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## [Cliff Forster -- U.S. diplomat, expert in international affairs](#)

- [John Koopman, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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Cliff Forster learned about international relations the hard way, traveling with his parents throughout Asia as a young boy and spending a couple of years in a Japanese internment camp in the Philippines before the age of 20.

Those experiences remained with him the rest of his life, which he dedicated to international affairs, as a U.S. Foreign Service officer and later as a director of the U.S. Information Agency.

Mr. Forster died Sept. 19 in Tiburon, where he lived, after suffering a fall. He was 82.

"Cliff believed very strongly in the concept of public diplomacy, something our nation needs very much today," said his wife, Nancy. "He spent long hours building friendships that still exist today. He wanted to get the message across that we're all in this together and we need to listen and learn about each other."

Mr. Forster was born in Manila, where his father was director of the Red Cross and field director for the Far East. He traveled with his parents and sister throughout Asia, including Shanghai, Tokyo and Beijing, and saw much of the turmoil in that region in the pre-war years.

Mr. Forster was a senior in high school in the Philippines, when that nation was invaded by the Japanese in 1941. Japanese troops rounded up all foreigners and interned them at camps in Santo Tomas and Los Banos.

Mr. Forster's father had a heart attack soon after and was taken out of the camp for medical care. His wife went with him, and Mr. Forster's sister already had moved back to the United States by then, so Mr. Forster had to fend for himself in the internment camps.

His wife said Mr. Forster was in the camp with many of his friends from before the war, as well as with a highly respected international community. The prisoners set up schools, gardens and baseball games, as well as their own camp administration.

It was in the camp that Mr. Forster learned best the concept that international exchanges build understanding and better relations between people of different countries. He learned that Japanese camp guards who had traveled abroad, many to the United States, were usually more humane than those who had lived insular lives.

In 1943, Mr. Forster was returned to the United States in a prisoner exchange. He promptly enlisted in the Navy. Shortly before he was to ship out for duty in the Far East, Mr. Forster was transferred to work in the office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Someone apparently had learned of his vast experience in the Philippines, and they used him for intelligence work in war planning.

Once, his wife said, Mr. Forster was given photos of the internment camp at Santo Tomas. He was in one of the photos, naked in the shower.

After the war, Mr. Forster studied international relations at Stanford University and joined the Foreign Service in 1949. He spent some time in the southern Philippines establishing the Mindanao-Sulu U.S. Information Office, then was sent to Yale University for intensive Japanese language and area studies.

Mr. Forster lived in Japan from 1953 to 1981. While there, he was instrumental in the development of various "sister city" programs, including those made between San Francisco and Osaka, and San Jose and Okayama.

Mr. Forster served in Burma and Israel, and also worked with the U.S. delegation to the United Nations during Adlai Stevenson's tenure as U.N. ambassador. He retired in 1983 as director for East Asia and the Pacific for the U.S. Information Agency.

Mr. Forster and his wife lived in Hawaii from 1983 to 1995. There, he worked in a variety of positions related to international relations. He was senior associate director of the Pacific Forum and executive director of the Pacific and Asian Affairs Council.

Mr. Forster's family had a home in Oakland for most of the 20th century. It burned down in the 1991 Oakland hills fire. He and his wife moved to Tiburon in 1995.

He is survived by his wife; sons Thomas of Orcas Island, Wash., and Washington, D.C., and Douglas of Mill Valley; daughter Cindy of Claremont (Los Angeles County); and four grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Nov. 18 at 2 p.m. at St. Stephens Church in Belvedere.

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