China Club. The job began to look manageable.

I had long since, with the aid of the Chinese Embassy in London, decided on an appropriate Chinese name for Racial – LEI KA JI TUAN – LEI meaning 'thunder', KA being the character used for the CA of DECCA (a well-known name in China's marine world), and JI TUAN meaning Group. Thus to a Chinese the logo read roughly 'RACA GROUP'. These four characters soon became well known in China, as we fed our contacts with plastic folders, bags and a tie bearing the Racial logo. All this may sound trivial but it helped to establish our name in the marketplace.

I was able to find three splendid recruits: Sam Tsui from Shanghai, Teddy Hung from Yunnan and Eddie Ho from Kwangtung. All had been educated in China, but had found their way to Hong Kong after the Cultural Revolution and were delighted to have an opportunity to join a foreign company.

In some ways, working once more with Chinese staff was a happy repeat of my early Malayan days. But this time the team owed their new opportunities to me, and their loyalty was as much to me as to their paymaster. Although the pay was lousy, the opportunity was considerable, and they set to with a will.

My opposite number in the UK complained that I had hired people without an electronic degree. I ignored this. It was more important to have effective interpreters, in both the linguistic and the cultural sense, than to have people with a string of paper qualifications. The idea of having Chinese on our staff was strange to Racial, and in the beginning the salesmen tended to think of Sam, Teddy and Eddie as being "on the other side". But we were well ahead of the competition with this arrangement. Our commercial competitors were using agents who owed them no particular loyalty and, since they were usually overseas Chinese, from Hong Kong or elsewhere, could not know as much about the mainland as our team, nor speak such good Mandarin. My team provided an excellent bridge between Racial and China and I was very

proud of them.

I never ceased to be amazed how little weight businessmen gave to language support; they seemed quite content to rely on the Chinese side to provide interpreters, never realising how bad much of the amateur interpreting could be. It was something of a miracle that any business was concluded. At an early stage I had a memorable example of the un-wisdom of relying on the Chinese side for interpretation. On this occasion, the Chinese had wheeled out an unfortunate who, although he had graduated from language school after a four-year course, had the greatest difficulty in interpreting. As the afternoon progressed the Chinese announced that they liked our proposals and if we could just drop our price by 30% a contract could soon be signed. I took our team out and suggested that our leader should say "Mr so-and-so must have been joking when he suggested a 30% reduction, otherwise he is accusing us of being robbers." I warned Racial that the Chinese interpreter was most unlikely to interpret this and suggested that I should interpret. The Chinese interpreter, as predicted, fudged the interpreting, so I took over. The jaws dropped, but the point was taken and we were never again faced with such nonsense.

Gathering Momentum and Finding Solutions

My approach, which had begun as a shotgun exercise, became, after six-months, more of a sniper's operation. I did not, of course, cease the general reconnaissance, and by the time I left Racial I had been to every Province in China and had a bird's eye view of the whole country. The East Coast, particularly from Shanghai southwards, was moving at breakneck speed, with ribbon development along every road, and concrete and glass monstrosities in every town. It was not a pretty sight. Every city was covered in a pall of smoke from the belching chimneys of their encircling factories, which had been built on the advice of the swarms of Soviet "experts" who had come to China after 1948. The cities were grimy, their skies

monstrously polluted from domestic coal fires and from the exhausts of badly maintained diesel engines, their traffic horribly congested. But the economy was progressing at considerable speed. Some years the Gross Domestic Product was reported to be growing at well over 10%.

This was no longer the dull China that I had known in the early 1960s. The people had been allowed to raise their heads above the socialist parapet to create a more dynamic economy. And the social scene was totally changed; Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door" Policy had given the Chinese freedom to accept entertainment and to ask us to their houses and offices. A new China indeed, but the freedoms were economic and social, not political. Deng Xiaoping once said to a visiting "Barbarian" leader, à propos of the separation of Legislative, Executive and Judicial powers, "Our country is too large to have three governments." The West, led by the media, continually deluded itself about democratic developments in China and was thus amazed when the peaceful marches led to the massacre of Tiananmen Square.

I enjoyed being introduced by my Chinese friends, as a "fellow anti-fascist fighter", although this description rang a little oddly in the context of my post-war career, when Communism not Fascism, had been the enemy. I also enjoyed a remark by one of my closest friends, a very senior government scientist, who said, "Talking to you is not like talking to a businessman." I asked him to refrain from making this observation to my Racial colleagues. My relationship with this friend was such that he stayed with me during visits to Hong Kong and once sought my advice on plans, policies and organisational changes in his Ministry. Contacts of this sort gave me growing confidence that my advice to foreign businesses was solidly based.

My regular Chinese circle was a mix of scientists, engineers and administrators; we shared a common interest in the development of China's electronics and communications industry. My Chinese inner circle was small, but well informed and immensely helpful in sorting out problems as

well as keeping me in the picture. Of course, it was a great deal easier for me than for most foreigners to play the partnership and friendship card. I had age, seniority and knowledge of their history and culture to offer, which their normal business, academic, and diplomatic acquaintances could not match.

I was frequently introduced as a "China expert" but this flattering description was withdrawn if I ever had occasion to contradict my interlocutor; then the Chinese would say, "Oh! Mr Stewart, you do not understand; in China etc. etc."

Not all my Chinese friends were to the taste of the Racial men. One of my most useful contacts had a delightfully un-Chinese habit of calling a spade a spade, and the Racial men, who were used to the circumlocutions and flattery of their Chinese interlocutors, misinterpreted my friend's refreshing bluntness as hostility. His bluntness also made him enemies in his own team. On one occasion he intervened at the beginning of a negotiation remarking, "They say that in China negotiations take too long; let us show that this is not true." He was rusticated for six months as a result of his brash remark, but thanks to his help we managed to finish the negotiations in a record five days.

Once when I was complaining about a failure of some of the equipment we had sold China, and painting a picture of the dire effect on Racial's reputation, my Racial colleague retorted, "Why should China get priority?" I replied, "Because in the rest of your markets you are represented by agents, but in China you are represented by me, and it is my job to ensure that Racial's name stands high in China." I added, "If you have no budget to put things right, I shall go to the CEO and ask him to make money available." The gambit worked, but of course I had to be careful not to over do "appeals to the headmaster".

On another occasion my local Chinese friends in Shanghai complained that they were embarrassed by Racial's failure to repair some equipment in their Training School for Marine Officers. My friend showed me his files, and I found that he

had couched his complaints in language far too gentle and courteous to prevail against the brutal strictures of a normal barbarian agent. I proceeded to draft a "stinker" for them to send to me, translated the "stinker" back into English, then forwarded it to the company concerned pointing out that, since the Chinese do not usually indulge in such intemperate language, they must be particularly incensed. This ploy had a most satisfactory effect. Within days the faulty equipment had been repaired.

The crux of my "service" problems was that since the Chinese did not want to pay for after sales service, and the Racal salesmen feared that if they insisted on realistic payments the contract would go to some other company, the issue was never fully addressed during negotiations. So I had to fight China's corner every time there was an equipment failure.

Negotiations in China in the early days were very long and drawn out. In some cases they took a year or more with countless meetings and great expense as our teams flew across the world to negotiate. The main responsibility for the delays lay with the Chinese bureaucrats who were unused to dealing with capitalists, terrified of being accused of being soft on foreigners, and part of a very sluggish machine. But the foreign suspicion of the Chinese and the western legalistic view of contract also contributed to the delays. The Chinese saw a contract as an agreement to work together to a mutually accepted objective and expected to be able to renegotiate if circumstances seemed to require a change. The Western lawyers, however, earned their pay by producing documents set in concrete, which could be used in a court case.

The two cultures were in serious conflict and the Chinese found it difficult to accept the legalism of the West. In Confucian society the legal profession did not exist, and anyone who offered services to a defendant in court would be dubbed "litigation trickster". This was a tradition, which until the end of the Qing Dynasty had produced no Commercial Code. All Imperial China possessed was a Criminal Code

detailing crimes and punishments.

I devised two partial solutions to the legal problem. The first was that we always stipulated arbitration in neutral Stockholm. The second was to adopt as far as possible, standard Chinese contract forms. Our British lawyers began to accept my advice, but it was much more difficult to convince the US lawyers that if they persisted in behaving as if they were in the US we would never get to the end of any negotiation. Even in such a simple matter as the standard Hong Kong lease, in an office building where I had been a tenant for seven years, I had a major fight with the US lawyers.

The Joint Venture, Warts and All

The general obsession with joint venture haunted me to the end. During my farewell visit in 1997 to the Shanghai radar factory, I asked the Chairman how many workers he would wish to transfer to a joint venture if we set one up. He answered, "All the four hundred and fifty staff employed on radar work." When I pointed out that this was ten times as many people as we employed in the UK on our production line and that it would be impossible to justify this number in a joint venture, he went into the familiar "But Mr Stewart, you do not understand. In China our workers depend on their factory for housing, welfare, education and we could not dismiss them, or find them alternative employment." This was twenty years after the Chinese leadership had announced that they were going to insist on enterprises becoming commercially viable. Our Shanghai radar manufacturing deal could have been a much greater success if the Chairman had not been idle and unimaginative. He made products according to the requirements of his official masters and saw no need to seek new markets or new methods of doing business.

I encountered the same dinosaur approach in every state enterprise I visited when wearing the hat of a potential investor. All I ever got was lectures on the Chinese Joint

Venture Policy and "China is a big market." The state dinosaurs continued loss making and inefficient, draining the country's resources and loath to face the laws of supply and demand. Fortunately, since China's economic cake has grown hugely, the State Enterprises have become a smaller and smaller part of the whole, while private and local cooperative ventures have proliferated. And luckily for me, Racal was never bedazzled by the idea of a manufacturing partnership with one of the State dinosaurs.

As the years rolled on I became more involved with Academia, where the joint venture had become a favourite topic for seminars and research papers. There were few clear-cut success stories, and plenty of disasters. The scope for culture clash and the opportunities for misunderstanding and mistrust was enormous. There were huge differences culturally and ideologically between China and the foreign capitalists, totally different understandings of the concept of cost and profits; the joint venture was a cultural minefield and I continued to be satisfied that we were right to stick to co-production. We provided China with the goods and technology it wanted, got paid for them, and avoided the hassle of joint management.

Sally and her colleagues produced many interesting studies on the development of the joint venture. Almost all the "literature" and conference contributions came from foreigners, usually with descriptions in detail of horrendous culture clashes. But the Chinese side were equally disappointed. My main contribution to the debate was that I found and translated the proceedings of a Chinese academics' conference on JVs. These sources predictably confirmed that the Chinese side thought they were being short-changed by their foreign partners, and particularly by overseas Chinese.

I had the satisfaction of seeing one of my papers being printed as an International Case Study but the Stewart co-production package was altogether too simple to commend itself to the army of people who made a living from handling the legal and financial complexities of the joint venture.

It seemed to me that many foreign businesses allowed themselves to be persuaded too easily into going down the slippery joint venture path. There were of course some areas where entry to the Chinese market could only be gained by adopting the JV ticket, but that should, in my view, have been the last, not the first resort.

Breakthrough

After about a year, when the Ministry of Electronics recognised perhaps that I was more likely to be a help than a threat, they entrusted me with a large "shopping" list and so I was able to move from amateur market research to matching Chinese requirements to Racal products. The list was extracted from my closest friend in the Ministry after I had remarked to him that unless, together, we could get the Racal business in China off the ground, I should be out of a job. I am not sure whether anyone else pulled off this ploy, but it certainly made my life much easier from then on, while cementing my friendship with key officials in the Ministry. Of course, there were many hurdles to cross thereafter but at least I was no longer in doubt of the relevant Chinese requirements for which foreign exchange was available.

The shopping list included a request for a navigation system called Megapulse, which was made in the US by a company Racal had just acquired. The negotiations and problems connected with the Megapulse contract were classics of their kind. The US company jumped enthusiastically at the opportunity to enter the Chinese market and the Vice-President, who I always think of affectionately as an Irish leprechaun, joined forces with me to make sure that we got the contract. We flew a Chinese delegation round the US in a chartered executive jet, dropping off to visit Coast Guard stations where Megapulse was in use, spending two days in Disneyland, and finishing up in Washington with visits to Capitol Hill and lunch with the Admiral in command of the Coast Guard. The leprechaun did a magnificent job; my only

problem was that he kept forgetting that I did not know my way around the US as I drove a hired car full of delegates around the highways and byways at each port of call. I almost lost the delegates in Disneyland.

The school solution in the "How to do Business in China" books was that foreign teams must never be in a hurry and must be prepared to hang about in China. I took the opposite view that at the beginning of each visit we should announce the date of our departure loud and clear, giving adequate time, of course, for sensible negotiation and scheduling our farewell banquet when we arrived. This policy helped the Chinese negotiators to prod their dozy seniors and to remind them that although the Chinese side might not be under pressure, the Racal side had many other contracts to attend to. We always said, with the utmost courtesy, "If we cannot conclude our business within the working week, we shall have to postpone until a later date." The approach succeeded. Whenever Racal regretted that our worldwide schedules did not allow us to change our dates of departure somehow, suddenly, the dinosaurs would stir sufficiently to come to an agreement. It was easy for me to take this strong line since, with my contacts and the help of my Chinese team, I was well informed on the Chinese position.

But all was by no means plain sailing once the contract was signed. In the Megapulse case the Chinese side had asked us to remove caesium clocks from the contract, on the grounds that they could source the clocks for themselves and thus save money. When it came to the point, however, the US Government would not allow the clocks to be exported as stand alone instruments to China, since they performed a vital function in missileery. Our Chinese partners had to ask me to help, but by then some US bureaucrat had the bit between his teeth. I resolved the dilemma by promising that CLD would inspect the Megapulse sites regularly to ensure that the clocks were, indeed, being used in our navigation system. So face was saved all round; but of course I never bothered to carry out an inspection since the system could not operate if the

clocks were removed. No one who knows the bureaucratic world will be surprised to hear that Washington never followed up on this question, nor that later I found several spare caesium clocks in an institute in China.

A much more complicated and long-winded negotiation preceded a contract to supply the Chinese Army with an electronic warfare system. I found myself one day in a hotel room facing about eight Chinese. They were in civvies, but looked like military types and they wanted to talk about electronic warfare, a term embracing interception, monitoring and jamming of the enemy's communications. I promised to consult with the UK and seek a solution. They then said, "You have an agent in Hong Kong who works for Racal Radio, but if you want this contract you must deal directly with us." I riposted with "Like you we value old friends, and trust, so we need time to look at all the options, please repeat what you have just said so that I have an exact record." They said it again. "Get rid of the Hong Kong agent!" This was a very tricky matter. I had stumbled on an esoteric requirement; but a brash Hong Konger without any feeling for the sensitivity of the subject, and complexity of the systems involved, was already in the loop.

This was probably the most difficult of the conundrums I had to solve in Racal. I was coming in from the outside. Who was this customer, the company Ping He, which was demanding that we do business directly with them, not through a Hong Kong agent?

Forging Alliances

When Racal took over the Chubb Group, Frank Bleackley, who was promoted to run Chubb Hong Kong, became a very close friend. Frank had spent all his working life in Asia. He was a voracious reader and imaginative strategist, as well as an effective day-to-day manager. It was a great delight to have, at last, a colleague with whom to plot and discuss strategies; and for the next twelve years we plotted together successfully.

Chubb Hong Kong was a joint venture with Jardine Mathieson. But the joint venture concept was alien to the Racal culture, and the Jardine old boy style was anathema. Happily the CEO took my advice and agreed to leave this successful operation alone. Unlike the rest of Racal, I enjoyed the company of the Jardine men, and the partnership gave us new and wide access throughout Asia, wherever Jardine had offices on the ground. These were not quantifiable assets, but I had every intention of exploiting them.

Very soon we had a Chubb presence in Beijing and I was able to use Frank's developments as part of the CLD mirrors and smoke campaign, to demonstrate Racal's growing commitment to China. I had no difficulty in persuading the Jardine man in Beijing to join forces and share the cost of a bedroom in the Beijing Hotel. So, although still operating on my shoestring principles, CLD now had a base in the principal hotel in Beijing.

My first hotel room in Beijing had been in the Peace Hotel alongside Ping He, our electronic warfare partners who fronted for us as tenants, while I paid the bill. This made life much easier for CLD: we no longer had to flog up and down carrying our heavy bags, never knowing where we would get a bed. Ping He's reward was that they could use the suite whenever we were out of town. Racal never understood the inwardness of this Sino/Scottish marriage of convenience and grumbled about Ping He occupying the CLD suite.

This happy arrangement stemmed from the CEO's first visit to China in 1984, when he suggested to Ping He that, since we seemed to be getting along so well together, they should send one or two of their staff down to my CLD office in Hong Kong and Racal should station engineers in the Ping He office in Beijing. We all nodded wisely, knowing that the suggestion was unworkable. But as soon as the CEO had gone I said, "Although the CEO's plan is premature, at least we can get closer together physically, if you can get us a suite in your hotel."

The partnership with Ping He provided an uncovenanted

benefit when, at the end of painful and lengthy negotiations, we won a large electronic warfare contract, and HMG refused us an export licence. The refusal was doubly irritating because I knew that the French and the Italians were already supplying analogous systems to Ping He. The Embassy washed their hands of the affair, saying that this was not a Foreign & Commonwealth Office decision but a ruling from Cocom, the Paris-based committee that was charged with monitoring and regulating exports to Communist countries.

Fortunately, Ping He was willing to give me chapter and verse about two analogous electronic warfare projects being carried out by our French and Italian competitors. And I was able to add verisimilitude to the tale, since our competitors had been using my conference room and I had seen the evidence of their contractual negotiations. My information, coupled with reminders that whoever prevented us from carrying out the contract would be responsible for the loss of many jobs, did the trick. This battle, uncomfortable at the time, added to the sense of partnership between CLD and Ping He. Together we had conquered Cocom.

Neither HMG nor Racal had much idea who Ping He were. It was, in fact, a brand new company, created to give jobs to military men and to pocket commissions which otherwise would go to Chinese middlemen in Hong Kong. Ping He was a major target as far as I was concerned, in view of its close relationship with the Chinese Ministry of Defence. Since we were operating on a shoestring. I had to play the "special relationship" "old friend" and "trust" cards to the full.

The Heping (Peace) Hotel had several advantages: since it was one of the very few hotels open to foreigners in Beijing, I used to meet old friends like Professor Roderick Macfarquhar, and John Tusa of the BBC when they came to stay in China. The hotel was also conveniently placed quite close to the main shopping area, Wangfujing, which had yet to be totally ruined by new buildings, and the old market and the old shops made for pleasant pottering. The Hotel was worth one rather than six stars, but the Chinese food and beer were adequate.

The CEO Visits China

The CEO of Racal was an interesting example of the self-made breed. He had no tertiary educational qualifications, had been a National Service Corporal in the Royal Air Force, and had made his way to the top of the radio company through hard work and imagination. I always found him stimulating company, and during his two visits to China with me he performed well as I introduced him to a stream of senior Chinese. These included Jiang Zemin, with whom he conducted an excellent dialogue developing the Stewart theme on long-term partnership. Of course this was very much mirrors and smoke stuff, since neither Chinese nor Racal underlings were ever going to have the authority to follow through on the sophisticated ideas of their bosses, but it was a delight to have this Chinese Charade performed so ably.

Before the CEO's first visit, I already had my CLD staff well-trained to make sure that the programme was run according to my standards, not those of amiable, but untrained junior Chinese officials, who had a tendency to hope that everything would be "alright on the day". Our careful staff work, of course, concealed from the CEO the general inefficiency of the Chinese system in which we were working, but ensured that he went away convinced of the potential of the Chinese market. We left nothing to chance; every step of the way, including hotels, and restaurants and sightseeing had been reconnoitred a week before the visit. The CEO, of course, found something to grumble about since I could do nothing to improve the standard of the Chinese hotels; and he moaned a bit about the tight schedules and full programme, but I knew full well that he would have grumbled a great deal more if I had not filled his days.

Lunch with our Ambassador was not, however, a great success. Our host patronised us, delivering what I presume was his standard *de haut en bas* lecture for visiting delegations, finishing with a warning that we should recognise how difficult it all was. This was not what I had brought the

CEO to hear. My CEO responded to pessimistic briefing with a bravura performance on Racal's strategic plans and progress; no damage was done, except perhaps to the Embassy's reputation.

This was not the only time when I found it impossible to move an Ambassador from the gramophone record style to a dialogue. Sadly, many senior diplomats are bad listeners. Lord Gore Booth had described this defect long before to Sally as the "déformation professionnelle" of diplomats. As we used to say in the radio trade, they were always on transmit, never on receive. The last time I visited the Embassy, the Ambassador of the day lectured an Admiral of the Fleet, whom I was bear-leading round China. Apart from the fact that the Ambassador concerned might have learnt something from us, it seemed extraordinary how little face he was prepared to give to someone who had once been the most senior officer in the British armed forces. My problem, perhaps, was that Racal was not *bien vu* in Whitehall, and the Embassy was more at ease with the big oil companies, banks, civil engineers, Rolls Royce and other conventional parts of British Industry than they were with the Racal buccaneers led by an ex-member of the Diplomatic Service into unorthodox areas. One of our Ambassadors told me that I was naïve to challenge the Embassy line that no serious business could be done unless by way of joint ventures. I contented myself with "We shall see". By the third year of my stewardship we had already identified about £40 million of business, not in joint ventures where results were uncertain and timescales long, but in contracts where we would be paid for our products and services immediately.

The CEO did not waver in his support for the China vision. I retained a considerable admiration for his energy, capacious memory, intelligence, and imagination, but he never learned to delegate, and this was a serious flaw for someone with an ever-expanding empire to run. It was ironic to reflect that Decca had fallen into Racal's lap largely because their CEO suffered from the same flaw.

The nearest we got to a disaster during CEO visits was when a Chinese Governor, apologising for his unavoidable absence at a dinner party, sent us a substitute who turned out to be a silly little man. He announced that "In China, the best man is the one who can drink the most" and proceeded to try to drink us under the table. This was particularly stupid of him since we were all about twice his size and experienced drinkers; and it was he who became drunk and finally troublesome, pinching the CEO's wife's bottom.

China Watching, Lecturing, and other Diversions

At one China Watchers' seminar, when a paper was being presented on China's future leaders, I suggested that we should remember that the names being discussed represented only a tiny part of the pool of potential leaders. There were a great many potential candidates whose names we did not see bandied about in the media, like my friend Jiang Zemin; Soviet-trained electronics engineer, factory manager, Vice Minister, Party Secretary and Mayor of Shanghai. When within a few months Jiang became Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party and soon Head of State, the China Watchers of Hong Kong remembered my intervention, and I gained considerable kudos for what had been no more than a reminder of the state of our ignorance. In fact, Jiang's rapid promotion happened only because of the Tiananmen débâcle, when he had prevented Shanghai sliding into Beijing-style chaos. I certainly had not predicted that he would be the next President of China but it was gratifying, as a one-man-band, to be seen as having a better crystal ball than the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Pentagon and all the others represented at the seminar. They had the troops, but I had the experience and the working contacts.

As part of my China watching I joined the China's Sunzi Association. Sunzi was a Chinese General whose short pithy work *The Art of War*, written about 350 BC, provides endless

opportunity for quotation and for extrapolation from military to civilian contexts. I met many interesting people involved in the Sunzi industry, and produced several academic papers relating Sunzi to modern business for Sally's shop. I participated with tongue firmly in cheek because one could as easily produce essays on management using the Bible or any other enduring world classic.

The highlight of Sunzi conferences in China was a meeting with Premier Li Peng, and a visit to the Chinese Military Academy, which had nearly ruined my career as a diplomat in 1960 when Sir Harold Caccia had insisted on prowling up the hill behind it. Mr Li Peng, known to the West as the butcher of Tiananmen, did not spend much time with us, but no doubt found it a pleasant change to meet foreigners who did not harangue him on human rights. The Military Academy gave a hilarious electronic presentation of a battle where the red forces advanced inexorably, surrounding and destroying each position of the blue forces, in a movement reminiscent of the game of *GO*, until the blue forces had been totally annihilated. When I suggested to the General in charge that war was not usually quite as simple as that, he replied, "But it's only a training video."

I soon started to share some of my thoughts with neophyte China hands at conferences, commercial and academic, on "doing business with China". My approach to the market was rather different from that of the lawyers, bankers, academics and businessmen who were the other lecturers at these seminars. I suppose I must have addressed at least twenty of such conferences over the years; discussing strategy, and market research. It all helped to put Racal on the map as a major China player. I enjoyed introducing the bemused tyros to China's Five-Year Plans. Other invitations came from the Royal Society for Asian Affairs, Chatham House, Wilton House and Ditchley Park. Always these seminars provided stimulating debate and an opportunity to meet old friends.

The height of my career as a conference speaker was with an invitation from one of the big UK law firms to join them at

a London Seminar. I warned them that I would be singing from a hymn sheet very different to theirs: preaching the gospel of partnership between buyer and seller and arguing that less emphasis should be placed on the words in the contract and more on the spirit of seeking common reciprocal benefits. To my surprise they swallowed my line and let me loose. On one bizarre occasion the Hong Kong Government sent me down to Taiwan to lecture the Taiwanese on penetrating the mainland market, and to my amusement three Taiwanese companies signed me up as their adviser.

Academia

In the academic world in Hong Kong, Sally's department made me an honorary lecturer, and I also lectured in Macau and Mainland universities. The oddest invitation of all was from the Communist Party School in Beijing to lecture them on modern management. I enjoyed the variety of audiences.

*There was a young man who said
"I think Business Ethics is pie in the sky
Profit's the name of the Business Game"
But his business soon started to die*

*This cocky young businessman
Said, "for ethics I don't give a damn"
But with no mutual trust
His business went bust
And he failed as a businessman*

I wrote these limericks to enliven a conference on Business Ethics: they reflect the brash views of many businessmen who failed to realise that honesty and trust, and reputation, were essential ingredients in any business – even crooked business – if it is going to survive in the long-term.

And, in the margins, I acted as a research assistant for Sally and Annie, who were under the lash to produce research publications, and were therefore grateful for my esoterica on the Chinese market, Chinese law, custom, and so on.

One of the central and most interesting aspects of my support for Sally and Annie, in their academic world, was work on Business Ethics. Of course, there were many businessmen who refused to entertain the idea that ethics had any relevance to business, but Sally managed to set up a centre for the study of the subject, to organise a useful International Conference, and to publish a book on the topic.

We also attended a conference in Beijing on the same subject, but all the Chinese contributions were about criminal activity, cheating, stealing, false accounting, bribery: ours was the only paper concerned with ethics.

The Tiananmen Tragedy

Very shortly after the Tiananmen disaster, I found myself back in the UK surrounded by worried Rascal men, troubled by the image of China now being projected on their TV screens and in their newspapers. As a one-man band I found it difficult to persuade them that the media hype and Foreign Office advisories should not be taken too seriously. I pointed out that this was not another Boxer Rebellion, with mobs in the streets baying for the blood of the foreign devils, nor another anarchical Cultural Revolution. This time it was a dispute between some of the Chinese people and their government, and we could expect our Chinese friends to do their damndest to ensure that we were allowed to carry out our contractual obligations.

But this was not the way the Chinese scene was portrayed in the media and seen in the City, and the CEO summoned me to his suite in the Ritz to ask "How much are we at risk?" The short answer was, of course, "Not at all!" since we had not invested in China, and there was no reason to suppose that the Chinese would invoke such concepts as "Acts of God" to

excuse them from carrying out their contractual obligations. But conscious of the fact that I was, as usual, swimming against the tide of media sensationalism, I replied "Since Racial companies are under no obligation to inform me of the details of their business in China, I suggest that you tell the Company Secretary to put your question to the operating companies." I never heard any more so I presume that the responses confirmed my view that we were not at risk in any serious sense, and on the ground the Chinese looked after our teams efficiently and effectively as we went about our business.

Those were exciting times. Racial expected me to provide them with the sort of service that Embassies are expected to provide. In a sense this was Hanoi all over again, but this time I was on much stronger ground. I had an excellent network of contacts, long years of experience as a China watcher, and my CLD staff to help. I think I got the assessment right. But it was understandably difficult for senior officers in Racial, with minimal knowledge of China, to accept my judgement and advice in the face of the media's continuing vitriolic attacks on China.

The Tiananmen tragedy was a watershed in Sino-Western relations. The euphoria that had followed the announcement of the "Open Door" Policy and the increasing interaction between Western business and Chinese Institution was suddenly challenged. The dragon had demonstrated that its priorities were totally different from the West. First, and above all else, stability; second, economic growth and democracy on the Westminster model, and human rights nowhere.

Soon after the tragedy, a well-known journalist asked me for my views on Tiananmen. Very reluctantly, knowing that I was (as usual) out of step, I remarked that: -

- (a) I knew of no government which would meekly accept a situation where students were allowed to bring their capital city to a halt for weeks on end;

- (b) The Chinese Communist Party had no experience of dealing with civil commotion directed against them, and there was no PLA drill book for handling such situations, still less a doctrine of the use of minimum force; *and*
- (c) It was thus inevitable that it would all end in tears.

I added for good measure that a battalion of disciplined Highlanders could have cleared the Square without serious casualties, except loss of face on the part of the demonstrators. My media friend was taken aback.

The policy changes in respect of export licences, which followed the Tiananmen affair, dogged our efforts for the rest of my time in China. Half our markets were denied to us since officials found it easier to revoke and refuse licences than to develop a sophisticated policy. Meanwhile I had to watch companies from less scrupulous nations taking over our business. Fortunately, since HMG was not fully informed on the ramifications of the electronic industry, we were able to continue to sell a lot of dual-use (military and civilian) equipment to Institutes that did not have obvious military links. A radio is a radio and a radar is a radar, and who knows who will use it? When I left Racial our Shanghai operation was still in full production, and it was none of my business if the main recipient of the factory's radars happened to be the PLA Navy.

China Topics

During my fifteen years of China Watching I wrote many pieces on China under the heading, *China Topics*, partly to remind my paymasters that I was alive and kicking and partly as a discipline and a mind clearer.

The following extracts give a flavour of the genre: -

December 1991

Introduction

For the geriatric leadership the three Ss, Stability, Stability, and Stability are the core of their policy. Western China Watchers have continued to expect, and in some cases perhaps to wish for, a dramatic backlash to the violent suppression of the demonstrators in 1989. So far foreign expectations have been disappointed and China continues to develop with little concession to Western democratic views.

Foreign media simplifications of the divisions between hard liners and reformists obscure the underlying reality that most Chinese prefer dull stability to heady chaos. On this topic hard and soft liners are at one, however much they may disagree on the best recipe for reasonable progress in the economy.

After Deng Xiaoping What? (August 1994)

Deng's 90th birthday has sparked off a mass of speculative writing on this subject. The consensus seems to be that the collective leadership will hold in the immediate aftermath of Deng's departure to join Marx & Mao: there is however no consensus on which individuals or combination of factions are likely to replace the "collective". The usual clichés have been trotted out about Jiang Zemin's lack of bottom, and Li Peng's unpopularity, but none of the pundits have had the confidence to nominate successors.

Conclusions: The Politburo will be able to carry on a relatively stable government when Deng, the paramount leader leaves the scene.

Chinese Bureaucracy

The country that invented Civil Service exams abolished them (1911) at the end of the Qing dynasty. The wheel has now been reinvented and exams are once more imposed on China's civil service aspirants.

Military Matters

a) Threat from the People's Liberation Army (PLA)

Foreign experts frequently draw attention to the vast numbers and vast budget of the PLA, and remark upon the threat which this armed force poses to its neighbours.

However, it seems reasonable to observe that, although the PLA continues to present a formidable Home Defence Force, there is no evidence that it is in a position to launch an offensive. The budget is spread thinly amongst several million PLA personnel and does not enable the PLA to buy and maintain the sort of sophisticated equipment required in modern offensive warfare. It seems unlikely that scarce foreign currency will be made available for military adventurers when the needs of the civilian economy are so great, and there is a growing Balance of Trade deficit.

The only concrete evidence of truculent behaviour, outside the generally acknowledged Borders of the People's Republic of China, is the Naval presence in the Spratly Islands.

b) Women Generals

The PLA has had 13 women generals since 1949, their careers being in scientific, technical, art, teaching and staff appointments. Three of them were the daughters (in one case adopted) of the old revolutionary marshals.

The question of what would happen after Deng's death dominated the political debate in the early 1990s. The following extracts from a paper written in 1997 give some flavour of the debate.

Deng is on public record with: -

"Our first priority is the succession."

"Further efforts should be made to correct over concentration of power which is liable to give rise to arbitrary rule by the individual."

"We cannot stick to the old concept of the staircase (length of service); cadres must be...younger, better educated and more competent professionally." "I was 23 when, in 1927, I was already Party Secretary."

I was under no illusions about the size of my readership but it is satisfactory over a decade later to note that: -

- (a) China has not collapsed despite its intransigent stand on democracy and human rights;
- (b) China has not launched any major military action outside its Borders; and
- (c) My old friend Mr Jiang remains Head of State.

Somehow the much-vilified leadership of this country of one billion inhabitants in a country the size of the US has managed to find a working formula.

Freelance 1992 - 1997

A cunning rabbit has many burrows.

So goes the Chinese proverb and, without intending to, I finished up at the peak of my general consultancy career, with three offices in Hong Kong and two in Beijing.

The change of relationship with Racal Group did not change my relationship with the Racal men on the ground, but I was now free to pursue other Chinese business.

I had several new strings to my bow. The first was a Diamond Merchant in the City. To Sally's disgust they were interested in rough: the stuff that looks like unattractive grey, coarse sand, not in cut diamonds. This was a fascinating excursion into the world of De Beers, Antwerp and so on. My role was to give them a feeling of security that they had someone on the ground whom they could trust if anything went wrong. They were amusing companions; my main contribution was to find them an excellent Shanghai man, both trustworthy and entrepreneurial, to guide them and their friends around China.

The second was a management consultancy that wanted to set out its stall as a consultancy for business with China. This opened many new fields, but despite our expertise and our vigorous researches into sales and marketing of chlorine and rat bait in China and work on the tobacco market, the consultancy could not persuade enough clients to pay retainers, so that job did not last. But it gave me an excellent opportunity to get to know the infamous Foreign Service Bureau. I cherish the paper which appoints me as an adviser to the Bureau that used to be my bete noir in diplomatic days. My new friends were extremely helpful when we were hiring staff and setting up offices in Beijing for Racal. I particularly enjoyed a champagne party (Chinese champagne) on the way to the airport one day to celebrate a deal which had taken days, rather than the usual months. The Bureau did not, however, take my advice on how to make themselves more popular and

competitive, "Charge less!" The main benefit which remains from that association, was a close friendship with John Masterson, a fellow consultant with many interests and tastes in common.

The most substantial of my new clients was an organisation known as Merchants. The Chairman invited me to work for him, on the strength of a short acquaintanceship, and we enjoyed each other's company, but after six months I was still uncertain what he wanted me to do. He was not certain either, but since he was looking for investment I had *carte blanche* to go round China knocking on the doors of enterprises looking for investment, or dreaming up schemes which might make money. The *least* exotic was an attempt to persuade the Tianjin authorities to invest in plant to clean up their filthy coal. The *most* exotic was a joint venture with MOFERT (Ministry of Trade) to set up a consultancy. Somewhere in the middle lay a scheme to improve the technology of a factory that made three-wheeled cars, and a joint venture in remanufacturing heavy-duty engines.

Having ceased to be on Racal's payroll I began to alter my programme, usually spending mornings in the university library or at home attempting to write a book, and visiting the office downtown after lunch. It was a painless way of preparing for retirement.

My local Racal friends were kind enough to let me keep my downtown office and sometimes they sent me off to investigate something, somewhere in East Asia, but these missions, though interesting, were doomed to irrelevance. Now Sir Ernest's main priority was to prove to the Stock Market that the City had seriously underestimated the value of the assets in the Group. He did indeed prove, by selling off the jewels in our crown, that the sum of the parts was much greater than the City's contemptuous valuation of the whole. The City's estimate was out by about fifty per cent. But the consequence was that Racal was once again a minnow. Such concepts as CLD and China Attack had no further meaning. General "ad hoc" was now truly in command. Maximum sales

and sales forecasts were the only thing that mattered. The City, and prospective buyers accepted Sir Ernest's version of a future when dismal performers would be "turned round", and make a handsome profit. He won hands down; but the buyers were singularly ill informed about the China market, and words like strategic and partnership were alien to them, so for all practical purposes Racal might as well never have been in the China market.

I still travelled frequently to China, keeping an eye on the progress of our offices in Beijing and Shanghai and keeping up my Chinese contacts. Outside the electronic field the most rewarding was with the Ministry of Foreign Trade. During the final years I forged a close relationship with the consultancy arm of the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Li Yong the clever and personable young Director and I struck up a close friendship in the course of discussions on behalf of the Merchant Group. We spent a great deal of time plotting a Merchant presence in Beijing, based on the CLD shoeing approach of a room in Li Yong's splendid old building in the compound of the former Belgian Embassy. We had pipe dreams for expanding the consultancy role, combining all our knowledge and contacts to provide a unique inside track approach for foreign companies trying to enter the China market. We never got there, partly because Li Yong was not really interested in moving from his successful little team to a much larger team, which would have needed management and delegation, and partly because my friend the Chairman of Merchants was not really interested in the long-term.

From my point of view this was a wonderful relationship: for all practical purposes I was part of Li Yong's outfit, and therefore in a sense, of the Ministry of Foreign Trade. We had a very free exchange of information and ideas and helped each other in many ways. His was the first office I called on whenever I went to Beijing and many a satisfactory morning in the office was followed by an excellent lunch in the small restaurant round the back of the compound, where a lot of beer and snake bile wine accompanied the food and the

conversation. Our friendship was cemented by joint operations such as a two-week series of China business clinics that we organised in the UK for Merchants' clients. One Sunday morning I took him onto a disused airfield and taught him to drive, using the techniques we used in my Anti-Tank days, and to my great delight he passed his driving test as soon as he returned to Beijing.

We did not always agree of course and on one occasion he complained that I had "manipulated" them. But usually we were in agreement on methodology and policy. Sadly there was no one to pass this relationship on to.

My readers may wince at my frequent use of words such as trust and mutual benefit, but I enjoyed many instances of Chinese showing trust that I would not abuse their confidence. The most extraordinary, perhaps, was an occasion when I was complaining to a Chinese friend that whereas I had to rely on published documents, he had access to NEI BU, the "internal documents", not available to the public. My friend said, "Nae bother!" or words to that effect, and pulled a copy of the relevant NEI BU from his drawer and photocopied it for me.

My difficulties were seldom with my Chinese "partners", with whom I usually managed to establish a good rapport. My problems were with the company cultures of my Western clients who found difficulty in remembering that long-term reliability and trust were as important as technical wizardry

One of the joys of the China job was the opportunity to take friends and family members to China with me; Rory was my most frequent companion. One of our most memorable visits was to Xinjiang Province when I was amused to hear Rory correcting a Chinese tourist guide. The guide told us that the statues we were looking at had been defaced by Western explorers: Rory pointed out that the destruction had been at the hands of Chinese Muslim troops, following their religious objection to the representation of human beings in art.

The whole family, except Rory, came to my farewell dinner in Beijing, which I held in the only princely house that had been turned into a hotel and restaurant. It was a delight to

enjoy old-style courtyards and gardens instead of the glitz of the new hotels. During Mao's time the hotel had been the mansion of the Head of Intelligence: a sinister fellow called Kang Sheng, who had distinguished himself during the Cultural Revolution by amassing a wonderful collection of porcelain removed from the houses of his victims.

A most entertaining sideshow was provided by Scottish and Newcastle whose International Marketing director, Richard Keith, became a very good friend. This was the easiest of all my freelance work since the canny Scots were attacking the market with imagination properly mixed with caution. I much enjoyed being associated with S&N in and out of China. Sadly, thoughts about a Tartan Pub in Shanghai never got past the ideas stage.

The Final Racial Days

During the final months in Hong Kong, I gave up much pretence that I was working, but fitted in one last visit to China to say farewell to my old friends, and to encourage the rump of Racial to keep their chins up under new, brash, US management. These little outposts of Racial Marine and Datacomms at the other end of the world were of no interest to the new managements. Within a year all had gone, except for Frank Bleackley's empire. The rump of Racial CLD was now commanded by an ex-Chinese Signal's Brigadier, not an ex-Black Watch Captain; it did not long survive my departure.

All of the CLD staff prospered; Teddy went to the UK, working for Avionics; Sam whom I helped to acquire an MBA, worked for Marine in Hong Kong, and Eddie became responsible for Radio in the China Region.

As a consultant I continued to use the Racial title Director of Operations (China). So as far as the Chinese were concerned nothing had changed. Although I lost my office, secretary, and car, and went in effect on to half pay, these changes did not significantly affect my "rice bowl" since several other companies retained me as a consultant.

I reflected that the Stewart family had been subsidising Racal throughout my fifteen years; we did not cost them anything like a normal expatriate package because I was a pensioner and Sally's university picked up the tab for flat and education, and also because I spent much less than my colleagues on hotels and travel. But since in effect Racal were paying me to pursue my hobby, I was content to give them Rolls Royce service at Model T cost. My only regret was that I failed to persuade the accountants to pay my Chinese staff more generously.

It was astonishingly lucky for me that by 1997, sixteen years after I had joined them, Racal still existed as a Group. I would have found it impossible to continue China Watching on the same scale, and to widen my customer base, if the Racal rug had been pulled out from under my feet. Racal gave me unrivalled access to the Chinese electronic world, as well as paying for my travels; and however disappointing it might be to find the group selling off its assets to people who threw away every advantage I had won, this did not detract from the tremendous pleasure I had experienced pursuing my Chinese hobbies.

By 1998 the Group had shrunk back to the company I had first known in the 1970s. Like the proverbial Chinese "snake which swallowed an elephant", it had digestive problems, (actually Racal had swallowed three pachyderms: Decca, Chubb and Datacomms) but when it spewed them out again and sold them off, the Racal shareholders made handsome profits.

But now the rump of Racal was certainly too small to justify a CLD style marketing arm. It was indeed time for me to go, and there was no point in crying over the waste of opportunities. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and I had had a ball.

Family and Hong Kong Affairs

In 1982 having persuaded Racal to give me a housing allowance, I had bought a traditional two-storied Chinese village house on Lamma Island. But a lot of work was needed to convert it to meet our needs. I was rather proud of the design that gave us three small bedrooms and bathrooms, a small dining room and a relatively large sitting room upstairs lined with concealed wardrobes for Sally's clothes. Instead of the poky little windows we had large glass sliding doors, leading to patio and verandah. To maximise space we put in a spiral stair.

The little house had many advantages over the sort of flat that Racal would have been prepared to pay for in Central. There was a regular ferry and the jetty was only five minutes from our house. But my labour force needed a touch of the whip, so after a few weeks of luxury staying with an old friend in Hong Kong, I moved into a room on the island to put pressure on the carpenters before Sally and Fiona arrived.

The problems of island living were mundane. It was fine to be there for the weekend, but if we had a late party in Hong Kong, we had to hire a motor sampan from Aberdeen to take us home. This could be a romantic journey, but also a very rough one. Lamma had many pleasant walks and beauty spots but unfortunately the local inhabitants were phenomenally untidy except in their meticulously kept market gardens, and the rubbish spoilt much of the pleasure of walks to and from the pier.

Shortly after our arrival in Hong Kong, Annie came to stay. Sadly she and Andrew had separated. We took over the little flat next door for her and had the great pleasure of having her and young Gordon living next door for some months. The little flat also came in handy when Sally's cousin, Charlie Green, came to stay during his gap year.

The biggest nuisance on Lamma was the occasional weekend invasion of teenagers camping in the block of flats next door. They liked to play their pop music at the maximum

volume and my polite requests for moderation only succeeded for short periods of time, before some buffoon turned the volume up again. I eventually retaliated by putting loudspeakers on the verandah and blasting the sound of the pipes and drums straight at them. Their astonishment was followed by a lasting truce.

The decision to buy a house on Lamma was, on balance, a sensible one, but the tyranny of the ferry schedule became a bore for Sally once she became fully operational in the university. However, it was a far healthier environment than traffic-congested, polluted Hong Kong. Fiona and I enjoyed our country walks and the little village shops and stalls were a lot more fun than the plate-glass monsters of central Hong Kong.

Our domestic logistics became much easier when we moved out of our island house into university apartments in Pokfulam. Sally was no longer bound to the schedule of the early morning ferry, and logistics were hugely simplified. Although ferry commuting was convenient for me, since by chance my office was just across the road from the Jetty, it was not so easy for Sally and Fiona.

I am not sure how else we could have played the housing game, because Racal Group would not for a second have considered paying the extortionate rents which were by now the norm for a decent sized flat in central Hong Kong, and I certainly had no intention of commuting by car from a house in the New Territories. At least on Lamma we had a house and a garden, and a seat on a ferryboat twice a day was a lot more fun than driving in Hong Kong's congested traffic.

While I was travelling to and fro in China, Sally was consolidating her position in the university and Rory was developing his talents at the Dragon School in Oxford, where he seemed very content. But he was also very happy to come home in the holidays.

Soon after we moved to Pokfulam, Heather came to roost; having separated from her husband. So now I had both my grown up daughters round the corner. It was a great joy to

have both of them nearby.

During these days Heather remarried. Her husband, Richard Stanley Baker, was an academic expert on Oriental, particularly Japanese, fine arts. Annie met Piers Gray, an academic and playwright in the English Department. So the Stewart sept was well represented in the university.

Annie pulled off a great success in the shape of a book on Hong Kong Business Law. She agonised greatly during the gestation period over its popular flavour, and I had to remind her every Sunday, when we met at the swimming pool, that anyone can produce a dense legal text book for fellow practitioners; it is much more difficult to produce something which is intelligible to the lay reader. Fortunately she persevered and the book, now in its 5th edition, is a standard item on the bookshelves of Hong Kong lawyers, as well as students of law and laymen. Heather never found a serious niche, or full use for her talents as a designer. She helped us greatly over Broich's renovation, and has done many useful jobs for family and friends. She acquired a teaching qualification and a degree in museum administration along the line, but not a career.

From Rory's Housemaster at Eton

"I have just received the splendid news of Rory's exam performance. He came 7th out of 250."

This was a lot better than I ever achieved. My reports seldom advanced beyond "Tries hard." Then my teachers had to write references, whereupon I became a paragon of all the virtues.

Rory moved effortlessly through prep school to Eton, and seemed to me to be making the most of it, and I continued to have the privilege of seeing him every term, as well as every holiday. Sally and I both derived colossal pleasure from his reappearances at holiday time, still the same loving son, however much sophistication surrounded his school and, later, Oxford days. Every Christmas we went to Megève but Rory

was by now away out of our class as far as skiing was concerned; we only met at mealtimes. During his gap year he was commissioned into the Black Watch, which gave me great pleasure, and astonished our academic friends who could not see the point of this budding academic spending time in the Army.

During our first year, a vicious typhoon struck Hong Kong. We all retreated into our little house and battened down the hatches. The first day it was an amusing experience; an unplanned holiday when we stayed in listening to the howling gale and pelting rain, and reading books. When on day two the typhoon continued to circle round we began to wonder whether our newly installed metal shutters would last the course. The third day the storm abated, and Rory and I set off on a cautious reconnaissance. All the footpaths (there were no cars on Lamma) were covered with branches and fallen trees.

There was another bad typhoon during our Lamma days, but this time we were all still in Central when the balloon went up. Fiona and I missed the ferry: I phoned the French Consul General, explained our plight and we were invited to stay overnight. By now the wind and the rain were sweeping along the streets, and as Fiona and I staggered along we found lengthy queues at every taxi rank. I decided that my duty to Fiona overrode my civic conscience, and so I stood at the corner of a street flourishing a large bank note, and thus jumped the queues. The top of the Peak was so shrouded in cloud that it was almost impossible to see the road. We succeeded by some miracle in finding the French Residence.

The next morning we woke to find that the Peak was still covered in cloud, so when I telephoned Sally I remarked that it looked as if we should not be meeting before I left for London that night. She replied "Why?" In Lamma, five miles away it was brilliant sunshine.

During our last years in Hong Kong Josefina and Raul joined us from the Philippines and we formed a happy team in the university flat. They immediately understood and helped immensely with Fiona, whose busy programme of out-of-

school activities required a complex support system. They contributed tremendously to her development, which culminated in a position as Teacher's Assistant in the Kindergarten of our local Primary School. Both have survived our Scottish winters, uncomplaining and contributing enthusiastically in the development of Broich.

By the mid-80s I had been appointed as an Honorary Lecturer in the university, so I too had dining, as well as library rights. It was a happy world indeed; academia in Pokfulam, if I felt like it, or the Hong Kong Club if not, with an office or two downtown and frequent journeys to China or the UK. I reflected with amusement on my Oxford tutors who had only one degree and never published, as far as I know, in any research journals. They would not have found a place in Hong Kong University.

Our time in Hong Kong spanned three Governors. Teddy Youde was there when we arrived, but did not invite us into his circle. When Teddy died of a heart attack during a visit to Beijing, David Wilson, an old friend, got the job to our delight, and we were back on the Government House circuit, enjoying the company from time-to-time of David and Natasha. It was highly satisfactory to have Murray's former Political Adviser, ex-Glenalmond, a skilled piper, ex-Black Watch and a Sinologue of note, in Government House. We were sorry to see him replaced by a politician, with no knowledge of China, or Hong Kong, but a great conceit of himself, and a certainty that only he knew the answers. It became fashionable to deride the Sinologues as people who were prone to see everything only through China's eyes. David's good work was dismissed. Whatever else Patten did he scored a major first by placing himself in a position where he was denied access to the leaders of China, the future paramount power.

When David Wilson left we still had one old friend in the Establishment, in the shape of Wang Gungwu, whom Sally and I had both known in our Malayan days. To our delight he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Hong Kong University. Of

course, as with David Wilson, we did not see very much of him but when we did meet it was a great pleasure. My 70th Birthday Party was on David's launch, there was a piper on deck and Gungwu was one of the guests, a privilege indeed.

I always treated Gungwu as my tutor, and saved up thorny questions on Chinese history and philosophy to toss to him when we met. A delightful man with all the qualities of a great academic historian and a Chinese gentleman, and as I write, we are anticipating, with great pleasure, his arrival in Broich to stay the weekend.

In Autumn 1997 when Sally too had given up full-time work, we set off on an odyssey round Asia, starting with a journey to India to celebrate Fiona's twenty-first birthday, and wending our way via Sri Lanka to Jakarta. We returned in January 1998 to live in Annie's vacant flat, while we closed down our affairs in Hong Kong.

With Sally's encouragement and the help of some of her Chinese students, I started to learn something about using a computer. I had been remiss in not exploiting the opportunity to learn while still in Rascal. I now joined the world of e-mail and enjoyed daily, early morning sessions in Annie's study, as the dawn broke over the Lamma Channel. But I soon learnt that I was the only member of the family who was a regular e-mailer. My children were very sporadic correspondents.

The Indian odyssey was great fun; we visited my mother's old stamping ground in Kalimpong and Darjeeling, and stayed in old clubs wherever we went. In Calcutta we stayed in the Tollygunge Club rather longer than we had intended because the clapped-out car, provided by our travel agent to take us to the hill station, broke down completely after about thirty miles. Since I can only speak a smattering of Hindi, and the village spoke Bengali, it was a harrowing task in the middle of a hot, dirty, decrepit village trying to find substitute transport. Sally and Fiona were very patient. So we returned to the Club and its comforts, golf, swimming pool, horses. Fiona loved it.

On the Indian leg of the trip Rory, that redoubtable traveller, managed to join us in Bangalore, so we had a party

of four in our minibus. When Rory and Fiona set off home, Sally and I continued our lotus eating in a delightful little hotel on the beach in Sri Lanka, where, since we were the only guests it was like having our own house, but without any administrative house responsibility. Our journey ended in Jakarta where we thoroughly enjoyed meeting all Rory's amazing coterie of friends; film stars, politicians, diplomats, journalists, and the comfort of his smooth-running house.

And so farewell Asia and settle down in Broich, after almost sixty-years of working and living outside Scotland. It would be untrue to say that I do not miss the old life sometimes, particularly the chance to debate affairs, and exchange views with colleagues and friends. But Perthshire is a delight. Broich is lovely, and the natives are friendly.

To crown our happiness, Fiona has settled into society as stable lass at the Crieff Hydro Hotel, student at Perth College and Sunday School teacher, and last, but by no means least, Josefina and Raul came home with us, so we are not struggling to keep the place going by ourselves. Sally has managed with her usual skill to find a part-time job with Edinburgh University. I have a couthie, lurcher dog that follows me everywhere like a shadow. God has been very good to us.

PART VII OUTSIDE CHINA

Cambodia

The Merchant connection led to a journey to Cambodia. This trip grew from a sketch I made on the back of a tablemat about a possible partnership between a Chinese Bank, Merchants, and Racal, to provide communications to Sihanoukville. In the end neither my Chairman nor the banker turned up so I had ten days by myself in Cambodia: a country which has been described as lying along a cultural fault line, squeezed between Thailand and Vietnam. It contains Buddhists, Muslims, Chinese, hill tribes, minorities; the remains of the once great Empire of Champa.

This was a memorable excursion. I cycled around Angkor at dawn, attended a wedding feast, spent the evenings with the local Chinese Mafia who frequently forgot when in full flood that their foreign guest understood Chinese, and travelled through the "Bad Lands" by taxi when the Mafia got cold feet about the road to Sihanoukville and said they could not get an armoured car.

I was reminded of the charm of the Cambodians and of the horrors of Pol Pot whose regime killed 1 million out of a population of 7 million, making Hitler's final solution for the Jews look relatively mild.

My first report contained the following annex: -

A DAY IN THE CAMBODIAN NEWSPAPERS - MAY 1994

1 GOVERNMENT OFFICER SAYS DECAPITATION IS WIDE SPREAD

An officer told the Press that he had beheaded three THAIS last month "In order to show that we were angry with them" he said, "We took a long time to kill them using an old rusty hacksaw."

2 WHY DIE FOR THE GOVERNMENT?

Prince Chakrapong, a leader of the Cambodian People's Party, and severe critic of the FUNCINPEC majority, remarked to reporters that if he were asked to join the Army, he would say, "Please explain to me for what purpose I am going to die?"

3 FOUR POLICEMEN MURDERED

The disembowelled bodies of four FUNCINPEC policemen were found recently; it is suspected that this was a politically motivated atrocity.

4 FUNCINPEC POLITICIAN KILLED

Ang Kuoy was shot dead by a gang, carrying AK 47s and hand grenades, on April 19. The gang surrounded his house: his nephew, who retaliated with an AK47 and grenades, was killed in the fire fight.

5 MARINE OFFICER CRITICISES HIS COMMANDERS

A Marine Officer alleged to reporters that having been wounded in battle at Pailin, he had to walk the 25kms back to Battembang because all transport had been commandeered by senior officers, to carry their valuables out of the battle zone. The officer said, "All our officers are corrupt." He confessed to having assisted in the execution of his commanding officer, and remarked that there were so many colonels in the army that it would take five days to kill them all.

My report remarked: -

It is difficult to take seriously the politics of a country that calls its main Political Party FUNCINPEC, but the activities of the Khmer Rouge and others were brutal, and the fury of junior officers had the ring of truth. I observed the Government Forces in action: they were pathetic.

The following Cambodian acronyms and proper names are culled from my glossary. It was a new language indeed.

1 *FUNCINPEC The Prince's loose coalition of Royal, Communist (United Front for a Peaceful and other parties: main component of the Coalition Cooperative Neutral Cambodia) Government 1994*

2 *GRUNK The Prince's Party (Royal Government of United Khmers)*

Kuala Lumpur

I returned once to Kuala Lumpur and to Singapore wearing the hat of an investigator, with a brief to discover what I could about Russian money laundering by way of buying assets in these two territories. I was amused to be carrying a formal letter from the Russian Government that identified me "To Whom it May Concern" as their accredited investigator, and even more amused by the expressions on the faces of the Russian Ambassadors when I presented my credentials.

Vietnam

Frank Bleackley, MD of Chubb Hong Kong, asked me to visit Vietnam with a British Chamber Mission. This turned out to be more than an exercise in nostalgia. The organisers were appalled by my insistence that I wanted to meet the Chiefs of the Fire Brigade, since they were part of the Public Security Ministry. I got my way, and had excellent discussions with three Colonels in uniform.

The changes in Hanoi were extreme: it was virtually impossible to move because of the motorcycles. The Vietnamese Politburo seemed to be a lot less effective at running a peacetime economy than they had been at running a war: they seemed unwilling to use Chinese experience and determined to reinvent the wheel.

Russia

By no stretch of the imagination could I justify a marketing reconnaissance to Russia, but I wanted another look at the Bear and to see what glasnost and perestroika had achieved, so I spent two weeks on holiday in Moscow and Leningrad. I had an excellent time, once I had broken away from the ghastly Intourist officials whose vocabulary seemed to extend no farther than "NYET" in answer to all my requests. Life was transformed when I recruited an English-speaking student to be my dragoman; blackmarkets opened up for all tickets and for excellent food in private clubs. But I was appalled by the economic conditions and miserable appearances of the shops. Deng's reforms had done a lot more for China than Gorbachev's had for Russia.

Korea

One of my missions took me to South Korea where I found that our Korean agents were terrified of Korean CIA, and totally refused to fight stupid decisions about commercial cypher systems. I was looking forward to the fight, but in view of the agents' attitude, there was nothing more to be done. Anyway, Sally got some eel skin presents, and I had been able to round off my experience in East Asia with a trip to Korea, the only one of the four "Little Dragons" that I had never been to.

Taiwan

Perhaps the oddest assignment was an attempt to help Rascal into the world of Taiwan. Here we had an extreme example of "right hand and left hand" in operation. HMG having, post Tiananmen, ordered us not to sell anything with military flavour to the PRC, I tried to interest the Taiwanese. Their interest was easily enough aroused, and I had several happy sessions with ex-Generals, in the "Mess", but my happiest memory is of a meeting in a Taiwanese Radio Factory where I persuaded the MD to show me his files with the "requirements" of his Ministry of Defence. But Whitehall was not happy with this initiative.

EPILOGUE

Parturient Montes Nascetur Ridiculus mus

Horace put it well

*"The mountain gave birth
to a ridiculous mouse."*

This mouse has been a very long time in parturition. It would certainly not have been born without Annie's nagging in Hong Kong, and it would never have been finished if Heather Hooker had not lent her enthusiastic support. The family as a whole has been immensely tolerant throughout the long gestation period. For my part, I have enjoyed the exercise. I hope my readers may find something to interest them in this miscellany.

*An eighty years' innings: no bad!
Retired now in Broich I'm not sad
There's plenty to do
Though no one pays you
And I like being no more Nomad*

Chronology

YEAR	HISTORICAL EVENT
1918	End of World War I
1922	
1926	General Strike
1929	
1931	Japan annexes Manchuria
1933	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
1935	Italy invades Abyssinia Spanish Civil War Hitler denounces Versailles Treaty
1937	Japan invades and occupies China
1938	Hitler annexes Austria Hitler annexes Sudetenland Hitler annexes Czechoslovakia
1939	Hitler invades Poland Britain and France declare war on Germany
1940	
1941	Japanese War starts
1942	
1944	Allies invade Normandy
1945	Germany surrenders Japan surrenders
1946	French bombard Haiphong (beginning of Vietnam War) Dutch fighting Indonesian Nationalists
1947	
1948	(June 18 th) Declaration of Malayan Emergency Chinese Civil War reaching its climax
1949	(October 1 st) Establishment of People's Republic of China Land Reform in China
1950	Korean War
1951	Assassination of Sir H Gurney
1952	Sir Gerald Templer takes over as H.C. and Director of Operations, Malaya
1954	Geneva Agreement to partition Vietnam (17 th Parallel) Chinese struggle campaigns increasing Malaya becomes Independent

Chronology

CURRICULUM VITAE	YEAR
	1918
Born in Edinburgh	1922
	1926
Dalhousie Castle School	1929
	1931
	1933
Glenalmond College	1935
	1937
	1938
	1939
Oxford University	1940
Commissioned 2/Lt.	1941
Battle School	1942
Anti-Tank Platoon	
Wounded and Evacuated	1944
Posted to Northern Ireland	
Staff Captain, Malaya	1945
	1946
Cadet, Malayan Civil Service	
D.O. Bukit Mertajam	
Secretary to Resident Commissioner, Johore	
Assistant Secretary Chinese Affairs, Singapore	
Language Student, Macau	1947
Complete Chinese Studies	1948
	1949
Assistant SCA, Singapore	
Home Leave	
2 nd Devonshire Course	
Assistant Commissioner for Labour, Selangor	1950
ASCA Federation	1951
SCA, Malacca	1952
	1954
Home Leave	
SCA, Penang	
Resign from MCS	

Chronology

YEAR	HISTORICAL EVENT
1957	China's campaigns against bourgeoisie and intellectuals intensify
1958	Agricultural disaster in China
1960	Sino/Soviet split
1961	
1962	Sino/Indian War Cuban missile crisis Creation of Malaysia Brunei revolt
1963	Indonesia guerrilla attacks on Malaysia
1964	
1965	China engulfed in Cultural Revolution First USA bombing of North Vietnam Singapore secedes from Malaysia Indonesia ceases Konfrontasi
1967	Vietnam War intensifying
1968	Tet Offensive
1969	Cold War at its height
1971	Cultural Revolution ends USA/China rapprochement
1972	
1973	Communists seize Saigon Death of Chairman Mao
1977	Den Xiaoping becomes Paramount Leader of China
1978	China begins to "Open Up" to the world
1979	Malaysian Bumiputra Policies and Malaysianisation of Estates beginning
1982	China seeking foreign investment and technical cooperation
1989	Tiananmen tragedy
1991	Collapse of Soviet Union
1993	
1998	

Chronology

CURRICULUM VITAE	YEAR
Join FCO	1957
2nd Secretary, Rangoon	1958
1st Secretary, Beijing	1960
Consul General, Shanghai	1961
Visit Mongolia	1962
Home Leave	
1st Secretary, Philippines	1963
FCO	1964
Councillor, Kuala Lumpur	1965
Consul General, Hanoi	1967
	1968
Cabinet Office	1969
	1971
Hong Kong	1972
FCO	1973
	1977
Resign from FCO	1978
Director RGA, Malaysia	1979
Resign from RGA	1982
Director of Operations (China) Racial Group, based in Hong Kong	
	1989
	1991
Resign from Racial and become Freelance Consultant on Chinese Affairs	1993
Return to Scotland	1998



Military Days