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Biographical Note

Barrows, ambassador to Cameroon from 1960 to 1966, discusses issues surrounding the 1961 plebiscite to determine the fate of British Cameroon, U.S.-Cameroon relations during the John F. Kennedy administration, and differences in State Department policy towards Francophone and Anglophone African nations, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

With

Leland Barrows

February 4, 1971
McLean, Virginia

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Mr. Ambassador, let me begin by asking you if you recall the circumstances under which you were appointed ambassador to Cameroon. What was there about you, about your background and so on, that led to this?

BARROWS: Well, let me point out first of all that I was appointed by President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower].

MOSS: Right.

BARROWS: And it's difficult to know. I was technically a foreign service officer chosen and recommended by the Department of State and appointed more or less routinely as a foreign service appointment. But that's only the general thing.

MOSS: All right, well let me ask you....

BARROWS: I would say that there were some interesting – to me interesting – aspects of that problem, such as the fact that my appointment was held up in the

White House for three months, and I subsequently learned it was because twenty-five years earlier I had worked for the Democratic National Committee.

MOSS: Oh, it was held up by the Eisenhower people?

BARROWS: Yes, I mean it was held up – it was presented as a foreign service appointment, which it was. But then too, you see, I'd gone into the foreign service by lateral entry only four

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years before, after twelve years in the foreign aid business; so that even before the Senate committee when I went up for confirmation, the question was asked for the record: was I there as a political appointee or as a career appointee? And the answer was, it was a career appointment, and that's the way it went through. But I never did actually get a Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] appointment. I was retained throughout the Kennedy administration and until I retired in 1966, when I reached the age.

MOSS: You were in Washington on June 15, 1961, and had a meeting with the President.

BARROWS: Yes.

MOSS: Was this a *pro forma* thing, his simply meeting the ambassadors, or was it....

BARROWS: It was strictly *pro forma* and, more than that, I think that at that time I helped to invent what I call the tie-in sale. All manner of newly appointed ambassadors were backing up waiting for their formal visit with the President, which is really very important to an ambassador, but which every new administration finds difficulty understanding. The President himself probably understands it, but the people around him regard anyone who wants to see the President as a competitor. Consequently they think, "Well, my God, what interest has – with all the vital things we have to deal with, what does it matter whether the ambassador to Cameroon sees the President, particularly since we didn't appoint him?" And I thought, "Well, I'm going to have trouble." I ran into the fact that a friend of mine, Tom Estes [Thomas S. Estes], had been named ambassador to Upper Volta, and was waiting in the hopes of seeing Kennedy. He, I knew, knew his way around Washington – he knew the personalities on the stage – at least better than I did. So I went to him and said, "Why don't we propose that they see two of us together. Maybe he won't find time for one but he might for two," and that worked. That's the way we saw him.

MOSS: There are occasions, I notice, in the White House appointments where not only two, but three, four, perhaps five....

BARROWS: Well I think since then that it's been almost a rule. That's the only way I ever saw Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson], was in a bag of miscellaneous people. I don't suppose he knew who I was.

MOSS: Since you go across both administrations, let me ask your comment on a notion that I have – and I forget just where it's from, whether it's from Bill Attwood's [William H. Attwood] book or where – that the policy of the Eisenhower administration with the new and

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emerging countries in Africa had been to assign foreign service officers who were about ready to retire so that they could have their ambassadorship on the record; whereas the Kennedy administration came in and turned this around and wanted people like Ed Gullion [Edmund A. Gullion] and Bill Attwood and so on to go over and be the ambassadors.

BARROWS: Well, when you bracket Ed Gullion and Bill Attwood....

MOSS: Yeah, it's two different things, I realize that.

BARROWS: They're quite different men.

MOSS: Ed Gullion does have a foreign service background.

BARROWS: Not only that; he's almost as old as most of the rest of us.

MOSS: I guess it's his young reputation, or his New Frontier reputation....

BARROWS: I don't know. I think perhaps it was because he moved in cafe society before he was appointed.

MOSS: Maybe, maybe.

BURROWS: I don't know. He's a good man, certainly.

MOSS: Okay. Well, let me get back to the....

BARROWS: Well no, let me just say it is probably true that under Eisenhower, Dulles [John Foster Dulles], and Loy Henderson [Loy W. Henderson], who was the senior foreign service man in that administration for appointment purposes, the traditional view that a person should work his way up through the system should be observed, that it was good for the system and on the whole good for United States representation. So you know, we had the rule then that no one could be an ambassador – that is to say, wait a minute, no one could be appointed career minister – until he was fifty. Well then you had, with the Kennedy administration, this sudden youth movement. I've always felt

that partly, that was to make Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] seem a little more respectable. But there were other factors, obviously. And Johnson did it even more than Kennedy later on. But you know, there was a saying that a man who was too young to be a DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] in November of 1960 was too old to be an ambassador in April of '61. And this was pretty well the way it worked out. Chances are if I hadn't been appointed ambassador when I was, I never would have been. Now, there's more to be said about how I happened to be picked. There was a lot of luck in it. It was mainly luck, to tell you the truth. I'd like to think it was merit, but....

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MOSS: Okay, you went when, in 1960, right after independence?

BARROWS: Yes, but I was six months late.

MOSS: You were six months late, okay.

BARROWS: Because the person who had been selected to go couldn't go for reasons of health, family.

MOSS: Okay, so you went there in 1960, after independence, and in 1961 there was the plebiscite over in British Cameroon to decide which way they were going to go. Did you have much in the way of activity in the embassy with this plebiscite? Was there – beyond just observing and reporting – was there any involvement of the United States embassy in it.

BARROWS: Clearly not, because, first of all, the territory was not under our jurisdiction. Second, the United States would have no business getting into it. Whether our embassy to Nigeria did anything, I don't know. But we were very, very much interested in what was going on, and I do know that I found the reporting from our consulate in Kaduna to be extremely helpful to me in understanding what was going on.

MOSS: All right, now, let me take another tack and ask you how you viewed — from your position there in Cameroon – the new team taking over in State Department under Soapy Williams [G. Mennen Williams], with respect to the American policy to African countries.

BARROWS: Well first of all, I think there was a genuine interest in Africa, and so far as Soapy is concerned, a sincere desire to make true his assertion that this was an appointment second to none – or whatever that phrase was he used. I don't think it was a simple case of a political figure who didn't get what many people thought he was entitled to and therefore tried to make what he did get seem bigger than it was. I don't personally feel that that was his feeling. And there was a very definite sense of

greater interest in Africa than there had previously been. I must say I think it ran down pretty quickly, but nonetheless it was there.

MOSS: All right, you have, in this time of new countries becoming independent or old countries becoming newly independent, a problem for United States policy *vis-à-vis* the European mother countries, as it were, or the old colonial countries – France and Portugal and Great Britain – and the attempt by the African countries to not only assert their independence but to get the greatest benefit out of the old associations. How do you see the Cameroon in all this, and particularly

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with respect to what you could do for them as United States ambassador?

BARROWS: Well, you must remember of course, Cameroon was a trust territory.

MOSS: Right, the French....

BARROWS: That part which gained its independence and to which I was first accredited had been under French control, and there was a plebiscite which determined the future of the former British Cameroon. I, during the first year, which was the Republican administration – the first six months – was under considerable pressure from the Cameroonians to give them aid, particularly military assistance, because they had a serious dissidence problem, and terrorist problem. Few people know that in the first four years of their independence – according to French intelligence – sixty-four thousand people were killed, which in proportion to that population was one of the biggest losses of life in all Africa. We just pay no attention to that sort of thing.

So they did need help. Well, we were in no position to provide it, and I knew that. But I do think that we did try to be responsive in the economic field at that time, and I think that our negotiations with the Cameroonians – although never enough to satisfy them – still kept the French sufficiently uncertain, so that I like to feel that they may have given the Cameroonians somewhat better terms than they otherwise would have received. France had no basic agreement with Cameroon when independence arrived. They operated under some sort of provisional arrangement, and they didn't negotiate their basic treaties, a group of thirteen, until October 1960. So I think our presence there had some value at that time, and I argued for a long while thereafter that we ought to continue to do enough things to give these countries some sense that they're not entirely in the hands of the former colonial powers.

I was very much impressed by a statement of President Ahidjo [Ahmadou Ahidjo] during that period, when he said, "I can understand why the United States wants its allies to do their share in this aid business, but you must beware of the danger of seeming to repartition Africa now in the name of foreign aid." And I thought that was a very good point. He was pro-French, pro-de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle], but at the same time he had his own political problems. In order to remain a moderate in Africa he had to be independent, and we could help him be independent. I never felt that I got very much understanding of that

in Washington, partly because one of the characteristics of United States interest in Africa, whether it's scholarly interest or political interest.... The Department of State – and the Kennedy administration was no exception – had this tremendous preoccupation with Anglophone Africa and relative ignorance of and indifference to the French-speaking Africa, which persists to some degree even today.

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MOSS: Let me ask you about your relationship with the Cameroon desk and with the office of African Affairs – Bureau, I guess it is, not Office.

BARROWS: It's Bureau now.

MOSS: Let me ask you how responsive you felt – you already said you didn't get much response on this one point – how responsive in general was the Cameroon desk? How responsible were people like Wayne Fredericks [J. Wayne Fredericks], in addition to Soapy Williams, to your needs?

BARROWS: Well, let's begin with Soapy. Soapy, I thought, never understood how to operate in Washington and to hold his own in the bureaucracy. He divided his time at first between visiting Africa and visiting Michigan, and I daresay he did a good job in Michigan. I *know* he did a good job in Africa. Whenever he was there I think he was effective. I know he was whenever he came to Cameroon, and he came there several times – fortunately, because no one else ever did. In the six years I was in Cameroon, for example, only one member of either house of Congress ever visited the country. But I never felt that Soapy understood how to fight the Washington battle, or had any taste for it, and therefore didn't do it very well.

Well, then you move down to Wayne Fredericks, and about him I know very little except that he is known to be such a friend of certain people in East Africa and of the Anglophone countries generally. I never succeeded in persuading him to visit Cameroon, and I had the impression that on the whole he ignored the French-speaking countries.

MOSS: To what do you attribute this?

BARROWS: Habit, background, interest, feeling of what's important. Plus, you see, as we began to back away from the burdens of foreign aid – which we did almost immediately under the Kennedy administration – we got this notion of concentration: “Since the French were being generous with their aid, then why does the United States need to do anything?” But you couldn't deal with a developing country anywhere without getting into the question of whether you'd give them aid. So better let them alone, because they might ask for aid. Well, of course they would. If they didn't, the ambassador accredited there would. To try to avoid this problem we more or less wrote off Francophone Africa and left it in the hands of the French....

At one point when Soapy called a meeting down in Libreville – I've forgotten what year that was – I did persuade him that this wasn't necessarily the best policy. I drafted for his

signature, at his request, a cable which became known as “Libreville 1” of that year. It was a plea for taking a more independent line towards the French territories and not

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writing them off, and of whatever aid we had, giving them their share. I pursued that as best I could, but that point of view never got in with the Democrats.

MOSS: Much is made of the influence of the Europeanists – the European Bureau in the State Department as sort of calling the tune for many years on what to do about the former colonies. Did you run into much of this?

BARROWS: I suppose this is true, although I was personally more conscious of – because of the Cameroon situation – the influence of the international organization part of the department. And at some time I think you might find it useful if I told you my view of the whole plebiscite question, because that was the most troubled thing I had to face during the Kennedy years.

MOSS: Go ahead.

BARROWS: Well, I'm not certain that I can recall – just from my memory-the precise order of events. But before Cameroon gained its independence there had been a plebiscite in what was called British Cameroon, posing the question of whether they would join Nigeria or remain awhile longer under the trust status and then vote again. I think that was the issue. In any event, they didn't vote to join Nigeria, and this gave the Cameroon regime of the new, independent, French-speaking Cameroon the feeling that British Cameroon really wanted to come with them. So the plebiscite was ordered. Preparation for it was necessarily handled under the British administration and under the Nigerian government after it gained its independence, although technically the British Cameroons, I think, were always administered by the British, not by the Republic of Nigeria.

Now, one of the important facts about the plebiscite is that that territory, which was a narrow strip between Nigeria proper and the French Cameroon, was divided physically into two parts which did not coincide with a division politically into two parts. What is called Southern Cameroon, Southern British Cameroon, physically adjoins a portion of what was called Northern British Cameroon, and the two, north and south, were handled separately in the plebiscite. The southern part, under the British, had been administered under its own autonomous government with a legislature, and is composed of certain ethnic groups which are different from those in the north. The northern part, on the other hand, had been administered as a part of the northern region of Nigeria, and it is ethnically similar to the northern region of Nigeria and to the northern part of the Republic of Cameroon as well.

The plebiscite for President Ahidjo of Cameroon presented real

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problems. He already had the difficulty of being a northern based leader with a hostile south. He's a Muslim; the south is pagan and Christian. And this plebiscite added still another complication. It used to be said – though I never heard this from him – that he would have preferred to have no plebiscite. There were four possible outcomes of the plebiscite: He could win both north and south; he could lose both north and south; he could win the north, lose the south; or win the south and lose the north. It was said that his preference would have been to lose them all, but he didn't dare say so because there were too many people, particularly in the south of Cameroon, who wanted the plebiscite to bring the territory to them. His second choice would be to win the north and lose the south. His third choice would be to win them both, and his fourth choice would be to win the south and lose the north, and he got his fourth choice. And it's one of the tributes to his ability as a political leader – I think he's the ablest politician I ever dealt with overseas, as a matter of fact – that he's been able to handle the thing, notwithstanding the difficulty of absorbing more than a million more southerners.

Because of the negative vote in the north, the Cameroonians protested the handling of the plebiscite, saying that it had not been fairly conducted, and that it should be set aside.

MOSS: There was the accusation that the Nigerians had been....

BARROWS: Well, that the administration over there had done various things that were unfair – intimidated people, I suppose. I've forgotten the details of the charge. But this was received by many people in Washington as a criticism of the United Nations administration of the plebiscite.

The Cameroonians brought their issue in the United Nations, and we were asked to vote with them. I at first didn't take the matter very seriously because it seemed to me so improbable that they could get anywhere, that I didn't think that Ahidjo, who was generally a very practical man, would do this. But I discovered this was vital to him and that he really thought that he had won the north. And so finally I argued very strongly with Williams. I said, "Well, keep the matter open." "Oh. I assure you, we'll give it very fair consideration." But we eventually voted against him, and Ahidjo is convinced – from what he heard through the French and otherwise – that we never did consider his view. I tried to argue with him that we did, being assured of that by Williams. Subsequently I became convinced myself that we didn't and either Soapy didn't know what was going on or didn't – I don't know, he must not have known because he's not a dishonest man.

Subsequently I was told by a man who'd been on our United Nations office in Washington, "Why of course, we told the British we'd vote with

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them and we did." Whether this is true, I don't know, but that's what Ahidjo had also told me. "Look," he said, "I can understand why you vote with your allies on a matter of this sort, but why did you have to campaign in the corridors of the United Nations against us?" I said, "I don't think we did." Well, he said, "I'm sorry. I know you did."

But this was a situation where I never felt I got any real consideration. And I would get back these cliché answers such as, "We've got to support the United Nations." Well, I

thought, "I understand this. Here you've got a new administration. They're not going to listen to any holdover. No administration does. The administration they know, certainly better than a bureaucrat. And more than that, we believe in the United Nations. It's a matter of idealism. Therefore we've got to support it." I didn't realize this other angle, that maybe we were indeed supporting the British, and I don't know how seriously to take that. But I remember saying often, "If this were an issue between Belgium and Holland, or France and Germany, we would never leave our decision to the United Nations to make. Why in the world then shouldn't we look at two African countries in the same way?" But we didn't. And I must say that I felt that the whole matter was not very well considered.

I know this, that the.... What President Ahidjo felt on this, I don't know, but his then foreign minister told me, he said, "You know, if the Republicans had still been in, they would have supported us because we had supported them." Indeed they had. At a certain moment when the United States was trying to get the – whatever that, Joseph Kasavubu, wasn't it – government in the Congo seated in the United Nations, Washington asked us to bring this very eloquent guy (the Cameroonian foreign minister Okala [Charles-René Okala]) back to New York and we got the Cameroonians to do it. I think it was in the interregnum after the 1960 election. But Okala said to me, he said, "Look, we did this for you. Why can't you give us a little more consideration?" Well, that was a realistic political view, but I couldn't get that considered. So the plebiscite made it extremely difficult for me that year. I did not think I was dealing with professionals at the Washington end, or indeed that very much weight was being given to the problem.

Now, I mentioned earlier the reporting out of Kaduna. It was from that reporting that I learned how much the British civil servants in the north were busy pulling in Northern Cameroon for Saruana of Sokoto. Subsequently when I retired I went to the University of Pittsburgh and taught for a couple of years, and there I met a man who had been the key British civil servant in northern Nigeria, teaching at Duquesne University, teaching the Hausa language. He confirmed that the civil servants did the job. But then he went on to say that Ahidjo made mistakes including overestimating his real chances in the north and so on.

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So, well, in a word, this was an interesting thing. It very much embittered my first Kennedy year out there and dampened my enthusiasm for the administration considerably. Other things happened. There was a terrible flap over the Cameroonian ambassador to Washington who made a fool of himself, but then we handled it very badly. Then there was the fact that in an effort to patch things up a bit, somebody arranged for Secretary Goldberg [Arthur J. Goldberg], then Secretary of Labor, to visit Cameroon, and on twenty-four hours notice he cancelled out for – subsequently I was told – no reason except he just didn't want to come. That hurt terribly, since I had set the meeting up and the visit was seen by the Cameroonians as a valuable gesture.

Things were dragging along pretty badly when, in early 1962, Washington did arrange for a presidential visit for President Ahidjo. There I had a chance to see how Kennedy's personality, charm, and the whole ambience that he personally could create could wipe out all the accumulated ill-feeling.

MOSS: Let me ask you about that visit. It took place, I have a note here, in March of 1962. I have the White House meetings listed here, and I wonder if you would generally recall and describe the events of that visit as you remember them?

BARROWS: Yes, well, I went over.... This means a presidential meeting?

MOSS: Yes. This is the March 12, 1962 meeting.

BARROWS: Yeah, that's the first one I recall, and it was a good meeting. The President was interested, responded with the right questions – I mean it was a pleasure to participate in this. I didn't do very much, but nonetheless I enjoyed it. And one interesting thing on the way out that I like to recall was this: as I was leaving the President said, "Well, Ambassador, where did you serve before?" I said I was in Vietnam. Well of course you know Vietnam was beginning to heat up even then, and he smiled a kind of wry smile and said, "Oh Vietnam." I said, "Yes sir." He said, "By the way, have you read a certain article in *The New Republic* in which the French say we're making all the same mistakes?" I said, "No, sir, I haven't. But I know what their view would be likely to be, and I will read it." And I went out and I told my friends, "Well, it's now official. It's all right to read *The New Republic* in this administration." I don't really remember much else about that.

MOSS: Excuse me, let me interrupt a moment and ask you what was your view at the time of the way things were developing in Vietnam, since you had served there?

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BARROWS: I didn't know. You see, I'd somewhat lost touch with events there. I felt that – it's difficult for me to separate out views that I formed later about the period when I learned more about what was going on. Looking back, I would say that we needed very much to take Ngo Dinh Diem in hand and try to get him to behave differently.

MOSS: Do you think it really could have been done?

BARROWS: I don't know.

MOSS: This seems to be the real crux of the thing.

BARROWS: I don't know whether it could have been done, but unfortunately it wasn't tried by Kennedy. I don't know of anyone who'd served out there who didn't share this feeling. There again, if it were possible to have continuity from one administration to another, more might have been done, but it wasn't. Going on to

the.... There's one thing I don't think you have on here. There was a luncheon in Blair House given by....

MOSS: Yeah, well that wouldn't be on here. These are strictly the White House appointments.

BARROWS: Well the President was there, though, as a guest, and that was a more intimate thing and more interesting. I know that one of the things that came out of that was that we were talking about the whole question of administration of justice, and the President said, "We must be sure that the minister" – the minister of justice was sitting there in Ahidjo's party—"sees Bobby." I thought, "Well that's an interesting way to – very informal but very effective."

I don't recall anything particularly noteworthy about the meetings except that they were on a pretty high level, and when it came to the end – when it came to drafting the communiqué – President Ahidjo pretty well brushed aside some of the pressure from one of his ministers to be more insistent about something that meant foreign aid. He obviously wanted American support, but he's not the sort of man who will come hat in hand or anything like that. I know that he came away feeling that – some such phrase as this he either made to me or someone who repeated it to me later at the end of the visit in New York—"Well, we have only friends in the United States." But when you think back on it, and when I put together with other things I know, it was very much President Kennedy's personality and the way he impressed President Ahidjo that did that.

MOSS: All right. There's been a good deal of criticism recently

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that there was more show than substance to the Kennedy administration. Now you are saying that this was the Kennedy personality that carried the day. How deep did this go into meaningful bettering of relationships between the United States and Cameroon?

BARROWS: Oh, it seems to me that it meant that we always had a certain benefit of the doubt thereafter that we hadn't had before. Now I don't – I say it was the Kennedy personality. That certainly was much the most important factor, but I suppose the whole American experience was not a bad one for Ahidjo.

MOSS: How durable is that sort of thing over the long haul? For instance, does it get us a vote on the question of seating Communist China in the United Nations, things of that sort?

BARROWS: Well, you have to get a vote on the seating of Communist China through a combination of circumstances.

MOSS: But how much does this sort of thing really contribute? How much

mileage can you get out of this kind of thing without going deeper into practical *quid pro quo* aid and whatnot?

BARROWS: I suppose it depends a great deal on the personalities you're dealing with, again. So far as Cameroon is concerned, I think it carried a great deal of weight and carried on even after Kennedy's death. When I got ready to retire in 1966, President Ahidjo invited my wife and me north in his country to where he lives, and we went with him on certain local visits and the like. And we called on him one afternoon, and he showed us around a little reception area that he'd built up there in his compound. On the wall he showed us a picture of himself and President Kennedy walking in from the airplane on the occasion of that visit. He says, "Well, there's my hero." And then in his rather slightly shy way he said, "You know, of course, the photograph's been manipulated. We blocked out some people who were there." I remembered then the scene. It was the usual walking in from the airplane, and there had been an interpreter whose picture had been removed. No, I think that this thing persisted, and I think that so far as Ahidjo is concerned it helped him to take a better view of all Americans and of the United States. Now, many other things have contributed to keeping that view, but before the trip I was told by French friends who were not unsympathetic with the United States that Ahidjo was suspicious of and hostile to Americans. He is of an ethnic background that is reserved – some say devious – I don't think it's devious but very reserved, and it's difficult to know about some of these things. In that particular circumstance I think it made a great deal of difference.

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Excuse me, one other thing I might as well say, Ahidjo is a politician, and at the time of Kennedy's assassination.... Of course he called on me that night. We talked things over, and he realized that Johnson was succeeding Kennedy. I was struck by the fact that Ahidjo said, "Oh yes, it was Johnson who saw me off when I left, wasn't it?" I thought I saw the politician's mind at work. "What is my contact with this new source of power?" – but in a manner that I didn't find to be critical. That's what he has to work with now.

MOSS: You mentioned a while ago that Governor Williams had made several visits to Cameroon. Let me ask you to describe the way he came through a country – Cameroon particularly. What did he do?

BARROWS: Well, the first time he came through he came with nineteen people, and it was quite an affair. He arrived very shortly before the appointment we'd set up with the President. I had ten minutes to brief him. As a consequence I did a better job than I might otherwise have done. He listened. He absorbs things quickly. He went in, and we had a good meeting. I would have to say that there are some things one might criticize about the visit. For example, the governor was then a great photographer, taking pictures everywhere. And a couple of incidents occurred which taught me that a public figure who is on display shouldn't be taking pictures.

MOSS: What sort of thing?

BARROWS: Well in the first place, as we pulled up to the presidential palace for the first official visit, the governor, instead of sitting in dignity in the car, jumped out, rushed over, squatted down and took a picture of the front of the palace. And I could just imagine somebody visiting the White House like that. In the second place, when we went down to Douala, the seaport city – I get this second hand – one of our people who spoke the local languages said that our avid interest in the markets and the people and, well, the poverty of things too, was seen by them as a morbid curiosity, not as sympathy. Now, I don't know how representative that view is, but it does suggest that what we – particularly people who are motivated the way the governor is – mean to be taken as an outgoing expression of sympathy, may not be perceived that way at all. And part of it was the picture taking. They thought this guy was just collecting curiosities for his files.

But having said that, I'd say that then subsequent visits were more – first of all, fewer people – more businesslike in the sense that those who were there knew better what to do. And the last visit that Williams made on the fourth of July of 19 – whatever it was – '64 or 5, was really a great success, and oddly enough, particularly helpful with the

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French at that time because he took the trouble to make a fourth of July speech at the party that we gave because we had not abandoned fourth of July parties in keeping with the notion that Washington somehow had that they weren't useful, toasts and everything, and it was all very much in the tradition that those people were accustomed to, and Soapy did well. And I heard many favorable comments from both sides, French and Cameroonian.

MOSS: How would he handle himself in a face-to-face situation with a man like Ahidjo?

BARROWS: Oddly enough, I'm not the best commentator on that because I was doing the interpreting.

MOSS: Right, I understand.

BARROWS: And therefore I just wouldn't like to say. I have no recollection of any great problem. I don't think that the two personalities are particularly congenial, but I don't think there was any problem. I always felt that Soapy would be unable to appreciate a man like Ahidjo. They are so different. Ahidjo is the kind of politician who does his work in small groups, by conversation, by patient listening and talking and working things out.

MOSS: All right. Williams makes a great deal in his book over the African palaver way of doing things. Do you think he recognized this at the time, or was this something that was brought to him by somebody else?

BARROWS: I wouldn't know.

MOSS: Okay, Let me take you off on another tack somewhat and ask you about the country team concept as applied in the Cameroon. Now, much is made of the Bowles [Chester B. Bowles]-Kennedy letter that went out to ambassadors saying that they were the head of everything that was going on, and Peace Corps, USOM [U.S. Operations Mission], USIS [U.S. Information Service], whatever CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] people happened to be around, were responsible to the ambassador and he ought to know what was going on. How did this operate in your area, in your embassy?

BARROWS: Well first of all, we really didn't have a country team because we didn't have a military mission, and although we had an economic mission, because I'd grown up in the economic aid business I didn't have any problems there. The letter and the intent of the letter were both useful, but this, you must recall, is merely the reassertion of things that various other presidents had said. And it is

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not what presidents say in such letters that count, but what they do, and not everything that Kennedy did was designed to reinforce this conception – the most notable exception, in my view, being the fact that he reappointed Allen Dulles [Allen W. Dulles] before he did anything else so that we were left with a period of months there when the agency people knew where they stood, and nobody else did. In my own case, in fact, I never did get any indication of whether I'd be kept. I just stayed. What brought the CIA into line was not the letter but the Bay of Pigs. After that they were relatively easy to deal with.

MOSS: How did you see this manifested in your area?

BARROWS: Well, I don't know – just a slight change in attitude is all that it really amounted to, plus some change of personalities eventually. But you have this kind of.... During the interregnum the CIA held an African regional meeting in Rome for their people. This, of course, during a period when all ambassadors are uncertain where the hell they're going to be, so you have a kind of institutional paralysis at the top. But they came back and the fellow we had kindly said to me, “Well, at our meeting we reviewed all the ambassadors in Africa, and we decided there are three of them that ought to stay, and I'm glad to say you're one of them.” And I, well, this is not exactly the finesse that I would expect, but.... Well, but that sort of thing didn't have any weight after the Bay of Pigs. But you can understand that it did have weight gained from the decision to keep Allen Dulles on.

Now, this is an interesting thing because when I called on Rusk [Dean Rusk] in the summer of 1961 to make my acquaintance with the new administration such as I could, he devoted most of our period of conversation to telling me to get control over the CIA business if I needed to. “You really have to know what's going on,” and so on. And I thought, “Well that's a very interesting piece of advice to come from you, Mr. Secretary, but you were undercut before you were ever appointed, to a degree.” Now subsequently these things

tended to shake down, and as time has gone on, you know, Vietnam has further weakened the status of the Agency, along with everybody else. These are not insurmountable problems, but if you're going to make any point of the President's letter about what the ambassador's job is, you've got to look at things like this.

MOSS: You've been talking about attitude and, in a way, administrative and management relationships within the agency with regard to CIA control. Was there anything operational that gave you a real....

BARROWS: No real problems, no. No, nothing serious. There is one

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problem which I, as a long time functionary, think has been incorrectly handled, and that is that the basic communication system of the foreign service is in CIA hands, for what is believed to be a pragmatic or practical reason that they can get the money and the State Department couldn't. My view would be that sooner or later the Secretary of State has got to face some issues of that sort if he wants to be responsible for his own operations because you have real problems – you may have real problems. I can't cite that I did have any because we didn't have sufficiently important communication issues. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis, you know, it is said that communications to all Africa broke down, and they were subsequently strengthened. But it's still not the way I would do it if I were king.

MOSS: Let me ask you about the Peace Corps in Cameroon. How did that work out?

BARROWS: Well, the Peace Corps was requested by the West Cameroonians, the English-speaking group, and they didn't need very many. Two or three people were sent out to look over the situation. I've forgotten who they were. They all struck me as pretty intelligent people. I had a chance to talk with them, get in my nickel's worth, and so on. When it came time to sending a team out, however, the Peace Corps insisted on sending more people than were needed, in order to justify having a doctor, because notwithstanding the fact that they were built on the public relations image of being rough, tough people who didn't have to have the amenities that the foreign service had to have, still they had to have a doctor – which we didn't have. And in order to justify a doctor they had to have X number of people. And I argued about that awhile, fruitlessly. And then they had a series of directors who on the whole were pretty good people, but there was always the atmosphere flowing out of Washington. I don't think the President's letter, by the way, put them under the ambassador's direction. They were somehow supposed to be separate.

MOSS: Untainted by United States propaganda and that kind of thing?

BARROWS: Yes, but actually we always ran their programs in integration with AID

[Agency for International Development] and pretty effectively. You could do that if you insisted on it, I think, and wanted to, and if they were the right programs – as they happened to be. Oh, you'd get some of this ostentatious virtue, this vicarious austerity and that sort of thing among them. You'd have one director who'd insist that he had to have a certain kind of house. They used embassy-leased houses or embassy leasing authority. I didn't mind that. Then the next man would find the house a little too fancy, and he wanted to move somewhere else. They were all trying to fit the image.

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I always felt that the Peace Corps, particularly under Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.], was operated much more with the American public in mind than with the needs of the countries that we were helping. I'll give you an instance of the sort of thing that amused me. I made it a point to go try to visit all the original Peace Corps volunteers in West Cameroon. It turned out that the weekend I could go they called a good many of them in to a conference. Now had this been any other branch of the United States presence, that wouldn't have happened. It wouldn't have been necessary for me to say anything either, and I didn't say anything. I just wanted to see what they would do. So I missed about half of them or a third at least. But on the other hand, I saw a good many in place. One young couple – married, they were recruited as a married couple – had decided to have a baby, and the girl was pregnant. She had been consulting an American missionary doctor some forty or fifty miles away for prenatal care. Things were going all right. There appeared to be no evidence that there'd be any complications, and she and her husband were perfectly willing to have the baby out there.

The Peace Corps doctor decided that that was not a fit place to have a baby, West Cameroon, so that as the time approached he insisted that they be returned home. Well, I got hold of this and I got hold of the Peace Corps director for the country and I said, “What kind of a damn fool thing is this? You're going to destroy Shriver's own image. I'm sure if you'll get this to his attention he'll settle it no. If these people are willing to stay there and they do have facilities they think suitable, why should we interfere?” Well, the couple got clear to the seaport before the order was reversed and they were sent back. They had their baby. I've forgotten their name, but I ran into them in the last year or so, and the fellow recalled who I was, and I said, “How's the baby?” “Fine.” But this was typical of the peculiar things that happened.

Another instance: one day we went over for a big day at a school where both AID and the Peace Corps were functioning in West Cameroon. It was a big day, everybody happy until the end of the day I learned that our USIS man from Douala had been lying upstairs all day, very sick with one of these mysterious tropical fevers. The Peace Corps doctor had been on the grounds all day and had not gone up to see the sick man because, you remember, the Peace Corps instructions were, “Take care of the volunteers and then take care of the local people, not other Americans.” Well this kind of foolish separatism – if I had reacted in the same spirit, the Peace Corps would have had a hell of a lot more trouble in Cameroon than it did, but so would I. I suppose that the general atmosphere that the Peace Corps brought gave me as much feeling of skepticism about the administration as any other one thing I can think of because it was so largely governed by image-making.

MOSS: Let me ask you about this meeting with the special group for counterinsurgency. I looked at the minutes of the thing. It seemed to be fairly routine. Cameroon was on their critical list of ten or a dozen countries where they were interested in the possibilities of counterinsurgency, and as I remember it from the minutes, you simply came in and said, "Well, there isn't much of a problem after all. You can pretty well forget about Cameroon. It's well in hand." Is this essentially correct?

BARROWS: Yes, but let me tell you about that. I've thought about that since. I learned that Cameroon was on the critical list, and I was told, "Well look, we had to get some from each continent." And clearly, if you looked at Africa at that moment, Cameroon was as much of a candidate as any. I, feeling strongly that the department consistently underrated Ahidjo, and felt that if I could make the case that he was handling it, somehow it would be a good thing. And I felt warranted in doing so – I was quite sincere in that. So it just happened I was in town when they had that meeting scheduled on Cameroon, and I said, "Well, let me do it instead of sending the man you'd intended to send." So they did. And I say that this was the highest ranking group of officials I ever dealt with in my career.

MOSS: Let's see, Max Taylor [Maxwell D. Taylor] was there, Robert Kennedy, Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric], McCone [John A. McCone], Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer], Ed Murrow [Edward R. Murrow], Johnson--I guess it was Robert Johnson [Robert H. Johnson], wasn't it?

BARROWS: No, this was Alexis [Ural Alexis Johnson].

MOSS: Alexis Johnson.

BARROWS: I think so.

MOSS: And a chap named Wolfe [Thomas W. Wolfe] – I didn't get his first name.

BARROWS: I've forgotten where he was from – Treasury, maybe – no, I don't know where the hell he would have been. Well anyway, look at that list. This will give you an idea of how damned important Bobby was. And it was an intelligent group of people, too. While it perhaps looks routine to anyone who looks at the list of things they do, for me it was by no means routine. It was really a very stimulating thing. But looking back on it I realize that I didn't play the Washington game at all well, not even as well as I was saying Soapy did, which isn't very well. I would have been much smarter either to stay out of there and let them keep it on the critical list so that I could occasionally get some attention in Washington, or if I could bring myself to do it, go in

and make the strongest possible case that it really was a threatening situation. And, of course, I took some chance in saying that it was cooling off and to forget it. In fact I was right – as it proved, but....

MOSS: It could have gone the other way, could it?

BARROWS: I don't think so, really. To be perfectly honest with you, no.

MOSS: You said it was a stimulating experience. What, besides the high power there, made it stimulating? What was the conversation like? How incisively were they grappling with the problem?

BARROWS: More than routinely, I thought. At least they knew what country they were talking about. They had looked at their briefing papers. There were different views coming in – just the kind of mind that Max Taylor would have or Bobby Kennedy. As I recall, it was Taylor who did most of the talking, but my memory may be faulty on that now. Of course I did quite a bit myself.

MOSS: I did have a note here that Krulak [Victor H. Krulak] was there, but I think he was sort of the executive secretary.

BARROWS: Could be. I don't remember the name even.

MOSS: The marine major general. Okay, I think that just about exhausts my questions. Do you have anything else you want to add at this point?

BARROWS: Well of course I suppose the reaction to the assassination of Kennedy is something that's more or less the same everywhere. But that was a great shock in Cameroon. It was a sad thing for President Ahidjo, but I've already told you that he came over to see me that night – because you see, it had occurred at seven o'clock in the evening, our time. And one little detail. He sent in, of course, a message of condolence, and the reply came back from Washington through the embassy. Now, I was accustomed in the years of the Kennedy Administration to such things taking an inordinately long time. This one came back very promptly, and it was appropriately worded. And I suspected, and still suspect, that that was because the White House was so demoralized by the assassination that they let the State Department handle it. Of course it was a routine thing, you might say. But at that I suppose the State Department handled more in those days than it does now, from what I read in the paper.

One other problem we had was the problem of the Cameroonian ambassador, which was very.... About the only comment I would make there is that he certainly behaved incorrectly.

MOSS: It complicated the efforts of people like Pedro Sanjuan to get decent treatment for African representatives in the area.

BARROWS: Well, they thought it would. But you see, what happened is that they took the decision in Washington that the man was emotionally unstable and that we should ask his government to move him, but we did not declare him *persona non grata*. Having made the decision that he was emotionally unstable, they then sent a wire to me which was necessarily classified. It took a couple of days to get to me in those days. I got it deciphered – no, I didn't as a matter of fact. What happened is, one noon I was called to the President's palace by the President's assistant – a member of the same tribe as the ambassador, by the way – and said, “What has happened? You have declared our ambassador *persona non grata*.” I said, “What?” Well, he showed me a message he'd received. What had happened is this, that having informed me, without waiting for any reply or recommendations, Soapy – I am sure, to make a date in Michigan – called this guy in and told him what we were doing. So the ambassador immediately went out and rallied all the fellow African ambassadors and made charges of racism, got emotional and sent off a clear wire to his government which got there ahead of mine. And that put things off on the wrong foot. Whether I could have handled his removal if it had been done quietly, I have no idea, but I was never given a chance. I think I might have, and I think this was perhaps – that coming so soon after the plebiscite business really made me unhappy about the way they did things because.... Oh, I lived through another two months then when they were threatening not to deal with me if we didn't deal with the ambassador in Washington. Because of the reunification Cameroons insisted the ambassador be allowed to present another set of letters of credence, and to Kennedy personally. Ultimately Washington agreed to it, happily. But that sort of thing is a matter of professional competence and skill, is a matter of, I would say, ordinary common sense. If a man's too unstable to stay, then you surely don't want to call him in and talk to him about it until you've got everything completely lined up, and then do it. Who's responsible I can only speculate, but I have to think it was probably Soapy.

To get back to your question that the Kennedy administration was more show than substance, I wouldn't put it that way. I would say that the administration was by no means of the quality of the President. Now whether it would have shaken down into a better administration had he lived is hard to say. It would certainly have been tempered by some political problems of one kind and another, and I do have enough confidence – or had enough confidence – in Kennedy's personal ability to think that he might have done it, although I did think he was cursed with too large a family.

MOSS: Would you like to end on that note?

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BARROWS: I suppose that's as good as any. It's gone now anyway.

MOSS: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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