VOICE FILE NAME: COHP David McDowell (Part One)

Key:
SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
DM: David McDowell (Respondent)

Part One:

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr David McDowell in New Zealand on Tuesday, 24th June 2014. David, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to be interviewed via Skype. I wonder if you could begin, please, by reflecting on how you came to be appointed to the Commonwealth Secretariat here in London.

DM: That's a mystery to me, too! [*Laughter*] I was rung one day by the then-Head of the Foreign Service, Alastair McIntosh – who, in fact, was one of the original candidates for becoming Secretary General. He said, "How would you like to go to London?" And I said, "What for?", and he said, "Commonwealth Secretariat. They're replacing Gerald Hensley." And I said, "Fine, but I better talk to my wife first." So, what the process of selection was I don't know, but I had replaced Gerald in Samoa and I later replaced him in New York and so on. So, we had sort of followed each other around.

SO: So, you weren't particularly aware of the work that he was doing in London with Secretary General Arnold Smith? Did he give you any sort of debriefing when he stepped down and you stepped into his role?

DM: Oh, yes. Yes, we took over their house in South Kensington and we had some time together. We had a session with Gerald and Juliet – Jan and I, along with Arnold and his wife – and we spent three or four very congenial hours together, going over what were the plusses and minuses of the job. Gerald has always had a capacity for telling you very clearly and very straight what the plusses and minuses were – you know, where I would run into trouble and where I would not, and so on. So, he was a very good guy to replace, because he was very perceptive and open and frank with you.

SO: Do you remember, particularly, what he highlighted as potential troubles in the shoals ahead?

DM: Well, it's reflected, in a way, in his memoirs: that the Commonwealth at the time was in a state of disarray. There were the open sores of Rhodesia and South Africa and Simonstown and all of that stuff. Mainly African, but then, of course, Malaysia had got a divorce from Singapore; India and Pakistan had been at war. Nigeria and Biafra were in open conflict. So, as he said, we had our hands full.

SO: How substantial was the Secretariat by the time you joined [in 1969]? I know that Arnold Smith had set it up in 1965 with a Canadian Secretary, Joy Tilsley. How substantial an organisation was it by the time you came to London?

DM: I can't remember the numbers, but it certainly seemed adequate for that particular bit that's on the political side. And, of course, we were only just starting to look at the CFTC and get that built up. I think Arnold had a gift for getting the right people in the right places, and governments were very cooperative: they didn't, you know, just dump people on him. Yaw Adu [Amishadai L Adu], for example, the Deputy from Ghana, was a wonderful guy. And brave: he was the only one of us who had the guts to stand up to Arnold if Arnold was being aberrant and stubborn, as occasionally he was. Old Yaw would sit there and he wouldn't say anything; he would do this West African thing of clicking his knuckles and he would do the whole eight knuckles – his fingers – [*Laughter*] and then he'd say, "Arnold: stop right there." And he'd look Arnold straight in the eye and he'd say, "You're wrong. Now, this is how it is." And Arnold would sit there and quietly take it, to his credit. It wasn't just aspects of the Biafran war or other African questions: it was management issues, sometimes South Asian or South East Asian issues, or Commonwealth issues in general. And Yaw was wise. I suppose we New Zealanders are also not all that backward about saying our piece. So, there was a whole string of New Zealanders. The first four Special Assistants on the political side were all New Zealanders, and that didn't happen by accident. Arnold insisted on having New Zealanders at his side because we also told it straight.

SO: Please could you just comment on that? In your earlier email, you remarked about Arnold Smith having this determined focus on a special assistant. Where did he get this idea from?

DM: He got it, particularly, from when he filled the role in relation to Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson. He was Lester Pearson's Special Assistant for some years. It wasn't a secretary, it wasn't a PA; it was very much being within twenty feet of him for about twelve hours a day for four years, with one's finger on the Secretariat's pulse and covering all the bases – and when we were overseas, of course, carrying two bottles of Glenfiddich! He had a lot of belief in the capacity of a small and fairly independent country like New Zealand to produce people who had, perhaps, less hang-ups and prejudices than others. Gerald, of course, was superb. I enjoyed my job. David Caffin replaced me, and then Chris Laidlaw after that. That was the succession.

SO: That's interesting, because I've interviewed a succession of Australians who have occupied the post of Director of the International Affairs division, which seems another determined use of one particular Commonwealth country's wealth of knowledge – the strength within their diplomatic corps and in their civil service.

David, when did you and Jan come to London?

DM: In July 1969 – about three days before Neil Armstrong stepped on to the moon, so it was a rather portentous week. I woke my six-year-old son, Tim, in the middle of the night and said, "Come and see this. First man on the moon. You won't see anything like it again in your lifetime."

SO: My parents did exactly the same thing to me. I remember watching it on our little black and white television screen.

DM: Yes, that's right. But it was very dramatic, wasn't it?

SO: Yes, it was.

DM: And Tim has always remembered it. It was also hellishly hot in London and the hotel had no air conditioning or even fans. We had three kids, aged six years or under, and they had no high chairs, no children's meals. So, it was a tough week. [*Laughter*]

SO: David, when you arrived then, in July 1969, the last London Heads of Government meeting had taken place. Do you recall the discussions and the planning with a view to Singapore being the first non-London based Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting?

DM: Yes, that was a good exercise, and Arnold and I went off and spent, oh, five or six days in Singapore – well ahead of time, six months before the meeting. We had very, very good discussions with Lee Kuan Yew who, as you know, is a very smart cookie. He called in his top people and we just went over all sorts of issues, right down to details about security. [*Laughter*] He was very worried about whether the Barisan Sosialis – which was one of the more radical, small parties in Singapore – might bump off Hastings Banda, for example, and told us about how big a security detail he'd have to have around Hastings Banda. That led to a lovely story which is that Hastings Banda, in the course of the conference, was called upon at 10:30 at night [to make a speech], when we'd already been discussing Rhodesia for about eight hours. Banda was called in to make a brief speech by Lee Kuan Yew, and he delivered the same wordy speech he had in the previous two Prime Ministers meetings, scarcely changing a word. Lee Kuan Yew leaned back to me and muttered, "I'm going to take that security detail away from this guy." [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] That's a very funny Heads meeting story! Were you aware of any particular tensions, at this particular point, between Lee Kuan Yew and Tunku Rahman or Abdul Razak Hussein? Because it seems that Malaysia and Singapore have had a fractious relationship of siblings since the separation in 1965.

DM: Well, they are very different personalities. Tunku Rahman was brought up in a sort of noble tradition. He was a lovely old man, and pretty pro-Commonwealth and not very anti-British. And Lee Kuan Yew was not anti-British, either, but he was a different kettle of fish. He was from a semi-proletarian [family] and he and his wife had both been to Oxford. They were from very different backgrounds, but there was no apparent tension that we could detect between the two leaders. No, I think that they admired each other for the fact that they had opposite qualities to what they had themselves, almost.

SO: David, were you aware of a particular security bond over the Five Power Defence Agreement which had been extended to Singapore and, to a degree, also covered Malaysia because of the ongoing Vietnam War at the time? I'm just wondering: did this feature in any way? Was this part of your regional discussions, your regional analysis of how this might affect the configuration of Heads' foreign policies or attitudes to the Commonwealth?

DM: Not really, no. We [i.e. New Zealand] stayed on well after the British had left and we still had both an air force unit and ground troops there in Malaysia, well after confrontation. So, we had a very different relationship, really. The Five Power became a sort of Three Power thing. But I cannot recall us thinking of what the implications might be in Commonwealth terms, no. It was 'Five Power', but it was very much a collection of bi-laterals, as well.

SO: David, the greatest controversy of the Singapore CHOGM, of course, was the incoming Heath government's decision to revive or to fulfil existing arms contracts to South Africa. How did you observe Arnold Smith managing this at the meeting?

DM: Well, Arnold, of course, had had long talks with Lee Kuan Yew about this beforehand. We had discussions about – as I mentioned before – the security issues, but we also, for example, went over the question of the furniture of the meeting room. Arnold argued on the basis of previous meetings that having a round table or an oval table would be an excellent idea, because it was more collegial and everybody could see most of their colleagues. But it didn't actually quite work out, because Lee Kuan Yew made it a very big oval table in a large room and had lots of lovely orchids, foliage and so on put in the middle. So, you could only barely see through the greenery! [*Laughter*] Some of the heads were thirty feet or forty feet or fifty feet away from others. So, that was one of our plans which came slightly unstuck, until they finally moved into the retreat mode and went into a smaller and more intimate room. There were Heads of Government only [and] one Advisor each…no, at the end, there were no Advisors. There was Arnold and me and the Heads of Government only, and that's where some of the tricky stuff was covered. HOGs always felt they could speak more freely when they were virtually off the record.

On Simonstown, it was clear right from the beginning what Heath's agenda was. He was almost exclusively focussed on it. He was trying to prove to his future colleagues inside the European Community that the Commonwealth was not – as some of them thought – an albatross around Britain's neck: that he could handle it and they shouldn't worry about it. He was quite provocative

about the way he pitched it, I thought. And so, the first two or three days were pretty heavy going. Arnold advised Lee Kuan Yew to let them talk it out, because a lot of the developing countries simply hadn't had a chance to talk with a British Prime Minister about defence and security issues in this way. Giving them the chance to do so was actually, frankly, therapeutic. Or so Arnold thought, and I think he was probably right. Douglas-Home was there, wasn't he?

SO: Yes, he was.

DM: Sitting there and he didn't seem to be advising or talking much to Heath. Heath was just speaking off the top of his head, and it was clear that this was a rather crucial moment in Commonwealth evolution because Mr Mother Country was declaring that it was going for a new liaison and that, in effect, was giving priority to that new liaison. And that was a shock to some people.

SO: Do you recall who came up with the idea of a working group to review the particular arrangements with South Africa? Was it pushed into committee stage as a way to take the heated debate between Heads off the table?

DM: No, I've got a copy of the minutes. I could look that up for you, if you were interested?

SO: I've got a copy of the minutes, too. I just wondered if you recalled the particular dynamics because, in the production of minutes, it's what's left out quite as much as what's put in which is important! Minutes don't necessarily reflect the temper of the meeting.

DM: That's true, yeah. No, I can't remember who it was, and I think it came up in the one room – the small room – discussions rather than in the full meeting.

SO: A couple of other things I'd like to ask you, David. What about Heath's advice to the Queen not to come? How did that go down with Arnold Smith and with Lee Kuan Yew?

DM: I remember Arnold being very irritated by it. Arnold had, as I have, a good deal of time for the Queen's role and the way she played it. I mean, she's a true professional. And the thought that she wouldn't be there was really distressing, even to a Canadian. [*Laughter*] I mean, I'm a republican by instinct, but the job she does is so polished and warm. She knows people by name and she knows about their families. She's got a wonderful memory and she can recall the last conversation with anybody: up to forty-five or fifty Heads of Government. It's pretty impressive. And Arnold, yes, I recall, was very angry about Heath's advice.

SO: Did he – that you were aware – try to suggest to Edward Heath that, in fact, he didn't give the British Monarch advice on her role as Head of the Commonwealth because that, of course, was a separate role?

DM: We had a discussion with Denis Greenhill, the head of the Foreign Office. I think it was Greenhill, yes. And Arnold made clear that the Head of the

association ought to be coming to the meeting, regardless of what the British thought. But we didn't win on that occasion.

SO: No.

DM: And I'm sure she put her foot down after that and she insisted on coming.

SO: Certainly. When Mrs Thatcher suggested in 1979 she would be advising the Palace that the Queen shouldn't come to the Lusaka meeting, the Palace was quick to say that the Queen would certainly be there. So, even if the Thatcher government was trying to use this as leverage to get Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU and ZIPRA forces to declare a cease-fire, Buckingham Palace was not having any of this. The Queen was going to be there regardless.

DM: Right.

SO: Just going back to that Singapore meeting, how clearly do you recall the genesis of the Singapore Declaration?

DM: [*Laughter*]

SO: I'm not asking you to think about the wording of those twelve clauses! I'm just wondering about the back room stuff, of which you might have had an inside knowledge – how it emerged and the politics of it.

DM: Well, as always – and people seem to be affronted by this – we had a draft before we went to Singapore, of course. Not as 'the Singapore Declaration', but as what the Communiqué might end up as. And it was modified as the meeting went on…

SO: Sorry, David, if I can just take you back. You say, "We had a draft." So, you were responsible for the drafting, in conjunction with Head of Political Affairs at that point, who would have been William [Bill] Peters?

DM: Yes, Bill Peters. Bill would put up a draft and then Arnold and I – and probably Yaw – would sit down and chew it over. They'd send me away to do a second draft and we'd send it back to Bill, and then Bill would come back with a third draft and then we would tell him, "Well, this is the draft we're taking with us." But, clearly, it was the Secretary General's draft by the time we put it in our pockets and flew off.

SO: How far was that draft a discussion point or a point of contention at the Singapore meeting? How far was it modified? Was this the subject of late night…

DM: That draft was never put in front of Heads of Government. It was just us putting our thoughts down on where we might end up, and then we listened carefully to two days of debate and then we modified it accordingly. And so, it was that that would go to the drafting committee: the re-draft.

SO: David, it strikes me – having read the Singapore Declaration quite carefully – that it also picks up on ideas that were coming out of the

Non-Aligned Movement at the time, for instance in their 1970 Lusaka meeting. It emphasises the non-association with blocs – you know, that it was possible to be members of an alliance, but that the Commonwealth itself was a non-aligned entity. Of course, it also stresses the racial anti-discrimination clause. I just wondered how far that these points were picking up on threads and themes of a non-European world, emerging out of Afro-Asian thought and also Non-Aligned Movement debates?

DM: Not so much the Non-Aligned [Movement], but the non-European world very much so, and that was conscious on our part. Arnold had worked very hard indeed to get a multi-national Secretariat together and he wanted to see a Declaration by the Commonwealth which "covered the waterfront". And, so, I don't think there was conscious lifting from Non-Aligned stuff, but the views of the majority of our members had to be taken into account.

SO: So, in a way, there was a sort of daisy chain of ideas, even if there wasn't a deliberate cross-referencing or drafting of input with a formulaic stamp on it.

DM: But a lot of that would have been picked up, you see, at the meeting itself, rather than necessarily being in the draft we took with us.

SO: What about the politics and diplomacy around CFTC? You mentioned that earlier in our discussion. The idea of CFTC had already started to take shape and form by the time you arrived at the Secretariat, but it doesn't become a going concern until 1971.

DM: The key to CFTC – and I can't remember when he was appointed – was Gordon Goundrey, who was its first head. A Canadian professor from St John's University in Newfoundland; he was a brilliant development economist, which were few and far between in those days. You didn't actually get a beast called a 'development economist', but he was one of them and he'd worked with Kenneth Kaunda for two years, in Kenneth Kaunda's office. He was very sound and trusted by nearly all sides across the breadth of the Commonwealth.

It was still a pretty hard sell at the beginning. People kept on saying, "Oh, well, we've got the World Bank and the IMF and the regional development banks starting to be set up and we've got the UNDP and the UN specialized agencies blah, blah, blah…What is the point of the Commonwealth one?" Arnold argued very persuasively – and he could be very persuasive if he wanted to – that this was a unique global association and it could draw quickly and accurately on a whole range of expertise, which wasn't necessarily easily available to huge outfits like the UNDP and the World Bank. And we had to get runs on the board fast. [*Laughter*] So, I remember, Botswana President Seretse Khama rang one Saturday night. He rang Arnold directly and he said, "I've got a problem. We're just about to sign an Agreement on a minerals concession with Anglo American. We've got very able people here, but I'd just like to have a second opinion in a hurry." And Arnold said, "What sort of a hurry?" And he said, "I'd like a team by the end of next week."

By the end of the week, we had a team on the ground in Lusaka, and it was Gordon Goundrey himself as the leader, a development economist. We had a specialist on royalties and minerals from the New Zealand Treasury. We had a development lawyer from Mauritius, who had worked on many Concession Agreements, and we had a smart Brit from Sussex, whose name I can't remember.

Anyway, they sat down and they negotiated – in constant consultation with the Botswanans - on behalf of the Botswana Government. At the end, two things happened. First, [*Laughter*] the De Beers people [a subsidiary of Anglo American] were grumbling away in their beers and Seretse invited us over for a weekend at his place and said, "My people tell me that you've got us three times what we would have got if we'd done it ourselves." The other thing was that Harry Oppenheimer rang Gordon Goundrey and said, "Goundrey, if you'll join us [Anglo American], tell me what your salary is and I'll quadruple it." Gordon just laughed. [*Laughter*] He said, "Harry, I'm a multis-basher. I always was and I always will be." Oppenheimer couldn't understand someone like that. [*Laughter*] And that was the sort of thing we were doing. CFTC was able to move very quickly and put a big effort into such exercises, to make sure they got it right!

SO: David, if I could just say, that example is held up as the paradigm of astute usage of natural resources: the 50/50 royalty deal between De Beers and the Botswana Government.

DM: Seretse never forgot it. He drew on us constantly; he really used the Secretariat. The South Africans, for example, subsequently threatened to take him to the World Court because they alleged that refugees from South Africa were escaping into Botswana and going by boat over the theoretical quadripoint in the Zambezi River and, therefore, for a brief moment, were infringing on both Rhodesian and South West African sovereignty. So, Seretse rang up and said, "What do we do?" And we sent a QC – a sound lawyer called Tom Kellock, an Englishman – who went down to Botswana. He looked at the whole situation and he found that the South Africans, for once, hadn't done their homework and…are you interested in this level of detail?

SO: I am, because I've seen these documents in the Secretariat, and it's the debate about where the boundary lies down the river. Was it a question of shifting river banks?

DM: It's not the banks that shift; it's where the medium *filum* – which is the median point between the two banks – meets the moveable bit, the *thalweg*. And so, in the wet season, Tom argued that the boundary between Botswana and Zambia could be up a quarter of a mile wide – and thus there was no means by which Rhodesia and South West Africa could travel across it without assent.

SO: Okay, this is a classic 'soft border', because it has to move! [*Laughter*]

DM: Well, it was drawn up by a British surveyor in the 1880s, I think. The median *filum* is the midpoint between the two banks and the *thalweg* is the middle of the navigable channel. And, you see, in the wet season, the latter moves downstream, because the water is moving faster… Anyway, Tom then went

back to have a talk to the President and others and then went off to Pretoria. [He] sat down with their lawyers for a week and they withdrew the threat to go to the World Court. The South Africans were a little shaken, I think. [*Laughter*]

SO: Yes, they probably were. So, having got through that cataract of the Singapore meeting, did Arnold Smith have a detailed debriefing with his officials – with you as his Special Advisor – immediately after such discussions? Do you recall sitting down and going over what went well, where were the successes, what were the attentive points that needed particular focus the next time round? Or was it straight onto the next event?

DM: Well, yes, I suppose we did it formally, but we would do it informally too - on the plane, for example. Arnold and Yaw and others would be sitting in a row muttering away for hours. Yes, I mean, by and large we thought the Commonwealth had got through the meeting surprisingly well, in the end. We were pretty upset with Heath's position in which he, clearly, put entry into the Community as his top priority and the Commonwealth well down the list.

SO: How much of the success of Singapore do you think can be put down to Arnold Smith's particular style and diplomacy? *Stitches in Time,* his memoir that he wrote with Clyde Sanger – who is a delightful journalist – really comes across as very dry and, yet…

DM: A bit boring.

SO: Yes, really rather turgid.

DM: Yeah.

SO: Please, could you fill in some personal details to expand on the quality of the man, as it were?

DM: Alright, well, let me be totally indiscreet. [*Laughter*] I found him very difficult to adjust to, the first month or two. He was very unlike any New Zealand diplomat I'd ever worked with. He was very loquacious, very self-confident, verging on the vain, but put him in a tight spot, put him under pressure, and he was brilliant. Take the pressure off him and he became, you know, less so. [*Laughter*] I really learned a hell of a lot from working with him for three and a half years, particularly about the capacity to handle pressure. And he was incredibly persuasive. I remember once, for example, we were in Delhi. The Foreign Minister was Tikki Kaul. India was engaging in the so-called 'tilt' towards Russia, which Americans and others were getting very twitchy about, and coming to exactly the wrong conclusion about handling it - by starting to support the Paks [Pakistanis]. Tikki Kaul gave a dinner for Arnold and he stood up and made this speech which became overtly anti-Commonwealth. Arnold's blood pressure was going up, I could see, and he turned to me and he said, "Shall I do a return of service?" And I said, "Yeah, give him both barrels." And he stood up and he was quite superb. He spoke, first of all, as a Canadian diplomat. He said, "Listen, you may wonder why Canada has supported you in your bid to build up the civil use of nuclear energy. It was always a controversial decision, but we did it because you're fellow members of a Commonwealth, not because we necessarily like the cut of your jib…" I

remember him saying that. [*Laughter*] And he then turned to Kaul and said, "And I think you should think very seriously about the implications of what you've just been saying." And he then went and did his hard sell line about the plusses of being a member of the Commonwealth and what advantage it gave you in terms of access to global and regional networks, expertise etc. etc. Tikki Kaul sat there and listened very attentively, and at the end he said, "Secretary General, I've never heard the Commonwealth described in those terms before." He said, "I'll have to think about it." [*Laughter*] So, you know, that was a good example of the way Arnold could turn people without deeply offending them, and could turn them around. He would say, "These are the practicalities, and this is how I see it." First of all, he spoke as a Canadian diplomat, and then as the Secretary General. A successful piece of counter-punching, as we say.

SO: Indeed, that really is a superb skill: to think on your feet, to respond forcefully, politely, but making those emphatic points which were, as you say, enormously persuasive. Gerald Hensley made the comment that, when Arnold Smith was making a prepared speech, when the pressure was off, that you would sit in the audience and signal that the particular speech that was recycled again and again should be cut short. Is that an accurate recollection?

DM: I had this agreement with Arnold: I'd pull my right ear lobe when I thought he was getting wordy. [*Laughter*] And, I remember, he was giving a lecture to the Institute of Foreign Affairs in Lesotho. There was a big audience and he was supposed to speak for 25 minutes. After 45 minutes, I started pulling my right ear lobe. He stopped and he looked at me and he said, "That chap over there is a New Zealander, and he's my Special Assistant. He's pulling his right ear lobe and that means I'm getting long-winded. Now, you don't think I'm being long-winded, do you?" [*Laughter*] And the audience was transfixed by this exchange. But anyway, yes, he did get long-winded and repetitive and so on when the pressure went off. Gerald's absolutely right.

SO: In terms of how he handled himself when the pressure was on, were you his Specialist Assistant when he was trying to deal with the final – and excuse this expression – 'death throes' of the Nigerian Civil War? Or had that come to a bloody conclusion by the time that you joined the Secretariat?

DM: No, the Kampala Meeting you'll have heard about from Gerald, and they got pretty close to a settlement there. But, it all fell apart partly because Louis Mbanefo lost his nerve, because he couldn't raise C Odumegwu Ojukwu on the radio to get clearance. I came in relatively soon after that and Arnold and I went off to Freetown, for example, and had a session with Ojukwu's Foreign Secretary, Francis Nwokedi. Arnold was dead set on flying into Enugu. I wasn't so keen. [*Laughter*] And we had two days of talks with Nwokedi, and then we had numerous talks with various official and unofficial representatives of both sides. At the time, of course, Emeka was off elsewhere…

SO: And that was highly deliberate, wasn't it, by Arnold Smith?

DM: Well, yes. The Nigerians were asking that he be fired – because he was an Ibo, of course – and Arnold declined to answer: we just never said where he was or where he'd gone. [*Laughter*]

SO: But did Arnold use Chief Emeka's private networks, his contacts with old Ibadan University connections, his political affiliations with other Ibo? The fact that, you know, his house in London might be a stopping-off point? Emeka makes reference to this in his memoir, *The Inside Story of the Modern Commonwealth.* I just wondered, even though Arnold Smith was very careful to protect him as far as possible – sending him off to the Gibraltar referendum, sending him off to the Antigua discussions – whether there was still stuff below-the-radar?

DM: Not to my knowledge. But, you know, that might have been just between Emeka and Arnold. I was in on 95% of Arnold's discussions, but that's one where it would be so sensitive that he may very well have kept it to himself. So, I can't answer on that one. I don't know.

SO: Please, could I ask you, David, and this is a personal enquiry… Arnold Smith had been the Canadian Ambassador in Moscow back in the 1950s. Was he a 'Cold Warrior'? Had he been in Canadian intelligence, do you know?

DM: Not as far as I know. And he was quite pro-Russian in that he admired much of Russian culture and had good friends there.

SO: He spoke Russian, I know that.

DM: Yes. Well, we were travelling from Washington to New York one day, and we were waiting at Washington railway station, killing time. Arnold had a beautiful voice. He wandered up and down this nearly empty platform singing Russian folk songs at full blast. Any American who came by thought he was bonkers, but I sat there and enjoyed it. It was great. [*Laughter*] And, he'd known painter [Wassily] Kandinsky very well, for example. He talked fondly of his time in Moscow. So, it seems to me unlikely that he could be seen as a 'Cold Warrior' as such.

SO: Of course. Others have talked about the Nigerian Civil War as having Cold War dimensions – that the French had a particular dog in this fight, that the British were taking a particular view, and that the Ivory Coast and South Africa were also devilling in Biafra as well. Were you aware of these geopolitical dimensions? Or were you focusing on trying to mediate between two warring factions in a key Commonwealth country?

DM: We were aware of the geopolitics but were more focussed on the Commonwealth angles. One of my great mates in the British Foreign Office was Brian Barder. Brian was the point man on Biafra, and he and I have still not reconciled our differences over the civil war! We see them [i.e. Brian and his wife] every time we go to London, and he now runs a very good blog. But Brian was quite convinced that it was best for Biafra and best for Nigeria to keep the two together. We weren't necessarily saying the contrary, but we were under pressure, also, from Julius Nyerere and Kenneth Kaunda and one or two others not to take a straight out anti-Biafran position, at all. But yes, the

French were dabbling. I'm trying to think of where the Americans fit there. I can't remember much contact with the Americans about it.

SO: So, in terms of your awareness of what French diplomacy was up to in the Biafran War, was most of your source material coming through Brian Barder at the Foreign Office? Or did Arnold Smith have his own particular contacts in Paris to find out quite what was going on?

DM: We had multitudinous sources. Arnold had very good contacts in Paris. I mean, he owned a farm down in Aquitaine, he spoke good French, he loved French culture, French wine, French food and…[*Laughter*]

SO: Yes, his memoirs, *Stitches in Time,* were written in France!

DM: Exactly. So yes, and we got a fair bit from Canadian sources – they have, of course, that special French connection. But a lot of it was in the papers. People like Patrick Keatley from *The Guardian* and lovely old Derek Ingram would keep us constantly in contact with what they got. Arnold trusted them absolutely, those two. You could give either of them an extremely frank briefing and say, "This you may use, this you may not use," and they never used the prohibited bits. They would use it to inform their comments, but they would never give a source or be explicit.

SO: Just going back, though, to the outcome of the Nigerian Civil War… Did this, in any way, affect Arnold's relationship with President Jack Gowon after it had reached its bloody conclusion? To what extent did there need to be adept diplomacy by the Commonwealth Secretary General to smooth the inevitable tensions that existed?

DM: Well, we had to, but Jack Gowon was very amenable. I mean, he completely understood what we'd been doing – or so he said, and I think it was true. He was a good guy; he was a straight soldier, in many ways. I remember we started talking about reconciliation, and Gowon appointed Allison Ayida as the Minister and, you know, he was absolutely the right appointment. Ayida did a brilliant job. I mean, well before reconciliation became the buzzword in South Africa, the Federal Nigerians were making up with the Ibo, to the degree they could after such a bitter struggle. They made up very fast indeed, and it was impressive to watch. And Arnold certainly encouraged that.

SO: How far did they draw upon the good offices of the Secretary General and upon Commonwealth resources to promote and support it? Or was this a Nigerian affair?

DM: It was very much a Nigerian thing. It had to be. But Arnold gave Jack Gowon and company moral support and said how impressed he was by it all and so on… So, he encouraged it.

SO: It seems the next storm looming on the horizon was the India-Pakistan War, which led to the independence of Bangladesh. I've looked through Arnold Smith's files, which are in Canada in their National Library and Archive. Did you accompany him regularly on those trips to…?

DM: All of those trips, yes. Yahya Khan twice, [Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto twice, Mrs Bandaranaike, and one aborted one, where I was flying at Mrs Bandaranaike's request – not for me, but for a representative of the Secretary General to go – to talk about the conflict. Indira Gandhi intervened and said, "No, there must be no talks…", you know, "You mustn't continue on this course." And so, I got a message on a plane – from the pilot, from Arnold – saying, "Get off the plane at Athens. It's got a service stop. Get off at Athens and come back." Well, the airline didn't have permission to drop people off in Athens! [*Laughter*] I just got off anyway and left my bag on the plane and then walked round and handed myself in to the Greek authorities, who were very sweet about it. [*Laughter*] They understood completely. And I even got my…

SO: You even got your bag back? [*Laughter*]

DM: Because it was Pakistan Airways, you see; because I was going to Karachi and then on to Colombo. Anyways, that was by the by.

SO: David, what were you tasked to do by Arnold Smith? Obviously, you were his emissary. Were these trips so that you could gather information for the Secretary General, or were you carrying a…

DM: Gathering information and handing on to Arnold… Also, giving Mrs B a briefing on what was happening and preparing the way for Arnold, really. You know, doing a John the Baptist sort of thing! Arnold was to come later and, in fact, he did come later.

SO: So, if I could just ask about 'Mrs B', as you refer to her. What was her attitude to the Commonwealth, her attitude to this crisis?

DM: Well, you know the old African thing about "when the elephants fight, the grass gets trampled"? Well, she [felt] a bit of that – and, as a New Zealander, we understand that! She was very apprehensive as to where it was going to end up. She had a certain standing in the region and so on, and she was quite shaken when Indira came down on her like a ton of bricks. But it didn't stop her trying to be helpful… I'm trying to think at what point the second trip took place, in which Arnold actually did get to see Mrs B. I'm trying to think whether it was before the end of the war or just after. I fell very ill in Dhaka. Not surprisingly, since all the water supply was contaminated. I'll have to look it up.

SO: Please don't worry, David. What was your experience, your observation, of Mrs Gandhi and her handling of this crisis, and her relationship with the Commonwealth?

DM: I don't think the Commonwealth came into it. I had a lot of dealings with her later, as I became non-resident High Commissioner to India, based in Wellington, in the early 1980s, and I had a couple of very frank talks with her. And it was all about Pakistan, basically. She was looking after the Indian interest as she perceived it, which was that a Pakistan split down the middle into two different countries was a good thing, from the point of view of India's security.

SO: So, the Commonwealth didn't feature at all on that geopolitical horizon.

DM: Not substantially, though the Pakistan side used Commonwealth channels and the SG's influence when they adjudged it suited their purposes.

SO: To what extent – that you observed – did you feel that Arnold Smith's arguing to other Commonwealth Heads that they should recognise an independent Bangladesh was shaped or driven by his awareness of the humanitarian crisis of Biafra? Because after all, by the November of 1970, there were four million refugees in India. If there was going to be an international relief effort, questions of sovereignty had to be resolved. Do you feel that there was any crossover between Arnold Smith's earlier experience and his suggestion to Heads that they recognise Bangladesh?

DM: Hmm. Not that I recall. The Indians were doing a reasonable job of feeding and sheltering the refugees. You've read the stuff, haven't you, of the several discussions with Yahya? They often followed Arnold's talks in London with Sheikh Mujibur, who was more flexible than Yahya. Arnold tried to give Yahya an out, several times. He would say, "You know, there are a variety of constitutional solutions. You could head towards a much more federal structure. You could have a bicameral legislature or separate legislatures, if you wanted them" – that, to some degree, they had already – and "there could be a good level of devolution and that way the country would remain intact." But Yahya turned them all down. Arnold says in his book something like, "Yahya Khan was a very charming man, but limited." Arnold was much less complimentary than that in private. [*Laughter*] He felt he was an inflexible and unimaginative military man who did not serve Pakistan's interests well.

SO: Because he was fixated on one particular solution, rather than thinking of possible permutations?

DM: Yes, a military solution. That was Yahya: he was a military man and he couldn't see past it. He *was* very limited. And Arnold put a lot of time and effort into trying to convince him that there were alternatives. But of course, as I have said, we were talking to Mujibur as well, because Mujibur was in London. We would go and call on him when we were looking at solutions. We would say, "What are you prepared to buy?" And Mujibur was very flexible. Right up until towards the end, when it became clear that the Pakistan Army was out of control, virtually, Mujibur was saying, "Yes, we could look at a two parts solution, or a confederation, or something like that." So, he was pretty reasonable, but once it became clear where the Paks were heading – whether consciously or unconsciously, one never quite knew – Mujibur lost interest in compromises. We were in Dhaka by the end of January 1971. The war ended on about the 15th of December, and we were in Dhaka by about the third week in January and the place was, of course, a mess. Bodies everywhere. And what they did with the academic staff of the university was the beginning of a genocide. I mean, they made them dig their own graves and shot them into them. It was appalling. Anyway, our judgment was that there was now no going back. The war had got so nasty and there had been so many casualties that there was no chance of reuniting Pakistan. So, this poor country was enduring floods and cyclones and starvation and something close to genocide; let's get the resources of the world mobilized through the UN system and through the Commonwealth, through recognition and then,

hopefully, some help. Let's get it under way as fast as possible. That's what was driving Arnold.

SO: How much, though, did he also have to manage the African dimension? Nigeria had just held together a federal state against a civil war; here was yet another Commonwealth state which was fragmenting into a bloody civil war.

DM: That was what was motivating Jack Gowon, and the Paks were ensuring that he saw the parallel. Yes, we had to argue with them – with the Nigerians – and not only the Nigerians: with several countries. The Brits were dragging their feet at first, and so were the Canadians – much to Arnold's mortification. I am trying to think if there was a fourth country…Another African country, also…

SO: I know of Emeka's visit around West African capitals – Freetown in Sierra Leone, Accra in Ghana – and that he called on Jack Gowon last, because he could present it that, even on the line of Commonwealth consensus, that although he didn't agree with something he could still live with it.

David, you say that the Brits and the Canadians were also resistant, initially, to the recognition of Bangladesh. How much diplomacy did this take from you and from Arnold Smith back in London, and also through contacts in Ottawa with the Canadians?

DM: I don't recall. That's the sort of thing that Arnold would have done directly. I'll tell you who was also pushing them – [it] was the New Zealanders. You see, Norman Kirk wasn't yet Prime Minister, but in 1970 he was part of the Asian branch of Socialist International, I think. I think he was President, actually. Anyway, he was heavily involved, and the New Zealand Foreign Service, the New Zealand Foreign Ministry, was pushing hard on humanitarian grounds for early recognition in the early weeks of 1971.

SO: David, how much longer did you stay on at the Secretariat after the independence of Bangladesh? You didn't stay on for the Ottawa Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 1973, because by then you were working for Norman Kirk's office, is that right?

DM: Well, not in his office, no. I was actually running the New Zealand Aid Programme, but because of my Commonwealth background, Norman Kirk pulled me out of there to go to the Ottawa Meeting. So, I was there throughout. But, no, I went home in December 1972. He came into office in early December and I was home about two weeks later.

SO: **So, just reflecting on your time at the Secretariat, what did you feel were the particular successes, the learning curves, but also the limitations and failures – of the Secretary General and also of ComSec as an organisation?**

DM: I think that the successes were probably that, during that period, we consolidated what had been a relatively successful first four years – you know, from the establishment of the Secretariat. So, there was very little talk

any more of people pulling out or anything like that. I think that, on the Biafran front, we had tried – and people had been encouraging us, in Gerald's time – to get the two sides together, and we almost succeeded. Even so, because we kept in touch it probably helped lessen the level of violence on the ground, because it became a cause célèbre – well, globally, but also inside Commonwealth circles. Arnold was very active, as you know, on the East-West Pakistan conflict, but he was excluded from actually producing a result or a big step forward because of the rigidity of Yahya Khan's views and, of course, Mrs Gandhi's opposition. In the end, it was useful that he moved to encourage the recognition of Bangladesh and its admission to both the Commonwealth and the UN. So, these were not big advances on the political front, although he was so active.

There was one area in which he certainly notched up a plus, which was that we went off to Kampala to talk to Idi Amin. We spent four days with him and his then-Foreign Minister, Elizabeth of Toro. Amin was threatening the 80,000 Ugandan Asians – they'd have to get out and they wouldn't be able to take any of their goods with them and so on. What Arnold succeeded in doing after days of talk was to get Amin's agreement to let them go with most of their moveable goods. And, you see, what Arnold kept saying to Amin [was], "Look, the reputation of your regime – or your government, I suppose, as you see it – will be badly hurt if you are seen to move against people who have made a big contribution over the years to the emergence of Uganda's modern economy." And he talked earnestly in this vein every night. We would sit around… It was very bizarre. We would go out onto the grounds of State House, which had lovely lawns and beautiful gardens and this soft African night and the four of us would sit down. Arnold and Idi sat with each other, and Elizabeth of Toro and I sat opposite each other, and we had a tall Sikh standing behind each chair and we had the military band playing soft, gentle English-type music in the corner. I remember we got more frustrated as the days passed. We did four nights like that, and Arnold got upset with me and asked querulously, "Why is it that you get to sit next to the beautiful and articulate Elizabeth of Toro and I get to sit next to Idi?" [*Laughter*] And he used to complain. But the intervention can be counted a success in the end…

SO: David, please, could I ask you… Did Arnold Smith have a particular brief from the British Government to handle this? The tensions were ratcheting up between HMG and Kampala at this point. Was Britain going to offer an asylum status to these refugees? Kenya would have been concerned, given the sizeable community of Kenyan Asians…

DM: Right.

SO: …and their contribution to the Kenyan economy. Were these all part of the diplomatic dimensions and thought processes?

DM: Obviously, we talked to the British before we went, but we did not expect the generosity which emerged from the British side. The willingness of the British Government to take so many of the Asian Ugandans – and other refugees, for that matter – over the next year or two was very impressive. And Arnold, when credit was due, he would go in and see the Brits and say, "We congratulate you on the openness of your policies." But we didn't know that for certain. I recall [that], when we went to talk to Idi, we didn't know for

certain how generous the British were going to be. Our expectation was that the Asian citizens might well go back to India or elsewhere.

SO: And had you made soundings in Delhi about this? It would not have been repatriation, because these were second or third generation Indians that had been in Uganda…

DM: Exactly, yes.

SO: And was there concern whether Kenya might replicate this? Or were there discussions with the Kenyan Government, with Jomo Kenyatta in Nairobi, say, as to whether they were prepared to take any refugees?

DM: No, that wasn't part of the expectation, I think, at the time. I can't recall a Kenya dimension like that. We talked about it, but we didn't actually go and negotiate or have a direct meeting with them.

SO: Milton Obote had been at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Singapore when Idi Amin launched that coup. How quickly had you been able to establish reasonable relations with Idi Amin and his staff?

DM: Well, Obote just got up and walked out the moment he heard what had happened. He got up and walked out of the meeting and we never saw him again. He'd got on a plane and headed back. He said he was heading back to Kampala, but he never got there. He must have got information about how much Entebbe was in Amin's hands. I'm just trying to think back. It became a necessity to deal with the guy, and he was very smart. One of the problems was that the world's press was fascinated by him and he was good copy…

SO: Oh, yes. I remember Alan Coren's satirical 'Letter from Kampala' in *Private Eye* very well indeed.

DM: …and he was, actually, shrewd like a fox. He became much more deranged in subsequent years, but in the first year to eighteen months he was very smart. He would pretend to be totally frank and open and answer all their questions and so on – often with rather bizarre answers, but…The British, in my view, always under-estimated him. [They] under-estimated how smart he was and how successful he was in manipulating the global press, the global media. Of course, later, when stories started to emerge of what his people were doing to the Acholi and the other tribes, then his reputation declined pretty rapidly. But, at that point, he was very, very polite to us and he sent us off on a little trip to one of the national parks to look at the flamingos. [*Laughter*]

SO: Later, when Sonny Ramphal made a visit to Kampala, he was taken off to a game park and it was re-named 'The Shridath Ramphal Game Park' in his honour.

DM: Wonderful.

SO: Sonny Ramphal suggested that the name of the game park was frequently changed, depending on the distinguished visitor of the time.

DM: Yeah.

SO: How far was Arnold Smith trying to carve out a separate role for the Commonwealth and the Secretariat, apart from the United Nations? As far as the Commonwealth was an expanding international sub-system, its approaches appear to be increasingly focused on opposition to white minority regions in Southern Africa, as well as a focus on development. Do you think these were dual grand strategies for the Commonwealth under Arnold Smith?

DM: Oh, yes. He did not lack ambition, personal or institutional. When I talk about this with my colleagues, they thought at first, when I came back from my Commonwealth experience, that I was a sort of romantic and I said, "It's got nothing to do with being romantic." I said, "This is an existing, in place, ready-made network, with a global membership." You know, almost one-third of the members of the UN are members of the Commonwealth and it's an institution. Arnold wanted it to be seen in those terms: in practical terms. Not as some romantic hangover from Empire, obviously, but as a practical means where there are so few networks like this existing in the world today. You know, "For goodness sake, take hold of this one and build it up and make it even more effective than it is at the moment." And that was the rationale for him, and it seemed to me to be a very sensible one. But the institution was still viewed with some suspicion in some quarters – including in parts of Whitehall – and we weren't over-endowed with funds. Here it was on a pretty tight rope. Once I'd seen the work of the CFTC and those sorts of things [that] I was talking about in relation to Botswana… I've since had a lot of contact with the World Bank Group, worked with them and for them, [and] I was on the UNDP Governing Council, all of that sort of stuff. And, in my view, in terms of value for money on the ground, the CFTC is probably the most effective – certainly one of the most effective – development agencies around. The level of assistance it ought to have, the level of funds it ought to have, and which is justified is much greater than it has… I've argued with my own government about this for years.

SO: Well, the drive here in the UK is very much bilateral aid, isn't it? Rather than giving funds to a multi-national entity that focuses on exchange of South-South skills and expertise.

DM: Yes.

SO: So, while you were at the Secretariat, there were limitations on funds and limitations on perception, despite the energies and activities of a key Secretary General. Was the relationship with Whitehall also one of the important constraints while you were there?

DM: It was at the beginning and in the run up to Singapore, and after Singapore, but the Rhodesian thing changed all that. The outcome of the Rhodesian situation, in terms of the Brits... Mrs T suddenly thought this is one means of getting off this runaway horse. That was well after my time. I left in 1972, and I suppose this was about 1979. The Brits at that point were very keen, and Whitehall – the defence people – got in behind Mrs Thatcher very quickly.

And it was a good operation. I was on the New Zealand observer team for the election in 1980. I was there for six weeks.

SO: I'd very much like to talk to you about that at our next discussion – that will be excellent. David, with your agreement, I think I'd like to draw this discussion to an end now, and look forward to talking to you again.

[END OF AUDIOFILE PART ONE]