

Michael J. Molloy

Uganda Collection Oral History Project: Immigration

Michael Molloy: “The first week in October was the Ugandan national day and all the other embassies were shutting down, and we decided, with Ottawa’s permission, that the secretaries and the younger officers would all get the weekend off because reinforcements were arriving. We were getting more doctors, more visa officers, and three or four more of these crack visa typists from the same section that the three original women were from. So they all arrived hot to trot on the long weekend and we shipped the youngsters—the ‘youngsters,’ I was all of twenty-seven at the time—so the ‘youngsters’ we sent off and we used those three days for a real drive.

The medical technicians worked twelve-hour days, they got caught up. The visa typists came in and they got it all caught up and we went through all the applications because we said, “Okay, we will go through and screen now and make a list of everybody we’re going to see until the end of October. So we can get those lists into the paper right away so people know we’re going to see them.” Because we were beginning to see a lot of people not showing up because with things getting bad, if you had a British thing and you didn’t you didn’t know when the Canadians were going to see you, you didn’t stick around, you went.

That was a long, brutal weekend, but at the end of it, we were confident that we could fill the flights and we could get probably something like six thousand people. It was at that weekend that the boss created a new unit that would be in charge of the documentation stream, getting everything on to the files and then when it’s time to make the visa make the visa, call the person in, put their name up—or their number up—call them in, and decide, are you going to come on one of our charters or are you going to go some other way? Sort it all out.

The same unit was responsible for doing the Uganda end of the charters. We now had the charter schedule—I think there were twenty to thirty flights that were coming for us, to us. And the boss, interestingly enough, reached down into this pool of five or six visa officers who had arrived, and picked the youngest one, Gerry Campbell. Gerry had worked for a month in London interviewing as a trainee, and he worked for me for two weeks, and on the basis of that six weeks, he was put in charge of coordinating all of the paper flow and meshing that with getting people on airplanes. He had managed to get somebody from one of the American airlines to help him, and they set up a whole system. The first thing he decided—and it was really brilliant—was we were not going to have our people go that thirty miles out to the airport unescorted because we were beginning to hear how the people, the British and others, were being ripped off at every stop along the way.

So what we did was, everybody had to come to the parking lot of the hotel, the baggage was weighed there, extra baggage was, “Take your pick, take your pick. You can take this one, you can take that one, you can’t take them both.” And onto the buses. There was always a very

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dignified looking car in the front always with a Canadian flag even though there was no ambassador—we got in some trouble over that, which we ignored—and then the buses were draped with big Canadian flags and it got so, when they came to the roadblocks they just opened up and we'd pass through. The other thing was that our guys would stay there until the plane was gone and they would follow the people through the processing. Now, you couldn't protect them from whatever the customs officers were going to do, but the fact that we'd send out soldiers, we'd send out—if they wanted a bit of a break—we'd send all these young muscular fellows out there, and the fact that we'd stand there and watch offered a degree of protection to them. And then that little team who went out with them would never come back until the flight was in the air."