

Murat W. Williams Oral History Interview –JFK #1, 6/22/1970
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Williams, Murat W.; Ambassador to El Salvador (1961-1964). Williams discusses his role as the United States Ambassador to El Salvador, his apprehension about American military involvement in El Salvador and Latin America, and other aspects of the Alliance for Progress program that was carried out in El Salvador, among other issues.

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Murat W. Williams
MURAT WILLIAMS

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Murat W. Williams
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Oral History Interview

with

MURAT W. WILLIAMS

June 22, 1970
Madison Mills, VA

By Dennis J. O'Brien

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'BRIEN: I think the logical place to begin is with the question, when did you first meet John Kennedy?

WILLIAMS: I had met John Kennedy before the war in London when his father was ambassador and I was at Oxford [Oxford University.] But I didn't see much of him. I saw a good deal of his older sister Kathleen [Kathleen Kennedy], who actually came up to the dances at Oxford with me once, and also Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.]. Joe and Kathleen came to Spain when I was at the embassy there in 1939. But I never saw John Kennedy more than once. He just happened to come in when I was talking to his father and his sister. The next time I saw him was when I went to say good-bye to him on my way to El Salvador after I had been confirmed by the Senate and sworn in. As I said to you, I think I was the first ambassador to be sent abroad by President Kennedy. Adlai Stevenson had been sent to New York. I was the first actually to go to an overseas assignment. I had been appointed as a career officer by President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] -- the appointment was signed by him -- with the advice and approval of President Kennedy and Dean Rusk.

The day I went to say goodbye seemed a rather chaotic day at the White House because they weren't accustomed to saying goodbye to ambassadors. Certainly, they didn't pay much attention. The photographers were taking pictures of somebody else; they never

took a picture of President Kennedy and me. Shall I tell you about it at all, because it was rather amusing. I went in and had an appointment... [Interruption]

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The west entrance at the White House was full of newspaper people and hangers-on and all kinds of people; there didn't seem to be any order at all. It was less than a week after the inauguration, perhaps exactly a week after the inauguration. Finally I recognized the face of Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] and realized that he was someone that had to do with appointments, and I had an appointment at the given hour. As soon as he saw me, he waved to me and he says, "Okay, go on in. He's ready for you." Well, I went through the narrow hall to the President's office and had to hold myself against the wall to let the Vice President out because Lyndon Johnson had just been talking to the President, obviously about the bill that was up to enlarge the Rules Committee. But when I got to the office I didn't see the President. He was over in the window leaning over his newspapers. He used to read in the window. After a moment I said, "Mr. President?" He turned around, "Oh, Mr. Ambassador, I'm very glad to see you." He was very quick. We had a very affable conversation, the main point of which was that he told me something that I really was amazed to hear him say. He said, "You now, I'm glad you're going to Latin America because that's our number one problem." My impression at that moment was that President Kennedy was saying that to be nice. I realized in a few months that he really meant it, that Latin America was our number one problem. We talked about it, and we talked also, of course, about his older brother and sister, whom I'd known fairly well. But our conversation was interrupted by Lyndon Johnson returning to point to the telephone, to tell the President to pick up the telephone. So the President picked up the telephone -- and I don't remember to which congressman he was speaking -- he was trying to make sure he had his vote for that bill in enlarging rules committee.

O'BRIEN: Well, how did your appointment come about? It came about in the last of the Eisenhower Administration.

WILLIAMS: I was told by people in the State Department that there was a coincidence of view between the people who were leaving and the people who were coming into the State Department who dealt with Latin America at that time. I was at the time deputy chief of mission at our embassy in Israel. That year there'd been a revolution after a while that they had to change ambassadors. The incumbent ambassador had been, I believe, fairly closely associated with the old regime, as often happens in Latin America, and wasn't getting on too well with the new one. They looked around for someone who knew that country. I happened to have been there earlier

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as charge d'affaires. I was first secretary back in 1947 to '49. They wanted someone who knew the country. I'm told that I was chosen on one hand by Tom Mann [Thomas C. Mann],

the assistant secretary, who knew of my connection, and on the other hand by Loy Henderson, with whom I'd done a good deal of work previously in another matter, in the Middle East, initially. It just turned out that way. As a career officer I was chosen.

O'BRIEN: What do you recall about your conversations with Rusk?

WILLIAMS: Well, Mr. Rusk, whom I had only casually met before, was very eager to see me, cordial about my going to Latin America. He had only one subject on his mind. Perhaps it came from the memoranda that had been prepared by the staff as to what he should talk to me about, but that one subject was the integration of universities of Central America. He says, "We won't bother you with it right away, but this is something we want you to deal with." This was a very interesting subject, I guess, since he had just come from the Rockefeller Foundation and was very much concerned with education, and it was a natural thing for him to bring up. Also, it followed our effort to build up a common market and improve relations between the countries and improve the sense of community among the five countries of Central America. It was a very thorny question though.

O'BRIEN: You were saying integration of -- did I understand you? -- the integration...

WILLIAMS: Of the universities. It was kind of -- I forget what word he used, I believe he used "rationalization" -- so that there wouldn't be a duplication of professional and scientific schools in those small countries whose total university population would be much less than the university population of one of our large state universities.

O'BRIEN: What's the feeling on the part of, well, let's take the Bureau of Latin American affairs, at that point. Who do you talk to before you go down?

WILLIAMS: At that time I talked mainly to Tom Mann as the assistant secretary at that time. Tom and I had known each other a long time. We may have had

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somewhat different points of view toward Latin America. We both agreed, I'm sure, on our feeling the need for economic development and for promotion of a Central American common market. We disagreed perhaps on who the people are that we needed to cultivate.

O'BRIEN: Yes.

WILLIAMS: I felt very strongly that we had to cultivate the university people and

the middle class, the young people, the people who are outside the hierarchy. Tom is a realist and recognized that power was in the hands of the hierarchy, the large corporate planners and others. He'd gotten along exceedingly well with them; they had great respect for him, and he had very good feelings for them. I think that most of us who went out under President Kennedy did try to reach out to the people in a way we hadn't done before. And I think we had some success.

O'BRIEN: Yes. Well, how does he feel at this point, and how does the department look at the coup that had taken place?

WILLIAMS: Oh, there were, of course, two coups, one in October, and then one between President Kennedy's inauguration and my departure. I think the second coup took place on January 24. I think Tom Mann and the State Department had hoped that we'd be able to get along with the people who had carried out the October coup and it wouldn't be necessary to go through this thing again. There were some people in the government who obviously thought we could do better -- I'm not so sure -- and they were not disappointed when the second coup took place because they thought that the second coup had a more firmly anti-Communist government to deal with.

O'BRIEN: Well, recognition is withheld from the first coup, and it's extended to the second coup.

WILLIAMS: Yes.

O'BRIEN: What goes into the decision on that?

WILLIAMS: At that time our main concern was Cuba and

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Castro [Fidel Castro]. There were in the junta and cabinet, formed by the October coup, people who alarmed our Defense Department, especially G-2 [army intelligence]. Because of this, the junta's relations with us seemed to have grown worse during the period from October to January. The relations between our ambassador, Mr. Kalijarvi [Thorsten V. Kalijarvi], and the leading members of that junta had broken down almost completely. They weren't on speaking terms. Mr. Kalijarvi went back to Washington leaving a charge in charge. You said that recognition was withheld. It was withheld for a long time, but by the time I had been appointed ambassador, yes, by the time I had been appointed, we had recognized the junta government. But there had been a very, very long delay for the reasons that I mentioned earlier, sort of lack of confidence. There were suspicions, perhaps, on the part of some of our intelligence officers that the junta might be much too closely connected with Castro. The Directorio, as they called it, the second junta -- the government that took power in January -- was recognized, as you know, in a very short period, something like less than three weeks, I think.

O'BRIEN: Yes, three days or something like that.

WILLIAMS: Right. Actually, I went down before recognition was extended. You asked me whom I talked to in Washington before I went. I talked, of course, to Mr. Rusk and the people in the Latin American Bureau, but I also talked to G-2. It just happened that...

O'BRIEN: Who is it at that time?

WILLIAMS: General Fitch [Alva R. Fitch] was there, Alva Fitch, who had been my military attache when I was charge d'affaires in San Salvador in the 1940s.... He was there from '48 to '50. I was there from '47 to '49, and we served together. He took a very intimate interest in me. Now is this partly off the record?

O'BRIEN: Well, you know, you can put all kinds of security restrictions on it. Everybody that handles it....

WILLIAMS: Well, I might say that this, perhaps, should be considered classified information. But Fitch told me that we are...

O'BRIEN: Wait a moment. [Interruption] [May 15, 1973 classification not necessary now.]

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WILLIAMS: Begin confidential. I called on General Fitch at the Pentagon. He was at that time deputy G-2. He later became G-2 and later became Deputy Director of DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency.] But General Fitch told me that the Pentagon was very seriously concerned about the danger of assistance from Cuba to revolutionaries in El Salvador, that if there was an effort to overthrow the government of El Salvador -- the junta or the new Directorio -- that we were prepared to send forces in to counter any subversives who came from Cuba. This had quite a sobering effect on me, to feel that there was considered to be such a situation that we might intervene. I was not at that point fully informed about it, but I pondered quite a lot what the general said. I'd end confidential there.

O'BRIEN: End confidential. Well, very soon after you got there in that regard, wasn't it -- I know through some of the Central American countries, including El Salvador.... There was a team that came, in terms of -- it was in April, I believe -- assessing the police needs and the ability to resist insurgency.

WILLIAMS: Yes, we had a number of visits of that sort. Some of them were from

the Pentagon, some from CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. Some may have been from CIA, under Pentagon cover. I don't remember right now. Later we had a visit from Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] who was then Deputy Attorney General, who came from the Attorney General's office to discuss collaboration, coordination of the efforts of the police departments of the different Central American countries. Maybe you've already been aware of this.

O'BRIEN: Yes. I'd like you, if you would though, to discuss some of this.

WILLIAMS: That came about two years after I'd been there, and it seemed a very important effort by our government. I don't think it would have done us much good politically were it to be known. Yet I think it inevitably has become known and will become known in Central America, that we not only provided... [Interruption] I was saying that, had it been known how much help we had given the police and how much effort we made to coordinate the activities of the police, it wouldn't have done us much good in Central America in our efforts to win over the students and the people who were outside

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the hierarchy. I often lamented that we, for security reasons, had to go as far as we did go in our cooperation with the police. And I think this may have been actually one of the handicaps to me in carrying out the purposes of President Kennedy in Central America, that we were known to be identified with the police, with security organizations and with those who were maintaining the status quo. Although our policy was to promote change -- I wouldn't say promote revolution but at least to promote change, social change -- people didn't trust us because they knew that at the time we were backing the police.

O'BRIEN: Well, first of all, when you get there, is there anything in the way of operations by the military, the CIA, or the department within the country that you stop, or check, or don't particularly approve of?

WILLIAMS: I had my biggest problem with the military missions taken as a whole. I don't know if you happened to have seen the letter I wrote to the *New York Times* last summer on the subject. I'll get you a copy before you leave here.

O'BRIEN: I saw it. I saw it back then, right, and I'd forgotten completely about it until this moment.

WILLIAMS: Right. I was appalled really by the importance of our military mission in the country. I won't say that this impressed me when I first arrived. I had to be there for a while to see what the role of the military missions was. We had more people in our air mission than there were flying personnel in the

Salvadorian air force. We also had an army mission. Between the two of them, we had more than forty officers and men in a country whose total military forces were only about three thousand. I guess with police and the national guard their armed forces would run up to almost six thousand. But our military missions were not only numerous with such a small force, a small military establishment, they were also conspicuous because the personnel lived well. They had automobiles that were conspicuous, a rather obvious mistake. But beyond that, anyone knowing that the United States had missions advising the local forces, and knowing that the United States supplied equipment, would expect the United States really to control the destiny in that country. Foreign diplomats assumed that we knew everything that was going on because we had such a large military mission. And students

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identified us -- that is, the Americans -- with the Establishment because of our military mission.

I talked to Mr. Rusk about this, I guess it was not 'til March, 1963, when President Kennedy was in Costa Rica. Mr. Rusk says, "If you really think your mission is too big, write to me and I'll take care of it." I said, "I certainly will write to you." So I went back to my post, I made a study of the mission and submitted a dispatch recommending that they be sort of phased out, reduced, that they certainly not be conspicuous any more, and sent a little note to the secretary telling him about all this and enclosing, obviously, a copy. I never heard from him. But I went to Washington soon afterwards and I saw Alex Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson], who was Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and asked him why some action hadn't been taken. Johnny said, "Oh, I can take care of that in a moment. The secretary gave it to me to handle. But I think you'd better speak to Jeff Kitchen [Jeffrey Cc. Kitchen] because Jeff is looking after it." So I went to see Jeff and I said, "Jeff, I'm going to reduce these military missions. They're interfering with achieving our other objectives." Jeff said, "Oh, I think you're right, but you've annoyed the Pentagon. You've gone at this the wrong way by asking that they be reduced in a formal message. I don't know what we can do about it but I'll see." Finally I got General O'Meara [Andrew P. O'Meara], the general from Panama, to come up and pay me a visit. General O'Meara discussed the size of the mission for about two days and then said, "You know, I think you have a point. We might reduce the missions by two slots." I said, "General, that's not too much, two out of forty-two." "Well, I don't see how we can function if we cut out more than those two." "Well, when will those two leave?" He says, "When their tours of duty are finished in the next eighteen months."

I often regret that I didn't stay and fight that battle and try to get something done because to me the Soccer War of July, 1969, was in a sense made possible by the existence of American military missions on both sides, on the Honduran side and the Salvadorian side. I don't say the cause of war, but then you have to make the war possible. I've been told by people who were there and who were in objective positions, able to observe, that certainly on the Salvadorian side, Americans -- members of the American mission -- advised the Salvadorian army what routes to take into Honduras. And members of the American air mission advised the Salvadorian air force what targets they should bomb.

O'BRIEN: Is that right?

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WILLIAMS: To me this was a shocking example of a misdirected policy. We should never have had missions playing the role they played in Central America, and certainly we shouldn't have had missions on opposing sides in such a war. They were called back eventually, but it did do some damage.

O'BRIEN: Why has this mission grown to the size that it had by the time you...

WILLIAMS: I'll answer the question by saying first, when I was there in 1947-49 we had, in '47, a military mission consisting of two persons, a colonel and a warrant officer, and they worked at the military academy. Later an air mission was added. The air mission got bigger and bigger. I suppose the military mission and the air mission both grew during the period from '47-'48 to 1961 when I went back, because of fear of Castroism and fear of subversive influences. I suppose also it was because of the natural tendency of military organization to grow; you get one officer and he needs somebody to help him handle one kind of problem. You need training officers; you need intelligence officers; you need your paymaster, and you go on; you need supply officers; you need engineers -- until you get to a point where you can't have a mission without having a complete table of organization, which is maybe standard in different parts of the world. You don't hear of very small missions.

I should say in this general connection as long as we're talking about the military, our military role had a big effect on our policy and certainly, I think, had a damaging effect on our policy. It was standard procedure, when I first went there, for the generals station in Panama -- the air general, the army general and the overall commanding general, General O'Meara -- to pay frequent visits to each republic in Central America. They came to see us, ostensibly to inspect the mission but also to consult with the president of the republic, consult with the minister of defense. But each time they came they seemed to make our military presence even more conspicuous. The standard operating procedures, I was saying, was for them to arrive; a regiment of Salvadorian troops would be driven out to the airport. We would go through a routine of driving, marching through the streets of the capital city to call on the President, to call on the minister of defense. There would be a party at the President's house or one of the local organizations, and there'd be a great dinner at the American embassy. Everybody was conscious that the American General

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had come. Well, it didn't take much perspicacity to see that this was interfering with what we were trying to do under the Alliance for Progress. So I simply wrote General O'Meara and asked him not to come anymore, and I kept the generals away for at least a year. They objected. They didn't understand why I should be different from other ambassadors who were always glad to have them come, but I said that in the delicate political situation when

we were trying to increase their own sense of self-reliance, politically, that it did not help, in our efforts to improve relations with all sectors of the community to have American generals coming every couple of months.

O'BRIEN: Well, in a military mission of that sort, does the relative wealth, and the fact that these people come, in any way diminish the role of the ambassador...

WILLIAMS: I don't think it was that so much, because they did.... Everybody under the military had a sense of protocol, a sense of aura and hierarchy, and they knew that they had to report to me, and they were very correct and respectful to the office of the ambassador. It wasn't that so much as simply the impression made on the Salvadorians by American military presence.

O'BRIEN: Yes, and on the general public, too. Let me....

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I]

WILLIAMS: ...about this military matter.

O'BRIEN: Okay.

WILLIAMS: I'll give you my letter to the *New York Times* which I've got several copies of. The other subjects I think we ought to cover is the relations with the university leaders, economic development and the common market, and then President Kennedy himself and the effect he had on the Salvadorians.

O'BRIEN: Okay, well, when you go there you've just recently had -- as I understand -- a student revolt at the university there. And then you got the junta that had come in. How did you -- let's start with the junta -- how did you find these people when you arrived.

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WILLIAMS: The second junta which had taken over, as I say, after I had been appointed and before I arrived, was exceedingly friendly towards me. One of them I had known very well, or fairly well, during my first tour of duty there. His name was Rodriguez Porth [J. Antonio Rodriguez Porth], a lawyer. The others were very eager to establish warm relations with the American ambassador because they had a program of what they considered to be a social reform, which seemed to fit into the Alliance for Progress, and they wanted our support. They had been deeply touched by President Kennedy's inaugural speech, by his subsequent discussion of the Alliance for Progress, and they wanted to get into it fast. They didn't just want money, but they wanted encouragement and support because any social reform, in their eyes, meant clashing with the

establishment, with the hierarchy, with the *catorce familias*. And they needed support from us, from the American embassy, in any such conflict because always in the past the American embassy, the American legation, I think, almost always had been looked upon as a pillar of support for the hierarchy itself. And these people were going to be in conflict with the hierarchy. This caused all kinds of difficulties between me and some of my old friends in the *catorce familias*, because the members of this *Directorio*, as the junta was called, would sometimes without my knowing about it use me in their arguments and say, "Well this is something the American ambassador wants us to do." Now at least I was told that, and it doesn't surprise me at all because whatever they were doing seemed very consistent with President Kennedy's program, the Alliance for Progress. Many of them had fairly close connections with people in Washington who were concerned with the Alliance for Progress.

I don't like to talk too much in generalities, so I'll say specifically there were three issues that I think of right away: one a foreign exchange law, one a minimum wage law, and one a law for control of the central banks. There was a fourth one which was a law providing for reorganization of the national coffee company. In each one of these cases the reform government -- the revolutionary government -- was clashing with the hierarchy, and in each one of these cases the hierarchy -- the *catorce familias* -- expected support from the American ambassador in resisting. On the question of the minimum wage law, for example, no sooner had it been announced that the government was going to establish a minimum wage law -- a minimum wage of something like sixty cents American per day, a ridiculously low sort of minimum wage -- no sooner had that happened, than I began to have visits at the embassy from coffee planters and others who waid, "Do you know what the government's doing? We're going to be ruined, and we

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need your help." I remember saying to one of them, "What do you think Arthur Goldberg would say if I wrote him and said -- wrote to the State Department or the Department of Labor to say -- that we must try to discourage the government of El Salvador from establishing a minimum wage law of sixty cents a day?" They came to me one after another. I'd tell them about Costa Rica, where they had a minimum wage of something like a dollar and a half a day and wondered why they were so different. But they always expected me to intervene on their side. I had a lot of fun resisting this request. When the government issued its law of control of flight of capital, again, the people who were affected seemed to think the American embassy should help them instead of encouraging the government to go ahead with this kind of thing. We were delighted, of course, that they had developed this kind of law, because it meant that more capital in the country, would be invested in the country, and since we symbolized a desire for economic development, that was fine.

The central bank is another case in point. The central bank was one of the few central banks in all the world -- possibly the only one outside of Great Britain -- which was privately owned. The government put an end to the private ownership of the central bank. The hierarchy, or the established families, the oligarchy, perhaps I should say, wondered if we hadn't been responsible for this change. Actually, we weren't, but it fitted in with our general program. Likewise, the oligarchy lost control of the National Coffee Company. The

cumulative effect of these reform measures by the government, which were carried out with no discouragement from us -- with no intervention from us -- caused one great expert in that part of the world, Alfonso Rochacc, a Salvadorian economist, to come to me one day and say: "You just can't imagine what's happened to the ruling families. The ruling families feel that they've lost their three principal supports: the Church, with the new Pope, John XXIII; the army, because the army people are carrying out the reform; and the American legation, because you refuse to sympathize with them."

O'BRIEN: Well do they, the *catorce familias*, see the danger of Castro? Are they really aware of Castro?

WILLIAMS: They think that the greatest protection against Castro is the American army and the American navy, and they drew their greatest comfort from the presence of large American military missions. Possibly I should have mentioned earlier that the military missions may have grown because the established families, the

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oligarchy, wanted more American military presence in the country. It comforted them to think that if anything happened that we would have more troops coming in and more people coming in and that sort of thing.

O'BRIEN: Would the people that are in the *Directorio*, and also the economists and military, are these people from the fourteen families or the....

WILLIAMS: There was just one civilian, possibly two civilians, in the original *Directorio* of five persons who might be considered members of the *catorce familias*, but those two were eliminated about two months after the revolution. One was a man named Dr. Valiente [Jose F. Valiente], a medical doctor, and the other was my friend Rodriguez Porth, the lawyer. They were squeezed out of the directorio, I guess it was April, '61, I just don't remember the day. That was more or less it. They were squeezed out of the *Directorio* because they were rather conservative. The original *Directorio* had been almost a coalition drawing people from conservative backgrounds to give it a broader base, but as soon as Rivera [Julio Adalberto Rivera] and Portillo [Anibel Portillo] and Avelar [Feliciano Avelar], the other three members of the *Directorio*, found themselves strong enough, those two were squeezed out. So there was no real representative of the *catorce familias* in the *Directorio* after April, 1961. From then on the real power -- intellectual power and I suppose political power -- was Julio Rivera, who later became President and is now an ambassador in Washington. Julio Rivera -- I should say, if this is not inconsistent with your story -- formed a very strong attachment for President Kennedy, and they got on very, very well when they met. May I saw a few words about that for a moment?

O'BRIEN: Sure, please do.

WILLIAMS: Rivera was enthusiastic about the whole program of the Alliance for Progress. Rivera himself came of relatively humble origin, from a rural town in El Salvador, but somehow he got a pretty good education from one of the private schools in San Salvador. Later, as an exile, he studied economics in Italy. He'd taken part in the revolution that failed -- I guess the one against Martinez [Maximiliano Martinez] -- and was sent off to some assignment at the Italian War College, I believe it was. While he was there he studied a lot of economics. When he was a lieutenant on another occasion, serving in Santa Ana in the garrison there, he went to an American Baptist missionary school and was very strongly influenced by the American Baptist missionaries, not religiously so much as some general ideas

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of social reform. He had good friends, economists and others, who helped him formulate his attitude towards social reform. And when he finally met President Kennedy in Costa Rica he made the great impression on President Kennedy because he was so sincere in what he had to say. But more than that, he wasn't begging President Kennedy for help, he was telling President Kennedy what he had been able to do in the field of social reform regardless of the assistance he got from us.

I remember on the morning after they had first met at dinner I had been asked by Mr. Rusk to be present at a certain time to brief President Kennedy before his "bilateral meeting" with Rivera. As soon as President Kennedy knew that I was to talk about Rivera he said, "I want you to tell me about that man because he impresses me more than any of the other Central American presidents. How does he get the way he is? How is he? How does he have these strong feelings?" I told him a little about his Baptist missionary school background -- and also I told him of his education and such, and assured him of his sincerity as well. He liked him. I might also say that for about a year and a half before that, we had had a management consultant team in El Salvador, Robert R. Nathan Associates, who had helped Rivera develop his programs, again very successfully. In their conversation together Kennedy and Rivera -- through the translator -- got on very, very well because Rivera -- I don't know if he really memorized -- but certainly he was well briefed and he'd studied his brief and he knew exactly what he wanted to say to President Kennedy, and said it with great force. He really didn't ask for anything, I repeat, and expressed his appreciation for the cooperation he'd gotten, and he was particularly pleased with what Ted Moscoso [Teodoro Moscoso] had helped him do. And he had nothing but optimism and great plans for the future. I thought Kennedy's reaction to him was warm and enthusiastic, and he continued to feel that Rivera had great hopes for the Alliance for Progress in Central America.

O'BRIEN: Well, you know, a moment ago we were talking about the universities. How does the university from the left, the student left, look at a guy like Rivera?

WILLIAMS: Anyone, I think, who comes out of the military forces and comes to power as a military leader is going to be looked upon with suspicion by the student left. In Rivera's case maybe this was somewhat complicated by the antipathies students instinctively had to us at that time -- to the Americans. Rivera was sometimes identified with the Americans. On the other hand, Rivera

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tried to bridge the gap to the universities, and I think made some progress sometimes. It was a very strange thing, his.... The director of the university during part of the time I was there was an old schoolmate of Rivera's named Fabio Castillo, whom I got to know very, very well. Fabio has actually been to Madison Mills three times since I left El Salvador. Although their respective backers opposed each other, Fabio and Julio Rivera would see each other from time to time and were basically friendly. I don't suppose the university students in El Salvador will ever take kindly to a military president like Rivera because university students are bent on nothing so much as rapid reform, and they don't see the military producing rapid reforms.

O'BRIEN: How about your own relations with the university community?

WILLIAMS: I was determined myself to establish the closest possible relations with the university community. I was frequently discouraged, but I didn't give up. When I first arrived there was no one who seemed more important among university people than Fabio Castillo. But Castillo had been a member of the junta that had been overthrown in January, 1961, and he was in exile. When he finally came back, I'd heard so much about him that I asked members of my staff if they couldn't arrange for me to meet him. They behaved as if I'd asked to meet the devil. None of them knew him well enough to call him. So I went to the telephone one day and dialed the university myself and said, "I'd like to speak to Dr. Castillo." They said, "Who's calling?" I said, "The American ambassador. My name is Williams." They seemed to be shocked to have such a call, but Castillo came to the phone. I said, "I've heard so much about you. I'd like to meet you." He said, "I said, "Well, will you come to lunch or dinner on Saturday or Sunday?" He said, "With my wife?" I said, "Yes. When would you like to come?" We fixed a date and he came and we spent several hours talking, and it was most enjoyable. We continued relations like this for quite a long time. We'd meet, and he was a little suspicious, but he was always very frank. And eventually I was able to go with my AID director directly to the university and discuss real projects with him. We got American professors, American university people, to come and do the work that he wanted them to do at the university. I also got to know some of the deans, his friends, pretty well. I think we made some progress, although it was never easy because they were always militant. And you might

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as well call some of them Communists because there were indeed Communist students who were acting under Communist discipline, wanted to cause us trouble and who would make a scene, or did on at least one occasion make a scene, at the university. It wasn't very serious. There wasn't any threat or violence but it was just a little unpleasant.

O'BRIEN: What happened?

WILLIAMS: There was some ceremony -- I believe it was honoring a contribution that the German government had given to the school of chemistry at the university -- the opening of the school of chemistry at the university -- the opening of the school of chemistry, that's what it was. The German ambassador had had a part there, and somebody with a bullhorn said that the ambassador of the imperialist Yankee government was present in the stadium and that he should leave. I didn't leave. The noise subsided and the ceremony was concluded. But it was slightly unpleasant. Frequently we had university students and professors come to the embassy and talk. We didn't make spectacular progress, but we did establish some sort of feeling of confidence. Of course there are some people who think that I left El Salvador in 1964 because I was fired for establishing relations that were too close with the university. Actually, when I congratulated Castillo on his election to the rectorship of the university, he replied with quite a long letter -- which he published -- saying what the problems were between the United States and El Salvador and saying that there was naturally some suspicion in the Salvadorian government towards any representative -- in the Salvadorian university -- of the United States government. I replied, insisting that our only interest was working towards mutual goals, and as representatives of democratic peoples we had mutual goals. I think that there was a useful exchange. Anyone who is studying relations between the United States and Central America might be interested in going through the whole long letters. I don't have copies of them anymore. They're in the files of the State Department.

O'BRIEN: Yes, I'm sure there are. What were the big problems in 1961? Would you...

WILLIAMS: The biggest problem was in the field of social reform. But social reform had to be accompanied by economic development. Robert Nathan put this very clearly in old fashioned terms to Rivera on one of his first visits to El Salvador. Rivera asked me to bring Nathan to lunch because he'd heard he was there. He was there. He was there on a study. (Later he returned under

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a management contract.) The three members of the *Directorio* at that time and Nathan and I had lunch. I was the interpreter between them all. But the key to it all was when Nathan said to them, particularly to Rivera, "Colonel, I have great respect for your program of social reform. But Colonel, you can't give the people more pie till you bake a bigger pie," which is an old hat expression with us, but it impressed Rivera. Rivera came back to see me some

months afterwards, and wanted to know about my friend Mr. Nathan the economist, who had talked about baking the bigger pie. So the answer to your question is that economic development, increasing productivity was the problem that went hand in hand with social reform. Rivera turned to that. His government did, I thought, do a great deal to encourage capital development, to encourage training and labor's increased productivity, and above all, to promote the common market -- the idea which it could start earlier which had great support at this time.

O'BRIEN: Then that first year you have a very decided interest on the part of the government of El Salvador for the Alliance. Now how do you implement some of the things that are in the Alliance in regard to El Salvador? Do you have someone's special team or special organization...

WILLIAMS: Our AID [Agency for International Development] did most of the real work, the technical work, in programming and in carrying out our own Alliance objectives. One of the things we did was to encourage the government of El Salvador to establish a planning mission, a planning ministry, Ministerio de Plantification, a planning council. The planning council covered all phases of economic development, in agriculture, in industry in general investment and investment development banks and such things, encouraging private capital investment and others. When it got support, direct planning management advice from Robert R. Nathan and Company, it began to make rather considerable strides, I thought. A large part of it was in manufacturing; in encouraging study of new marketing techniques -- we brought people from there up to this country to some of our trade marts -- in improving industrial design, which has a lot to do with improving manufacturing, as I say; and in productivity. We also did a lot of work in helping them establish the kind of industrial development banks, an industrial development bank, to provide capital for the small businessman.

We also worked in agriculture, not so much in land

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reform -- and reform would have been undertaken on separate terms in El Salvador -- but in providing better credit facilities for farmers, medium and small farmers, as well as better productivity. We had one or two agricultural advisory groups come down to assist in these fields. We even helped them in the field of social security, improving pension systems for government employees. Some people would probably say that the best thing we did was to help in building inexpensive schools. We provided a fair amount of money but also designs suitable for the tropics. Building schools didn't cost a great deal of money. In fact they were probably the most conspicuous or spectacular feature of our program.

We also did -- Rivera had a special interest in this -- some work in developing health clinics, quite a number of health clinics; I think eleven we dedicated. Always had some trouble because I have seen -- maybe you've seen this yourself aboard -- that frequently a government will build a hospital or a sanitarium of some sort, dedicate it with a lot of publicity and fanfare, and then leave it for months without putting it into operation. I've seen

this in Greece. I've seen it in other parts of Latin America. I remember it happened once in Guatemala. But I made an arrangement after the first dedication, made an agreement, that we wouldn't come to dedicate any health clinic unless the personnel and the material was there to put it in operation right away. So that had a good effect.

We tried to help in other aspects of the Alliance for Progress. One thing that was the cause of a lot of interest one time was our effort to reopen some old gold and silver mines near San Miguel in the eastern part of the country. These mines hasn't been used for several years, and the area where they were located was sort of impoverished because they were out of operation. I went down to visit the mines at the request of some people in the ministry of development who were hoping to get some help from us. There was a great demonstration of the workers saying, "We want your help, Mr. Ambassador. We want to see that the Alliance for Progress is real. What are you going to do for us?" I realized the only thing we could do was to get some American or foreign mining company interested in putting money in it. We worked for quite a while to do that. Fortunately just these past few months during the past winter I got word that our efforts which began there really... [Interruption]

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[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

O'BRIEN: One of the big things you have there when you go in 1961 is the balance of payments problem. Do you get involved in their balance of payments problem at all?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I did. I don't remember too many of the details. What we tried to do was to help them increase their export of manufactured goods, not to the United States so much as the other countries of the common market.

O'BRIEN: I see.

WILLIAMS: We also helped them by encouraging the effort of Esso Standard Oil to establish both an oil refinery and fertilizer factory, the fertilizer factory in which Esso had a large interest in El Salvador.

O'BRIEN: Were these under the guaranteed loan program do you recall?

WILLIAMS: I don't think that either of them needed the loan guarantee. There were other concerns that did get the loan guarantee. We were very fortunate in -- we can't claim full responsibility for any of these decisions -- encouraging a number of important American concerns to establish factories, manufacturing facilities, in El Salvador for production of goods to supply both El Salvador and other countries of the common market. Examples are Phelp Dodge [Corporation], Crown Zellerbach [Corporation] I guess had already established a cardboard plant before I got there,

a pencil plant with Eberhard [Eberhard Faber, Inc.] and, various pharmaceutical plants. Of course local entrepreneurs, particularly the De Sola family, worked out their own arrangements for producing goods that otherwise might have been imported, goods which they could export abroad. Sears Roebuck [and Company] did a lot to encourage local manufacturers to produce products according to Sears' specifications, that Sears could sell in its own retail outlets in Central America. As a matter of fact, there was one young man Arturo Zablah, who built up a plant to make mattresses and bedding in El Salvador, who was supported by Sears and provided by Sears with equipment to manufacture according to their specifications. He was written up in a front page story in the *Wall Street Journal* during my first year there. All kinds of things like this helped relieve the

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Salvador a balance of payments problem. But of course the most important thing always was coffee, and we obviously worked hard to support the International Coffee Agreement, to provide some sort of stability in the coffee market, which was badly shaken in those days by the arrival of new supplies of coffee from Africa. Sugar was beginning to be something, though it wasn't a really large export. Cotton was more important. During the early years that I was in El Salvador there were good cotton crops. I suppose this was partially due to the fact that the area most suitable for growing cotton had been opened up by construction of a new highway, financed largely by World Bank funds, the Littoral Highway. Once that was completed and the land was made available for growing cotton, El Salvador improved greatly its balance of payments situation. I think those were the principal items: coffee, cotton, sugar and manufactured goods to the Central American common market. We tried to help develop industries which might export to the United States, but the main interest was in things that suggested local handicraft, and I don't think that had much effect on the balance of payments.

O'BRIEN: I'm curious -- what accounts for the interest of these American companies like Sears and Eberhard and all? Is there some incentive or pushing on the part of the government?

WILLIAMS: Well, there wasn't an incentive, I don't think there was any real incentive until the Central American common market offered them a market of twelve, fifteen million people in the peninsula. Previously they had to deal with individual markets, which weren't attractive to anyone manufacturing on a large scale.

O'BRIEN: In terms of policy in Washington, what is the feeling towards the common market? At this time, as I understand, there was a good deal of questions about LAFTA [Latin American Free Trade Association] and the relationship to the common market.

WILLIAMS: Yes, well, I don't think there's anything that's happened in Central America that the State Department and AID have been so proud of in

the last ten, fifteen years as the common market.

O'BRIEN: There was a lot of enthusiasm for it?

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WILLIAMS: There was and has been, yes. I think Tom Mann should have a lot of credit for originally promoting it. There were two American economists -- whose names escape me right at the moment -- who made some of the original studies. It was a logical development, much more logical than LAFTA, because the Central American common market is a more compact area than the area of LAFTA. Communication has improved, both by air and by land, and even by sea, between the five countries, and they have a tradition of earlier efforts to achieve unity. We were able to help develop the institutions of the common market by helping them find capital. This was done through the Inter-American development bank and the Central American Development Bank [Central American Bank for Economic Integration] in Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

President Kennedy, after his visit to Costa Rica, had the great idea of developing a school for business administrators, which would make the Central Americans better equipped to compete in the international market, to compete with other countries economically. And soon after his visit to Costa Rica, down came George Lodge from Harvard with two other professors from Harvard Business School to talk.... Maybe you know about this?

O'BRIEN: Why don't you discuss that further.

WILLIAMS: ... about the establishment of a business school under Harvard supervision and general encouragement. This was done very thoroughly and very well. I think the institution was called INCAE [Instituto Centroamericano de Administracion de Empresas.] [Interruption] Oh, when we talked about that Harvard Business School...

O'BRIEN: Right, coming down with one of the...

WILLIAMS: That was a directive of President Kennedy -- excuse me.

O'BRIEN: Right, go ahead.

WILLIAMS: It was direct intervention by President Kennedy -- at Harvard Business School in order to interest Harvard Business School in Central American progress. The school apparently is going, and Harvard is still interested in it. The only thing that is just so darn

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discouraging is that Soccer War last summer between Honduras and Salvador, which should never have taken place, which might not have taken place -- I won't say definitely -- but might not have taken place had we not had those military missions. That pulled the props from under the common market for a while because trade between those two countries stopped entirely. I might say parenthetically, I shouldn't overlook the population crisis and other causes behind that war. All I'm saying is that giving them the hardware, the military hardware, on both sides made it a little easier for them to go at each other. Covey Oliverly and I have argued about this, but I still believe that we made it easier for them to fight. Have you talked to Covey, by the way?

O'BRIEN: I haven't, no.

WILLIAMS: I don't believe he had an appointment under Kennedy. He was Assistant Secretary for Latin America later on.

O'BRIEN: But it may be worthwhile. In fact, I was thinking just a moment ago of talking -- as long as he's in Washington -- talking to Rivera.

WILLIAMS: Oh, you should, especially about Kennedy, because although he never saw him much, he talked about him as if he were his brother.

O'BRIEN: Well, I think it would be worthwhile, and I'm going to write him or call him as soon as I get back. I imagine one of the things you had to deal with there in 1961, too, was the promise of the junta to have elections as well as the writing of a new constitution.

WILLIAMS: Yes.

O'BRIEN: Does the United States get involved in that in any way, as the technical....

WILLIAMS: Well, I just think that the most I did was to say Feliciano Avelar, who was a civilian member of the Directorio -- I said to him one night at a party, "Doctor, when are you going to have these elections? Have you set a date for them?" I said it in a sort of tone of pleading, not pleading but concern. I think that was the kind of hint that might have helped them to go ahead and set that date. I don't say that I told them when

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to set the date, but at least he knew that we cared about it, and they cared about us because they wanted support from us.

O'BRIEN: There's some charges to the effect that the elections were rigged. Did

you see any evidence of this?

WILLIAMS: We had, on election day, groups of officers or pairs of officers from the American embassy covering every important electorate area. Of course I realized that what they saw was more of the mechanics of the actual voting. And in the mechanics of actual voting none of them saw anything that made them suspicious of a rigged election. I think there even were arrangements for ballot boxes to have glass sides, glass bottoms, so everyone could see that the ballots were in them, those that were dropped in. What does happen is not so much the mechanical rigging of the election -- stuffing ballot boxes, voting people from the cemetery and such -- but rather the pressure in a given community or a village from the *sargento* or the guard or someone like that who lets people know how they're going to vote. Now, I don't know whether there was much of that, and we couldn't identify that sort of pressure. Maybe we should have. But we had the impression at the time, that the election which brought Rivera into power as president was an honest election. I know old friends of mine in El Salvador who said that it was the most honest one they'd ever seen. Maybe they said that because they knew I was interested, but I think it was pretty honest. I haven't talked to you about another political factor...

O'BRIEN: Sure, go ahead.

WILLIAMS: ... which to me is terribly important. That was the growth of the [Christian] Democratic Party. I think it's very likely that the Christian Democratic Party will eventually come into power as a civilian ruling party. I have great respect, even affection, for many of the leaders of the Christian Democratic Party -- the head of it was a chap named Duarte, Jose Napoleon Duarte, who had graduated from Notre Dame in Indiana. Duarte and Abraham Rodriguez and two or three other leaders were men whom I saw quite often. But I never thought that I had their confidence because they were a little suspicious of me, mainly because they identified me with the Rivera government. This unfortunately happens to an American ambassador in a small

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Latin American country. He gets too easily identified, whether he wants to or not, with the government that happens to be in power. But I had on the staff a very able political officer named Bob Phillips, Robert Phillips, who had served in Chile with the Christian Democrats, knew Eduardo Frei and other Christian Democrats very well. Now I gave Phillips the primary assignment of winning the confidence of these Christian Democrats and of helping them any way he could, any way he appropriately could. At least we weren't spying on them; we just wanted to establish some sort of understanding with them, as a responsible opposition party. They were very serious. They have a sense of political organization, and I believe in the last elections in El Salvador they did very well. I don't have details of it, but we considered this in other elections. But Duarte and Rodriguez may become, as I say, the

civilian heads of government. El Salvador used to have civilian presidents -- customarily had civilian presidents up to 1930 when Martinez took over.

O'BRIEN: How about some of the other parties there that are present, some of the minor parties?

WILLIAMS: The minor parties are parties that change their identity, change their names so frequently that I never considered them terribly important. The *Partido de Accion Renovadora* would represent a different group at different times. The only one with real consistency seemed to me to be the Christian Democrats -- aside from the Communist Party.

O'BRIEN: Well let's pass over to Cuba for a bit there, then go to El Salvador. Can you see influence, can you see direct aid, action coming from Cuba into El Salvador in 1961?

WILLIAMS: We frequently had reports of subversives getting into Cuba. The security services of El Salvador were very sensitive to it. Our CIA was very sensitive to it. Sometimes, perhaps, the reports were exaggerated, but I'm satisfied that there was a contact, a rather strong contact, and it might have been more active, more noticeable, in the university community than anywhere else.

O'BRIEN: Can you see any shift or change in intensity of that from 1961 to '64?

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WILLIAMS: I think it was much less in '64 than in '61. I don't think it was because.... I'm sorry to say that it was not because there'd been so much success in removing the causes of revolutionary feeling. The social problems hadn't been solved. It wasn't that so much as probably an improvement in security forces; I think that might be right. Maybe there was some understanding in certain revolutionary -- or potentially revolutionary -- groups that the government was making an effort. And I think that we were succeeding somewhat in our determination to change the American image, to picture ourselves as people -- and President Kennedy was responsible for this -- who are to be identified with social reform in El Salvador. This was a great service that President Kennedy really performed in Central America -- I can't speak for other places -- but he changed the American image, and Bobby Kennedy did the same thing. The transistor radio helped this. I might tell you that once when I was out in a rural section in the eastern part of the country -- it was raining -- and I'd been asked to come to a school house. I thought they were going to have a little ceremony welcoming me, but I got inside and there was the schoolmaster waiting to make a speech to us. The speech was this: "Mr. Ambassador, I have in my hand twelve points taken from President Kennedy's speech of March 12, 1961. What I want to know, Mr. Ambassador, is what are you going to do to carry out what President Kennedy has promised us." This was, you know, a remote area which would probably never

see a newspaper, selcom see a newspaper or a movie, obviously no television. But this chap had heard that speech on the radio and he'd written down the points, and he said, "What are you going to do about it?"

O'BRIEN: Where did they get these transistor radios?

WILLIAMS: Yes, as a matter of fact, not so much the United States government directly, but various institutions including the Catholic church. I forget what the Catholic organization was that actually bought transistor radios from Japan to distribute to people for home education. There was a -- gosh, it's been eight years now, but....

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O'BRIEN: Well, is the Agency [Agency for International Development] involved in this at all?

WILLIAMS: I suspect the agency might have helped, but it -- oh, it was some American institution, I just can't remember which one. I remember the name of the person, the local representative, who....

O'BRIEN: Who was it?

WILLIAMS: Ricardo Quinonez, who was a Salvadorian of a very distinguished family. His father and grandfather had been presidents of the republic. He was a very devout Catholic. He went to University of California and played in the Rose Bowl game against Roy Riegels the day Roy Riegels ran the wrong way with the ball. He's dead now, I'm sorry to say, but he was a great promoter of education in the countryside, and of the Catholics, and helped to get these transistor radios spread around the country so people could learn.

O'BRIEN: Well, in regard to Cuba and the influence of Cuba, what is your response, as well as the response you see in the various communities in El Salvador, to the Bay of Pigs?

WILLIAMS: It was one of the most shamefaced days of my life when I had to go to the foreign minister, who happened to have been very recently the Salvadorian ambassador to Cuba.... This was Equiza-bal [Rafael Equiza-bal Tobias.] I'd go to him and say not to give up hope, that we'd had reports that maybe the troops that have landed are making more progress than we thought in the Bay of Pigs operation, and that we had had reports of this and that, that there was still some hope that the operation might be a success. He looked at me with some skepticism. The reaction was unfavorable, of course, because everybody identified us with the whole operation, and they thought that we'd bungled it. At first, there was elation. I was at a wedding when the

thing actually started. I was at a fashionable wedding when we heard the first news of it, and the guests were just delighted that somebody was going to do something to overthrow Castro. They lost a lot of confidence in us when we didn't and we failed, and they saw us behind it. But of course there's the other aspect besides the reaction of the wedding guests and the government. Of course there were other people who were reinforced in their conviction that we were interfering with their affairs.

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O'BRIEN: Did you have any major demonstrations against the embassy?

WILLIAMS: Not at that time. We had one major demonstration against the embassy. It was in July, 1962. I'm very sorry to have to remember those circumstances. When Rivera was inaugurated there was still quite a lot of local opposition to him, mainly among the students, not so much in labor. I'd like to talk about labor separately.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

WILLIAMS: July, 1962, Rivera was inaugurated. He was inaugurated at a great kind of gymnasium place, which was carefully guarded by troops -- good security precautions -- everything went off very smoothly.

Unfortunately, a demonstration had been prepared to go and protest or demonstrate against his inauguration, but the demonstrators couldn't get very near to the gymnasium, to the place of the inauguration. And having nothing else to do -- no other target -- they turned to the American embassy. They caused an awful lot of trouble. I remember seeing what purported to be a Molotov cocktail. Fortunately it had not gone off -- which would have caused a great deal of damage had it gone off. The demonstrators didn't get into the embassy yard itself. They certainly didn't get into the embassy building, but they caused about fifteen hundred dollars worth of damage to windows and paint on the outside of the place -- maybe a little less than that. It was something that caused us a lot of embarrassment. But I've seen similar things happen in the Middle East, which often occur when demonstrators go after their main target -- which may have to do with people in the country. If they can't get the main target they go after the soft target, which in one case was the American consulate general. That happened to me in Greece. That was unpleasant, and that made it all the more necessary for us to try to improve relations with the reformists groups in the country.

O'BRIEN: Did you happen to get any feeling for the other embassies there? I'm speaking particularly of the bloc countries -- well, Russia?

WILLIAMS: We had no.... There were no Iron Curtain missions in El Salvador when we were there. I think that probably the friendliest mission might have been the Mexican mission.

O'BRIEN: Well, how about the missile crisis? What do

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you remember...

WILLIAMS: That was a terribly dramatic thing for us. I was actually away on that Sunday when the first word came to the embassy that we had information about missiles in Cuba. When I got back to town the deputy chief of mission told me that the news had come. We were to inform the foreign minister immediately that President Kennedy was to make a speech shortly afterwards, and that until that speech was made no one at the embassy was to know about the substance of the telegram except the code clerk, my secretary, the deputy chief of mission and me. I immediately went, as I remember, late Sunday night, to call on the foreign minister at his house and give him some explanation, and to tell him that we would appreciate getting some help. We were glad we took him into our confidence. There was not much that could be done locally. I think they felt that we had more confidence in them because we told them about it in advance. It didn't involve any particular diplomatic action on our part. The people of the country were quite concerned until the crisis passed, and they felt they were in the same boat with us. By the way, there's another item I should mention. I want to do these things in the sequence that you prefer.

O'BRIEN: Oh, all right.

WILLIAMS: This is a question of the space shots, the recent space shots.

O'BRIEN: Oh, space shots...

WILLIAMS: This was fairly amusing.

O'BRIEN: Okay. I was wondering, in regard to El Salvador's vote in the OAS [Organization of American States] on the Cuban Missile Crisis, as well as earlier, the resolutions at Punta del Este that Cuba should be out of the system, do they have any reservations about this at all? Do you have to lean on them in any way?

WILLIAMS: No, not at all. I don't think that anyone could have asked for a more cooperative foreign ministry than that we had there. They saw an identity of interests. I don't think we ever had any trouble. It was partly a tradition of co-operating in the United Nations. There was one fiasco back in 1932, when El Salvador by mistake recognized Manchukuo, and that's the only diffi-

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culty we have every had with them for a long time, although generally the same persons were still there. We didn't have to lean on them. They were very cooperative. They understood the Alliance for Progress and common interests.

O'BRIEN: You have a number of foreign ministers or at least three foreign ministers you deal with essentially, Serrano [Hector Escobar Serrano]....

WILLIAMS: Yes, Hector Serrano -- Garcia Serrano -- oh, gosh.

O'BRIEN: Escobar.

WILLIAMS: Escobar Serrano, yes, and Equizabal, and -- I don't know whether....

O'BRIEN: I was thinking of Gamero, but he may have been gone by the time you got there.

WILLIAMS: Yes, oh yes, he was there. I dealt with him for a while. He was a very decent chap.

O'BRIEN: How do you find -- well, let's put it this way -- what is your working relationship with the government? Is it basically the Rivera?

WILLIAMS: Well, several of my predecessors, particularly Robert C. Hill, who is now ambassador to Spain -- Robert C. Hill seemed to think that I should go in and bang on the President's desk. But since we, among other things, were trying to encourage the development of government institutions I thought that as often as possible we should deal with them the way they dealt with our government.

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE II]

WILLIAMS: Okay, my memory sometimes becomes very general rather than specific.

O'BRIEN: Oh, I think you have really a very good recollection.

WILLIAMS: Well, in fact some occasions come back to me that I haven't thought of since then. Yes, I used to think that on diplomatic matters I should deal with Foreign Minister, call on the President only when it was really a matter of presidential interest.

But also we dealt quite frequently with other ministers of government, and the foreign minister was not jealous if we did. We had such important economic interests and agricultural interests that we would deal with the others. And they were very easy to deal with most of the time I was there. Hubert Humphrey, as senator, came to see us once, and I had a lunch for him at which I had the members of government who dealt mainly with Alliance for Progress projects. It was a remarkable occasion for cooperation, and it showed the fruits of some earlier efforts at cooperation because among the six ministers, cabinet ministers or personages of cabinet rank, who were present, all but one had been a student at American universities, mainly under the old Rockefeller program and other circumstances. The minister of agriculture had studied at Texas A&M [Agricultural and Mechanical College System], the minister of public works had studied at the University of Florida, the minister of economy had studied, I believe, at Harvard, the President of the Central Bank had studied at Purdue, and the minister for planning at this lunch for Hubert Humphrey had actually studied at the University of Minnesota. So they were good people to deal with, worked well, and our relations with the government were excellent, especially in those days, at all levels. We helped -- I think we helped -- to build up the importance of the individual ministers so they weren't simply at the beck and call of the President all the time. It makes for better general relations between the government when you have responsible people sitting in individual ministries.

O'BRIEN: Sure. Well, in terms of the coffee agreements that take place -- international coffee agreements -- do you get involved in this at all, when you were in Washington and El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: Yes, not too much. They had some pretty clever coffee people who'd go to Washington to operate. Every now and then someone would come down from the State Department or the Department of Agriculture who was an expert in his field, and we would help him. We'd support him any way we could.

O'BRIEN: Is there a key guy on coffee for the State Department?

WILLIAMS: Well, in those days it was Jerry Jacobson [Jerome J. Jacobson.] Later I think it was Blumenthal [Michael Blumenthal.] Jerry Jacobson, Jerome Jacobson I think that's his name. He's now at Robert R. Nathan Company; he's a vice president. Tom Mann himself was pretty smart on coffee. I told you I wanted to speak

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about labor and the space program.

O'BRIEN: Right, let's get into labor.

WILLIAMS: We had great hopes for strengthening the trade union movement in El Salvador. I thought it was very important to do. And we frequently brought down American labor leaders for training sessions with the Salvadorians. Their federation, Confederation General Trabajo, CGT, had an annual school for union leadership, and they normally had an American trade union leader there to conduct the school. And this worked pretty well. It was hard to build up a responsible union leadership in that country because unions had been repressed and kept in their place, had been given a little subsidy every now and then to the chiefs to make them a little happier. But we had very warm relations with such unions as existed, largely because of the cooperation of Americans. There was a chap named Haddad [William Haddad], Bill Haddad from Pennsylvania, who came down and ran that school. Usually my wife and I would invite the graduating class to the embassy at which a man came without a shirt. He had an undershirt, but he walked out carrying his glass. But they were good people.

O'BRIEN: Sure.

WILLIAMS: He was the head of the bootblacks' union of San Miguel.

O'BRIEN: Well, do you work with labor groups in other ways? I'm thinking in terms of subsidies through the agency.

WILLIAMS: Yes, we did. I can't remember how the subsidy arrangement worked through the agency, but we did help them. George Lodge actually went with them one day to the CGT headquarters, and George had been with the labor movement elsewhere and had concern with it. It always gave them a good boost to show interest and concern. Oh, there's a fellow named Andrew McLellan -- you've probably heard of him -- he was sort of the Latin American man for AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations], and he often came to Salvador to work with union leaders and to advise me as to which ones I should cultivate and what I should do. This was important to us because unions were capable of putting on quite a demonstration and had put on demonstrations and strikes. General

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strikes had played a part in Salvadorian politics in the past. Good union support was important to the Alliance.

O'BRIEN: Right. Do you work the same kind of subsidies with student groups or political groups at all?

WILLIAMS: No, no. It's a pity we couldn't I think.

O'BRIEN: Why couldn't you? Is it just that they're not receptive?

WILLIAMS: They're not receptive. If you get someone who'd accept a subsidy, it's usually someone who didn't have much influence. There were one or two efforts -- I don't know whether I should mention it confidentially -- one or two efforts...

O'BRIEN: Well, you can place any restrictions you want on it.

WILLIAMS: Let's put this secretly; this is secret information. In letter of May 16, 1973, Ambassador Williams indicated this was not secret or confidential. I think the Department of Defense sent a young man there to be a student at the university, to see if he couldn't get on the inside there at the university and report on movements which would be of interest to our security. I believe we had somebody else possibly from the agency -- I can't remember -- in the university under similar circumstances. We didn't know about that one. We'd better end the secrecy there -- I'd put that in parentheses -- secrecy.

O'BRIEN: It's a very common practice.

WILLIAMS: Yes, I believe it's done from place to place. I don't think overall it's probably been that beneficial.

O'BRIEN: I'm wondering here now -- by 1961, '62, '63 -- well, by 1963 there was in Washington, of course, this CI [Counterinsurgency] group that's been meeting for a number of years, and it began in terms of Latin America, as I understand it, in which teams that were beginning to develop which come into the countries. Does any of these teams come in, in an advisory way or a training way?

WILLIAMS: We had two Green Beret teams. You said CI, didn't you? Yes. We had two Green Beret teams there at one time. I'm not sure that it was right to have them, as I look back on it.

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O'BRIEN: What did they come for?

WILLIAMS: They came to assist the military mission in training the Salvadorian army personnel in handling insurgency.

O'BRIEN: Were they involved in any actual operations at all when they were there?

WILLIAMS: No. There weren't any actual operations in the time I was there. There were no military operations, I suppose, until the Soccer War. Oh yes,

there was an incursion, I guess, in 1968, into Honduras, or '67, I forget just what the date was. It was after I'd left. No, these were all training missions. But as I say, I'm not sure that it was a good thing to have them because it simply added to the fact of the American presence, military presence.

O'BRIEN: There was a lot of talk about civic action in these years, too, which was listed of course as part of the Alliance...

WILLIAMS: I'm glad you brought that up.

O'BRIEN: What's your impression of that?

WILLIAMS: Civic action can do some good, and maybe it did some small good in one case or another. I don't think it was a successful program in El Salvador, though it was made to appear to be such. The Salvadorian military realized that it was a popular opportunity to get some additional funds and equipment from us. They put out a magazine -- what we call a newspaper -- once a month called *Accion Civica*, which purported to show what great projects had been carried out. Well, some of them were fairly ridiculous, like having a clinic open once every two weeks -- I say ridiculous just because a lot of people are going to get sick in between those two weeks, and going to the clinic two weeks later isn't always going to help somebody. They may have undertaken some useful projects, but I don't think that it was the great success that I believe we had in Ecuador. I know on one occasion the university was trying to get some landscaping done around its new buildings and I tried to get the civic action people who had the bulldozers to go and do some work for them. I got an absolute no from the Ministry of Defense. I did not fight it, maybe I should have. I don't know. There are some things that I regret I didn't push, but I didn't push that. Maybe we gave them a good idea, maybe we touched some of their consciences. I think it's too easy to make civic action look like a good thing. You can make good propaganda of civic action without

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really achieving anything. So I believe; I may be wrong.

O'BRIEN: Do you feel the emphasis on this part in the United States for the Green Berets, as well as some of the general things that come out of counterinsurgency, strengthen the military's hand in a place like El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I do. I do. It doesn't always improve its position as a republic, but it makes it stronger from a security standpoint.

O'BRIEN: Does the training school in Panama at all have the same philosophical or intellectual influence upon the military?

WILLIAMS: Yes. Maybe it's a good influence. I should try to be fair about this. I say I should try to be fair because I do have a feeling that we over emphasize our military activities in these countries, our security activities. But it may be that that school in Panama improves the sense of professionalism on the part of law enforcement officers who go there and come back to El Salvador. I've visited that school, and it certainly seems to be a well run school. It's still running, isn't it?

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, yes. At least it ran for a long time. Well, you often refer to the Soccer War here, with reference to the general border problem. During the time you're there, do you have any real thoughts or things that come up in regard to border problems with Guatemala and Honduras?

WILLIAMS: We didn't have any serious border problems the whole time I was there. I went out to the area, the badly defined boundary in the northeastern corner of the country, several times. But at that time the problem seemed to be more legal than otherwise. People bought land which might have been in one country and might have been in the other; they didn't know. Rivera used to talk about maybe flying up with me sometimes, taking a helicopter and going up to look and see what the land was really like. But there was no real border problem; there was no violence or anything of that sort while we were there.

You used the word "fright." You asked if I had any other frights. I did have other frights. Every now and then we really would get concerned about the possibility of

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overthrow of the government, primarily by reactionary people who thought it was too reformist. We began to get used to those and they didn't seem to be too serious. Rumors were easy to start, as in all Latin countries. I remember one occasion, one Saturday morning. The military attache at that time was a very able, level headed chap named Matthews [Maurice H. Matthews.] He came in to see me and said that there was a group of officers which he was afraid would attempt to carry out a revolution. They had spoken to him about it. I said, "Well, I don't think a revolution would do this country any good right now. I think you ought to go back to those people and tell them that they would be unpatriotic and would not be serving the interests of their country if they did it. Well, he went back. I never reported this to Washington as I probably should -- I know I should have -- I never reported it. And things went off peacefully, and we congratulated ourselves the next week that we might have averted a coup. I don't know whether we did or not. We used to get lots of wild stories every now and then.

O'BRIEN: Did you ever see a serious... Did you ever have evidence there was a serious coup attempt that didn't come off?

WILLIAMS: No. We had really some wild stories every now and then, but I don't

think there ever was a serious coup attempt from January '6 until I left in July '64.

O'BRIEN: As I understand it, one of the things -- and passing over to the Alliance for a minute again -- I understand that the tax structure in El Salvador goes under a major reform and change. Now is this a result of technical....

WILLIAMS: Oh, I forgot about that, yeah. Primarily the income tax structure, yes. This was a very delicate matter for us to get into...

O'BRIEN: I'll bet, with the fourteen families.

WILLIAMS: Right. They had gotten along pretty well in getting those people to pay income taxes, but -- I guess it was in '62 -- there was a strong need by the government to reform its income tax law to raise more funds. It just had to raise funds. So we encouraged a group that cared about this whole thing to bring down an independent American expert whose name was Oliver Oldman,

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who is one of the best professors of tax law in this country. He's at Harvard. Oldman came down. Of course I had a party for him, but I did not identify myself with him. I left him alone as someone in the middle between the fourteen families and the government. He was able to help them work out a pretty decent -- it seemed to be a pretty decent tax law. I suppose in that case we were encouragers and catalytic agents. We certainly did not dictate the terms of the tax law, and Oldman was bright enough to be able to conciliate the different views of the different sides. That was our main contribution to tax reforms, although we were accused of having done everything else -- you can imagine -- we were accused of having dictated the tax law. Oh, once I had a visit from an irate group of Salvadorians who said, "The government says that they have received fourteen points that you have laid down as necessary for new legislation on their part and new legislation which they've got to undertake. Is this true? Are you dictating to them?"

It was a false accusation. I used to have a lot of trouble with Americans, particularly local Americans. They divided up into two groups -- and this applied to tax law and every other kind of reform we mentioned -- people who wanted to see real economic development and a rise in the purchasing power of the people, on one hand, and, on the other hand, people who wanted to keep the costs of labor low so that they could produce coffee, sugar and cotton as exports to the United States, cheap. They were always.... One of them was supporting me and the other was attacking me, and they were Americans. Often I'd get them to the embassy just to talk things over with them. The ones who supported the Alliance for Progress were obviously people like the Pan American [World Airways System, Inc.] representative who wanted to sell more tickets, the Esso representative who wanted to sell more gas and kerosene, Sterling Products who wanted to sell more aspirin. The businessman

who really wanted to increase the business sales were right with me. But those who represented the old coffee interests, they thought I was really pulling the rug from under them.

O'BRIEN: Who were some of those people in the coffee industry?

WILLIAMS: Well, Eddie Wilson [Edward Charles Wilson] was one, Joe Maleady [Joseph Maleady], who had been an American vice consul and came from Boston and had some

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coffee interests. Those were the two most vocal ones. Oh, there was one named Ramsey Moore who had been an FBI agent during the war. He married into a coffee family and stayed on. They used to think I... Actually they came up to Washington -- as my British colleagues aid -- to check my credentials, to see whether the State Department was really backing me up. My colleague said, "Each time they came up they found that your credentials were solid and that you were being backed up." This is true primarily when Robert F. Woodward was Assistant Secretary of State, and Ed Martin [Edwin M. Martin] was Assistant Secretary of State. I don't know if you know either of them.

O'BRIEN: Yes, I've talked to both of them.

WILLIAMS: You've talked to both of them? Well, they fully reflect, to me they fully reflect, the intention of the Kennedy program. And as long as they were assistant secretaries I never had any doubt that I was getting full backing from Washington in anything I did.

O'BRIEN: Did they have an easier time with Mann? Is there a difference in opinion between Mann and, let's say, Woodward and Martin?

WILLIAMS: Yes, Mann takes an entirely different point of view, he would want to keep in good with the oligarchy because they're the ones that had the power. When Mann became assistant secretary, things were not nearly so friendly as far as I was concerned. I didn't have any trouble; I kept on doing my job until I left, but by that time Mann had vetoed my appointment, which had been made before Kennedy's death -- or rather which had been arranged before Kennedy's death -- to go to the Dominican Republic as ambassador. He probably didn't care for that.

O'BRIEN: I know.

WILLIAMS: I'm sure that -- if you stop this machine for a moment....

O'BRIEN: Sure. [Interruption]

WILLIAMS: Shortly before the death of President Kennedy I had information that I was to be transferred to another embassy. I didn't know about it definitely until a week after the assassination, when Mr. Johnson -- President Johnson -- came to the State Department,

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and at a meeting with ambassadors I was introduced to him by Secretary Rusk as "Mr. Williams, our new ambassador to the Dominican Republic." It was the first time that I knew that that was the place to which the Kennedy Administration wanted to send me. John Martin refers to this on page 629 in his book, *Overtaken by Events*. Later the proposal was vetoed by Assistant Secretary Mann, who took office not long after the assassination. I'm sure that Mann thought that I was too liberal for an appointment to the Dominican Republic. But Ted Moscoso and Ed Martin had been enthusiastic about my going. Both had told me that they hoped that I would be able to do in the Dominican Republic just exactly what I'd done in El Salvador, and they wanted me to take the same principal staff members with me, that is, Bob Herder [Robert W. Herder] who was director of my AID mission. I thought that Mann's veto of this -- which incidentally he did after having assured me that he expected me to go on as had been planned -- I thought that his veto of this nomination was a very significant indication of his different attitude towards the Alliance for Progress and what we were doing in Central America and the Caribbean from, I think, the attitude of Bob Woodward and Ed Martin. I don't have any real regrets, though, because I wouldn't be in the position I'm in now if I had taken on the Dominican Republic.

O'BRIEN: I've heard it suggested -- and it's been suggested by a lot of people in print -- that Mann and Martin represent very different definite points of view within Latin America affairs, and that there is a cleavage.

WILLIAMS: I think there is. Ed Martin this is.

O'BRIEN: Right. Are there other people that you can sort of let fall on either side of this?

WILLIAMS: Well, Mann always had his clique.

O'BRIEN: Yeah, who are they?

WILLIAMS: Well, one that I can think of right now is Sayre [Robert M. Sayre] -- I believe he's in Panama. I'm not sure. But there were lots of people who'd been with Mann in Mexico. One poor boy,

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Bob Adams [Robert A. W. Adams] who worked so hard that it ruined his health, he's dead now. But they were a group like that. They were usually considered to be sort of the tough guy. The others just did what Mann told them to do. Tap Bennett [William Tanley Bennett, Jr.] was sent to the Dominican Republic after Mann vetoed my appointment. Incidentally, Mann vetoed that appointment after it had gone, as I say, all the way to the White House. Rusk had sent it to the White House, and Mann had told me, "Yes, go ahead, get going." And then, to my great surprise, I got a telegram in El Salvador -- where I'd gone back really to pack -- saying that somebody else had gone and my appointment was cancelled. But it wasn't an official telegram. Mann cancelled it without even telling me.

O'BRIEN: Well, in terms of the aid that went into El Salvador in those years, there was quite a bit that goes in the way of agricultural aid, as I understand. And I've just got some figures; there's a thirty-five million figure for '61 and a fifty million figure for '63. Is there anything in particular in terms of the apportionment of that aid that you feel that we might be well ptu to discuss?

WILLIAMS: Well, I'm not clear enough. I don't remember the figures well enough. Thirty-five million seems a little high right now. If you have been wanting to -- if anybody wanted to go into this -- the person who knows it best of all is Robert W. Herder....

O'BRIEN: Herder.

WILLIAMS: H-E-R-D-E-R, who was the head of our AID mission. I just am a little too shaky on my recollection of figures. I think thirty-five million is a little high.

O'BRIEN: I thought maybe you could talk about the appropriations.

WILLIAMS: Some of it -- it may be from all sources, including Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank [International Bank for Reconstruction and Development] [International] Monetary Fund. Monetary Fund played a great role in El Salvador in those days. They had a very smart man named Sweeney [Timothy D. Sweeney], an American.

O'BRIEN: How about our own AID relationships and our own embassy relationships and department relationship with the IMF [International Monetary Fund]?

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Is there a good deal of coordination?

WILLIAMS: Yes, excellent coordination, I thought, in '61 to '64 -- excellent

coordination. We had very good economists on our AID mission staff. They worked very well with IMF, and they all worked well, I think, with Inter-American Development Bank and with the World Bank. The World Bank really, over the years, played a great role in Salvador's development because World Bank provided the first big loan for hydroelectric power development in El Salvador. I happened to be there the first time they sent a mission down. If I'm not mistaken Henry Wallich was one of the people who came to make an area of study of possibilities. They put enough money in El Salvador to quintuple its electric production in about six or eight years.

O'BRIEN: IMF has been criticized for having a very, very strict monetary policy, particularly in regard to Latin American countries, in regard to inflation. Did you find any problems at all...

WILLIAMS: Sometimes it was politically difficult for us to accept that strictness, but it was medicine that served its purpose. I don't think that in the long run, even though I was unhappy with it from time to time, I don't think that in the long run IMF policy hurt El Salvador in political sense.

O'BRIEN: Well, we're going to run out of tape, and I've got another role of tape in the car. Could we go on for about half an hour more?

WILLIAMS: Sure, right.

[BEGIN SIDE I, TAPE II]

O'BRIEN: What was Bowles' [Chester Bowles] particular interest in El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: Mr. Bowles had a meeting in Costa Rica with all of the ambassadors. It was one of his regional meetings, and he was quite enthusiastic himself about the Alliance for Progress and was rather pleased when we began to tell him a little about what we were doing in El Salvador. It seemed to suit him so well. It seemed to fit his idea of what should be done that he made a special point at the Costa Rica meeting of talking about El Salvador quite.... This was in October, 1961. He began talking

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...He sent a cable to Washington which I never saw, but which I heard about later, suggesting that El Salvador was one of the places where we might accomplish most of what we were trying to do because we had told him about the reform measures and what we were doing and how we were assisting. I also told him about the inevitable difficulty we were having with the conservative and the local Americans, and he warmed up to the idea and he told me that he would do anything he could for me. I remember him saying, "I will send some speakers up, I'll come myself, I'll send the Marines. I'll do anything that you want." He

did send a chap named Jay Cerf, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce, who came up and made a rather hortatory speech to some American businessmen, who didn't really appreciate it -- what our objectives were.

O'BRIEN: How about the President's visit to Costa Rica? How did this develop in relation to El Salvador?

WILLIAMS: The principal effects of the President's visit were to encourage Rivera -- to persuade Rivera -- that the President was with him, to initiate the project that I mentioned for the training of businessmen by the Harvard Business School, and to convince the Salvadorian government, ministry, president, that we were real partners in the Alliance for Progress. Specifically, I don't think that it resulted in more money because El Salvador was already getting the money it needed. It had a lot to do with the spirit of the thing. It improved the spirit of the Alianza. After that meeting, I might say, Rivera always had in an entrance hall in the *casa presidencial* in San Salvador a photograph taken of himself beside President Kennedy. Anyone who went in there saw how close the relationship was between the two of them.

O'BRIEN: Yes. What do you recall on your own contacts with the President at that time and the way he handled perhaps some of the other Central American presidents? Do you have any private thoughts?

WILLIAMS: I think that Ydigoras Fuentes [Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes] from Guatemala left him pretty cold because Ydigoras went to see him and told him how much money he needed. I think Panama left him pretty cold. Panama was President Chiari [Robert F. Chiari] at the time. I think that Rivera really cheered him up and made him feel that he'd met somebody who was really at work. Rivera was -- it seemed to me -- looking at him as the most genuine. The president of

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Honduras at that time was a very fine person, Villeda Morales [Jose Ramon Villeda Morales] -- I think that was his name. He was distinguished looking, a typical Latin American civilian, lawyer, and talked very well to the President. But I think, I got the impression, that all of them were asking for something except Rivera. Rivera just wanted to say what he was doing. I've seldom seen a conversation between two people carried on with such enthusiasm on both sides. Kennedy was warm; Rivera was warm; and they loved each other in the discussions, so it seemed.

O'BRIEN: Any problem in bringing all those Central American presidents together in terms of conflicts between them?

WILLIAMS: No, there weren't any terrible conflicts, serious conflicts, at that time. The main problem was Somoza [Luis A. Somoza-Debayle] of

Nicaragua, who had to have more secret service agents, more security precautions, than the president of the United States. I will never forget seeing Somoza's car surrounded by secret service agents -- his own secret service agents there -- plus troops. On that occasion I didn't have a great deal of talk with the President except in preparing him for and briefing him for his talk with Rivera, and sitting in there, and of course the lunch. They all had it together. The other time that I saw the President to talk about El Salvador was probably in 1963. I'm not sure of the exact date. No, it was late '62, just before he went off to a conference with the British in Geneva; I'm not sure of the date. I can look it up in the book.

O'BRIEN: I've got December 17.

WILLIAMS: Oh - better records at the White House than I thought.

O'BRIEN: Just Kenny O'Donnell's appointment book.

WILLIAMS: Well, good for you. Is it '62?

O'BRIEN: Yeah, it's '62.

WILLIAMS: December 17 '62. Well, we didn't have much time together, but I was impressed by the informality of the President because he said, "Look, let's get the picture taken." Instead of pressing a button to get somebody to send in a photographer he says,

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I'm going to find the photographer." He dashes by Mrs. Lincoln's [Evelyn N. Lincoln] office desk and goes into one of the back rooms -- Cabinet rooms somewhere -- and gets the photographer to come in and take the picture of us. Of course I've had it on my wall. I won't use it much in the campaign. Unfortunately in Harry Byrd's district it's not the...

O'BRIEN: It's not the best thing. Well, you mentioned the space shot a little earlier.

WILLIAMS: Oh, well that was just a funny little thing that happened. When Gordon Cooper -- in Faith 7, I guess -- made his space shot, our people got instructions, our military mission got instructions, to ask the Salvadorians to prepare to render assistance if any assistance was necessary. I didn't take it seriously but the chief of the military mission did, and he took it very seriously. I thought that it would take a fraction of a second for that spaceship to get across the territorial boundaries of El Salvador. But on the night of the shot I was at the embassy and suddenly got a call from the head of the Department of Communications who said, "Senor Embajador, I want you to know that everything is ready." I said, "Ready?" "Yes, for Gordon Cooper. Should he come down in El Salvador we will extend the hospitality of the country to him." I said, "Well,

thank you very much.” I told him good-bye, and he says, “But wait a minute, sir. I have a message I would like you to deliver to Gordon Cooper. We want to welcome him to the territorial skies of El Salvador. Will you deliver it?” I gulped and said, “Well, you send it to him. I’ll do what I can.”

In a little while a fellow comes up on a motorcycle-- *correo de comunicaciones* -- and he hands me a telegram addressed to Gordon Cooper, Faith 7, Faith 7. I said, “Thank you very much.” He said, “Will you sign for it?” So I signed his receipt. AND then I called up the public affairs officer and said, “Bob, I’ve got a problem. I’ve got a telegram for Gordon Cooper. Can we get it to him? What will we do with it?” He says, “Give it to me.” He right away sent it to Washington and told them it was from the President of the Republic of El Salvador for delivery to Gordon Cooper as he passes over the country. The telegram was signed “Williams” -- my telegram. I forgot about it. The next morning I got a call from the desk officer in Washington about something else, and he says, “By the way, that message you sent to Gordon Cooper last night, it’s been delivered.” I said, “What do you mean?”

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He says, “Well, as they were reading him the morning news this morning in the space ship, they added that, ‘We have a telegram from the president of El Salvador welcoming you to the country. - in case you know you passed over it.’” The response was, “Okay, tell the President thank you.” So I told Mr. Bob Seamans [Robert C. Seamans, Jr.], who at that time was in NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration]. I told it to him a year or so later. He asked me to write it down as part of the NASA history because it was the first message from the head of a foreign government delivered to an astronaut in orbit. I’ve sometimes thought that it was transmitted because... in that particular project, whatever it was, the director’s name was Williams [Walter Williams], and the telegram that came from El Salvador was also signed ‘Williams.’ But that was the only thing I had to say about that.

Oh, one or two little interesting things happened from time to time. During that school construction program we ran short of reinforcing rods for the school buildings. Just about the same time the head of our military mission told me that he had a lot of old weapons that he had to get rid of because they were being replaced by modern carbines. So he said he was going to take them out to sea and dump them. I said, “Oh, no, don’t do that.” He said, “What else can we do with them?” I said, “Well, there’s a foundry here. Maybe we can get them to convert it into reinforcing rods.” And by golly, we took every one of those three hundred old weapons out to the foundry and threw them in. My wife and I watched them going in and out came reinforcing rods. *Newsweek* wrote that up as an example of converting swords into plowshares.

O’BRIEN: Well, in light of some of the things that have happened in more recent months here in Latin America in regard to diplomats, did you ever, at that time, have any real threats to personal safety?

WILLIAMS: No. I used to like to -- I always liked to walk. I always walked in every post I’ve been abroad, and I always walked in Washington. I used to

like to walk from the embassy up to -- from the residence to the office. It wasn't the best part of town. Occasionally someone would say, "You really shouldn't do it." But I enjoyed doing it and did it, so you can see in those days it was no threat to personal safety. I'm sure it wouldn't be allowed now. It's tragic what's happened.

O'BRIEN: A couple of questions in regard to just the

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way the embassy runs -- you were one of the first ambassadors who dealt with -- or at least the letter came out...

WILLIAMS: Yes, in May, 1961, giving me complete authority...

O'BRIEN: To take charge of the embassy.

WILLIAMS: I think we had authority. I think we did take charge. I had good relations with the CIA chap and believe that we were informed as much as we wanted to be informed. I never had any complaints about that. I think I was not as insistent as I should have been in forcing the military to take a low profile, as I said to you before.

O'BRIEN: Sure. Do you have any problems with the military or AID going around you in any way, or anyone going around you?

WILLIAMS: No, I really didn't. I think the first AID chief, a man named Colonel Miller [Harry W. Miller], was not really sympathetic to the AID program and the Alliance for Progress, but he didn't last very long. Then Herder came later and was very sympathetic to it. He began quite well, I know he did. So we had a well coordinated country team. Fact is, I've spoken to Defense Intelligence Agency and to one or two of the service academies on the subject of each of the country teams, and we had a good one.

O'BRIEN: Yes, and it was pretty effective for you?

WILLIAMS: I think it was.

O'BRIEN: How about your desk officers in Washington, or desk officer?

WILLIAMS: Yes, we had several of them, and I think they're all.... As long as they sympathized with the purpose of the Alliance for Progress -- and they did -- we got along well and achieved what we wanted.

O'BRIEN: Do you ever find that in time that you get out of tune with your

assistant secretaries? Of course we have talked a little bit about that -- Mann....

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WILLIAMS: Yes. It was much, much better with Woodward and Martin than it was with Mann. I remember once Paul Douglas visited Salvador and he was quite interested and wanted to be able to talk about the union wages. He was concerned about what the housewife in Chicago had to pay for a cup of coffee, and thought if she was going to have to pay more he'd like to see some of the money trickle down to the workers on the coffee plantations. SO I got an agricultural attaché to prepare a pretty good report which I sent to him. But I sent it via the Department of State -- Mann's office -- and said, "Please send this to Senator Douglas if you have no objections." Well, about ten days later or two weeks later I got an angry phone call from Mann one morning saying that he'd been up testifying before Douglas about the coffee case and that Douglas had whipped out a sheet of paper which he said he'd got from me about wages in coffee plantations. I said, "Tom, I sent that to your office and I said, 'Please don't send it to Senator Douglas unless you approve.'" AND he realized his office had let him down and said, "Oh, I won't fuss with you about that, but I just wondered what it was all about." I was not too disappointed when Mann went off to work for the Automobile Association [Automobile Manufacturer's Association.]

O'BRIEN: Do you have any contact with an White House people who'd been involved in Latin affairs? I'm thinking of either Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] or Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] or Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.]

WILLIAMS: With Arthur Schlesinger and with Ralph DUNgan, I met Goodwin only once.

O'BRIEN: What are your impressions of these guys and what were the contexts that...

WILLIAMS: Well, I find Arthur most sympathetic of all. I see him every now and then. He was down here speaking at Woodberry Forest School in March. I invited him to come down and speak to the school. I think very highly of him. Of course, he is on a different plane from much of Latin American politics. Some of his ideas are a little intellectual for ordinary Latin American operations. Goodwin I admire as a writer of editorials in the "Talk of the Town" for *The New Yorker*, but I never really knew him. Ralph Dungan I knew fairly well, and we got along pretty well. I know him very well. I haven't seen any of them in the last five years, except Arthur.

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O'BRIEN: Do you see any real shifts, or developments that take place, in the Alliance or in policy towards El Salvador and of course policy towards Latin America in the change of administrations that take place from Kennedy to Johnson?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I thought so. And it was mainly symbolized by substitution of Mann for Martin. I don't know too much about what is going on down there now. I have visits from Salvadorian friends every now and then, such as Francisco de Sola and Terence O'Sullivan and Castillo and Rochac. Oh, actually we had something very interesting here in April. We had a council of twelve Central American, mainly Salvadorian, economists, graduate students and economists who had told me in January they would like to have a meeting, but they didn't know where they would meet. And I didn't know I was going to be involved in this campaign, so I asked them if they would like to come here. We almost had to call it off because of the present campaign, but they came and they had a terrific time. They were talking for two days.

O'BRIEN: Well, you're current in a number of things. Is there anything else that comes to mind at this point that deals with your mission?

WILLIAMS: I might take just two minutes to tell you of something...

O'BRIEN: Sure, as long as you wish.

WILLIAMS: ... something that happened before I got there which had a great effect on our mission and our effort to establish the relationships we felt we needed in El Salvador. When the first junta was overthrown, January 24, 1961, a number of members of the American military mission -- two colonels at least -- were at the *cuartel* where the revolution was being coordinated. They just went in in the morning in the usual way not knowing anything had happened, as far as I could tell. They were rather monolingual, and they didn't have very close contact with the officers in the revolution. Later the head of the mission turned up at the same *cuartel* to try to find out what was happening. While these officers were standing around, just to have a look and see what was going on, in came the newspaper photographers and the television cameramen and they took pictures of the members of the American mission as if directing the revolution. The effect on the television audiences and the newspaper readers in the country

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was rather bad, and over the next few years I had to try to counteract the conviction of all these people that we had military missions in the country in order to run their politics. This is the kind of thing that happens when you have an insensitive military mission, a mission that doesn't have real contact with the officers of the country, doesn't know any of its politics, and doesn't speak much of the language. It was a really unfortunate thing.

O'BRIEN: Would you mind naming some of the people who were in the mission that you felt were a little less sensitive than others, or more sensitive?

WILLIAMS: The head of the mission at that time was Colonel Robert Matter, a very nice man. I've always thought that Colonel Matter would probably have been much better as director of, say, the military academy in New Mexico or something like that. He was a nice man. I just don't think he was -- I think he was thrown into a job which required a bit of sensitivity, and maybe he hadn't prepared for it in his previous military experience.

O'BRIEN: Well, thank you, Ambassador Williams, for taking a few hours from your campaign and busy busy schedule for a very informative interview.

WILLIAMS: Thank you. Let's see if I can find that...

[END OF INTERVIEW]