

DEATH OF A STALWART

A Profile of Andrew W. Cordier

By

Doreen Geary

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## INTRODUCTION

Andrew Wellington Cordier was a unique personality who emerged into prominence in the shadow of the first two Secretaries-General of the United Nations, serving first under Trygve Lie from 1946 to 1953 and under his successor, Dag Hammarskjold until the latter's death in 1961. Both Lie and Hammarskjold became well-known world figures not only ~~due to~~ <sup>BECAUSE OF</sup> the prestige of the position but due also to the very important role they played in evolving and developing the political functions of the office of Secretary-General.

Andrew Cordier held the position of Executive Assistant to each Secretary-General, a post which involved him in a wide range of political and administrative activities. In addition, he was charged with responsibility for the operation and direction of the General Assembly. By the very nature of his role therefore he was directly and closely associated with both men in the over-all direction of the Secretariat and the General Assembly. His full title was Executive Assistant to the Secretary-General and Under Secretary-General for General Assembly and Related Affairs.

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During his United Nations career, he gained great prominence in international circles not only because of his position but by virtue of his own powerful personality and unusual qualities of leadership. Within the United Nations community he was considered to be an expert on the United Nations Charter and in parliamentary procedure. He was highly regarded by the press corps and developed a superb working relationship with them as immediate spokesman for both Lie and Hammarskjold. As a personality he himself was frequently featured in the United States press and elsewhere. He was affectionately referred to by them as "Mr. UN."

When he submitted his resignation in 1961 and finally concluded his career with the United Nations in 1962, a shock was felt throughout the world community, not only because of his unique contribution and central role, but also because his resignation was hastened by the political circumstances of the time. The impact of his final departure in 1962 was all the more keenly felt coming as it did only a few months after the tragic death of Dag Hammarskjold, for it seemed to mark the end of an era.

Andrew Cordier officially joined the United Nations Secretariat in 1946, coming from the United States State Department where he had served for just two years, but during this period he had worked on the drafting of the Charter and attended the United Nations Conference

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at San Francisco in 1945 as a technical expert with the United States Delegation headed by the late Senator Vandenberg. Immediately following this he was posted to London in 1945 with the United States Delegation to the United Nations Preparatory Commission.

His career prior to this had been that of teacher and professor of history in Ohio and Indiana. When he first joined the state Department in 1944 he had come from North Manchester, Indiana where he had been Chairman of the Department of History and Political Science of Manchester College. He had received his graduate degrees in history from the University of Chicago. Always a keen student of the League of Nations and a strong supporter of the concept of an international organization to serve the cause of peace, it was his knowledgeability in international affairs that had brought him to the attention of the State Department.

Cordier, who was born in Canton, Ohio in 1901, was sixty-one years of age when he re-entered the Academic world in July 1962 as Dean of the School of International Affairs of Columbia University in New York. Several years later at the behest of the Trustees he assumed the Presidency of that institution, becoming Columbia's 15th President, and presiding over the campus from 1968 to 1970 during two tumultuous years of student riots and general campus unrest. These events were not only in protest against the University establish-

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ment, but they were also manifestations of the prevailing political dissatisfaction with the Viet Nam war and the active leftist movements of the times. In 1970 with some degree of pacification having been established on the campus he was able to return to his post of Dean of the School of International Affairs and to complete the remainder of his term there until August 1972.

By the time his formal working career with Columbia University had come to an end he was seventy-one and in frail health. However, as President Emeritus he was able to continue in his own pursuits at Columbia. He still had many affiliations and he was engaged in the completion of an eight volume series comprising the public papers of the first three Secretaries-General of the United Nations -- Lie, Hammarskjold and U Thant. But he felt there were two more important tasks which he must yet undertake. He wished to write two volumes of memoirs; the first would contain his personal recollections of his years with the United Nations; the second was to be an account of his years at Columbia University, with particular emphasis on the two years of his Presidency. Because of my long association with him at the United Nations where I had served as his personal assistant for twelve years, he invited me in 1974 to come to Columbia University from Canada to assist him in the preparation of the United Nations memoirs.

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As a first step in the preparation of his book he sought interviews with former United Nations colleagues and staff members. On more than one occasion he indicated that he would also like to interview me in order to obtain my evaluation of him and his role "from where I sat." But Andrew Cordier died on 11 July 1975 before he could begin the narrative of his first book of memoirs and although he had completed interviews with many of his former associates, the interview with me had never taken place.

In the following pages I hope to honour his request for an interview and also to contribute what I can to the story of the last year of his life during which I worked so closely with him and during which he was so ill.

Doreen Geary,  
Victoria, Canada  
1976-1978

Author's Note

When Andrew Cordier first said he would like to interview me, I wondered how I would handle this encounter if and when it came about. I knew that it would certainly have to be very different from the sort of interview he would have with one of his peers for I had not carried their responsibility nor had I "sat in council." I also felt that I had been "too close for proper perspective" and that I had been viewing "from too limited a vantage point" to give a proper evaluation. However I did not say any of these things to him in case he might misunderstand, especially as he seemed convinced that I had something to contribute.

Later I regretted not having discussed these reservations with him for this very matter came up when I was later working with him on his memoirs. In the midst of an interview with one of his former colleagues, he turned to me and said "Doreen, how would you assess my role in that particular situation?" The question caught me off guard. I replied that to tell the truth I could not give an assessment for I had been too busily involved in those days with other affairs in his office; and that it was not I but others of his staff who at that time were working more closely with him on that particular problem and who would have been in a better position than I to give an assessment. My reply appeared to puzzle and irritate him and I feared that he had taken my answer in a very negative sense, that is that I had not wanted to commit myself,

whereas that was not the case. I had only tried to give an honest answer.

Actually while serving in his office -- as would most people in similar situations -- I had never consciously allowed myself to stop and think of him in either complimentary or uncomplimentary terms, nor to critically assess his role, although I was indeed fully aware of its importance. Owing to the heavy pressures of his office I believed at the time that the most effective contribution I could make was to keep abreast of his desk work and to move things along as smoothly as possible without stopping to analyze everything that was taking place. Moreover I endeavoured to maintain as neutral a stance as possible as far as situations and personalities were concerned.

Now that time has passed and I am able to stand back and take a long look at the days that are gone, it is much easier to analyze my personal impressions and judgments and, freed from earlier inhibitions, to let them surface. It is difficult, however, to assess or write about Andrew Cordier and his career at the United Nations for it was not so much the concrete things that he accomplished or was responsible for, as it was his quality of leadership, his attitudes and what he stood for that counted for so much and seemed to have such a strong impact during the formative years of the United Nations.

It should be borne in mind that the pages that follow contain my versions of what transpired, my interpretation of events and people, and my personal recollections of this unusual man. I do not always claim to be accurate in my assessments, nor indeed to have always witnessed events in the proper perspective. However this does not mean that I have relied solely on my own personal memory of events and personalities, for human memory is frail indeed. Where possible I have taken into account the views of his colleagues and friends. I have also consulted books written about the United Nations, other United Nations source materials at my disposal and his own private papers with which I was already familiar. Except for the Congo I have not dealt with specific questions or events in which Cordier's work involved him because this would have required extensive research which I was not able to do, located as I am in Victoria and several thousand miles away from New York. Nevertheless I hope that what I am about to set down will be useful historically.

In the title I have referred to Cordier as a "stalwart", not in the partisan sense, but within the dictionary meaning of being a person marked by outstanding strength and vigor of body, mind and spirit. As this is a personal assessment of Andrew Cordier, and not a biography, I have called it a profile.

Doreen Geary