

Francis H. Russell Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 11/1/1972
Administrative Information

Creator: Francis H. Russell

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Biographical Note

Francis H. Russell (1904-1989) was the Ambassador to Ghana from 1960 to 1962 and the Ambassador to Tunisia from 1962 to 1969. This interview focuses on the relations between Tunisia and the United States, the internal operations of the American embassy in Tunisia, and the key figures in the Tunisian government, among other topics.

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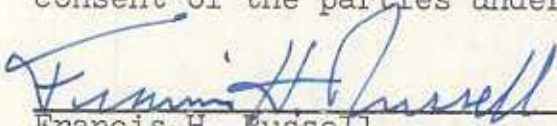
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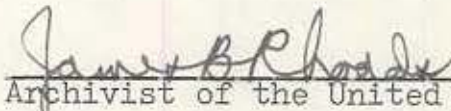
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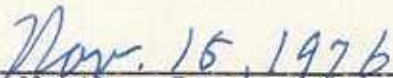
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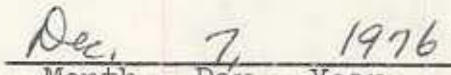
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Francis H. Russell


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Francis H. Russell– JFK #1
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Oral History Interview

with

FRANCIS H. RUSSELL

November 1, 1972
Medford, Massachusetts

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Let me begin, Mr. Ambassador, by asking you if you can recall the circumstances of your appointment as ambassador to Tunisia. You were ambassador to Ghana...

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: ...and became ambassador to Tunisia in the late summer of 1962.

RUSSELL: Yes. What happened was that I came down with cancer of the colon when I was in Ghana and came home for an operation, and the expiration of my recuperation from the operation would about coincide with the end of the normal two-year tour of duty, and so I submitted my resignation just as I entered the hospital. I came from Accra directly to the hospital -- they wanted to operate very rapidly -- so I submitted my resignation at the time I entered the hospital and then went up to a place in Maine for a month or two. While I was up there I was told by telephone that I would be going to Tunisia.

MOSS: It just came out of the blue?

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: You had no advance preparation for it or anything?

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RUSSELL: Well, I did have a period in which to brush up on my French and become briefed.

MOSS: So you got the notice and you went back down to Washington. Now, what did the briefing process consist of? Reading the old cables, talking to people in the African bureau [Bureau of Africa Affairs] and that sort of thing?

RUSSELL: Yes, pretty standard. You go through the cables of the last six months and the desk officer picks out the other dispatches or material that would help to fill you in. But I would like to pay tribute to William Witman who was director of the Office of North African Affairs.

MOSS: Why don't you talk about him just a little bit since we're on the subject.

RUSSELL: Alright. He took me, as I think he did other men who were appointed ambassadors to his countries, under his wing just like a mother hen. He was extremely good at giving a feel of the atmosphere of the country you were going to. He shepherded you around and made sure you touched all the appropriate bases. In my case, and I'm sure it was true of the others, he seemed to be simply delighted that you were going out to this country. He thought I had one of the best posts that the foreign service afforded. Tunisia was a wonderful country; it had a very enlightened leadership. It was a very heartwarming experience. Thereafter, the relationship between the embassy and the office was just as though we were in adjoining rooms.

MOSS: Do you recall any special concerns that the briefings communicated to you? The Bizerte thing was just beginning to end. What things were pending that you were asked to watch out for?

RUSSELL: Well, our relationship with Tunisia was so much a thing to watch out for as it was something to nurture. Bourguiba [Habib Bourguiba] was the type of national leader the United States would like to see many more of. So it was a question of how you make sure that the relationship remains a good and close one, and that we convey to the Tunisians that they are appreciated.

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MOSS: Okay. The Bizerte thing is just getting over, and the question of France and Algeria is now settled. What did you see in the department as lingering on, in

the problem between North Africa and Metropolitan France as reflected in the relationship between the African bureau in State and the European bureau [Office of Western European Affairs] in State. A lot of people say there was a conflict in State itself.

RUSSELL: Well, the conflict arose from this, the Bizerte episode galled De Gaulle [Charles A. De Gaulle] terribly. De Gaulle expected the heads of State of the former African colonies to bow and scrape actually if they were in his presence and figuratively if they weren't. He had a sense of dignity. He knew that he was an asset to the free world. De Gaulle's policy was one of trying to show what happens to a man like Bourguiba who stands up to the head of the French state. He was always trying to put Tunisia's head under water, and the United States was trying to keep its head above water. That meant that French policies and American policies were opposed during that period.

I made it plain when I was in Tunisia, both to the French ambassador and to anyone else who was interested, that the United States had no ambition to take over the French role in Tunisia. We did feel that it was important to NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the free world that Tunisia prosper and that it continue to be the kind of state it was, with the kind of leadership it had. So we were not competitors of the French in the sense of competing for a primary role. We were at odds with the French over what the policies of our two countries toward Bourguiba should be.

MOSS: Let me ask you to come at it from the other point of view that I was asking about. We've had a number of people tell us that the African bureau was a new one in the State Department, and that the people in the European bureau had come to feel a proprietary interest in the former North African colonial states, and that there was a tension between the new bureau and the old that caused policy problems and caused problems for ambassadors. Did any of this come to you?

RUSSELL: I must say I was never aware of that.

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MOSS: You weren't.

RUSSELL: The European bureaus, of course, looked at things from the point of view of their constituent countries, and they were interested, as they had to be and should be, in American attitudes and policies and objectives in the African countries there were clashes. But as far as I observed that was the nature of the tension.

MOSS: It was based on the actual issues, not on an old bureau versus an upstart new crowd. Okay. Did you have a farewell call on President Kennedy? I didn't find the evidence for that although they tried to set it up.

RUSSELL: Yes. I forget whether he was out of the city or what. He announced my appointment when he was on a yachting trip off the coast of Maine.

MOSS: So you didn't have any last words with him.

RUSSELL: No.

MOSS: What about from some of the top people in State? Did you have any particular words from say, Rusk [Dean Rusk], or Alexis Johnson or from Mennen Williams or Wayne Fredericks, some of those people?

RUSSELL: I had many talks with Mennen Williams and Wayne Fredericks. I had come to know them well when I was in Ghana. I had known Dean Rusk since wartime days and I saw him before I left. He had a very warm attitude Tunisia. He had a very warm personal relationship with Bourgiba [Habib Bourgiba, Jr.]. Whenever, Bourgiba came into Washington, Dean Rusk gave a luncheon for him. They were like two old college pals.

MOSS: What about the people around Williams, Wayne Freericks and Tasca [Henry J. Tasca] and people like that?

RUSSELL: I have great admiration for Wayne Fredericks. He had a background with the Ford Foundation in Africa, and he understood it from the point of

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view of what the Africans faced in the way of problems, and what they were trying to do for themselves.

MOSS: Did you find that there was any difference in the department generally in the way they handled sub-Saharan Africa and the Magrib from the point of view of expertise, capability, and understanding of the situation?

RUSSELL: I never experienced any lack of interest in, or understanding of Tunisia. However, I think it was true of the African bureau generally that their primary interest was sub-Saharan Africa, but in my experience that didn't mean any lack of attention when it was called for.

MOSS: Let me ask you about a couple of events that were contemporaneous with your ambassadorship. There was a shift in the Tunisian setup. Mongi Slim became foreign minister and Mokaddem [Sadok Mokaddem] went to France.

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: How did this impress the State Department and you? Did it cause any special concern?

RUSSELL: No, quite the opposite. I think it's possible Mongi Slim was appointed because of his experience at the UN and his acquaintance with American leaders and their warm attitude toward him. As I've explained, Bourguiba had entered upon a period of being at odds with the French leadership, or with De Gaulle. That should be stressed. During all this time I think it's fair to say that a majority of French leaders and the great majority of the French press maintained a very warm attitude toward Bourguiba and Tunisia.

MOSS: I see. Because that doesn't come through very strong in the papers. What you get there is the French saying, "How could Bourguiba do this to us?" Over the whole Bizerte thing, you know. "He promised us, you know, that he'd lay off Bizerte while we've got the problems with Algeria," and so on.

RUSSELL: But that part of the French attitude, except for De Gaulle, vanished very quickly.

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They got over it, but De Gaulle never did. Where were we? Mongi Slim. I think Bourguiba wanted as foreign minister someone who would help him build warm relationships with the United States. Being at odds with the French leadership meant that he had to turn somewhere for support. He decided to make the most of the warm attitude that he knew existed in the United States toward Tunisia. It's quite possible he appointed Slim for this purpose, as he later appointed his son, Bourguiba who had even warmer relationships in the United States. Bourguiba was in and out of the White House under Kennedy. He was very popular there.

MOSS: Could you talk about that a little more and develop it a bit, because that's interesting.

RUSSELL: I was not in Washington at that time. I was in Ghana or New Zealand during that time. I heard from quite a number of people that the relationship was a very warm, mutual one. It cooled a little bit after Bizerte because Bourguiba, I'm told, went to the White House and started screaming that the United States must provide military support, and making demands that were not reasonable.

MOSS: Yes. There was one point at which the Tunisians said that Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] had promised that if France ever invaded Tunisia the United States would come to their assistance.

RUSSELL: Bourguiba really started screaming. I'm told that cooled Kennedy off a little. Nevertheless there was a very close, personal relationship that continued after

that. So, during all the time I was in Tunisia the two foreign ministers were either Slim or Bourguiba, both of whom made it possible for Bourguiba to establish good, close relationships between his country and the United States.

MOSS: May I ask you about the Peace Corps group. It arrived about the same time, about mid-August, and it had the oldest Peace Corpsman that had been recruited, a fellow by the name of Haugen.

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RUSSELL: I had the privilege of being the ambassador to receive the first Peace Corps contingent to set foot on foreign ground, in Accra. I had worked with the advance representatives of the Peace Corps in setting that up. I had a deep respect for what they were trying to do.

When I got to Tunisia, I found we had a fairly serious problem because the advance work there had not been done as thoroughly as it should have been. The principal group were some recent college graduates who had just had A.B. degrees, and who were sent over to help build houses, to do construction work. The only two who had had any experience were one who was the son of an air-conditioning man and had worked for his father one summer (the peasants of Tunisia don't have air conditioning), and the other was the son of a man who had an outfit that engaged in woodworking with intricate electrical appliances which they don't have in Tunisia. All that had to be done was just to put one brick on top of another. (A bit later on a chap came who was a terrific bricklayer. People would stand around and watch him lay bricks because he did it with such aplomb.) Here were some thirty odd A.B.'s who were there to help the Tunisians put bricks on top of each other. It had two difficulties; one was there were thousands of Tunisians whose ancestors had been building houses since before the dawn of history and who knew all about it. And the making of houses in Tunisia is very different from the making of houses in the United States. The second thing was that there were a lot of unemployed and they would see these young Americans come over doing things inexpertly that they could do much more expertly and taking their jobs away from them. Well, the American Peace Corpsmen quickly absorbed this anomalous situation and it made them very unhappy. I spent a lot of time in dealing with that situation. We got other work for them to do.

MOSS: What did you do, go round to the Tunisians?

RUSSELL: We had meetings with the ministry of public works. The minister, Ahmed Nouredine, took the position, "This thing is going to work. Whatever needs to be done. We'll see that this Peace Corps thing works." But it was an unfortunate kickoff. Some of the men went home at the end of one year rather than at the end of two years; others got jobs teaching English. One got a job with the Bardo Museum. There were other jobs: operating youth libraries in Sousse and Sfax. So it finally got sorted out

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and those that stayed were doing useful work. Thereafter, the Peace Corps became a tremendous thing when it concentrated on teaching English. Bourguiba had as a major objective making the Tunisian people generally, and particularly their emerging leaders, fluent in English; partly because of the close relationship between Tunisia and the United States, but also because English is becoming the world language and he wanted Tunisia to be able to play its role.

MOSS: Let me ask you about the occasion of your presenting your credentials.

RUSSELL: Well, I went to the palace which was an old Beylical palace. Bourguiba took me aside after the formalities and said he'd like to take me into his study. We sat down and talked informally. He said, "We here in Tunisia have observed communism at work. We've read their literature. We know what they're trying to do and how it works in practice. We also have a very good knowledge of the Western democracies. We know they don't succeed 100 percent. They're human beings like the rest of us. They have their successes and failures, but we're convinced they're on the main track of history and that's the kind of society we want to evolve into here in Tunisia. We want to do what we can in our tiny way to support that approach to life. There will be times when you do things that we don't like. We have difficulty with your support of Portugal, but we know that you need the Azores as a place to put your planes down on their way to Europe, and so we understand. There will be times when we'll do things that you don't like because we have our political imperatives, too. We're part of the African world and a part of the Arab world, and we hope you'll understand that." Then he said, "You'll find that when the crunch is on we'll be on your side."

MOSS: How is a crunch defined in situations like that?

RUSSELL: What he said was, "*les cas durs*," in the hard cases. And the hard case that came along was Vietnam. And he, as far as I know, was the only leader of a small underdeveloped state that spoke out publicly in support of what we were doing in Vietnam. When Mennen Williams was sent by President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] one Christmas season was to travel to all the African states and explain the *demarche* that we were making on Vietnam at that

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time, he called on Bourguiba, and he read something that had been prepared in the State Department, some seventeen points. You know; it was very boring. But he literally just read it. Bourguiba thanked him for the presentation and then talked for forty minutes expressing more powerfully than Mennen possibly could have, the reasons why the United States had to do what it was doing. If Johnson had sent Bourguiba around to the African states, we'd have been much better off than sending Mennen Williams whose heart was only half in it.

Bourguiba had several arguments. One was that what was happening in South Vietnam could happen to almost any small underdeveloped country, having dissidents become guerillas, and guerilla get moral and political and economic and even arms support from the communists. And if it succeeds in South Vietnam, all heads of small underdeveloped states had better start looking out. The other reason he gave was that following World War II certain boundaries had been agreed upon as a means of settling the problems between the communist world and the free world; in Berlin, the rest of Germany, Korea, Vietnam. The communists had pressed at Berlin, and the free world had held firm. They'd pressed in Korea. And now they were pressing in Vietnam. They were trying to accomplish in Vietnam what they hadn't accomplished in the others. It was in the interest of world stability and world peace that the general pattern that had been agreed upon hold firm. If that crumbled, you'd have a very unstable world situation. So that was the *cas dur*.

MOSS: Another case happened shortly after you arrived, the Cuban Missile Crisis came up. Under what circumstances did you express the U.S. position on this to Bourguiba, and what was his reaction?

RUSSELL: I'm sorry to say I don't recall either such a meeting, nor do I recall any particular exchange between us on the Cuban problem. My guess is that I made whatever presentation the State Department sent out, that it was a routine thing, and that I had no problem.

MOSS: Okay. In 1962 there was the Oued Gabes flood. And there was a request for relief assistance by Tunisia. They wanted President Kennedy to use a contingency fund as he had in Chile, and you had to explain to them that this wasn't the way it worked. Did you have any particular problem there:? I know that you got blankets

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for them through CINCEUR [Commander-In-Chief, Europe] delivery system, and so on.

RUSSELL: It was a bad flood. It created a great deal of damage; thirty thousand people were homeless. What we were able to do was to get blankets and tents in considerable number for those families. But that's all we were able to do.

MOSS: Did they understand the point about the contingency fund, that this was not exactly what it was for usually? Or do you recall?

RUSSELL: Bourguiba several times made the point that he and Tunisia were prepared to be as close to the United States as we were prepared to have them -- that's about the way he put it -- and that he would hope that we would want to be close enough so that we would be prepared to do more.

MOSS: He wanted a little quid for his quo.

RUSSELL: That's one way of putting it.

MOSS: He wanted it on a friendly basis.

RUSSELL: Those two phrases are not synonymous. What he meant was that relations were good, he appreciated everything the United States was doing, and that was very considerable. He had no complaint about the extent of our economic aid because, that was my other point, we were giving aid to Tunisia in very considerable amounts. At one time, when Nigeria was having its civil war, we were giving more to Tunisia than to any other African country. During the rest of the time we were giving more per capita than to any other country. So, we had nothing to be ashamed of. And, I pointed that out to him. In the case of Gabes, we couldn't come in with the particular kind of emergency aid that he wanted. Our aid had to be programmed. Obviously it wouldn't be wise for us to make Tunisia a client state.

MOSS: You have to feel your way very carefully in this kind of thing.

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: There was a plot against the life of Bourguiba: two characters by the name of Mehrezi and Chraiti, is it?

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RUSSELL: There were ten in all, that were found guilty.

MOSS: And as I understand it, it was a very badly managed, foolish sort of business with some people who were not very capable anyway. Was it tied in with the Youssefist [Salah Ben Youssef] thing or not?

RUSSELL: They shared the general Youssefist philosophy, only they went much further. They were orthodox Moslems, and they felt the state was getting too modern, that the Moslem religion was being weakened.

MOSS: Bourguiba's knocking Ramadan?

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: I notice that later on, in early '61, you begin to have some chats with Mongi Slim on the whole question of Maghrib relations and that this, particularly in early '63, was just about the same time as the \$2.4 million aid agreement was signed, and you had some talks with both Ladgham and Mongi Slim on both aid and the

whole business of Maghrib relations. How did this begin to look to you? Was there a Maghrib entity? or were they just trying to find out if there was one? And where did the U.S. aid then fit into this?

RUSSELL: Tunisia was very much in favor of a closer Maghribian relationship. Its population was too small to support a modern economy. They didn't have enough of a market as a base for industrialization. Also, from the point of view of their security, they felt that it was desirable to get on as good a relationship as possible with the other North African countries, particularly Algeria; so they were very ardent supporters of a closer Maghribian relationship. We supported them in that. In giving aid we increasingly favored regionalization, because we felt that the aid would go to better purpose if there were regional cooperation, if some countries undertook one kind of development and other countries took other lines. Bourguiba thought that Tunisia could provide leadership and know-how. They'd worked out a good program for themselves, one that was accepted in the World Bank [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] and was receiving support from other countries. Bourguiba was always pursuing it.

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But Algeria always pulled away. As you know, there was a succession of crises between Tunisia and Algeria. But that was the Tunisian philosophy and that was our philosophy. But it's a long, uphill fight.

It's hard for anyone who hasn't lived in that area to understand how great the difference are in mentality and character between the different countries. If you ride in an automobile from Algiers to Tunis, the minute you cross the line you're aware of an entirely different national personality. The Tunisians are friendly; the children see an automobile and get out on the road and dance. The adults are equally friendly. You get into Algeria and they're dour and glare at you. Partly, that goes back to prehistoric times. Tunis was the cross-roads of civilization, whereas the Algerians built their villages and towns on top of mountains. They'd been fighting amongst themselves and with foreigners during the centuries. Partly the difference is the result of the Algerians' blood war for independence in which eight hundred thousand or a million people were killed. That's bound to leave a scar. At any rate, there are basic differences in character.

MOSS: Let me ask you about the bits and pieces of the American aid program. You have economic aid, you have the military assistance program, and U.S. private investment. You have the assistance to Tunisian police and international security. Were there any problems in any of these, anything that in retrospect you think could have been handled better? Were there any particular successes along these lines?

RUSSELL: In general the economic program -- improving agriculture, stepping up their industrialization, helping with some aspects of their education, developing

water resources, expanding tourism -- could be characterized as a marked success. The major problem came in connection with military assistance. Algeria, largely as a result of the anger and bitterness that had developed during its long, blood struggle for independence, had become a rebel nation adopting an angry attitude toward the West in general. It wanted to become a leader of that element of the African nations. It was always putting in resolutions that would push the OAU [Organization of African Unity] toward the communist side. Bourguiba represented the other point of view. So, here were these two states next door to

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each other, with completely opposite attitudes toward Africa and toward the Arab world, and toward the world at large. And Algeria was getting massive arms, the very latest type of Ilyushin planes from the Soviet Union. And Bourguiba saw Tunisia threatened.

MOSS: I note that Ladgham asked you at one point if a U.S. military mission might not come...

RUSSELL: And of course it did.

MOSS: ...and it did. And I wanted to ask what the follow-up on that was because it's not in our files.

RUSSELL: Not only Ladgham but Bourguiba. I had a very long session with him at his request. He pointed out in somewhat different language what I've just been saying in the last few minutes, and said that Tunisia was dependent for its security upon the United States. Again he made this point about Tunisia's being prepared to be as close to the United States as we were prepared to have it. But at the very least he hoped we would see the desirability of helping a country like Tunisia in the circumstances in which it found itself.

He said that he would like to have a group of really capable American military men come to Tunisia and spend as long as they wanted. They would talk with him; they'd talk with Ladgham. They could go anywhere in the country, talk with any man from a general down to a soldier that they wanted. There would be nothing they could ask that they wouldn't be given an answer to. And then he hoped that they would make a recommendation as to what a country like Tunisia ought to do in that kind of a situation. Tunisia had one of the lowest rates of expenditure for arms in its national budget of any country in the world -- around 6 percent -- and one of the highest for education. His hope was that Tunisia would not be forced into going down the path toward bankruptcy the way Ethiopia was, in an effort to maintain its security. He hoped that the study would include recommendations as to the kind of commitments, if any, the United States could give to Tunisia to supplement Tunisia's own arming process. We accepted the invitation and a group came over, a highly skilled, broad, statesmanlike group, someone from the army, someone from the air force and the navy, experts in

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different kinds of equipment, and so on. There was someone from the State Department who drafted the portion of the report that had to do with the political situation and what might be in the United States' interests to do. We, of course, were not able to give Bourguiba the whole report. They prepared a sanitized version of it which gave the general thrust, and gave in detail their recommendations as to how many planes and what kind of training and all the rest of what Tunisia ought to try to achieve without throwing its budget into a tailspin.

MOSS: I noticed -- it was before your time -- one of the complaint that the Tunisians seemed to be making to the Americans was, "Look, you say you're going to give us x dollars in aid, but then you tie a few strings to it like it has to be shipped in American ships which we have to pay for, so that by the time you give us \$16 million, actually it only amounts to \$8 million in aid because we've had to kick all of this back. We'd much rather you give us the \$8 million at first, instead of misleading us with a higher figure." Did you run into this at all?

RUSSELL: Yes. At first, our aid to them was in the form of funds which they could spend wherever they could buy the things they needed the cheapest. From the point of view of the economic development of a country like Tunisia that had excellent planners and economists, finance ministers and so on, that was the most sensible way to give aid. But then our problems with our balance of payments made us shift from that basis of giving aid to one of giving American goods shipped on American vessels. That was a disappointment to the Tunisians. They would have liked very much to have continued the old way. It was a sensible position for them to take. But we explained to him what our problem was and that this was not a change that related just to Tunisia but to all of the countries that we were giving aid to.

There were several surveys of our aid program. There was a basic one before I got there. The governor of some western state was chairman. It recommended that we give substantial aid to Tunisia. We made a three-year commitment to Tunisia on the basis of it. Thereafter, there were two or three groups that came out to see how things were going, whether the money was being well spent, was it the right kind of a program, was Tunisia concentrating on the right things.

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Invariably their reports were favorable.

MOSS: Okay. One problem I note that has something to do with what we're talking about is this civil air problem the Tunisians had. We had asked them not to enter into agreements with the East European countries, particularly the Czechs...

RUSSELL: Yes.

MOSS: ...and, as I understand it, they did with the Czechs, we didn't like it a bit. And then, in September of '63 Tunisia suddenly came and said, "Look Aeroflot, you know, has agreements with Libya and with Algeria, one on each side, and we're being squeezed to death." Do you remember how this was handled?

RUSSELL: Yes. Shortly after I got there, the American government became concerned at the Soviet bloc efforts to obtain landing rights and transit rights from African countries. We suspected they were using this, in large part, as a means for getting their people down there and for espionage. The [Belgian] Congo flare-up was then going on, and we didn't know what relationship it might have to that. But until that time there had been no Soviet air activity in Africa, and that's the way we hoped to be able to keep it. So we made a great effort to persuade African governments not to grant them those rights. The Tunisians understood our point of view and because of their philosophy, as I've described, they were willing to go along with it to a certain point. But when they found that other African countries were granting rights, and in particular Senegal, which enabled them to get to South America, then it appeared to them that we were not going to be able to achieve our objective of keeping the Soviet bloc out of air transport in Africa. So they told us that they thought they'd have to give in on that point, in part because they were, of course, receiving aid from Soviet bloc countries too. The Czechs were helping, the Yugoslavs had quite a program, the Rumanians, Bulgarians, the Poles, and theft wanted to balance their interest in having that continue against their desire to cooperate with us as far as it made sense on the use of airports in Africa.

MOSS: You mentioned the Congo thing, and, of course,

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there was an up and down thing with the Tunisian force in the Congo. Do you remember any representations you made to Bourguiba on behalf of the UN and the U.S. with respect to the Tunisians in the Congo?

RUSSELL: Most of that happened before I got there.

MOSS: Right.

RUSSELL: Their man Khiari [Mahmoud Khiari] was a very important figure in the UN effort there, and my impression is that we appreciated very much the Tunisian participation.

MOSS: Let me turn to another kind of thing and ask you about the working of the country team concept in Tunisia. We usually refer to the Bowles [Chester

Bowles] letter that established the ambassador as head of the country team, and we usually ask each of the ambassadors we talk to about his control over the pieces of the country team: the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], the USIS [United States Information Service], USOM [United States Operations Mission], Peace Corps and so on, the military attaches. How did it work for you in Tunisia?

RUSSELL: Very well. I'll make a confession to you. I had had a country team in operation when I was in Ghana. Then I came to Tunisia, and during my first month there I was quite busy in getting around the country, getting to know the leaders, making my calls on other members of the diplomatic corps, and I just didn't get around to starting country team meetings. Then a chap, fairly well down the line, from AID [Agency for International Development] was making a visit to Tunisia, and we found ourselves down in the desert together at the end of his trip. We were having a drink at a hotel down there and he kind of mentioned casually that he thought it might be useful if we had a country team meeting in Tunis. And I said, "By God, you're right." [Laughter] The next week when I got back to Tunis I called my first country team meeting. Just a few weeks after that we got word that a team from Washington was going to make an intensive study of country team operations in three African countries one of which was going to be Tunisia. By the time they got to Tunis our country team was working very well. When they got back to Washington, they made a report commending me...

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MOSS: Oh, for heaven's sake.

RUSSELL: ...and the embassy at Tunis for the fine way in which the country team was working. They also commended particularly the relationship between the country team in Tunis and the office in the State Department. Bill Witman told me a year later that that was responsible for his getting his first ambassadorial post. This study group went back to Washington and was so impressed by what I'd said about how close and effective our relationship was, they wanted to talk with him and see how it worked there.

[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

RUSSELL: I was blessed with two excellent heads of AID. The first one, Daly C. Lavergne, was from Louisiana. His way of operating was to take me in on everything, to invite me over to address his staff fairly frequently on other aspects of the embassy operations and our relations with Tunisia generally. He'd make sure that I traveled around the country and visited our projects of all kinds. The fellow who supplanted him was an entirely different sort. He wanted to run his own show. He never invited me over to address his staff. He and I did go to visit operations around the country. But my relationship with him was just as friendly and close as it was with the previous one. I had complete confidence in the job he was doing, and I knew if a real problem arose he

would come over and we'd discuss it. But he didn't want the ambassador messin in with his relationships with his own staff.

MOSS: How about USIS?

RUSSELL: Everything was perfect until the fellow they sent the last year and a half I was there. He was very able. He worked terribly hard. He took papers home from his office, worked till eleven o'clock at night, filed voluminous reports back to Washington. But he had one problem, that was that he ran his staff like some medieval duke. He once bawled out his cultural affairs officer, and extremely capable woman, a graduate of Radcliffe [College] who had a genius for getting on with Tunisians. When my deputy Ed Mulcahy [Edward W. Mulcahy] went down to attend a USIS staff meeting, she had a little conversation with Mulcahy before the meeting assembled. And the USIS director later bawled her out for having spoken to Mulcahy before he did.

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MOSS: What about relations with the Tunisian press, with Afrique Action for instance, the newspaper?

RUSSELL: Well, I don't know what to say, really. They were a very independent group of journals. They didn't take any word from us at all. They were appreciative of material that we would pass along to them. But, because of the very warm relationships between the Tunisians and the United States, we had no problems.

MOSS: How reliable were they for information from your point of view?

RUSSELL: Well, it was a government controlled operation, and you wouldn't use them as a means of keeping abreast of what was going on in the world.

MOSS: But in Tunisia? Keeping abreast of what was going on in Tunisia?

RUSSELL: Not really. It was what the government wanted you to know, and it didn't give you any inside information.

MOSS: Okay. Well, this leads me, then, to your general embassy intelligence operation both in quotes and literally, the CIA aspect, your CAS [Covert American Source]. I don't even know if you had a CAS...

RUSSELL: Yes, we did.

MOSS: ...and your military attaches. How did this operate? How effective were they? Did they give you any trouble? What kinds of things were they mostly involved with?

RUSSELL: Again, we were blessed with a succession of very good military attaches. Knowlton [Colonel William A. Knowlton] was the first while I was there, William Knowlton. He had a mind like a triphammer. One of the things the Tunisians told about him was that we'd made a trip into the desert where he'd met a dozen or more sergeants. When the minister of defense gave Knowlton a farewell dinner, there was a sergeant in charge of seeing the food got in hot, and so forth. Knowlton came and say this fellow, this sergeant, and called him by name and recalled their meeting down in the desert. Knowlton would learn enough of the language of the country of each ambassador in the corps so that he could say hello to each in his own language.

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It was no surprise to anyone that he quickly became a general in Vietnam and is now head of West Point. The only minus quantity was that he had the arrogance that goes with that kind of a mind. As Ladgham remarked to me after Knowlton left, "Knowlton treated us all like children, including the minister of defense." That is a liability, but he had all the other virtues.

He was succeeded by Donald Spiece who, with his wife, was God's gift to an ambassador. Spiece wasn't the ball of fire that Knowlton was. His virtue was his ability to get on with the Tunisians. They felt very comfortable with him. He was followed by Col. Buford [Algernon S. Buford, III] whose strength was his knowledge of American military equipment with the Tunisians were acquiring.

Then, something happened that I'd been promised by the Pentagon wouldn't happen. I'd been promised we would not have two colonels there at the same time, that either the military attache would be a colonel and a lieutenant colonel in charge of the military program, or vice versa. I didn't care which, but I'd had enough experience to know that if you had two colonels in the same place, it's like that Charlie Chaplin picture, *The Dictator*, each one trying to get his barber chair higher than the other's. Then we got an air colonel too, but that was just in the final months of my stay.

MOSS: What about your CAS operation?

RUSSELL: Again, I was extremely fortunate. Bill Witman, when he went to Togo, was told that a certain CAS fellow was going to be sent out there and he did everything he could possibly do to get a promise from CIA they wouldn't send this fellow because they'd worked together somewhere else, and this other fellow had a reputation for going off on his own. They promised Bill they would not send this fellow. Two weeks after Bill got there the fellow showed up. He wrecked Bill's experience there. Not that Bill didn't do a good job as ambassador, but he was worrying all the time about what this fellow was doing. I've never had a CAS man I didn't get along with very well.

MOSS: What kind of a window does Tunis give you on the Maghrib, on the Arab world and so on, from the point of view of somebody who is doing

intelligence evaluation, collection of CAS type operation?

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RUSSELL: The CAS work in Tunisia was almost entirely in the form of cooperation with the Tunisians in getting information about Iron Curtain countries. The Chinese had a representative there the last few years I was there, and the Tunisians were just as much interested as we were in finding out what they were up to. The same thing was true of other Iron Curtain countries.

There was a question as to whether and to what degree we should carry on an operation against the Tunisians themselves. Toward the end there was, I think, some feeling in Washington that we ought to do more. The Tunisians made it plain that they wouldn't welcome that sort of thing. They couldn't understand why we should feel it necessary to do it with a country that we were as close with as that. The CIA has a reputation, earned to some extent, of playing behind the backs of local governments.

There was the Youssefist opposition movement in Tunisia. The government said they were prepared to give us all the information they thought we would need about that. They knew pretty well what went on around the country. If we started nosing around and asking questions they'd learn pretty fast. It seemed to me we had to do it either one way or the other. We had more to gain by having their confidence, working closely with them, than by setting up an operation they would be suspicious of.

MOSS: Or buying bureaucrats, and that sort of thing. Let me ask you about one thing that I've tried to pin down, particularly with respect to Africa, and that is the relationship between American and foreign unions. The AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] relationship with the UGTT [Union Generale Tunisienne du Travail] in Tunisia, for instance. What do you recall of this?

RUSSELL: There had been, over quite a period of time, a very close relationship between the UGTT and the American labor organizations. As a matter of fact, the AFL-CIO had been supportive of Bourguiba in his efforts to achieve independence for Tunisia, and it continued after independence. But then, a question arose about the relationship of the UGTT to the party and to the government and the right of the UGTT to call strikes, and that led to a move

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by Bourguiba to make sure that the UGTT would not call strikes and would work in cooperation with the government. His argument was that the Neo-Destour party and the Bourguiba government were doing everything that any labor union could possibly ask for. The record of the government in providing universal education, their efforts to bring in industry, to raise social benefits and wages, was all that any real labor leader could ask for. And it didn't make sense, therefore, for a labor organization to pit itself against the government. That left the director general of the UGTT to resign and he left the country. He

came to the United States and made speeches denouncing Bourguiba, and the AFL-CIO passed resolutions supporting him. They provided funds for him to live on. Then he took up residence in Switzerland in exile. Then he came down very sick, and in his final months he and Bourguiba effected a reconciliation and he spent his last months in Tunisia.

Incidentally that's a quality of Bourguiba that was very noticeable. If anyone pitted himself against Bourguiba, Bourguiba was pretty relentless in dealing with him. He might put him in prison. But almost invariably, when he was released from prison, he would have a better job than he had before he went in. He made it a point of not allowing momentary periods of conflict to interfere with getting on with the job and getting as broad support as possible.

MOSS: Of course he didn't have the opportunity to do that with Ben Youssef who was killed in Germany. There was some implication at least in the press that Bourguiba had something to do with that.

RUSSELL: Yes. That is something we'll never know. Nobody will ever know. I never heard any authoritative story on it.

MOSS: Okay. Let me go to a couple of other things. Let's take that list of people for a moment and just talk about them generally. I'll give you the list. These are the ones that I want you, if you would, to describe, what kind of people they were, what were they like to deal with. They're the ones who seem to me to be most important. I don't have Masnioudi [Mohammed Masnioudi] who was the information officer that was kicked out.

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RUSSELL: Well, we can add to it. Bourguiba went to law school and became a student leader in Paris, and was from his earliest post college days active in the move toward independence. He founded the Neo-Destour party -- Destour means constitutional -- because he felt that the original Destour party was moving too slowly. It was based upon cooperation with the French. It was gradualist, and too gradual. He proclaimed on every opportunity his own approach, which was gradual but not too gradual. He said the way to get things done is to make a very honest appraisal of where you are and what your resources are, and then fix a goal, say a five-year goal where you honestly and realistically think you could be at the end of that period, then work indefatigably to get to that goal. Then you do the same thing over again. That's the way, he says, Tunisia, under his leadership, achieved its independence. They were not radicals who held out for everything immediately, nor were they gradualists who were prepared to let nature take its course.

Incidentally, when he was visiting the Arab countries in 1965, he was taken to one of the camps on the West Bank where there were several hundred thousand refugees. And while it was not on his schedule to make a speech, several hundred refugees gathered around his car, and he was asked to say a few words. He said, 'You people have allowed yourselves to become a political football. You're being used by others for their purpose and not for your

own good. I suggest you do what we did in Tunisia.” I don’t think he mentioned Nassar [Gamel Abdel Nassar], but everybody knew that’s who he was talking about. He described his process. “Be honest, with yourself, don’t be overly optimistic, don’t look for pie in the sky, but survey your situation, look around and see whom you can count on, and then get on with the job. And when you’ve accomplished that, then go on from there. And if you do that, you can achieve a good life for yourself and your children. If you allow yourself to continue as you are now, demanding everything at once, twenty years from now you’ll be where you are today.”

That was his basic philosophy, pragmatism. The goal he had for his people in my opinion was all that Abraham Lincoln or Thomas Jefferson could have written for him. I think he wants a real democracy. There’s no doubt but what he wants economic and social progress. But his conviction

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is that Tunisians can only get that if they go through a period of firm leadership by someone like him. Therefore, he had, in effect, been a paternal dictator. He runs the show. People who stand in his way are gotten out of the way. He’s been extremely skillful in maintaining a close bond with the people. My personal opinion is that if we had to write the bill for the kind of leader we would like to see in countries like Tunisia, it would be pretty much Bourguiba. He genuinely wants a close relationship with the western world. He is extremely skillful. He does everything he can to exercise a role of influence both among African states and within the Arab world.

MOSS: He had Haile Selassie visit Tunis in mid ‘63. How do those two compare, Selassie and Bourguiba?

RUSSELL: Selassie seems to me to be an old time emperor. The economic progress in Ethiopia, I think, doesn’t begin to compare with what they’ve done in Tunisia.

MOSS: I was thinking of the international role, because he tried to play a role in the OAU.

RUSSELL: Selassie rules on the African scene pretty much as he rules in Ethiopia. He’s trying to bring the countries together. He’s taking initiatives in setting up the Organization of African Unity in keeping it together. But I don’t get the impression that he is a fighter within the African scene for policies toward the west that Bourguiba is. He’s more the covener, whereas Bourguiba is continually engaged in trying to move the OAU along the paths we’ve been describing.

MOSS: We’ve talked about his standing up to Nassar.

RUSSELL: Yeah. He is a man of great courage. He stood up to Nassar, he stood up to Ben Bella [Ahmed Ben Bella] in Algeria. He’d stand up to the United States, as I

guess he did under Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] at the time of the vote on the admission of China, which was one of the most hypocritical and wrongheaded things we've done for a long time.

MOSS: Ridiculous.

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RUSSELL: But that was after I left. But he stood up to De Gaulle, and if he thought we needed standing up to he'd stand up to us. He has the very highest goals and ideals for his people. He is convinced, I think probably correctly, that a people who were only 15 percent literate, whose average income is \$150 a year, don't have the resources for running an American type democracy. They have to go through a period of tutelage, and it's just a matter of luck in any particular country whether they have a Bourguiba, or whether they have an Amin [Idi Amin].

I'd say one other thing about Bourguiba. He does have this house there, in Carthage, that probably cost more than the White House would cost to build today. It is a glorious thing. He also has residences that are quite adequate for a head of state in four or five other parts of the country. He makes a point of spending two or three or four weeks at one, and then later another one, and the next year another one, and so forth. It's too bad. It is a weakness, a decided weakness. The only thing that can be said is, maybe it gives a sense of pride to the Tunisians. The people can take a certain sense of satisfaction that their country does well by itself in entertaining foreign leaders. I could have hoped he wouldn't have spent quite so much on his residences. It's a flaw, but not a fatal flaw.

MOSS: It seems to be a temptation that all leaders fall into with the possible exception of Gandhi [Mohandas K. Gandhi].

RUSSELL: But otherwise I have great admiration for Bourguiba. He is good news for the west, good news for the United States. Bourguiba, junior is a jovial personality. He was a great success in Washington, not only in the White House but generally. I've already said that Dean Rusk had great admiration for him. I think he was made foreign minister by his father because Tunisia's security and economic survival, while DeGaulle was head of government in France, depended upon having a country like the United States as a friend. When the Nixon regime came in and their interest in Tunisia seemed to be somewhat less, which coincided with DeGaulle's death and the succession by Pompidou [Georges J. Pompidou] who was prepared to enter into a new friendly relationship with Tunisia, Bourguiba was supplanted as foreign minister

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by Masmoudi who had been ambassador to Paris. He had done very well in France, and built up warm relationships. So what is taking place now is what I felt and said should take place, that Tunisia's natural close relationship is with France. They're across the Mediterranean

from each other; they need to sell their wines and so forth, and that's the way it should be. It was only because of DeGaulle's personality that it wasn't that way after Bizerte.

Bourguiba's shortcoming, I think is that he gives an impression of "shineyness," of being glib. He has a rather short temper which shows itself at times. He doesn't have quite the caliber of his father.

The question everybody asked in Tunisia during all the time I was there, was "What will happen after Bourguiba leaves the scene?" During the first part of the time it was clear that Ladgham would succeed. He was referred to by Bourguiba several times as the man who would succeed him, as the man in whom he had complete confidence. Then, it began to become apparent that Ladgham really wasn't going to be the real successor, he would probably be the caretaker. The betting was that it would be either Bourguiba or Ben Salah [Ahmed Ben Salah], probably Ben Salah.

It should be said that I never observed Bourguiba and Ben Salah in any other relationship than complete friendliness and camaraderie. I couldn't visualize a big fight between them for the succession. It always seemed to me they'd work it out somehow. But Ben Salah was obviously, during the last two or three years I was there, Bourguiba's nominee for the succession. He held the ministries of agriculture, of planning, of finance, of education, and one or two others that I can't think of now. He disposed of 75 percent of the Tunisian budget with all of those ministries. At the national meeting of the party at Bizerte in '68, he gave the address with Bourguiba sitting there listening to him, and beaming.

But Ben Salah's downfall came because he was recommending a policy of enforced cooperative farms. On paper it seemed like the solution to Tunisia's economic problem. It is predominantly an agricultural economy. But the farms are broken up, in large parts of the country, into little plots where a family, say own seventy-five olive trees. Ben Salah, as minister of agriculture, had a survey of the entire country made, first to determine what kinds of agricultural

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products could be most efficiently grown in which areas. Where should apple trees be grown? Where should asparagus be grown? Where olives and so on? Then they decided how large an area had to be farmed as a unit in order to make it economic. If you were going to grow wheat, you couldn't have little plots. If you were going to grow asparagus you could.

Then, to the extent necessary, where you had to have several thousand hectares in order to farm it for wheat and have the necessary machinery, they would require the owners of the lots within that area to get together and form a cooperative whether they wanted to or not. They had it worked out in great detail, and on paper it was beautiful. But, what they ran into was the worldwide desire to own the land under their feet. There was even armed rebellion. Farmers took guns to drive off the men who were coming in to bulldoze trees. That was part of it, the opposition of the farmers. Secondly, they had not adequately trained the men who were going to have to run these new units. They found that they were producing less than they had before. The plan was a failure.

But Bourguiba had laid his reputation on the line in a speech before several thousand people in which he said, "Have I ever led you down the wrong path? Have I ever taken any

important action that was not in your interest? And I tell you, 'this is essential' for the economic progress of the Tunisian people." But inside of two years it became apparent that it was not.

There was one additional thing that was reputed to be the case and that was that Ben Salah was building up his own political machine in this agricultural plan: a large number of people who were reporting to him, who were reliant upon him for their jobs and that, in time, might be a competitor of the Neo-Destour party. The extent to which that is true I don't know. But in any event, Ben Salah had let Bourguiba into a position which was intolerable for Bourguiba and he put Ben Salah on trial for treason. He's now in jail for ten years. It's a shame. Ben Salah is a remarkable person. He's certainly one of three or four people who would do the best job as successor to Bourguiba.

Ben Salah, as minister of education, was innovative, he thought they put too much of their resources into universal education. They were trying to take people right off the desert

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and teach them French, even teach them English in addition to that, and tests showed that inside of two years after they'd graduated from eighth grade, they'd forgotten a large part of what they had learned. The investment wasn't paying off. They'd made a huge investment in school buildings, wonderful school buildings But, they didn't have the teachers to do an adequate job. And when you take youngsters out of slums or out of tents on the desert, you can't quite make that kind of a jump. It has to be a little more gradual.

MOSS: Something we're beginning to discover in our educational system, too.

RUSSELL: Another thing Ben Salah criticized was that the university was copying the French curricula too much. They were training hundreds of lawyers, and they didn't need a tenth the number. What they did need was technicians, supervisors, foremen, accountants, things like that. They weren't training their people for the jobs that existed. A very ebullient, warm, intelligent, attractive, able person. It's a loss to Tunisia that it didn't work out.

Mongi Slim. I think Bourguiba was surprised and irked when Mongi became president of the General Assembly. He'd plucked this fellow out of the party and sent him over to be the Tunisian representative at the UN, and there he was a renowned world figure.

MOSS: Almost secretary-general, by golly.

RUSSELL: Almost secretary-general. And Mongi Slim was very popular at home. It was embarrassing on occasions, rare occasions, but nevertheless it happened, that when there was a motorcade of government leaders, the president would go by and there would be very warm applause, but then Mongi would come by in his car and the applause would be several decibels higher. So Bourguiba made it plain after Mongi returned to Tunisia that he shouldn't have any great aspirations, become a competitor of Bourguiba's on the world scene, or even on the national scene.

MOSS: He should have stayed in New York.

RUSSELL: Well, Mongi would have liked to, and he sounded people out from time to time in a very discreet way about the possibility of some kind of position

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as head of some UN agency.

MOSS: A position like Bunche [Ralph Bunche] held or something of the sort.

RUSSELL: Yes. Or the World Court, or something like that. But that didn't work out. The last few years were one where he was under Bourguiba's thumb and not too happy.

Mokaddem was a hard man to get to know on intimate terms the way you could with Mongi Slim or Bourguiba or most of the others. He was somewhat aloof. He was an instrument of Bourguiba's. He was president of the assembly all the time I was there. Never any real political power.

Ladgham was a man who kind of surprised you. He didn't give the impression at first of being very forceful, or of being very confident in expressing a point of view. And yet, the more you were there and had occasion to deal with him, the more you were impressed by his ability to state the Tunisian position on a complex matter. He rarely did that when Bourguiba was in the country. An ambassador, particularly an ambassador of the United States, would usually meet either with Bourguiba or with the president, although I did have quite a few meetings with Ladgham about military assistance, particularly before the mission came, in which they were always asking for more, and they were complaining that the armored trucks that we sent over had four-wheel drive and used an awful amount of gas. It practically wrecked the national budget to send their armored trucks on a drive out into the desert.

MOSS: Eight miles to the gallon.

RUSSELL: But they had to have four-wheel drive because that's the only kind that would go into the desert. He had greater ability than appeared on the surface. But he had absolutely no charisma, and I don't think he really had what it would have taken to be a successor to Bourguiba. I think Bourguiba built him up because Ladgham was completely loyal to Bourguiba, and when Bourguiba was abroad he could always be sure that he had somebody there that was carrying out his wishes, and that nothing untoward would take place. In the last three years Ladgham has been relegated to a completely unimportant post. It rather looks as though Bourguiba was just building him up so that he would be a loyal

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surrogate, but never intended that he should be a real success.

I'd like to mention one other fellow who I think may well become a candidate for the top post and that's Mestiti [Ahmed Mestiti], who is minister of defense.

MOSS: Succeeded Ladgham as minister of defense?

RUSSELL: Yes. He is a man of great courage. He became convinced early on that Ben Salah's approach to the agricultural problem was not going to work out, and that indeed the close hold that the government was exerting upon the economy of the country was in the long run not a desirable one. He resigned from his post as minister of defense on a matter of principle, and did the thing that nobody does in the Tunisian government of calling a press conference of foreign correspondents to announce his resignation. Of course, not a press conference of the local press because nothing would appear, but of foreign correspondents to state why he was resigning. He was completely out of things carrying on a minor law practice, living with in-laws in the outskirts of Tunis for three or four years. But then when the Ben Salah thing took place he was brought back by Bourguiba.

I was told in a conversation I had with somebody from Tunisia six months ago that the relationship was still kind of rocky between Mestiri and Bourguiba, but he gives the impression of strength under control. He's not flashy the way Ben Salah or Bourguiba are, but very able and sound, and I think a possible contender for top position.

Nouira [Hedi Nouira], who is the present Prime Minister of the Cabinet is a good sound man, but again with no charisma. I can't see him as really carrying on for a very long period if anything happened to Bourguiba.

Sahbani, Secretary-General of the Foreign Office, has held a succession of positions. He's not really a competitor for top position. He's a good number two man.

Driss Guiga, Director of National Security, was head of tourism during the latter part of the time I was there. Very attractive fellow, a lot of charisma, a wife who was an Algerian and just as attractive as he is, very active. She's

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a painter of considerable note. She's had a solo exhibition in Paris. She also runs all kinds of committees. But I would think he's not a competitor for top position.

MOSS: What does the director of national security do in Tunisia? It smacks of anything from head of police to CIA kind of thing, you know.

RUSSELL: Well, it does include the police, but also -- if this is still the same job as it was when I was there -- to governors of the various governorats, of which there are twelve, report to him, so he's very much involved in domestic operations of the country.

MOSS: Kind of a secretary of state in a way, in the old sense.

RUSSELL: Yes. Not in our sense.

MOSS: Not in our sense.

RUSSELL: Yes. That's right. But it's a little more than that. He is responsible for security and seeing that there are no rebellions bubbling, and he has his apparatus for that. He also is the man to whom the governors report, and that's a very important aspect of the national life of the country. But while he's an awful good companion on social occasions, I don't quite see him as a candidate for the top.

MOSS: Who else have I got down here?

RUSSELL: Sauvagnargues [Jean Sauvagnargues], the French ambassador to Tunisia. Well, he was carrying out DeGaulle's policy, and it finally got so that Bourguiba was very outspoken to people like me in expressing his dislike of Sauvagnargues, saying he was dishonest, that he was sabotaging Bourguiba's efforts to get back on an even keel with the French government. He's a very smart, able fellow, but I shared Bourguiba's lack of trust in Sauvagnargues' integrity. He was the kind of guy who could slit you up the back rather quickly if he thought that his country's interest required it. He's now their ambassador to Bonn. He had a reputation, before he came to Tunisia, of getting on well with Americans. He had worked in Berlin as part of the four power administration. The reports that I saw about him reported that he got along well with them.

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But that, I think, fits in with what I was saying because our efforts there were in cooperation with the French whereas in Tunisia they weren't. Their policy was to push Tunisia's head under water and ours was to hold it up.

MOSS: Fine. Let me ask you in summary, I guess, to give a general view of how you saw the Kennedy administration, generally and with specific reference to foreign policy in Tunisia and North Africa. Just sort of a general summary, evaluation sort of thing, strengths and weaknesses and that kind of thing.

RUSSELL: Well, it was my impression that although John Kennedy had first emerged into the field of American foreign policy by his speech urging independence for Algeria...

MOSS: In 1957.

RUSSELL: ... that he didn't have any substantial or keen interest in North Africa. He fully supported any efforts that were being made, any policies, but my impression was that he wasn't asking for the cables from North Africa the way he would have been for other regions.

MOSS: In Ghana, for example.

RUSSELL: I have mentioned that Bourguiba was in and out of the White House, but I got the impression that was a personal thing as much as because of Kennedy's interest in North African politics. So that Bourguiba was able to get, in very generous measure, what he was trying to get, namely large American aid for Tunisia.

The Kennedy image in Tunisia was tremendous. At the time of his death there was a funeral ceremony at which Bourguiba spoke. There were four or five thousand people standing up for it. Before Kennedy's death he had an extremely good image both because of his personal traits but also because he was the president of a country that was doing extremely well by Tunisia.

But, as far as I know, there were no questions involved in our relationships with Tunisia that had to go up to the president to be resolved as they were in Ghana. We had the impression there was a man who had shown an interest in North Africa by his first speech on foreign policy and who was giving general direction to the policies I've been describing.

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MOSS: Fine. I think that exhausts what I had to ask you about. Do you have anything further you want to say on the Tunisia experience? Okay. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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