

**United States Foreign Assistance  
Oral History Program**

**Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection**

An Interview with

ROBERT J. MACALISTER

1995

Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Arlington, Virginia

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## ASSOCIATION FOR DIPLOMATIC STUDIES AND TRAINING ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, was established in 1986 to enhance the training of foreign affairs personnel and to instill in the public a greater appreciation for our diplomatic history.

The Association's Foreign Affairs Oral History Program was established in 1988 and is housed in the Lauinger Library of Georgetown University and at the Foreign Service Institute in Arlington, VA. The collection is comprised of oral histories taken from a number of projects, with the unifying factor that all concern the conduct of American foreign affairs and experiences of those employed in the field of diplomacy and consular affairs and their families.

The oral history collection includes interviews done under the auspices of the Foreign Service History Center of George Washington University, which was amalgamated into the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program, the Foreign Service Family Project, the Women Ambassadors' Project, the United States Information Agency Alumni Association Project, the Foreign Assistance (AID) Oral History Project, the Senior Officers' Project, the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project and others.

The aim of the US Foreign Assistance Oral History Program, in particular, is to develop a collection of oral histories of those who have served USAID and predecessor agencies and those who have served in foreign assistance programs of associated organizations such as private firms, private voluntary organizations, and other US government agencies. The Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) of the USAID has made a grant to help finance the preparation of 120 oral histories.

For the most part these interviews are carried out by retired USAID personnel on a volunteer basis, directed by the Oral History Program. The interviews are unclassified, and unless so marked are available for use by researchers. Most of these interviews have been transcribed and then returned to the person interviewed for editing. The transcript is an edited version, and is not a word for word rendition of the cassette tape. The editing usually consists of correcting of names and dates that have been missed during an interview. The individual interviewed may also choose to expand upon topics that may not have been developed in the time allotted for the interview.

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**KEY WORDS**  
**ROBERT J. MACALISTER**

1960 Democratic Convention  
Abdoul Diouf  
Aiken  
American Friends of Vietnam  
American Republic Affairs  
Andrew Biddle Duke  
Averell Harriman  
Bao Dai  
Bard College  
Captive Assembly of European Nations  
Casamance region  
Ceylon  
Chad  
Chester Bowles  
CIA  
Claiborne Pell  
Committee of One Million  
communists  
contraceptives  
David Martin  
Dennis Roberts  
Diolla  
Director of Staff Training  
environment  
European Community  
Everett McKinley Dirksen  
Felix Hirsch  
Filipino  
Foreign Service Institute  
French colonialism  
Fulbright Program  
Gandhi  
Geneva Agreement of 1954  
Guinea worm  
health education  
Health Maintenance Organization  
Humphrey for President Committee  
Hungarian Revolution  
India  
integrated rural development  
International Rescue Committee  
irrigation  
Ivory Coast

J. Howard McGrath  
Jim Loeb  
Joe Rau  
John Kennedy  
Joseph Kovago  
Joseph Buttinger  
Korry Report  
Labor and Public Welfare  
Lyndon Johnson  
Madame Banderanike  
Marc Chagal  
Marvin Liebeman  
Mike Mansfield  
Ngo Din Nhu  
nonaligned movement  
non-governmental organizations (NGOs)  
Operation Brotherhood  
Outward Bound Camps  
overpopulation  
Pandit Nehru  
Paul Douglas  
Peace Corps Act  
Peace Corps  
Popular Culture Association  
President of Senegal  
private voluntary organizations (PVOs)  
Raymond Vernon  
REDSO/West Africa  
renewable energy  
rice production  
Rules Committee  
Russians  
Sahel Regional Development Program  
Sahel  
Sam Brown  
Senator Pastore  
Senegal  
Sergeant Shriver  
solar power  
Soviets  
Sri Lanka  
State Department  
talapia  
Thomas Mann  
Tom Hughes  
University of Chicago

Vietnam  
Willie Brandt  
women farmers  
wood lots  
Zaire

**United States Foreign Assistance Oral History Program  
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An interview with  
Robert J. MacAlister

Interviewed by W. Haven North  
Initial interview date: August 14, 1995

*Q: This is August 14, 1995. The interview is with Robert J. MacAlister who retired from AID in...?*

MACALISTER: The end of calendar year eighty nine.

*Q: Eighty nine. Okay. Well, as we start off on this interview, Bob, let's get a running start on your early family life. Where you came from, family situation generally, where you grew up, and then on to your education, focusing particularly on those things that seem to have stimulated you to being involved in international development work.*

### **Early years and education**

MACALISTER: Well, in terms of growing up, it's basically in the New York City and New York suburban area. I lived in the Bronx until the end of the fifth grade and then lived in various parts of New York suburbia. My first travel overseas was with the US Navy in World War II. And it's interesting we're marking today the 50th anniversary of the signing of the surrender, the signing of the surrender documents with the Japan. I started traveling early because I spent my eighteenth birthday in Okinawa with the US Seabees (a U.S. Navy Construction Battalion).

*Q: I see. When you were eighteen?*

MACALISTER: Right. I joined the Navy when I was seventeen. And I certainly remember the celebrations that took place at the end of the war in Okinawa. After the war, I went to Bard College in upper New York state. And at Bard, one of the educational innovations which was a part of the overall program was a field period. I was studying history and was very much interested in international affairs. I spent two field periods of something like six weeks each working here in Washington for the State Department.

*Q: How do you account for this? Obviously, this interest in international life occurred very early in your growth. How do you account for that?*

MACALISTER: I think, Haven, one of the principal reasons was that I found myself attracted to questions of international understanding or international history— I guess part of that was because of my war experience— and looking for a substitute for war. Also, when I was doing my undergraduate studies at Bard College, which is a very small college, one of my courses was a tutorial with a man who is very influential in my life. His name was Felix Hirsch. He was a refugee from the Nazis and had been editor of the *Berliner Tagenblatte* which is, I believe, a German equivalent to the *New York Times*. He was a scholar and a very decent and thoughtful man. Consequently, I took a number of courses with him and I found. Studying with people like Dr. Hirsch certainly reenforced my interest in international relations and history.

Q: *Where did you have these field studies?*

MACALISTER: Here in Washington at the State Department.

Q: *Not overseas?*

MACALISTER: Nope. Here in Washington. And it was in the middle of the academic year. We used to shut down between terms.

Q: *I see. And where did you work in the State Department?*

MACALISTER: The first year I worked in a bureau—I forget the exact name of it— but it was a bureau that was interested in economic questions. I did some research work on the development of cartels with a man named Raymond Vernon. A man who, I think, later went to Harvard. I was very lucky because he was a person who was very geared to working with young people and students. He gave me some solid research to do and reviewed it carefully. Plus I had an opportunity to see how a foreign affairs bureaucracy works. The second internship was in the ARA Bureau which dealt with American Republic Affairs. I forget the particular nature of the work, but it did give me exposure to how a geographic bureau in the State Department functioned.

Q: *What was your impression of the State Department from that perspective?*

MACALISTER: I liked it and I liked it so much that I applied for the State Department intern program which is, I guess, equivalent to what we call the IDI - International Development Intern program in AID these days.

Q: *This was a civil service program?*

MACALISTER: That's right. A civil service program. And it was for nine months and you worked in addition to special meetings and lectures at the Foreign Service Institute; you also had assignments. Again all domestic, but in three different parts of the State Department. After I finished my internship, which ran for a year, I had the opportunity to work in a GS slot. And at that time, I ..

Q: *And what year was that?*

MACALISTER: I'm sorry. Good point. This was in—well, I went in [the internship] in September 1950 so this was in about September 1951 when I finished my internship.

### **With Ambassador Bowles in India as an assistant cultural affairs officer**

Soon after I finished, a call had come from Chester Bowles (during his first Ambassadorship in India) for young people, who had been involved in student government in the States, to come out and work as assistant cultural affairs officers and, in particular, to be in contact with student and youth groups. Ambassador Bowles spent a considerable amount of time speaking at Indian Universities. He soon became aware that the communists were very active and had groups of students organized in different universities. And because I had been active in student government at Bard College, I was asked if I would be interested.

Also another consideration that took us to India besides Chester Bowles was that this was the time of Pandit Nehru. It was right after independence and an exciting time. Also one of my wife's aunts went to India in the 1920s as the wife of an American dentist in Bangalore, South India. Therefore, her family had a connection with India. I guess for all those reasons we went and spent a fascinating two and a half years of visiting and traveling all over, particularly in South India.

Q: *What were you supposed to be doing?*

MACALISTER: Well, I sought occasions to give talks to student general assemblies, or student clubs at universities, or to be in touch with various youth groups or to attend their meetings. We did a lot of entertaining of young people in our home.

Q: *Were you welcomed by these groups?*

MACALISTER: Yes, I was. It wasn't difficult to get invitations. The Indians, particularly the young, were very curious about the United States. At that time, the United States was certainly much less known to Indian intellectuals and students than it is now.

I remember I was also involved in the Fulbright Program and reviewing candidates to study in the United States or professors to teach and conduct research in the United States. We were constantly faced with the question of, once the students or the professors returned, how their credentials would be evaluated in India because they had been used to the British model of higher education. And I ran into that later in life in French speaking Africa. The same question.

But it gives you some example of how relatively unknown we were. On the one hand, there was tremendous curiosity about us. On the other hand, there was a tremendous amount of misinformation about us. Some of it planted and encouraged by the communists. And, in addition

to the challenge of trying our best to communicate what we were really like, there was also the fascinating experience of living in a country that has every religion known on the face of the earth and a deep and very strong cultural history. Dance, literature, etc., which also added to the interesting experience.

*Q: Can you remember any of the major themes of inquiry or interest of these students?*

MACALISTER: I can remember. Perhaps I remember the negative inquiries most because those were the ones I dealt with a lot. First of all, there was a tremendous interest in our race problems. I could speak about student life in America or American writers or historians and practically the first question I would get—regardless of what the topic was— was “what about your negro problem.” I believe this was because most Indians tended to be non-Caucasian of one shade or another. I particularly use the word “shade” because it was certainly my experience that the Indians, at that time anyway— and we're talking 1952-1954—were not only color conscious, but shade conscious. You could look at the advertisements in the newspapers for brides and often you would see: “Wanted: a fair bride. Must be such and such a sub-sect, etc.”

Also I will never forget the day one of the secretaries who worked for me who was an Anglo-Indian, i.e., joint Indian and, in her case, Portuguese heritage, and who dressed in Western frocks, rather than a Sari, etc. came to me crying. She was an excellent secretary, one of the best I have ever had in my life. She came to me crying one day. Her name was Cleo and I'm happy to say we're still in touch. Tears were just streaming down her face and I asked her, “What's wrong, Cleo?” I had just reorganized the office in terms of where people sat. In terms of the person who most frequently had contact with me. Cleo, I didn't normally have a lot of contact with me daily so I had moved her. And she came to me and said, “You moved me because I am the darkest person.” And that made a big impression on me.

Also I think I have some sensitivity for how people of different colors feel about stereotypes because I found as a white person in South India, at that point anyway, people had certain stereotypes about me which I constantly had to deal with either directly or indirectly, and some of them were negative stereotypes.

*Q: Were there other themes that you .....?*

MACALISTER: Sure. There was the whole question of violence and nonviolence. This was soon after the death of Gandhi. There had been the success of the non-violent approach that the Congress Party had used under Gandhi. And there were constant allusions to the violent West. At the same time, India was arming tooth and nail, as was Pakistan. Then, as today, there were these tremendous tensions between India and Pakistan.

This was also the time of the—well, I forget what exactly it was called— but certainly Nehru wanted to be in between East and West.

*Q: Unaligned.*

MACALISTER: Right. Unaligned. The nonaligned movement. And there was the whole question of tolerance, if you want, at least on the part of our foreign policy, of an India that was not going to vote with the UN on every call. And an India that was very sensitive about its ability to take its own stand. Certainly Pandit Nehru and some of his associates were very articulate leaders.

I think this was the first time that I was exposed to the thought of community development or grass roots development because obviously Gandhi was a great believer in working at the village level. So I had the chance to visit some of the villages where people, who were followers of Gandhi, were involved in community development and cottage industries. Also, even at that time in terms of national policy, the Indian Government at least was paying lip service to the idea of decentralizing development and putting great importance on the village.

*Q: I guess this was in the very early stages of the program in India. Did you get any impression about it as the country's development progressed?*

MACALISTER: Sure. Certainly the theme made sense to me in terms of consulting the people about their felt needs. Even then, before the term appropriate technology became used among development professionals, if you look at what Gandhi was preaching, it was some form of appropriate technology. Also, probably the followers of Gandhi, at least at that time, would assert that small is good no matter what. There was the theme of decentralization and of focusing on the agricultural economy, which was something that impressed me.

*Q: What about Chester Bowles? Did you get to know him at all well in this process.*

MACALISTER: I didn't get to know him then. I got to know him a little bit later on. I was very impressed by his style, and that he traveled a great deal. He wanted to get out and see as much of India as he could. He came from a public relations and political background.

He developed a good rapport with Nehru. While they may not have always agreed, they respected each other and I think Bowles was correct in recognizing that regardless of whether or not we agreed with all the policies of the Indian Government, they were definitely determined to go their own way. And, consequently, the best way to advance our national interest was to make sure they understood what motivated us and that we didn't always fit into the stereotypes that the Soviets painted. Also, Bowles made clear to the Indians that we felt a certain kinship with India since we had our struggle with British colonialism.

*Q: Very good. We'll go on to what happened after that exciting start.*

### **Joined the International Rescue Committee in Vietnam — 1955**

MACALISTER: Well, I had decided after the United States Information Service (USIS) that I wanted to try something outside of government because up to that point I had worked for government since obtaining my B.A. My father-in-law had a small steel fabricating business in

Michigan and he had been after me to get involved in it. So we went back to Saginaw, Michigan and I tried it, and I didn't like it. Let's say I found it wasn't for me.

My next job stemmed from a contact I had made in India. Another part of my activity in India involved scheduling American visitors who came under the USIS program. The young ones, who were American youth leaders, would travel around with me in South India. One of these leaders was a fellow named Ernie Howell with whom I am still in touch. In 1955 Ernie was asked by the International Rescue Committee— a refugee assistance agency— to go to Vietnam. This was right after the Geneva Agreement of 1954 and the first refugees were coming down from North Vietnam. This was the end of the Indochina War between the French and the Viet Minh. As a result of the Geneva treaty, you had the seventeenth parallel demarcated between North and South Vietnam.

The International Rescue Committee, among other American PVOs, had decided to go in there and try to do something to help the refugees. So Ernie Howell gave them my name and my wife and I decided to go. The International Rescue Committee is a very interesting refugee assistance agency because it was started by Albert Einstein for refugees, particularly from the Nazis. And we worked with refugees like Willie Brandt, Thomas Mann, the man who wrote the “Song of Bernadette”, and Marc Chagal. Traditionally, it specialized in intellectual and political refugees. And so we worked with students and professors and other intellectuals who had come down from the north.

While I was in Vietnam, we had an opportunity to work with a group of young Vietnamese who had no respect for Bao Dai, who had been the principal Vietnamese leader under the French. However, they did have respect for the Presidency of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was made President of South Vietnam after the Geneva Agreement. These young people had formed an association. in providing services for students and intellectuals who had come down from the North. They called it the Popular Culture Association. They offered night courses to people. I guess we'd call it “continuing education”.

*Q: The reason they left the North was because of the communists?*

MACALISTER: Yes. They were anticommunist and had not come back to South Vietnam while the French were still there because they were anticolonialist. So that was another exposure.

*Q: How long were you there?*

MACALISTER: We were there about a year and a half which gave me an opportunity to work with some very interesting people including Andrew Biddle Duke, who recently died. He was President of the International Rescue Committee and I got to know him fairly well. Toward the end of our stay in Vietnam, I decided that I wanted to get some graduate work.

*Q: Before we go to that., what kind of impressions did you have of the Vietnamese people that you worked with? How would you characterize them?*

MACALISTER: Very hard working people. People who had a great respect for education. It was my first direct exposure to refugees. Most of them were Catholic. Whole villages came down. They saw this as an opportunity to escape the Vietcong, Viet Minh. It was my first opportunity to see first hand a people uprooted from their livelihood and what that means. Of course, I had dealt with it second hand by having college professors who were refugees, mostly from the Nazis.

I was intellectually of the persuasions that Asia and later Africa should have their freedom from colonialism. As noted previously, I had the opportunity to live and work in India right after they had gained freedom, and the opportunity to live and work in South Vietnam right after they had obtained independence. I was struck by the different approach that the French and the British used. I came away much more of an Anglophile in terms of the British approach to colonialism. The British had left a civil service. They had left a court system. There were Indians with training and experience. I remember, when I first came through Saigon on the way back from India, there were Frenchmen at the airport checking the customs. Obviously that wasn't the comparison with India.

In Vietnam I also had the opportunity to work very closely with a Filipino group called Operation Brotherhood. Working with them gave me an opportunity to compare first hand the effect of American colonialism in the Philippines with the French approach. Another important part of my Vietnam experience was the opportunity to be associated with newly independent countries. I was extremely disappointed by the road that Diem took in South Vietnam and the ultimate collapse of a democratic alternative to the Vietcong.

*Q: The road he took was what?*

MACALISTER: The road he took was a very authoritarian one. Initially, I dealt quite a bit with Diem because the person who actually went out to open our office in Vietnam, a man named Joseph Buttinger was a member of the board of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). He was a socialist in Austria. A refugee from the Nazis, who had been very active in Austrian politics. One of the great things about the IRC board was that it spanned from very conservative republicans to people like Joseph Buttinger who were democratic-socialists. And they all worked together for something they believed in. But in any event, Buttinger went out first and established a very close rapport with Diem and I had many opportunities to talk with him.

*Q: What was your impression of the man?*

MACALISTER: In the beginning, it was favorable. The fact that he was a decent man. For a short time Diem had been in exile here in the U.S. He was a very devout Catholic. One of his brothers was a Catholic priest. I thought he really wanted to make a positive difference to his country. In contrast to Nehru, he did not have the human resources, infrastructure, or the tradition that India had even in terms of provincial legislators, free press and an educated core group with which to start. He did not have the tradition of British parliamentary democracy.

You had the whole Mandarin tradition in Vietnam. Diem became more of a recluse, adopted more and more authoritarian methods, and ended up with his brother Ngo Din Nhu. Ngo Din Nhu and his wife became more and more the architects of intrigue and repressions which I think ultimately played into the hands of the VietCong. As a result, I saw the great tragedy of people as refugees a second time. People, with whom I had worked in Vietnam and who had already been refugees from the French, who had come back to try and build a democratic country free from French colonialism, had to become refugees again.

*Q: Very good. From there, you went on to do what?*

### **A brief period of graduate studies and return to IRC—1957**

MACALISTER: I went on to the University of Chicago to work on my MA in political science. Part of my studies involved International Relations and part involved American political activity, which had always been an intellectual interest for me.

*Q: What year was that?*

MACALISTER: This was 1956-57. While I was at the University of Chicago, Andrew Biddle Duke called me and asked if I would be interested in becoming the Executive Director of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in New York. I said yes, so we moved to New York suburbia. Andrew was serving as President and I worked as the Executive Director. This assignment opened up the fascinating life to me of fund raising and administering a complex organization like the IRC.

*Q: What scale of organization was it?*

MACALISTER: At that point we had an annual budget of about two million dollars. We had never worked in Africa. Actually, the Vietnam program was the first time we had worked outside of Europe. When I came in, it was right after the Hungarian Revolution. Our main activity was resettling Hungarians here in the U.S. or helping them to get resettled in Europe.

*Q: What did the IRC do mainly? How did it define its role? There are a lot of different things to be done in refugee work.*

MACALISTER: Well, at that point, it was much less developmental than today. Or at least the initial elements of development. It was very much concerned with resettlement. It was working with people in refugee camps to try and make life a little more bearable for them. Again you were dealing with European refugees who had lost everything, but who were getting a standard of living in refugee camps that was far above what, subsequently, people would find as refugees in Africa.

There were, for very reasons, opportunities for resettlement for these people so that the refugee camp was a temporary phenomenon compared with what we often find now. It was basically

making sure they were registered, that reasonable efforts were made to facilitate their registration with various refugee programs whether it be of the U.S . or various other European nations. Working with the European committee on migration to facilitate contact, etc., etc. So it was mainly facilitation activity. And then, of course, here in the U.S. we had a large section that worked with following up with individual refugees here in the US.

*Q: Were there particular categories of refugees that you are referring to or did you register refugees in general?*

MACALISTER: Again, IRC worked in particular with refugees who were intellectuals, professionals, or politicians. I remember one case in particular where we helped the former mayor of Budapest, Joseph Kovago, get reestablished here in the US. The IRC was a very politically sensitive organization. There was a strong interest in groups like the Captive Assembly of European Nations, a group in New York that was subsidized by various parts of the U.S. government to represent governments in exile, particularly for the governments of Eastern Europe.

*Q: Politically sensitive about what?*

MACALISTER: Okay, it meant that it took an advocacy position in the sense of being active with the United States Government, at least in terms of newspaper ads and meeting with government officials to advocate for political freedom.

*Q: Was [IRC] involved in immigration law? Things of that sort?*

MACALISTER: Yes, very much so. But not just immigration law. For instance, there was a group called the American Friends of Vietnam established after the Geneva Agreement of '54. The IRC did not have any direct organizational link with them, but there were a number of members of the IRC Board who were very involved with the American Friends of Vietnam, which was a definite political advocacy group. At that time, one of their main goals was to convince the American government to support Diem. So as Executive Director I was exposed to all of these areas.

At this time, there was a group called the Committee of One Million established by Marvin Liebman. It had to do with the question of recognition of Communist China. And there was a man named David Martin, who had been one of my predecessors. David Martin and Marvin Liebman were both former communists who, once they decided that had been a mistake, became rabid in the other direction. I personally was uncomfortable with some of their choices. I felt their political judgment had been affected.

*Q: You mean in terms of helping refugees? Was there some sort of political screening of the refugees?*

MACALISTER: No, it didn't get into that. What I am referring to was in the peripheries of the IRC. My overall memory is that there was more interest in certain aspects of political advocacy, than there was in assisting refugees.

Currently, as a retiree with a consulting practice, I act as the Washington representative for the American Refugee Committee. I go to meetings at trade associations and I see today some of this tension between the raison d'être of assisting a people in international and/or internal development, on the one hand, and the advocacy for particular political themes, on the other.

*Q: Well, we should come back to that. It is an interesting point. So how long were you Executive Director?*

### **Experience with American politics and the Humphrey for President campaign—1960**

MACALISTER: I guess it was about two and a half years. I decided at that point (obviously, I was a restless person), that I wanted to get some experience in American politics. Angier Duke had been rather active in the Democratic Party and through Angier I got a job as Deputy Director of the Humphrey for President Committee in the 1960 campaign against John Kennedy. So I came to Washington and worked on the Humphrey for President Committee, which was my first exposure to practical politics.

Certainly, the political philosophy of Hubert Humphrey was one that I supported. So I had the opportunity to see firsthand how you carry out a primary campaign for the Presidency, particularly with little money. And I got to know some of the major supporters of Hubert Humphrey. For instance, Joe Rau—a perennial Washington liberal lawyer. Another fellow who stands out in my mind was Jim Loeb, a newspaper publisher in upstate New York, who, in the Kennedy administration, was Ambassador to Guinea and perhaps Kenya. I also got to know some of the labor leaders who were supporting Kennedy.

I had the chance to watch people like Senator McCarthy, not Joe McCarthy, but the McCarthy of Minnesota. I'll never forget in a statement he made in a fund-raising speech at a luncheon which I felt was a good characterization of Humphrey. McCarthy said that one of Hubert's problems was that "... he was soft on people." Anyway, as we all know, the first campaign for the Presidency of Humphrey came to a grinding halt one night in West Virginia when John Kennedy won the primary there. As a consequence, what little money Hubert Humphrey had, dried up.

My experience, in general, in terms of finding jobs is that it helps to have contacts or a network. One of the people I had worked with in Humphrey's campaign was a woman named Charlotte Orton, who had been Humphrey's personal secretary. She came from Minnesota and knew intimately the "entourage". There was Tom Hughes who had been Administrative Assistant to Humphrey, who later became President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was the chief staff person that year for setting up the platform committee for the Democratic

Party. Charlotte introduced me to him and he hired me to assist with putting together the Democratic Platform for that year.

This again was a fascinating experience because Chester Bowles was the Chairman of the Platform Committee. Instead of just holding hearings in Washington, he instituted the “get out and meet the people approach” of holding hearings around the country. So we traveled all over the country and it was a marvelous educational opportunity because I heard the pleas of everybody from the National Rural Electric Cooperatives to the National Association of Manufacturers and everybody in between. It certainly broadened my understanding of what a pluralistic society we are and how varied a mosaic we are politically, both regionally and economically.

*Q: Was there any particular or dominant themes that kept coming up?*

MACALISTER: Not really because we covered everything from reforestation to the Atlantic Alliance and everything in-between. I did have the chance to meet some of the luminaries of the Democratic Party including John Kennedy and Averell Harriman. Then I went to the 1960 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles so I had the chance, as a staff person, to see how a convention is organized and how Chester Bowles steered the platform through the convention. That too was a great learning experience.

After the convention was over, I had the opportunity to go to Rhode Island and work on the primary campaign of Claiborne Pell. Again this was through the International Rescue Committee because when I had been the Executive Director of the IRC in New York, Claiborne Pell was our Washington representative.

*Q: Before we cover that, did you have any impression of Kennedy and Harriman and some of those people? What kind of a view did you have at the time of some of those personalities?*

MACALISTER: My impression of working in the Humphrey committee and just watching the Kennedy operatives including Teddy and Robert Kennedy working on the floor of the Democratic Convention, I was very impressed with their total commitment to politics. They were 1000% political people. And they were extremely well organized. I was also impressed with their financial means.

Since my experience with the Humphrey for President Committee, I have been troubled by the effect that inadequate public financing of campaigns has on our democracy. Because the costs of campaigning have escalated, unless you happen to be born into wealth or have gained wealth as part of your career, you are placed in the inherent conflict of interest of having to depend upon large contributions by people who have special interests whether they be labor or management.

*Q: Did you have any sense of the quality of the people, the leadership in that group?*

MACALISTER: I think I got a much greater sense of the quality later on when I worked in the Senate where I had a chance to see people working every day, dealing with real questions. It's one thing to be outside of government and promise what you're going to do and another thing to work in it.

Q: *Well, then we'll come back to that later.*

MACALISTER: Okay.

Q: *Let's continue.*

MACALISTER: So I ended up going to Rhode Island to work in Claiborne Pell's primary campaign. There was still the theme of international affairs, because Claiborne had been a Foreign Service Officer with the State Department at one point. His father had been an Ambassador. And Rhode Island ethnic politics involved four groups: French-Canadian Americans, Italian-Americans, Portuguese-Americans (including quite a few people from Cape Verde who were fishermen in Rhode Island), Irish-Americans and Yankee Americans—a wonderful American *mélange*.

Within that context, there were three people in the primary for the seat of Francis Greene. Again there we had a foreign relations connection, since he had been chair of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. The three candidates were Claiborne Pell, the Yankee blue blood, Dennis Roberts, and J. Howard McGrath, who had been Governor of Rhode Island and Attorney General in Harry Truman's administration.

Working in that campaign, in addition to getting firsthand experience with carrying out a political campaign, I got a chance to work with foreign affairs, since I drafted some of the speeches that had to do with foreign affairs issues. It was a marvelous contrast to having worked in the Humphrey program where we wondered where the next buck was coming from. Money was no problem in the Pell campaign—although Pell was a very thrifty guy. One time he was talking to a Yankee farmer in the southern part of Rhode Island, out on the farmers' farm. Pell gave him a button that said, “Ring the bell for Pell”, so Pell took the button back in order to save the cost. At that point, the farmer said he might vote for Pell since he was obviously a man who appreciated the worth of a dollar! *[laughter]*

Q: *Well, what was Pell's character? What were your impressions of him apart from that incident?*

MACALISTER: Well, he was a very decent man. I later worked for him and I've been in touch with him over the years and I still think he's a decent man. I was very much impressed with how American politics can provide an opportunity for all of us to work together no matter what our socio-economic backgrounds. You had Pell the blue blooded Yankee and the Ivy League lawyers who supported him out of conviction; then, you had the manager of our campaign who was an American from a very humble Portuguese-American background— all working for this guy. In

most cases because people wanted a change from the old style politics they had in Rhode Island up to that point.

In many ways, it was right out of the novel, The Last Hurrah, and Pell was just by being himself was so strikingly different. He was able to attract a wide coalition of people who were all able to work together regardless of religious background. And religion was very important since Rhode Island was, and probably still is, the highest percentage of Catholic people in the country. Also pertinent, was the fact that Jack Kennedy was running for the Presidency at that time, and Pell's wife was very close friends with Jackie Kennedy. They were, thus, able to attach the Kennedy mantle to the campaign.

*Q: What were some of the main themes of Pell's campaign?*

MACALISTER: The themes were jobs and peace. Pell was able to be credible on the peace issue. He had been a foreign service officer. He had worked for Averell Harriman on the UN San Francisco Conference. Between he and his wife, they spoke two or three foreign languages.

On the jobs theme, the international issue again came in. Pell was very committed to developing international trade. At this time, you had a lot of textile mills in Rhode Island and Massachusetts closing down and going south. Ultimately, it was the question of foreign imports. He was constantly faced with the intellectual conviction of free trade and trying to retrain people. These are questions which face our nation today. He won the primary and overwhelmingly won the final election and came to Washington.

Initially, there was a question of my working in the Senator's Washington office, since I was not a Rhode Islander, and there was a strong tradition of only Rhode Islanders working for members of the Rhode Island congressional delegation. But one day I got a call from his administrative assistant inviting me to work as a Legislative Assistant, which gave me the opportunity to see how the Senate was run; and to work in a Senate that included people like Lyndon Johnson, Mike Mansfield, Aiken, Everett McKinley Dirksen, and Paul Douglas. It was a wonderful opportunity.

In Pell's office, I was the only person who had any real exposure to foreign affairs. I wrote most of his statements for the Senate floor on foreign affairs, and I particularly followed the issue for him in the media.

*Q: Was he on the Foreign Affairs Committee then?*

MACALISTER: No, he wasn't. Unfortunately for me. In any event, it gave me the chance to use some of my foreign affairs background. And since he and I agreed intellectually, he would outline his thoughts on a particular issue and I didn't have any problems building on them in terms of statements or speeches.

*Q: What were the main legislative issues you were working on as a legislative assistant?*

MACALISTER: It was my responsibility to follow any bills that related to foreign affairs in any aspect. This brought me into the question of international trade. I also responded to most of the mail having to do with legislation. I covered Labor and Public Welfare, which was one of his initial committee assignments, and which were very important for Rhode Island. He also served on the Rules Committee so I had a chance to see how the Senate organizes itself. But in order to respond to the mail about pending legislation, I had to keep up with events in the Labor and Public Welfare Committee.

In these days of almost vituperous political exchange, I fondly remember going to the Senate Cafeteria in the morning and watching Mike Mansfield (the Democratic Majority Leader) and Senator Aiken from Vermont (a Republican), have breakfast together every morning.

Even in terms of some of the particularly poisonous statements that are made now, the fact is that in order to get bills passed, people need each other regardless of their political persuasion, and you have to have some compromise.

By and large, I was very impressed by the caliber of most senators. Most of them, at least once they got there, did have a serious interest in doing their best (as they saw it) for their country and constituency.

I was also impressed by just how personal this business is. The senator is your agency, your office, your bureau. Everything revolves around the senator. The staff very much reflected the personality and the style of the senator. I remember, for instance, the example of an American success story. The senior senator from Rhode Island—at the time Pell started out—was a man named Pastore. He was the son of an Italian immigrant tailor. The junior senator at that time was Claiborne Pell, an American blue blood. His great-grandfather had been vice-president of the United States. The junior senator was very deferential to the senior senator. And just looking at the staff of the senior senator, you could see it was very different from ours. I remember the counterpart to me in his office, the assistant to Senator Pastore, was a guy named Tom Meehan who had been a vaudeville dancer. He wrote a fantastic speech for St. Patrick's Day for the Sons of Saint Patrick dinner which Pastore was then able to give. His office was very ethnically organized. I would say very politically correct in today's terms. Claiborne would always tell me to call Tom Meehan before agreeing to sponsor or cosponsor anything to find out what Senator Pastore's stance was. Every time I would call Tom Meehan, he'd say, "Bob, it hasn't crossed my desk yet." He was really more there to write speeches.

*Q: So did you get involved in any drafting of foreign affairs legislation?*

MACALISTER: Not really. I was there for a couple of years. Claiborne was very sensitive about being the junior senator from Rhode Island, being deferential to the senators who had been there longer by not being an upstart freshman. During the first two years, he did not introduce any bills. He did cosponsor on some immigration legislation.

*Q: But none of those would have involved any foreign assistance bills?*

## Joining the Peace Corps —1962

MACALISTER: No. I finished working in the Senate in 1962 and moved on to the Peace Corps. The move was triggered by a lunch I had with a friend named George Carter, whom I had known through USIA in India. He went on to become the Peace Corps Director in Ghana. He told me about this exciting new group called the Peace Corps. So I decided to throw my hat in to become a Peace Corps Director. Originally, because of my India experience, I was supposed to become the Director of Ceylon (Sri Lanka today), and I couldn't go when the first volunteers went because the Congress was still in session. And certainly Shriver, being the consummate politician, agreed that I should stay with Pell until the session was finished.

By the time I was ready to go, Sri Lanka had a freeze on it. At the time, there was a Trotskyite head of Parliament named Madame Bandaranike and the American Ambassador said that he didn't want any more American officials arriving until he saw how the situation played out. Things were very tense at that time.

So I had an interesting experience as part of my Peace Corps orientation. Sergeant Shriver was very much into Outward Bound Camps as part of training. The Peace Corps had two of these camps in Puerto Rico. He had always wanted to see what would happen to a staff person who was sent to one of the camps along with the volunteers. So I got chosen! I went from sitting at a desk on Capitol Hill to climbing up and down mountain and drown-proofing with a group of kids who had just come out of college. It was great physically, but it was also valuable for me as a staff person. At first, the trainees thought I was a plant from Selection, but once they found out I wasn't, I became one of them. It was very useful later in terms of becoming a Peace Corps Director—in terms of understanding their psychology.

*Q: There was some age difference, I guess?*

MACALISTER: Yes. Most of our volunteers were right out of college, although one of the best ones I had on the Ivory Coast was a 62 year-old grandmother!

When I returned from Puerto Rico, I was put to work temporarily on the Pakistan desk. I regularly reviewed the cables from Ceylon and saw that Madame Bandaranike was still carrying on. Accordingly, I came to the conclusion that if I waited for the dust to settle in Ceylon, I could wait a long time. So I indicated that I was open to being assigned to another country. Sergeant Shriver called me into his office one day and noted that I spoke some French from my time in Vietnam. He didn't want to put any undue pressure on me, but he needed someone in the Ivory Coast, and that it would help him a lot if I would go, but on the hand, it was entirely up to me. So that was how I became an expert in development in French-speaking Africa.

*Q: How did you find Sergeant Shriver as a person to work with?*

MACALISTER: I'm hesitating because he's a complex guy. I was very impressed by the excitement that he created at the Peace Corps. I was very impressed. He had many of the traits

of Chester Bowles. He wanted to get out and see the volunteers. He was a consummate politician, very attuned with what Congress thought or might think. He made himself available to his principal staff. He talked about being a practical idealist, which is a motto I tried to follow.

At this time the Peace Corps was very controversial. Some critics referred to it as the Kiddie Corps. There may have been some kiddies there, but Shriver was no kid. Although he may have oversold the Peace Corps in terms of what we could do, I agreed with his interest in making the Peace Corps distinctive. On the other hand, I think some of his top echelon people went overboard with the approach that we should in no way be identified with the U.S. Government which was impossible anyway since we were an agency of the U.S. Government. Additionally, I didn't appreciate the arrogance that we were "God's chosen people" and that anybody else involved in international development was the Neanderthal Ugly American. I, of course, had already worked with the State Department and USIS and am wary of people who begin to get arrogant—who think they have a monopoly on wisdom and virtue.

Being with the Peace Corps reinforced my appreciation of the importance of having an understanding and insight of the local culture, if one wants to be effective in international development. Not only the local culture in terms of religion and sociology, but also, if you're dealing with government, you must know the bureaucratic culture. How do the civil servants and their ministers think? Awareness of the special favors for the districts that some of them may have been looking for. If you were talking about doing things at the village level, you needed to understand how the village culture functioned. What is the role of the chief? How is the land distributed?

### **Assignment to Ivory Coast as Peace Corps Director—1963**

*Q: Well, let's pick up when you went off to the Ivory Coast. What year was this?*

MACALISTER: This was from 1963-1965.

*Q: What were your main concerns there?*

MACALISTER: This was the first group of Peace Corps volunteers to be sent to the Ivory Coast. I had a predecessor who had been there about six months, but he was transferred to Geneva for liaison work with other groups of volunteers. As Director, one of my principal tasks was to help the first group of Peace Corps volunteers get established. In this context, I, not only had to deal with the culture of the Ivory Coast, I had to deal with French colonial culture.

Many of the volunteers were teaching in what they called the Corps complémentaire, which I guess we'd call middle schools. And at this time (with one exception) the director of every middle school except one was a Frenchman. Most of the teachers were French as well. And the man in the Ministry of Education, who made the decision about affectation, about assignments, was a Frenchman. English was part of the curriculum, because they were following the French colonial curriculum, but initially some of the French were concerned. They believed we [the

Peace Corps] to be the opening wedge of American cultural imperialism. Some of them were persuaded that we were there to displace them culturally. Anyone who knows anything about the French knows that cultural displacement is the worst worry you could put in their minds. Eventually, my efforts, and above all the conduct of the volunteers, indicated that we were not there to displace the French culturally.

*Q: So what was the reception for the volunteers?*

MACALISTER: Well, it was mixed. They had a double reception. They had two societies to deal with. They had the society of their bosses, who were, by and large, the French. And they had the society of their students, who generally came from rural backgrounds. Also, initially, the volunteer's level of French was not very good. So they constantly found themselves under a lot of heat to get their French up to speed from their directors and colleagues, since they were working in a totally French environment. All this despite the fact they were there to teach English.

It wasn't just the French issue either. One of my volunteers was a young man named Robichaud who came from a family of French Canadian heritage in Massachusetts. He had studied in French at school, at least through primary school. He was entirely bilingual. I traveled frequently and called on Robichaud's boss, who was French. I used to ask how Robichaud was doing in his English teaching and all I would get was a string of criticisms about Mr. Robichaud. Clearly, Robichaud was a loser in this man's eyes. I would always look for some gracious way to end the interview and get out of there—to try to cut my losses. In any event, I said to the gentleman in French, “In any case, Mr. Director, Mr. Robichaud speaks French well, right? *N'est-ce pas?*” And he said, “Yes, but his accent!”

This was the dilemma that most of the volunteers had. Most of their colleagues were French, but unlike most of their colleagues, most of the volunteers were interested in getting to know the Africans, trying to learn about their country and find out what made them tick, not just to live a totally expatriate life. This set up tensions with their colleagues. The volunteers had joined the Peace Corps in order to learn about a new country. So they had a tough row to hoe.

Later on, other volunteers got involved with adult education for women, for example, where they were not in that close contact with the French and their immediate supervisor was not a Frenchman. In any event, I learned how the environment in which you have to work affects your ability to do your job. You have to be sensitive to that environment.

*Q: What were the volunteers' relationships with the Africans? How did that work out?*

MACALISTER: Well, let's say it was better than most of us had. The reason I say that goes back to my personal experience in Africa, particularly compared with India where we still have friends—people who visit the U.S. and look us up. One of the things I personally regret, in terms of my own African experience, was that I found it was much more difficult to become friends with Africans or to get beyond the initial level. My experience was that, for whatever group of

reasons, it is harder for Americans to get to know Africans. The job that the volunteer had, and the context in which he or she had to work, had a real effect on the degree to which they got to know local people. Someone working and living out in a small village, particularly when they worked in an activity that took place in the village itself, had a much greater chance of getting to know the Africans than someone teaching in a school with a lot of French colleagues.

*Q: Well, let's move on now. Where did you go from the Ivory Coast?*

MACALISTER: I came back to the US. I was Chief of French Speaking African Programs here in Peace Corps, Washington. But before we do move on, I would like to make one more point that touches on the Ivory Coast, but also goes beyond it. It has to do with the independence of the Peace Corps from foreign policy and intelligence. I think Dean Rusk once said that the greatest contribution the Peace Corps could give to foreign policy would be not to make it a part of foreign policy, and I agree with that. At the height of the Cold War in Africa, there was some suspicion, particularly on the part of the Africans, that the Peace Corps was somehow hooked up with the CIA. Obviously, the best way to negate any of the positive accomplishments that a Peace Corps volunteer could make would be to have that person considered an agent of the CIA. This was certainly floating about in the 60s. Radio Moscow and/or the papers were constantly going out of their way to link the Peace Corps with the CIA. In my own case, I had to walk the fine line of sitting on the Ambassador's country team, but not being involved in the process of gathering political information.

*Q: Were you under any pressure to gather information?*

MACALISTER: Well, I was, at one point, from a gentleman who was a politically appointed Ambassador rather than career. I resisted that pressure and I didn't have any trouble in resisting it, because the President's brother-in-law was the head of the Peace Corps at that time. Also at one time my administrative assistant's good personal friend was a woman whom I did know to be associated with the CIA. I didn't see any particular problem of their being personal friends in the capital. However, a situation did arise which did pose a problem. One of our star volunteers, the 62 year-old grandmother, who was involved in adult education for women. She was stationed in the President's home village. The President's sister was one of her students. We had purposely placed her there because she was a star! And the President personally assigned her lodging and everything else.

At one time during my tenure as Peace Corps Director in the Ivory Coast, there was a period of definite political stress— political machinations going on. One day during this period, my administrative assistant announced that she was going to drive up to Yamoussoukro, the President's home village with her friend from the CIA! And I said I do not want you to do that. It could be misunderstood and could jeopardize this assignment and could jeopardize our standing here in the country. Well, she went anyway. I, then, went back to Washington and asked for authority to send her back home which I got from Sergeant Shriver. He backed his people up. It's nice to have a boss like that.

Q: *What was the Ambassador's view of that situation or was he not involved?*

MACALISTER: The Ambassador called me in and told me that I didn't want to rock the boat and so forth. He asked me to reconsider. I explained to him that I felt this was a very important point and that she had specifically defied my direct order.

Q: *Good. Good to illustrate a point like that. Otherwise, you felt relatively independent of the political issues?*

MACALISTER: Yes, I did. And I must say subsequently, where I dealt with career ambassadors I never....

Q: *But did you ever get into situations where the volunteers became politically active in either domestic or local politics or questioning views about U.S. policy?*

MACALISTER: I don't think I did. Of course, during the Vietnam War, there were occasions where Peace Corps volunteers would get involved with protesting the war. Jack Vaughn, who was then head of the Peace Corps, did put out a directive defining what was acceptable or unacceptable in terms of protests. My recollection is that the volunteers I dealt with respected that.

Q: *Well, then from the Ivory Coast, you did what?*

### **Assignment as the Peace Corps Director in Chad**

MACALISTER: I was the Director of French Speaking Africa in Washington. No, actually, I'm mistaken. I came back on home leave from the Ivory Coast and I was to be the first Peace Corps Director in Madagascar. And according to reports, the French, who were still very powerful in Madagascar at that time, decided that they did not want the Peace Corps in Madagascar. In any event, the host country request for the Peace Corps was canceled. So, then I became the Director of French Speaking Africa Programs.

Subsequently, I was to go to Guinea as the Peace Corps Director. However, just before my departure there was an incident which caused the cancellation of that assignment. The Guinean foreign minister got on a Pan American plane in Conakry and when the plane landed in Accra in Ghana, he was taken off by the Ghanaian government. Consequently, the then President of Guinea decided this was an American plot and his first act was to throw the Peace Corps out. Since my wife didn't want to go to Guinea, it was often rumored that she had arranged for the Guinean foreign minister to be yanked off the plane! In any event, that was another one I missed. I almost got to the point of saying, "If you want a program to be wiped out, send the MacAlister there!"

Soon after that, Jack Vaughn called me in and asked me if I would go to Chad. It was as a pinch hitter, but I like to cite the situation without citing any names because I think it is important in

terms of understanding what kind of people you need in international development. The man who had been named as the first Peace Corps Director to Chad was a doctor of internal medicine. His wife was a pediatrician. They were practicing medicine in a very well-off suburban community, so for them to take an assignment with the Peace Corps represented a tremendous financial sacrifice. But they went off to do it because they believed in the Peace Corps.

However, it turned out that, for a number of reasons, my predecessor in Chad was not successful. To the contrary, the volunteers were in an uproar. I think his primary problem was his attitude and approach to the volunteers. He was used to being in the position of authority—of being a doctor and giving orders. Here you had a group of young people with minds of their own. The only time he went to visit them was when he flew in on a plane. In any event, it's another example of the importance of understanding the people with whom you're working, particularly if you're in a leadership position. We did get the program back on track in Chad.

*Q: The program again there was mostly English teaching?*

MACALISTER: No, no. That was the minority program. One of the problems in Chad, in addition to this guy just not being suited to this kind of work, was that the programming there (in AID parlance the “project identification”) had been lousy. We had twenty volunteers on the shores of Lake Chad. These volunteers were supposed to be introducing oxen-drawn agriculture. The land was magnificent. You had polder land reclaimed from Lake Chad which was tremendously rich. But there had been no decent project identification. The host country entity, in which the volunteers were supposed to work, wasn't functional, etc, etc. So in addition to everything else, you had twenty young people sitting around growing more and more sour without enough to do. And this guy did not move to rectify the situation.

My Peace Corps experience in Chad served to reenforce my conviction that specific projects have to be well thought through. You can train Peace Corps volunteers appropriately, but, if you don't have a well organized project, you cannot be successful.

In Chad an opportunity to do something constructive with AID developed. As I mentioned earlier, we had these volunteers who were supposed to be involved with animal drawn agriculture and that didn't work out. Consequently, we had some people who needed jobs. At this time, I was approached by an AID engineer who had developed a system which involved sending water through a pipe to drill down to the water table and then install hand pumps. He had the technology, but didn't have the agents to install it so we (Peace Corps and AID) worked together. I am pleased to say that I left Chad in 1968 and, when I returned in 1976, the system was still running. I am also glad to note that the Peace Corps finally overcame its arrogance of not being willing to work with other agencies and now cooperates regularly with AID.

*Q: Let's talk about Chad and the situation you faced there.*

MACALISTER: Well, it was good preparation for later being the Director in Zaire. When traveling, you had to have your own survival system in place. You had to bring water, food, fuel

and spare tires with you everywhere you went. It was a tough country to exist in. But in terms of the morale of the volunteers, it was better than the Ivory Coast since they weren't caught in a vice of having to work with the French. The French were well represented in the Ministries, in the city but not many of them were stationed in the countryside.

*Q: What were the volunteers doing?*

MACALISTER: They were working with animal drawn agriculture, water pump installation, some teachers and some health educators. We also had a medical team that was involved with in-service retraining of Chadian medical personnel—a physician, several nurses, two or three lab technicians. They visited district hospitals or their equivalent to perform in-service training. We had one or two nurses who taught at the nursing school in Fort Lane. Then there were two lab technicians assigned to an oasis in the Sahara Desert working at the local hospital.

*Q: What was the relationship with the Chadian officials?*

MACALISTER: I found the Chadian officials, generally speaking, much easier to deal with than the Ivorienne officials. I would say they were less *complex*—more at ease in the sense of being Chadians. I still ran into the French in the capital, and particularly with our medical team, because one of the principal officials in the Ministry of Health was a colonel in the French army.

*Q: We just finished your last tape talking about your time in Chad as the Director of the Peace Corps there. And now we'll move on to your next position. What year are we now in?*

### **Peace Corps Director of Staff Training—1968**

MACALISTER: Okay, I finished up in Chad in 1968. Then came back to Peace Corps Washington as Director of Staff Training for a little over a year and a half.

*Q: Was there any particular emphasis in training you were promoting?*

MACALISTER: We were constantly challenged by the theme of what can you do in the States to approximate most closely the reality of what one would find in being a Peace Corps staff person overseas. We used a lot of role playing including using returned volunteers in Washington. One of the most interesting role plays which I remember involved former volunteer who played the part of a host country official. The trainees interviewed this person concerning an assignment for a volunteer. Also, there was constantly the question of the spouse which is today different, but at that time the spouse was very much part of the equation. Peace Corps volunteers were considered your international development product and you had to deal with them as individuals. The spouse could play a very important role.

*Q: Was the spouse in the training program too?*

MACALISTER: Yes, they were. We encouraged them to participate in the program. Not only in terms of any technical assistance that a spouse might be able to offer by virtue of his or her professional background, but also the spouse often got involved in counseling the volunteers, particularly the female ones, although this often depended upon the couple. We definitely wanted the spouses involved. Being a Peace Corps staff person is a very intense experience and there really was no water's edge between the office and home.

*Q: Right. How long was the course?*

MACALISTER: Our particular orientation went for something like two or three weeks. This was totally aside from language. And we certainly encouraged spouses to take language training.

*Q: So was this the end of your Peace Corps experience?*

MACALISTER: Well, it was the end of my Peace Corps experience at that point. That incarnation.

*Q: So you came back to the Peace Corps at some other time?*

MACALISTER: Yes, I came back to the Peace Corps in 1977.

*Q: Well, maybe we ought to jump ahead and go through the whole Peace Corps cycle now.*

### **A return to the Peace Corps in 1977 as Director in Zaire**

MACALISTER: Okay, I was asked to be the temporary Peace Corps Director in Zaire right after there had been problems in the Shaba province of Zaire. The Peace Corps program there was one of the largest—over 200 volunteers. Operating in Zaire was and is difficult. Like in Chad, you need to have your own support system. They were looking for someone who had prior Peace Corps experience to keep the program going and manage a large and far-flung group of volunteers. We had English teachers; people involved in fish farming which I will come back to in a minute. We had volunteers involved in health training. Some agricultural volunteers. It was quite a diversified program. But PC/Washington was looking for someone to hold down the fort while they went about recruiting on a long range basis. I was not interested in a long range overseas assignment at that point.

*Q: How long were you there?*

MACALISTER: I went for three months and stayed for seven. Sound familiar? Additionally, we had a very large in-country training program for volunteers in Zaire which was something I had not experienced before. Also, at that time, the Peace Corps Director for Zaire was also the Director for Rwanda where we had just six volunteers teaching English at the University.

In any event, one of the finest programs I have ever come across was the one showing farmers how they could grow talapia. The reason I say it was one of the finest programs is that it added an additional source of earning power that the farmer didn't have before the arrival of the volunteers. And with the exception of bringing in some cement, it used entirely indigenous products. Also, the farmers decided for themselves if they really wanted to participate. The whole element of being willing to make a commitment, the fact that the demand of the farmers wishing to participate was so huge, meant that the volunteer was able to screen people and decide who was really serious.

Interested farmers came and visited farmers who were already raising talapia so they could see exactly what was involved. In a sense the program sold itself. The farmers already involved were the ultimate extension agents. It was very creditable. A farmer could look and see that a farmer just like him with the same background and resources could do this. It wasn't something that depended on a lot of foreign intervention. For feed, they used rice chaff and so forth. With the exception of some cement, everything involved was local.

The farmers who participated had to decide to invest a considerable amount of labor on their part. They had to dig the pond, dam it up, and the farmer and his family had to feed these fish regularly. You needed a commitment from the farmer. I guess that is one of the first times I saw graphically the importance of village people investing their work in a project with the result that they felt it was their project—not the Peace Corps.

The talapia project operated in an area of Zaire where any kind of protein in addition to rice or cassava was very rare. Consequently, marketing the fish was very easy. As I recall, you could harvest the talapia once every six months. The farmer would let the water out of the pond and was able to sell the crop right then and there at the pond site. People came from miles around to get it. Cultivating talapia represented guaranteed additional income for the farmer.

*Q: Was there some government involvement?*

MACALISTER: Well, I was just about to get to the only drawback which was that we didn't really have counterparts from the government because the Government of Zaire was broke. Theoretically, we had counterparts at some district headquarters, but in reality we didn't.

*Q: Did the idea spread on its own?*

MACALISTER: I think it did. One of my best fishing volunteers went over to Rwanda at the request of the Rwanda government to advise them on how the project worked, what it involved and so on. I do know there were other Peace Corps fishing projects.

*Q: Was there any sense that this was sustained after the farmer had got it going?*

MACALISTER: Yes, definitely. Because all you had to do was to ensure that fingerlings would be available. Then once you had your pond, you used the residue from growing rice for feed. All locally available inputs. Also, the farmers knew how to keep up the ponds.

*Q: Did the fingerlings have to be imported or were they locally available?*

MACALISTER: Well, there were, as I recall, government installations that grew the fingerlings. Depending on how well the government financed the program, the spawning of the fingerlings could very well be the missing link in the future.

*Q: Was there any other important project in Zaire?*

MACALISTER: No, this is the one that stands out in my mind.

*Q: And this was your last Peace Corps assignment?*

MACALISTER: No. I came back to Peace Corps Africa for a while and worked in the Africa bureau before I went over to AID.

*Q: Well, it might be useful to discuss what you generally felt about the Peace Corps in its developmental role and who really benefitted from the program.*

### **Views on the developmental role of the Peace Corps**

MACALISTER: Well, I think there are three main goals to the Peace Corps Act. One is to give us an opportunity to learn about other countries; two is to give other countries the opportunity to learn about us; and three, to provide technical assistance. Looking back on that, I have always felt, and still feel, that the people who benefit most are the volunteers. In most cases, it is a very positive experience for the volunteers, certainly in the area of international development. I think the Peace Corps has been a rich recruiting area for AID.

The reason I say that is that it is an excellent training program in terms of grass roots development, and I believe very deeply that there is no substitute for experiential work in preparing people for international development. Certainly there is a place for the classroom, starting with the liberal arts in the undergraduate level and interdisciplinary seminars at the graduate level, where we try to learn from experience of different cultures. Also, it is important to review all the theories from trickle down to the poorest of the poor and in-between. However, particularly for those of us who come from highly industrialized societies, I don't think you can duplicate in the classroom the realities of attempting to implement a project in such a different society, different not only in terms of culture, but also in terms of government and its attitude toward government.

For instance, in terms of the IDI program, I think that it is advantageous if we can be recruiting people who have had overseas experience either through PVOs or Peace Corps or some other overseas opportunity. Often the overseas experience means having learned another language and the experience of living in another culture. Plus, if the volunteer had been a agricultural extension agent, they would have had the educational experience of working with people in the field, trying to introduce the technology in the context of the culture and within the economic realities with which the farmer works in. It is a fine background for people in the State Department, international business or just in terms of making a contribution to our own society. There are certainly many opportunities in this society to use what one learns in another country.

Volunteers usually return with a healthy pride and respect for our country, which I think is positive for the U.S. regardless of what one does after the Peace Corps. The impression of America which the volunteer gives is normally a positive one. Often, those volunteers who were involved in teaching are involved with some of the future leaders of the countries to which they were accredited. It doesn't hurt to have a favorable experience in terms of the future leaders being exposed to Americans.

And finally, the Peace Corps has made some contribution in terms of technical development which is a much grayer area than the other two, I mentioned. I think part of that is because of the nature of the activity. If you are teaching anywhere in the world, you often don't see the results of the ideas for many, many years. It is not as though you are growing a field of corn and are able to increase the output per hectare by such and such a percent. Also, I think I really don't know at the present time, but certainly in the past, the Peace Corps has suffered from the urge to produce large numbers of volunteers—quantity rather than quality. There are times when the programming hasn't been as carefully thought out as it should be. Therefore, what the volunteer can do is affected. I think there have sometimes been grandiose ideas as to what the volunteer could contribute.

Q: *Such as?*

MACALISTER: There are no specifics that come to mind. I would have to really sit down and do some recalling, but I think that volunteers were sometimes placed in technical positions to provide technical assistance where they really didn't have the technical background to do that, and too much was expected of them in terms of their ability to produce. Certainly, one thing I learned in the Peace Corps, which was helpful when I was a project manager for AID, is that the support you get from the host government can be key. As I mentioned before, when I first went to Chad, there was a group of disgruntled volunteers sitting on the shores of Lake Chad who were supposed to be introducing animal-drawn agriculture. Part of the reason they were disgruntled is that the host country hadn't produced the plows or oxen. Checking out the host country contribution I learned to be a very important part of project design.

Q: *Which of the various sectors or technical areas do you think the volunteers were most effective in?*

MACALISTER: Well, talapia was a good example. A good teacher is very important for all the reasons a good teacher is important anywhere in the world, plus if you're talking, for instance, about teaching English, (even in French speaking Africa) it opened up new possibilities for communication for future leaders or even for people going into education who could now access research in English.

*Q: Even in a French speaking area there was an acceptance and a desire to learn English?*

MACALISTER: Yes, actually, the French colonial ministry required it as part of their curriculum. But also, as the French speaking Africans began to govern themselves, they became very much aware that there was a world beyond Paris and France. Witness the fact that people like Abdoul Diouf, the President of Senegal, sends his kids to school in the United States. Certainly people in higher education get involved with research, and it became apparent that a tremendous amount of research had been done in the United States; that a tremendous amount of scholarly journals were written in the United States—not to mention international conferences taking place there.

I think it is most important to provide volunteers who meet an important need. I think of a project that the Peace Corps had in Guinea which involved mechanics. And you know as well as I, how many times we've seen material broken down along the side of the road after someone (not just Americans) had done an equipment drop in an area where there was no one trained to use or maintain it. I remember in Guinea I saw an international junk yard of equipment from the Russians, the East Germans, the Hungarians, and the Americans, to what have you. Material was dropped and after six months or less it is not useable. There are no spare parts or anyone with the know-how to maintain. Into this situation came a group of Peace Corps volunteer mechanics in Guinea who got the whole Conakry bus fleet running again and started to trained Guineans in the maintenance of these vehicles.

Again, you are dependent on someone ultimately being able to provide the spare parts, so I guess I would end up with the thought that it is important to have programming which really meets a felt need on the part of the people and to recruit volunteers who either, by virtue of previous experience or careful training, have what is needed to do the job. Also don't expect miracles, with three months of hands on technical training, you are not going to turn a BA generalist into an etymologist.

### **An interlude as dean of students and chair of an HMO—1969**

*Q: Good. Well, that covers the Peace Corps dimension of your career. Obviously, you'll have an opportunity to cover that more if you want. But there was a period between '69 and '77 before you went back to Peace Corps in Zaire.*

MACALISTER: Right. I left the Peace Corps in '69 and got involved in being Dean of Students at a new state university in Illinois that was an upper division university of just juniors and seniors and graduate students. I think I was picked for that because the president of the university was an innovative educator. The president projected that someone who had worked with Peace

Corps volunteers might have had some good experiential learning in terms of dealing with people of that age group.

And later, because of people I had worked with in the Peace Corps, I got involved with starting up a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) in the Cleveland, Ohio area. This involved an inner city community group that had a grant from the then-existing Office of Economic Opportunity. And I guess one of the reasons I got chosen for that is because Peace Corps staff tend to have experience in dealing with a broad cross-section of people plus unstructured situations. I started out with a board composed almost entirely of people directly involved with the welfare system and ended up with a board that ranged from a retired black army sergeant as chairperson to several welfare mothers. The board also included a representative of the Cleveland Hospital Association, of the United Auto Workers for labor, and a representative of TR&W for industry. It was indeed quite a cross-section of people.

### **Return to international development work as a consultant for the Sahel Development Program—1975**

After getting the HMO launched, I decided I wanted to get involved again with the international area, and in 1975-1976, I started doing consulting work for AID. Originally, I was involved with the original task force that looked at a Sahel development program. Because of the work I had done with getting an HMO started, I was asked to make some recommendations in terms of what type of assistance we might give in the health sector as part of task force. The work with the HMO was very relevant because delivering health care through an HMO involves very careful planning of your health professionals. Given the shortage of health professionals that you find in the Sahel, there was a lot of focus on preventative medicine which you also have in HMOs.

If you look back ten years, Blue Cross, which is a health insurance plan for indemnity where you choose your own doctor and then file a claim, would not pay for an annual physical for people. Statistics have always shown that prevention is, indeed, important in terms of what your medical costs are. Often you would save money in the long run by financing preventative activities—whether it was educational information about how to stay more healthy or periodic examinations to catch things before they became a problem. This was certainly a very important part of operations for health maintenance organizations and it is one of the principal reasons they were able to keep costs down compared with an indemnity program.

The preventative approach is very appropriate for a region like the Sahel. If you analyze some of the most endemic diseases in the Sahel, many of them can be prevented by vaccination, appropriate sanitary activities, appropriate nutrition, clean water, etc. Accordingly, the Sahel task force report stressed efforts to develop preventative medicine and careful use of your medical personnel. We also focused on the importance of “primary health care.” I will never forget the time later when I was doing consultative work for AID in Chad, and I visited a hospital in what used to be called Fort Archambeau but it now called Saar. The hospital had been erected by the European Community but was falling apart. The physicians were by and large Russians forced to go there by their government. The equipment was falling apart. There were no spare parts and

much of it would not function. They didn't have x-ray film. It was a disaster. I visited a small hospital fifty miles from there, established by an American missionary doctor whose family had been in the area for two or three generations. A lot of the health care in that region was done by a paramedical staff that he had trained at the hospital which had a thatch roof, but was clean. The missionary had spent its money not in the big three or four floor concrete building or in a lot of fancy equipment which people couldn't operate or maintain, but on the preventative work. The difference was amazing. That primary health care approach is an important one.

*Q: Now, you were on this task force writing recommendations. What were the dimensions of the program you were recommending then?*

MACALISTER: Basically, what we recommended was to focus on primary, preventative health care and related activities. We recommended careful training of paramedical personnel, using an extension of the paramedics in village dispensaries, not only in terms of providing health care to people once they came to the dispensaries, but also in terms of preventative outreach and health education.

*Q: Do you have any recollection of the origins of this task force and what it was trying to accomplish?*

MACALISTER: My recollection is that Dave Shear was involved with it and that he was then the Director of that part of AID that was involved in the development of a Sahel Regional Development Program after one of the droughts. AID was looking for a program that they could develop and then take to Congress to seek support for a multi disciplinary regional approach.

*Q: This was 1976?*

MACALISTER: Yes, exactly.

*Q: Do you have any recollection of what happened to the proposed program?*

MACALISTER: Yes. As I recall, Congress did earmark money for this program and for Sahel, and that there was a health component to that program. As usual, you always get into the question of relying upon people to implement these programs. Aside from shortages of money, most medical personnel existing at that time in the Sahel, had been trained with the emphasis of curative medicine.

*Q: Now are you talking about the Sahelian personnel?*

MACALISTER: Yes. So there was resistance on the part of many of the professional people in the ministries to this heavy preventative approach.

*Q: Was this pervasive throughout the Sahelian countries?*

MACALISTER: That is my impression, yes. However, there was considerable pressure for a preventative approach from us and the World Health Organization, which was very supportive of the preventative approach. Everywhere the Sahel medical planners turned, with the possible exception of some of the old French medical corps people who still played a very important role at that point, the emphasis was on preventative health care.

Q: *You were working on a task force for the development of the Sahel program and then....*

### **Assignment for USAID in Chad on the Sahel Development Program**

MACALISTER: Then after that, I was asked to go to Chad where the bilateral program was just starting up again after a period of regionalism.

Q: *What does that mean? Elaborate a little on that.*

MACALISTER: As I recall, there was a document called the Korry Report, issued in the late 60s or early 70s, with the theme that AID should cut back on the bilateral missions and develop regional programs. For instance, there were some regional programs for the Sahel run out of Dakar. The idea was that way you could save personnel and some money too, I guess. Then came the Sahel drought emergency and the Congressional approval of the Sahel Development Program. Accordingly, bilateral missions were reestablished in the Sahelian countries. I served as chief of party or team leader for a couple of design teams in Chad. The major effort was an integrated rural development project. The design took several months because it was a large effort. I worked very closely with a man by the name of John Lundgren, who was assigned to open up the mission in Chad.

Q: *What were the characteristics of this project? You were still a contractor at this point?*

MACALISTER: Yes, that's right. Well, I must say I haven't looked at the documents we produced lately, but, as I recall, we produced a Project Identification Paper—a document which represented a step before the Project Paper—I forget what that was called, and as I recall the team and myself also got involved with the Project Paper. And it was a good learning lesson for me of how AID actually operates. As I recall, John Lundgren's priority was to have a large, comprehensive project. At that time,—REDSO/West Africa was very involved in the review process and Miles Wedeman was the Director. Miles had a good deal to say about whether the project paper was approved. At that time, AID/Chad was still subject to REDSO/West Africa. It developed that the project got shot down when it got to the Project Paper stage. As I look back on it now, I realize that John Lundgren was way ahead of what Miles Wedeman was going to buy.

Q: *What was the issue, do you know?*

MACALISTER: One was just the sheer size of the effort. And I suspect Miles Wedeman's concern was one of absorptive capacity. We had not been working in Chad on a bilateral basis

and the Chadian Government has always been thin in terms of personnel resources. There was a lot of rural extension activity. I haven't looked at it lately, but my overall recollection is that he [Wedeman] felt we were trying to do too much, too quickly, and expecting too much of the Chadian government.

*Q: So what happened to the project eventually?*

MACALISTER: It got shot down. It didn't go. That was it. Subsequently, the Peace Corps asked me to go to Zaire and fill-in as Director. Then I became a direct hire person with AID in '79.

### **Joined AID as a direct hire employee—1979**

*Q: What brought you to that assignment?*

MACALISTER: Well, I think there is something relevant to international development here. What brought me was this. Peace Corps, at that time, was part of an agency called ACTION. The head of ACTION was a man named Sam Brown who was a political appointee. He was a man of very definite opinions and, as far as I could see, he surrounded himself with people, his inner-entourage, who had never had any experience in international development. One of their big problems was that they were arrogant. This prevented many of them from learning from the past. Their general approach, from where I sat anyway, was that people who had had any experience before were suspect. Their view was that if people with previous experience raised questions as to whether it was advisable to undertake a particular activity, it was probably because they were very conservative and traditional in their approach.

I think, at that point, the buzz word was poorest of the poor. Anyway, as usual, I think I always spoke my mind, at least in the internal debates. I followed the party line at an international gathering or something like that, but internally if I disagreed with what was being said, I expressed myself. Eventually, Sam Brown sent word to the Peace Corps Director that MacAlister should definitely go. And so I started job hunting.

*Q: Was there any particular issue on which you were in disagreement?*

MACALISTER: There was a meeting of Peace Corps Directors in Niger and one of the themes that Sam Brown and his entourage were very much keyed to was that English teaching was not an appropriate activity for Peace Corps volunteers, and that only those that were in the villages rubbing shoulders with the farmers were true Peace Corps volunteers who could make any contribution to eliminating poverty. So he was constantly pressuring all programs to cut out volunteers teaching English. When I was the Acting Director in Zaire, we had a Peace Corps Africa Directors meeting in Niger and Carolyn Payton, who was the head of the Peace Corps at that point, came out for the conference. We discussed English teaching and I expressed the opinion that I thought English teaching should be a part of the Peace Corps and I said why. I also probably made the mistake of noting that this question had been debated from the beginning of

the Peace Corps—whether to teach or not to teach— and that the idea of not teaching English was not a new one.

Also, the Minister of Education or development who came to address this group of Peace Corps staff people. During the question period I asked the Minister what he thought about Peace Corps volunteers being involved with education and he replied that he thought education was the key to development, etc., etc., etc. I doubt if that endeared me to Mr. Brown.

Even before the conference in Niger, I had some contact with Mr. Brown's deputy, Mary King, which probably didn't help my cause. Mary King also had absolutely no experience whatsoever in development. I remember that she went to a conference on the Sahel. In the course of the conference she stood up and promised that the Peace Corps would provide a thousand volunteers to make the Sahel bloom in two years—or something to that effect. When she returned from the conference, I was given responsibility of making the Sahel bloom with a thousand volunteers. I raised questions as to whether this had been an overstatement. I asked what were these volunteers going to do, etc., etc. I just raised too many questions. Brown, Mary King and their entourage just didn't want to hear these kinds of questions.

*Q: That is a useful point. So then you were looking around for something else.*

MACALISTER: Yes, I started to explore possibilities in AID. Somebody gave me the name of John Koehring or John Koehring was given my name—I can't remember exactly. Also at that point, there were two people I knew in the Peace Corps who had positions of responsibility with AID. One was Alex Shakow who had had some positions of responsibility for PPC. I had had some dealing with Alex who was the Assistant Administrator for Program and Policy Coordination (PPC). I had some dealings with Alex when he was involved in the Peace Corps. Also Alex had a good friend who knew me fairly well who contacted him to say he thought I had been shafted at the Peace Corps. Another person I knew from the Peace Corps was Doug Stafford and who was the AID Controller at that time and was now Assistant Administrator for UNHCR. In any event, I met with John Koehring

*Q: Now, he was the Director of Project Development in the Africa Bureau?*

MACALISTER: Right. And John Koehring put me in touch with John Blumgart and one or two other people. As I recall, John Koehring thought that my background equipped me to make a contribution to what he was doing. And eventually, John Blumgart and I focused on my being his assistant. The office which John Koehring headed was called DR—Development Resources. John Blumgart was head of a division involved with renewable energy and the environment.

*Q: John Blumgart?*

MACALISTER: Blumgart. Yes, sorry. So it eventually worked out that I was able to join John Blumgart working on...

## Working on renewable energy and appropriate technology in Africa

Q: *What was your assignment there?*

MACALISTER: Okay. I was Deputy Chief of the Special Development Project Division (SDP) which John Blumgart headed. We were particularly involved with energy questions, renewable energy, and urban affairs. And environmental reviews of projects and with some kind of macroeconomic review that was later transferred to the Development Planning Office. However, at this time renewable energy was big and I found myself very much involved with renewable energy questions. Many people were coming in with unsolicited proposals on the topic. Also, we had close ties with the energy office in the Science & Technology Bureau - is that what it was called? Anyway, the technical folks over in Rosslyn.

One of the principal themes that stands out in my mind from that period was the question of what I would call appropriate technology. The gentleman who was head of the Office of Energy was an engineer and I always felt that he was very much focussed on the technical capabilities of a particular technology, whether it was solar energy or various types of tapping thermal springs. God, I remember there was some sort of Rube Goldberg thermal contraption that was developed outside of Bakel in Senegal. It was supposed to use the sun to generate electricity.

Q: Solar energy pumps probably?

MACALISTER: It was a form of pump. I found myself constantly raising the question, "Is this technology appropriate for the situation in which we are working?" We even got into generating electricity by tides going in and out in Cape Verde. There really was no shortage of schemes! And there were a lot of technical approaches. I was concerned with raising questions such as "compare an investment of ten thousand dollars in a solar pump to irrigate a certain number of hectares. one, if you invested ten thousand dollars in a solar pump to irrigate a certain number of hectares with an investment of the same amount in hand dug wells, or hand pumps or pumps that might have been turned by an oxen. Could you irrigate more hectares, would you have a better opportunity of maintaining the wells. What were the possibilities of really multiplying the solar pumps that used the panels and so forth?" There certainly were some engineers around who didn't want to hear those questions. I felt my total experience in development dictated that I raise those questions.

I should cite a story, as I think about this, that goes back to when I was doing some consulting work for AID in Chad. We were designing the integrated rural development project, I mentioned earlier. I remember visiting what I call a "wahdi" out in the middle of nowhere where I came across a group of farmers who were growing vegetables to ship to the capital. I guess we'd call it truck farming. And they were using what they call a *shaduf* which is an ancient means of getting water out of the ground. You have a long pole on an axis and there is weight on one end of the pole and a basket that dips down into a hand dug well. You push on the pole and, because of the weight, water comes up fairly easily. The farmers had made little canals and the water brought up from the well went into the canals to water the cabbage and onions, etc.

Because I was an American associated with AID, the fellow wanted me to see something so he took me over to what looked like a little shrine. It was a little house that he had built on the edge of the field. Inside was a diesel pump which AID had given them some years back. It had broken down some years before. There were no spare parts. I don't know if they had diesel fuel. In any event, he had carefully preserved the pump. He wanted me to see it because I was an American and we had given it to them. To me it was a rather dramatic example of the importance of appropriate technology. They were doing just fine growing their vegetables with their *shaduf*, and this fancy pump that had been offered was off in its little museum piece house.

My impression was that one of the best ways to deal with renewable energy in terms of the reality which we found in most places in Africa, was something like wood lots because that didn't involved fancy imported equipment. Also it made economic sense, etc. One of the major inputs I feel that I was able to make at that juncture, along with John Blumgart, was to say to the technocrats, "Does this make economic sense? Is it economically and socially viable?"

*Q: But you say the wood lots was one of the more successful ventures that you were trying to advance? Could you describe it a little bit?*

MACALISTER: Sure. Wood lots were not a magic solution. You had to be careful about what you did. The idea of growing wood as a cash crop was a new idea for most people. Some had grown fruit trees, but wood had always been plentiful so you didn't really have to be concerned about growing, just cutting it down.

*Q: This was in the Sahel?*

MACALISTER: Yes, the Sahel. When you talk about renewal energy, recognizing the figures that ninety percent of people in Africa cook with wood for their meals, if you could somehow deal with the need for fuel to cook with you were working with renewable energy because, indeed, wood is renewable. So this gets you into charcoal and so forth. One approach was to try to improve charcoal kilns, and improved wood stoves, some of which we got into. To this day, I have never seen a widespread use of improved wood stoves because as far as I know, nobody has produced one yet that is cheap enough to really be marketable on a mass scale.

In any event, the fact is that in the immediate future, most Africans are going to cook with wood, there is a market for wood. What can you do to make it more available? What could be done to encourage people to grow wood as a crop? Since that is a new idea, farmers have to be convinced to give up land that they are currently using for a cash crop, to experiment with growing wood and, in most cases, you are talking about marginal farmers who can't afford too many bad guesses.

There was a lot of talk about communal wood lots. My general experience was that they didn't work because often they were the land of the Chief, and people didn't have any direct interest in keeping up the wood lots. You could have the ceremony where the minister drove out in his Mercedes, he planted a tree, everybody stood around with a watering-can, and then after the

minister had left in a cloud of dust, there wasn't too much watering after that. So you had to focus on some sort of personal wood lot which required convincing the person to switch from a crop he was growing on his own land. When I was there in '79 or '80, we were experimenting with that. I don't know how much progress has been made in wood lots as a crop. I do know that subsequently I have seen some people growing wood as a crop for building poles and so forth. But I'm not aware yet that wood lots have been established as a viable commercial venture. We were trying this in Burkina Faso. I think there was a project in Senegal that had started. Again it was an example that there are no easy answers to these questions.

I remember, at one point, some group and I don't remember whether it was us or the Europeans, subsidized cooking gas in Dakar. That didn't work. In a lot of cases, evaluators would find bottles of gas duly hooked up to a gas stove in the kitchen. However, the cook, which is always a woman, would be out in the courtyard cooking with wood and three stones because she was scared to death of the bottle gas! And she felt comfortable cooking with wood. So you have the social question. And then, as I just mentioned, you get into the fact that there has been no tradition of growing firewood as a crop. To what degree will you give up land that produces other crops in a marginal society?

*Q: Were there other technologies that you were concerned with in that job?*

MACALISTER: In Ghana, there was a pyrolitic converter that burnt sawdust. And what was that supposed to produce?

*Q: That was a charcoal maker.*

MACALISTER: Was it a charcoal maker? Okay.

*Q: From Georgia Tech.*

MACALISTER: MacAlister: Okay. Georgia Tech that's right.

*Q: Converting articles of agricultural waste to charcoal.*

MACALISTER: I remember visiting it. I don't remember hearing that it was successful commercially. Also there was discussion of collecting animal waste and producing gas that could be used for cooking. A lot of interest in solar power.

*Q: What was the experience with that?*

MACALISTER: Well, as far as I know, in the Sahel there is a hell of a lot of sun. I forget what these pumps cost, but if you take them out and you install them, you can certainly produce power to run a pump that can be used for irrigation. The question is: in how many villages can you afford to install these pumps and still have money for other methods?

*Q: A question of efficient use for costs.*

MACALISTER: Yes. Exactly.

*Q: How long were you in this division?*

MACALISTER: I was there until '82 and then I was assigned to go to Senegal as a project manager for a very large, integrated rural development project. But just before that I went to a two or three month course—a staff training course; I forget what it was called now, but it was a graduate level development studies course which I thoroughly enjoyed and which, at that juncture, I felt was very appropriate for me. Before going out to manage a large project, it gave me the opportunity to become acquainted with some of the latest development theories. I found it very stimulating and helpful in terms of codifying my own thoughts.

*Q: Do you remember what kind of development philosophy or policy was being promoted in those days?*

MACALISTER: I didn't sense there was any particular policy being promoted within the seminar. It was certainly my impression that some of the core faculty were skeptical of the structural adjustment approach or at least of the trickle down theory. To what degree, even if you increase the per capita income statistically through investment, etc., and manufacturing, to what degree will this improve living standards. There was a lot of debate back and forth. I am happy to say that having been involved with Africa since 1963 or so, and having watched the apostles of democratic socialism like Julius Nyerere and Marxism like Toure in Guinea and whoever was in Guinea Bissau, etc., there seems to be a pretty good understanding that whether it was democratic socialism or totalitarian marxism, it did not work economically. So I was glad to see that there wasn't a lot of time spent discussing whether or not socialism could work.

### **Managing an integrated rural development project in Senegal**

*Q: And after the studies program, you went to Senegal, is that right?*

MACALISTER: Right. Where I was put in the position of trying to manage a classic, integrated rural development project in the southern part of Senegal. You name it, we had it. A literacy component, a small rural works component, a credit component, a health component, an agricultural research component, an extension component and I have probably forgotten a couple of other activities. This was a multimillion dollar, multi-year contract run through the Senegalese Government. We had a regional development, parastatal (SOMIVAC) that covered the total region, and then one (PIDAC) that was supposed to cover part of the Casamance in which we were working. The official channels of government for implementing this project were SOMIVA and PIDAC and they were located in Ziguinchor, the capital of the Casamance region. Of course, the goal was to increase the general quality of life and standard of living of the people in the part of the Casamance where we were working. It was primarily an agricultural area.

Q: *How many people in this area generally? What were we talking about in terms of scale?*

Q: I forget. My recollection is that we were talking probably one hundred thousand people. It is one of the most densely populated regions of Senegal, if not the most densely populated region, because it has the best possibilities for growing. It is primarily a rice growing area with the best rain fall in Senegal. So one of the major efforts was to increase the production per hectare of rice. This was a real challenge, because it didn't just involve improving the variety of rice seed or the method of planting. It also involved the Casamance River which traditionally had been used for irrigation. However, because the rainfall had been very erratic over a number of years, the salt content of the river (which flows into the ocean) was very high—to the point that you couldn't use it for irrigation. Accordingly, we decided to develop small dams to block out the river coming into the rice fields. This got very complicated and was, in addition to being a tremendous challenge to me for many reasons, was also a tremendous learning experience.

Q: *To start, what do you think was mostly accomplished by the project?*

MACALISTER: Certainly one of the successes of the project was the small rural works. One of the reasons for its success recalls the talapia ponds project in Zaire. Before the project would make available assistance for cement, or what have you, for the small dams— anti-salt dams we called them—we wanted to see a real commitment from the village. They had to commit themselves to do most of the work. Also, they had to be available for training concerned with how to keep these dams functional in the future. Again, I mentioned previously, the big hospital built by the European Community in Fort Archembeau in Chad, there was also a big anti-salt dam that had been built by the European Community in a part of the Casamance and the dam was not functioning at all.

We had a credit component. The credit program was successful as long as we had something concrete to use as collateral. We were making loans available for plows and oxen. We had something called a *groupement du producteur* which was something like village organization. If you were a farmer and you took out a loan to get a plow, you signed the loan paper, but also the president of your *groupement* signed your loan paper. If you didn't make your payments, nobody in the *groupement* could get a loan. That worked well. It shows the effectiveness of social pressure. Also you had something you could take back if payments were not made. Credit programs are difficult in Senegal because, in the past, every time a presidential election was coming up, the loans were forgiven. Farmers were not used to paying back!

We had a research component. We started to really promote communication between the agricultural researchers and the extension people. Traditionally, there had been a real divide and a long tradition of little communication between the extension agent and the research person. There was a research station in Ziguinchor where we had one or two technical people doing various trials.

I remember one day standing out in a rice field with a guy from the research station who had been working on varieties of rice that were somewhat resistant to salt where the dam had

succeeded in shutting out the river. As I recall, we had had fairly good rain in the beginning of the season and then it slacked off toward the middle of the season. As a result, it had been determined that the land we were standing on had quite a high salt content because of the capillary action of the salt seeping up onto the surface. As a result, the crop of rice that had been planted on this lot was wiped out. The extension agent turned to the man from the research station and asked, "What do we do now?" The research agent replied, "I don't know." To the best of my knowledge, this was the first time they had been in a rice field together to discuss the reality of growing rice in the Casamance. Now they were finally starting to talk directly to each other.

On reflection, I think those were the principal accomplishments. Also, we certainly had some improvement of rice production with the use of fertilizer. However, the use of fertilizer was sporadic. There was always the question of how much rain you were going to get and whether it was worth the investment in additional fertilizer. Also, the fertilizer was made available by a parastatal and sometimes the fertilizer would get there when you needed it, and sometimes it wouldn't.

*Q: You had a health activity that you mentioned.*

MACALISTER: Yes, we had some health education. We got started in a couple villages a revolving fund for village pharmacies that was useful.

*Q: Let's talk a little bit more about your time in the Casamance. How long were you there?*

MACALISTER: About four years.

*Q: Four years! How did you find working with the Senegalese officials and people?*

MACALISTER: Mixed. The farmers themselves, who were mostly from the Diolla tribe, were very pleasant people to work with by and large. The officials, by and large, were pleasant to work with, but we had built-in tensions. The tensions were that we had a situation where they were short of money. They were trying to expend as little as possible of the government's money and I was constantly pressing them to spend more of their own money.

*Q: Were they receptive to new ideas?*

MACALISTER: Yes and no. Again, you get into social questions. The main effort was to increase agricultural production. Who undertook a particular agricultural activity varied by tribe. There were tribes where the men plowed the land, the women planted the seed, weeded and harvested. In another tribe, the women would do it all including the plowing. So for the most part, the farmers were women.

However, with one or two exceptions, the extension agents were men. It was not generally socially acceptable for the male extension agents to be involved with the women farmers. So

often, we would call a meeting to discuss some new agricultural activity and you would get only the husbands of the women farmers. So you were constantly faced with trying to pass information along second hand. I kept raising the question of increasing the number of women extension agents, based on the fact that most of the farmers were women, and in order to increase agricultural production we needed to talk directly to the women. I emphasized that women would have a better opportunity of communicating with women.

Next came the “catch 22” scenario. It was asserted that not many women were training to be extension agents because they know there is no possibility for them to find a job. The other side of the equation was that women with enough education to train to be an extension agent didn't want to train in that field because there would not be the opportunity to find husbands in that milieu. Again, the importance of the social factor.

Another challenge was that the money for the implementation of the project, at least that part of it involving the regional development agencies, was channeled through the host country entities. We had real problems of accountability. The social implications of the importance of the extended family were very important. In many cases, I think people felt “morally speaking” that it was acceptable to siphon off the money from the rich Americans to help support their extended family, rather than choose not to siphon the money off. So we had real problems there.

In terms of lessons learned and project implementation, I remember one of the principal recommendations I made in the project completion report was that when project implementation required working through a host government entity, that there should be a very, very hard look in the project identification team or project design team at the ability of the host government to function effectively. For instance, is there reason to believe that the entity has the authority required to implement...

*Q: The authority from the central government?*

MACALISTER: Right. Moreover, in our case, we had this regional development agency (SOMIVAC) and then we had an agency we had to work with that covered that part of the Casamance where the project was being implemented (PIDAC). Therefore, we not only had to get the agreement of the regional agency but also the director of the smaller agency...

*Q: Of that part of the region in which you were working?*

MACALISTER: There was a problem, then, in terms of getting decisions made. And in terms of their making available the host country contribution. We had a large expatriate technical assistance group in there. At one point, we had twelve American technicians. They were anxious to do their job. They also felt they were going to be evaluated on what they were producing. The project agreement provided that many of the inputs which the technicians needed were to be provided by the host country. However, if the inputs they needed was not available, through the host country agency with which they worked, they wanted to access petty cash funds which the

USAID contractor for which they had worked, had available. The result was to relieve the host government of part of their counterpart obligation.

The lesson I learned is that once you sign the project agreement and you have expat technicians in the field, you are really held hostage to this agreement. You can't turn off the faucet, because you have these high paid expats in the field who need certain inputs to function. Consequently, before you open the faucet and start the project, you need to (1) be assured that the host country entity through which you are supposed to implement the project is capable of doing the job, and (2) that at least a certain portion of the host country contribution would be placed in an escrow fund before the project started.

*Q: What was your view of the capabilities of the AID technicians or contract people who are working?*

MACALISTER: By and large, they were good. We had a contract with a consortium of universities called the Southeast Consortium for International Development. I was struck by the fact that, I think, of the twelve technicians, only two could be said to have any long range relationship with any of the universities that were involved in the consortium, which I think is very unfortunate. I know very well that the universities are constantly arguing that AID should use them because they have institutional resources which they want to bring to bear, and what have you. So I was disappointed that the universities were not really institutionally involved, and in a lot of instances, they were just writing the technicians paychecks.

*Q: What about the quality of the people?*

MACALISTER: By and large, they were good people. They had a challenge on a day to day basis of working within the host country framework. Their supervisors were Senegalese. They had their work cut out for them.

*Q: What were other major lessons for you from that experience?*

MACALISTER: Aside from the importance of what I mentioned above of working through the host country bureaucracy and our need to verify that they have the authority and the money to hold up their end of the project, I want to discuss briefly the concept integrated rural development. As we both know, at one time integrated rural development was a very popular concept. However, there was a backlash against the concept. Certainly one argument *against* integrated rural development is that it is too comprehensive; you can't focus enough on particular activities.

On the other hand, it seems to me that you have to look at what is needed to accomplish a particular project.. If in a situation like the Casamance, you want to improve agricultural production, then you have to ask yourself at the very least, what are the minimum requirements for doing that. And if, indeed, intrusion of salt water on the farmland is a problem, you have to deal with that. If credit to buy fertilizer is a problem, you have to deal with that. If you are not

dealing with some kind of a regional development agency, if you must depend on different agencies of government for project implementation, you have to ask what are the prospects that they are really going to work together? I guess, that you have to look at what your major objective is and, if it requires imports of different types, then you have to focus on that

Q: *Did you enjoy working there?*

MACALISTER: I did. I did.

Q: *What did you find attractive in that kind of an assignment?*

MACALISTER: An opportunity to use various parts of my management background. An opportunity to work with quite a varied group of people, including people who have fit into my own personal background. One of our engineers was a gentlemen originally from Vietnam. And some of our technicians were former Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: *How were the living conditions?*

MACALISTER: I was based in Dakar and I would go down once every three weeks or so which worked out well. When I returned to Dakar, I would follow through with the AID bureaucracy, getting what was required to carry out activities in the Casamance.

Q: *How did you find working through the AID system at that time?*

MACALISTER: I got to understand it very well. I learned what was needed to be done to ensure that decisions were taken to support project implementation. Also, I spent a lot of time with the AID Mission Controller. We had one occasion when the principal accountant from the Senegalese agency with which we worked was caught embezzling funds.

Q: *Senegalese accountant?*

MACALISTER: Yes.

Q: *I see.*

MACALISTER: So we needed a lot of preventative medicine.

Q: *What do you sense that you left behind as a result of four years of working there?*

MACALISTER: Since I haven't been back there, I express this as a hope. I hope that there is a realization and understanding of the importance of people who benefit from the project having to be involved in order for it to be successful. I am thinking of the actual construction of the anti-salt dams. I hope they have solved the problem of the capillary action of the salt coming up in the soil, and I hope the research and extension people understand that they must talk with each

other. I hope there are more community or revolving funds now for basic medicines in the village and that people realize that this *is* something that they can do to help themselves.

Q: *What happened to the project; do you know?*

MACALISTER: It had a follow-on. I think it was called the Casamance Water Management or something like that and I haven't read anything about the follow on.

### **Observations on development practices and what works**

Q: *And working with the Senegalese Government, what kind of a feel did you have for that?*

MACALISTER: Well, frankly, I see a dilemma. It's one that I think constantly confronts those of us working in development. On the one hand, it's easier in many ways for the foreign donor to deal with an indigenous NGO if you have a viable one or an international NGO or PVO in terms of organizing an activity in a village or group of villages because you avoid all of the headaches of dealing with another government's bureaucracy.

However, this approach has implications. One is that if you are not implementing the project through the host government, the area which you can affect is going to be limited by the area in which the NGOs or PVOs are working. If there are problems in terms of attitudes in the host government bureaucracy, in terms of planning ahead of time, budget planning, etc., then if you don't deal with them, nothing is going to happen to change that situation. So personally, as attractive as it is to work through PVOs, and I do think there is an important role for PVOs to play, it is not the ultimate answer and we still have to work with governments. As I mentioned earlier, when we implement a project through the host government, we have to review it not only in terms of what makes for a decent project, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of the minimum ability of government to implement and the minimum host country financial counterpart being available.

There is one final thought that occurs to me in this, in terms of how AID operates; it is my impression, and I only spent ten years working on the inside, but it is my impression that there is much, too much reward given in AID to obligating money for projects rather than rewarding project implementation. And this in a sense goes back to my Peace Corps days when, at times, the way to curry favor was to say that you had a big country program.

Also, I remember at one point in the early days of the Peace Corps, Sergeant Shriver going back to the Congress and saying, "Look, we couldn't spend all the money you gave us this year. We're dealing in an unpredictable situation. And rather than just obligate it to get through the fiscal year, I'm bringing it back." And because of the fact that development is an art not a science—there are so many unpredictables, particularly if we're going to work with host country governments, I think there ought to be a lot less emphasis on obligating money and a lot more on quality of project. This means that you just don't go ahead and approve something because you've got to get that money obligated by the end of the fiscal year.

*Q: But what do you think is a more appropriate for a quality project?*

MACALISTER: Well, Haven, it's been my experience whether in academia or elsewhere—that it is the reward system that is important. For instance, in academia you can preach that good teaching is important and that the emphasis on research is in some cases inhibits good teaching. However, if the people who get the promotions, the people who get tenure, are the people who publish in the journals—then generally speaking members of the faculty are going to give priority to research and publication.

Accordingly, if the reward system in AID were geared to rewarding people for project implementation, this could be a step in the right direction. This approach would have to involve everyone and operate from the top down; including going back to Congress from time to time and saying, “We can't spend it all this year and here is why.” Incidentally, we might find such an attitude would enhance our credibility in terms of future appropriations.

*Q: What about some of the approaches in developing projects. Some experience that you thought would give you a better chance of having successful projects.*

MACALISTER: Sure. I remember when I was still in Dakar, I used to love to go out around 10:30 in the morning and there was this marvelous *patisserie* where I'd get marvelous coffee and I'd take something to read quietly. And one time I took along the 25th Anniversary Report of the World Bank. And the report said that they had come to the conclusion that in order to have a successful development project, the people who were supposed to be involved with this project, had to really want this project. It had to be their project rather than something from the outside. Obviously, this is something that I have touched on throughout this interview. And I think this has to do with the fundamental definition of a good project that gives you a reasonable chance to succeed: that is, have we been able to ascertain that the people who would be involved with the implementation as well as the beneficiaries of the project really want to participate?

*Q: How do you find that out?*

MACALISTER: Well, I think, there are a couple of ...

*Q: Whether they're being genuine or whether you're bringing in money, therefore, they appear to want it. How do you know?*

MACALISTER: One question to ask is: what input do you have in the design process from the people who will be involved locally? There are ways of getting that input and there should be evidence that you have it. Another step is requiring the people involved to put up something of their own in terms of cash or labor. We try to do this with the host government, although it has become a game in a lot of cases. In any event, I would think that if you are going to have an agricultural development project, even if it runs through government, there ought to be some evidence that the people in the villages involved are willing to put up some money and effort. I'm not totally familiar with the full reengineering theory or practice that is currently discussed,

but I do hear talk of customer involvement, etc. I think this is one opportunity for customer involvement.

*Q: What was your view or do you have any impression of the Sahel Development Program because you were very much in the middle of it or at least of some aspects of it. That was, I guess, a big emphasis at that time.*

MACALISTER: Sure. I am hesitating because it's so difficult to come up with a lot of precise results. I have worked on annual reports of the Sahel Development Program. I am sure that if I went back to them, I could cite you success stories such as the reduction of the incidence of the Guinea worm, or increased crop production, or so many wells dug here or there. However, when you look at the Sahel (which is one of the least favored spots on the face of the earth in terms of land and resources, erratic rainfall, etc.) , it is an extraordinarily difficult place to work. Consequently, I think that one can only have very long range goals. My goals would include a bureaucracy that is geared to serving people which are more transparent; and a strong family planning program.

We look at overpopulation and we see this steady syndrome of cutting down more trees, land erosion, overpopulated land being divided up into smaller plots. Developing a strong family planning program will take time. I can remember that when I went on the Sahel Regional Task Force for Health, I stopped at the Ministry of Health in Senegal. This was 1975. I had to whisper in the corridors about spacing births. In contrast, when I left Senegal in 1986, there was a big coverage on the front page of the most prominent newspaper about family planning. This is the tip of the iceberg. You are talking mainly about the elite [using birth control]. You can have all kinds of contraceptives, but if people— for social reasons—won't use them, then you can't have effective family planning. Once again we need to take a long-range point of view in terms of making progress.

In general, we need to constantly be alert to opportunities to learn from the past, and be very careful on how we spend our money in our efforts.

*Q: The Sahel Development Program was, of course, a region-wide, multi-country endeavor. Did you get any sense of whether that approach was working or...?*

MACALISTER: I must say that I didn't have an occasion to look at it from a regional point of view. I did have some dealings with the regional organization for development in the Sahel (CILSS) which had its genesis in the outcome of the droughts of the 70s. Another benefit from the Sahel development approach is that you look at the Sahel as a region, you emphasize planning and cooperation. One of the things I constantly ran into with a project manager in Senegal was that most of my bureaucratic counterparts really didn't gear their budget plans to some kind of a course of action. In many ways, their budget requests were based on how much they thought they could get, period. This question of planning was and is important.

End of interview