

Interview with June Hamilton

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project
Foreign Service Spouse Series

JUNE HAMILTON

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi

Initial interview date: January 11, 1991

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi interviewing June Hamilton on January 11, 1991 at her home in Santa Barbara, California.

Let's begin with Baghdad, then. Were you there during the Revolution, the coup when the king was killed and his body dragged through the streets?

HAMILTON: No. We arrived after that, in June 1960, and everybody was still talking about it. The coup was in 1958. I don't think there's anything about it that probably hasn't been heard. His body was dragged through the streets. The prime minister, I forget his name, escaped from Baghdad disguised as a woman.

I had a very unusual experience there. I never did make a call on the ambassador's wife, Mary Jernegan. We came in by plane. We had friends on the embassy staff, the Munns, and the Davies, he was DCM, we had known them for years. Apprised that we were coming, they met us at the airport, as did Mary Jernegan, the ambassador's wife. We were invited to come next day to the ambassador's birthday party around the pool. This was in the old embassy. Mary asked me to go with her to a bazaar the women in the Czech embassy were holding. So I never did go through any [protocol] formalities.

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Actually, I don't think my husband John had to in the office, either. It was all so wonderfully informal. It was a small post, then. There must have been, I would guess, about 14 officers, and there were quite a lot of other people as staff, but it was a very small Mission. The original embassy building in Baghdad was supposed to be an adobe copy of the White House. I don't know much about its history but that house was really pretty old. The floors were rippled and you had to watch your step going from one room to another. This building housed both the residence and the offices.

That was the embassy's early history. We decommissioned that embassy and commissioned the new one in 1962.

Q: I hope you have photographs of that old building?

HAMILTON: I believe I do, I have to see. I recall that John took a picture of Ambassador Jernegan watching the flag go up. Bent way over backwards to watch the flag's progress upward, he said to the Marine raising it, "Look, you don't have to put it all the way to the sky!" I have a lot of pictures of the new embassy, I'll show you what I have.

Q: So your relationship with Mary Jernegan was really very informal right from the beginning, wasn't it.

HAMILTON: Right from the very beginning. We've been good friends to this day.

Q: You said you did a lot for and with her in the new embassy residence. What was your relationship with her? We're now talking about 1960, 31 years ago.

HAMILTON: It was sort of like a friend's house. I went in and out as I would — usually she'd have asked me to come, I don't remember that I ever just dropped in. She would want me to come for some reason and I would go. We did a lot of planning there, of course, for activities and such like.

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Q: Women's activities? Embassy or official activities? Or both?

HAMILTON: Both. Parties. Particularly for entertainment.

Q: So you assisted her with entertainment?

HAMILTON: Yes. And there was a beautiful garden in which to do entertaining. I never did quite know why the architect put in so many little individual ponds but it was a beautifully laid-out garden. Somebody almost always fell in, (laughing) because they'd be talking and back up and then fall in. I understand that that embassy has gone to ruin, since.

Q: What about your relationship with the American Women's Club? And you mentioned working with the American women who were married to Iraqis.

HAMILTON: Yes. I'll show you some pictures of that group. That had started before our arrival in 1960. It was a very small organization then but we increased until we must have had at least, oh, 60 or 70 members, of which a small minority were connected directly to the embassy. The majority were girls married to Iraqis. I would like to contrast that with Iran, where there was the same activity. The American women married to Iraqis were much freer to come and participate in our activities, and we included their husbands in a great many of our parties. There were always a half-dozen of them at a big party.

Q: These women were more sequestered in Iran?

HAMILTON: Yes. I would say that out of a large number of them in Tehran, there were a dozen who had no difficulty in joining us in any of our activities to which they were invited. But there were only two or three whom we were forbidden to contact in Baghdad.

Q: I see that you were married a number of years before your husband went with USIS, so during that period you had no idea what sort of life you were going to lead. Or did you?

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HAMILTON: No, I didn't. My only trip overseas before the Tehran experience was when John worked for the British Information Services (BIS) as films officer, and as a local employee. We lived in Minneapolis and John was on the faculty of the University of Minnesota. The man in charge of the BIS's Chicago office called and asked John, "How would you like my job in Chicago?" John's mouth dropped open and he said, "I don't understand, Tom, how could I take it?" In brief, he could be taken on as a local [hire] employee. So we went to Chicago in 1945 to work for the British Government in their information services headquarters there. (Tom went on to head the division in New York City.) John's territory reached from Chicago and Wisconsin all the way to Denver, so he did some traveling and was known as Films and Publications Officer in the BIS.

So I knew what the job might be, but I'll confess that as John came out of the office [Department of State, Public Affairs Division, Motion Pictures (1949)], when I picked him up in Washington when he was hired for the job and he said, "Well, they want us to go to Tehran, as films officer." Had it not been for the Churchill-Roosevelt talks, I wouldn't have known what he was talking about. That's how ignorant I was of the area then.

Q: So how was it to arrive in Tehran in 1949?

HAMILTON: That's a story in itself. In those days we were fairly young and inexperienced in this respect but we decided we wanted to take our car on the ship to Beirut and drive to Tehran. This was in 1949. John had consulted friends and others in Washington and obtained some Army maps. So we debarked with our car and the two of us started out to drive cross-country to Tehran. Going through Lebanon and Jordan was an experience, and so was my first glimpse of Iraq. We had an accident. I was driving a new car and had no idea the chassis was so low. I ran over a stone — I hadn't much choice: a deep ravine lay on one side, a cliff on the other. But the crankcase was ruined and we had to be towed to the next town. We were now in Khorramshahr, Iran. And there we spent the night, in the car, in a caravanserai.

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Q: How did you get it repaired?

HAMILTON: The only phrases we knew were from the phrase book but we understood that there would be a mechanic there at six o'clock the next morning. Sure enough, one showed up, the car was repaired. There were no Americans in Khorramshahr then, so they took us in a carriage to the British Consulate, where they were very happy to take us in and had the servants give us breakfast. The British Consul and his wife were about to leave for the countryside for a lunch with some Iranians. Later, we had the good fortune to meet that British Consul and his wife, in Tabriz, and they became friends of ours at that time.

Q: That was your introduction to Iran! (both laugh)

HAMILTON: Which was quite different from our introduction to Baghdad, where we stayed with our friends the Davies, he was DCM, who had just moved into a huge house near the new embassy. Then we had to find our own quarters elsewhere. This was Roger Davies, the ambassador to Cyprus who was later assassinated.

Q: Regarding Tehran: we started talking about the difference between the seclusion of the American wives of Iranians as opposed to those who were married to Iraqis. Do you want to comment a bit on that?

HAMILTON: Well, it took a little more persuasion and we could not do as many things with these women in Iran as we did in Iraq.

Q: Was that because the government just refused to let you?

HAMILTON: No. It was mainly a personal matter.

Q: Oh — their option.

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HAMILTON: Their option. Most of these girls had met their husbands in the U.S. where their husbands were in college. Some of the girls were college graduates, some were not. It depended somewhat on their education and that sort of thing — some of them submitted very quickly to their Iranian mothers' and grandmothers' dictum that they shouldn't be with other Americans; others did not. It depended a lot on the individual woman. I don't think the government frowned on these contacts, but they didn't make it easy.

Q: It was more of an individual thing.

HAMILTON: Yes. I think that was also true in Iraq.[sic]

Q: Have you any explanation of why the American women married to Iraqis were more accessible, more interested in-

HAMILTON: (after some hesitation) I think there were a number of reasons. Most of the girls in Iraq had, probably, a graduate degree from college but in the case of those in Iran, there were also some girls who'd been waitresses in restaurants where the men were going to school. They lacked background and didn't quite know how to cope and hadn't expected a situation like they got themselves into. You've heard the stories of how they are and so on — the society is a matriarchy, so mothers and grandmothers had a lot to say. I remember one grandmother in Iran who really thought she'd given this girl the world with a fence around it — they'd bought her a typical Iranian house, loaded it with heavy over-stuffed furniture, and the girl herself was the “cottage type” — she would have loved something feminine. Furthermore, she didn't know how to deal with her servants. She was a very unhappy woman. We did what we could for her, but-

Q: What happened to some of those women? Did they go home?

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HAMILTON: I really can't answer that question, because of course when we came away from there in '54 everything was sweetness and light. And then it all went to pieces after that.

Q: So it really wasn't a political reason at all that they couldn't have any association with you. It was more a personal-

HAMILTON: Personal and family relationship. (she laughs) I don't think it would have made any difference to the Shah.

Q: What were you able to do for those women in Iraq?

HAMILTON: We gave them an outlet. We did a lot of the typical women's clubs activities, sponsored fairs, and where they had a chance to work with us and do things with us — the activities there were not different from those at any post, I think. It was just a fact that they were an amalgamated part. Nobody thought, “Are you an embassy wife, or a USIA wife, or a girl married to an Iraqi?” We were all just good friends.

Q: It's good that you could maintain that relationship, because that doesn't always happen.

HAMILTON: And I think a lot of that was due to Mary Jernegan.

Q: That was absolutely my next question. What did she do to foster that?

HAMILTON: She was a big part of it. She turned a lot of the work over to somebody else. As president I would do all of the things one would do in such cases and coordinated the activities. But I don't think I did anything she didn't know about. We spent a lot of time talking together and she always had ideas and I did too and we'd figure out which would work and which wouldn't. When we were working with the women in Iran, the only thing I can remember that we did that was beneficial to them, in a way, as far as being in Iran was concerned, the Red Lion and Sun, Iran's equivalent to Red Cross, was under

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the supervision of Princess Shams. She gave a fair every year and we supplied food, handicrafts — I don't think we collected old clothes — and once a year we did that job for the Princess, supervised the whole thing.

Again, I don't remember that we did anything like that in Baghdad. Yes, we had committees who went to the hospitals and nursing homes or their equivalent and helped there. In Iraq, any American who happened to be there was a part of the club. That of course was true in Tehran too, so it included the military and other Missions to Iraq and Iran. But Baghdad was a bigger post than Tehran, so there was a chance for more activities.

Of course, we spent a lot of time in that coup in Tehran, which we haven't talked about yet. We didn't have the opportunities in Iran that we had in Iraq.

Q: Which coup was that?

HAMILTON: In the 50s, when the Shah left Iran and the Mossedegh government came in, and then the Zahedi government. So, there was so much political activity in Iran, we didn't have the opportunity to do some of the things that we did in Baghdad.

Q: Were you more or less sequestered like people are today? I really refer to it as the "fortress mentality." Could you go out during these times? What was it like?

HAMILTON: Yes. In Baghdad, except right during the worst of any coup we were free to move. I recall a few days when I was confined to the house, not knowing what was happening to my husband at the office and all the rest of it. There was a lot of that in Iran when all this business was going on. It started very shortly after we arrived, when the prime minister, Rasmara, had been assassinated. (pause) Do you want me to go back and finish Baghdad?

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Q: Well, whichever. My problem, because I'm "on the road" so to speak, is that I didn't really have time to research each of your posts. Baghdad does interest me because it's so much in the news today. I think it would interest people to know how your life in Baghdad was 25-30 years ago, as compared to today when our diplomats have been hostages there.

HAMILTON: In Baghdad in our day there was the assassination of the prime minister, Abdul Karim Kassim. Of course, it was a dictatorship that he worked under. I don't think he came in as prime minister right after — I'd have to verify — the '58 assassination, coup, and so forth.

Q: Was he responsible for that coup or involved in it?

HAMILTON: I'm sorry, I just don't remember. As far as I can recall, he was the only prime minister up to then that we had known; I know about the other things only by hearsay. And then he was assassinated. Because the people down in Basra were skeptical that this man they thought was so wonderful had been killed, his dead body was pictured on Baghdad television and transmitted to Basra as well as pretty much all over Iraq, to prove that he really was dead. I have pictures of that taken off the TV set.

That was a very horrifying thing on Baghdad TV. They interrupted a screening of Felix the Cat! Someone grabbed the body by the head and pulled it up so you could see for sure that it was he. It didn't affect us too personally. I do remember that one night John was called out to a meeting that ran quite late. I was worried because I could see tracer bullets arcing across the bridge near our home and I knew he had to cross that bridge to return home, so I was a little bit concerned and awfully glad to see him when he did come during the day. I had watched the shooting from the roof of our house, not knowing whether the bombs that the opposition were dropping were falling on the palace, about the length of a football field from the embassy, or whether they were hitting the embassy, where my husband was still at work. He knew I was all right. One of the embassy staff had

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walked the 20-minute journey to our house to see if I was all right. He met our cook, who was leaving, and learned from Daoud “she's all right, she is there all alone,” because it happened that the houseboy was up in his home town, “and I just took her in some eggs and bread and she'll be all right.”

So the staff person turned around and returned to the embassy, which was understandable, bu(she laughs) I didn't get the message that my husband was all right! He finally managed to reach home about 4 o'clock that afternoon. The telephones were all “out” at that time, that's another experience, so he couldn't call but he did manage to drive home via back streets. He said he could only turn around, he just wanted a clean shirt, and he would spend the night at the embassy. I said, (in plaintive tones) “Can't I go and help you?” Because he'd said that schoolchildren had all been evacuated to the embassy and were having to be fed. I said, “Well, isn't there anything I can do?” He said, “Yes, just stay home and keep away. There are too many people there already.” (both laugh heartily)

So I did. He didn't return home until the next morning. As I said, the schoolchildren had all to be brought into the embassy. I knew that I had helped already because I ran the Embassy commissary — with paid help I'd been stocking the shelves, which they were now eating from. The embassy had a small snack bar-

Q: How long were the children there?

HAMILTON: Two days. Of course, parents were concerned, trying to come. The telephones were ringing off the wall, but they managed very well. I remember one embassy wife who lived in the compound who baked beautiful brea— she just stayed there all day long making bread.

Q: Everyone helping in their own way, obviously. When that was over, life went back to normal more or less?

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HAMILTON: More or less, yes. We were under curfew for quite a long time. One of those hair-raising experiences came along. We had a pass from the embassy to be out at night because John had to pick up a visiting fireman (I don't remember who) and we lived not far from the airport and we were going to bring him home to stay with us. We had returned to within a block of our house when John was stopped by one of the guards on the street who was poking a gun through the car window at John. The guard had no idea what the pass was, but John was very calm in dealing with him. I laid my hand on our visitor's knee and indicated, "Just don't move!" because all of a sudden another guard appeared on my side of the car, poking his gun in the window. We sat there like a couple of stiff dummies. Finally, in gestures and sign language, John reassured the guard. John did not speak Arabic although this was our second post in the Near East. The Department had sent him to school to study Urdu, so we had assumed our next post would be in Pakistan, but we were sent to Baghdad. We both knew a few phrases, but Arabic is a very difficult language and I think it's better not to speak it than to say something "wrong." (she laughs)

Anyway, we got back to our house. Our garage was so small that anybody in the car except the driver had to get out before the car was put in, so John pulled up to the garage and I got out and started in the house. John came in, saying, "Well, that was a bit of a scary experience." I asked, "Did you by chance know that there was a man at my window, at the back?" "My God no," he said, "I don't know how I'd have gotten out of that." I was glad he hadn't known, though at the time I was afraid the visitor might betray his presence somehow. So, we had a good stiff drink and went to bed. I can't remember a single thing about that visitor, the experience just sort of knocked everything out of my head. I don't think he stayed more than a night or two.

Q: The circumstances would certainly be far more vivid in your memory, because you had lots of visitors, I'm sure.

HAMILTON: Oh, yes. That was a pleasant experience but visitors did not like to get up at four or five o'clock in the morning to go out to Babylon. Everybody wanted to see Babylon.

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I didn't blame them, and the drive took only about an hour and a half, but it got hot so fast that if you were there at certain times of the year, there was no way to do Babylon except to arise very early and return by the time it got hot.

Q: How many times did you do that, over and over again?

HAMILTON: I didn't always go. Marnie Akins, the wife of Jim Akins, who later became ambassador to Saudi Arabia, was an antiquities buff and we all relied on her knowledge, so she usually accompanied the visitors. She enjoyed doing this and learned something new herself on each visit. I'd been there a number of times. Ctesiphon was another site visitors wanted to see. It's not so well-known — I had never heard of it before we went to Iraq — a ruined palace remarkable for a tremendous arch still standing. The countryside was interesting, too.

We took Duke Ellington and some of his band there when they came to play in Baghdad. He became entranced with a little old man who must have been 90 years old who sat in the ruins playing the two-stringed sitar. Ellington asked him to repeat what he'd been playing and later on the composer wrote a song based on the theme he had heard there. Still later, when Ellington came to Expo 68 in Montreal with his band, he invited us to come to his concert. During the evening he announced, "Because the Hamiltons are here with me tonight, I'm going to play the song I wrote from my experience in Baghdad." And he proceeded to play it. So that was one of the benefits of our Baghdad tour.

Q: Did he call the song "Ctesiphon" or — ?(Mrs. Hamilton says she can't remember) We'll have to find out what song Duke Ellington wrote after visiting Baghdad.

HAMILTON: This was in 1963. He was there at the time of a coup, the fourth one attempted that year. We were under curfew while he was playing there. He gave three concerts, free of course, and we had listeners stacked against the walls. The hall seated at least 300 or 400 people and we had to turn people away every night. After the performance, his orchestra had to get right back in the bus and return to the hotel. Until this current

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war against Saddam Hussein, I don't think the Hotel Baghdad had ever had that much business!!I'm sure the bar was very busy. The musicians did cooperate very nicely.

Q: Tell me more about the sitar player. Was this someone that USIS knew about and so took Duke Ellington there or was the old man's playing just then pure happenstance?

HAMILTON: We didn't know for sure. We knew about the sitar player, and knew that he usually was there. That was all he did — sit there, and when people came, play for them. But there was no way you could arrange the happening in advance, so we just went, hoping he'd be there, and playing. Duke himself was most interested in visiting Ctesiphon; only a few of his band members went along. The arch and the ruin impressed him very much but the sitar player utterly fascinated him.

Q: So Ellington and his orchestra were just holed up in the hotel during those two days, along with everybody else.

HAMILTON: Yes. The curfew was lifted for the concerts, however.

Q: How interesting — all these hundreds of people could come flocking to hear Duke Ellington after the coup had been raging in the streets all day! Wonderful, wonderful. The contrast between them and — do you think that would happen in Baghdad today?

HAMILTON: Well, the people were very much interested in hearing Duke Ellington. There was no question about that, and I suppose they still would be today if something like that were to happen. A good orchestra, entertainment, something. I remember a couple more interesting things about Ellington's visit. My husband was planning a briefing. As you know, all those art visitors were briefed by Ambassador [R.C.] Strong, because they were supposed to learn something about the country. John was planning to have them come to the USIS library. I said, "No. These poor men have been on the road, they've been in Africa, and India, let's have a buffet breakfast here at the house, a let-come-who-will

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sort of thing.” He said, “I don't suppose all of them will come anyway, they aren't all that interested.”

I'd say at least half of the orchestra came. During the morning the phone rang and the caller said, “Mr. Hamilton, this is Edward Ellington, is it too late to come to breakfast?” John replied, “Of course not, please do come. Do you have a car or shall I send one for you?” Ellington said that he had a car and was sure his driver could find us. He came and I have pictures of him and me scrambling eggs. The bacon was fried in the kitchen and the hot rolls and everything kept coming out of the kitchen, but we were doing the eggs at table with an electric frying pan. Ellington said, “Nope, you can't make them for me, I'm going to do it myself.” And so he did. (she laughs) The musicians began to arrive about 10 a.m. and I think the last of them finally left when it dawned on them I'd probably have to give them dinner. (both laugh)

Q: Did they bring their instruments and play?

HAMILTON: No, we had [only] our piano. But they were just enjoying being in somebody's home, with coffee and drinks. They were just enjoying being there and talking.

Q: They were on a State Department tour?

HAMILTON: Yes. This was at the time the Marine ball was to be held at the embassy, so about 10 members of his orchestra played at the ball — a very interesting experience, too! I don't know how the Marines got the curfew lifted for that, but they did (Willard Devlin, who was assigned to the embassy in Baghdad at the time, suggests that the Marine Ball was held early in the evening to comply with the 11 o'clock curfew.). Things were beginning to quiet down, there wasn't so much activity on the streets by then. I do recall we had one small problem — the orchestra decided they would leave the morning after the ball for their next stop, Beirut. For some reason we weren't able to communicate with Beirut to tell them to meet the group at Beirut airport but I believe word finally got through before they did.

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Q: Do you have any programs among your memorabilia of the Ellington concert? Was it recorded?

HAMILTON: No, the hall wasn't suitable for recording. I think he simply announced each number, and talked a good deal. I don't think I have pictures of the hall and the audience.

Q: You were going to tell me what you were doing in Chicago with films when you and your husband moved there.

HAMILTON: To go back a bit before that, John and I were working in the University of Minnesota Theater when we became engaged. I was business and advertising manager for the theater, which was part of the curriculum, but the theater itself was self-supporting. Ticket sales had to pay for everything except for the salary of the director, who was a professor as well. My husband just before World War II was teaching film and the use of it in the Navy V-12 program at the University's junior college, so our life just before and after we were married revolved around film. I had to quit my job because both husband and wife weren't allowed to teach. This was in 1941 and we were married in August. My husband's physical exam revealed a heart murmur so he was ineligible for the military. While he was teaching the course we spent many evenings working on films and I learned a great deal.

In Chicago John was with the British Information Services as head of the Motion Pictures and Publications unit. He worked with movie theaters (with 35mm) and with schools, libraries, etc., using 16mm films. I was with the Chicago Film Council in charge of their International 16mm Film Festival to be shown in a local motion picture theater. I had six committees of experts in each field covering science, nature, literature, travel, etc.

We wrote to producers of 16mm films all over the world asking them for prints to screen and select for theatrical showings over a period of four weeks. We received hundreds. Admission was free for whoever wanted to see these films and the theater was filled every Saturday. Just before that I had been working with the Chicago Council on Foreign

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Relations, moderating a discussion group using 16mm films as starting point for the panel, whose members I would introduce.

Q: Which job did you have to give up when you were married?

HAMILTON: The theater job for University of Minnesota. I had graduated in 1932 and been a YWCA secretary for three years when I realized I was in a rut professionally, though I loved working with high school girls. A special experience in that was taking 12 girls from Minnesota every week to the Century of Progress fair in Chicago. Most of them were bigger than me, but we had no problems, they liked me and cooperated well.

Then I decided to go to graduate school at Minnesota, for a Master's degree at least, in theater and speech. One day I walked into the theater and asked the young woman who was the advertising manager to lunch with me. She said she couldn't, so I said, "If I come back and volunteer some time, could you go out then?" "Yes," she said. I went to work as a volunteer that afternoon and left when I had to, four or five years later. (she laughs)

Q: Because in the meantime they had hired you.

HAMILTON: Yes. They put me on the payroll and I was her assistant for a couple of years before she quit when her doctor husband took up practice elsewhere. I succeeded her. When John was given a trip to Great Britain to acclimate him to his job with the BIS and I tagged along at our expense.

Q: You must have been more interested in what your husband was doing in Tehran and Baghdad and other places than what the American women's clubs were doing. Were you? I think you were a very good sport to do all that you did.

HAMILTON: I did both, yes.

Q: You did both, you were able to help him-

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HAMILTON: Yes, I was able to help him a great deal. One of the things we did, the day after we arrived in Tehran, was to inspect the building where the USIS program, which was just getting off the ground there, would be located. Washington had been shipping in film, and we found a room filled at least halfway to the ceiling with cans of 16mm. films which we were supposed to show eventually in Iran. Well, there they were. So John said, "That's your job!" With help from some boys on the staff I started putting them on shelves, alphabetically to begin with so one could find them. I'll show you the catalogue that we made to classify the films. I worked with a local printer to set it up in both English and Farsi. One of the first big jobs was for the translators to render the film titles in Arabic. The catalogue ran to about 25 pages, English on one side, Farsi on the other.

In Tripoli I did the same thing. Films were already shelved in alphabetical order, and they were being shown to some extent but we pushed showing them. Again I did the cataloguing, all of this as a volunteer. I loved doing it, I was happy to do it.

Q: You worked with your husband always as a volunteer?

HAMILTON: Always a volunteer. Whatever he wanted me to do, (laughing) I did it.

Q: And when you weren't helping him, you quite willingly worked with the American women's organization, as president of that and-

HAMILTON: Yes.

Q: Were you conscious at those times that you were keeping up morale at post, or were just doing it because it was there? I think your organizations were great morale boosters for the American community beyond the embassy compound.

HAMILTON: Yes, that's true. I would give Mary Jernegan credit for some of that. We both felt that anything that would keep up the morale of the military establishments, et cetera, as well as that of the girls married to locals, was worth it. I think we were conscious of that.

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Q: Since I love wandering through souks and casbahs, I can't resist asking did you get into the souks of Baghdad? Those were "free" enough?

HAMILTON: Yes. The bazaar in Tehran was the most fascinating. The one in Baghdad didn't seem to have quite the local color. I think it was Ida Richards who said, "You always remember the first post you were in as the best one, and that things there, some of them, were 'the best'."(she laughs)

Q: Well, I think it probably makes the most profound impression, don't you?

HAMILTON: I think that's true probably.

Q: Because when you had seen the souks of Tehran , all right, the ones of Baghdad were different but it hadn't that first impact. We were in Morocco for four years, and of course the two cities are Fez and Marrakesh. Well, it often depended on which one you saw first that became your favorite.

HAMILTON: Yes. I was always sorry not to get to Morocco. The borders seemed always to be closed between Libya and Morocco whenever we had free time to go.

Q: You were in Libya between 1954 and '57. That was when King Idris was still in power, because Qadhafi didn't come in until the late 60s.

HAMILTON: Right, I had never heard of Qadhafi.

Q: You roamed around in Sabratha and Leptis Magna (Roman ruins near Tripoli)?

HAMILTON: One time we took our car to Europe, met my sister there and flew back with her to Tripoli. She fell in love with the place and kept us on our toes all the time she was there. Leptis Magna and Sabratha interested her very much. She'd never had an opportunity to see ruins-

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Q: Still so untouched, even when we were there right after the '67 War.

HAMILTON: We had three years in Libya, with home leave between there and Baghdad. Our longest assignment was in Baghdad — five long years without home leave. We were to go out, supposedly, for three years in Baghdad with no home leave, when we accepted. Then Ambassador Strong arrived, and every time we'd say we were due to go home, when do we go on home leave, he'd say, "You can't, I need you." So we stayed, for five years without home leave.

Q: Did your husband go out and film in these countries? Or did he set up-

HAMILTON: He supervised film units and always had his own camera with him but he was not doing anything official. We went out with the mobile units; I'll search for a picture of that. In Tehran we had about 50 mobile units with generators and motion picture projectors so they could show films in the villages, and we went with them a number of times. We also took one of the carryalls [large vans]. I went with John and one of his assistants when we went from Tehran to Tabriz, and then along the Russian border and the Caspian Sea to Meshed, then back to Tripoli. We made that sort of round trip, which took us about two weeks. We slept out. Sometimes we could find a tea house along the way. We had flat tires and they mended the inner tubes with needle and thread. (both laugh) We went to Isfahan and Shiraz in various trips.

We did travel. We had more opportunity to travel in Tehran than we had in Libya. Twice in Tripoli we went to Benghazi by car. We saw a good deal of Libya that way. When I read about it these days, I know where things are. When we were in Baghdad we drove to Basra, then on to Kuwait, so just now I am able to visualize what's happening there.

[Several statements obscured by static. Resuming, evidently concerns present war against Saddam Hussein, not clearly audible] *Q: You said "no sad tales about servants."*

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HAMILTON: I never had anyone steal anything. I gave them access to anything. I wasn't home enough to hand out food the way some other people felt they had to, to keep their supplies locked up and so forth. If mine were locked up, the servants had keys that they could use and they did use them. I never had any problems with servants. I inherited some good ones. In Tripoli, I remember, I waited almost six months to get the cook we got when the air attach# left but it was well worth it. You shared servants for parties, in Libya particularly — Muhamad was known as “Muhamad Hamilton” and John used to say sometimes, “You know, I wonder if these people really want us at this party, or is it because they want Muhamad?” (both laugh heartily)

Q: Because there were many Muhamads, so Muhamad Hamilton-

HAMILTON: — was one that everybody wanted. He spent a lot of time in the Residence with Mrs. Tappan in Tripoli, too.

Q: And your servant in Baghdad in '62-'63 when Kassim was killed, you said he translated.

HAMILTON: Yes, he was the servant, the cook, who met the man coming to me from the embassy. It was my house boy who spoke better English.

Q: So he could keep you informed.

HAMILTON: Yes. Actually, I did not interview him for the job. His brother came, and I was a little bit skeptical about the brother but I thought, “Well, okay, I'll try him.” I said to him, “I'll try you. If it works that's fine. You'll be here tomorrow?” “Yes.” He came “tomorrow” and it turned out to be his brother, Sliwol, (Fenzi laughs) whom I'd expected to interview.

Q: Did they explain why the brother came for the interview?

HAMILTON: I guess just because Sliwol couldn't come! I never did find out why but I must say Sliwol turned out to be an excellent servant and was there for quite some time. That's

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an interesting thing, too... My cook was a Shiite Muslim, rather unusual for Baghdad. Sliwol was an Armenian. The girl who did the upstairs work was of a third religion, I can't think which, but they all got along very well together. Sliwol was the only one who stayed in the house. The others came and went each day.

Q: You had bursitis in your heel?

HAMILTON: Yes. So when John went out to the Tehran airport to meet Vice President and Mrs. Nixon, John just apologized for my absence by saying I had bursitis. The doctor had told me that if I'd stay off my feet for the rest of the week I would be able to attend the big reception to take place a week later at the Shah's palace. When we arrived at the reception I was separated from John by several people in the line. I was with the Bruces, and when we came opposite Nixon, I was introduced to him as "Mrs. Hamilton," but not with John. Nixon, looking at me, inquired, "How is your heel?" (she laughs) I was absolutely amazed that he would, for onweek, remember that little detail. So I wasn't surprised when later on, in Tripoli, going through the line at the reception Ambassador Tappan gave for Nixon, I said, "I've met you in Tehran, how many years ago I don't remember." And he replied, "Yes, I remember. You had trouble with your heel."

Q: Good politician, hmmm?

HAMILTON: Good politician.

Q: So he really paid attention to detail. (They spend some moments looking at photos)

End of interview

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Spouse: John Lawrence Hamilton (Deceased)

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Spouse Entered Service: November 1949 Left Service: May 1971 You Entered Service: Same

Status: Widow of Retiree

Posts: November 1949-March 1954 Tehran, Iran August 1954-1957 Tripoli, Lybia
1957-1960 Washington, DC (Voice of America) June 1960-1965 Baghdad, Iraq
1965-1971 Washington, DC (USIS) 1967 Montreal, Canada (Detailed to Expo 67)

Spouse's Position: Tehran - Motion Picture Officer, Deputy PAO Tripoli, Baghdad - PAO
Washington - VOA Director, Iranian, Pakistan Services; USIA Director, Operations Center

Place/Date of birth: Minnesota, June 18, 1910 Maiden Name: Margaret June Miller

Parents: Willis and Alice Miller

Schools: BA University of Minnesota, 1932

Date/Place of Marriage: Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 2, 1941

Volunteer and Paid Positions held: At Post: As volunteer in Iran, under my spouse's supervision, organized a complete Film Library, including a 25-page film catalogue in English and Farsi. (Film cans had previously been scattered over the floor)

In Washington, DC: As a member of AAFSW, ran the Poster Section of the Book Fair for two years (see photo)

Prior to Foreign Service: (3 paid positions) Chicago, as head of international 16 mm film festival for Chicago Film Council. Minneapolis, as Business and Advertising Manager of the University of Minnesota Theatre, a self supporting theatre except for salary of the Director/Professor. Also two years as a Girl Reserve Secretary for the YWCA