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## PART 3

# The Foreign Service in Action

## Tales from the Field

**F**oreign Service professionals work on the front lines of history. If something important happens in a country, the Foreign Service is there, keeping the U.S. government informed, protecting American interests and, where possible, playing a constructive role. Yet because the Foreign Service role in world affairs is often played behind the scenes, few know about the dangers faced and the skills and courage exhibited every day by Foreign Service employees serving overseas.

Andrew Young was the only diplomat who attended a court hearing for Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy parliamentarians in Rangoon, Burma, making sure the military regime knew America was watching. Overseeing the evacuation of American citizens from East Timor, Gary Gray and Victoria Alvarado faced rampaging militias and chaos during the aftermath of the East Timorese vote for independence in 1999. Tex Harris blew the whistle on the Argentine military during the "dirty war," meeting with family members of the "disappeared" and calling attention to the human rights violations taking place.

When Ambassador Chris Hill went into a refugee camp in Macedonia in the middle of the night, quelled a riot, and saved the lives of Roma refugees under attack, it was not covered on CNN. When Security Officer John Frese spent days rescuing Americans and others stranded in Monrovia, Liberia, during fighting between warring factions in a brutal civil war, no one made a movie.

Those who serve America in the Foreign Service do not do it for glory or for publicity. Yet recognition for the courage and the sacrifices made every day by the Foreign Service is warranted, and these stories give a glimpse of the ways that the Foreign Service makes a difference in the world.

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# One Riot, One Ambassador

MACEDONIA, 1999

*By Charles A. Stonecipher*

One summer midnight in the Balkans, an American ambassador walked into a refugee camp to try to quell a riot and save lives of Roma (gypsy) refugees under attack. He succeeded, and went home to bed. It wasn't diplomacy around big tables in grand rooms. The U.S. embassy had no responsibility to intervene, and few who were not there ever heard about it. But the actions of Ambassador Christopher Hill highlight the power of the individual Foreign Service officer's moral and physical courage.

At about 11 p.m. on June 5, 1999, my cell phone rang at home. It was Ed Joseph, an American working for Catholic Relief Services as a refugee camp manager at Stenkovac Camp, a few miles north of Skopje, the capital of the small ethnically-tense Balkan nation of Macedonia. Stenkovac housed tens of thousands of refugees from Kosovo, mostly ethnic Albanians. There was a riot going on, Ed told me, and it looked like people were going to get killed. A rumor had run through the camp that some Roma residents were Serb collaborators who had participated in a massacre of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo weeks earlier. A mob had formed in the camp to go after the two accused Roma families. The camp managers had just enough time to get to the scene, pull the Roma away, and get them inside the small building they used as an office. Two of the men had been very badly beaten and were only semi-conscious.

The building was surrounded by masses of angry people, pounding on the doors and barred windows trying to get at the Roma. If the mob got in, it was unlikely any of the Roma, including the children, would stand a chance. Ed was on the edge of the crowd by the front gate with other camp administrators, but their efforts to break up the crowd were not working. He did not know how long it would be before the mob would be able to smash its way into the building.

Ed knew that sending Macedonian police into the camp would only inflame the situation. We quickly ran through some ideas — NATO troops, Western European police officers from an OSCE training mission, a couple of others — but none had any prospect of working in time, if ever. The one trump card we could think of was the immense respect of the Kosovar Albanians for the United States, and for our ambassador in Skopje, Chris Hill, admired by Kosovar Albanians for his efforts to prevent the Kosovo conflict. Maybe he could calm the mob. It was a long shot, and we could not rule out the grim possibility that in the confusion Hill himself could be attacked or trampled. We could think of no other options, so I called Ambassador Hill.

Hill listened to my explanation of what was going on and our vague idea for his intervention, then simply said, "Yes, I want to get out there right away." Minutes later, Deputy Chief of Mission Paul Jones, Refugee Coordinator Ted Morse, Ambassador Hill, and I were standing at the gate to the camp, looking at the milling mass of people surrounding the building that held the Roma. We were met by Ed, an interpreter, and

a gaggle of worried but seemingly powerless camp elders. As I listened to the din of noise from the unseen center of the crowd, the plan we'd concocted on the drive out began to seem a bit light.

We had decided to start with the interpreter using a bullhorn to announce that Ambassador Hill was coming into the camp to address the residents. The people closest to us would be able to hear it, and we'd wait for their reaction. Hill would then enter the camp flanked by Ted and Paul, holding lights. I would troop along with both arms overhead, displaying a towel-sized American flag I'd grabbed on the way out of my house. Between the flag and Hill's face we hoped to be allowed to pass far enough into the crowd for him to be able to make a speech at a spot where he could be seen and heard by as many people as possible. If he was able to calm things down, I'd try to get vehicles up to the building and we'd load the families and get out as fast as we could. There was no Plan B. Ambassador Hill looked around, said he was as ready as he was going to get, and headed for the gate.

Initially, our biggest problem was visibility, but the people on the edge of the crowd quickly turned to face us, recognized Ambassador Hill, and let us pass. With each step farther into the crowd, though, it got hotter, denser, and darker. Paul Jones grabbed a plastic crate for a podium as we pushed on. Around us the crowd swirled but people's attention increasingly turned to us. When we were about midway to the building, Hill stood on the crate while the interpreter continued announcing, "Ambassador Hill is here!" People yelled at each other in Albanian, "The Americans! Ambassador Hill!" Hill raised his arms for quiet and people began to shout, "Quiet! Everyone sit down!" Astoundingly, hundreds of men all around us began to sit on the ground so everyone could see and hear the ambassador.

Hill started to speak, and bit by bit, word by word, proceeded to transform the mob into an audience. He announced that NATO had just presented Milosevic with its non-negotiable plan to enter Kosovo. He told them how close Milosevic was to giving in, how close they were to being able to go back home. He said he knew they had suffered grievously and knew they thought the people in the building were guilty of atrocities, but they would bring no honor to themselves by taking matters into their own hands. "You know me," he said. "Give me the chance to take custody of these people and determine their guilt or innocence. I will do right by you. We have been through too much together to shame ourselves by making a horrible mistake." People listened, whispered among themselves. The whole crowd was now quiet, a mass of half-seen faces disappearing off into the darkness all around us.

As Hill spoke, I moved back toward the gate, using my awkward Albanian to ask people to clear a way for "the cars Ambassador Hill wants." This did not result in anyone actually moving — I was no Hill! — but at least they knew that vehicles were going to head that way. Two vans were waiting, and we inched them through the crowd and up to the building. The staff inside quickly loaded the battered Roma into the vans as hundreds of still-surly but now quiet men stood packed against the building, glaring. We drove out fast. I jumped out at the gate and the vans tore off for a hospital. Ambassador Hill was thanking the crowd and urging everyone to return to their tents. He was given a loud ovation and, amazingly, people started to drift off into the darkness. It was over.

Within a few days we confirmed from records that these particular Roma had all been in Macedonia during the time they were accused of having committed war crimes in Kosovo. Tension, rumor, and mass hysteria had created the mob that had come so close to killing them. Within weeks, Stenkovac Camp was virtually empty, its former residents back in Kosovo trying to pick up the pieces of their lives. The beaten men recovered, and those families, too, went their own ways.

We never talked much about that night again — each day at Embassy Skopje brought too many new problems and issues connected with the Kosovo crisis. But I've come to realize that night was characteristic of much of our work in the Foreign Service: We confront so many unknowns, we have so little time, and — on scales large and small — the consequences of our actions and inactions can be so extraordinarily profound.

*Charles A. Stonecipher was the political officer in Skopje from 1998 to 2001. He joined the Foreign Service in 1989. Other postings have included Bissau, Guinea-Bissau; Calgary, Canada; Washington, D.C.; Tirana, Albania; and Geneva, Switzerland.*

## A Prayer for Democracy

BURMA, 1998

*By Andrew R. Young*

**D**own Rangoon's Merchant Street, past trees that offered scant protection to democracy activists shot by soldiers in 1988, I walk to the Supreme Court on a spring day 10 long years after those killings. Easy to find, the halls of justice are surrounded by troops and barbed wire. Burma's junta sealed off the court's front entrance, so now one enters via the back door — a fitting metaphor for a once-proud judicial system reduced to a mere adjunct of the military dictatorship.



Faces of the Pa'o people from Shan State in central Burma.

ANDREW YOUNG

A hundred National League for Democracy (NLD) supporters have gathered to support Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's attempt to end the illegal detention of about 50 parliamentarians. Elected in the NLD's 1990 landslide victory, the political leaders have been harassed for most of the past decade. The regime has detained them for a year now without charge in the latest effort to break their spirit.

These years have been rough on NLD supporters.

Jailed in record numbers, they have lost jobs, family members, and seen a decade pass without freedom. Aung San Suu Kyi arrives to cheers of "Long Live the NLD!" She and the elderly party leaders (the younger leaders are in prison) know the outcome of the case in advance. Just as I do. Aung San Suu Kyi persists in a non-violent struggle that inspires people to action, armed only with the conviction that they are right and protected only by party uniforms of homespun cloth.

Today's court date is a cynical ploy to suggest rule of law prevails. But no witnesses are allowed into the court. In fact, I'm the only diplomat who even tries to enter. Did the others give up? Or worse, have they begun to believe the lies put out by that classic oxymoron "military intelligence"? A Burmese bureaucrat backed by gun-toting soldiers tells me I must leave. My refusal is tolerated. In an attempt to reason with the junta, I explain on camera to the regime's videographer that this charade of judicial freedom is both obvious and pointless. Their attempt to force me to leave only ensures that I will stay. I wait.

When all seems quiet, I return to the embassy, after surreptitiously indicating to NLD supporters that the United States is watching, that they are not alone in their struggle for freedom. Within 15 minutes, riot police clear the street using truncheons. Such is the duality of a diplomat's power and impotence. I can prevent violence against democracy activists only as long as I can witness regime actions.

Weeks earlier a parliamentarian visited me. I suggested he not tarry, as covert operatives certainly saw him enter the embassy. He chastised me, saying, "I have a right to be here. A right to talk to anyone. I know what will happen to me. But before it does, I want to earn the trust of the people who elected me. I want to do something." Six months later, he was sentenced to 21 years in prison. He did nothing more than talk. But talk is dangerous in Burma. A monk once invited me into a monastery, through a locked door and down into a cave cut 35 feet into a granite hillside. At last he said, "Now, we can talk."

How courageous the Burmese are even when informants seem everywhere. I've met the bravest people in my life here. The Burmese struggle on for democracy despite the repression, despite setbacks. Here the State Department wages a righteous fight for justice. Some day, the Burmese people will win their freedom. I pray that change comes soon, comes peacefully, and comes before more lives are destroyed.

*Andrew R. Young was a political officer in Rangoon from 1997 to 2000. In the Foreign Service since 1991, he has also served in Hong Kong, China; Washington, D.C.; Mumbai (Bombay), India; and Auckland, New Zealand.*

## A Coup GUINEA-BISSAU, 1998 *By Peggy Blackford*

**I**n June of 1998, I was looking forward to my imminent transfer back to the U.S. after three years as ambassador to Guinea-Bissau, one of the world's poorest nations. U.S. interests were modest in this former Portuguese colony. The small mission staff had two goals: to strengthen democratic institutions by providing training to the media and funding programs that empowered women, and to help create a more modern and stable economic development climate. One of our most successful programs was training Guineans in the simple technology required to process the cashew nuts that grew abundantly on trees all over town. Family income among some program participants had