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Guinea 1966-1968

Two weeks after our arrival in Guinea, on October 30, we heard confounding news: the Guinean delegation en route to the OAU (Organization of African Unity) meeting to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, had been arrested in Accra, Ghana. Since February 1966, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana had lived in exile in Guinea as a personal guest of Sekou Touré. The relations between Ghana and Guinea were tense. Since the Guinean delegation was on a Pan-American Airways plane, the Guinean government immediately accused the United States of having fomented a plot against Guinea and made our country responsible for Ghana's action. In retaliation, U.S. embassy personnel and their families were put under house arrest.

It was a Sunday and the dumbfounded Americans returning from the beach, still drowsy with sand, sun, and salt water, rushed to their cars to go home. Radio Conakry blasted the news every half hour. The children and I went to spend the night at the house of the embassy doctor, Dr. Wilde, and his wife. Alan, as chief of the Political Section, went straight to the office since he was the duty officer. He finally made it home at two in the morning after crossing several road blocks. Reluctantly, we left our friends' house and moved back to ours. We were notified that we were then under house arrest.

Monday morning, Alan left for the office. At 10 am, as I was helping the children do their homework, I noticed a group of Guineans approaching our gate. With a shock I noticed that they were carrying guns. They were wearing ragged civilian clothes. The whole situation began to worry me: my husband had the car, and there was no telephone in the house. The closest Americans lived more than one mile away. Alan returned in the afternoon, escorted by a *gendarme*, and reported that the other American embassy families were also under house arrest. Hurriedly, he said that in case of trouble we should climb over the wall to our immediate neighbors, the United Arab Republic (UAR) Chancery and the Yugoslav Embassy Residence.

Then he left. The children and I went on a reconnaissance expedition to study the escape routes over the walls. Hardly had we walked a few steps from the house when a threatening voice yelled, "*Rentrez tout de suite à la maison!*" ("Get back inside immediately!"). We noticed two guards in a tree over our fence, waving their guns at us. The group by the gate was getting bigger. Philip tried to open the shutters of his room and was yelled at again.

In the evening we heard the news that Robinson McIlvaine, the American ambassador, had found his house broken into and his wife Alice cornered into a room

with their two children. The McIlvaine family remained under house arrest for a couple of days.

The atmosphere in the streets of Conakry was volatile. The eighth anniversary of Guinea's independence was being marked by demonstrations and huge gatherings at the stadium to hear speeches given by the president.

On the third day of being prisoners in our home, the civilian guards were replaced by men in khaki or faded blue uniforms. They belonged to the Militia, but not to the Gendarmes, who were a regular government police force.

Our fear went up a notch when our regular night watchman opened the gates to let the Militia enter. Now, they were practically in our house. One of the soldiers had brought his sheepskin. He took off his shoes, and there, in the shade of the mango tree, accomplished his afternoon prayers.

Colleagues from our embassy stopped by our house several times to offer their help and ask if we needed food. They were met with hostility by our guards. "*Tu ne peux pas parler aux Logans.* (You can't talk to the Logans). Bring them food if you want and then get out!" A *gendarme*, politely and in good French, tried to intercede. Alan explained that he was a diplomat and that we had an agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A sullen-faced young guard holding a bare bayonet answered, "*Je m'en fous, tu es en prison.*" ("I don't give a damn, you are in prison.")

Later, a Peugeot pulled up in front of the house. A man in a Mao Tse-tung tunic came out. In perfect French he explained to us that he was responsible for the district and had orders to protect the Americans. However, nothing could be done yet to free us, since the armed guards had received orders from the local committee, which in turn was answerable to the section. But the section was now in session so nothing could be done. This meant more waiting. We remained prisoners in our own house for a whole week, much longer than the other embassy members.

This was our first introduction to Africa. Was it a preview of our life for the next two years? By then we had established friendly relations with our neighbors, the Egyptians and the Yugoslavs. They asked if we needed anything, cigarettes, bread? The Yugoslavs were handing toys over the fence. We were living in a bare house since our household effects, including books and toys, had not yet arrived. Surrounded by threatening guns, the children commented that it was the worst Halloween they'd ever had.

Lebanon 1956-1960

One day, in late morning, I was returning with the children from the beach. The streets were unusually quiet. A woman popped her head out of a window and cautioned, "Quick, go inside, there is a civil war going on." It was mid July 1958. The buildings were shuttered and our neighborhood was deserted. We rushed to the house. Soon Alan joined us.

We happened to be on the front line separating the Arab quarter, or Basta, from the Christian Patrakie district. Our house was soon engulfed in rounds of bullet fire. I remember feeling more excitement than fear in the midst of this noisy shelling. I quickly told the children to hide under the dining room table. My priority was to stop them from looking out the windows.

Our study was a beautiful room with many windows curved in a Moorish style. Alan had a very heavy metal desk, which followed us around the world. During the shooting, Alan crept under that desk and remained on the phone with the American embassy. He started giving a live report of the action, just as a CNN reporter would do from any war frontline. Accounts of Alan's exploits were related in several books. Beatrice Russell, the author of one of those books wrote: "When the economic officer (Alan) called, we could hear someone firing just outside. Alan said, "Hear that? That guy has been firing steadily since eleven o'clock. He does not seem to be aiming at anything—just keeps firing in the air. We've had two bullets in our living room, however. I dug them out of the woodwork for souvenirs."

In Beirut, street fighting started between rebels and the government forces. A prison was stormed. Sporadic explosions could be heard around town. Being in the middle of a civil war is most confusing, and it took me some time to understand what was happening and why. The Middle East situation was particularly tense following the Iraq coup that toppled King Faisal II on July 14, 1958. Syria and Egypt had just formed the United Arab Republic. In Lebanon, Rachid Karame, the Sunni Muslim prime minister, wanted a "rapprochement" with the UAR and supported Nasser and Arab nationalism. Lebanon's president, Camille Chamoun, a Maronite Christian, felt threatened and called the United States for help, since the Lebanese army seemed unable to cope. The American response was swift. President Eisenhower authorized the dispatch of two aircraft carriers, the USS *Essex* and USS *Saratoga*, which sailed from Greece. Overall, about 14,000 U.S. Marines took part in the operation.

All the official American families had to be evacuated from Beirut in July 1958. This order happened to coincide with our scheduled home leave. When we returned from the

United States in late summer, there was another outburst of violence, resulting in a new curfew. Would we be evacuated? we wondered. One morning we saw several tanks approaching on our street—the no man's land between the Christian and Moslem districts. This was the only time I felt really scared. I imagined the fierce gun battle to ensue if the tanks were to be attacked. Fortunately the tanks kept on going and disappeared down Patrakie Street without firing.

During periods of lull we went on with our normal life. We even spent time at our beach, about eight kilometers south of Beirut. The children and I were there one day when we saw a small group of U.S. Marines, looking rather relaxed, disembarking from a landing craft. Whenever the situation seemed calm, I took the car to go shopping. I continued playing tennis at the Alumni Club. My regular partner, Bea Russell, and her husband, Earl, also with the American embassy, were close friends. A few years later we heard the terrible news of Earl's death. Bea and Earl had been walking in the Mauritanian desert with other people. Earl somehow left the group and became totally disoriented from sunstroke. He never recovered.