



Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences



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Interviewees: Lila and Richard Cheville

Interviewer: Paul Ortiz

Date: July 2, 2011

O: All right, Mr. Cheville. Well first of all, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy reunion schedule to sit with us to do an interview. And I wonder, could we start by having you describe your early life kind of generally in the canal? Were you a second-generation person or did you move there?

RC: No, I moved there later. I went down to the Panama Canal when I was about thirty to do an internship at Gorgas Hospital. I was interested in tropical medicine and public health, and it was really one of the very, very few places where you could have an approved internship that had any tropical medicine at all. That's what took me down to the Canal Zone in the first place. That was in 1961. I did my internship and then they were short-staffed in a couple of areas. I took the opportunity just to work for about six months to make doctors' salary to pay some debts and to save some money. And then after that I went back to the United States. Actually, when I went to Stanford, I was there from 1963 to 1970 doing post-graduate medicine and also for a while on the staff in community medicine. Then we had two children there, and then we went back, thinking we'd go back to the Canal Zone for a couple of years in 1970. That stretched on until the time of mandatory retirement for me at age sixty-two in 1993.

O: And so your children went to high school in Panama.

RC: Yes, they were in kindergarten and first grade when we left California, and they went through their schooling through graduation from high school here.

O: Oh, okay. Which high school did they attend there?

RC: Balboa High School.

O: Balboa High School, okay. The bust of the school now is down in the museum, right? [Laughter]

RC: Yeah, that was kind of a joke thing. Every year, the students would either capture it or they'd paint it pink with green spots. It was kind of a fun game between the staff and the students, if the students would get away with messing up Balboa's statue. That went on all the time.

O: What was your impression about kind of social life, political life, comparing it between the Panama Canal Zone and say, the United States in the [19]60s and [19]70s as you went back and forth?

RC: In the Canal Zone, we were living in a quite benign system of socialism. Everybody was salaried who lived there. There were Americans who were in business in Panama City, but the Canal Zone was kind of a socialistic system. Salaries were squashed together so craftsmen made more relative to the United States and people at upper levels made less relative to the United States. There were no fancy, big houses. There were no slums. So the quality of houses also

was—I'll call it squashed together toward the median, rather than the extremes in either direction. We all shopped in the commissary; there weren't really other options. Later as Panama improved, there were options downtown. But even as late as the 1960s, early 1970s, shopping downtown was not as good as shopping in the Panama Canal commissaries.

O: As your kids were going through school, what kind of educational experiences did they have in the Canal Zone?

RC: My opinion is that the Canal Zone schools were better somewhat, even maybe considerably better than most schools in the United States. I'm not going to compare this to urban magnet schools or something like that, but in general I think they were quite good. The schools at that time were the Canal Zone schools; after the treaty they became the Department of Defense-dependent schools. In either case, I stand by what I said. Part of it is a matter of money: the teachers were paid better salaries in general than in the United States. Secondly, there are always folks that are looking for some adventure in life who came to Panama and later to D.O.D. schools because it just was a thrill to go somewhere, to go work in the jungle, to be where the beaches are. So, I think our schooling was really good. A lot of kids—in fact, that's another area where you can see this kind of socialistic system made a difference—a lot of kids of blue-collar workers ended up going to very good schools in the States and getting their degrees. Our kids didn't have any trouble. Our daughter went to Swarthmore and then Harvard

Medical School, and our son, Alan, did a Ph.D. in electrical engineering at Rice. I don't think I can really speak for that, but for the most part don't think they felt handicapped by what they had for high school.

O: What was social life like in the Canal Zone?

RC: There were a fair amount of clubs that people belonged to. That was fostered during construction, because early in construction people were going back to the States almost as fast as they came down here because there were no amenities. So, clubhouses and a lot of other things were fostered. Those weren't still in extent at the time we came here, but I think the idea of clubs and doing things together had continued in the Canal Zone. Of course, there were just all sorts of things, from foreign legion to a historical society to garden clubs, whatever.

O: What types of clubs did you participate in?

RC: I think zero.

O: Zero? [Laughter] Okay.

RC: I worked with Boy Scouts a good deal, actually. I guess that's kind of like a club in the sense that I really enjoyed the other adults that I worked with, but I spent a lot of time working with Boy Scouts. I was in the American Society, as an officer of one kind or another for a long time. Initially it was for Americans who were in

business downtown; later, it was for any Americans here. It was kind of an active way to get together.

O: Was that kind of a business association, like the chamber of commerce, or—I've never heard--

RC: Not really. It was really quite social. The garden club, for example, was wonderful because it had no purpose. It had no officers, it had no constitution. It took place at a lady's who, it's called **Morgan's Gardens. Dot Morgan**, she'd been a nurse that fought in World War I in France, and had gardens for economic purposes. She was the one, really, that kept it going even when she was quite old. That was the ideal society. We didn't have to spend two years writing a new constitution ever. We just went and had a good time.

O: [Laughter] All right. After your graduate work at Stanford, did you come back and work as a practicing doctor?

RC: At that time, I came back and I did adolescent medicine, pediatrics department. And I was in public health: I did a lot of work in the schools, did some work in baby clinics. Gradually over time, I did more and more just straight public health, preventive medicine and a lot more administrative time, although all during my career I always had two days a week where I saw patients because I don't believe a doctor who stops seeing patients knows what medicine is about after a couple of years.

O: What were the facilities you had to work with in the Canal Zone? How would those have compared to facilities, say, in the United States at the same time?

RC: Not as slick-looking, but basically better. I didn't have funding problems. Later on when I was in charge of all of that, I just didn't have any funding problems.

O: The work was funded by the U.S. government or the—

RC: Everything here was funded by the ships going through the canal. What was left over went to the U.S. government. I don't know what it was over time, but millions of dollars made it into the U.S. Treasury over the American life of the canal. If there were a worldwide recession and shipping tonnage went down, then we had to cut stuff out of our budget. We always had to have a plan for what was going to be cut and some kind of rank order in case the ship transits went down. But for the most part, it was such that if you were a credible manager you didn't have any trouble with funding.

O: What were the politics like of the country at that time in Panama?

RC: When we came back, we came back in 1961 and it was very much like it had been since the opening of the canal, since the time the gringos came here. There were tensions between Panama and the United States, and in 1964 there was a real confrontation, with shooting and breaking diplomatic relations, closing a bridge. By the time we came back in 1970 it was clear that the United States hold on the canal was going to end sometime. There was an attempt to do a treaty in

1967, but it was broken when the three colonels came to power in 1968. Torrijos was one of the three colonels that was left standing, and he was pretty much in charge of the country by the time we came back in 1970. Initially, he was quite benign and I will give him credit for pouring money into universities, schools, and health. The other thing that Torrijos did was open the way for black people and Indians and Chinese, who up until that time could not expect ever to rise very high in the government. I'm sure there were exceptions—there always are—but in general the black kid faced a real uphill fight, even if he was very clever and well-educated, too. To enter not society, but levels of employment either in the government or private business. And Torrijos broke that. Panama changed totally from that, and that's still true.

O: As you think back on the political, social system in Panama, Dr. Cheville, what kind of impact did the U.S. have on any of this? On, say, the three colonels or the social system in Panama?

RC: My own personal opinion is that the three colonels would not have overthrown Arnulfo Arias and come to power without some kind of back-door agreement with the U.S. military here or the State Department, or both. It's inconceivable to me that they would have because the United States intervened enough times that they had that as a good example. That's me speaking. I've never run into anything written about that, but I think that's not something that would appear very easily, either. Torrijos played—he always dressed in a fatigue uniform, a la

Castro. He toured the country a lot and made a lot out of starting peasant things. There was a lot of interchange with Cuba. There was nationalization of a lot of small farms to create huge state-owned sugar plantations up in the interior. So there was a fair amount of movement and a leftward economic disposition of the country. This started, I think, with a lot of enthusiasm initially. I'm not in a position to know how things got started, but gradually I think on the top first, people began drilling holes in the cashbox and catching what came out. And if the top guy is taking the next guy down, **see he has the right**, and then the next guy. So gradually, the system had more and more troubles. For people that were well-connected in the government or even on lower levels doing things for their own purposes—also, a lot of economic situations in Panama were carved out amongst the colonels and lieutenant-colonels. So if a guy had the telephones, for example—I can't remember his name, but one colonel had the telephones—and a lot of money had to go out to get a new telephone system, and the more you put the faster you got one. He didn't do anything. He just collected the money. That's an example, but that occurred in many facets of economic life in Panama. But up until Noriega—otherwise the surface was really quite peaceable. I'm not going to say there weren't tensions, there were, but early on there were a lot of desaparecidos under Torrijos and the colonels. I had some video clips of people digging up graves and identifying people that were opposed to the regime and disappeared. There was the case of Padre Gallegos, who was a Colombian priest, who was rather leftist and working for the poor. He disappeared. He was

working up in Veraguas, where Torrijos came from. He disappeared, so much that he had a leg of pork tied to his leg and dropped off in the shark channel out here. Nobody really knows. There was a lot of to-do over that, but I think that's the main one I remember. But there were little things going on. People occasionally were shot. I was involved in a visit for President Carter in 1977, and five kids died at the University of Panama that night in some demonstrations against him. But it wasn't until Noriega that things really turned sour.

O: When President Carter came to visit, what was the reception given to him?

RC: Quite positive, quite positive. And look, Panamanians had felt that they'd been screwed by the United States in 1903. To some extent they had been. They'd been wanting things better for a long time. For example, in the [19]20s and [19]30s, you could only drive in the Canal Zone if you had a Canal Zone license. So Panamanian families going to the interior, when they got to the border of the Zone west of Panama City, would have to hire a driver to drive through the Canal Zone because they were not allowed to drive through the Canal Zone. If you were what's called a rabiblanco is a bird that looks like it's wearing a tuxedo, and so the term for very rich, old family people here was rabiblanco. If you were rabiblanco, you could get a permit but the average citizen couldn't. Kids who came over to get mangoes were chased out. There was a lot of prejudice against Panama. It varied from person to person. There were a lot of people from the

South and the **veterans** from New England who carried a lot of prejudice against the Panamanians who were here.

O: So when President Carter visited in [19]77, Panamanians at least kind of saw him in a positive light.

RC: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, by all means. I mean, they were getting Panama back. The Canal Zone was coming back, lock, stock, and barrel. The treaty—the negotiations were finished in 1977, and it was going to start taking place two years later in 1979. So I think it was a rather outpouring of positive feelings for President Carter.

O: How about within the Zone itself?

RC: You know, I'm not terribly sure about that because, see, we weren't born here and none of us had the feeling that it was a birthright. On the other hand, a lot of people in the Canal Zone whose grandparents or great-grandparents came down to build the canal and the family had been there ever since, they looked upon this as their birthright, their homeland. They simply didn't want the canal to go. There were other people who were, at least compared to me, farther to the right, who felt for other reasons that the Canal Zone shouldn't go. If you want to see a practical reason for that, draw a fifteen hundred-mile radius around Howard Air Force Base and then draw one around Homestead Air Force Base and see how much you can command in Latin America by air. [Laughter] And so I think the

military reasons were in the treaty we might have wanted to control something. So there were people that were like that. But there was a great deal of opposition to the treaty and there were a number of people who worked very hard to try to derail the treaty in any way that they could. I think the number of people who were either neutral or else for the treaty was a good deal more than was publicly thought because those who were against it were very outspoken. If you were a moderate leftist today in a meeting of Tea Party people, you might keep your mouth shut. I think that would be a good analogy.

O: It's interesting that you mention that, Dr. Cheville, because people that we've interviewed so far talk about the Canal Zone being almost like an exception to American life in general. The description is often, it's almost like it was a static world in a way, that things didn't change in the Zone the way things were changing in the United States. Is that fair to say?

RC: That's true to some extent. I mean, everything always changes, and there were significant changes from 1963 when I left after being an intern, to when our family came back toward the end of 1970. There were a lot of changes, and they did affect the Canal Zone. But I think that's a fair statement to say. A friend here who was in business downtown, who had been in Argentina at the start—English in Argentina. There are a lot of English people in B.A., and he had been in Argentina at the start of World War II, went back and fought with the Brits, then came back to Argentina. The reason he went back to Argentina is because he

said it was like Britain when he was a small child. I think there's some truth in that. I think people looked at the Canal Zone as something like 1935 to 1950 in perpetuity. And it was a good feeling. I'll grant you that I had a certain amount of comfort for that. I grew up in a little bitty small town in the Midwest, and not terribly happy with a lot of the social movements that we have going on, economic movements in the United States, and I have some discomfort for that.

O: So there's a sense of stability, maybe, in the Zone.

RC: Yeah, sure.

O: So far, people have not really mentioned the types of political figures that you often hear people talking about in the [19]60s like John F. Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson or Martin Luther King. Did that have any impact?

RC: Well, we came from California in 1970, and I had been in San Francisco and Palo Alto during all that turbulence. We were there when the flower children started in Golden Gate Park. Used to go and spend some time in Haight-Ashbury. Up until I left in 1970, there had been sixty-eight murders in the Haight-Ashbury district, most over drug wars, which is what the flower children came to. So then, in that sense, I think it was kind of unchanging. I think that down here, people had no idea the real social turmoil that was going on. People got drafted and went off to Vietnam. My time in the army was during the Korean War, and nobody in the United States raised hell about getting drafted in the Korean War.

That just wasn't done; it wasn't a part of our culture. At the time all of that was happening in the United States during the Vietnamese War—draft card-burning, people saying, save the whales, sacrifice Jane Fonda, all that kind of stuff—that was not happening down here. It was absent.

O: But people knew it was kind of happening at a distance, do you think?

RC: The kids in high school emulated to some extent, and we did have a drug problem. In fact, I was kind of recruited back here to deal with the drug problem in young people more than anything else. But they started talking about it, and having come from the Bay Area in 1970 I had a hard time seeing what the hell they were talking about initially, about the big drug problem. It was here. It was significant, but comparatively speaking not much.

O: You mentioned earlier that it was almost a sense that people could see a treaty renegotiation of some kind coming on the horizon.

RC: Well, there were treaty negotiations. First of all, the white paper about the Canal Zone was written in the Eisenhower Administration. It's extant in archives up there. The federal government was dedicated to having some kind of different arrangement with Panama from 1955 on. The treaty was actually negotiated in 1967, 1968, but that went out the window when the colonels came to power. The government may have had something to do with that; I kind of suspect that, but you can never know.

O: We may find out fifty years from now or something. [Laughter]

RC: Somebody's archives will be opened.

O: Yeah, right, exactly. [Laughter] Were you still in the Canal Zone? I guess I should kind of back up and ask when you retired?

RC: First of 1994. I lived through all of everything. For three years, from 1976 through a little while after the treaty took effect, I was the president of the Pacific Civic Council, which was essentially the elected mayor of the Canal Zone. So, that's through all kinds of stuff: making arrangements for older people to be taken care of, trying to make some arrangements with some people in Panama looking into what kind of retirements the people would have. I appeared before Congress probably ten or twelve times during that period of time. So for somebody who was not paid to be in that position, probably was as central to all the negotiations, everything that went on, as it could have been.

O: So you're president of the civic council and that was like in some ways being the leader of the civic society in some ways, right?

RC: Well, it would be like anything. People would elect a mayor, but that's not all the political activity that goes on. Our neighbor at that time was one of the most active people against the treaty and was crazy radical. We were glad when he moved, 'cause we were always afraid they'd blow up his house and we'd get hit by a little shrapnel. [Laughter]

LR: Talk about the black. I think it's very important. Can I--?

O: Oh, yeah.

LC: 'Cause part of the whole civic council, I think the understanding of the black communities and the white communities—I suppose you have gotten some of this information—and what happened through the treaty and your experience—who was it, Metcalfe?

RC: Congressman Metcalfe.

LC: Metcalfe.

RC: Not Metcalfe—

LC: [inaudible 27:40] go back to the—

RC: He was a congressman from Louisiana, but he was second to Jesse Owens in the [19]36 Olympics in Berlin in the hundred-meter dash. He was on the four hundred-meter relay that set a world record with Jesse Owens that stood for a long period of time. He'd been in Congress; I got to know him very well...I don't know. There was an earlier date when, for some reason, all the Canal Zone had to have schools speaking the same language. That's how it was gonna be. The people were going to speak the same language. In order to keep the blacks—the schools were segregated. The hospital was segregated still when I got here in 1961. The wards were segregated. The euphemism was, local rate and U.S.

rate, which went back to how people were paid during the construction. And in the schools what happened is, overnight it was decided that all the black people were Panamanians so they would go to a Spanish-speaking school. The teachers were told if they wanted to teach in the fall they'd better learn some Spanish. Do you know what year that was? I don't.

LC: I don't remember that.

RC: That was sometime before the treaty. But at any rate, part of the treaty was that any black kids that continued to live in the Canal Zone after the treaty would all go to the U.S. schools. There was a fair amount of opposition to that, and there were some difficulties. They weren't all easy-to-teach kids. There were a few more problems per whatever unit of number of kids who were—that's what happened in the United States, so that happened here late and was associated with the treaty. There was a lot of opposition to that, but there were no problems of parents lining up and spitting on kids or anything of that sort. Just a lot of talk and unhappiness. They melded the kids in, starting with one year so that after a certain amount of time, all of the grades would include the blacks. But the ones say over in the black high schools at the time this happened, [inaudible 30:10] they would graduate without ever going to the U.S. schools. And there were a lot of Spanish-speaking people in those schools, and they simply changed to schools in Panama. There was some of that that took place, too.

O: So there's a fair amount of segregation within the different institutions in the Canal Zone, especially schools and hospitals.

RC: I remember when we first got here, we were driving. We bought ourselves a little black VW about three days after we got here. We were driving around looking at what we were going to be living in for a while. We came around the corner, and there was a guy digging for a sewer or a water pipe or something, and there were five black guys sitting down in the hole and there was a big tall fat white guy leaning against the palm tree reading the newspaper. There was a lot of that.

LC: Supervising.

O: [Laughter] Supervising, yeah.

RC: But there were a lot of other ideas. I remember a guy who was the superintendent of the locks on the Atlantic side, was a very good friend of mine. After the treaty, we had a lot of retirements, both U.S. and Panamanians as well. I was asking him how he was working without all the U.S. people and he said, you know, Dick, it's not the U.S. people that are causing the trouble. He says, it's the old fifty-five year old guy that pulls on my sleeve and says, hey boss, bossman, we have same problem back in 1952. This what we do then. Why you try that? I think it fix it, boss. He said, those are the guys that are causing me trouble to man the locks, their absence. And in the midst of this, there was a lot of camaraderie also between whites and blacks and good friendships of people

that worked together. So that I don't want to leave the impression that it was like the South in 1935, either. It never was that hard.

O: As ships were coming through, would you say Panama was—did the ships have an impact on social life, did people pick up news from people coming through the canal? Or were those people coming through more like a transient...

RC: I think later they didn't have any affect at all. Perhaps earlier, before radios, before television, perhaps there were the tourists made some difference. But as far as affecting lives, really the people in Panama—the cultures were different enough that somebody coming through on a transient basis I don't think could really affected the life of anybody in Panama. They were just people going by. Wave back and act like a native and let it go at that.

O: Okay. [Laughter] All right. Were you president of the civic council during Operation Just Cause, or was that after?

RC: No, Just Cause was quite a bit later. That's a decade later. Just Cause was in 1989, and I can't tell you the date, but let's say early 1980 I finished three terms and that was it. I had done my duty. [Laughter]

O: What were some of your most difficult duties as president?

RC: Well, I don't know about difficult, but probably the most difficult part were that there were certainly people on the civic council who were radically against the

treaty. Trying to balance that, I developed techniques for how the meeting went depending on what I expected. If I thought it was going to be really wild and bad, I would not cut off any discussion. I would let people talk as long as they wanted to and all of a sudden it'd be ten o'clock and we'd have to go home. Nothing happened. If it was going to be peaceable, then I'd control the meeting and have a direction to go. But that's nothing that—that's what people do if they're running a meeting anywhere; you develop techniques to try to avoid that so that you'd not take people head-on. Also, another technique I used as people raised a lot of hell, I'd ask three of the worst of them to develop a position paper that we could look at, and usually they never did. They'd be quiet after that.

O: [Laughter] Okay, that's a good technique. And you mentioned going to give congressional testimony. Was that testimony on behalf of the council or was that—

RC: People in the Canal Zone. People in the Canal Zone, period.

O: What was the process of—were you canvassing people in the Canal Zone for their ideas?

RC: Well, from my position I didn't really have to do that. I don't even remember how often we met now, if it was monthly or what. I think as it got busier for the treaty it was even more often than once a month. But I think I had a pretty good earful from that. The other thing is that I'd go down to shop the commissary, and I

usually couldn't get out without two or three people telling me what they really thought: how I should manage things, what I should tell the governor. Maybe I'm not quite that democratic. I tried to put together what I could, and for some things I'd do some canvassing to find out. But in general, I had some people that I knew and trusted—some more conservative, some more liberal—who I would consult what they thought about this and that or something that I was writing, because I wrote all my business papers totally when I was going to testify.

O: When you went to testify, did you find a receptive audience in Congress? Were people trying to kind of gauge American opinion within the canal?

RC: I know, I don't I ever found anybody in Washington that cared a fig about what people in the Canal Zone thought. We were sort of kind of strange people set off in the distance.

LC: Can I interrupt here for just a moment? Because one of the things that happened not only did representatives from the Panama Canal Zone go and appear before Congress, we continually had a group of congressmen, as they like to do, used to come down and to visit the Canal Zone apparently on a fact-finding mission. One of the social gatherings that was **el rigueur** during any senatorial or congressional meeting was to go on a midnight cruise from Balboa on one of the—I don't remember what ship it was, **East River**?

RC: I don't remember the ship, either, but we had a ship that would go through the locks out on the lake—

LC: And then turn around and come back.

RC: It was a cruise ship primarily for visiting dignitaries, although people in the Canal Zone could rent it and use it.

LC: But during some of those midnight visits, that when we were invited to have dinner and socialize, particularly with Senator Congressman Spellman.

RC: She was a congressman; Spellman, yes. She was—

LC: She came out of the Department of Education herself, and as a board member, something like that.

RC: She started a school board in Maryland.

LC: And she was very interested in education. One of the things that we particularly worked with her all night [Laughter] in fact, was to incorporate within—whether it was the treaty or whatever it was—and one of the things was to have a sabbatical for teachers, because it was very difficult for them to get additional education coming out of the Canal Zone. There were some perks like that actually effectively got into some of the negotiations. I think everybody on those ships that night had something to tell a congressman that they wanted in the treaty. [Laughter]

RC: It was variable. She was quite interested, Metcalfe was quite interested. I remember a lot who were not interested. I remember Congress people, senators, representatives who already had their own idea. You'd back off quickly because you sensed they were soon going to be pissed off because you didn't agree with their preconceived picture. But my two best lobbying points were the ship and the train, because we went to the other side by train and people would come down for fact-finding. We'd ride right over on the train. I remember our daughter went to a school that was right on the border. It was a small school, and her class looked like the United Nations. There was a little Scottish boy who was as blonde and blue-eyed as you could be, right up to totally black kids and everything in between. They had met Congressman Metcalfe. Congressman Metcalfe, all day, black people on the other side. And I almost countered everything that was said by showing him a picture of my daughter's class, smiling kids that looked like a biblical picture of the lion and the lamb.

LC: I'll think of it. It just went. I think, Dick, you ought to talk about the experience that was not your experience, with what happened with President Carter and the president of the pilot union, because that was very significant in the treaty.

RC: Actually, I was half of that and he was half of that, because people were going to finish early and things were going to change, and we were looking for some kind of better retirement for people that were going to lose a lifestyle and job and be cut off early. And there was a fellow who was the president of the Pilots'

Association who had a friend that was on Jimmy Carter's interior staff in the White House.

LC: Jordan?

RC: No, no, no. I don't think. Well, it could have been Hamilton Jordan. I'm not sure about that. Anyway, that was a lot of the stuff that I did, was representing Spellman and Metcalfe both. Actually, there was a **truck at three ways**. Then, the president of the Pilots' Association got with some of that Carter staff. I don't know the details, but he was highly effective in regard to the people. And there was a representative, a guy that was later indicted from Pennsylvania, and I can't bring his name up. But he was the one that actually put the bill before the House.

LC: But in our conversation previous to that, the Pilots' Association had had a problem with the administration of the canal. I don't remember what the issue was, but you can't go on strike against the government but you can have a sickout. And the pilots had a sickout, and the teachers supported the pilots with an additional sickout.

RC: And a lot of other people as well.

LC: And a lot of other people as well.

O: This was during the Carter administration?

RC: No. This was later, and I don't know when.

LC: This was before the treaty because when our conversation—and I forgot the name of the Pilots' Association's president--

RC: John, John, John. I don't know. But he left shortly after the treaty was signed.

LC: He had the friend, he got an appointment with Carter. And Carter said, what do you want? Because Carter wanted the treaty. He said, well—and one of the things from conversations that you and other people had had with John was, they were asking for what was called an eighteen forty-eight: eighteen years and forty-eight years old, you could retire without penalty from the U.S. government at that point, as a way of easing people out and what Dick was saying about protecting them.

RC: Right. You could take your equity and run. Not that you were going to get fantastically great retirement, but that if you really felt threatened by it or if things changed so your job died, you could your equity and run.

LC: So at that point Carter said, you've got it. And John said, I want everybody to have it in the Canal Zone. And the reason why he said that—because, again, there was this closeness among people and watching out for one another—and so he wanted to protect everybody, not just the pilots. And he said, you know, the teachers went on the line for us. I want it for everybody in the Canal Zone, and he got it, too.

O: Wow. So you were able to take your seniority and you could either retire or apply it to another...

LC: You could go to another government agency, but the main thing if you had to leave, you had that little bit without penalty that you could take with you.

RC: It was fairly favorable, but that wasn't enough in itself because only Congress could say that. Carter couldn't say that; he could say what's most important but it was Murphy? I think Congressman Murphy, but that's a question mark in Pennsylvania. He was very friendly; he was on the committee that oversaw the canal. He was the one that introduced it.

O: Is that Murtha?

RC: No, not Murtha.

LC: No, he's not.

RC: Murtha's D.O.D. It was Murphy, I think. Try that. I'm not sure about that.

O: Okay. But eventually it was approved.

RC: Well, the sickout was interesting because down from the Pentagon came all this saying, we're gonna fire everybody, we're gonna run the canal with the Navy. They just about sunk half a dozen ships. They folded. They found they couldn't run the canal. The people who went out got scared, and the people who were gonna fire them all got scared because they didn't—nobody's managing wants to

have something fail on their watch. So everybody got a little cooler. That's my view.

O: But the strike happened during the Carter Administration.

RC: I guess it did. I can't put that together. I guess that was during the treaty negotiations.

LC: It was because it was before John went to Washington.

RC: That's right. I'd say 1978.

O: Okay. We can ballpark.

RC: Yeah, you can find that out, but I'd say [19]78.

O: Yeah, this is the first time anyone has mentioned this.

LC: Well, not many people understood what was going on under the table, behind closed doors.

RC: There's another factor and that is the State Department had a giant bug up its butt about people in the Canal Zone anyway. There was a fifty-year fight between the Pentagon, the Panama Canal Commission and the State Department. And the State Department oriented everybody coming down, and it had all the stuff about all the manicured lawns and people who were taken care of so royally who lived here. There was some real prejudice; I know this 'cause I had friends from

down at the embassy and I dealt with them an awful lot during this time. They used to tell me about their orientation before coming here and laughing about it. One colonel that was the head of the unit out of Fort Clayton who I worked with in Boy Scouts—after about two years, he said, you know, this is the best place I've ever had in my whole service career. He said, it's a shame it's coming to an end or I would try to stay here and work. He said, they really poisoned me about what you people in the Canal Zone were like, and I found you to be very good people like those in my hometown.

O: So the Pentagon gave him a certain image of the civilians.

LC: Very much.

RC: Yeah, yeah. And the State Department both. I don't know who did the orienting; maybe they both did it. There's a certain amount of Canal Zone paranoia, maybe even in my part, but I do really think that's quite true, I mean, primarily because I heard it from people in the military and in the embassy.

O: Interestingly enough, even though I was not in-country as much in Fort Davis, we heard the same thing about civilian life actually. [Laughter] The way it was presented to us was, oh, those people. It's like a city on the hill. It's paradise for them and you guys are in the jungle. It was interesting, because interviewing a couple yesterday they said, oh, we had great relations with the military. And I thought, wow. I don't think we had negative relations when I was there, but we

just didn't have any relations that I remember. It would have been different for officers, maybe.

RC: I think that's really true. First of all, the head of the hospital was always from the Army, and the governor was a major-general and the lieutenant-governor was a colonel who was shortly to be a brigadier general unless they screwed up. Engineering department was overseen by military engineers. It was a combination thing, and actually the Secretary of the Army was essentially the president of the board of directors for the Panama Canal. That went back from the time construction was over. Beyond that, if you got to the officers' staff at Fort Clayton or especially out at Amador with the Navy and the Marines and the Army, relations were quite good. But I think a lot of people in the Canal Zone didn't want their daughters running around with enlisted men. If you had a daughter and had been here, you probably would have taken the same view.

O: Right. [Laughter] So there was the State Department, Pentagon—there were different groups who saw themselves as having a stake in the Canal Zone.

LC: There was a real battle, which I only heard of just through Dick and other forces about who really was going to control the Canal Zone. There was this continual battle between the powers that be, being those three forces. It was a little tug and pull all the time.

RC: When the treaty went into effect, you can guess some of the winnings because the head of the agency became a lieutenant-general... [Laughter] Who was very good, who was very good. He came with for me a bad reputation because I knew some people up at Corey Heights that worked for him. He was prone to do things like getting everybody up at two in the morning to go to have a review of some situation, which I thought was just a good show of his power. But he never demonstrated any of that while he was head of the agency. I worked with him a lot, sat in a lot of meetings, and I just thought he was excellent.

LC: That was General McAuliffe.

RC: Yeah.

LC: Dick, tell him about your invitation when you met in the treaty negotiations with some of the very, very wealthy power players in Panama.

RC: Oh, that was interesting. There were a few of us that came over that were not in the power structure that much in the Canal Zone or in the company. But it included three guys: one who was the foreign minister, and two had been foreign ministers, and some very powerful people. They were essentially trying to bribe us to come out for the treaty and support it. Of course, I hadn't been publicly terribly supportive of the treaty, but I'd been pro-treaty from the first. It didn't seem to me our country should really control Panama, this is Panama. Then after that, I was never contacted but some of the other people that were in that group

were contacted by McAuliffe—no, that was Parfitt at that time; that was before the treaty--General Parfitt, who in kind of a general way suggested it would really be better to leave all the routes and negotiation to the pros in the State Department and the Pentagon.

LC: But you were pretty well offered, weren't you? What would you like?

RC: I was the only one that was not, interestingly enough. I don't know why that was. Later on I was offered, but the time I was offered **quarter** bribes was when we were building—we put together the ten million-dollar contract for the retired people from Pan Canal in Panama, the old **black folks** downtown. Before the treaty was over, I managed to con money out to build a home for them, a **silo**. And that was done through one of the three, at that time, big clinics in Panama. We had it out on bid and the largest, most famous clinic at that time, the Centro Médico Paitilla, and the head of that guy offered me a bunch of stuff. I sort of shut them out after that. Fortunately, they didn't have a low bid. I'd have been very unhappy if they had. [Laughter] But the time that we all got—everybody else openly was offered something; I'm not quite sure why I wasn't but I wasn't.

O: Oh, offered something to support the treaty.

RC: Yeah. I mean, I'm talking about position and money in Panama to stay, quite concrete.

O: Your feeling was that it was offered by private individuals or by..?

RC: Well, there was a mixed group. Fernando—what the hell was his last name? Anyway, the family's from Spain who left during the Civil War. He went to Stanford from Panama, studied philosophy, decided he couldn't make a living so he studied engineering, set up the first television station, two radio stations, and by the time I knew him he was rich as Midas. Eleta, Fernando Eleta. He had nothing to do with the government and some of them were very much in opposition to the government, but this is before Noriega so the opposition wasn't bloody or deadly at that time. There was a lot in the newspapers and there were angry feelings, a lot of worry about the direction Panama was taking. But people on both sides of the spectrum—or all seven sides of the spectrum—could sit down and talk together in Panama's interest at that time. It was so much coming out against the treaty in the United States, both in the United States but some of it originating here, that they really thought it would be nice to have some people thought of as leaders in the Canal Zone come in on that side. Essentially, I didn't do anything, just went to a meeting.

O: What were your impressions of Noriega?

RC: Well, I shook his hand three times and I've not been able to feel anything since. [Laughter] Noriega was evil. There were some very bad things done when the three colonels were in power, because there was a lot of opposition to that. Some of the video that you saw—I don't know whether you saw the video we were looking at yesterday that I put together—is finally after Operation Just

Cause, they were able to dig up the graves. There were students that disappeared and other people that disappeared that could be identified. My own opinion, more people were killed under Torrijos than under Noriega, but I don't know that that's true. I'm a contrarian in that regard. But he was an evil man and he had a technique, almost inborn, of reading people and knowing what their weaknesses were. He had like a resort hotel that catered to anybody's weaknesses. You liked little boys? There'd be little boys. If you liked whores, you could get a whore. If you wanted to get high on cocaine, there'd be cocaine. And while this was happening, pictures were being taken to archive that could be used later to get rid of you. It was interesting. We were in Summerville, South Carolina. We lived in Charleston for a while and I bought a car from an ex-colonel who had been involved in that and almost lost his career over—he didn't ever tell me exactly what happened. But anyway, he got involved in Noriega this way down here as a colonel, and almost destroyed his career because if he wanted something and approached you and he didn't get it, it would cause you a lot of trouble. Lila's colleague—why don't you tell about Coralia and Noriega and his relationship with the troops and the officers?

LC: Well, I do folklore in Panama and one of my colleagues is Coralia Hassán de Llorente. Her husband was a captain in the military, and her brother was one of the very high colonels working with Noriega.

RC: He was like the general staff. He was one of half a dozen main guys.

LC: Colonel Hassán. And Colonel Hassán was just a happy—just doing his job, but apparently through Coralia he was just swept into Noriega's command because Noriega was able and would offer them—in this hotel, they would offer them women, they would offer them booze, whatever they wanted. He himself I think personally had a certain charisma among his officers, and they were just schmoozed and pulled in to be very faithful. Then, they were very afraid of him because they knew his techniques, they knew what he was doing, and it could happen to them. So loyalty that was gratuitous in the beginning then became mandatory if you wanted to save your life.

RC: It's easier to mount the tiger than to get off. But this spilled over into—the child of a corporal was really sick and in the hospital, something from Noriega would show up or even Noriega himself. He extended himself for the soldiers and for the officers in kindly, supporting ways as well, too.

LC: In the true patrono system that is known in Panama, and so he did become also as well as evil, he also became the patrón.

O: Yeah, he had a certain charisma.

LC: Yeah, and under the patrono system is, again, the peon works for the—you know, he also gives them the birthday party, he gives them all of the Catholic-type of thing, he pays for the marriages. The patrón is the one that really supports in times of celebrations.

O: There has to be some kind of reciprocal—

LC: That's right.

O: Yeah, there's a responsibility of—

RC: It came out of Spain and it's universal in Latin America. If trouble happens and shit falls on the household, the patrón shows up with a shovel. [Laughter]

O: There was a perception that, at least in the beginning, that the U.S. either tolerated or even openly supported Noriega. Did you see that?

RC: They worked for the C.I.A. I can't answer that question. I'd say that's a perception, although I do know that the president of Panama—I'm preceding Noriega—no, I'm not either. That was still true. I guess Lakas. I'm not going to go there because I'm not very sure of my data, but at any rate the thought was that through the middle group in Panama—these are military folks attached to the embassy working with the Panamanian army—that there were guns and other supplies going out of the back door of the embassy to Noriega literally up until the time that the war started. So we had a little trouble with the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing as well. This I really know.

LC: Dick, don't you think also, though, that you have to look at Torrijos in the light of Arias, Arnulfo? And you have to know the history of our Arnulfo, what a dictator

he was, what an autocrat he was. Wasn't he for Germany during the Second World War?

RC: No. Yeah, he was, but we need to go back further because he got a beca, scholarship to go to Germany to study neurosurgery in the early 1930s, and he did his residency in neurosurgery in Germany in the [19]30s. He'd gone to medical school at Harvard so he clearly wasn't an idiot, and came back to the United States and started the Panameñista Party and made a symbol with a lightning bolt that was yellow on a purple background. You may still see some and the arnulfistas are still a powerful party. But then he organized his party really very much on a fascist level, and he was very close personally to the German ambassador to Panama and the Japanese ambassador to Panama. There was a lot of tic-tac-toe going on in 1940 and 1941. One of the tic-tac-toes is that Lloyd Aéreo, which is a German airline, was building an airport in the jungle of Colombia within a hundred and fifty miles of Panama. And they were bringing in Heinkel 110s, which is a bomber; they were calling them fast mail planes. Franklin Roosevelt pushed and paid for Colombia to take this over. That became Avianca, which to this day is probably Latin America's best airline. We threw Arnulfo out at that time because—I don't know the details of how he was kicked out, but he was thrown out three times, twice by the United States, and that's when I said I can't believe that the colonels would throw Arnulfo out without

some connivance from Corey Heights, which was the high command for the military here.

LC: So even though you had two bad peas in the pod, which is the worst pea that you throw out? I think that was—I'm just guessing, but that was the U.S. dilemma at that time when the three colonels came to power and the U.S. saw, we better back the colonels rather than Arias.

RC: Well, there was the hassle between the three colonels. At that time, Noriega was in a group of Panamanians in Mexico—no. Torrijos had gone to Mexico, and Noriega was in charge of the area up by the Costa Rican border. When Torrijos came back, he came to Panama through San Jose, Costa Rica and then they started a march down the isthmus, sort of like Mussolini marching in the [19]20s on Rome. And they picked up people as they came along; there would have been no Torrijos without Noriega, which was probably why Torrijos was so faithful. But I'm afraid I don't see a connection philosophically between Arnulfo and Torrijos. If there's a connection, it'd be much closer to Castro—

LC: No, I'm talking about an American perspective.

RC: Oh, yeah.

LC: From an American perspective, if you had the elected president in Panama who was Arnulfo, and knowing the history of Arnulfo—and he was a little crazy—and

then these colonels coming to power, who would you choose to back? I think at that point that we didn't have a choice but to go for the colonels.

O: Yeah. I mean, you had mentioned—

RC: We had a choice, we just didn't take— [Laughter] I think we took the wrong choice, personally.

LC: But there was a less—that's my opinion.

RC: That's all understandable. Anybody that thinks the American government acts the same overseas doesn't know is a naïve fool.

O: And there are the broader—it isn't just Panama; it isn't just the canal. It's the broader region, hemisphere.

RC: That was a lot of the reason for the treaty. Holding onto it—Torrijos beat the hell out of us in terms of propaganda, in terms of moving towards the treaty. And all of Latin America talked about the heathens to the north, the shark and the sardines.

LC: I would also like to say in terms of your experience in Panama was really within **mil** groups in other countries in Latin America, and I think that was the entrance in terms of, the U.S. was very interested in SOUTHCOM and what they were doing, and I can't tell you how many people we talked to that were off to Peru, were off to Argentina, were off. We knew exactly—

RC: Oh, we knew about it.

LC: What was happening with the SOUTHCOM and their involvement all through South America. So I think your comment is very important because at that time it was not just Panama.

RC: It was a huge C.I.A. center, it was a huge listening post. It had people that read newspapers from all over Latin America every day to find little bits of information. It seemed like there was one period of time everybody we met turned out to be associated with the C.I.A. in some way. A lot of what we were doing—Lila was doing folklore studies out there, and she got a guy she met, George Archer, who was a good photographer and was set up to do photography and worked with him for a while. All of a sudden, he and his wife just split. [Laughter] They disappeared, the two red-headed kids disappeared, and we don't know where George went.

LC: George went back to C.I.A.

RC: But his wife, it turned out later I found out from other people, was with the agency.

LC: So there was a lot going on.

RC: It was an interesting place.

LC: That's an interesting—

O: We needed Arthur Miller to write a book about Panama, right? [Laughter]

LC: Yeah.

O: That's interesting. I know we've taken well over an hour already, and I know there's other activities that you probably want to get to. Thinking back now, let me ask this question: how often do the two of you go back to Panama?

RC: I'll take a little time answering that. Life was pretty turbulent during the last years right up through Just Cause. I was on a hit list, carried a radio around for a year and a half, two years. A message came through **hammerblow**. I was to get hold of Lila and we were to go someplace where we'd be never been before where there was a telephone, had a number to call and an armored vehicle would pick us up. We had big Ford sedans with blackened windows that would drive up in front of our house. We lived next door to the head of the Marine Bureau and he was also on that list. Six guys with crew cuts and muscles under tight T-shirts would get up and go through some kind of exercise and get back in the car and drive away. These were Panamanian Guardias who clearly had a right to be there because it was Panama by that time. None of this really got through to me. I tolerated that all very well, but after it was over when I watched the new government go into Panama. Endara got married to a Chinese chippy, then he decided to haul into the cathedral for and he lived in the cathedral what, for a month or six weeks, just some kind of crazy business. They were fighting like cats and dogs. Two people that I had pushed—Panamanians—for higher

positions, like bureau directors, got caught for acting like Panamanians with contracts. One of them, for example—for this cut widening that's going on right now, that started about 1990, as a matter of fact. There were twenty-seven separate contracts involved and he was either a part-owner or on the board of directors or in some way associated with seventeen of the twenty-seven, and was asked to leave. That's okay in Panama. I'm not quite sure why this bothered me. My friends used to say, well, just let Panama be Panama, forget about it. I was not really able to do that. I was quite angry when it was over. We didn't come back—I guess I came back for some depositions later, but beside that we didn't come back for a long time. Later we bought for ten years a timeshare, so that we had an apartment in what was Corey Heights for three weeks in January and February, which is the early dry season, the best part. We come down every year for that. Lila's back into her folklore again, and our contacts and friends. We've enjoyed that, but I was quite bitter when I left in 1994. I could've stayed longer, and I had no interest in doing so. The part that got me was I guess I expected more of the Panamanians, and I thought that the Panamanian dead and the U.S. dead from Just Cause deserved better out of Panama than we were getting.

O: Now when you talk to other folks in the reunion, do you find yourself—what do you talk about in--?

RC: Oh, at this reunion I talk about old days or playing tennis or swimming or mutual friends or time that we spent together. If I'm going to talk about the canal, it would be with a few people that I would talk to. I think you were there when Rich Wainio was talking yesterday. He's the one that—maybe not.

LC: I don't think he was there.

RC: Oh, okay, it was the other guy who was there. He's the head of the Port of Tampa, and he was the chief economist for the Panama Canal at the end. I would talk to him. I go back and talk to some of my good friends in Panama, who were people that I talked to a lot when I lived there. So there would be people that I trust, but aside from that I don't talk about old Pan Canal days. I will say because everybody expected Panama to screw it up in three years when the turnover came, I'll occasionally remind people that it didn't if I feel a little piqueish, but that's about the end what I'll talk about.

LC: I'd like to go back to the whole feeling in the Canal Zone because there are not very many places in a tropical, lush environment that you could go to the beach within an hour, an hour and a half. If you were hunting, you could go down to the Darién, you could go hunting. If you were a birder, you just go half an hour out to Gamboa and go on Pipeline Road and you see some of the most beautiful birds in the world. If you liked SCUBA, you could go over to the Caribbean and in that regard, fishing out in the bay, some of the best fishing in the world. People, even the blue-collar workers, they could afford a boat and things were kept—I don't

think artificially cheap—but it was a time which everybody could afford to do anything like that that they wanted to do.

RC: Let me interject. That's another area where what people got was squished so that it was not expensive to have your boat at the yacht club. The yacht club was built by Pan Canal people off-duty. If you had a little boat, you could afford to have it out there. As soon as the treaty occurred, that was gone. You had to be very wealthy all of a sudden because the yacht club turned...

LC: To Panamanians.

RC: To Panamanians, or like it would be in the United States, mostly.

LC: And so, I was involved in education. And one of the things that was very evident to the counselors at the secondary school was that Panama was so seductive in its lifestyle for people growing up in Panama, that kids graduating from the high school, they wanted to stay there. They would do anything that they could; they would take a mediocre job in order to stay in Panama because the lifestyle was so beautiful. In fact, Dick with our own kids—we went to Panama thinking that we would travel internationally with the kids on our vacation. Then one day Dick came home and said, you know what? We got to get our kids back to the States. Because what he was finding in his interviews with adolescents in the adolescent clinic—the same mentality of wanting to stay here, and it being what they called this third world of kids growing up in the military outside of the United States, not

really feeling comfortable as being U.S. citizens. So, probably when the kids were about eight, something like that, every year we either sent them back with relatives to the States, or we took all our vacations back to the United States.

O: Back to the States, okay.

LC: And we began to talk about, you're gonna go to the college in the United States. This is where you're going to study. We began a real brainwashing so that there would be no alternatives for them to want to stay in Panama at that time, and to have their higher education in the United States.

RC: By the time we came back in 1970, it was clear that the days of the Canal Zone were numbered. That was before all this treaty stuff even started, but it was clear.

O: So you wanted to make sure your kids would be able to adapt to life outside—

LC: Back into the States.

O: But probably not everyone probably shared that belief, right, in terms of childrearing at the time?

RC: I think a lot of people just had their children here, and when they got out of high school, they sent their son to go to the States, whatever happened. I don't like to set up the difference between people that have a lot of college education and blue-collar folks, but there is, and there wasn't quite as much forethought about

that. But there were a lot of kids that stayed here, no matter what, and are still here.

LC: Still in Panama.

RC: Just doing anything in Panama to get by. Some of them have done fairly well. If you're going to do that, you should go back and get a skill needed in Panama, then come back. That would make some sense, but otherwise...

LC: But in terms of the whole feeling and the Canal Zone and the comfort and just the beauty and just—it was easy. It was a great life. I think that what you talked about earlier in terms of people looking back on that, most people feel like, wow. And they did have something very special there. There was something very unique about the Canal Zone.

RC: It's that feeling that keeps this Panama Canal Society going. First of all, we were both about twenty-nine or thirty when we went to Panama the first time.

[Editor's note: At this point, there is an interruption in the interview and it concludes without further information.]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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