Sally and I returned to Washington for a short stay in January 1989, long enough to see family and for me to get through confirmation hearings for my next and last diplomatic post: U.S. Ambassador to China.

Sally, who usually left things political to me, was prescient in a farewell note to Jeffrey, who left South Korea in September 1988 after spending ten months with us while working at the Olympics as a researcher for NBC. “Change is in the air for you and Dad and me who have shared these past historic months in Korea. Active and varied as they have been, I feel in retrospect it will have been a serene time—in contrast to the unpredictable future into which we three now head.”

**STEPPING ON A VOLCANO**

President George Herbert Walker Bush, who defeated Michael Dukakis in the 1988 election, appointed me to be Ambassador to the People’s Republic of China shortly after Sally and I returned from Korea. The China position was a great honor, and it was fitting that my former boss in China had appointed me.

Reporting on my appointment as ambassador in March 1989, a Soviet radio commentator remarked that I would have my hands full dealing with the Chinese. I would have to draw on “my rich diplomatic experience,” the announcer said, to keep the Sino-U.S. relationship on track. It wasn’t a daring pronouncement by the Russian commentator, but it proved true sooner than I could have imagined. I met outgoing ambassador Winston Lord for dinner at the Metropolitan Club in Washington in late April before I left for Peking. As we sat down, a TV showed the latest scenes from Tiananmen Square, where tens of thousands of Chinese students had been rallying for a more open society since the death on April 15 of popular leader Hu Yaobang, the former head of the Communist Party. The Chinese leadership seemed paralyzed by the huge protests against corruption, nepotism, and special privileges for Party officials. In four decades of watching China, I had never seen anything like it—spontaneous, motivated, exuberant, idealistic protesters.

“Is this for real?” I asked Lord, who had recently returned from Peking. “Are these demonstrations really against the government?”

“Yes, replied Lord, they are for real.

Truth be told, I was not up to date on China when I met Lord in Washington. The two-year tour in South Korea had kept me focused
on the Korea Peninsula. Even when Winston Lord visited us in South Korea in 1988 to see the Olympics, the two of us talked sports, not China. But now China was a lead item on television screens all across the world. "Demos," I wrote to Jeff shortly before leaving for China, "seem to follow me around." Or perhaps I was following them.

Sally and I arrived in Peking on May 2. As a New York Times writer aptly put it several weeks later, we "stepped on a volcano." Stirring the pot were not only students' complaints against the government, but also a confluence of important anniversaries. The year 1989 was the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution as well as the fortieth birthday of the People's Republic of China. But it may well have been the marking of another student-led revolt—the seventieth anniversary of the May 4th Movement—that was motivating the protestors the most.

On May 4, dressed in casual clothes, I rode my bike down to Tiananmen Square—meaning Gate of Heavenly Peace—to do a little investigative work of my own. I saw young Chinese marching around the city carrying signs for "Democracy and Science," the main slogan of their predecessors in 1919. As I passed by them, they gave me the "V" sign. I detected no antiforeignism in these demonstrations.

Making sure to keep my identity as the American ambassador secret, I engaged students in conversation, querying them about their hopes and dreams for China. I was struck by their passion and enthusiasm for their causes. They were determined to rid China of corrupt rulers and practices of nepotism in the government. They wanted a better China, but not necessarily a noncommunist China. Above all, in those early weeks, I saw a protest movement, not a call for democracy. The students were not yet asking the Chinese Communist Party to give up power.

The Tiananmen demonstrations kept building in numbers. People from the countryside and other cities poured into Peking to show their support for the grassroots movement. It was both exhilarating and frightening to witness these outpourings from a Chinese populace that had a reputation for being subservient and close-mouthed unless whipped into a frenzy by forces in the government. Soon, the demonstra-

strations would represent a genuine cross section of Chinese society, with workers, intellectuals, civil servants, and journalists joining the students on the square.

Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev was due to arrive on May 15 for a historic visit that was supposed to cement party-to-party relations. Some people in Washington were alarmed that the visit might signal real progress in Sino-Soviet rapprochement. To take some wind out of the sails of a Sino-Soviet summit and to underscore U.S.-China military cooperation, the White House and Pentagon set up a visit to Shanghai by the U.S. Navy. I was scheduled to make a speech in Shanghai on the U.S. flagship, then accompany Vice Admiral Henry Maiz, the commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet, to Peking for more ceremonies before traveling back to Washington to accompany Wan Li, the chairman of the National People's Congress, on an official visit to the U.S.

The schedule was a full one, and on top of all the planning, I was making introductory calls on Chinese leaders. In a meeting on May 8 with President Yang Shangkun, who was the highest-ranking official in China, I told him that it was a source of pleasure to serve as ambassador to the country where I was born. I used a chang yu that explained I was coming back to my roots (yu luo gui gen—a leaf falls and returns to its roots). The Chinese president said he expected further progress in our bilateral relations during the next decade. Deng Xiaoping, whom I did not call on, was, in fact, the most powerful person in China in his role as chairman of the Central Military Commission.

My meeting with Premier Li Peng, who ranked under Yang as head of the government, was less cordial. I had gotten to know Li when he came to the U.S. in 1985 in part to search for American partners in The Three Gorges Dam project. He had a prickly personality and came across as a man influenced by his Soviet training and steeped in the jargon of his Soviet mentors. I remember him in Los Angeles talking about the need for central planning and the importance of ideologically sound workers. He even used the Soviet term "Stakhanovite"—hearking back to the hero shock worker of the Soviet Union's drive in the 1930s to increase industrial production through ideological fervor and effort—to drive his point home.

During our meeting in Peking, I did not speak directly with Li
about the growing protests in central Peking, though he knew full well that we had been giving the Chinese the message through government channels not to use force. But in a not so oblique reference to the students gathered on Tiananmen, I paraphrased the author John Hersey in his book about how Yale University had responded to student demonstrations there in the 1960s. I said that at the time Yale president Kingman Brewster had said, “If you lose your youth, no amount of crisis management will make much difference in the long run.” This allusion was not lost on Premier Li. He shot back, “No government in the world would tolerate this kind of disorder in the middle of its capital city.” He was stating his case as a law-and-order man.

What wasn’t as apparent at the time I was meeting the Chinese leaders was that the students’ tactics were causing a deep fissure in the leadership ranks of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The General Secretary of the CCP, Zhao Ziyang, sympathized with the students’ demands for accelerating reform. While Zhao maintained the primacy of the Communist Party’s place in governing society, he believed the Party had to change. At a Politburo Standing Committee meeting on May 1, he said: “Times have changed, and so have people’s ideological views. Democracy is a worldwide trend, and there is an international countercurrent against communism and socialism that flies under the banner of democracy and human rights. If the party doesn’t hold up the banner of democracy in our country, then someone else will, and we will lose out.” Zhao insisted in front of his colleagues that “the student slogans that uphold the Constitution, promote democracy, and oppose corruption all echo positions of the Party and the government.”

Opposing Zhao was Premier Li Peng, who feared that the government was losing its grip on the situation and starting to panic. In response to Zhao, Li said: “Some socialist countries launch political reforms only when conflicts in society are severe and the Party is crippled. This makes control of the process nearly impossible. So our first order of business should be stability. Once that is achieved, we can talk about reforming the political system.”

Ironically, while the Chinese leaders had their hands full with protesting students, those same students were disrupting both American and Russian plans. President Gorbachev’s state visit was the first casualty. Though it had been billed by some diplomats as a first step toward Sino-Soviet rapprochement, Gorbachev’s first visit to the Middle Kingdom was doomed from the start. By the time he arrived on May 15, close to half a million people filled Tiananmen Square. Protesters had set up tent villages on the square, so a grand welcoming ceremony, complete with an honor guard and twenty-one-gun salute, had to be moved from there to the airport. The students held their own welcoming placards for the Soviet leader, whose policies of “perestroika” and “glasnost” to reform the Soviet Union were music to their ears. “We Salute The Ambassador Of Democracy” read one poster, while another crowed: “In The Soviet Union They Have Gorbachev, But What Do We Have in China?”

Events throughout his visit were marginalized by the demonstrations, as was Gorbachev’s final press conference on May 17. McKinney Russell, the chief of the American Embassy’s press and cultural affairs office, was set to attend Gorbachev’s farewell press conference at 5:30 p.m. in a ballroom in the Great Hall of the People. But the area around Tiananmen Square was choked with surging crowds. Buses filled with students from the provinces and flatbed trucks draped with banners and jammed with workers, journalists, and even Communist Party functionaries clogged Peking’s main roads. After being forced to ditch their bikes halfway to the square, Russell and a colleague walked the rest of the way to the Great Hall of the People. There, after waiting twenty minutes for the press conference to start, journalists were told by a sweaty Soviet counselor that the venue had been changed to the Diaoyutai guesthouse where Gorbachev was staying because his motorcade couldn’t get through the masses of protesters. The visit of Gorbachev, the so-called champion of reform from the top down in the Soviet Union, had been rendered meaningless by Chinese people power from the bottom up.

That same evening, members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo voted to impose martial law in Peking. Communist Party boss Zhao Ziyang and propaganda chief Hu Qili voted against the proposal, but they lost out to Premier Li Peng, planning czar Yao Yilin,
implications of the ship docking seemed much less significant in the face of the demonstrations. Back in Peking I had sensed that the tide of popular sentiment building in the cities would eclipse the ship visit, particularly in the eyes of the international media. I knew Western TV crews angling for a story about the gathering protests could quickly turn their cameras away from the ships to the students. I tried to communicate this to Foreign Minister Qian Qichen when I met with him before going to Shanghai. "If things go wrong," I had warned him, "the Western media will go after you like a mad dog." He just smiled.

For my welcoming speech on the flagship I said the pro forma words about growing U.S.–China military ties. Meanwhile, a largely spontaneous uprising was under way across the water. In the midst of waving banners and military pomp and circumstance, I remember thinking to myself, "Here we are making nice speeches on the ship, but there is something wrong in the equation." It was even more evident by that time that neither Gorbachev, nor our ship visit, nor platitudes about U.S.–Chinese military cooperation were going to diminish or divert attention from the student demonstrations. Nor should they have. They were growing, and they were the story. My thoughts were echoed in a cable I sent to the State Department on May 21. "What is happening here in opposition to the authorities has a permanence about it. It is not going to go away," I wrote. Two months later in mid-July, I cabled back to Washington that we had not been "coping with or anticipating current realities" by going through with the ship visit when demonstrations were going on. "Our attitude," I stated in the cable to the State Department, "was a throwback to the early days of our relationship when common Soviet bashing was in vogue."

Back on shore in Shanghai, I telephoned the State Department to tell them I was not going to leave China with Wan Li at a time when the country's major cities were in turmoil. Over the Department's strong objections, I said, "It looks ugly, and I am going back to Peking." Then along with others I recommended to Admiral Mauz that he forego his visit to Peking. The best thing would be to get the American ships and sailors out of Shanghai as soon as possible. To get back to Peking as soon as possible, I took Sally's ticket, leaving her in the care of a consulate official to get to Peking on the soonest flight they could book.
As Sally and I were preparing to leave for a dinner the evening of May 19, I turned on the TV in our hotel room. We listened as CBS news anchor Dan Rather announced from Peking that the CBS broadcast had been ordered to go off the air in ten minutes. At the airport the next day, I saw Premier Li Peng himself on TV making the declaration of martial law. It was both chilling and absurd. Right after Li's declaration, the song "Paper Moon" came across the airwaves. No doubt the TV station had pro-democracy sympathizers making the controls. It was a jab at the increasingly unpopular premier because the song implied a phony and make-believe arrangement.

By now the heavyweights of the American press—NBC, ABC, CBS, as well as fledgling CNN—were devoting expanded resources to cover the growing demonstrations. With the world's attention focused on them, the Chinese students became more emboldened in their tactics. On May 13, 1,000 students had embarked on a hunger strike around the Martyr's Monument on Tienanmen Square. Student leaders like Wuer Kaixi, Chai Ling, Wang Dan, and Li Lu were becoming folk heroes among Western viewers. On May 18, to the amazement of Chinese who watched on TV, Wuer Kaixi, one of the leaders of the hunger strike, upbraided Premier Li Peng for being late to their meeting in the Great Hall of the People. Wuer was even dressed disrespectfully in pajamas. Not only were the young student leaders willing to voice their grievances, but many of them were also putting their lives on the line by engaging in a hunger strike. It was high idealism coupled with erratic and undisciplined tactics. Propelled by the combination, the student movement was gaining adherents among the general populace. People continued to stream into Peking from outlying cities and provinces.

Meanwhile, in the upper echelons of power, there was disorganization and acrimony over how to respond to the demonstrators. Paramount leader Deng Xiaoping was apparently furious at Chinese Communist Party chief Zhao for airing party secrets when he told Gorbachev during a meeting on May 16 that, despite reports to the contrary, Deng still continued to wield power from behind the scenes. In my opinion, that was Zhao Ziyang's deathknell. The fact that he was also allied with the reformist leaders of the Communist Party didn't help either. These reformers were in touch with the demonstrators and were advocating a softer line within the government. They were pushing the government to rescind a tough April 26 editorial in which it had branded the demonstrators as counterrevolutionary troublemakers inciting turmoil. They also wanted greater press freedom as well as recognition of independent student associations. In return, the reformers would convince the students to leave the square peacefully. The terms were rejected by both the old guard and the student leaders.

Like millions of Chinese and viewers around the world, we were informed by what we saw on TV. And that spoke volumes. On the night of May 19, Zhao showed up on the square. With tears in his eyes, Zhao was broadcast on television apologizing to hunger-striking students that "We have come too late." With current premier Wen Jiabao standing near him, he urged the young students to end their fast and look to the future. That night the students ended their fast. Behind Zhao on the square was Li Peng, somber and silent. His sidekick Luo Can stood by his side. According to accounts of the time, Li followed Zhao at the last minute in an effort to offset any political advantage the reform-minded leader might gain from appearing publicly at Tiananmen. It was remarkable footage—the drama of the inner party struggles being played out on TV in front of millions of viewers. Zhao Ziyang was the loser. He was dismissed by the Party elders on May 21 and then placed under de facto house arrest, where he remains today.

The imposition of martial law did not do much to quell the demonstrators. In fact, the heavy hand of martial law fell so lightly and uncertainly on Peking that expatriates were wryly calling it "partial martial." Few troops were in evidence, and when they were around, they were hopelessly outnumbered. Crowds held convoys of soldiers on the outskirts of Peking at bay on May 20 and 21. The traffic on Peking's main thoroughfare, Chang'an Boulevard, was still being conducted by student volunteers, and despite prohibitions against demonstrations, there were impromptu speeches on street corners and even a bike parade on May 21. As for foreigners, we were told to stay in our compounds and not go downtown, but it was hard to corral curiosity, and the authorities weren't preventing people from moving around.
Shortly after arriving in Peking, I had made a quick survey of the embassy staff. I hadn’t worked with many of the principal players before, but I was impressed with the caliber of people. We had excellent Chinese-language capability among the economic, military, and political sections of the embassy. In addition, over the past fifteen years of relations with China, our diplomatic staff in Peking had established reliable contacts with people in the military, the student movement, and the intellectual class. These two attributes—Chinese-language capability and contacts on the ground in Peking—would pay dividends in the coming months.

As the standoff between the demonstrators and government continued, we augmented the monitoring measures we had already taken. Since April, our defense attaché’s office had been working closely with its counterparts in the Australian, British, Canadian, French, German, and Japanese Embassies to keep tabs on events in Peking. They divided the city into sectors and shared information obtained from patrols. At the end of May, in response to the attenuated crisis, the defense attachés of the different embassies set up full-time listening posts at designated spots around the city. In a farsighted move, General Jack Leide, the defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy, lobbied for and got permission to rent hotel rooms for the U.S. monitors. In addition to a room at the Fuxingmen Hotel on the west approach to the square, we booked two corner rooms at the Peking Hotel, just northeast of Tiananmen Square, that provided a clear line of sight to the square. Leide also equipped his men with walkie-talkies smuggled in from abroad. It was a violation of diplomatic protocol because diplomatic missions are prohibited from maintaining their own private radio communications inside China, but it was a violation I felt comfortable making.

With so many situation reports being filed back to the U.S., our political section opened a 24-hour phone line to the State Department. This line allowed us to get up-to-date reports immediately to Washington from Peking and our four consulates in Shenyang, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Chengdu. Because of timely communication from

Shenyang, for example, we knew that Chinese troops were moving south toward the capital. Crack Foreign Service officers on the ground in Shanghai delivered excellent reports on how the Shanghai municipal government headed by Zhu Rongji and local party headed by Jiang Zemin were handling the protesters with more success.

As ambassador, responsible for all of those at the embassy, and concerned about other Americans in the city, I also had to prepare for the worst: a siege in which Americans might be harmed or trapped inside the compound. Our medical office put a disaster plan into action, making sure there were first-aid supplies at the three embassy buildings and compiling the necessary information on blood type and potential donors for blood transfusions. Families started to stockpile food, and we made sure there was enough peanut butter and candy at the embassy to keep people energized.

Already most of us were working twelve to fifteen hours a day in an attempt to keep abreast of the fast-changing situation. But the demands kept growing. For example, when martial law was declared, we made sure that embassy staffers called Americans in Peking who had registered at the embassy. Their message to the American residents and visitors was to sit tight and avoid Tiananmen Square for the present time. Unfortunately, we couldn’t tell them anything more specific. We also reduced our files. My secretary, Kathy Gaseor, took several boxes of embassy files for safekeeping to Hong Kong in late May.

The previous months had already been hectic for Gaseor and most of the embassy employees. President Bush had visited Peking in February. Then an inspection team came to evaluate embassy operations in May. With annual efficiency reports on almost everyone in the mission coming due, embassy staffers had been working long hours since the start of the year. Already fatigued by the grueling schedule of the preceding months, American diplomats were now living in a capital city that appeared to be trying to break away from the control of Central Communist authorities. We were working the staff to its limits.

Sentiment among American diplomats was with the students. Their youthful enthusiasm, not to mention their clear favoritism toward America, earned them many supporters at the U.S. Embassy. “The movement has been non-violent, but passionate,” I wrote back to the
State Department in a cable on May 21. "All signs indicate this is a popular uprising supporting basic principles of democracy." Chinese nationals working at the embassy were going down to the square to show solidarity with the students. Some Chinese employees would arrive for work only to linger around aimlessly before announcing, "My place is not here. I have to go down to the square." Chinese workers cooperated with Chinese nationals working at other embassies to organize a march. But among the American embassy staff, along with affinity for the Chinese people came apprehension that the Chinese government would suppress the democracy movement violently. "We lived a roller coaster," recalled Gaseor of the last weeks of May. "Would the police and military crack down? When would it happen?"

On May 26, after about three weeks of watching the dangerous dance of the students on the square with their paralyzed government, I put pen to paper or, rather, I dictated to Kathy Gaseor my thoughts on the coming crackdown. From the point of view of the Chinese government, the whole debacle had dragged on because, as I liked to put it, the "old men couldn't make up their minds." But I sensed that Deng was still in charge and that he was gathering the allies necessary to reassert control. On May 21, I had sent a cable in which I said that "[a] confrontation resulting in bloodshed is probable." But in the five days between the May 21 and May 26 cables, what looked "probable" turned to "imminent" in my reading of the situation.

During those days, plainclothes police sent to monitor the square had been accosted by residents of Peking and prevented from advancing. The repulsion of the police was the latest in a series of humiliations suffered by the Chinese authorities in their attempts to restore order. Critical editorials decrying the student movement hadn't dissuaded the demonstrators or their supporters. Meetings between government officials and student leaders only highlighted the arrogant and difficult stances of leaders like Li Peng. Both plainclothes police and unarmed troops had been subsumed by masses of people in the streets before they could even get close to the square. The appearance of armed soldiers only made the crowds more determined to convince them of their wrongdoing in moving against the people. Half-measures hadn't worked. Neither had shows of minimum force. The government had run out of options short of a military assault, I reasoned.

In my analysis, I also took account of China's history of defending "the revolution" at all costs. To a China-watcher, the capacity of the system—meaning the Communist Party—to damage the country and its people was not unfamiliar. Hundreds of thousands of people had been violently purged, killed, or driven to suicide during the Cultural Revolution, little more than a decade earlier. The attitude of the Communist leadership had long been that it would have to inflict casualties to accomplish important political objectives. I thought it especially significant that by the end of May the government-controlled press constantly referred to the demonstrators as "counterrevolutionaries." There was a specific provision in the Chinese constitution stipulating that counterrevolutionary behavior was criminal and had to be stamped out. This would give the government a semilegal basis for suppression.

Finally, there was the personality of the man in charge, Deng Xiaoping. I had studied the Chinese leader both up close and from afar for almost three decades. Though he was the father of China's economic liberalization, he was a dyed-in-the-wool communist, committed to using force to restore order. Deng had lived through the insanity of the Cultural Revolution when he had been purged. His biggest fear, as well as the biggest fear of his elderly comrades-in-arms, was chaos. In my cable, I wrote that Deng resembled an Old Testament character. Revenge was in his nature. He was being personally humiliated by the student demonstrations and the government's inability to quell it, and he would not stand for it. As for the negative repercussion in the West of a crackdown, I remember somebody quoting Deng as saying, "You carry these things out, and the Westerners forget." There would be no happy ending to the Tiananmen affair. There was going to be bloodshed, and we believed this would happen in the next couple of days. In my personal tale of two cities, Seoul and Peking, South Korea in 1987 would be no model for the Chinese.

I had a sense that the White House perceived Deng as basically a leader who sought reform and opening up and would avoid harming U.S.–China relations. Perhaps that is simplistic, but I had the feeling
during the week after martial law was declared that high-level people in Washington were under the delusion that the standoff between the students and government would have a peaceful outcome. My cable resonated little in Washington, and I learned later that it never made it to the president’s desk. It remained in State and with lower-level members of the National Security Council staff.

As for the role of the U.S. government in dissuading China from cracking down, I had little hope. Unlike the situation in Seoul two years earlier, we had little influence on internal decision making in China. Yes, George Bush had a personal relationship with Deng Xiaoping that stretched back fifteen years, but even then the relationship was not one in which he could send a letter to the China’s de facto leader and expect results, as President Reagan had done in South Korea. Another alternative-going through the Chinese bureaucracy—was not efficacious either because information was probably doctored for the top Chinese leadership. This was one of Zhao Ziyang’s chief complaints—that Deng was not getting a true sense of the democratic nature of the student movement from the reports he was reading. In the end, as history has shown, you tend to get better results when you use high-level emissaries and present to the Chinese clear choices. I sometimes think that there was a point after May 26 when we might have been able to use former President Nixon, Henry Kissinger, or even a high-level presidential envoy to convey to Deng or his longtime comrade Yang Shangkun that we care deeply and that there would be serious repercussions from a crackdown. But it probably wouldn’t have worked. The Chinese leadership had by then isolated itself to such an extent that we had to use the Foreign Ministry in Peking or the diplomatic channel to the Chinese ambassador in Washington to get messages through.

The best we could do was to stay apprised of the latest developments and report them back. Fortunately, we had good contacts in Peking. On May 24, one of those contacts confirmed to an embassy staffer that Zhao had lost out. We learned that the general secretary had intended to carry out an anticorruption campaign and that he was prepared to start with an investigation of his own two sons, who had reportedly profited in business from their contacts in government.

Zhao’s determination turned well-placed children of top Chinese leaders against him. During the revealing conversation, our contact got a phone call telling him to stop talking.

Residents of Peking awoke to an extraordinary sight on Saturday, June 3. Thousands of PLA soldiers, bedraggled, befuddled, and some even weeping, were wandering through the city in a disorganized retreat from the city center. During the early morning in parts of the city, Peking residents and demonstrators had swarmed around buses carrying troops. After halting the troops’ progress, they proceeded to berate the soldiers verbally. At one location, elderly women were seen scolding shame-faced soldiers, who stared at the ground. Embassy press chief McKinney Russell witnessed the people of Peking repel a column of 5,000 unarmed soldiers who had been ordered in at a “reluctant” jog to “co-occupy” the square. They looked more like a children’s crusade than a military strategy. Near the square, several thousand citizens at the intersection of Chang’an Boulevard and Xidan Avenue surrounded a bus of about forty soldiers. On top of the bus, students and other citizens took turns posing for photos holding a rifle and wearing a helmet taken from the soldiers. People cried, “We have to protect Peking.” The vaunted People’s Liberation Army seemed to wilt in the face of people power. Jack Leide called the PLA’s fiasco “a Chinese version of Napoleon’s retreat from Moscow.”

If U.S. diplomats weren’t out on the streets witnessing such extraordinary events firsthand, they could probably see them from their balconies, at least those who lived in the main diplomatic compound at Jianguomenwai about a mile and a half east of Tiananmen. For a good part of May and into June, diplomats would return from work and watch the drama being played out below them in the streets that led to Tiananmen Square. They would invite friends over, make drinks, and observe the street scenes, transfixed by the spectacle of Chinese people standing up to their government. Pictures snapped and video cameras rolled to record history in the making. It was an exciting atmosphere, and as one embassy staffer said, it was a time when “the unusual takes on normalcy.”
But by early June, normalcy had given way to serious jitters. I had already upgraded the likelihood of a crackdown from "probable" to "imminent." People on the street had ominous feelings about an impending crackdown as well. When Kathy Gaseor returned on June 2 from a few days in Hong Kong, the cab driver who picked her up at the airport told her excitedly of the new statue that had been erected on Tiananmen Square. Built by students at Peking's Art Academy, the statue took after the Statue of Liberty and had been named the Goddess of Democracy. "Do you want me to take you to see it?" the cab driver asked Gaseor. Tired from her trip, she politely declined. "Perhaps, I will go see it tomorrow," she said. The cabbie turned to her. "Tomorrow, it won't be there," he said cryptically.

On June 3, I went with a group of embassy people to bowl at the Diaoyutai guesthouse at the invitation of Sinochem, one of China's largest trading companies. The head of Sinochem had invited us for an evening of relaxation and, I believe, to give us a sense that things were normalizing. I agreed to go because I wanted to stick to as normal a schedule as possible despite the abnormal circumstances in Peking. The excursion also gave me cover for openly traversing the city in the area of Tiananmen. Coming back through town in the early evening, we saw the demonstrations building up in number. Earlier that afternoon police had battled crowds with tear gas near the square. There were other altercations around the Great Hall of the People between workers and unarmed troops, and near the Minzu Hotel on the western approach to the square, an irate crowd had destroyed ten military vehicles. The atmosphere was palpably tense. I returned to the embassy and didn't leave for the next twelve hours.

Assistant Army Attaché Larry Wortzel struck me as a man of action from the moment I met him. A stocky and gregarious former infantry officer, Major Wortzel had excellent Chinese and was always on the prowl. He avoided sitting in his office. Upon Wortzel's arrival in Peking in 1988, his boss Jack Leide asked him about his goals for his tour. Wortzel replied that he wanted to find a group of Chinese military officers to exercise with and then drink beers with afterward. He then planned to work his network of contacts for any information he could get. "General," Wortzel told Leide, "you will probably see me, I hope, about an hour a day in the office."

On June 2, Wortzel and another assistant military attaché, Bill McGivven, were investigating the northwestern suburbs of Peking. They had gotten word that a convoy of troops had been halted by civilians. Sure enough, they found an entire PLA radio battalion, with radio logs lying open and frequencies turned on, stopped on the train tracks twenty miles from Peking. The two American military officers ran up and down the length of the train shooting pictures with impunity. The PLA soldiers were too busy arguing with townspeople to notice the eavesdropping Americans. But the Americans pushed their luck and were hailed to the front of the train to see the battalion commander. The commander berated them for stealing military secrets. Wortzel and McGivven flashed their diplomatic cards but to no avail. Wortzel was expecting the townspeople to step in to save them. Instead, he got a surprising lesson in the limits of anti-government action. "You cannot be here," townspeople told the two American military attachés. "We will stop the train, but you cannot violate the national security of China." It was a telling moment and highlighted how Chinese civilians, whether they were hunger-striking on Tiananmen Square or stopping military trains on the outskirts of Peking, considered themselves patriots who, however much they might have resented the current government, strongly identified with their motherland and would defend its interests against foreign intrusion.

About forty miles outside of Peking on the following night, Wortzel and McGivven were settling in for a night of troop watching after scouting out the situation around Peking's military airport, Nanyuan Airfield. They had been coming to Nanyuan for the past couple of nights to observe troop movements in their sector, the southeast quadrant of Peking. The two assistant military attachés had watched while planes landed, troops unloaded, and armored vehicles were assembled. The night of June 3, they took a room in a small hotel in the town bordering the airfield. By the time they checked into their room, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and trucks were lined up with their motors running in a convoy on the main road into Peking. Facing the military
convoy, townspeople had assembled a barricade of trucks, tractors, and buses. Wortzel and McGivern sat poised in their room, ready to call the embassy when the command was given for the convoy to move forward.

In the heart of Peking on Tiananmen Square at about 9 P.M. on June 3, Jim Huskey, an unusually adventurous embassy officer who had been pulled out of the consular section to help us with information gathering, sensed an air of relief among the people occupying the square. Despite ominous messages over the loudspeakers that Peking residents should stay off the streets and away from the square, the protesters were feeling secure. The troops had not come in sufficient numbers to do any harm, and they had been turned back with minor scuffling. In front of the History Museum on the east side of Tiananmen Square, student leaders Wang Dan, Chai Ling, and Wuer Kaixi buoyed the spirits of a gathering of 5,000 to 10,000 people with emotional and inflammatory speeches. The mood was optimistic—they believed that they would get through another night as they had gotten through other nights before.

Jim Huskey was another extraordinary member of our staff, a diplomat who had joined the Foreign Service at the late age of 39 after getting a Ph.D. in Asian Studies and studying Chinese intensively. Fortune smiled on him when he drew Peking as his first post. He had traveled all over Asia as a merchant seaman and penniless student, but had never lived in China. While most Foreign Service officers on their first tour bemoan their mandatory visa-stamping work in the consular section, Huskey had attacked his job with vigor since arriving in Peking in 1987.

Equipped with excellent Chinese-language skills, Huskey started to keep a file on the children of high-ranking Chinese officials who came to the consular section to inquire about visas for America. Huskey would spot a familiar last name or recognize a particular government ministry or institution on the back of the visa application and note the information. After making the connection, he might say to the candidate, “Please give your father my regards. I read his article in the paper recently.” If the candidate had a strong academic record, Huskey would process the visa application. More often than not, he would end up getting an appreciative phone call from the father and an invitation to dinner. In this manner, he collected valuable information on influential Chinese with whom we might otherwise never have had contact. Huskey's junior-level position and seemingly innocuous consular work allowed him not only to open but also to walk through doors that were shut tight for other embassy officers. In the aftermath of Tiananmen, Huskey's list of sons and daughters of high-ranking cadre who went to the U.S. to study came in very handy.

Huskey had become a regular on the square in the preceding weeks. Along with political officer Don Yamamoto, Huskey had been drawing the 12 P.M. to 6 A.M. shift. The two men would meander among the crowds and usually end up among a clump of trees in the northwest corner of the square where they would watch the sun come up.

But on June 3, with Yamamoto having left for annual leave, Huskey was alone. After dropping off his wife at their apartment following a quiet dinner at the Palace Hotel, Huskey returned to the square via the main thoroughfare in front of the Jiangoumenwai diplomatic compound. The street was packed with thousands of people milling around. Huskey's gray Honda was the only car visible on the wide road. As had become the custom, he showed the victory sign with his left hand as he drove slowly down the road. It was the sign of support and nonviolence that had been adopted by the movement. The mass of people parted, and Huskey drove straight through, accompanied by cheers from onlookers. He parked his battered 1974 Honda near the Great Hall of the People.

By purging Zhao Ziyang, Deng Xiaoping overcame a main obstacle to using force against the demonstrators. He then shored up support of the military in the last days of May and early days of June. The preceding weeks of chaos and confusion had weighed on China's paramount leader. There were rumors that he had had a heart attack and had been hospitalized. But I believed that, seething over the inability of his military to quell the anti-government movement and the personal humiliation at seeing his capital city overrun by demonstrators, he withdrew to work behind the scenes. In the evening of June 3, we had information
that Deng, through Yang Shangkun, gave the final command. “End it,” he said. “Halt!” Deng did not order a massacre. He wanted a minimum of bloodshed, if possible, and he cleared what he did with the eight elders. But quelling the effort came first in his thinking, and once the order was given to move, the officers and soldiers acted violently.

We sent off a cable to Washington: “We are witnessing a massive military movement into central Peking. The troops are armed unlike the troops that moved into the city early this morning. We have citizens resisting the entry of these armed troops into Peking. We have American television crews filming directly on Tiananmen Square in violation of martial law provisions. We have our own officers out observing. Many Americans and American residents are wandering around oblivious to what is happening or the potential dangers involved.” It was a recipe for disaster if you were the American ambassador with a stake in protecting American lives and preserving the U.S.–China relationship.

Meanwhile, near Nanyuan Airfield, Wortzel and McGivven were taking turns pulling two-hour shifts observing the armored column when they heard the motorcade rev its engines. Wortzel knew that meant trouble because the army would have to break through the barricades put up by the townpeople. As the engines were cranking, McGivven suddenly doubled over from pain in his abdominal area. Wortzel was at a loss what to do. It was the beginning of the assault, and his partner looked as if he were going to die. With McGivven moaning in the background, Wortzel called the embassy doctor, who instructed him to bring McGivven into the embassy as soon as possible. As far as Wortzel was concerned, judging from McGivven’s cries of pain, he had no other choice. He loaded McGivven into the front seat of the embassy-issue white Plymouth Fury they were driving and turned onto the only road back into town—the same road that the PLA was getting ready to blast its way through on its way to Tiananmen Square.

Wortzel pulled the Plymouth Fury into the middle of the armored PLA column that had begun to crunch its way into Peking. The tanks crashed through the jerry-built barricades, and PLA soldiers opened fire all around. When there was a pause in the onslaught, Chinese offi-

cers would turn toward the alien white car in their column and scream, “You have to get out of here!” Wortzel pointed at McGivven, buckled over in the front seat, and screamed back, “I am going to the hospital!”

The incongruous back and forth between the assistant American army attaché and PLA officers continued for twenty minutes as the column made its way to Peking, shooting and smashing through anything in its sight. Finally, Wortzel reached the turnoff for the embassy and sped to the medical unit. McGivven was diagnosed with kidney stones and evacuated on the next plane out.

Down at Tiananmen Square at about 11:30 P.M., Jim Huskey heard what sounded like firecrackers going off to the west of the square. He found a phone and dutifully called back to the embassy. I picked up Huskey’s call in the political affairs section on the second floor, our command post during the crisis. From a defense attaché’s post on Fuxingmenwai Boulevard we had received reports that an armed PLA column was moving toward the square. I instructed Huskey to clear as many Americans as he could from the square and then to get out himself. Huskey told several foreigners to evacuate the area and then heard a big boom. When he turned around, he saw an orange glow in the sky above Chang’an Boulevard, the main avenue feeding into Tiananmen from the west. It was the afterglow of a battle being waged on the streets below. Like a wave rushing the beach, masses of Chinese on the square moved toward the glow. Huskey tucked himself into the crowds of people, pulled forward by his duty to keep Americans out of harm’s way and by a powerful sense that a historic event was unfolding.

Jim Huskey fulfilled dual roles in his reporting that night. He was both a diplomat and a historian as the Chinese Army moved in to crush the spontaneous flowering of a freedom movement. “I know the history of Chinese student movements, and I realized I was watching another one of these events,” he recalled later. “I realized this was a student movement being massacred, and I had to be there. But, secondly, I am an American Foreign Service officer, and I thought we should have people seeing this—to count bodies and get some sense of what was happening.”

The Chinese around Huskey at the northwest corner of the square didn’t believe that the troops were firing live rounds. People ran toward
At the same time, we had CNN on in the snack bar. CNN’s coverage of the crackdown was first-rate, and its capacity to deliver instantaneous news during the events at Tiananmen Square set the standard for TV crisis reporting. CNN’s Peking bureau chief Mike Chinoy and his staff worked nonstop to deliver images that not only informed policymakers in Washington, but also came back to us in the embassy and supplemented our information. Western TV cameras may have missed Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968, but in 1989 CNN led a pack of broadcasters who, as far as I know, for the first time televised in depth a military crackdown on a popular uprising in a communist country.

For its part, the Chinese leadership was woefully unprepared to cope with the impact of such coverage. The government was in such disarray that it couldn’t exert effective control over Western broadcasts. There were too many ways for enterprising journalists to get the story out—via phone, fax, satellite feeds, and courier service. A country that badgered America for interfering in its internal affairs inadvertently gave the major U.S. networks box seats while it aired its dirty laundry. The elderly Chinese leadership simply fumbled in the face of the Western media and its ability to literally spread the news.

Reports from the embassy’s outposts around Peking comprised the third source of information. Jim Huskey’s reports, called in from street phones or from the Peking Hotel, filled many of our cables going back to Washington. Throughout the night of June 3, we also got timely updates from our four consulates on events in other cities in China.

Around midnight, Huskey found himself looking down Chang’an Boulevard to the west. He saw smoke rising and tanks going over the barricades. In a grim drama that would replay itself several times before the night was over, people ran toward the gunfire as it got louder and louder. It was as if they believed they could face down the guns and tanks with their willpower. Or their rage blinded them to the danger. A column of tanks and APCs, leading with headlights thrusting into the dark, smashed through barricades on its way to the square. Huskey wondered why people kept tripping on rocks in the road, but then he realized they were being felled by bullets. Huskey retreated with the
crowds to the eastern part of the square. He traded words with a young man beside him about the live firing. When he turned back to speak to the man, Huskey saw a red hole appear on his forehead, and he fell with a bullet through his head. Huskey moved back to a grove of trees lining Chang’an Boulevard for safety and caught his breath. He watched as tanks and APCs came to a halt along the northwestern edge of the square.

After army loudspeakers broadcast an order to the remaining students huddled around the tents to evacuate the square, a group of students and thousands of supporters began leaving between 1:30 and 2 A.M. Others carrying cans of gasoline tried to torch the army vehicles at the northern edge of the square, but they were arrested by soldiers.

Jim Huskey stayed around the square until about 2:30 A.M., long enough to witness the start of a grisly series of events. At about 2 A.M. in the northeast corner on Chang’an Boulevard near the Peking Hotel, from a starting point about 150 yards away, Chinese citizens edged toward a line of prone soldiers, backed by jeeps with machine gun turrets on top. Huskey watched a wave of Chinese edge forward, chanting, “Don’t shoot your own people” and “Chinese don’t kill Chinese.” Some citizens tried to coax the troops into putting down their arms. But the machine guns opened fire on the unarmed people, cutting them down with bursts of automatic weapons fire that lasted up to forty-five seconds. The grim theater would play itself out at least four more times over the next several hours: The people retreated, then returned to aid the fallen. Enraged at the wanton killing, they became emboldened and started to curse the soldiers as they edged forward, only to be met with another hail of lethal fire.

At about 2:30 A.M., Huskey made his way to the Peking Hotel. Doormen let him in after he banged on the doors. From the embassy’s seventeenth floor watch post, along with acting deputy chief of mission Ray Burghardt, Huskey watched the PLA unleash more fusillades on the defenseless citizens. Bicycle carts driven by citizens hauled the bodies away after each flurry of sirens and gunfire.

Meanwhile, a quarter mile away in the center of the square, Chinese authorities were using more peaceful means with student leaders gathered around the Monument to the People’s Martyrs. Sometime around 3 A.M., negotiations ensued between student leaders and the army. By 4 A.M. only a core group of a couple of thousand demonstrators remained around the Monument to the People’s Martyrs in the center of Tiananmen Square. At 4 o’clock sharp all the lights went out on the square, sending its occupiers into panic. There were more announcements to clear the square. In a voice vote, students around the monument decided to leave. A half hour later the lights came back on, and armed soldiers, their bayonets fixed, started marching across the square and pressed the students closer and closer together. At about the same time, the tanks and APCs moved in and rolled over the demonstrators’ tent city. The Goddess of Democracy was pushed over by military vehicles. There was noise and gunfire and crying and screaming all around. At about 5 A.M. the last students and citizens began to file out, threading their way among the tanks and APCs toward Qian Men, the southern entrance to the square.

Jim Huskey’s eyewitness reports from the square became a basis for labeling the PLA’s military action on the night of June 3 a massacre. In a letter to President Bush after the dust had settled on the crackdown, I commended Huskey for his superb duty. “What he reported was accurate, timely, relevant, and made up a sizeable portion of our situation reports. Jim is a people’s man with good Chinese. He is a giant among men.”

Before leaving the embassy for home at about 5 A.M., military attaché Jack Leide and I had to settle another heroic down. Larry Wortzel had been up the whole night since coming into town in the middle of the motorized PLA column and was determined that I should send him to the hospitals to get an accurate body count. “The Chinese are going to deny it all happened,” said an exasperated Wortzel. Leide and I agreed, but we also knew that Wortzel’s skills could be better used elsewhere. “That’s not your job,” Leide reminded Wortzel. “You are a military attaché.” Wortzel’s flare-up was the kind of thing we had to handle carefully, especially in the midst of a crisis situation. The welfare of hundreds of American citizens depended upon our ability to use our personnel wisely. As a “man of the streets,” Wortzel would be far more useful in tracking down Americans in Peking, a task that soon became our first priority. Instead, Jim Huskey and others went to the hospitals.
and gave us the first reliable casualty counts, which were frightening. They indicated that, at a minimum, hundreds had been killed and thousands wounded.

At the San Li Tun diplomatic compound, where Sally and I were temporarily living while renovations were being completed on the ambassador's residence, the morning of June 4 broke gray and overcast. The weather was a fitting complement to the pallor of death and destruction that overhung the city. I returned to the apartment in the early morning through broken roadblocks, overturned buses, and stunned people. Military vehicles still burned at major intersections, and gunfire rang out periodically from the streets. Along the city's main avenues leading from Tiananmen, loudspeakers blared the national anthem, and the army announced that order had been restored in the city. On the square, a huge bonfire lit up the sky. Huskey and many others, myself included, suspected that the government was burning the evidence of its carnage, so that it could begin to perpetrate its version of what happened.

Sally had spent the night at our fifth-floor apartment. She had been stranded there for the last several days. The house staff had stopped showing up for work, begging off by saying it was too hard to commute. But the cook had stockpiled food before he left. Sally and I ate simple meals, and while I was at work Sally stayed in the bare apartment, reading, taking our dog, Joey, for walks around the compound, and listening for the latest news by taking a radio onto the porch to catch the faint reception of the BBC. Each time she took the elevator down to take the dog out, she found the elevator lady in tears.

At 10 A.M. on Sunday, June 4, I began the job of trying to put together the U.S. response to the Tiananmen Massacre. Special assistant to the ambassador Gerrit Gong came out to brief me on the latest developments. It was clear that the Chinese were already trying to minimize the fallout. We had reports of bonfires on Tiananmen reportedly to burn bodies, and I sensed that in the coming days the Chinese government would try to rewrite history. Indeed, on June 6, State Council spokesman Yuan Mu, who became the odious face of

the government, declared that martial law troops had shown great restraint in the face of a "counterrevolutionary rebellion." The hundreds of thousands of citizens who had occupied Tiananmen Square were labeled criminals.

Thus, the first order of business was to make sure that we had the facts recorded and right. Then, at the least, the U.S. government could make policy based on concrete evidence. I tasked Gong with this job. "We need a detailed chronology because we aren't going to remember this clearly afterwards," I said.

I called a meeting of the embassy's Emergency Action Committee, and we put the embassy into crisis mode. We opened the consular section on a twenty-four-hour basis and set up an American Citizens Services phone line around the clock. Staffers started calling American residents, embassy dependents, and hotels to tell Americans to stay inside. All embassy social functions were canceled. We advised Americans to stockpile food, and we set up a triage area in the embassy chancery. I instructed consular officers to visit Peking hospitals to check for injured American citizens and to get estimates of the number of casualties. That search turned up just one injury to an American, who had been hit on the head by a blunt instrument during the massive confusion the night before.

It was fortuitous, but also calculated, that Americans, one of the largest foreign communities in Peking with 1,400 people, had escaped unharmed from the chaos. The Chinese purposefully instructed their soldiers not to shoot or attack foreigners. Even when the Chinese wanted to kick foreigners out of Peking, as we were to learn soon, they gave advance warning to avoid bloodshed. Later, however, an ABC correspondent was brutally beaten by Chinese troops when he intruded into Tiananmen Square.

While pairs of diplomats were checking the hospitals, Wortzel was working with a political officer to scout out evacuation routes for a voluntary evacuation of American citizens and embassy dependents in Peking. Wortzel knew the city as well as anyone and had proved he could handle the pressure in rough spots. The PLA and People's Armed Police had set up roadblocks all around the city and were stopping cars in menacing fashion, on occasion pointing their guns at
drivers. I instructed him to map out routes from the university district—where a number of American exchange students were living—to the embassy and hotels that we would use as collecting points. "You guys stay out of the square itself," I cautioned Wortzel before he left the embassy. "I don't need any dead Americans on the square." I relied heavily on Wortzel and didn't want to lose him to some trigger-happy Chinese soldier.

The evening of June 4, Gerrit Gong returned to his apartment exhausted. He turned on the TV to relax and found to his puzzlement a documentary being aired on the funeral practices of a minority people in the southern province of Yunnan. The program was full of clanging and banging and wailing and moaning. "Why in the world is this on TV now?" Gong thought to himself. Then it dawned on him that someone in the hierarchy of Chinese State Television was calling attention to the students and workers who had been killed the previous night. The program was a funeral for the dead since they weren't going to get any other kind of send-off. Like the broadcast of "Paper Moon" after Li Peng's announcement of martial law, this was a sign that there were people in the bureaucracy in anguish and agony over what had happened. Gong started to weep in front of the impromptu, unsanctioned funeral for the nameless "counterrevolutionaries" who had dared to dream of a new, free country. Shortly thereafter, all programming was halted on Chinese TV.

President Bush called me Monday morning, June 5th. Earlier that day in Washington, in his first official comment on the crackdown, the president had announced a ban on new weapons sales and suspension of military contacts. In our phone conversation, I told President Bush that things were pretty calm on the ground but that my main concern was the safety of American citizens in Peking, particularly American students living at Peking universities that were the locus of the student movements.

At the U.S. Embassy, we were already getting heat from the American press, which had gathered en masse in front of the embassy at 7 that morning, clamoring to know how the embassy was going to safe-guard the lives of Americans in Peking. Fortunately for the U.S. government, McKinney Russell, a career officer at the old United States Information Agency, was an experienced hand. Russell knew that any story, once the fighting subsides, becomes a local story. He had called me at about 6:30 A.M. that morning, and we got our cue cards together. Yes, we assured the journalists, we had scouted out evacuation routes and organized buses to get students out of harm's way and take them to hotels or to the embassy. We fended off the hungry journalists, but we knew they would be coming back for more.

At this point, I should have put into place a general evacuation order as some other embassies had done, in particular the Japanese and French Embassies. I would have saved myself a lot of headache, but we went about it piecemeal. We started evacuating students on Monday, and on Tuesday embassy personnel started calling all Americans to urge them to leave Peking. But we waited until Wednesday, June 7, to inform American residents of a voluntary evacuation procedure for all Americans. Initially, I relied on the Consular Section, which has the responsibility for the welfare of American citizens, to do the calling and planning. Later, at Leide's suggestion, I switched the evacuation planning to the military attaché's office because, as military men, they were better organized to handle this sort of crisis operation.

Larry Wortzel's frustration over delays was the catalyst for the change. On June 8, after scouting evacuation routes and informing American citizens of collection points, Wortzel returned to the embassy prepared to lead a convoy of embassy vehicles at 11 A.M. But he discovered that little progress had been made in assembling the convoy. Diplomats and others were haggling over insignificant details, like who would drive which car. Wortzel stormed out of the room, cursing a blue streak. He bumped right into me. Ten minutes later, I found Wortzel in his office. I dumped the batch of motor pool keys on his desk. "You are in charge," I said. "Get this convoy out of here in 30 minutes."

The delays brought all sorts of opprobrium down on our—largely, my—head. Disgruntled Americans gave the media the story they wanted: The American government wasn't performing well in a crisis. Stories appeared in the stateside press about the embassy's "failure" to assist U.S. citizens trying to get out of China. Magnifying the "failure"
was news footage from Peking that showed a city under lockdown with the possibility of more clashes. There was talk of civil war between branches of the Chinese military, which had different views of the crackdown. The reports were wrong. At the embassy, we knew from accurate reporting by Wortzel that rumors of a split in the PLA were overstated. It turns out that a Canadian military attaché, who had never been trained in ground combat, asserted to the press that civil war between ground troops was imminent. The attaché had looked at tanks facing outward on a highway overpass with guns pointed in three directions and come to his erroneous conclusion. This fueled the rumor mill racing around Peking and over the airways.

Nevertheless, despite our best efforts, I was behind the curve. Hysteria set in on the other side of the Pacific Ocean. Our Citizen Services Center started getting about 2,000 calls a day from Americans concerned about family members in China, and politicians in Washington excoriated the Bush administration for failing to act to protect Americans. I had people badmouthing me in Peking and all over the U.S.

While we may have taken a hit on the evacuation, we fared better in saving lives of Americans in Peking. Without a mysterious phone call on the night of June 6, there could well have been tragic loss of Americans in Peking’s already bloody June of 1989.

That night, Larry Wortzel, worn out from a day of scouting evacuation routes and checking troop movements, fell asleep on the floor of his office. The phone rang in the middle of the night. The voice identified itself as a young PLA officer. The voice’s urgent tone roused Wortzel from his slumber.

“Major Wortzel, I have been to your home a number of times. Please do not go to your apartment between ten in the morning and two in the afternoon tomorrow,” said the young officer, whom Wortzel knew. “Do not,” the voice implored, “go above the second floor of your apartment building.”

Wortzel explained that he had no plans to be near the diplomatic compound.

Sensing that Wortzel had not understood his message, the Chinese officer repeated himself. “This is very important. Do not be in that building above the second floor.”

Wortzel’s mind raced as he tried to make sense of the Chinese officer’s cryptic message. “A call in the middle of the night from a Chinese military officer warning me not to be near my apartment tomorrow,” thought Wortzel. It was a classic tip-off. The Chinese officer had been instructed to call, Wortzel decided. Something was going to happen tomorrow at the diplomatic compound, and Wortzel was the conduit to get Americans out of harm’s way. Wortzel immediately called me, Jack Leide, and the regional security officer. “They have warned us,” said Wortzel. “Something is going to happen.”

To me, the call was a sign that there were elements in the Chinese military that didn’t want to jeopardize the working relationship with the United States that had been built up over the last decade. Wortzel’s contacts were reliable, so we conceived a plan to protect Americans. To ensure that the Jianguomenwai apartments would be empty, I scheduled a meeting at the embassy on Wednesday morning for all embassy officers and dependents, ostensibly to discuss plans for the voluntary evacuation we had been organizing, but just as much to clear the building for whatever was coming. We ended up getting all Americans out of their apartments except for seven dependents. Two small children of one of our diplomats may well have been saved by their alert Chinese amah who threw herself over the children when bullets crashed through the windows.

Through his contacts, Wortzel learned later that the Chinese Army wanted to teach the international community a lesson for reporting on the Tiananmen events from their balconies at Jianguomenwai. The idea was, we learned from a Chinese source, to “close the door to beat the dog.” The PLA planned to close the door by firing on the diplomatic compound, thus chasing out the snooping foreigners, and then, in the privacy of their own country, Chinese security forces would carry out a massive crackdown on their own citizens to restore order. “Close the door to beat the dog,” or “guan men da gou”—it was a cheng-yu, and it carried a particularly chilling message.

The PLA had used the withdrawal of the 38th Army as a convenient pretext to fire directly at our apartments. The Chinese leadership ap-
pears to have cooked up the scheme of claiming a sniper was on the roof and then machine-gunning the diplomatic compound from one end to the other. An inspection of the bullet holes indicated that some of the rounds had come from directly across the street, from the buildings that had been infiltrated by soldiers the day before.

On the afternoon of the June 7 shooting incident, we got word from the Chinese Foreign Ministry that I could meet with Vice Foreign Minister Zhu Qizhen. We had been stonewalled for several days after the massacre, but this meeting came through. I took advantage of the opportunity to drive home several points. First, I asked that he help establish contact between the U.S. Embassy and the martial law authorities. I told him there was a sense of panic in the American community after the indiscriminate shooting at Jianguomenwai. Given the anxious state of U.S. citizens in China, I also requested that the Chinese government let the U.S. land four planes in Peking to assist in evacuation. Zhu replied that the situation in Peking had still not quieted down, but that what was happening was temporary and that the government was fully capable of suppressing the riots. As for my request to establish contact with the martial law authorities, Zhu replied that it wasn't possible at this moment. I closed by noting the growing credibility gap opening between official statements and what had actually happened the night of June 3 and pointed to the fact that the June 7 edition of the China Daily contained no reporting on the most important story in China. "The situation in China is complex," Zhu said. "It is not easy to understand events at a single stroke."

Voluntary departure became mandatory evacuation for all dependents as a result of the incident at Jianguomenwai. Reasoning that the situation was too uncertain and that the embassy could no longer ensure the safety of American citizens, the State Department ordered the evacuation of all embassy dependents and urged American students, business people, and tourists in China to leave as soon as possible. Secretary of State James Baker called at midnight on June 7 to inform me of the president's decision to evacuate all nonessential personnel and dependents. "That means Sally, too," Baker said. Later, I talked with my counterpart from England, Ambassador Alan Donald, who explained to me why his wife was not among the British dependents being evacuated. "There is privilege in rank," he said matter-of-factly. There is no such privilege in the U.S. diplomatic corps.

In late June, I had a chance to impress upon the Chinese government my views of their behavior. The new Chinese vice foreign minister replacing Zhu, who took a position in the Chinese Embassy in Washington, called me in to chastise me for articles in the U.S. press about the shooting at the Jianguomenwai diplomatic compound on June 7. He was livid that the stories were calling the shooting a ruse to chase foreigners out of China and not an attempt to snuff out snipers. "This is a fabrication," he said. "You have insulted the Chinese government and military by saying we fired deliberately on you." I listened patiently to the high-ranking diplomat and then responded. "I was only a private in the infantry," I said to him. "But I know that you don't machine-gun a building from one end to the other and up nine stories to get one guy on the roof." As I had done in Korea with President Chun Do Hwan at a crucial point in Korea's transition to democracy, I pressed harder to make my point even more powerful. "If you had hit one of those kids," I said in reference to the two American children who were shielded by their Chinese nanny, "I wouldn't be sitting here today." It was not a blessed exchange.

At the embassy, we went into high gear to arrange the evacuation. Embassy officers manned the hotlines around the clock, taking calls from all over China to help Americans find transportation to Peking and evacuation flights out of China. Embassy personnel called twenty-four local bus firms in search of assistance because our drivers were no longer coming to work. They were turned down by every firm. All the buses were out on the streets, some, no doubt, smoldering. So, using every available embassy vehicle, Foreign Service personnel drove cars and vans around the city to pick up American citizens. Embassy staff made posters in Chinese saying "American Embassy" and painted American flags, which we attached to the sides of the vehicles. The deputy chief of mission's car, bedecked in flags and posters, was the lead car for convoys around town. Larry Wortzel led the operation. He became a master at getting past armed roadblocks, using bribes of ciga-
rettes, Cokes, candy, and even money to convince fierce-looking and armed PLA guards to let the convoys through.

The evacuation was an arduous and grueling process. In some cases, we had to cajole students to take advantage of the evacuation. They were reluctant to leave their activist Chinese friends on such short notice, and some had a strong distaste for anything associated with the U.S. government. But most were eventually swayed by our argument that the situation was still dangerous. At the other end of the spectrum, consular officers had to handle crafty Chinese civilians who tried to use infant and child relatives with American passports to get themselves into the U.S. as escorts. In the midst of it all, we would get phone calls from the U.S. in which a distant voice would rant at an overworked embassy officer, “Where’s my Johnny? He’s disappeared!” In at least one case, Johnny turned out to be in the next town in Texas, safe and sound.

On June 8 and 9 more than 350 Americans departed on United Airlines charter flights to Tokyo, and on June 10 a convoy of American-flagged U.S. Embassy vehicles brought eighty-three Americans and other foreign nationals from Tientsin to the Peking airport. The Tientsin convoy was led by Lyn Edinger, a resourceful and tough commercial officer who came through in the clutch. The departures provided poignant moments. As the wife of one embassy official was packing her bags to leave on June 8, her amah turned to her and said of the Chinese authorities, “We’ll never forgive them because they killed our children.”

I went out with McKinney Russell and special assistant Gerrit Gong to say good-bye to the first group of evacuees on June 8. At the urging of the savvy Russell, I made a point of being seen. In the wake of events that had had such a thunderous impact all over the world, I had to appear to our media like an ambassador who was accessible. At the airport before the departure of the charter flight, I gave three interviews to radio, TV, and print journalists detailing the evacuation plans. Later that day, I sat down for an interview with CNN.

China was the center of world news, and I was in the spotlight, or on the hot seat, depending on your perspective. President Bush had helped to focus attention on me during his June 5 press conference by referring to me as “thoroughly experienced” and “very able.” I was even the subject of an inquiry in the June 25, 1989, issue of Parade Magazine. “So much is going on in China,” asked a reader from Seattle, “I’d like to know who our new ambassador in Peking is.”

With the interviews behind me, I boarded the charter plane with Russell to bid good-bye to the first group of Americans. On either side of me sat Americans whose families were being split up and for whom the future looked uncertain. No one knew what was going to happen in Peking, once a stable and peaceful city but now the vortex of powerfully destructive political forces. There was still sporadic firing in the city, and our embassy officers were routinely getting loaded guns aimed at their heads as they went through blockades around the city. Emotions were running high and people were crying as I made my way down the aisle of the plane shaking hands and wishing passengers a safe journey. “Go home and tell the world what you have seen,” I said. “Do not exaggerate. The truth speaks for itself.” From the group of evacuees, David Semmes, one of my first CIA colleagues and a friend of almost forty years, stood up from his seat and walked toward me. Semmes and I had started out together in the CIA working on China projects during the Korean War. A lawyer in Washington, Semmes’s business trip had been interrupted by the Tiananmen events. As an old China hand, he knew what I was going through. He said nothing and just put his arms around me.

Sally was evacuated the next day with our dog on her lap. Ambassadors may not get dispensation on evacuations for their wives, but we were able to convince the Japanese authorities to give our 14-year-old dachshund a reduced one-day quarantine before Sally and the dog went on to Korea, where they would stay for the evacuation period, which dragged on for two months. So I guess there is a little privilege in rank.

By June 23, more than 6,000 Americans had been evacuated from China in one of the largest evacuations of Americans in a crisis situation since World War II. In the end, not a single American died during the disturbances in China and only two U.S. citizens were injured, one seriously. Thanks to the efforts of a remarkable group of diplomats, military officials, and embassy workers, we got every American citizen who wanted to go.
A word about the embassy staff during these tense times. Most of the people rose to the occasion, performing superbly in a difficult and dangerous atmosphere. A few, however, broke under the pressure. Of those who broke, some indulged in grandstanding, putting their own interests before the interests of the embassy and country. Others slipped out of town, and a few fell back into wayward behavior like excessive drinking. Those who did the best were grounded in traditional American values of hard work, subordination of self, and pride in accomplishing things as part of a team. I also noticed that the embassy staff members most shocked by the events of June 3 and 4 were often the people who had spent a good deal of time studying China but who had developed a romantic image of Chinese behavior. They felt personally let down or jilted by the Chinese government’s actions to disperse the students with force.

On June 8, Sally went to our residence to collect things from our unpacked boxes of belongings, which had been deposited on the first floor. While fishing around for her Korean language books, she was struck by the organized fashion in which they were stacked—piled high against the guest room like a fortress wall, as if to protect someone inside.

She was dead right. Three days earlier in a semiconfidential operation, Chinese dissident Fang Lizhi and his wife, Li Shuxian, had slipped into the embassy and been granted protective refuge. They spent their first night in the guest quarters of the residence before being moved to a secret hideaway on the embassy compound. Our boxes had been hastily assembled into a wall around the guest room to prevent the Chinese staff at the residence from going in there.

At the time that Fang sought safety at the U.S. Embassy, he was one of the most famous dissidents in China. A renowned astrophysicist, Fang had made a name for himself by openly criticizing China’s Communist leadership, and in January, in a bold move, he had written a public letter to Deng asking for a pardon for Chinese political prisoners. For his outspoken support of human rights and democracy, Fang was known as China’s Andrei Sakharov. Though he did not appear on Tiananmen Square, his effigy had been burnt by a group of pro-government demonstrators, who demonstrated infrequently and in small groups in the lead-up to June 3. Fang was a personal thorn in the side of China’s paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping. On June 6, Dengfingered Fang as one of the “ambitious handful who were trying to subvert the People’s Republic of China.” It was a Chinese version of the personal enmity I had seen in Korea between South Korean leader Chun and dissident Kim Dae Jung.

Fang’s final entry onto embassy grounds was the stuff of spy novels, and of some suspense for the Chinese dissident. Earlier in the day, Fang and his wife had come to the embassy seeking refuge. He was number one on the Chinese government’s black list, and for his safety, he told McKinney Russell and acting deputy chief of mission Ray Burghardt. The American diplomats talked with Fang and his wife for three hours, explaining to them the State Department’s procedure for granting asylum—unless there was a threat of death, people were encouraged to leave the embassy voluntarily and find another solution. That is what Fang did.

He and his family took temporary refuge in the hotel room of an American journalist. Russell got the room number and cabled back to Washington what had happened. Several hours later, a senior officer on the China desk called back with an urgent message: Get Fang and his family into the embassy as soon as possible.

The call overruled standard operating procedure, and Russell and Burghardt raced to get China’s most famous dissident onto American soil. At about 11 p.m. on June 5, they snuck through the back entrance of the Jiangguo Hotel. Russell, an urbane man who speaks five languages, says he felt more like James Bond than a career diplomat. They stealthily made their way to Fang’s room. “Let’s go,” they said in Chinese when Fang came to the door. The group hunched down as they passed the hotel guards, and Fang, his wife, and adult son climbed into an unmarked American van with their American escorts. Later in June, their son decided to leave the embassy, and in another covert operation he was smuggled out and returned to the family’s apartment in Peking.

That first night, surrounded by a wall of boxes in a dark corner of the uninhabited embassy residence, Fang and Li got a taste of what
their lives would be like for the next thirteen months in protective American custody. During their stay at the embassy, Fang and Li lived like hermits in a sanctuary. In their hideout, they did not see the light of day for a year. As I like to say now, Fang was the man who came to dinner and stayed.

Fang's presence at the embassy was initially top-secret information that was shared with only a few people. To me, it was a sensitive situation best handled as covertly as possible until the political temperature had cooled down in Peking. So you can imagine my surprise when on June 6 White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater announced during a press conference that Fang and his wife had taken refuge in the U.S. Embassy. While I knew the Chinese would eventually figure out where he was, I didn't think the U.S. government would be the one to tell them. Apparently there had been a misunderstanding among decision-makers in Washington regarding Fang's presence at the embassy, and Fitzwater thought he was simply being accurate. The Chinese government went ballistic. Chinese spokesmen and the official media denounced the U.S. for interfering in the country's internal affairs and for violating its sovereignty. At an already difficult time in Sino-American relations, the Fang ordeal pushed the relationship to a new low.

On June 9, Deng Xiaoping made his first public appearance since the massacre. He looked frail and articulated his words poorly. But his remarks in support of the military action on Tiananmen were unequivocal: "The aim of the small group of counterrevolutionary rebels was to overthrow the Communist Party, the socialist system, and the PRC in order to set up a bourgeois republic."

And at the U.S. Embassy, cut off from our contacts and surrounded by Marine guards with automatic weapons, we were harboring a "so-called" ringleader. The presence of Fang and his wife in our embassy was a constant reminder of our connection to "bourgeois liberalism" and made us foreign enemy number one in Peking.

U.S.-China relations were in a deep freeze.

Much of what we witnessed and heard about in the weeks following Tiananmen showed that the Chinese leadership and its immense propaganda operation were at work rewriting history. The official government line in news conferences and in the press was that the military had suffered more than the civilians, a dubious claim in light of the fact that the PLA's firepower, manpower, and armored vehicles overwhelmed the unarmed people in the square. As part of an effort to glorify the military for putting down the "counterrevolutionary" rebellion, entire schools were instructed to write letters praising the soldiers. Parents were encouraged to buy presents for the "heroic" troops.

In those first weeks after the massacre, a gloom hung over Peking. The overcast weather was the silenced population's funeral dirge. Residents of Peking stayed home and largely mourned in solitude. The mood of darkness was caught most poignantly by a Chinese professor writing in mid-June to an American colleague, who had left Peking. "In China, if you don't know anything at all, you may be able to live happily. But the more you know, the more pain you feel. We are suffering here. As I write to you now, I want to cry," he wrote. "Since the massacre, it has been either cloudy or rainy every day in Peking. It seems to me that even the heavens are saddened."

In the face of a countrywide campaign to arrest opponents of the government and a numbing, relentless propaganda campaign, a palpable fear gripped Chinese citizens. Steady propaganda tried to blur people's memory of the Tiananmen massacre, but it was etched into the minds of Chinese citizens, especially in Peking. In contrast to the