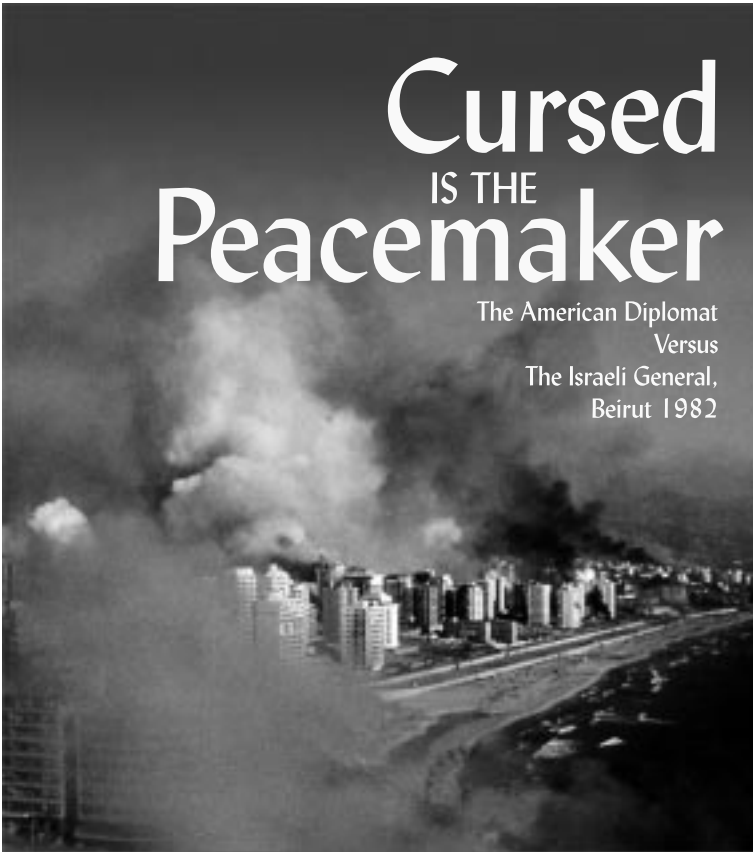


Sample chapter

Cursed IS THE Peacemaker

The American Diplomat
Versus
The Israeli General,
Beirut 1982



John Boykin has done an outstanding job of portraying a preeminent peace negotiator and profoundly complex man. Part pragmatist, part idealist, Phil Habib possessed a powerful personality--brilliant, profane, tenacious, and courageous--a dedicated career diplomat who was the one sent when the issues were the most intractable.

Henry Kissinger

John Boykin

Foreword by George Shultz

PLEASE NOTE

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Rather than pepper the text with over 2,000 superscript footnote numbers, the author begins each endnote with a page number and a few key words to peg it to the passage to which it refers.

In this sample chapter, the endnotes begin on p. 220,

Background to this chapter

In 1982 Lebanon was overrun with two of Israel's most hated enemies: the PLO and Syrians. Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon launched an invasion of Lebanon on June 6, 1982, to destroy the PLO once and for all. His plan was that the Israeli army would trap the PLO in their stronghold, Beirut, then his Lebanese Maronite Christian ally would go house to house doing the actual dirty work of slaughtering the PLO fighters for him. When his ally reneged on their end of the deal, Sharon had no Plan B except to bomb and shell the city and threaten to send his own troops in on the ground.

In hopes of defusing the crisis, American special envoy Philip Habib tried for weeks to arrange to evacuate the PLO and Syrians from the city. He would need a neutral multinational military force to conduct the evacuation. Viewing Habib's diplomacy as at best futile and at worst jeopardizing his victory, Sharon raced to win his siege militarily before Habib could end it diplomatically. Time after time, Sharon did everything in his power to prevent a diplomatic settlement while Habib plodded on.

The Marines

He needed us to do the damn thing right and not add to his shots. We were around Habib enough to sense that, one, the man knew what he was doing; and two, what he was trying to do was extremely difficult. As long as it didn't jeopardize our force, we were going to hang tough with him.

Colonel James Mead

Despite having spent much of July grouching that his negotiations were dead in the water, in late July Phil Habib began the process of handing off his plan to the people who would execute it. He did so partly because of his inexplicable optimism and partly to drum up some momentum. The most important of those people were the handful of American Marines chosen to coordinate with him. On July 26 he helicoptered out to the carrier *USS Guam* in the Mediterranean to discuss his concept of the military role with some of them and with Colonel James Mead, who would command the Marines ashore.

They did not like what they heard.

Habib started by laying out a map of Beirut and explaining the situation on the ground. He pointed out Muslim West Beirut, Christian East Beirut, and the no-man's land called the Green Line that separated them. He summarized the civil war that the Israeli invasion had only interrupted and the reasons the Syrian army had been invited into Lebanon as peacekeepers and turned into hated occupiers. He showed how Sharon had the PLO and several thousand Syrian troops trapped in West Beirut, surrounded by Israeli troops, by his Maronite Christian allies, and by the sea. He explained why the Palestinians were nearly as afraid of the Christians as they were of Sharon's forces, fearing that either enemy could move in for the kill at any time.

His goal, he explained to the Marines, was to evacuate the PLO and Syrians from West Beirut before the Israelis or the Christians went into its streets and tenements to root them out. His fear was not simply that they would kill PLO or Syrian fighters. His fear was that, as those guerrillas and soldiers fought back, house-to-house combat would also indiscriminately

kill countless women and children, bystanders, Israelis, Christians—anybody within reach. “Unless we can defuse this crisis,” he told the Marines, “there’s going to be a bloodbath of enormous proportions.”

The centerpiece of his concept was that the Marines would insert themselves as a buffer to separate the IDF and Christians in East Beirut from the PLO and Syrians in West Beirut. Without such a buffer, an evacuation was unthinkable. The Marines, he said, would be like the meat in a sandwich, separating the two slices of bread. He wanted to bring them into the port of Beirut, then have them extend about 3 kilometers along the Green Line.

The Marines gave Habib a soaking splash of cold water. Mead said, “Of course we can deploy along the Green Line. But what do you want us to do once we’re there?”

“First, I want you to disarm all the Muslims.”

“Then what?”

“Then I want you to corral all the arms together and burn the weapons.”

“Uh-huh. And then?”

“Then you disarm the Christians.”

The Marines had been listening poker faced. They realized that Habib was speaking conceptually, that he had not yet worked out the details. Still, one of them says, “my jaw was down around my ankles” at the audacity—or naïveté—of Habib’s scenario. At this point Mead drew his Boston accent to full strength and said, “Let me see if I understand this properly, Ambassador. You want to put 1,000 United States Marines between some 15,000 Israelis, some 4,000 to 5,000 Christian forces, and some 20,000 to 25,000 Palestinians and Syrians and other forces. Is that what you want me to do?”

“Yeah.”

“And then you want me to disarm them?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m going to tell you right now, Ambassador, we’re not going to do that. That is not possible to be done.”

Habib looked at Mead as though the Marine had just spat in the punchbowl. For a long moment, the two men just stared at each other. Finally Habib asked, “And why *aren’t* you going to do it? What do you think *is* possible?”

Sobering Realization

That moment set the tone for their whole relationship from then on. Habib’s willingness to listen won the Marines over. In the weeks ahead Habib never shrank from telling them precisely what he wanted—loudly and bluntly—

The Marines

but he always listened to their comeback. They respected that. They considered his attitude reasonable and conducive to coming up with workable solutions. The 6-foot 6-inch Mead, who describes himself as a street kid from Boston, felt right at home with the 5-foot 10-inch diplomat from Brooklyn. “Guys from Brooklyn don’t hem and haw,” he says. “They let you know what the hell they’re thinking. A lot of times you’re not going to like it, but you’re going to get it straight in the chops the first time. That’s the way he was.”

Beyond the specifics, Habib was asking the military to take on a mission unlike anything for which they had been trained. Soldiers are trained to kill and destroy. In a peacekeeping mission, by contrast, they’re trying to keep other people from killing and destroying. Warriors force their way into a situation; peacekeepers must be welcomed in, small in number and lightly armed lest they come across as conquerors and occupiers. So they are always outnumbered and outgunned by the belligerents. They thus have to keep the peace through tact, diplomacy, and voluntary cooperation.

As the Marines explained to Habib the logistical impossibilities of what he had in mind, he quickly saw that, unless he wanted to send in a massive force—and he did not—the vastly outnumbered MNF was not going to be in much position to compel anybody to do anything. If the PLO, the Syrians, the Israelis, and the Lebanese Christians were going to follow his program, it would have to be by their voluntary consent. This was a sobering realization. He had so far seen few glimmers of cooperation from anybody.

Four days later, on July 30, the PLO again offered to leave Beirut, an offer Habib considered firm and sincere. He decided the time was right for his Marine liaison team to come ashore to start nailing down the particulars of the MNF’s job. The Marines chosen to coordinate with him were Colonel James Schulster, who would be the highest ranking officer; Lieutenant Colonel Edmond Gaucher Jr., Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Johnston, and Lieutenant Colonel Charles R. Smith Jr. But Sharon’s massive assaults in the next few days made it impossible for them to come into Beirut. By August 5 Sharon had backed off, and Habib told them to come now. For Habib, this was the beginning of the endgame, like the start of rehearsals for a playwright. His negotiations with the Israelis and the PLO were continuing, and he felt that, once his liaison team came in, he could complete arrangements for the MNF’s deployment and get the evacuation going in a matter of days.

The Marine liaisons finally met with Habib at Yarze for the first time at 9 A.M. August 7. He went over the general outline of his plan but emphasized that “this is not going to be a textbook exercise. Flexibility is going to be the key. We’ve gotta be realistic and recognize that we could be thwarted

in what we're trying to do here." He briefed them on an ongoing obstacle: Sharon's demand that no MNF troops set foot on Lebanese soil until after the last PLO fighter had left. Habib thought that notion was ridiculous, since it would be pretty much the same as not having any force at all. He was certain that no PLO guerrillas would come out of hiding except under MNF protection, and he told the Marines that he had flatly rejected Sharon's demand.

The Marines raised the matter of command. Like the Israelis and the French and everyone else, the Marines thought the MNF should operate under a single commander. Habib disagreed. His plan was that the American, French, and Italian forces would each operate autonomously. They would have unity of effort without unity of command. That way, if any one country backed out at the last minute, as he feared Weinberger might, the evacuation could proceed with the other two countries' forces. The Marines tacitly understood that the closest thing to an overall commander would be Philip Habib.

They had several other issues to cover at this first meeting at Yarze. The French had insisted on coming in first, and Weinberger had insisted that no Americans come in until the operation was well under way. So Habib leapt to the front of the parade, telling the Marines, "Let the French do the dirty work, then we'll take positions when they're cleared by the French." He also said he was "worried about the dollies," that is, that once the Marines came ashore they would be distracted chasing the beautiful Lebanese women. The Marine officers smiled indulgently and assured him that discipline would not be a problem.

There were still hundreds of issues and details to go: How would the three countries' forces coordinate operations? Where would each be stationed? What would they be required, allowed, and forbidden to do? How should they coordinate with the Israelis? How could they respond if they got shot at? But those were questions for another day.

After this first meeting ashore, Johnston reported, "All going well. Amb Habib in good spirits. No question who is in charge." But Habib was not just in good spirits; he was buoyant. "I'm ready to close out," he told Washington in his own report. "We'll get going by the twelfth. That's only five days away."

The First Incident

The IDF chose this point to launch three extraordinary attacks on Habib's mission that physically threatened his team.

Habib had always been protective of the people working for him, his "boys." He wouldn't think twice about working them to an early grave or

The Marines

scorching their ears anytime their work dipped below his standards. But he wouldn't stand for anybody else giving them trouble. These Marines were not his boys, and they didn't especially require his protection, but they had become an essential part of his team. They now represented his mission.

When they finished their first meeting ashore with him late in the day August 7, they boarded two Huey helicopters at the little Lebanese naval base nearby at Junieh to fly back to their ship. They had barely taken off when two Israeli F-16 jets swooped down on them. One roared from left to right just over them, shaking the Hueys violently. Before the Marines could cuss, the other jet zipped just under them, shot up right in front of them, and kicked in its afterburner. One jet wheeled sideways between the two Hueys, which were only a hundred feet apart. The jets, flying at about 600 miles per hour, came close enough that the Marines could clearly see the Israeli pilots' faces.

"We'd been in helicopters before, and we knew what peril we were really in," says Sehulster. "It scared the hell out of the pilots," says Gaucher. Reports of the incident said the jets "buzzed" the helicopters, but "buzz" hardly describes it. A helicopter is not a very stable kind of aircraft to begin with. Its ability to stay aloft depends heavily on the condition of the air around it. What the Israeli jets were doing was creating wickedly curly air turbulence all around the Hueys and shock waves for them to fly into. Bouncing and reeling, the two Hueys were close enough together to collide.

"They damn near knocked the helicopters down!" says Sehulster. "It wasn't just a matter of being in the same airspace: They were within 20 or 30 feet of us, which is awfully goddam close. It was a deliberately provocative act. Absolutely. Fully intended." The jets did not wag their wings to indicate friendliness. Johnston and one of the Marine pilots thought this was just a case of a couple of pilots hot-dogging, but others on board decidedly did not. Sehulster points out that Israeli pilots are all officers, and no pair of officers would do such a rash act without orders. The Marines considered it "direct hostility toward us" and "blatant harassment."

The Marine Huey pilots dropped from 500 feet down to 100 feet to prevent the jets from flying under them. But then the jets circled back and roared all around them again. Then again and again, for the next fifteen or twenty minutes. The Huey pilots gritted their teeth and grimly tried to ride out the buffeting, boring forward rather than making any evasive maneuvers that might encourage or antagonize the Israeli pilots.

Habib's liaisons did get back to their ship, shaken but undamaged. A Navy captain who had been along for an inspection ride charged up to the admiral's office and angrily reported the incident. The admiral sent a strong message back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff saying that he intended to send an armed fighter escort with Habib's liaisons the next day and, should any

Israeli jets try such harassment again, “it was his intention to issue the orders to shoot them down.” But the brass worried that any such retaliation might disturb Habib’s delicate negotiations. They vetoed an armed escort but said, “Should a hostile act be committed use such force as is appropriate to respond.”

Weinberger and Shultz furiously protested the incident, and Begin personally apologized for it.

The Second Incident

The IDF’s second physical attack on Habib’s mission came the next day, August 8, when his team of Marine liaisons flew back to shore for their second meeting with him. As their Hueys approached Junieh at 8 A.M., an Israeli patrol boat tracked them, with a manned and loaded machine gun trained on them. The Hueys landed at Junieh in a small bowl surrounded by a berm. As soon as the pilots put the rotors in neutral so the Marines could get out, five or ten IDF tanks rolled up over the berm, surrounding them, and aimed their cannons at them. Ground troops came up to the top of the berm, pointing their automatic weapons at the Americans. Israeli jeeps blocked off all the ground exits and aimed their 50-caliber guns at the US embassy vehicles that had come to pick the Marines up.

“We were captured,” says Gaucher. The top Israeli officer on the scene, Colonel Yahya, gave them what Schulster calls “a rash of trash” about who they were and what they were doing there. Though the Marines were in civilian clothes, Schulster had no doubt that Yahya knew perfectly well who they were and why they were there. After all, Israeli jets had been flying within a few miles of their base ship and monitored all flights on and off of it. The Marines had just come from an American aircraft carrier in American-marked military helicopters and landed at an American-controlled landing spot with American embassy cars there to pick them up. “Who else would be coming in and out like that?” Schulster says. Even if Yahya didn’t know the identity of the individuals, he certainly knew what they represented, that is, Habib’s liaison team. Schulster was “madder than anything else at the arrogance of the SOBs.” He thus refused to answer Yahya’s questions, saying only “We are on our way to the American embassy, and you have no authority in Junieh.”

When after twenty minutes it became obvious that the Israelis were not going to let them go, the embassy’s defense attaché who had come to pick them up called Yarze for instructions. Dillon told them to give only their names, ranks, and Social Security numbers. “Being the obstinate son of a bitch that I am,” Schulster says, “I took the smallest piece of paper that would accommodate very, very small printing. I put the five names and

The Marines

Social Security numbers on it, handed it to Yahya, and said, ‘There. That’s who the hell we are.’” He added only that they were there to provide support for Ambassador Habib. After another forty-five minutes or so, Yahya decided to have his troops escort the Marines to Yarze. Along the way, the Marines veered off onto a side street, sped away, and lost them.

When they got to Yarze and told Habib about the two incidents, he “just went goddam ballistic at the audacity of the Israelis harassing us,” says Schulster. “He just absolutely came unglued: ‘Who the fuck do they think they are? Where do they get the goddam nerve to harass people?’” He picked up the phone and blasted the general in charge of Israeli forces in Lebanon. To Habib, the issue was not so much that the Israelis had seriously endangered American lives, though they had; it was that harassment of his team was an attack on his mission.

He had no doubt that the incidents were deliberate and sanctioned. This was a “clearly orchestrated power play,” says Johnston. The IDF “didn’t do *anything* without orders from above,” says Schulster. Habib considered the incidents IDF attempts to show that they were in control, that “we were playing in their sandbox, and they wanted us to damn sure know that.”

Rather than give the Israelis more opportunities to harass his team, Habib decided to have his Marine liaisons stay ashore from then on.

Having dealt with the problem, he started the meeting they had come for as though nothing had happened.

The Third Incident

Two days later, August 10, it was Habib’s turn to fly. He and Draper needed to go to Israel to resolve the last outstanding issues with Begin. Around 4:30 they arrived at Junieh to board their US Navy helicopter and were angered to find Israeli troops there. Habib’s helicopter was hovering 300 feet above its landing pad with “Israeli machine guns, 20-millimeter cannon, and other things trained on it, ready to shoot it down,” says Draper. “They were preventing it from landing so that it could pick us up.”

Habib was hopping mad—the most fervently furious Draper ever saw him. Red-faced and quivering with rage, he seemed ready to wade in and start busting heads. It wasn’t just that he was insulted at yet another incident of harassment. It wasn’t even that one of America’s closest allies was poised to shoot down an American helicopter and kill American pilots. It was that, in Draper’s words, “the Israelis were trying to interfere with the mission.” And that, to Phil Habib, was unconscionable.

He was so hot that he wouldn’t trust himself to talk. “He would have blown up,” says Draper. So he spun away, seething in silence, and let Draper do the talking.

For twenty minutes Draper and the Israelis argued. “It was a touch-and-go problem,” Draper says, “because these guys were trigger happy half the time.” Finally, the Israeli commander radioed back to headquarters, got the OK to back off, and let Habib’s helicopter land.

Only once he and Draper were safely on board did Habib allow himself to erupt. “Phil was just beyond himself,” Draper says. “He exploded in the biggest temper tantrum I ever saw him in. He kept cursing about this and what the Israelis were doing and the harassing and so forth. He was getting pretty sick of it. Phil and I had both been in the military, and we talked about whether it was just a standard military fuck-up or deliberate.” Draper strongly suspects that it was deliberate and was “ordered by Sharon to show how much control they had.”

Within an hour they landed in Israel. Habib had a productive meeting with Begin, dealt with the issues at hand, and never mentioned the incident.

It wasn’t that he forgot. It wasn’t that he forgave. It was that he would not allow anything—not his anger, not his righteous indignation, not any Israeli provocations—to distract him from stopping this war.

Sitting Ducks

Habib’s plan was not really as fully developed as he let on. It was extensively developed in his own mind, but the Marines still had serious disagreements with him about key elements. Habib envisioned the PLO, in effect, surrendering to the Marines. The Marines saw no possibility of that happening. Habib wanted the Marines to then shelter and feed the disarmed PLO until they could be evacuated. The Marines said they simply lacked the resources to, in effect, run refugee camps. Habib wanted the Marines to clear the innumerable land mines and booby traps that littered the city. The Marines said absolutely not. That is extremely dangerous work, and they refused to have anything to do with it. Yes, they would provide ordnance experts to teach the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to do it, but, no, they would not do it themselves.

Habib did not give up lightly. Despite the Marines’ refusal, he clung to his insistence that a buffer along the Green Line was critical to success. The reason Habib wanted the Marines there was precisely the reason they refused to go there: They would be standing between the belligerents. He considered that they would be an essential trip wire, preventing anyone on either side from passing through their lines; they considered that they would be sitting ducks vulnerable to hair triggers on their left and right and to mines below their feet. He was adamant that he wanted them there, and the Marines were equally adamant that they were not going to go there. They

The Marines

countered that, if anybody was going to deploy along the Green Line as a buffer, it should be the LAF. But Habib wanted Americans in there: Positioning Americans in that strategic piece of territory, he felt, would send a clear signal that the United States meant business.

He talked about having them patrol around the Green Line too, but the Marines considered that idea so unworkable that they wouldn't even discuss it with him. "It was a real bone of contention," Schulster says. "This was probably *the* most testing time of the whole relationship. This is one of the times he got mad and called me a pussy."

After two days of Habib and the Marines going around and around about whether they would deploy along the Green Line, the commander responsible for American operations in the Middle East finally weighed in with a definitive veto. Habib then let it drop. He would try to get someone else to do that.

As Habib had continually reworked his plan based on the input of the Lebanese, Israelis, and PLO, he now set about reworking it based on the input of the Marines. He kept the essentials, but revised the specifics. Maybe instead of actively disarming the PLO, he could just have them passively leave their arms behind. Maybe he could get the French, Italians, or Lebanese to do the jobs that the Marines rejected. And maybe some of the jobs, like holding the PLO in some staging area before they left town, didn't really have to be done at all.

Once they got past their rocky start, Habib and the Marines worked superbly together. The Marines actually came to appreciate his grasp over when and how to use the military. On a personal level, he made them feel that they were not just doing a job, but were saving lives. They gave him their enthusiastic support because he let each one know that what they were doing was important and that he appreciated it.

These Marines, not known for sentimentality, fairly gush about Phil Habib. They describe him with words like *charisma*, *personal magnetism*, *forceful*, *immensely talented*, and *steel-trap mind*. "We loved him," says Schulster. "He just tickled the shit out of us," says Mead. "A brilliant man. He's one of my all-time heroes."

Habib kept them apprised of where his negotiations stood and never failed to keep them apprised of how furious he was at the Israelis, the PLO, the Syrians, the State Department, and the Defense Department for their latest sins. The result, intended or not, was that the Marines on the ground "knew just how incredibly difficult this whole thing was," Mead says. "We also knew that he didn't need any problems out of us."

That understanding did not extend back to the Pentagon, however. Habib would roar about the Pentagon's insistence on deciding unilaterally what the military should do instead of going along with what *he* thought they

ought to do. When he didn't get his way, the Marines on the ground with him were displeased too.

Habib demanded quick decisions and commitments from his military liaisons. "It was a freewheeling, fast-moving situation," says Mead, "and he needed to operate like a gunfighter. But the other agencies involved just couldn't suit up as fast as he wanted them to. There were too many people involved in trying to cut the same piece of pie. The military superimposed a World War Two chain of command on an operation that needed a lot more direct communication between those doing it and the final decision-makers. We had to go back through six layers of chain of command to get a decision. It was ludicrous."

The one saving grace was that this evacuation operation was unprecedented. It was Philip Habib's unique solution to a unique problem. "So nobody knew the book on it," Mead says. "I wanted to work directly for Ambassador Habib, but the chain of command would not allow that. But they did give me very wide latitude, because *they* didn't know what the hell to do." The brass imposed general restrictions on where the Marines could and could not go, but left it to Mead to decide specifically where and how they would deploy within approved areas. That gave him a lot of wiggle room. Whenever Mead could give Habib what he wanted, he did so without hesitation.

The Holy Ghost

Though Habib viewed his American Marine liaisons as the most important part of the team that would implement his plan, they were only one part. He met daily at Yarze with his team of diplomatic and military representatives of the United States, France, Italy, and Lebanon. Each of the men at the table—and they were all men—was a strong personality in his own right, but Habib didn't chair the meetings; he ran them. As Smith put it, Habib functioned as "the officer in tactical command. There was absolutely no doubt who the leader of that pack was. Habib was a commander, running that operation on pure force of his personality. He was like a thousand-watt light bulb, burning bright the whole time. I never saw anyone argue with him!"

This was not a time for brainstorming or thrashing out basic issues. These were not really even planning meetings. Habib had learned quickly from his early arguments with the Marines and moved on. He knew what he wanted done, everyone at the table accepted his authority, and the meetings consisted mostly of him issuing directions. He would hold forth for hours, rarely asking anyone's counsel. When problems arose, he would turn to the person he thought should handle it, snap out a quick command,

The Marines

and say, “Can you do that?” The answer he wanted to hear—and usually did hear—was “Yes.” He would accept their answers as gospel. In requesting these liaisons originally, he had specified that he wanted only a few “responsible guys who can give an order and have it carried out, who know what the hell they are doing.” Now that they were here, he expected everyone at the table to have ready answers and to speak with full authority to commit the party they represented. They understood that he wanted things instantly in order to exploit fleeting windows of opportunity.

Woe unto anyone who couldn’t give him a definitive answer on the spot. He might know perfectly well that the Marine at the table was simply not authorized to make certain decisions or commitments that he wanted. Didn’t matter. He’d still thunder, “Well, goddam it, why can’t you tell me the answer? You’re a goddam Marine and you can’t answer my question?!” He had assigned the LAF to come up with a plan for their role and would ask the Marines for an update on the LAF’s plans, only to hear that the Lebanese generals were still dithering. “What the hell are these goddam generals doing?” he would say. “Doesn’t anybody make a decision up there?”

The people at the table didn’t take his tirades personally or begrudge him his impatience. As Smith says, “I think he was driven to impatience by sensing that this thing could explode any minute.”

In the meetings, Habib’s approach was that they needed to get certain things accomplished, and everybody was going to stay until they did. His big meetings typically started around 4 or 5 each afternoon and ran till around 8 P.M., when the group would break and go somewhere for dinner. They would then often resume around 11 P.M. or midnight and run till the wee hours of the morning. The meeting wouldn’t end until Habib was satisfied that things were lined up pretty well for the next twenty-four or forty-eight hours. Sometimes they went all night long.

The fifteen or twenty participants would sit around the great mahogany table in Dillon’s dining room surrounded by beautiful Persian carpets on the floor. Habib would sit at the middle of the table and let everybody else sort themselves out however they liked. The French and Italian ambassadors usually staked out spots close to Habib.

One day, after his plan had crossed a major hurdle, Habib anxiously gathered the team to go over the latest version. This time he moved the group out of the dining room into the living room. He sat in an easy chair; everyone else pulled up chairs into a circle. As he got more and more intense ticking off the particulars of where each contingent of MNF troops would go, he said, “Get a map! Put a map down here so we can all see it!”

Schulster fetched an enormous map, about 4 by 6 feet in size, and spread it out on the living room rug. As Habib named off the various positions for

each military unit, Schulster pointed out each one on the map. One by one, the ambassadors and military officers got down on their hands and knees to study the map as Habib talked and Schulster pointed. Within a minute, everybody was down on the floor—except Habib, who “sat presiding in that great big chair waxing eloquent!” says Schulster. “He was in his true element. Absolutely glowing: the master and his students. Unbelievable!”

The people in his coordinating committee meetings at any given time represented at least four languages. There was no translator. Habib spoke French well, and he certainly remembered all the Arabic profanity his brother Fred had taught him as boys in Brooklyn. Beyond that, there is an intriguing difference of opinion.

One of his Lebanese friends says Habib “didn’t know three words of Arabic,” and Draper and Howell agree. Yet the Marines at the table, none of whom spoke Arabic themselves, were convinced that he spoke Arabic fluently. In fact, they called him the Holy Ghost because he could switch back and forth between so many languages in the blink of an eye. They recall him routinely turning to the French ambassador and speaking French, turning to a Lebanese and speaking Arabic, then giving the Marines a summary in English of what had just been discussed. Some Marines even remember him speaking Italian.

Perhaps the most accurate report is that of the embassy’s political officer, who says Habib spoke Arabic like an undereducated Lebanese, which “absolutely enchanted” whoever he was talking to.

Whatever his actual facility with languages, the Marines considered his use of language a deliberate tool of his diplomatic trade. “It had a very positive impact,” says Schulster. “You could just sense that the others in attendance truly appreciated and recognized his leadership by his deferring to their language at critical points to be sure they understood.”

There is no disagreement that he was exceptionally fluent in what Mead calls Marine language: “He swore beautifully in five languages, and I swear it was simultaneous! You could always tell by his eyes whether it was profanity or not.”

Eventually, the meetings lapsed into French, since that was the one language that just about everybody at the table could at least follow.

Mixed Blessing

After the American Marines, the second most important element of the MNF, in Habib’s mind, was the French. But the French turned out to be a mixed blessing for him. On the one hand, they were indispensable. The MNF was simply not going to fly without them. And, whereas Habib had spent weeks dealing with some of the most infuriatingly intransigent people

The Marines

on earth, the French were refreshingly willing to do whatever was asked of them. Habib needed somebody to deploy along the Green Line. The French volunteered. Habib needed somebody to secure the port prior to the evacuation. The French volunteered. Habib needed somebody to clear out minefields. The French volunteered.

That's the other hand: They were *too* willing. "All they wanted to do was everything," says Sehulster. "It was so evident that the French wanted to lead this whole thing. We had to rein them in. I mean, they would have done it *all* on their own had they been given license to." Still, Habib seems to have used even this problem to his advantage. Weinberger was loathe to commit American troops to this risky mission, and Habib apparently played the French enthusiasm as a trump card with Washington, pressuring them to get with the program by saying, "We can't let the French do it by themselves."

Why were the French so anxious to play a major role? Part of their agenda was to be seen as protectors of the PLO. Another part was that, as Sehulster put it, "They were just green with envy at the prospect of getting their foot back in the door and re-establishing their predominant influence in Lebanon." They would then be in a good position to sell weapons in Lebanon and the rest of the region.

Habib didn't greatly care about France's long-range agenda, but he was determined to keep the MNF strictly neutral and to keep any one country from getting out too far ahead of the others. He recognized that, if the French handled everything, his whole plan would collapse. Officials in Washington and Rome were jittery enough about being part of this unprecedented mission: They might welcome such an excuse to back out altogether. Moreover, the Israelis frowned on the pro-PLO French being involved at all: Sharon might welcome an excuse to reject the French, leaving Habib with no troops to do anything and thereby scuttling his plan altogether.

The French official with whom Habib was working most closely was the ambassador to Lebanon, Paul Marc Henry. Habib had a love for all things French, and he clearly liked Henry. He appreciated his shared commitment to ending this siege. And the two just hit it off.

Habib never missed a chance to needle him. While virtually all the wives and other dependents of the diplomats in Beirut had gone home when the invasion began, Henry had kept his mistress with him. She was strikingly beautiful, witty, and charming. Everyone enjoyed being around her. At the team's many dinners together, Habib would pretend to flirt with her, just to rib Henry. At the group's meetings, Henry usually showed up late. "How many girls this time, Paul?" Habib would say. "Which woman is keeping you late this time?"

Late or early, Henry tended to chime in with “weird, bold, off-the-wall, cavalier recommendations” for where the troops should go and what they should do. He would blindside Habib with these ideas that were militarily unthinkable and totally at odds with Habib’s plan. Having already been set straight by the Marines about his own naïve ideas, Habib had no time for new ones: “Paul Henry, you’re not going to do it, and that’s all. I say *fini*. That’s it.” He would then try to calm everybody down by saying, “No, we’re not going to race off like that.”

The French members of the team caused him headaches on less substantive issues too. Soon after Habib’s Marine liaisons began meeting with him at Yarze, the French joined in, and then came the Italians. When it was just the Americans and the French, the two groups of military officers had sometimes socialized together. One day, after the Italian officers had arrived, the French officers invited the Marines to a formal dinner party at Henry’s residence. Schulster asked his French counterpart who all was invited.

“Just you.”

“You mean, just the Americans?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I’m sorry, but if the Italians aren’t invited too, we’re going to have to regret.”

The French colonel then “flipped a hissy,” says Schulster, and went to Henry to complain. Schulster got to Habib first. Habib was upset at the French attempt to divide the MNF team by leaving out the Italians. Had this been just a casual get-together, that would be one thing. But a formal dinner party at the ambassador’s residence was too blatant a snub. When Henry called Habib to complain about this affront, Habib lit into him. “There’s no goddam place for this not acting as one! We’re here to work together. I just won’t put up with any of this.”

The Sign of the Pill Box

Though the Marines slept elsewhere, they were virtually living with Habib and the embassy workers crammed into Dillon’s residence in Yarze. They saw him in meetings, at breakfast, in the car, during bombardments, and during lulls. They saw his humor, his compassion, his anger, and his unique blend of impatience and perseverance.

They also saw how he dealt with the continuous, throbbing, grinding stress. They never saw him looking nervous or disheartened, but often saw him looking worried. They could clearly see when he was particularly stressed. His face, already jewelily from too many rich meals, would look drawn and haggard. His usual ready smile wouldn’t come. His cheeks

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sagged. He would pace the living room. He would run Arab worry beads through his fingers. He'd sit at the dining room table with papers scattered all in front of him, holding his head. He'd tap a pencil on the table or waggle it between his fingers. "You could read all kinds of things behind his eyes," one colleague recalls. "You could just see the torment, that he was having difficulty reaching some person or having him see his way."

The Marines could almost quantify Habib's stress by how often they saw his little pill box. Every hour, his alarm watch went off, and he would pause from whatever else he was doing, pull the box from his pocket, and take a heart pill. But he'd pull out the box also whenever he got especially agitated or stressed. Before taking the pill, though, he would look at his watch, realize that it was nowhere near time, and stuff the box back in his pocket.

When the stress did become too much, he would simply break off his meeting, excuse himself, and go to his bedroom to gather his wits, sort things out, and settle down.

"We always worried about him," says Mead, "because, one, we knew that no one was going to pull off this mission except him, and, two, we knew the man's health history. We had so damn much respect for the guy, because we knew he was 'in combat' and he probably wasn't going to survive it."

Notes

Each note begins with the page number(s) and a few key words to link it to the passage to which it refers

13 The Marines

205 He needed: Mead 6-5-94

205 Handful: As early as July 3, the day Reagan approved American participation in the MNF, Habib asked that French-speaking Marine liaison officers be identified and placed on standby to come meet with him. "But I don't [want] them to come until I know that we have something. That may be tomorrow, it may be the next day" (Johnston 12-4-96; NEA Veliotos memo to S/S Bremer, 8218794, "TelCon Habib and Charles Hill/Adm. Howe, 12:07 P.M., July 3, 1982," p. 4). Habib specified that he wanted Marine officers who spoke French because French would be the first or second language of most of the participants in these meetings. Though the liaisons had been chosen in early July, one flare-up or another made it pointless for them to come ashore.

205 *USS Guam*: Smith 6-21-94; Mead 6-5-94. Commodore Richard White and Adm. William Rowden of the Sixth Fleet were also present.

205 Maronite: The Palestinians hated the Maronites even more than they did the Israelis. A chant heard in the streets of West Beirut during the siege was "Even Sharon, but not Maron"—i.e., the Maronites (Mikdadi, p. 84).

206 Buffer: Smith 11-25-96. Sharon's original plan called for the Lebanese Christian forces, the Phalange, to enter West Beirut and kill the PLO once the IDF had the city surrounded. Though Sharon was disappointed that the Phalange had so far basically sat out the war, the PLO feared that the Phalange would strike at the first opportunity. The two had, after all, been regularly killing each other in the civil war that had raged from 1976 until interrupted by Sharon's invasion.

206 Sandwich: Mead 6-5-94; Sehulster 6-23-94

206 Marine responses to Habib: Mead 6-5-94; Smith 6-14-94 and 6-21-94. Disarming the Palestinians had been a goal of Habib, Wash-

ington, and Lebanese leaders since the early days of the invasion (Habib cable Beirut 04233, 161325Z Jun 82, par. 1C and 3F; NEA Veliotos memo to Bremer 8217953, "Recorded Radio Report from Habib, 1800, June 25, 1982—Late Afternoon Meeting with Sarkis," 6-25-82, p. 2). In fact, the goal of disarming them was a given even before the idea of an evacuation emerged (Hill 7-9-94). It was always assumed that disarming them would be one of the MNF's basic jobs.

206-7 Attitude, guys from Brooklyn: Mead 6-5-94

207 Always outnumbered: Draper ADST oral history. *Peacekeepers* is an unfortunate term that inevitably raises platitudinous objections that there is no peace to keep. *Calming forces* would be a much more apt term.

207 Impossibilities, consent: Smith 6-21-94

207 Marines chosen: Johnston and Smith were aboard a ship in the Mediterranean; Sehulster and Gaucher were working in Germany awaiting the call to go to the region and didn't actually go until August 6 (Sehulster letter to the author 1-12-97). After early consultations with Habib ashore, Johnston would need to be on ship to make preparations for the Marines to land, so he would be relieved ashore by Smith.

207 Matter of days: Hill 7-21-94

207 August 7: Johnston 12-4-96

207 General outline: Johnston cable, USMC 2 07 Aug 2030Z, to Cmdr. White and Col. Mead

207-8 Textbook: Johnston 12-4-96

208 Ongoing obstacle: Hill 7-21-94

208 Ridiculous: Draper 5-4-93

208 Matter of command, overall commander: Johnston 12-4-96; Lewis cable Tel Aviv 12139, 101505Z Aug 82, par. 5

208 Dirty work, dollies: Johnston 12-4-96. During this first meeting ashore Habib also emphasized how important it was to give the

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LAF a role suitable to the army of a sovereign country.

208 Good spirits, close out: Johnston cable USMC 2 07 Aug 2030Z, to Cmdr. White and Col. Mead; Hill 7-21-94

209 Helicopters and Israeli jets: Account compiled from Sehulster 7-12-94 and 11-24-96; Draper 4-25-93; Gaucher 5-15-94; Geske 6-5-94; Johnston 12-4-96; Kerlek 12-8-96; Frank p. 11; and Johnston (CTF Six Zero) cable LIAA00144 to COMSIXTHFLT 111011Z Aug 82. Kerlek was the pilot of the lead Huey; Sehulster, Johnston, and Gaucher were on board; Geske was in charge of the Hueys. Geske says the Marine helicopters that flew Habib typically flew in pairs 100 feet apart. Sehulster says the jets came within 20 or 30 feet; other estimates by people not in the helicopters at the time range up to 200 feet. Even 200 feet is extremely close for a jet to pass by a helicopter. The Pentagon and State Department were anxious to keep the Marine liaisons' meeting with Habib secret (Howe memo to Eagleburger, "Lebanon Checklist," 8-5-82, 8223325, p. 1). So the liaisons had been instructed to keep a low profile, making day trips ashore in civilian clothes to meet with Habib and spending nights on ship (Johnston 12-4-96).

209 Reported the incident: Kerlek 12-8-96

209-10 Intention to issue orders: Sehulster 11-24-96. In the words of Johnston's official cable, the Marines requested authority to scramble an armed fighter escort to "take harassing action" at the first hint of any encore (Johnston [CTF Six Zero] cable LIAA00084, 071835Z Aug 82). This was the Marines' closest and most dangerous encounter with the IAF, but not their first. Johnston's report on the incident mentioned without elaboration that "Previous flights to and from Junieh had been intercepted by what were believed to be Israeli aircraft" (cable LIAA00144).

210 Should a hostile act: Cable LIAA00112 from COMSIXTHFLT 090951Z Aug 92.

210 Protested, apologized: Shultz, p. 63-64. Israeli officials told an American diplomat in Tel Aviv that the helicopters were buzzed because they had not coordinated their flight with the IDF. They said it was not harassment and was no problem. Begin told Habib that the Israelis were suspicious because the French had said they would be in touch with the IDF and had not been. The Americans rejected such

explanations, pointing out that they were not trying to keep the French from talking to the IDF and that the French had nothing to talk about with the IDF yet since they had not yet met with Habib's MNF planning team (Hill 7-10-94 and 7-21-94). NEA suspected the incidents described here stem from "Sharon's entirely mistaken suspicion that we were transporting French military personnel as part of a French attempt to enter Beirut before an agreement is reached. We have told the Israelis that this is utter nonsense" (Evening Reading Item "Israelis Harass U.S. Helicopter," 8-8-82).

210-11 Detainment incident: Account compiled primarily from Sehulster 11-24-96; also from Sehulster 7-12-94; Gaucher 5-15-94; Johnston 12-4-96; Frank, p. 11; cable LIAA00102 from COMSIXTHFLT and USCINCEUR to the Joint Chiefs of Staff 081315Z Aug 82; Kerlak 12-8-96; Shultz memorandum for the president, "Status Report on Lebanon," 8-9-82, 0223742. Johnston's version is quite different from Sehulster's and Gaucher's: He says he never felt captured or threatened, that the Israelis never surrounded the Americans, and that Col. Yahya just insisted on giving them an unwanted escort to Yarze. Johnston considered this just "a little bit of arrogance by the Israelis." He agrees that the IAF was monitoring their ship and their helicopter flights (Johnston 12-4-96).

211 Unglued: Sehulster 7-12-94

211 Phone: Gaucher 5-15-94. The general was Amir Drori (Sharon, p. 503).

211 Power play, sandbox: Sehulster 7-12-94; Johnston 12-4-96. Washington strongly protested this helicopter incident too. Begin sent his personal apologies (Shultz memo to The President, 8-9-82, 8223742).

211 Stay ashore: Johnston 12-4-96

211 As though nothing: Sehulster 11-24-96. He did, however, forbid the Marines to have any direct dealings with the Israelis. They would, of course, have to have some dealings, but those must always be in their capacity as members of Habib's political/military committee for the multinational force, not as US Marines. The IDF was anxious to have highly visible meetings with the American military, but Habib was determined to avoid any appearance of the Americans being in cahoots with the Israelis in their war (Johnston 12-4-96).

Sharon had repeatedly said he wanted an IDF representative to be a member of the MNF

CURSED IS THE PEACEMAKER

planning group. Habib had repeatedly refused (Hill 7-21-94). As late as August 18, the Israelis were still demanding to know why they were not included as members of the MNF (Johnston 12-4-96). The Israelis were pointedly not invited (Sehulster 7-12-94; Smith 6-21-94), but Habib would send representatives of the committee to brief the IDF every morning on how the plan was evolving. Because of the buzzing and detainment incidents, though, Habib specifically instructed them to drag their feet at every opportunity about giving the IDF any information that might provide better insight into what the MNF was doing (Sehulster 7-12-94; Smith 6-21-94). While these Americans would meet with the Israelis, some of the Lebanese army officers in the meetings served as liaisons with the PLO.

211-12 Habib's helicopter: Entire story Draper 4-25-93 and 9-19-97. Date and time per Beirut 05272, 101300Z Aug 82 and Beirut 05282, 101515Z Aug 82. Draper says Habib never even reported the incident to Washington, but an official of the Near East Asia bureau recalls having heard about it at the time. Habib confided the story to his University of Idaho classmates at a 1985 reunion, quoting himself telling the Israelis, "Get the hell out of here! That's for me!" (Easterbrook 2-21-94). The Beirut embassy had sent word to the Tel Aviv embassy to notify the Israelis of Habib's flight plans in advance (Beirut 05272, 101300Z Aug 82). Schiff and Ya'ari tell an abbreviated version of the story on p. 223-24. In their version, Sharon ordered his troops to Junieh to prevent American helicopters from landing French troops on the beach. IDF jeeps scurried around the tarmac to keep this helicopter from landing. Draper arrived (their version does not place Habib himself at the scene) and screeched "That's Habib's helicopter!" The IDF troops were gone a few hours later. Schiff and Ya'ari give August 8 as the date of the incident. The declassified documents give no indication of any Habib trip to Israel between July 28 and August 10.

212 Surrendering, shelter: Smith 11-25-96, 6-14-94, and 6-21-94

212 Land mines: Sehulster 6-23-94. The LAF had virtually no mine-clearing capability (Johnston cable, USMC 2, Beirut 5311, 11 Aug). The French did send some of their soldiers out with the LAF to clear land mines and booby traps. After three or four of them got blown up, they backed out (Sehulster 6-23-94). Habib knew quite well from personal experience how

dangerous mine clearing was, having been required during his WWII service to probe for mines by poking bayonets in the ground (Draper 9-19-97).

212 Buffer along Green Line: Sehulster 6-23-94

213 Signal: Sehulster 11-23-96

213 Bone of contention: Sehulster 6-23-94. As the guy on the ground who had actually looked at the places Habib had in mind for the Marines to go, Sehulster found himself in the awkward position of having to tell his superiors that Habib's idea was "far less dangerous" than they thought, while telling Habib that it was more dangerous than *he* thought. Though Sehulster did not support Habib's idea, his superiors accused him of being too close to the situation and too sympathetic to Habib (Sehulster 6-23-94).

213 Veto: Sehulster 6-23-94. The decision was made by the US Commander in Chief in Europe, almost certainly with the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Sehulster letter to the author 1-12-97).

213 Let it drop: Mead 11-25-96

213 Grasp: Smith 6-14-94; Johnston 12-4-96. Both Smith and Johnston talk about some of Habib's utterly unworkable military ideas, and in the next breath say things like "he had a good sense for what was in the art of the doable from a military standpoint" (Johnston 12-4-96). They apparently reconcile the two themes by Habib's willingness to listen to their comebacks, learn quickly from their feedback, and revise his ideas accordingly.

213 Personal level: Sehulster 7-12-94. This contrasts markedly with his treatment of fellow Foreign Service Officers, to whom he rarely expressed appreciation.

213 Fairly gush: Smith 6-9-94, 6-14-94, and 6-21-94; Mead 6-5-94; Johnston 12-4-96; Sehulster 7-12-94

213-14 Kept apprised, Pentagon, freewheeling: Mead 6-5-94

214 Unprecedented: Shultz 9-16-93

214 Nobody knew: Mead 11-25-96

214 Left it to Mead: Mead 1-19-97; Sehulster letter to the author 1-12-97. Sehulster adds, "We, of course, always advised our seniors of such decisions. I do not know of any being

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overturned.”

214 Tactical command: Smith 6-14-94 and 6-21-94

214-15 Issuing directions, responsible guys: Johnston 12-4-96; NEA Veliotis memo to S/S Bremer, 8218794, “TelCon Habib and Charles Hill/Adm. Howe, 12:07 P.M., July 3, 1982,” p. 4

215 Full authority: Sehulster 6-23-94; Smith 6-14-94

215 Why can't you, LAF: Sehulster 6-23-94; Johnston 12-4-96. The Lebanese Armed Forces were capable of little more than getting out of bed in the morning. But, this being their own country, Habib had bent over backwards to involve them. He asked the LAF to come up with a plan for going into West Beirut in advance of the MNF. But the LAF generals were extremely cautious and loathe to commit themselves to anything that might upset the Israelis, the Syrians, or anyone else.

215 Driven: Smith 6-21-94; Johnston 12-4-96

215 Stay until they did, mahogany: Smith 6-14-94 and 6-21-94

215 Sit at the middle: Sehulster 6-23-94

215-16 Map on floor: Sehulster 6-23-94 and 11-23-96. This happened August 11 when Habib returned from Israel with Cabinet acceptance in principle of the plan. His helicopter touched down in Junieh at 4:15 P.M., and he started the meeting as soon as he drove back to Yarze.

216 Three words: Tueni 11-15-95. Draper says, “He did not speak Arabic, but many of the phrases were familiar to him from his childhood, especially the curse words” (Draper ADST oral history). Howell says “As far as I know, he didn't speak any of the language. He may have known a few words, but I never saw him use the language” (Howell 10-11-93).

216 Holy Ghost: Mead 6-5-94. The nickname is based on Acts, chapter 2, in the Bible. That chapter recounts the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) filling Jesus' apostles and suddenly enabling them to speak in languages they did not previously know.

216 Routinely: Smith 6-21-94 and 6-14-94

216 Italian: Sehulster 6-23-94; Mead 6-5-94. They were almost certainly mistaken.

216 Political officer: Crocker 4-25-94. Habib says “Arabic was probably my first language, because my parents did not speak English to one another. I spoke sort of a simple Arabic, colloquial Arabic as a child” (Habib interview with Tueni). Dillon says Habib's Arabic was better than people give him credit for (Dillon 12-31-97).

216 Positive impact: Sehulster 6-23-94

216 Swore beautifully: Mead 6-5-94

216 Lapsed into French: Smith 6-21-94; Johnston 12-4-96. When Habib had first asked the US military to send liaisons, he specified that he wanted ones fluent in French (Smith 6-21-94).

216-17 French volunteered: Sehulster 6-23-94 and 11-23-96; Draper 12-22-93

217 French do everything, agenda, envy, excuse: Sehulster 11-23-96; Gaucher 5-15-94

217 Liked Henry: Dillon 11-5-96 and 11-24-96; Sehulster 6-23-94 and 11-23-96

217 Mistress: Dillon 11-16-96

217 How many girls: Gaucher 5-15-94

218 Weird, unthinkable, *fini*, race: Sehulster 6-23-94 and 11-24-96; Gaucher 5-15-94

218 Dinner party: Sehulster 6-23-94, 6-23-96, and 6-24-96

218 Worried: Pascoe 6-4-94

218-19 Stress: Sehulster 6-23-94; Barrett 5-9-94; Lee 10-2-94; Pascoe 6-4-94

219 Heart pill, bedroom: Sehulster 6-23-94

219 Always worried: Mead 6-5-94