

# CANDOER News



A quarterly Newsletter dedicated to Communicators AND Others Enjoying Retirement

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Welcome to the latest issue of the newsletter dedicated to the **CANDOERs** (**C**ommunicators **AND** **O**thers **E**njoying **R**etirement). This newsletter will be distributed quarterly. New issues will be posted on the Web for viewing on or about, January 15, April 15, July 15, and October 15.

The **CANDOER** Web site and newsletter may be viewed by going to the following URI: [www.candoer.org](http://www.candoer.org)

***The success of this newsletter depends on you. I need contributors.***

Do you have an interesting article, a nostalgia item, or a real life story you would like to share with others? If you do, send it to me at the following e-mail

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Please, **NO** handwritten submissions.

This newsletter is available on the Web **only**, free, to any and all who worked with or for DC, OC, IM, or IRM.

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### Cat's Corner

Nancy and I are back in Southern Maryland after spending our first time as a "snow bird" in Florida for three months. The weather was outstanding; the fishing not so great. It was an enjoyable experience, but not one I will repeat.

On February 15 I met Chuck Scott, Stu Branch, Bill Callihan, Bob Ribera, Tim Taylor, and Ken French for lunch in Lakeland. Stu made all the arrangements. We had a very enjoyable gathering.

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### Letter to the Editor

The following was received from Tim Lawson:

In case you haven't had the opportunity to see the February issue of the FSJ yet, my former IRM team and I in Moscow (back in the USSR) have finally received a little press (please see the next article). While they are no doubt richly deserving, I couldn't allow only our generalist corps to receive all the glory surrounding the historic, watershed event of the USSR's fall in 1991. I'm not certain these days where they may be or what may have happened to many of the superb IRMers who served with me, but to the best of my recollection they included: Jim Wiley (IMO--departed in late 1989 and whom I replaced as Acting IMO until my ETD in 1991), Tony Bart (CEO/C), Charlie Hall (CEO/T), Janice Fedak (Moscow's very first ISO), Joe Hester (CSS), Don Ballue (CSS), Eileen Girard (SCO), Howard Sparks (SCO), Robert Humbel (SCO), Sharon Minahen (SCO), Bart Hoskins (SCO), Robin Byrd (SCO), Donna Chick-Bowers (SCO) and Scott Bowers (Diplomatic Courier Escort). These officers come to mind immediately as being assigned to Moscow from on or about 1989 until it was all over. But before and following the March 1991 fire, there were others who arrived at post--regretfully their names escape me now.

For the record the Department

refused to ultimately approve the Superior Honor Award nomination highlighted in the attached article. According to certain sources, the decision was based upon serious concerns regarding "sensitive matters" making the incident itself as well as the actions of my team the day of the fire, activities "that could not be processed via the normal awards function." Yes, it was an explanation that left me wondering and confused a bit too. Nevertheless, let me assure everyone that all of the employees assigned to Moscow's IRM unit during that final year of the USSR were outstanding members of the Foreign Service who deserved recognition. They served with real courage and determination while performing their duties diligently at a post which, up until that last year in history, truly represented America's "first line of defense." I was lucky to serve with them.

Best Regards,  
Tim

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## FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL THE MAGAZINE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

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### Final communications out of the USSR

The December issue of the Foreign Service Journal was truly superb. The articles by Ambassador Jack Matlock and former political officer Tom Graham brought back many memories. Of special interest was the July 1990 cable Graham highlighted in his article. While it was just one of thousands of cables sent that year from Moscow, it caught this former Information Resource Management officer's eye. I remember hearing from across the room: "Tim, come take a look at this one!" It seems the cable (90 Moscow 23603: "Looking into the Abyss: The Possible Collapse of the Soviet Union and What We Should Be Doing About It") was sufficiently sensitive to warrant what was called "double encryption." That message would, indeed, as Ambassador

Matlock asserted, prove prophetic the next year.

There is no question that it also testifies powerfully to the divination powers of the Foreign Service. Such cables trigger reflections not only on the substantive intellect and powers of persuasion brought to bear on events by our political, economic and public diplomacy officers but, equally important, the critical support functions provided by the management section — specifically, the outstanding team that I led: the IRM section. Looking back 20 years, I appreciate just how skillfully Moscow's IRM staff managed critical communications involving cables like 90 Moscow 23603, supported negotiations regarding "Hot-Line" improvements and served as embassy liaison to Soviet Foreign Ministry officials for a fledgling Nuclear Risk Reduction Center initiative. We helped manage high numbers of official visitors that year too—the most during the Cold War. Assignments behind the Iron Curtain as an Information Resource Management or Regional Information Management Center officer were always challenging, for our access made us highly prized KGB targets. But they also usually put us on the fast track to promotion and greater responsibility since Moscow was at the center of U.S. foreign policy, and communications support was critical.

During the final year of the USSR's existence, IRM had perhaps its finest hour. On the morning of March 28, 1991, a large fire broke out in Embassy Moscow. Curiously, it coincided with several huge rallies by the "Democratic Russia Movement." Once evacuated, most staff returned to their living quarters; but for IRM, the fun was only beginning. With speed and courage, the team restored vital command and control circuitry and added makeshift unclassified processing (our cafeteria became office space). Most urgently, it restored secure-voice capability, which the ambassador used to consult Washington that evening. These accomplishments, performed as sparks continued to fly and smoke still rose from

the charred embassy, won the IRM team a Superior Honor Award nomination. Despite the challenges posed by a rapidly crumbling Soviet society and infrastructure, Washington expected a world-class performance. My IRM team never flinched. I thank the Journal for this opportunity to highlight our achievements. The department can be assured of the same dedication from today's Foreign Service IRM professionals. With the leadership support they deserve, they too will be ready to respond as history unfolds.

Timothy C. Lawson  
Senior FSO, retired  
Hua Hin, Thailand

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### **The proverbial fly on the wall**

By John Lemandri

In Baghdad, Iraq, we held twice weekly 9 a.m. meetings where our seven American staff, including the Chief of Mission (COM), would sit on chairs arranged in a circle and discuss the latest incidents or strategy. The Intra-Section (we didn't have an embassy back in 1979) was a rented three floor building where sensitive issues were usually discussed on the upper floor, away from the locals who worked in the first floor consular and admin sections. Our COM, however, wanted to hold these meetings in his second floor office, which although secure, left some doubt as to the degree of security.

The COM always started the meetings with a glance over his left, then right shoulders, as if to assure himself no one was listening. As each meeting progressed, his paranoia grew to a point where every few sentences were punctuated by a look left, then a right, before continuing the discussion. One day it got so bad that the rest of us decided enough was enough. If the boss was going to look for the proverbial fly on the wall, so were we. At the next meeting we entered the room, sat in our chairs, and each time the COM turned his head, so did we. The scene soon became a circus of twisting and bobbing heads to a point where we could

no longer contain our laughter. The seven of us never did find that fly on the wall, but we had fun trying.

### **Grenada, after the invasion – 1984**

By Charles Christian

While on home/annual leave, after my Oman tour, I found I had too much time to kill and was bored. My wife was a school teacher and our three kids were all out of the nest. I called OC and asked if they had a TDY for me prior to my reporting in to Washington in two months. They called back and said; "How about two weeks in Grenada?" I agreed and shortly was on my way from SFO to JFK to catch a flight to Barbados. Then onward to Grenada on a small plane which was very weird looking; two small prop engines on each wing, one large one on the rudder; three compartments with outside opening doors holding four passengers each and the rear compartment, two; which I shared with a drunk Grenadian returning home after fleeing before the revolution. The engines on the wings were both dripping fluid that made sizable puddles on the tarmac. I was starting to wonder not only about this flight, but what was ahead of me at Embassy Grenada. I was also informed that a few days previously this flight had landed in Venezuela instead of Grenada due to pilot error. This I did not need to know to be apprehensive about this flight. I noticed that everybody had their luggage stowed in the nose of the plane with a lid that opened like an auto hood. That is everybody's but mine, it did not make the transfer at JFK.

We finally arrived at the island. At that time the only airport was the old Pearl Airport in the center of the island. It had just a paved straight and short runway in the middle of a tall jungle on each side. There was a little hut for a terminal. A disabled two engine Russian transport was sitting next to the hut that had been left by the former regime in Grenada. I took a taxi to St. Georges over terrible roads that I learned had been barely passable for

years. The Grenadians were still shaking hands with Americans and thanking them. I bought a tee shirt with the two crossed flags with the words "Thank You America" above it and another one with a colored map of Grenada, "Urgent Fury" above it and "1984" beneath. It was the code words for the invasion and current year.

The embassy had been opened after the island was secured and was a former resort complex on a point at the edge of the bay that the city was on. It had a dozen cabins and a couple large buildings. CPU was in one of the cabins. Mary Jo Lange was CPO and SCO was Swain Britt. I got my I.D. badge and the issue of one of the many Suzuki hard top white jeeps that the embassy had on hand for TDY'ers. This was for transport to and from work and for my use. TDY personnel stayed in another beach resort a few miles away with a private sandy beach, two bedroom cabins with a combo living/dining room and the kitchen in the middle with a great view of the fields and mountains beyond. I shared one with the late Ed Melnick, who was TDY from Buenos Aires. The embassy complex was guarded by several dozen MSG in full battle dress and who had the whole complex surrounded by barbed wire and sand bagged bunkers at the only entrance and at the corners. Local guards also patrolled the ocean side of the resort at the cliff above the ocean. Looking to the south was the large and famous Grand Anse Beach with its many resorts. Across the road from it was the row of cabins that held the Cuban new airport construction workers who were armed and resisted the invasion forces. Most were full of bullet holes. At the end of that road was another large resort (Grenada Beach Hotel, 184 rooms. I heard it may be Hilton Inn now). It was the billeting complex of the remaining 400 soldiers of the 82nd Airborne who were still maintaining order on the island with outposts all over the island. Across from that was their Heliport with their four Blackhawk helicopters.

We were busy in the CPU, but had our days off. First thing I did was go get a

couple cool Grenadian shirts from the flea market to wear, as I only had a white dress shirt. They were colorful pullovers with two patch pockets in front at the waist. They were confiscated upon my return home by my wife as she said they were contraband. She wore them for years until they were all faded and worn out.

In a day or two my suitcase arrived in fine shape.

At times we had no electricity, but we did have generators which kept the CPU up and running at all times. We did not have them at the cabins we lived in and the well was run by an electric pump. This meant no water in the cabin and we were on lantern light often at night. Several nights we could hear AK-47's going off in the jungle nearby with some of the fighters of the former regime shooting it out with some new regime Grenadians.

There was a good restaurant that many of us liked called the Coconut Grove. Here the manager could whip up a fine hot meal with only his back up propane/stove oil oven. Lantern and candle light dinners under the roof with open sides made the evenings most enjoyable along with battery powered cassette music and cold adult beverages. Selwyn, the manager, was a most enjoyable fellow to know.

The Blackhawks were used twice daily to take large aluminum containers of hot chow to the outposts all over the island. They also took some of us on a space available basis for a sightseeing tour. My turn came one off day and I sat behind the pilot at a large open window with a larger section behind me with maybe half dozen soldiers. Two of them were on a marijuana plot search and we flew over an area that they were interested in. A half dozen quick stops to off load the hot meals by two soldiers with a jeep at the open fields that were used for the various landing pads.

There was a mechanic aboard who was needed on the dependency island of Carriacou which was about 25 miles away. Just a piece of luck that I was on that flight to get the bonus trip. One of my photos that I took on the flight was St. Georges

harbor with the Cunard Princess at anchor. Eight years later we would take a two week cruise on her in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Eleven years later we took a Caribbean cruise and called at Grenada. One of the waiters was from there and when I mentioned Selwyn, he said he knew him. He phoned ahead and Selwyn was at the pier with a car to take us on a tour of the island. I saw sites I had not seen before including the spice orchards and some I knew including the cabin at the beach resort. We also bought a basket of wrapped bundles of the various spices grown on the island so to remember "The Spice Island" of Grenada.

One of the more enjoyable TDY's of the many I had over the years. In 1995 we saw the new embassy out by the new airport that was fought over during the invasion. Here also was the medical college which the American students holed up in during the invasion until the USMC arrived. An OC'er, who helped me out on his TDY (there were ten in two years) to Muscat, told of being one of the CANDOERS who raised the antenna on the roof of one of the hangars while under fire in December, 1983. I have never heard again of Ron Fontenot's whereabouts.

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**See you next quarter!**

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