Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs History Project

AMBASSADOR HARVEY F. NELSON, JR

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Ambassador Nelson]

Q: First of all, let's start at the beginning. Where were you born? What about your family?

NELSON: I was born in Long Beach, California on January 26, 1924. My father and mother came from Nebraska. They were part of a large migration that brought many Nebraskans to Southern California. My paternal grandfather was of Swedish stock; he had immigrated when he was about nine or ten years old. He went to South Dakota to work in the gold mines in the Black Hills. I don't know much about my paternal grandmother; she was raised in the Middle West and had some harrowing stories to tell about encounters with the Indians. That much I do remember.

My maternal grandfather, George Norris, was in politics; he was first a Congressman from Nebraska and then Senator for a number of years. He had a lot to do with the establishment of TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority). A dam in TVA is named after him. His wife, my blood grandmother, died in childbirth; he married another woman who raised his three daughters. I don't know anything about this second wife, although she was a very strong prohibitionist. That effected our lives at times in amusing ways.

My paternal grandfather and grandmother moved to California in about 1920; then the rest of the family followed them. As I said, I was born in Long Beach; my father was in real estate with his father; they were very successful. In the early days of Southern California, it was a very profitable business.

Q: How did you mother and father meet?

NELSON: I am not sure; I used to think it happened when both were students at the University of Nebraska, but I am not sure, although I think it is a reasonable assumption. My mother's older sister also went to the University of Nebraska. But I am not sure that my mother ever finished university. She went to school at Goucher College, an institution in the Washington area, when her father was in Congress.

We moved from Long Beach to Hollywood in about 1926. My father and grandfather made a lot of money in real estate, as I have mentioned. My parents built their dream

house in Glendale - a Tutor house. It was a beautiful place. We moved in just before the depression, which then forced us to move out. They had to sell the house to meet all their debts. So we moved across the canyon in Glendale - about three or four miles away - to an interesting old house which was much more fun for us kids. It had been partially burned down by a forest fire, but was patched up. They rented the place for $50 per month. Eventually, we made more repairs and built it up. It was our home for much of my youth. My parents eventually bought the place. It survived until the freeways came along; now the lot is part of a highway. That was very depressing to my father who really loved the place. It was a wonderful place to grow up in.

Q: Did your father remain in the real estate business?

NELSON: He did, but his real passion was the oil business. He did a lot of prospecting; he was a very well respected business man in the Los Angeles area. Even in the depression, it was not that hard for him to raise money for various oil expeditions. There were some people who still had resources in the early 1930s; furthermore, oil exploration was a tax write-off ; that made investments attractive, particularly for those in the high tax brackets. My father became involved in some interesting explorations; I can remember going to the oil fields often when he and his wild-catter friends would be drilling or trying to find a new field. We would sit and wait for the gusher. I never saw one. So I don't think my father was very successful in the oil business, but he did develop a few small fields. He went on one expedition where the drilling was down 15,000 feet; in the 1930s, that was a real feat. It was very expensive of course. He finally had to quit that field because he just couldn't or wouldn't ask for more money from anybody. Of course, a few years later one of the major oil producers took over the field and drilled another 500 feet or so and hit pay dirt - a major gusher! So my father was right about the location. He always used to say that the oil was there; it was just a matter of finding it.

So oil exploration was the love of his life, but the income for the family came from the real estate business.

I went to Glendale high school and then to Occidental College when WWII came along.

Q: What was life like at home? *Did you have brothers and sisters?*

NELSON: I had two younger sisters. I was the oldest child. My mother was very much involved in politics; she was an avid Democrat. For a while, she headed up the League of Women Voters chapter in Los Angeles County. This attachment to politics of course came from her life experiences with her father. She continued her almost fanatic interest in politics until she died four years ago at the age of 101.

Q: I think I remember that particularly in the early 1930s, politics was a consuming business for a lot of people.

NELSON: Quite right. The bookshelves were filled with books about politics and the

muckrakers like Upton Sinclair were riding high. Then there was the Townsend plan. That was something. I can remember when we moved from our up-scale house to the considerably more modest dwelling, I went to a little grammar school at the bottom of the hill on which we were living. That was a three room school. The playground was in very bad shape. This was a fairly conservative community, but I was a supporter of FDR. We used to fight about politics on the playground. It was a very activist time.

That was a very intense period, in part because a lot of people were afraid; they didn't know how to escape from the terrible economic conditions. I can remember when the banks were closed; I never understood that - I was too young. But it was obviously a very difficult period. My parents were very good; they were living on the margin, but they never made us kids feel that the family was in trouble. In retrospect, I now know that we really were in great difficulties. As I said, particularly my mother, felt very strongly about the political scene and about bringing the economic crisis to an end through some political actions.

We used dinner time as forum for discussions. I liked that even though we used to sit sometime for hours. The subject usually would be politics, although sometime we listened to a discussion of the oil business. Sunday morning breakfast used to be outside; sometimes those meals would last until three o'clock in the afternoon. Those meals were really gripping; that is what really got me interested in the public service. I was not sure which part of that service I would enter, but it ended up with me becoming a Foreign Service officer.

Q: Was your father more Republican oriented in light of his business interests?

NELSON: Not really. He had a great sense of what was fair. He was very uncomfortable with the economic extremes; whether it was wealth or poverty. He was a very gentle and considerate man. He also had a great sense of humor. As I said, he was not a successful oil man, which might have had some influence on his political views. He used to say that he wasn't a gambler, by which I think he meant to say that he was not a big gambler. He didn't go to the poker or any other gaming tables. In general, we had a liberal household, driven by my mother's spirit.

Q: What kinds of things did you read?

NELSON: I was not a good reader; I didn't do a lot of it. My step-grandmother, whom I didn't know very well, gave me books; she saw me as the coming light in the family and she tried to stimulate my curiosity. I read some; my mother encouraged me a lot and we did have a lot of books. But I didn't really begin to enjoy reading until I was a senior in high school or maybe even later. Then I couldn't get enough. My second wife on the other hand read from the first moment she could recognize a letter. I did enjoy Steinbeck and Sinclair and Jack London.

Q: Being in or near Hollywood were movies at all of interest?

NELSON: We lived among people who were in the movie business, but I really was not interested except that a lot of money for political efforts came from the movie industry. Since my mother was deeply involved, she knew a lot of the donors. My dad sold them a lot of houses. I can still remember when my father and a school friend of his opened up a very posh area of Beverly Hills. A lot of the movie people bought houses there. My grandfather had a very big house; it used to sit by itself in a large field and I can still remember the meadows around it. Gradually, of course, the land was sold off and other houses began to be built there by my father and his partner. When it came time for my grandparents to move to smaller quarters, my father handled the transaction and sold the house to Laurel of Laurel and Hardy fame. I remember that because my father came home one day with an autographed picture from the comedians. My father and I thought they were the greatest comedians of their time.

I am not sure how many movies I in fact did see. I was forbidden to go to the movies until I was late in elementary school. My mother was very liberal in her attitude towards me; she let me do all sorts of things. I am not quite sure why she trusted me so much. But movies were out until I was seven or eight. I tried to sneak off for a couple, but I got caught. That was tough because I didn't like to act contrary to my mother's wishes. I did have a friend, Bill Webber, down the street and he and I got permission to go the Saturday matinees at the Carmel theater on Santa Monica Boulevard which was about a mile from my house. The films were silent; I could not read fast enough to catch all the explanations, but my friend, who was a Swiss immigrant and who had learned English later than I did, had no trouble keeping up with the sub-titles. He would then tell me what was going on. That was a friendship that has lasted until his death about four years ago.

Q: How was the Glendale educational system?

NELSON: As I mentioned, the elementary school was tiny. We had two or three grades in one classroom with one teacher. There were probably 25-30 students in each classroom. I can remember one outstanding teacher; my fourth and fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Badour. I remember in part because my younger sister, who lives nearby in Fairfax, talks about her periodically. Mrs. Anderson who had the sixth grade, was the fantastic teacher; she undoubtedly made a lot of difference in my life. I learned about integrity from her, as much as I could from someone who was not a member of the family. I also learned compassion from her, in addition of course to the course lessons. We used to go back to see Mrs. Anderson. When she had ended her teaching day, we would come from our junior high school on our bicycles. She was tired after a day's work and undoubtedly wanted to go home. But she had to stay and listen to us telling her what we were doing and she would patiently listen to us. She was just one of those persons that appear in your life and leave a permanent imprint. She had everything and was a large motivator for me.

Then I went to Woodrow Wilson Junior High School, which was co-located with the high school. It was a pretty big school, although I don't remember exactly how many students attended. I can't say that I remember much of my junior high school days. I rode my

bicycle to school for about five miles each way. It was down hill to the school, but it was a struggle at the end of the day to get back home. We had buses, but my friends and I insisted on using our bicycles; it was an era when the roads were not completely jammed with cars, although there were some risky places. On some days, we would catch the bus, but we tried to bicycle whenever we could.

Glendale High School, which, as I said, was on the same grounds as Woodrow Wilson, was a huge school - about 3,000 students. My graduating class totaled 900 students. It was an unusual situation because in those days, schools used to be rather small.

Q: How was the educational system at Glendale high?

NELSON: I can't really grade it; I did moderately well by their standards. I began to learn Spanish; I learned a lot about science which I enjoyed. I just told my wife that I did take one semester of Latin at Glendale because my paternal grandfather said I should - and I trusted his judgment. The civics - now known as political science - classes were interesting. As was required for all, I had to take chemistry. That was fun; the teacher was the band leader who had never taught chemistry before. So we were learning together and that made for lots of entertainment. He said that he could teach us to play various instruments, but that chemistry was going to be new to all of us. Fortunately, he turned out to be a pretty good teacher and we learned the rudiments of chemistry.

Q: Did you concentrate on any particular subject or activity?

NELSON: I did not participate in extra-curricular activities to any great extent. I happened to be looking at my year book recently and found that I had been president of the Spanish club. I must say that I have no recollection of that at all. I am not sure that added up to very much. I had a small group of friends. Football of course was the big thing and I gave some consideration to trying out. I didn't play, but some of my friends did; so I served as a water boy. I traveled with the team, but after one year of doing that I tried tennis, where I played on the second string team. Extra curricular activities were just not that important to me; in some respects, I was very much a loner. I used to have to hurry home right after school to do some jobs in the neighborhood as well in our house. That old house was on about three acres with eucalyptus trees; there was never any end to what I could do on our property.

I also had a very close buddy with whom I cycled a lot. We cycled all over California. One year, we took a train to Seattle and bicycled back. We had what I called a "racing" bike. By today's standards, it weighted a ton. It had smaller tires - not the tiny ones - and it had handle bars turned down - I turned them up. We made special packs to put on our racks and we camped on the way. We did a lot of that which was very enjoyable.

We had a small group in high school who always had lunch together. We brought our lunches. In the group were my younger cousin, my cycling buddy, a budding photographer - never very successful, but made his living that way - , Senator Nye's son,

who had moved to California with his mother after his father developed a fondness for some other woman, and another fellow who became a doctor. We would eat together and play penny ante poker. That was our little social group. I had a couple of girl friends with whom I went to dances. But it was the guys who were my focus; as I said, I didn't really get involved in school activities.

Q: When did you graduate?

NELSON: I graduated in 1942.

Q: During your high school days, was there much conversation around the family table about events overseas?

NELSON: There were discussions about events overseas. I really had not appreciated that so much. I mentioned that there was a group close to my family that consisted primarily of teachers and school administrators - younger than my parents, but who also had been impacted by the depression. They met each other at political meetings and became good friends. These people would get together several times during the year for dinners or barbecues at our house. These get-togethers were lots of fun and interesting. They would discuss current events and then would make predictions about the coming year. One would record these predictions and would read them the following year. Most predictions were off target, but it was a very interesting exercise.

They must have been paying considerable attention to Asia because my father, who was not as knowledgeable as the others in the group but who paid attention, predicted that the U.S. would be dragged into a war in Asia by the Japanese. He thought that the U.S. would be attacked somewhere 7 ½ miles north-east of Pearl Harbor. You can imagine how surprised the group was when it opened that prediction on New Year's Eve in 1941. The European conflict of course also got considerable attention.

Q: I am interested in the development of a future Foreign Service officer. Was geography thrust on you?

NELSON: It was not thrust on me; I learned eagerly. I was very interested in Latin America. I did a lot of special projects in school on that area. Ironically, I never served there. I studied Spanish in part because my mother was a great believer in learning other languages. She studied Spanish as well. My father did too, although he didn't get very far. My mother traveled to Mexico on several occasions. There was a considerable Spanish-speaking population in Los Angeles even in my days. I found California history quite fascinating; I became a buff in it. I learned all about the missions.

Q: How did Pearl Harbor and subsequent events impact on you in your senior year in high school?

NELSON: We had some friends who had moved to Hawaii. They had been school friends

of my parents. The woman was seriously crippled by arthritis. They thought that the Hawaii climate might ease her pains. Their business was in Omaha; so the father, Wilbur, used to travel back and forth. In those days, of course, the mode of travel was ships - the Luralei and Matsunia. In 1938, he stayed with us when he was traveling back to Hawaii. I went upstairs after dinner to do my homework. I had told him jokingly that I would be ready to go with him the next day when he was boarding the ship.

The next day, I went to school. At about 10:00 o'clock, I was called to the principal's office. I wondered what transgression I had committed. He told me that he was sending for a taxi to take me home because I was about to go to Hawaii. My parents were like that. Wilbur had asked them to let me come because he had a son my age. So off I went and stayed for a year. I must say that I fell in love with one of the island girls. I really didn't want to leave even after a year. I did go home, but at the first opportunity, I signed on the Matsunia as a seaman for the summer and sailed to Hawaii only to find that the girl had lost all interest in me. In Hawaii, I went to Roosevelt High School which was about one and a half miles from our house in the Punch Bowl. We had to wear shoes in school, but didn't have to do so in going and coming from school. So I used to tie the shoes together and carry them around my neck. I just reveled in the life on the islands. It was fantastic.

We did a lot of dancing, which I loved. We danced on the quad at noon which had music. We danced at night. You couldn't go barefooted, so we wore little Japanese slippers. It was a wonderful life for kids. It was very comfortable and you could do a lot of stuff in those slippers.

So I had this connection with Hawaii. In fact, I had signed off to crew on the ship during the 1941 Christmas holidays; unfortunately, the Japanese interfered with those plans.

Q: What were your responsibilities on the ship?

NELSON: The lowest possible job. You had to go to the union hall - the communist union run by Harry Bridges. He was a great political power for years. I had to join the union; I still have my papers from those days. When you went to the hall, you just took a chance. It was a matter of luck if you got on board a ship. Fortunately, each time I went, I was successful because I was not a regular union member. I was what was called a "scallion," which meant you had to do whatever was asked of you. I worked in the galley; I hauled 300 pounds of ice from the trucks onto a rolling ship. It was fun; you would be pushing up hill at one moment and downhill in the next. Once, I made forty pieces of toast and spread butter on them with a paint brush. That was the kind of unusual work that I had to do. Of course, I had the worst possible bunk in the ship. But it was an eye-opener for me. I think if my parents had known how hard and perilous the work was, I think they would have said that they would have preferred if I found some other employment. But they didn't know and I had no inkling before I started. I learned to deal with it.

But this connection allowed me to know where the bombing took place. The impact on us as far as our livelihood was concerned was primarily a plus because with the war came a certain amount of prosperity to southern California. Lots of people came and my dad's business blossomed. My mother was deeply concerned by the politics of the events. I soon became available for the draft.

Q: Were there Nisei at Glendale high?

NELSON: There were a few. It was a terrible chapter in our history when we interned these Americans of Japanese descent. My mother had Nisei friends. The market where she shopped was run by Nisei. The cleaners were also Nisei. They served us but were also our friends. We didn't socialize with them because we had little in common, but they were friends. When they were interned, my household was quite upset. It was very hard particularly for my mother who was an avid supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt. But she could not accept our policy towards the Nisei. It disturbed her for the rest of her life. She thought that FDR had betrayed his ideals. It was also stupid.

Q: We didn't lock up the Japanese-Americans in Hawaii.

NELSON: That is right. We would have had to lock up most of the population. I should mention that I really loved the Hawaiian society. There were all kinds of people on the islands. It was glorious.

Q: I suppose that when you graduated in 1942, you were prepared to enter military service.

NELSON: Certainly. But I had another year before I was drafted. I had registered immediately but was not called until 1943. In August 1942 I signed up for the V-12 Navy program which was not activated for another year. So I went off to Occidental College until the V-12 program was activated. Occidental was one of the colleges which participated. I spent my sophomore year there as a seaman-student.

Then I went to Columbia for the "90 day wonder school." Then I became an ensign. I had a couple of choices then. In my case, it was a meaningful choice. My choices I think were interesting. I should have noted that I was quite a swimmer; I enjoyed it greatly. I thought therefore that underwater demolition might be an interesting assignment. The other option I had was Russian language training. That tied into my international affairs interests. So I had a rationale for either option; the first would have had me engaged in the war and the other could have been useful for the future. So I was sent to the language school - probably for the good of the nation and the safety of other underwater demolition Navy men.

I took Russian language training at the University of Colorado. That is where the Navy had its language school. The majority of students were studying Japanese or Malaysian or other Asian languages. There were five Russian language students as well. I met my

future wife there; she was the younger sister of a colleague who was also studying Russian. We had four Russian teachers which helped greatly in our learning. They were very hard-fisted task masters and very good. We learned Russian! I spent six months at the university.

Q: What was the language system? Did you learn dialogue and then held conversations?

NELSON: It was an oral approach. We learned very little grammar. We discussed it periodically, but we were supposed to learn the language structure from our conversations. It was very similar to the FSI method, which I always found very successful.

Q: How was the Navy planning to use you?

NELSON: It was anticipated at that point that we would be fighting a long war in Asia with the Russians against the Japanese. I was told that this would be a long struggle. We would need to work with the Russians. Of course, the war really came to an end before I was finished with all my learning and a couple of assignments. So, they sent me first to Washington to work on some military dictionaries. Then I went to New York to attend an intelligence school. Then to Europe where I worked for a little while as an interpreter for one of the commissions that met in Berlin. But by then, we had too many Russian language officers; so I was sent to Kiel to work as a liaison officer with the British Navy. I did that for a year and a half before I was discharged in August 1946.

Q: During your language training, what were your teachers saying about Soviet society?

NELSON: They were all émigrés and therefore very anti-Soviet. They had had lots of interesting experiences. They were very much imbedded in Russian ethos which made them very interesting. We learned a lot about Russia, but little about the Soviets whom they did not know because they had left Russia before the Soviets really came to power. They were not happy with what had happened to their country but were pretty much resigned to the realities. I remember reading Pushkin and Tolstoy. The Russian language is really quite beautiful and very powerful. I think later when I met Russians I felt that their emotions were more evident than in the case of others. That was true even among the military; Russians are quite emotional. I was very impressed by them.

It was during the language training that I began to seriously consider the Foreign Service. My language colleague - the brother of my wife-to-be - J.T. Kendrick. He had been in the Foreign Service in Latin America. I had very high regard for him. I recently said goodbye to him; he was heading for Cambridge University to study for 18 months at the age of 80. He stayed in the Foreign Service after the war but retired many years before I did.

Q: Did you get any feeling for the conditions in the Soviet Union?

NELSON: I never heard any doubts about the nature of the Stalin regime. I think I came

out of the language school very pro-Soviet. They were, after all, our allies in fighting the bad guys. We didn't pay much attention to the negative side. Even the pact with the Germans which preceded the Soviets entry into WWII did not register until much later with me. I had a very naive view of the Soviet Union.

Q: What did your Berlin Commission work on?

NELSON: We were mainly dividing up the spoils of war. Most of the work was connected with the movement of industrial capacities from Germany to the Soviet Union. The British did not have a Russian language officer, so when I was in Kiel I helped in moving small boats to the Soviet Union. The British ran convoys through mine fields to Poland where the Soviets took them. There weren't many boats, but my language training came in handy in helping the British work out arrangements with the Soviets.

Q: Were the Soviets you dealt with at all leery?

NELSON: Not at all. They were very warm and seemed open to me - perhaps I was misled in that. They had been greatly misled about the U.S. My Russian was not really good enough to explore some of the more profound subjects. I could use it for everyday work, but I could not carry on an intensive political conversation. So my impressions were somewhat superficial.

Q: You were discharged in 1946. What happened next?

NELSON: A very high priority was getting married. I had met this charming woman in Colorado. Her sister moved to New York, and she came to join her. Both worked for a model agency, doing administrative work. So we met in New York and then went to California to meet my parents. Then I went to her home which was on a farm in Oklahoma to ask her father's permission to marry his daughter. I spent Christmas on the farm and then married in June, 1947.

Q: Did you go back to Occidental College?

NELSON: Yes, I did to get my bachelor's degree. I majored in political science. As I said, my interest in the Foreign Service had been stimulated by my brother-in-law as well as the Russian language training. So when I returned to Occidental, I was already interested in pursuing the Foreign Service possibility. I looked at other possibilities, but not seriously. One option was to join my father in his real estate business, although I doubt that I would have been much good at it. But that didn't seem to me to be a very satisfactory career, so I didn't pursue it very far.

I got my bachelor's degree in 1947 after which I rushed to Oklahoma for my wedding. We returned to Occidental where I took a year of graduate studies and she attended college which she had not previously completed. The Foreign Service was very much on my mind, but instead we decided to go to Sweden for a year. I attended the University of

Stockholm while my wife, bless her soul, threw herself into learning the language. She got herself a job as a secretary to a little diesel motor company. She did their English correspondence and she answered the telephones. She used to have great stories about her coping with Swedes on the phone, but she managed.

Q: Was going to Sweden a return to your "roots"?

NELSON: It was in a way. When I was in Kiel, I could get to Denmark and Sweden rather easily. I had gotten a name of a Swedish person from my grandfather. I was successful in finding him. That led me to all sorts of relatives. I learned to have schnapps for breakfast; those country folks were something else. That stimulated my interest in returning to Sweden for a more extended period. I still had some part of my GI bill rights left, which I used to finance my attendance at Stockholm University. A lot of other people were going abroad using the GI bill to finance their overseas education. They went to France or England or Switzerland. I wanted to do something a little different which was one more reason I chose Sweden. There was a small group of us who went to Stockholm. It was a great year. So my trip to Sweden had some connection with "roots" and some connection with doing something a little different - not doing what everybody else was doing.

Q: I am sure you recognized the GI bill was not going to sustain you forever. When did you focus on a career?

NELSON: I had been in the military long enough that I had some more years to go on the GI bill. I wanted to use them, but I didn't use all of them. I did return to the U.S. to attend Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy for one year, which I completed in 1950. Then I really had to face the prospects of employment. I obviously had my sights on the Foreign Service. Before going to Fletcher, I took the exam - the three and a half days ordeal. I finished my work there and had received my master's degree. But I had not passed the oral exam; so I had to try again, which I did in 1950.

Q: How was Fletcher in the 1949-50 period?

NELSON: It was a very small school. Just this week, my class is trying to put together a 50th anniversary; I think about twelve people said they would attend. I don't think my class was larger than 35 or 40 students. It was a diverse group. We didn't live with other students; we lived in Cambridge and then Boston. She got a job in Boston. So we didn't really participate in the campus life; I went to Fletcher for the academic work. In retrospect, we probably should have been closer to the campus life because perhaps I missed some opportunities. I still enjoyed and found it fulfilling, but our community participation was not as great as it might have been. The classes were small; the staff was very impressive; and the final exams very intimidating.

Q: What do you remember of the first Foreign Service oral exam - the one you did not pass?

NELSON: Most of the questions were on literature to see whether I had done enough reading; I obviously had not. So thereafter, I spent a lot of time reading. When I came back for the second round, I think the board had pretty well decided that it would pass me anyway. The second examination was rather perfunctory. I think the first panel's concern was legitimate if that was the standard for everyone; I did not meet it. It just took me two tries to meet the standard.

Q: What did you do between the two oral exams?

NELSON: I took a job. We had to eat. I really didn't know what we were going to do after having been rejected by the first panel. I don't think my approach at the time was very realistic. It so happen that the head of the political science department of Bowdoin College was touring schools in the Boston area. He needed an instructor for his department. So I decided to look into it. I was interviewed by him; he was very decisive since he had done so many interviews in his life. After a while, he said that he had seen enough and was ready to make an offer. I said that was fine with me and so I was hired.

The experience at Bowdoin College was a great one. I came very close to deciding to stay in academia and forgetting about the Foreign Service. The college at the time consisted of about 800 students - all male. The president was a Mr. Sills. Bowdoin had been in existence for about 200 years and had had only eight presidents. Once appointed, you stayed forever. My colleagues were very accomplished and decent people. My wife and I discussed the possibilities a lot. She worked on her degree at Colby College which was within driving distance. She enjoyed that. So we both were very reluctant to leave, but I said that I had put a lot of time and effort in getting ready for the Foreign Service and that we might regret it if we didn't try. So we proceeded.

Q: You entered the Foreign Service in 1950. Did you attend the basic officer's course?

NELSON: I entered in October and went right into the course. I thought our group was very diverse. We had couple of women, which was still unusual in those days. They were very talented. Larkin was the name of one; she was very forceful. I must say that I don't remember much of my class. I was still a loner and therefore did not interact very much with my classmates. I got along well with them, but I didn't have much camaraderie with them. My wife came to Washington with me, but then we discovered that we would not be leaving until January, 1951. That would give her enough time to finish her BA if she hurried back to Occidental. She went back to California and lived with my parents. She got her BA.

I had an uncle and aunt in Washington, so I was not entirely on my own. I just went to class and then did my own thing. So I don't have much of a recollection of my class. As best as I can remember, they were good folks, very interesting and very diverse. I do remember the women because they were so impressive.

Q: Did you have some thoughts at the time in what you might to specialize?

NELSON: I still wanted to go to Latin America. I had taken both Russian and Spanish and passed both exams. My first assignment was to Latin America - Guayaquil. But our assignment was changed. It was changed for a very compassionate reason. My brother-in-law had just been divorced. He was stationed in Germany. The director of personnel knew my brother-in-law and knew that he was hurting. So he asked us whether it would be useful if we were assigned to Copenhagen so that my wife could be near him, which I thought was a very thoughtful suggestion. I discussed it with my wife and agreed to go to Copenhagen.

So a very recently married coupled with no children was sent to Denmark. Not bad! We were there from 1952 to 1956.

Q: What was the situation in Denmark at the time?

NELSON: This was during the early days of NATO and there was a lot of debate on whether Denmark should join. The tensions with the Soviets were running very high. There was a lot of uncertainty about American influence - a subject that was being discussed in many countries. I still have a newspaper cartoon which showed the changing of the guard at the royal palace; only the troops were American GIs shown as a sloppy, crummy looking bunch of guys. It was very funny. It was almost on the mark! It showed a friendly and humorous concern that the Danes had.

During my tour, the first defection of a Soviet MIG took place. He flew to Bornholm. It was a big story.

Q: What was your assignment?

NELSON: I started as a consular officer. After a year, I joined the political section. Our ambassador was Eugenie Anderson, an outstanding person from Red Wing, Minnesota.

Q: Did you mention your connection with Senator Norris?

NELSON: I wouldn't have dared to do so. That is something I learned from my mother; we were not to use the Senator's name, and I think she was absolutely right. The Senator would have been quite displeased.

Anderson was an outstanding ambassador and she had a superb DCM, Jack Bell, who became a sort of a mentor and a great friend. As I said, I spent one year as a vice consul.

Q: What do you remember about your consular work?

NELSON: We had the usual number of Americans in jail. We had a lot of seamen who got into trouble. One day, one of these seamen came in to see me. I had seen him before

when he was in some sort of trouble. He told me that his ship had left, and he was stranded in Denmark. So we had to repatriate him.

I had a very unfortunate case of an American woman whose Danish husband had died, leaving her penniless. She wanted to return to the U.S. So I arranged free passage on a freighter which could be done on those days with the captain's permission. We had no resources at the time for repatriation. I think it was some sort of miracle whenever we were able to find free passage. We did have some money to provide an allowance to pay for food and sundries. But I didn't realize that she was an alcoholic. So she showed up at the ship, drunk and in bad condition. The captain refused to let her board. But the next day, I gave the captain the money and he allowed the woman to board. That took some persuasion, but I convinced him that as long she didn't have any money, she couldn't get any alcohol. As far as I know she was delivered to the U.S. This was my first lesson in naiveté when working with people who you are trying to help, but who do not help themselves.

Then there was a young man who came through during Christmas time. We had been taught in the indoctrination course never to use your money to help destitute Americans. This man was headed for Norway for reasons that I don't remember now. He asked me for $10 for bus fare; I knew I couldn't get government assistance for him, and I did have the money in my pocket. So I loaned him the money and much to my surprise, a few weeks later I got the money back.

Q: Did you have a visa fraud problem?

NELSON: I was not conscious of any efforts to obtain visas fraudulently. I had very little to do with visa issuances in any case. I was working on passports and protection of Americans. So if there were major problems, I was not aware of them. Redman Duggan, our consul, was an exceedingly cautious man. I don't remember him ever mentioning any problems.

Q: Did you get involved in the annual Fourth of July celebration?

NELSON: Certainly; it was a major event in Copenhagen. We had a very nice ambassadorial residence. I don't think at the time the list of invitees was quite as large as it has become in more recent years.

Q: Did you make any close Danish friends?

NELSON: We did establish some very good relations. Next week, my wife and I are going to Europe. First we are going to England to visit some friends; then she is going to Amsterdam for a business conference; we will then meet in Copenhagen to see some old Danish friends. I should mention that this is my second wife who was not with me during my Copenhagen tour, but she has met these Danes and has also become friends with them. I have a Danish God-daughter and have in effect adopted her daughter as our

Danish God-grand-daughter. We have a place there, and these people have become sort of family. These friendships all stemmed from my first tour in Copenhagen. We adopted our oldest child in Copenhagen. He was a Swedish national. So when we adopted him, he was given a diplomatic visa in his Swedish passport - as a son of an American diplomat. Among our close Danish friends is an attorney who arranged the adoption and the convoluted passport document.

I hadn't realized that making friends with the Danes was any kind of problem. I have heard that although they are very friendly, it sometimes difficult to break into their inner circles. I never found that. Of course, we were there when all of Europe was still trying to recover from a horrible war. It may well have been that everyone was more open to Americans particularly.

Q: That raised the question of how the Danes viewed the Germans in the early 1950s.

NELSON: Not at all friendly. They were edgy about their neighbors although they recognized that Germany was pretty much under the control of the Allies. The control was tight enough to limit our access to and through Germany only through some specific routes or limited transportation ways - e.g. closed trains.

The Danes managed to deal with the Germans during the war and delighted in fooling the Germans sufficiently to become an escape route for Jews fleeing Germany and other parts of Europe. The lawyer I mentioned was one of the leaders of this "underground" escape route. He unfortunately was shot while trying to help the Jews and is today crippled by the wounds. He is barely able to walk. Not surprisingly, even today he bears a resentment against the Germans.

Q: The Soviets were quite close to Denmark at the time. Was there concern that they might make a move?

NELSON: Certainly. They were stationed right across the water in Lübeck in Germany. And the island of Bornholm was very close to Soviet occupied territory. So the Danes did worry. My wife and I were first alerted to this when upon our arrival, we were housed in the Koden Hotel which was right on the waterfront. The morning after our arrival, we noticed large numbers of troop on the docks. People were scurrying around with guns. We wondered whether some action was under way. Fortunately, we discovered it was just an exercise. It was enough to worry us and to raise some questions in our minds.

Q: You were in Copenhagen in 1953, when the Berlin riots broke out. I was in Darmstadt at the time in the military and we were ordered not to leave our barracks. It was a very tense moment.

NELSON: We didn't really understand what was going on and whether anyone could keep events from getting out of control. We had enough of these kinds of incidents by that time so that when a new one popped out, people were not overly alarmed.

Q: How large was the political section?

NELSON: It was a small embassy. I think there must have been just a couple of political officers in it. In fact, I think that Jack Bell, the DCM, and I covered the political landscape. We spent our time talking to the political leadership. There were several parties in the parliament, and I spent most of my time talking to the fringe groups. The contacts with the major parties were reserved for the ambassador and the DCM.

One of my contacts was with the representative of the "Single Tax" party; he was the sole member of parliament from that group. He tried to explain "single" tax to me several times, but I can't say that it made much of a dent. It was an interesting time in Denmark; I got to meet most of the Danish political leadership. How useful any of this was one never knows.

Q: Did the Danes have a socialist society at the time as the Swedes had?

NELSON: I don't think so, My impression was that it was a different society from Sweden having observed that one a few years earlier when I was a student. One of my classmates whom I didn't know very well was Olaf Palme, who became prime minister in 1969. Erlander was the prime minister when I was there and for many years thereafter - until 1969. They espoused a socialist philosophy, but I have the impression that despite the rhetoric, today the country is far from being a socialist state. The Danes never went in that direction, even though the socialist party was very strong. But the leadership of the country was changed often enough to prevent any radical departures from the norm.

Q: What were American interests in Denmark at the time?

NELSON: I think we were principally interested in assuring that Denmark remain a solid and forceful member of NATO.

Q: Were there any major issues between us and Denmark?

NELSON: I don't think so. We didn't run into many negative attitudes toward the U.S. I am sure that a few Danes may have held them, but it was not a general attitude. As I said, they were still recovering from a very difficult period in their history, and we were providing major relief.

Q: Many communist adherents in Denmark?

NELSON: No. There were some intellectuals and students who spoke in favor of the Soviet Union, but it was a very small minority. We of course considered this fringe to be very unrealistic. Even today there are still a few supporters of Russia and one has to wonder why. There was a small peace movement led by some members of the cultural community. I remember once that a visa was issued to a Danish cello player who turned

up on one of Senator McCarthy's lists. Our consul was thoroughly shaken, but he was never punished for issuing the visa.

Q: Were McCarthy's activities well known in Denmark?

NELSON: Oh, yes. It was a very bad time for the U.S. and particularly the Foreign Service. As I mentioned earlier, my wife and I had only committed ourselves to trying the Foreign Service. During the McCarthy era, we were very close to leaving it because we felt that he was an unchecked rogue who was doing serious harm to our interests and certainly was not representing the principles for which we thought the U.S. stood. We considered Secretary Dulles extremely cowardly, and my wife and I felt that we could not really work for this administration.

Q: Were your embassy colleagues expressing similar dismay?

NELSON: Absolutely. Jack Bell was replaced as DCM by Luke Battle, who was more or less a political appointee, although certainly not a newcomer to the Department. The story was that he was sent to Denmark to get him out of the Department because he was too liberal and therefore suspect for Senator McCarthy. He was sent to Denmark in order to protect him.

Q: Scott McLeod was McCarthy's eyes and ears in the Department.

NELSON: That's right. It was a bad time for the Department of State. People were treated badly. So we came close to resigning from the Foreign Service.

Q: By 1954, were you still on the fence about the Foreign Service?

NELSON: I think lethargy had set in by that time. I didn't have an alternative. Furthermore we had come to like the work and life-style; so I guess you can say that by that time we were hooked. You may remember that by this time, we had a Refugee Relief Act which had not been well implemented, at least as far as Congress was concerned. Because of Congressional pressures, the Department decided to open a number of new consular offices to handle the additional work-load. So we were suddenly ordered to go to Naples to join the Refugee Relief staff there. We were given ten days to report. So we sold our car, packed up our belongings, etc. The night before we were supposed to leave we were told that our orders had been canceled and we were to stay in Denmark. So we had to start all over again.

Q: After the Naples debacle, what happened in 1955?

NELSON: We stayed in Denmark one more year.

Q: And what happened in 1956?

NELSON: Then we were told to return to Washington where I was assigned to INR (the Bureau of Intelligence and Research) where I worked in the Scandinavian Affairs office. This office covered Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Finland. The Finns were not always happy to be with these other countries because they had been a Swedish colony for 600 years and wanted to distance themselves from these other northern countries.

Q: What were your office's main concerns?

NELSON: As I remember we were concerned about Iceland's continued participation in NATO. Iceland was very important to us, but the Icelanders were not totally supportive of their membership in NATO, especially as the Cold War was heating up. It was an important base for us so that Soviet submarines operating in the northern Atlantic could be monitored. There was an Icelander political party which we considered as communist and pro-Soviet. That worried us a great deal.

Greenland was also important to us also because of the bases we had there. That made it important that the Danes not waver in their participation in NATO.

We worried about Finland because it had to make some concessions to the Soviets in light of their geographical situation. They had lost a war with the Soviets and were paying huge reparations; they certainly didn't want to endure any more hardships. So they played the "Soviet game" sometimes, in our view.

Q: What were our views of the Swedes at the time?

NELSON: We considered them pretty soft on the Soviet Union. We kept forgetting the Swedish proximity to the USSR. We were not comfortable with the Swedish position; they never joined NATO although they would have been very welcomed. But I think we recognized their dilemma. Nevertheless, we wished that they would have been a little harder and less compliant with the Soviets. We worried that they could not have defended their own security if the Soviets mounted any kind of threat.

Q: How did you find the political reporting that was being sent in by our embassies?

NELSON: I don't think I can give a good answer to that question. I don't remember any memorable reporting.

Q: What about the CIA analyses?

NELSON: We had the national intelligence estimates which we used often. We relied on them.

Q: How were the INR-EUR (Bureau of European Affairs) relationships?

NELSON: I don't remember it being very close. I don't think I talked very often with the

desk officers. I am a little vague on specifics, but in general, I don't remember that relationships as being very close.

Q: What were you doing in INR?

NELSON: We were doing our own intelligence analysis on what was going on in each country and where it might be heading.

Q: Did you travel?

NELSON: No; it was an "inside" job. In retrospect, I think that that wasn't very good, but as I was still a novice in the Foreign Service, it was a good assignment. I may not have been assertive enough, but I think INR in general was not a central concern to the policy-makers. The bureau was potentially important, but had not reached that level.

Q: Did INR have a large civil servant component who had been in the organization for a long time?

NELSON: Certainly; there were many people who had been in INR for many, many years. I found that those with whom I worked were very good. I didn't have any problems with civil servants which might have been due to the fact that I was not experienced enough. We had a good team and we worked well together.

Q: Then what happened in 1958?

NELSON: I first went to Finnish language training before that assignment. The plan was that I would eventually be assigned to Finland. Finnish was one of the harder languages for an English speaker. We had a very fine and demanding teacher. There were two of us in the class - Eric Fleisher and I. The teacher said that we would learn the language and lo and behold, we did. The course took about six months. The one saving grace for the language was that it was totally phonetic; you can't go wrong in reading a word. On the other hand, it has something like 20 cases. Furthermore, the spelling of words change depending on the specific usage. Finnish has no prepositions; for us it was a very odd language with a lot of rules. But once you manage the basics, it was a fun language.

But I was not assigned to Finland right away. Instead, I was assigned to the University of Indiana to study Eastern Europe. By sheer accident, Indiana had a Finnish speaking professor, so that I was able to practice what I had learned at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). In fact, Finland was included in Eastern European studies, although I am sure the Finns would have been very unhappy with that if they had known. It was a well-led department. I had a good experience. But it was also sobering; I did not do very well in the first semester because I was not paying enough attention. I did much better in the second semester. I was very grateful for the academic experience.

Q: Where did the teachers come from?

NELSON: The only one I can remember was a Czech economist. The professor I mentioned earlier with whom I practiced Finnish was a Finn; his English was heavily accented. So I think that most of the staff was from Eastern Europe.

Q: In 1959, you were appointed director for Sweden, Finland and Iceland affairs. Wasn't that an awkward combination - a NATO member, a neutral and a Soviet neighbor? Who handled Norway and Denmark?

NELSON: They had their own country director. They were both members of NATO, although Iceland was as well. I am not sure why they split the work that way; it would have been more natural to have three NATO countries in one directorate. But once a division of labor is established, it becomes very difficult to make changes.

Q: Was Iceland still a concern in the 1959-61 period?

NELSON: It was less of a concern then when we discussed it earlier. I think the Icelanders became resigned to having the Keflavik air force base. I think it is still there. The Icelanders however established very strict rules about leaving the base so that most of our people were essentially confined to the base. That made the assignment more difficult. We were unhappy with the restrictions, although we understood the Icelandic rationale. They didn't want the large American presence to upset their culture.

Q: There were no fishery disputes during this period?
NELSON: Those came later.

Q: How did we view Sweden during this period?

NELSON: I think we felt that Sweden was leaning toward the West, but for its own geographical reasons had to appear neutral. But the issue never loomed very large. Swedish neutrality was just an accepted fact of life. Swedish policies did not jeopardize our objectives, and their position was a much lesser concern than it had been years before when the Cold War started. I don't remember us having any major issues with Sweden during my tour on the desk. As I recall, I don't think we worried very much about the Swedes.

Q: Were there any Soviet subs prowling around?

NELSON: Yes; in fact there was a Soviet sub in Swedish waters at one point. That was not well received by the Swedes, but we thought it might be quite useful for the Swedes to learn something about how the world worked. In the final analysis, no one was able to determine whether in fact a Soviet sub had been in Swedish waters - it could have been an American one. Unlikely, but it could have happened.

Q: Did the Finns show any bias toward Soviet positions or were they really neutral?

NELSON: I don't think they took the Soviet side to the extent they could. I think we had some problems with some of their votes in the UN, but we understood that they had to behave with a certain amount of caution. They still had Soviet troops occupying the Porkkala Peninsula. If a Finn wished to transit this peninsula, he or she had to do it in a closed train car. They also were paying very heavy reparations to the Soviets and were forced to produce certain equipment for the USSR. They certainly could not look forward to a secure future. If a war had broken out between East and West they would have been caught in the middle. This is a situation that lasted for several decades including the time we served in Finland. The occupation of Finnish territory had ceased by that time, but they still had to tread carefully.

Finland was of concern to us during the 1959-61 period. It had a very large communist party - about one-third of the electorate - and any opportunity for Soviet intervention worried us. Of course, we were super-worriers about the communist threat in this period. In retrospect, a lot of our concern looks pretty ridiculous, but at the time, we were worried about events in Finland.

Finland was receiving assistance from the U.S. During this period, the Finns had an election. The communists made some gains in parliamentary seats. I had just landed on the desk after my year at Indiana University. I was told to attend a conference on the subject of assistance to Eastern Europe, including Finland. I was very surprised by being asked to do this and was totally unprepared. When it came to discuss assistance to Finland, I was asked why assistance should be continued when so many Finns seem to be supporting the communists. There was a question of whether our assistance had not been a colossal failure. I responded, for the lack of anything else to say, that we should just imagine where Finland would be now if there had not been any U.S. assistance. But we terminated the assistance program a couple of years later. Finland in any case did not really meet the criteria for an aid recipient country. But we did worry about Finland, not only in the bureau, but at higher levels as well. It was hard to make the case that assistance was justified when many Finns seemed to be supporting our enemy.

Q: You were on the desk when Kennedy was elected. How did you view this change in administration?

NELSON: We supported it wholeheartedly. The blind fear of communism had been the mantra of previous administrations. Of course, that is easier realized today then it was then. But I think instinctively we thought that it was time for a new look at the world. We thought and hoped that Kennedy might provide that. In fact, there was not that much change, but we had hopes at the beginning of the new administration. So we were quite pleased with the election outcome. It was an unusual reawakening which we had not experienced in the deadly early post-war years.

Q: What was your next assignment in 1961?

NELSON: I was assigned to Helsinki as political counselor and I was there until 1964. It was a natural assignment in light of my Finnish language school three years earlier and my tour on a Scandinavian desk, which handled Finnish affairs.

Q: What was Finland like in 1961?

NELSON: It was closely tied to the Soviet Union. It was still paying reparations which accounted in part for their poor standard of living. They worked very hard to meet their obligations they incurred in their peace agreement with the USSR. The Soviets still occupied part of Finland. The Finns suffered great fuel shortages. In the squares of many towns there were mounds of trees that the people could use for heating and cooking. So the Finns were managing, but it certainly was not a comfortable living. Their conditions were improving slowly. It was during our tour that the Soviets began their withdrawal.

We were very nervous because the Cold War was quite evident. As I said earlier, we were concerned by the close Finland-USSR relationships. In part we did not appreciate that the Finns in fact had not much choice. The president was Urho Kekkonen, who was a very skillful politician. He had grown up on a farm but had found his way into political life. In retrospect, I think he was quite skillful on how he handled the Russians. At the time, he occasionally made us very nervous.

Internally, the Finns were working very hard to overcome the problems which had been imposed on them. They tried very hard to keep their peace with the Soviets.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

NELSON: I think it was Edson Sessions, who had been the deputy postmaster general or something like that. He was replaced in 1961 by Bernard Gufler. Sessions was a decent ambassador. We didn't have a particularly prominent role in Finland.

Gufler was a career Foreign Service officer. He stayed for about two years when he was replaced by Carl Rowan, who has just passed away. Gufler was not well treated; he was a difficult person, but he was treated rather shabbily by the Department. He learned that he was going to be replaced through the newspapers. That does happen periodically, but it is not the way to run a railroad. He was obviously unhappy and I think he retired after his Helsinki assignment. I did see him later in the Department, but I don't know what he was doing there.

I learned how to write from Bernard Gufler. I thought I was a pretty good writer, but I learned from him how to communicate well with the Department. I appreciated what he taught me. When I drafted my reports, he would call me in and go over the text with a fine tooth comb, trying to make it more meaningful. He took the time to teach me. I have read some of my reports several years later and I must say that they read well. I could clearly see the Gufler influence. So I was very appreciative of Gufler's teachings.

He also got me interested in Urho Kekkonen whom I studied and on whom I wrote some good reports. I came to appreciate the difficult path that he was trying to follow. So I had a good relationship with Gufler. He wanted to be "one of the boys." He started by asking us to address him as "Guf." You can be sure that didn't happen, except once. We had a press attaché who had too much to drink one day. We were seeing someone off at the airport and he entered the VIP waiting room and said: "Hi there, Guf!" The rest of us just sank in our seats trying to hide. Soon, he became aware of the gaff, but we never let him forget it.

Then came Carl Rowan, an African-American. He stayed for ten months. It was a very interesting period. I have a very special place in my heart for Carl Rowan. He was a guy who came up the hard way. He had no help from anyone. But he persevered against odds that none of us can really imagine in a period when prejudice against blacks was quite acceptable. He did extraordinarily well. He was very close to LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson). He got the Vice President to make a tour of Scandinavia - Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Norway. It utterly exhausted LBJ.

During the ten months of Rowan's stewardship, we had a fascinating time. The Finns were astounded that we would send a black ambassador. Rowan was both colorful and decent. He was a journalist. I think he came from Tennessee and fought his way up the ladder, against all of the odds that African-Americans faced. We didn't have affirmative action in those days. I am not sure that he would have used that process in any case. I think he would have been more likely to do it his way. He just made the system work for him.

It was a very active period, with great emphasis on public relations. The LBJ visit was certainly an opportunity for that. The naval attaché in Stockholm had a white Cadillac convertible. Rowan managed to have the car flown to Finland for the Johnson visit. The Finns responded by giving Johnson a ticker-tape parade on the main street in Helsinki! It was a very strange experience. I think it is well known that the Kennedy White House encouraged LBJ's travels and Rowan might have been in cahoots with the White House in pushing this visit; I don't know.

Q: Did you brief Vice President Johnson?

NELSON: Rowan did that. I saw Johnson and worked a lot on the speeches he was to deliver. He had speech writers with him who I thought were awful and wrote inappropriate drafts. We had a hard time getting LBJ to fish in his pocket to get out the right note cards. On some occasions, he did not pull out the right cards. He gave a very bad speech at a sacred graveyard on the Arctic Circle. The Finns first had to fight the Russians and then the Germans who wouldn't leave the country voluntarily. So the graveyard was sacred territory and unfortunately LBJ pulled out the wrong cards giving a speech which had little to do with the surroundings. It did not go over very well.

LBJ was tired by this time. Lady Bird was with him. She was a magnificent human being.

He was petulant and acted like a spoiled brat. He was very difficult to deal with. The Finn press was not very kind to him, despite all our efforts from the control room. He refused to do some things that had been part of the mutually agreed schedule. But Lady Bird filled in behind him; she was great. My wife got along very well with Lady Bird. Rowan would turn to me and ask me to fix something with Mrs. Johnson. My wife did that; we were very lucky that we had Lady Bird's cooperation.

In general, I think it was a successful trip. The Johnsons were in Finland for three days. He really covered the country in that short a span. One night, while I was in the control room, at about 2 a.m. my wife visited. We lived outside of town on the Baltic; we had four kids. She was clutching a bunch of pillows. I asked her what she was doing. She said she was bringing some pillows for "your God-damned Vice President." He hadn't liked the pillows that had been provided and somebody knew we had the kind of pillows he liked. So they called our house and asked my wife to bring her pillows, which is what she did. I will never forget that moment.

LBJ had his Texas steaks and his Cutty Sark whisky - all which came on his plane. He was difficult and petulant. We went to a large city on the Arctic Circle. The Finns put on a show for the American party - a deer roundup and a presentation of the Lapps in their colorful garb. After Johnson returned to Helsinki, I stayed behind to put the pieces all together. The Lapps who had paraded in their costumes and with their sleds, went into the woods and came out in daily wear driving Mercedes to get back home. That was amusing! The National Geographic covered this part of the Vice President's trip.

Q: You said that you studied the Finnish president. How did you interpret his positions vis-a-vis the East and the West?

NELSON: I didn't feel as nervous about Kekkonen as Washington did. The Finnish views were not a major preoccupation in the Department, but some people there worried. As I said before, the communist party was pretty strong in Finland - it had about 1/3 of the vote. That party was headed by the daughter of a former member of the Soviet Politburo. He had stayed on the Politburo until his death. So if someone worried about communist parties, the Finnish one posed a challenge. It must be said that Finns are all nationalist and that went for the communists as well. They, however, fully supported the Soviet Union unless it threatened Finnish independence. They supported Moscow even though Stalin and his successors understood that the Soviets could have Finland whenever they wanted. They tried at a very heavy price - The Winter War - but they pretty much controlled the country. There is a play entitled The Unknown Soldier which depicted the situation pretty well. Our oldest son went to Finnish school and that was his favorite play. I might note that he was the head of his Finnish class even though this was his first foreign language.

In that play, the troops have some political arguments. It made quite clear that the Finnish communists are first of all very nationalistic, although there were times when this position put them in very difficult straits caught between their compatriots and the

Soviets. They had to fight the Soviets and still maintain their loyalty to the communist cause. This periodic dilemma made it interesting to watch the Finnish communists. I must say that the party chief was a very strong person and very articulate. We had a little contact with her; not very much. I met with her on a couple of occasions. She was very effective on the floor of parliament. She was tolerated by her Finnish colleagues who appreciated her skills and intellect, even if they did not agree with her views. In retrospect, I probably should have been more active in meeting with her, even though my masters might well have been very unhappy if I had done so. Throughout the world, we were not communicating with communists. That probably was a very short sighted policy.

I remember that I used to drive the North Korean representatives in Helsinki nuts. I would go over to them and try to shake hands with them and they would run away as fast as they could. They didn't know what to do. Of course, I was also breaching protocol to some extent.

Q: Of course, you would not have been sent back to North Korea. Were we looking for potential splits between the Finnish communists and the Soviet Union?

NELSON: I don't think we were sufficiently sophisticated to undertake such a mission. I think in general our view was that the party was going to follow the directives of the Politburo regardless of any other points of view.

Q: How were our contacts with Kekkonen and how did he manage the East-West conflict?

NELSON: His view was that Finland's most important relationship by far was with the Soviet Union. He didn't want to upset the West, but he was not going to spend sleepless nights worrying about our views. His first priority was to keep the Soviets happy. There was one incident when I was in Sweden. Kekkonen was summoned to the Kremlin, and he went in a hurry. That bothered us a lot. He struck some kind of agreement which did not sit too well with us. But the Soviets had the right, as I indicated earlier, under the peace agreement to take over the country or parts of it. Kekkonen of course did everything he could to prevent such Soviet action. Eventually, he hoped they would leave all Finnish territory, which eventually they did because no purpose was being served by a continuing occupation.

Kekkonen would have liked to be friends with the West but could not jeopardize relations with the Soviets. He was very realistic about Finland's situation and could not forget that Finland had been part of Russia at one stage in its history.

Q: As I remember, this was a very tense period during which the Berlin Wall was built and the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962. Did we try to use these events to sway the Finns towards us?

NELSON: We just watched. We did not have a pro-active policy vis-a-vis the Finns. I

think we all understood their situation and thought that any efforts to move Finland from its pro-Soviet stance was bound to fail. Our ambassadors talked to Kekkonen on a number of occasions. He was always available for them, but no argument that we presented could sway him from his course. I think the Finns did become quite anxious about these developments which just heightened East-West tensions. There was some concern about nuclear fall out hitting our residences. I can remember storing water in our basement and trying to seal our windows. We were down wind from the Soviet Union and felt threatened about nuclear debris being blown our way. The Soviets were testing their bombs in the Arctic Sea not too far away, which did produce some fall out over Finland.

Our diplomatic efforts were essentially limited to staying in touch with the Finns. The Soviets were also very active. At one time, they tried to subvert my wife. They thought they saw a relationship developing between one of their agents and my wife. They tried to take advantage of that, but they didn't get very far. My wife spotted their efforts right away.

Q: As political counselor, how did you deal with your counterparts in the Foreign Office?

NELSON: There was nothing unusual about that relationship. It was close. We used to have very open and frank discussions. They were very clear on their difficult geopolitical situation. We used to have very open discussions after I established their trust, which in Scandinavia takes some time. I should note that the Finns do not like being considered as Scandinavians. I think we had good relationships. They were very accessible, and our conversations were never tense. I had very good relationships with the members of the second tier leadership of the Conservative, Social Democratic and Agrarian Parties. I sometimes even had meetings with the leadership of these parties. Again, these were very open relationships which led to good conversations. So our ability to communicate with the bureaucracy and the politicians was very good, but always circumscribed by the reality of the Finnish situation.

Q: The elections were western-style?

NELSON: Absolutely. In fact, their electoral process was one of the things that made the Finns nervous. Except for the conservatives, the electorate in general did not want to see an increase of parliamentary seats occupied by the conservatives because they were concerned that the Soviets might get upset. The Finns would have preferred a smaller representation from the communists, but not to the level that might have made the Soviets nervous. There were nuances like that in the elections, but they were fairly conducted.

Q: In your social contacts, did you notice any interest in changing the external political situation?

NELSON: I think most of the Finns looked forward to the day when they would not have

to always worry about the Soviets. They had broken loose before and hoped to able to do it again. Many, especially the conservatives, would have preferred a policy which would have distanced Finland from the USSR. They thought that Finland had been much too much subservient to the Soviets. The social-democrats were very disliked by the Soviets because they were a leftist alternative to the communists which made them very attractive to the Finns. So I think, except for the conservatives and some of the Social-Democratic leadership, most of the Finns were resigned to their relationships with the Soviets. They all wanted to keep as much independence as they could, but understood the limitations. I think they understood their situation far better than we did.

Q: How did you find the Washington reaction to your reporting?

NELSON: I can't remember that we had much response. I don't think our reporting was a problem, even at the political levels which might have tended to be more ideological. I mention the episode that took place before I left Washington when I had to attend a meeting on whether assistance should be continued to Finland in light of the strong support for the communist party. That is the only policy issue that arose on Finland in my several years of dealing with the country, both in Washington and in Helsinki.

Q: What about USIA? Were they able to perform there?

NELSON: Yes.

Q: This is Tape 2, Side 1 with Harvey Nelson. Do you recall what you were doing, sort of writing think pieces or what were you doing in INR?

NELSON: We were doing our own intelligence estimates, whatever we called the darn thing.

Q: Wither Iceland and that sort of thing?

NELSON: That kind of thing yes.

Q: Did you get out and around at all?

NELSON: Not really, no we worked there it was pretty much an inside job when I think in retrospect that really wasn't very good but we were still pretty green in the business and probably not assertive enough. We were on the fringes still of what was happening. It was potentially important but not really at the beginning.

Q: Things were changing but was there a fairly substantial civil servant component to INR? I mean people who had been doing this for a long time.

NELSON: Oh yes, it'd been a long time. I found the people with whom I worked who were the civil servants were very good, very good indeed. I didn't have any real problems

with them and that may have been a product of the fact I wasn't experienced enough, but no, it was a good team. We worked well together.

Q: Well then in '58 you were off to university of what? Indiana?

NELSON: Went off to the University of Indiana.

Q: How did that come about?

NELSON: Well let's see, I went first…didn't I go to Finnish language training? You read that and tell me.

Q: Well I've got you Eastern European studies University of Indiana from '58 to '59.

NELSON: OK, well I must have come in to Finnish language training somewhere there.

Q: It doesn't mention it here but maybe…

NELSON: But I had studied Finnish before I went to…it would have been close to that. I have to stop and really dig back and see what…I must have gone to Finnish language training from INR and then to the university.

Q: I mean was the thought that you would be obviously going to Finland?

NELSON: That's right.

Q: When you took Finnish this is not exactly Norwegian or something…

NELSON: No.

Q: …like that I mean…

NELSON: Completely different.

Q: This is one of the harder languages for an English speaker.

NELSON: Oh yeah, no it was quite a new experience. We had a very fine, very demanding teacher. There were two of us in the class, Eric Fleicher and I. She was very good and she said you are going to learn Finnish and we, by George, we did. Her name was Tanler.

Then the difficulty there was we had months of this language, five, six months concentrated in the FSI system. A very unusual language. One saving grace is it's 100 percent phonetic so you can't go wrong at reading a word. The other is it's got twenty cases, something like that, and then words are changed in their spelling depending on

how you're using it. They had no prepositions, a lot of odd things but quite a fun language, a phonetic language with a thousand rules, but it was learnable. But I wasn't assigned to Finland right away, I eventually did go to Finland but didn't go right away. I must have done the Finnish before I went to university because I picked up with a Finnish professor, a Finnish language professor there and carried on to keep it current while doing Eastern European studies. Then I went back and I must have gone to the bureau.

Q: I have you down here as going as country director for Sweden, Finland and Iceland '59-'61. Well tell me about Indiana and Eastern European. I mean did that include Finland?

NELSON: Yes they included Finland and again it's not a very happy classification from the Finns point of view but no that's where they put the Finns, they had no where else to put them. It was a very good department, very well lead and I cannot remember the professor's name.

Q: Well that's been their specialty for a long time.

NELSON: So it was a very good experience. It also was a comeuppance because I had been getting a little bit cocky and my first semester I didn't do well because I wasn't paying enough attention. But I picked it up after that and very grateful for the experience I must say.

Q: Where were their instructors or teachers coming from?

NELSON: The only one I can remember who was an economist, I do not remember his name and he was a Czech. The Finnish fellow was a Finn and he had a heavy accent so he hadn't been there very long I guess. I think they were mainly Eastern Europeans.

Q: Then you became country director for Sweden, Finland and Iceland?

NELSON: Yes.

Q: And you did that from '59-'61. It's sort of an odd combination in a way. You've got a NATO, a neutral and kind of a Soviet thing.

NELSON: Right.

Q: What happened to Norway and to Denmark in this?

NELSON: They had an office of their own. They were members of _____.

Q: Except for, of course, Iceland being the odd man out.

NELSON: That's right. But that is strange and it just struck me at the time and I'm not

quite sure why that was but that was the way it had fallen out. You know when these things get established and so people forget what were the reasons for establishing it that way. They don't know that and they just carry on as they did before.

Q: Let's talk about Iceland first. Was Iceland still a concern?

NELSON: Finland was less of a concern.

Q: We learned to live with it or something?

NELSON: Oh yeah, sure.

Q: And the Icelanders learned to live with us?

NELSON: I think that was probably the bigger thing because we had that big Keflavik base. I don't know if we still have it?

Q: I think we do but…

NELSON: They established, I think during that period, very restrictive rules about movement of our people. We were pretty well confined to Keflavik so life became a little bit more difficult for people at that time and we were unhappy about that but I think understanding at the same time.

Q: Well Icelanders just didn't want the impact of so many Americans to really upset their culture and they are absolutely right, sure. You didn't get involved in the cod wars or anything? Was that going on or did that…

NELSON: No that was later. We didn't get into that.

Q: What about Sweden? I mean was Sweden trying to play both sides or was it understood that they were kind of on our side but didn't want to make too much about it?

NELSON: Oh I think you described it pretty well. It was hardly a blip on the screen though. By then I don't think we understood their situation. They seemed pretty solid and less of a worry than they had been a few years before while we were getting this Cold War underway. I think we were pretty comfortable with them. There was nothing very big about Sweden during my time.

Q: Was there any sort of Soviet subs prowling around?

NELSON: Yeah at that time there was a Soviet sub in Swedish waters at one point, I know that was, I think it was during my time and that was very upsetting to the Swedes and we thought that was probably a good experience for them. We never really determined whether it was a Swedish sub, who knows? I think we were not worried about

the Swedes.

Q: Were we cooperating at all as sort of helping the Swedes upgrade their military? I mean on the side or not?

NELSON: I can't remember if we were, I'm afraid I just don't know the answer to that.

Q: How about dealing because I imagine you were talking to the Finnish Embassy and all, were they carrying the water for the Soviet Union or pretty much doing their own thing?

NELSON: Oh I don't think they were. They certainly would have avoided carrying the water for the Soviets to the extent that they could. I think that we had some problems with some of their votes in the UN so they had to behave with a certain amount of caution. They still had Soviet troops occupying the Porkkala peninsula and whenever Finns wanted to go through there they had to go through and shudder their railroad cars and that kind of thing and they were paying very heavy reparations and having to produce things for the Soviets. Their future was kind of uncertain should things get bad and we go to war of some kind or other. In that sense the situation had prevailed for many years including during the time that we were assigned there although the occupation of Porkkala had been removed by then.

I think the Finns were a concern. They had a big Communist Party and any gain by the Soviets or any foothold by the Soviets worried us because we were super worriers about the Communist threat. Looking back now live it looks pretty ridiculous but we were very, very worried.

One of the things that came up during that time was we had a Finnish election. Finland was an AID recipient from the United States and the Communists gained a seat or two maybe more, three or four, a fairly good sized party; about a third elected which held between 25 and 30 percent, was that way years later. I was a pretty new kid in town, fresh from the University of Indiana and I was told to go over to this hearing that was being held somewhere in town. I've forgotten who was in the chair.

Q: These were congressional hearings?

NELSON: It was a departmental thing I think and there may have been some congressional presence. It may have been under the auspices of AID itself, I just don't remember. But, in any event, I was very surprised by this and totally unprepared; it was a hearing on other countries too in Eastern Europe. They came to Finland and the AID program in Finland and they asked me, "Well now Mr. Nelson, we give all this aid to the Finns and then they go to the polls and they elect all these other Communists, more Communists than they had before we started giving them aid. So what'll we do? I mean it just looks like a colossal failure."

Well the only thing I could think to say was, "Well Sir, think of what it would have been like if we hadn't given them any aid." How many more Communists would have been elected. We ended our AID program with Finland; they were not a proper recipient anyway. They hadn't been for a couple of years.

So it was a worry and it worried people at the higher political levels that we were helping them out in someway and then they go elect more Communists than they had before, that's not good stuff.

Q: No. Well we had the same problem with Italy too.

NELSON: Oh God yes.

Q: You were there during the election of President Kennedy.

NELSON: Yes.

Q: How did that, particularly at the beginning, how did you view it sort of personally and maybe some of your colleagues view this change in administration?

NELSON: Oh I think we were very much a very positive response to it. We had been pretty blindly stuck in the mud on this fear of the Communists. It's easier to say now than it was then and so I'm not sure. But I think instinctively we were feeling that we needed to take a fresh and renewed look and that Kennedy could provide that.

Q: Yes.

NELSON: In reality, of course, he didn't provide all that much change but we thought it would.

Q: Thought it would.

NELSON: So no, I think we were quite pleased with this and it was sort of an unusual reawakening which we hadn't experienced in a sort of deadly post war, early post war years.

Q: Well I think this might be a good place to stop now and I'll put at the end of the tape where we are. So we are coming up to you when you went to Finland as political counselor for 1961-'64. So we'll pick this up in 1961 when you're off to Finland.

NELSON: OK, very good

Q: Great, great.

NELSON: Very good, that is fine.

Q: Today is the 11th of October 2000. Harvey, you were in Finland from '61-'64. Was that just a regular assignment or was there any logic behind it?

NELSON: Well I suppose the Scandinavian background and they had been looking for a volunteer to take Finnish language about three years earlier. There were two volunteers, a fellow by the name of Eric Youngquist and I. So we both took that course and actually as things go in our business, of course, we weren't assigned there for a while and it began to look like I might not be. Eventually happily, we were.

Q: What was Finland like when you arrived in 1961? How did it set both internally and sort of in the external world?

NELSON: Well it was very tied in with the Soviets, it was still paying reparations, it was still very poor, and they were working very hard on meeting their obligations under the peace agreement that they made with the Russians. The Russians were still in occupation of the Porkkala Peninsula, which meant when you took the train across southern Finland you had to go through this and they put blinders on the railroad cars; you couldn't drive through but you could take the train through but you couldn't look out. It was a very, very strange situation and the reparations there were big fuel shortages; there were still piles of trees in the squares for people for their heating purposes, they didn't have gas and oil or that sort of thing so it was pretty. They were managing but it was pretty poverty stricken sort of situation out of which they were climbing and with great effect. Of course in the ensuing years, and it was beginning in our time, the Russians were beginning to withdraw. We were very nervous because it was in the early days of the Cold War and we didn't like their close connections with the Russians. I'm afraid often we didn't understand that they really didn't have much choice. They had a president named Urho Kekkonen who was a very skillful politician. He had grown up as a farm boy but learned his way into politics somehow and was really pretty skillful, in retrospect, in dealing with the Russians although he made us very nervous at times.

So I think from an international point of view we were edgy about Finland's relationship with the Russians. Internally they were just working real hard to deal with their problems and try to keep the peace with the Soviets.

Q: Well now, who was our ambassador at the time?

NELSON: I was just thinking now who was our ambassador when I went there. I'm not sure of the order of things but it must have been Edson Sessions who had been, I believe, former deputy post master general or some such position. Anyway, he was a political appointee and he was there for some months before he was replaced or retired. I have forgotten exactly what happened there. He was a perfectly decent ambassador. He was replaced by Bernard Gufler who was a career Foreign Service officer. But he didn't stay very long only about a year or so, well maybe a little bit more than a year. I think I've got the order of things right. I think it was Bernard Gufler; he was replaced by Carl Rowan

who incidentally died about a week ago. One of the sad things was the way Gufler was treated. He was a difficult person but he learned about his replacement by reading the newspaper. It's a kind of a sad thing; it does happen in our business but he hadn't been informed so that made him pretty unhappy. I think that was the end, I think that was his last assignment. I did meet him once later in the Department but I'm not sure what he was doing at that point.

One of the things I learned from Bernard Gufler was how to write. I'd fancy myself a pretty good writer and I guess I was but I learned some of the real…to write very usefully and communicate well and I appreciated that very much.

Q: How did you go through the learning process, what did you do?

NELSON: Well I was doing my reports and he had me on the carpet and said, "How are you supposed to understand this and you can make it much clearer if you did that." He took the time and I read some of my stuff since then, in recent years, and it's pretty good but I consider it the Gufler influence. So I was very appreciative of that experience. I did some very good studies of Urho Kekkonen with his encouragement and gave it some understanding of the man and what he thought he was facing. So that was a good relationship. Gufler, he wanted to be one of the boys and he came in telling us to call him Guf. You can bet that didn't happen except once. We had a press attaché and he got a little too much to drink one day and they were seeing somebody off at the airport and he came in the room and said, "Hi ya Guf!" The rest of us just sank out of sight and, of course, he realized what he had done at that point as he really wasn't all that far-gone. So he had a hard time living that one down.

Then we got Carl Rowan and Carl Rowan stayed for ten months. It was a very interesting time. I have a very important place in my heart for Carl Rowan. He's a guy who came up the hard way, nobody helped him, he fought the awful battle, he fought odds in ways you and I wouldn't understand because he's a black man and it's just not possible to know it from his position, but he did extraordinarily well. He was very close to LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson).

Q: We're talking about President Johnson.

NELSON: Yes, Vice President Johnson at that time. He was so close to him that he got Vice President Johnson to do a Scandinavian tour. He did it all, he did Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway, he was utterly exhausted the poor man. But during that ten months we had a whirlwind of a time because it fascinated the Finns that we would send a black ambassador, a very colorful and very decent man.

Q: What was Rowan's background?

NELSON: He was a journalist. He came from Tennessee, I think. He fought his way against all the odds that black people faced particularly then. We didn't have affirmative

action and all that stuff and he wouldn't have put up with it anyway. He would have done it his own way. He just made it work for him, made the system work for him. So it was a sort of colorful, very active, sometimes sort of uncertain time, really a big PR time (public relations) especially with ending up with this visit by Lyndon Baines Johnson. The Naval attaché in Stockholm had a white Cadillac convertible and he organized to have that darn car flown over to Finland for the Johnson visit. He had a ticker tape parade on the main street. It really was a very strange experience.

Q: While we're are talking about it, could you talk a little about Johnson because some of these trips I think the Kennedy White House tried to keep Johnson out and Scandinavia sounds like a place where you could put him where he's not going to do too much trouble and they are kind of happy to have him away. I mean there wasn't much love lost.

NELSON: It may well have been. That may have made it possible, but I know Rowan made a big thing. I think, I may be wrong but sort of instigated this and maybe he was in cahoots with the White House, I don't know. But he made everything possible we could do.

Q: Did you brief the Vice President?

NELSON: I didn't, Carl Rowan did. I saw him; I worked a lot on his speeches and things. He had speechwriters with him who were awful and inappropriate. We had a hard time getting him to reach into the right pocket for the right set of cards, his speech notes and many times we lost. We had one or two, well one, a very bad speech that was given at a sacred graveyard up in Rovaniemi, up in the Arctic Circle. The Finns are still fighting over the war. First they had to fight the Russians and then the Germans wouldn't leave so they had to drive them out of there and going to war against Germany. So there were a lot of deep-seated feelings about all this and Johnson didn't do well there because he reached in the wrong pocket and read the wrong speech from our point of view. But he was tired and his wife.

Q: Lady Bird.

NELSON: Lady Bird, Lady Bird was there. What a magnificent woman.

Q: Everyone who has dealt with her has said she is just a delight.

NELSON: But he was petulant, he was a spoiled kid. He gave us a difficult time. His press wasn't all that good and we stayed up all night in the control room and prepared all his stuff for one of his aides to read him the awful results of the news coverage. He refused to do something that he had originally agreed to but Lady Bird filled in behind him beautifully. God she was great. My wife Siley Ann hit it off very well with Lady Bird and Carl Rowan would say, "Ok, Sam would you go fix that with Mrs. Johnson?" "Who me?" Well she went and fixed it and the two of them worked. So it was generally a successful trip.

One night I was in the control room, it was about two o'clock in the morning roughly and in comes, we lived out on the outskirts of town on the Baltic, on the edge of the Baltic. We had four kids what have you, and in comes my wife clutching a bunch of pillows. I said, "What are you doing here at this hour?" She said, "I'm bringing some pillows to your God damn vice president." He didn't like the pillows anyway and somebody knew that we had down pillows or something and so "Get Siley Ann, she'll bring in the pillows". So she did. I'll never forget. That was the phrase, "God damn vice president."

Well anyway, he had his Texas steaks and his Cutty Sark whiskey all with him. He wasn't bad but he was petulant, he was difficult. We went to Rovaniemi, which is the main town north on the Arctic Circle and they had a big Laplander show and they showed him reindeer roundup and stuff and the Laps in their garb and what have you. That was an interesting thing because after the vice president left, we went back to Helsinki. I was there sort of putting everything back and pieces were put back together. Finally these Lap little guys and all these furs and things and they had been lassoing and riding reindeer, hitching up sleds and what have you they went into the woods and they came out to drive home in their Mercedes. That was kind of a cute thing and the National Geographic did cover that part of the trip actually.

Q: Well let's talk a bit about the study you did about Kekkonen. At that time how did you read him vis-a-vis the East and the West.

NELSON: Well, I suppose how they officially and I suppose I absorbed that. I didn't feel as nervous about him as I think people in Washington felt about him. And sure this is not a big blip on our radar scan. The Communist Party was pretty strong in Finland; they had about 25 billion percent of their vote. Hertta Kuusinen was the leader of the Finnish Communist Party and her father, I can't remember his name, Kuusinen, of course, but he was a survivor in the Politburo, he lasted all the way up until he died, he held out.

Q: We're talking about the Soviet Politburo?

NELSON: The Soviet, that's right but he was a member of the Soviet Politburo. He had gone over to those guys in spite of their revolution and his daughter was ahead of the Finnish Communist Party. So if you're worried about Communists there are grounds to worry.

Q: These were not national Communists these were Soviet Communists?

NELSON: These were Nationalists, the Finns are nationalists. The Finnish Communists were very nationalistic, very Finnish nationalistic but it was hard for the Soviet Union to do anything wrong in their point of view even though Stalin and his friends had made a deal with the Russians that said that the Russians could have Finland if they wanted. The Russians did take a stab at that, it cost them but they got control of it.

Q: The Winter War.

NELSON: The Winter War, that's right. There is a play called The Unknown Soldier, and this depicts the situation, I think, pretty well.

Q: A movie was made of that too. I think I saw that, a Finnish movie.

NELSON: This is when my oldest son went to Finnish school and that was his favorite book. He was head of his class in Finnish. Finnish was his first language at school.

But in that play there are arguments, political arguments, among the troops. The Finnish Communists are very Finnish, not Russian, not Soviet, not what's another term for the Russians, but they were very conflicted. It was very hard for them; they had to fight the Soviets at the same time being Communists. But there was an interesting feeling with that kind of problem maybe inner conflicts for those guys.

I must say Hertta Kuusinen was an extraordinarily able person and very, very articulate.

Q: Did we have contact with her?

NELSON: Yes we had a little, not much. I had some political contact with her. She was very effective on the floor and very tolerated by her Finnish colleagues. They appreciate her skill, her intellect, being strong. But I didn't, if I had it to do over again I would have done more to get close to her but I think that would have made my masters very unhappy.

Q: Yes, well I was just going to say this was not a time when there was an awful lot of sort of relaxation. I mean in Italy, well almost around the world, we really weren't talking to the Communists unless it was in a country like the Soviet Union.

NELSON: No and I think that was kind of stupid. I remember I used to drive the North Koreans in Finland nuts because I'd go over there and kind of shake hands with them and they'd run like hell. They didn't know what to do. It was terribly wrong.

Q: You weren't supposed to either, but you weren't going to be sent back to North Korea. Were we looking for signs in the Finnish Communist Party of differences? Were we looking for perhaps the embryonic ketoism or anything like that?

NELSON: I don't think we were that sophisticated about the Finnish Communists. I think the general conclusion was that Hertta Kuusinen was her father's daughter and she's got things in control and whatever the Politburo said they'll do.

Q: Well back to the president. What were our contacts with him and how did he play the Soviet west situation during this time?

NELSON: His view was the most important relationship Kekkonen had by far is that of

the Soviet Union. He didn't want to upset the rest of [inaudible], if you were going to worry about it, it was more important to deal with and keep the Soviets happy. I had forgotten some incident occurred and I should remember this, as it mattered at the time.

I was in Sweden at the time that this thing happened. I've forgotten what it was but anyway Urho Kekkonen was summoned to the Kremlin and he went without argument and that bothered us a lot. He made some sort of arrangement, but the details of the deal struck at that time I'm just am not sure because the Russians had the right under their peace agreement to reoccupy some areas I've forgotten and Urho's objective was to avoid this kind of thing and also eventually get them to leave Porkkala, which eventually they did because it wasn't serving them. So to him he would like to be friends with everybody but all that would be sacrificed to keep the Russians at arms length if at all possible. He was very realistic; these guys were right next-door.

Q: Well they had been part of Russia at one part.

NELSON: Oh they had been yes, sure.

Q: Now this was a very tense time. There are two major things that happened that I recall. One was the erection of the Berlin Wall, which got rather tense and then the Cuban missile crisis in October of '62. How did these things play? Were we trying to do anything or were we just watching really?

NELSON: You mean in Finland?

Q: Yes.

NELSON: We didn't try to do anything with the Finns. I think there is enough realism involved. I mean Kekkonen made it clear, in fact instinctively, it was not my job to do. So we talked with them, I mean the ambassador did. He was always available, very accessible guy but he always got the same answer that we didn't want to hear. No, I think that the Finns became quite anxious and we did have the rudiments of residential defense against nuclear fall out and this kind of thing. We were storing water in our basement and finding ways to seal windows and we were down wind from the Russians. We did do some things, but as far as our relationship with Finland we just sort of kept in touch as close as we could.

The Russians tried to subvert my wife.

Q: How did that work?

NELSON: Well they tried to. They thought they saw a relationship developing between one of their number and my wife and they tried to take advantage of that. It didn't work but my wife spotted it right away.

Q: Your position was what?

NELSON: Political counselor.

Q: So how did you deal with your counterparts in the ministry of foreign affairs, the Finnish ministry of foreign affairs?

NELSON: Well in the usual way, we had very good relationships with them. We had a very good open discussion they were very open folks.

Q: I mean would they at a certain point would they sit down and say, "Hi, you know what our position is here. You don't have the Soviet bear sitting across the border and you don't expect us to do this or that." Or did they sort of spout kind of the party line?

NELSON: No, no you are exactly right. They were very open on this and the discussion was very good with them. They didn't have any problem with that. It took a while; it took quite a while to establish trust with the Scandinavian types. But the Finns hate to be called Scandinavians, but they are in that part of the world. No, the relationship was very good, very accessible, not tense or anything like that that. We could say pretty much what one wanted to. They likewise. I mean this was true. I had a lot of relationships with the secondary level of the Conservative Social Democratic Agrarian Parties, which made up the bigger chunk of the Parliament. We had very good relationships and sometimes occasionally we talked to the leadership.

Again, it was a pretty open relationship and very satisfactory from their point of view but you know accepting reality.

Q: Well now with the political parties there, I mean, were there two elections and was this…

NELSON: Oh absolutely, two elections. This is one of the things that made the Finns nervous. One of things was they didn't want to see, except for the Conservatives, they didn't want to see an increase in Conservative seats because that would make the Russians nervous, they didn't want that. They'd like to see a little bit of diminution of the Communist members in the Parliament but not very much because then the Russians knew. There were nuances but often it was quite often elected.

Q: Well, I mean, nuances are great but when you get around to voting; what was your sounding of people you meet socially and all this? Obviously they were aware of the situation, but did they have any hope of breaking loose at this point?

NELSON: Oh, they looked to the day when they could, yes. They had broken loose before and they hoped to do it again. They had hopes but they realized, I think, most of them, not all of them, that they ought to stand up more strongly to the Russians, they shouldn't be so kowtowing as we have been and that kind of thing.

The Social Democrats were very disliked by the Russians because they were a leftist alternative and that's were a lot of Finns would like to go. So this affected the attitude of these folks. I think in general the idea was let's accept the Conservative side and some of the Social Democratic leadership, let's not upset the Russians for God's sakes, that is the worse thing to do. But you have to keep as much as you can. In that respect they do a lot better than we do.

Q: Well did you find in our reporting that we were having a problem. This didn't rank very high on the American international radar but sometimes you have a problem reporting where you're dealing with people who are dealing with a tremendous problem in very practical terms but when it gets kicked back to Washington, particularly when it moves up into the political field, it gets almost ideological. I mean people say either you're with us or against us or something like that. Was that a problem for you all?

NELSON: I can't remember that it was. I suppose it must have been. Before I went to Finland I was in the Northern European bureau and one of my responsibilities was to, having never been there of course, and I was sent off completely blind, very naive to some hearing in which featured the director of AID I think or something like that but I was caught completely in flap. I had no idea what this was about, would I just go to this meeting. Well I went and I thought just go and watch and listen to this and report back. No, no I was to be a witness. I was totally unprepared for what I knew. There had been an election in Finland and the Communists had gained three seats and at that time we had and AID program prepared, folks with AID a little bit of a fall out from the Marshall Plan even though the Finns didn't join it in Western Europe. The director said to me, "Mr. Nelson we put all this money into Finland and what happened? The Communist Party increased six fold." All I could think of was, "Well Sir, think what the vote would have been like if we hadn't given them any money at all." He had to leave it at that as it answered the question. So, things like that were happening but I can't recall anything in the fall out.

Q: Did we have an expert on tribes in the political section?

NELSON: No; I suppose we should have, but it would have been a daunting task because there were about 200 languages in the Congo. Tribalism was a terrible problem in Africa, especially in the Congo. I did have some good meetings with tribal representatives when they would gather together. The issue is a very delicate one. They don't like to talk about it. They don't like to be accused of tribalism, but indeed that is their society. We did discuss the problem of all of the various languages in the Congo and the barriers that this created to bringing the country together. We did discuss the necessity for a country to have one language if it is be at all governed. They had adopted French as that one common language, but that was a foreign language which had no relationship to their cultures. That was the only solution to the language problem.

Q: Did Mobutu's tribe gain from his assumption of power?

NELSON: I can't really remember. I am sure he favored his tribesmen; that was the only way for him to have some peace of mind. But I don't think his tribe took over as much power as the leading tribe in Kenya did, for example. The standard approach was that one tribesman could not trust members of another tribe. According to local customs, your house doors were suppose to be opened to any one, but that does not mean that you could trust him.

Q: How were Leopoldville's relationship with Brazzaville, which at the time was the capital of a completely Marxist country?

NELSON: At least, so it proclaimed. Some proclaim their loyalty to Marx to this day, but it is mostly a hollow statement. The relationships between the two Congos was not good. The ferry traffic between the two countries was stopped because they were concerned about infiltrators. That may have been a legitimate concern. On occasions, there used to be an exchange of gun-fire across the river. But this situation resulted in a very profitable smuggling trade.

Q: Was Mobutu involved in that trade?

NELSON: I wouldn't be at all surprised.

Q: Did we still have relations with Congo-Brazzaville? Did you have contact without people there?

NELSON: I think we severed them in 1965. We had a telephone line and a radio connection with Brazzaville, and we used them periodically. That was useful at times, particularly to our folk in Brazzaville who felt very beleaguered. When we did break relationships, I thought it was a great idea. It saved all the costs of keeping that embassy going. But then the U.S. couldn't wait to open it again. I could never understand that. Why would we wish to have representation in Brazzaville?

Q: By the time you left, was there still fear that the civil war would get to Leopoldville?

NELSON: No, that feeling had passed. That fear had been laid to rest.

Q: You left Leopoldville in 1967. What was your feeling at that time about the future of the Congo?

NELSON: I am not sure that after two years and a day there, that I really cared. It was an interesting experience. I think that as in the case of most, if not all, Foreign Service people, by the time I left Leopoldville, I was really focusing on my next assignment. Sometimes one feels desperate about leaving his or her present assignment.

Q: Were you surrounded in the embassy by Africanists or was there a wide

representation of different backgrounds and interests?

NELSON: I didn't feel surrounded by Africanists. The embassy people came from everywhere and many would go outside of Africa in their next assignments. I think by 1967, the optimistic view of Africa's future was fading and people were beginning to look at our assistance levels. On the other hand, Africa was one of the few geographical areas where we had not been the guilty party.

Q: What was your next assignment in 1967?

NELSON: I was assigned to Gabon as DCM. We went on home leave and then to Libreville.

Q: Did you feel that you were being made into an Africanist?

NELSON: It never occurred to me. My attitude was that as a Foreign Service officer, I went where I was told. It is so different today! But then, that was the way you behaved. I was a little concerned by the Gabon assignment because we didn't know what we could do about the kids and school. There had been a good international school in Leopoldville. Originally it had been a Methodist or Baptist school, but by mid-1960 it was essentially non-sectarian. It was a pretty good school. Our kids learned French pretty well. But the education in Gabon would be a different situation and that bothered us a little. We didn't know what problems we might have to face. But later on, we found out what we had to do.

Q: You were in Gabon from 1967 to late 1969. Who was our ambassador? How did he operate?

NELSON: David Bane. His wife's name was Patty. Bane had been mainly in the Asian sub-continent. He was in Pakistan as consul general. He learned to play polo. He was a prince of a man. Patty was delightful. The embassy was very, very small; that was great and I loved it. The embassy was quartered in an old bank building, which had a huge iron-grilled work for a door. It weighed a ton but could be opened by a little key inserted into a tiny lock. Anyone with a little strength could have opened that door. But every morning we would unlock the door and every evening we would lock it, even though we recognized the weakness of the door.

Gabon was an interesting and fun assignment. It is a tiny country of approximately a million people. It was not terribly important to us. But it was a great place for the kids. The environment was very secure as contrasted to the Congo where life was very dangerous. I think if the Department were to do it all over again, it might not have assigned officers with families to the Congo. The problems there were corrupt soldiers and policemen, who would stop you on the street and demand money. The population was very restive. Every time there was a automobile accident some one else got killed. It was bad situation, but we went there blindly and learned to cope with the problems of

Leopoldville.

Q: What was Gabon like in the late 1960s?

NELSON: It was a country of major French influence. The president was Omar Bongo. The country had oil and wood resources. Very fine plywood came from Gabon. There is also a huge iron mine owned by U.S. Steel or another American company. That mine is way back in the jungle which made it rather inaccessible. There were plans to build a railroad from there to a port, which I think has been built by now. So oil, wood and iron were the major sources for income.

There was a small French colonial community - people who had lived in Gabon before it achieved independence. They were a delightful group. Also there were a few people from other former French colonies - Cambodia, Vietnam, Senegal etc. I think there were five members of the diplomatic corps - the Chinese, the Germans, the Israelis, the French and us. So it was a small diplomatic corps. There were in addition countries that were accredited to Gabon but whose representatives lived elsewhere and only visited Libreville.

Gabon was quiet and peaceful and as I said, very secure. There was no diplomatic enclave. We all lived in the city. So we had all kinds of neighbors. Our closest neighbors were from Vietnam; our youngest son developed a great relationship with the young Vietnamese. They were great explorers, so these kids wandered off into the city streets, but we never worried about that. It was fantastic. My wife once had her bicycle stolen; she reported to the police which caused an interesting episode. She had to fill out a massive number of forms, but the bicycle was never found. That was our only incident in over two years.

We first sent the children to local schools. That lasted only briefly because the children did not know French well enough to keep up with the lessons. The public schools were very undisciplined, so we tried Catholic schools. They were almost as bad; so we finally decided to teach the kids at home - the Calvert system. That was very successful because two of our officers had wives who were accredited teachers. Foreign Service officers were eligible for a 25% hardship differential. We used that to pay these teachers with those funds. My wife first tried to teach the children at home, but we soon found out that it's very difficult for a mother also to be a teacher. They have discipline problems. The teaching wives were very good; the kids loved them and worked very hard to please them. That was probably the best education they received in all of their lives. So that worked out well.

Our oldest child was not with us. He attended a boarding school in Switzerland. His younger brother attended the same school for one semester. That didn't work out very well; so he returned home which worked out well. We had looked at the Swiss school, which looked good to us. It turned out to be anything but; it was a money making device. The only positive part of his experience was that he learned how to ski. A lot of broken

families sent their kids to this school. They didn't know what else to do with them. That did not make for a very good atmosphere. We had an allowance which paid for the costs of the school. There were a number of Lebanese children at the school and our son became friendly with them. They invited him to join them in Beirut where he could attend the American school. He decided he wanted to do that, and we permitted him to go to Beirut. Beirut at the time was not a sea of calm; there were constant shootings and bombings, but the school was kept open and so we let him go. It was crazy. We did have some friends who worked for Shell Oil in Beirut; they looked after him. He fortunately did not need much help; he was very self sufficient.

As I said, Gabon was comfortable situation for us and the kids. We had an "evacuation boat;" a high powered speed boat. We used to water ski. Libreville was on an estuary which was about twelve miles across. We rented a cottage on the water and spent our week-ends there, skiing, swimming and fishing That was our evacuation mode!

Q: In other places, we had emergency water storage places, which were a cover name for swimming pools. Those provided the only recreation in the country.

NELSON: We had this high powered boat - two 50 horsepower engines which would let you travel for a few hours. But where would one go? So we used the boat for recreation, which was wonderful for our whole family. We had had a small sailboat in Finland. I wanted to get another one, and we did. That allowed us to spend even more time on the water, which was great. That was a life-saver because the paved roads ended about 25 miles outside of the city. It was possible to drive over other roads, if they weren't too rutty. We had a terrible time convincing businessmen not to use these roads in the rainy season because they would be ruined and then would not be available any longer even in the dry season. I am not sure how many paid any attention to us. In any case, the lack of a road system made Libreville pretty isolated; we could fly out - to Lagos for example - but it was very expensive.

Q: What was the political situation in Gabon when you got there?

NELSON: It was not very exciting. The country was pretty much under France's thumb. The French ambassador was in effect the governor-general. The political situation was quite calm. President Omar Bongo stood in good stead with the French. There had been some anti-American ferment before our arrival, but it was quite modest, and we never saw any such thing.

Q: What was the cause of such ferment?

NELSON: I don't really know. The French may have been behind that, but that is just speculation. When anything goes wrong, we blame the French. We couldn't prove anything. There was no CIA presence in Gabon. We had had a small assistance program and a had small USIS (United States Information Service) office. The assistance program had been terminated, although there was some residual work to be done to close the

projects. I was given a small library of AID regulations which I was supposed to read and know in closing this program. I looked at the material and couldn't make heads or tails out of it. I suggested to the ambassador that we not waste much time on this effort. I suggested that he call the AID (Agency for International Development) regional office in Lagos and inform it that we could not do what was required and if that office wanted to follow-up, it should send someone to do the job. We were just not equipped to do the job, even if we had figured out what needed to be done.

Gabon didn't really need any aid. The French had a small police presence as well as a more sizeable military force which was there primarily there for regional purposes. The oil business was doing quite well. Gabon had no problems with any of its neighbors that I can recall.

We had a Peace Corps program in Gabon. It was a very good one. They worked in teams of two, working in the bush, building schools and housing for the teachers. The Gabonese had a teachers college in Libreville. The students would come to the college for a couple of years. Once they had lived in the big city, they didn't want to return to the hinterlands and live in a grass hut and teach in a mud school house which was washed away with every heavy rain storm. So the Peace Corps came up with the idea of building sheltered schools. The design was ingenious so that in the summer time, breezes could blow through the building. They also build some very nice small houses for the teachers. The Peace Corps volunteers worked very hard; they taught the indigenous population how to do this construction work - how to make the bricks, etc. It was a very successful program.

They also built shelters in various communities that could be used for political meetings or other functions. They set up a little TV arrangement in these places for the community to watch.

After we had been in Gabon for about a year, suddenly around Christmas Day, we were advised that the volunteers had to leave by the end of the year. No explanation. I talked to people in the President's office and the Foreign Ministry and they said that they were not at liberty to discuss the matter and that the volunteers would have to leave. Some of the volunteers were far in the bush and not easily reached. We did manage to contact all of them. They straggled into Libreville and most of them came to our house where they slept in the backyard. They used our facilities. We arranged for a plane to take them to Sierra Leone - hardly my choice as safe haven. Some of the volunteers had several days to kill before the plane would arrive. The kids had time on their hands. Although they were being kicked out of the country, they decided to go to help to finish a construction project in Libreville before they left. What dedication! I was impressed by their attitude. And they followed through and managed to get the building completed. Of course, the government never expressed any appreciation for this extraordinary effort.

But we did manage to evacuate all the Peace Corps volunteers. The ambassador was away in the U.S., so I reported the events in Gabon immediately. No response. So I reported it again. Silence. No response at all. Soon after I sent the report, I was called to the

president's office to attend a cabinet meeting. I was asked what our protest delivered to the Gabonian embassy in Washington was all about. It was related to the Peace Corps. I had to confess that I didn't have a clue; nobody had told me anything, but I knew what the Department probably said. So I speculated what the protest might say. But I felt quite naked in Libreville because no one in Washington would keep us informed at all.

I assumed that the French may have had something to do with the withdrawal of the Peace Corps. I thought that someone in the France became very nervous about the Peace Corps presence in Gabon. It did have the reputation of stirring unrest. They kept preaching that people had to demand their rights, which probably made the French nervous. I assume that perhaps some of our volunteers had indeed talked about the benefits of democracy, but I think much was imagined. Crews of two are not likely to stir up any rebellion. But the French were nervous. In addition they had their own Peace Corps-like operation, but few of the participants were college graduates. They found it difficult to understand or believe that a college graduate would spend time in the bush; they would be concerned about a career and not some altruistic exercise. So the French concluded that the volunteers were probably CIA agents, which were a threat. That was our rationale for French attitudes. Some years later, the Peace Corps was allowed to start a program again.

At about this time, the Biafran - in Nigeria - war broke out. The French was on the side of the Ibos (the Biafrans). We supported the other side because our main goal was to hold the country together because if one country split along tribal lines, then it would happen in the whole continent. Ours was a quite justified policy. The French for some reason supported one of the Nigerian tribes. Gabon became a base of operations for the support of the Ibos. So we had an enormous amount of air activity. We began to keep track of air traffic; we hoped surreptitiously, but I don't know that we succeeded. But I doubt whether anybody cared. So we tried to identify the planes and noticed that many came from the U.S., which was very interesting. We reported our findings daily - all the details we could muster - numbers and types. I even got my wife involved watching and identifying the planes. There was a little beach by the airport from where she could watch the end of the runway. From there she could watch the landings and departures; so she would lie on the beach with her notebook. At the end of the day, looking tan, she would give me her report. So we spent a lot of time on this effort. Whether it was useful or not, I don't know, but our reports were avidly consumed.

Q: Were American planes involved?

NELSON: These were planes belonging to private entrepreneurs.

Q: This is an interesting story because there many quarters in the U.S., including members and staff of Congress, that supported Biafra's independence.

NELSON: Indeed. Norman Cousins, of the Saturday Review, was one of the advocates. He came out to visit us. He irked me and my wife because he made a point of the

"extended bellies" of Nigerian children. He had never talked about the children in the Congo who also suffered from starvation and malnutrition. There was a political group in the U.S. that became associated with the Biafra rebellion. We had a lot of Ibo friends both in the Congo and Gabon, and they were outstanding. They did their best to help the new fledgling African countries. We met a lot of others who were trying their best to make these new countries viable entities. They were also very kind to us.

Q: What were your thoughts about Bongo?

NELSON: He was a young man, a puppet of the French. He never exercised much visible independence during my tour at least. He was able to keep on top of things. He was not troubled by an excessive number of tribes. I think there were only two or three in Gabon. When OPEC was founded, he changed his name to Omar because he had joined OPEC; he may have become a Muslim around this time as well. One must conclude that he found some way to make a little money and be admitted to the right class of people. I think he is still alive.

Q: Were the Chinese or the Soviets at all engaged in Gabon?

NELSON: We had no concern for their possible activities. The French made sure that neither could play a mischievous role.

Q: How were your relations with the French embassy?

NELSON: Cordial. One day while my youngest son and I were sailing, probably getting ready to transport people to our cabin across the estuary. My son was about nine or ten. He was at the wheel of the boat. As he was looking around, he said that he noticed someone who appeared to be in trouble. Sure enough, there was a bow of a boat sticking our of the water. It was obviously sinking. So I said we should investigate and we did. As we got close to the boat we noticed two people in the water. They were being held up by an up-side down cooler. By this time the boat had completely sunk. So we took them on board and thereby saved their lives, thanks to my son's keen eyesight and alertness. They were obviously grateful; we delivered them to their cottage and left them on shore safe and sound.

Some months later, we received a note from the French embassy saying that a medal had been struck in memory of our rescue mission. The French are great on medals and related ceremonies. Every week they would have a ceremony and sometimes we would go because friends of ours were being honored. If they had followed normal practice, they would have presented the medal in a public ceremony in front of Gabonese and Frenchmen. It would have meant honoring an American. We received the medal by messenger.

So we held our own ceremony, complete with press conference and an ambassadorial presentation. As I said, we had cordial relations with the French, but I am sure they would

have preferred it if we had not been there. We made them nervous.

Q; *You left Gabon in 1969. What was your next assignment?*

NELSON: We came back to Washington where I was assigned to the African bureau where I became the deputy director of the office for southern African affairs. I stayed there until 1971.

Q: What did your office cover?

NELSON: We covered Zambia, Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa and Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Q: We are now at the beginning of the Nixon administration. What was the reaction of the African bureau?

NELSON: I can't really answer that question because I arrived after the administration had taken office. I don't really know what the initial reaction might have been. I don't remember my new colleagues talking about the change in administrations to any great length.

Q: I raised the question because many observers have said that neither the President or Kissinger seemed very interested in Africa. They had other fish to fry. What were your concerns in the 1969-71 period?

NELSON: We were witness to the disintegration of South Africa. That may not have been obvious at the time, but in retrospect, the situation was changing starting around this time. Our focus was on the "Unilateral Declaration of Independence" emanating from Southern Rhodesia under Ian Smith. The embargo on Rhodesia continued in an effort to get the white leadership to come to terms with the black majority. The white population was only about 4% - very small, but very much in control. In South Africa, the white population was about 17-20%.

Q: Was our government pretty well agreed on a policy toward southern Rhodesia?

NELSON: I don't recall any divisions. There may have been some disagreements on how hard we should push the Rhodesians. I think our policy was very conservative; we did not do enough to satisfy a lot of the Third World. We had a lot of trouble all over the world from those countries.

Q: Were you involved in consideration of our policy and its implementation?

NELSON: Very little. I was asked for my opinion by the office director, Mike Crosby, but he carried the dialogue within the Department and with other agencies. He was a first rate officer. He was well respected. I worked well with him and he was very helpful. He

allowed me to have part of the action, which I greatly appreciated. We had discussions, but he was the one that dealt with other parts of the Department.

Q: Did we have any idea how the southern Rhodesia crisis would be resolved?

NELSON: No. We just insisted that the white power structure come to terms with the black population. Our general philosophy was that this was a matter for the Rhodesians to settle. We could not impose our solution. But we could push. Some people thought we should push harder. We tried to encourage Americans to leave Rhodesia, which most did. But outfits like Hertz and Avis remained; they were franchises.

Q: Was there considerable Hill pressure?

NELSON: Dingell was a very strong figure. He was a leader in the Black Caucus. He kept after us. Of course, I met him many times in the next few years. I had a high regard for the congressman. He did his homework. He knew what he was talking about. He knew what he wanted. And he was effective. He made a lot of troubles for us. He wanted us to be more active and up-front in pushing the South African government and Ian Smith to making changes in their racial policies. Whenever he went after us on those issues, he was well prepared.

Q: If I remember correctly, we had by this time withdrawn our representation from Southern Rhodesia. How does one influence events and policies in such circumstances?

NELSON: We had no relationship with Ian Smith at all. We had to work at arms' length. That is one of the consequences in withdrawing representation. We did not have access. We didn't even have an interest section, which is often a solution to some the possible consequences of breaking diplomatic relations. We worked with Castro through our interest section. We didn't break diplomatic relations until we were assured that we could have such a section.

Q: Was anything resolved on the Southern Rhodesia issue during your tour?

NELSON: No. Nothing happened as far as I knew.

Q: But Nixon and Kissinger really didn't pay much attention to this issue or Africa in general.

NELSON: That is right. They wouldn't spend any of their time on these matters. They wanted to avoid spending any money in the area. We were supposed to keep our hand in and not cause any problems.

Q: Did you have contact with the British embassy?

NELSON: Some. I had contacts with media people, particularly South African journalists,

interested in that part of Africa. The embassy contacts were mostly discussions, comparing notes and impressions.

Q: Angola and Mozambique were still Portuguese at the time? Did you have much to do on those colonies?

NELSON: Yes; they didn't gain independence until a few years later. We didn't have much to do with the Portuguese. It was not an area of focus for us. That was unfortunate because the situation in these colonies was coming apart. The Portuguese just couldn't support these colonies economically. They weren't getting anything out of Mozambique, and Angola was just trouble. So it was hard for the Portuguese. Portugal was a member of NATO. In retrospect, I don't think we handled the problems in this area very well. We didn't pay enough attention.

Q: How were we dealing with South Africa?

NELSON: We were pretty soft on South Africa. We viewed them as "God-fearing" folks. We were pretty easy on them. We did make it known that we opposed apartheid. We wanted that system terminated. But we didn't for example vote for UN resolutions highly critical of South Africa. We didn't support sanctions. It was a long time before we became very active on apartheid. The issue was not a very high priority for the Nixon Administration. There was no strategic interest that would have been served by our pressures. The Soviet Union was not much of a factor in the area of Africa that I covered.

One of the advantages South Africa had was that it was staunchly anti-communist. The government thought that most of the rabble rousing in the black population came from domestic communists. So the government was much on our side in the Cold War.

Q: Did we watch the ANC (African National Congress) at all?

NELSON: It had people in South Africa, although most of the leadership resided outside the country. They did mount terrorist operations as well as very vocal propaganda campaigns. They were active agitators. With Mandela in jail and the leadership outside the country, the ANC could not become a very influential organization. I don't think we communicated with the ANC very much. This was another preference of the Nixon administration. Communications with the ANC was not pushed at all. They were not to be encouraged by us showing any interest in them. I am sure that some contacts must have taken place overseas and they may have had some in Washington, but I didn't really know. We had a lot of clandestine contacts, but as a government, we were not really engaged or concerned with the ANC.

Q: Were we concerned about Soviet influence in Mozambique or Angola?

NELSON: Certainly. We thought that particularly in Angola that the Netto group was greatly influenced by the Soviets. After the Cuban troops became involved in the war

against South Africa, we were certain that the Soviets were involved. We supported a group headed by Holden Roberto who was much more conservative. It was a splinter group which was totally unsuccessful. We also supported Savimbi who had the support of South Africa. That policy continued for a number of years.

But in general, we were not supposed to spend much of the U.S. government's energy on my part of Africa.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary for African affairs during your tour?

NELSON: It was David Newsom. He was a very competent leader.

Q: In 1971, you were assigned to the Senior Executive Seminar. Did you enjoy that year?

NELSON: It was a wonderful year. It was fantastic. I liked the mix of people. I liked the experiences we had. It is the kind of assignment that most Foreign Service officers should have. We learned a lot about what was going on the U.S., which we would never have learned had it not been for the Senior Seminar. We met all parts of society including hippies and revolutionary women's groups. The most shocking session we had was with some very aggressive women who used the foulest language. Here were these meek Foreign Service officers, Department of Agriculture people, a Marine Corps officer; we were all shocked by the language these women used. It was quite an experience. It is one thing to read about these women or see them on TV, but to meet them close up was quite an experience. That was a good experience.

Q: After the Senior Seminar, what came next?

NELSON: I went out as DCM to Zambia.

Q: What was Zambia like in 1972?

NELSON: At that point, Zambia was pretty much in the grip of President Kenneth Kaunda. He had been president since independence in 1964. He was in a pretty secure position. Zambia was doing fairly well. It had a pretty good size welfare budget based on copper income. The copper mines were essentially run by South African firms, but that was seldom mentioned. Zambia had a farming sector dominated by whites. They were good farmers; their biggest crops were tobacco and corn.

The country was relatively stable although there was some political turmoil. Kaunda had been in power for many years, and some were beginning to chafe at that. The country was trying to be in a leadership role in fighting South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. It was beginning to be involved in the collapse of the Smith regime. So it was engaged - sometimes positively and sometimes not helpfully.

Our ambassador was Jean Mary Wilkowski. A very dynamic woman. She had been in

Latin America, and this was her first and I think her only ambassadorship. She had a very strong personality. She was quite blunt with the staff. She upset the staff on several occasions because of her bluntness. In fact, she loved them all, but she didn't project that. I learned this over a period of time.

I first met her in a hall in the Department. She was as tall if not taller than I am. I think that in college she had been a basketball player. She was striding along when I stopped her to introduce myself as her new deputy. The first thing she said to me was that "they didn't even give me chance to choose my own DCM." I am sure she didn't mean how it sounded. She was just bluntly stating a fact. She probably felt pushed around a little bit, and she didn't like it.

Q: It sounds like that as DCM you spent some time smoothing over ruffled feathers.

NELSON: I did a certain amount of that. My wife was enormously helpful in helping me. For all her faults, I had a great attachment to Jean Mary. I haven't been in touch for years, but I suddenly thought of her this morning. She had some physical problems even as ambassador, and I don't know her condition now.

We made it work, and I gained an enormous respect for her despite all the gripes about her. She stood on her rights as an ambassador, which got her into trouble with Kissinger just about the time I was leaving Lusaka. She was a damn good representative of the U.S. She had the staff in the palm of her hands. They appreciated her. They may have joked about her behind her back, but they respected her. And that was what she was being paid for - as I told the staff periodically. I told them they had to live with her personality. We were accomplishing our tasks, and she was doing what she was paid to do. She was in Lusaka not to coddle us but to represent the U.S.

Q: What was our Zambian policy at the time?

NELSON: We had an AID program. We were trying to strengthen Zambia's economy. During my three years there, I noted the usual African reaction which was to blame foreign colonialism for their problems. To certain extent, of course, they were right. When the copper price plummeted, it meant a serious budgetary short-fall. Zambia had no money! Copper prices did not recover. Kaunda's solution was to nationalize the mines without any compensation. And then he rehired the same mining companies which had been in charge before nationalization. That was obviously more expensive. Now they have sold the mines back to the companies.

The government's relationships with the white farmers were tense. Those farmers were doing very well; they lived well as Rhodesian land owners. They brought in foreign exchange, much of which they pocketed. But there was still plenty for the country. The farmers were very good, and the land was quite fruitful. The Zambians might have known about subsistence farming but knew little about managing large and productive farms. Interestingly enough, the same criticism might have been made about a number of the

white land-owners. They had been in the British military and had decided to stay in Zambia after its independence. They started farming without much background. Labor was cheap and plentiful, and they managed somehow. I was just visiting in England about three weeks ago with one of those land-owners, who was chased out. The government had put so many financial restrictions on farming that he just left. Of course, the farmers were breaking many of the financial laws while we were there. But the country was still profiting from their labors. But the whites worried about their kids and whether they would be able to pay for their education. So many left, although there were also many who remained.

Q: What kind of commercial farming did Zambia have?

NELSON: Maize and tobacco. Those were the major products. Maize was the stable crop. If there weren't huge mounts of maize at the end of the harvest season, then the country was in trouble, not only to feed Zambia's population but also to maintain some exports. Sugar was another major cash crop. All the farms depended on British and South African farmers.

I have already mention copper which was the largest foreign exchange earner. But as I said, the price really took a dive and is still in the doldrums today. The Chinese built a railroad through Tanzania to Dar es Salaam. The Zambians had smelters, so that not all of the raw ore had to be exported. Much of the product and the ore was probably shipped out by train and truck. When the embargo was put on Southern Rhodesia, that blocked exports going through there. That was the genesis of the road construction to Tanzania so that the ore could be shipped to Dar es Salaam. This was even before the railroad was built. We were asked whether we would be interested in building the railroad. We declined.

Q: Were we very nervous about the Chinese?

NELSON: I really wasn't. The legacy of McCarthy taught me that we were over-reacting to the communist threat. They built a railroad. The construction workers were confined and studied their little red books; they rarely mixed with the Zambians. The railroad was pretty neat. I remember one day while my wife and I were driving in the bush probably heading for Tanzania, we passed a truck load of Chinese workers, who were singing and have a great time. We waved to them. One almost waved back but didn't. The fact that a westerner would wave to them undoubtedly made them suspicious. I don't think the Chinese made much of an impact on the Zambians. Of course, the country expressed gratitude for the construction of the railroad, but I don't think the Chinese left a communist legacy.

Q: What impression did you have of Kaunda?

NELSON: We dealt with him very directly. If we needed to talk to him, we would just call him. We knew his principal advisor who was a very able young man. Zambia is a

small country so that personal relationships are developed. Of course, we didn't always reach him when we phoned, but then we could talk to his advisor who could be relied on to pass a message on to the president. When we went to the president's house for dinner, Kaunda served. When we washed up before the meal, the president brought the bowl and towels; everybody washed up in the same water. Then he would stand behind a buffet table and ladle out the food. It was very informal and Kaunda was very personal. He had a nice sense of humor; very steady. The atmosphere was very informal; Wilkowski had access to him any time she needed it. I also could get word to him, usually through his advisor.

That does not mean that things got done. Kaunda did not have people who were very good at getting things done. The system didn't work well. We once were ready to make an $8 million grant. We had a terrible time getting a Zambian to sign off on it. All they had to do is sign the agreement, and we would hand over the check. Time was beginning to run out. I remember the ambassador finally getting the minister of finance out of bed to tell him that unless Zambia signed the agreement, the funds would not longer be available after midnight. He reluctantly agreed. But we had to force the grant down their throats. It was put to good use, but this was an illustration of the problems the Zambians had in making government work.

Q: Were we concerned about Kaunda's human rights record?

NELSON: We had some discussions, but it wasn't a big thing. He didn't have much opposition so that the issue of human rights didn't really come up. Kaunda was unusual in that he really was a Malawian and therefore did not belong to any Zambian tribe. Of course there were people then and even more so now that he is trying to make a political comeback that held his antecedents against him. In fact, because he didn't belong to any tribe, he was not a threat to any of them and therefore quite acceptable to all. At the time, the fact that he was a Malawian was not mentioned; it is now much more of a factor. Although his small tribe also spilled over into Zambia, it was no threat to the other tribes. If he had any political enemies, they were not many, and Kaunda did not feel the need to take any actions against them. So he did not run a repressive regime, although he did behave undemocratically when he felt the need for some direct action.

Q: Did you spend a lot of time convincing the Zambians to vote with us in the UN?

NELSON: Yes, but not very successfully during this period, particularly on southern Africa issues. It was an absolutely impossible task. Wilkowski would often spend time with the president or other high officials trying to garner votes and I would too. But all we can say is that we tried, but usually not very successfully.

Q: How much of a factor was South Africa in U.S.-Zambia relations?

NELSON: They believed that we should be on the same side with them and other African countries to change South African behavior, including if necessary the use of our forces.

They wanted the white regime driven out. We had a lot of unrealism in Zambia. Kaunda tried to be in the forefront of this anti-white regime movement, along with Julius Nyerere of Tanzania - a colleague and sometime competitor for the international spotlight. They were aggressive about South Africa and Southern Rhodesia first and Mozambique and Angola secondly. Kaunda had two or three meetings with South African and Southern Rhodesian leadership in a railroad car on a bridge spanning the Zambezi river. These were publicly announced meetings the content of which was kept secret. The Zambian press was pretty much controlled, so we knew little about these meetings. He tried to influence the leadership of these other countries to provide greater rights to the black population. Being a reasonable man, it is quite possible that Kaunda had some impact. He did have a certain amount of courage because his negotiations were sometime viewed skeptically by his African colleagues. They would never have even looked at a South African or Southern Rhodesian white. On one occasion, he really got quite angry with the South Africans, which was quite risky since the Zambians depended on South Africa for some agricultural products, which they could probably could have produced themselves. These goods came by train which would have to change engines at the bridge so that a Zambian could drive the train to Lusaka. Kaunda put an embargo on these imports which meant that the Zambians would have a very limited diet. That became a very tough situation because there really wasn't an alternative source for the agricultural products. Eventually, without any announcement, the embargo was lifted although the imports were disguised. For example, we suddenly found Botswana apples in the market. Now Botswana did not grow apples; these were South African imports in disguise. This might well have been the bright idea of some South African who suggested covert ways to restart the import program. We did lose South African wines and that was unfortunate. They never came back in any bottles.

So there were some tough moments due to Kaunda's stance against South Africa. He truly believed that he was in the right. His actions were not for effect. I think he truly found the South African regime odious. Since he was asking other countries, like the U.S., to take a tough line against South Africa, he undoubtedly felt that his country had to make a showing. I don't think that his pressure had much effect in South Africa.

Q: Did the actions that Nyerere was taking in Tanzania have any effect in Zambia? I gather that Nyerere was taking a different course.

NELSON: I didn't know much about what Nyerere was doing. I believe that he was taking a lot of private property and giving it to communities. He had to move people around the country to do that. That was pretty harsh and difficult. We had friends in Mombasa with whom we exchanged visits. They had a Tanzanian working for them. He finally had to go home because his family which lived in Tanzania had been moved off their farm. They had refused to join the communes which left them entirely stranded. I understood that this happen quite often. We did find him in Dar once when we visited there. He was trying to run a little shop, but he no longer had a family farm to fall back on. The communal farms did not do well.

Q: Nyerere was the darling of the socialist world, particularly Scandinavia. He was getting tons of money, but in the process essentially killed a country that had some economic growth potential.

NELSON: Unfortunately, you can find examples of that process all over the world, not just in Africa. Radical change all at once seems to be a recipe for catastrophe. It is just destructive.

Q: Was Zambia a listening post for what was happening in South Africa?

NELSON: Yes. We had a large number of "freedom" fighters from Southern Rhodesia. There were some of Savimbi's people in Zambia from Angola. We had Namibians - the SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) people. There may have been some from Mozambique as well, but I didn't have any contact with them. I saw the other people, particularly the Zimbabweans. They were also " freedom" fighters. I went to Harare last spring and saw some of them for a couple of days. My closest contact works for LANRO, a British international corporation. He was pulled out of Zambia on a couple of occasions.

The Southern Rhodesian "liberation" movement was split. The divide was so bad that they were killing each other, for reasons that were never quite clear to me. It was murderous stuff. There was one black leader, who had been an attorney in Southern Rhodesia. He finally had to leave because he was just too successful. He used the available white courts and ran rings around the white legal profession in the protection of many accused, including some whites. He then became involved in the "liberation" movement and moved to Zambia. He was a very interesting guy, who became a very good friend of my wife. They had a nice intellectual relationship with many exchanges. One morning, down the street, he got into his car which had been booby trapped. It blew up and killed him. That is what the Southern Rhodesians did to each other. My wife was broken hearted and I also found it hard to accept.

We knew a leader of the Namibian resistance group, but that was also split. He later became at odds with Nujoma, who was the leader of the resistance. He ended up in prison, sentenced to death, but fortunately that was never carried out. So the Namibians also killed each other.

These splits were bad news. It was tough enough to mount a resistance movement. They didn't need internal feuding. But wherever you go, there are people who become power hungry regardless of cause.

Q: Did you have primarily a watching brief?

NELSON: Yes; we did not get involved in their operations. We had a small CIA office, which might well have done more which I may not have known about. I knew much of what CIA was doing, but I can't guarantee that I knew all.

Q: Did you have any major issues with the Zambians during your tour?

NELSON: One of the big events was the nationalization of the mines. There wasn't much we could do about it except wring our hands. We were in touch with the government and the South Africans-who had been running the mines on behalf of the Anglo-American Corporation. But as I indicated earlier, the managers returned to work for the government-owned corporation. We made an effort to counsel Kaunda that perhaps he should not pursue nationalization or find a way not to expropriate the mines. I think in the final analysis, some compromise was worked out with the Anglo-American Corporation being compensated for their property. So the issue was not quite as acute as it appeared originally.

Zambia became the venue for the talks between Portuguese, the Mozambicans and the Angolans. They all came together in Lusaka. The embassy did not play a role in these negotiations. It was an interesting process. The meetings were held at the State House, under the chairmanship of Kaunda or his representative. They began to work on how these two colonies would achieve their independence. That was a big event. The leader of the Mozambican delegation was by Samora Machel. I took my daughter once to a social event where we met and talked to Neto, Dispasse and Machel. That was interesting because they were powerful people. My daughter and Machel got along quite famously.

When anybody significant would come to Lusaka or leave Lusaka, the diplomatic corps would show up the airport, line up and shake hands. We spent a lot of time doing that. I used to take my daughter with me; she stood behind me. Once when Machel returned, he came to me and pushed me aside so he could embrace my daughter, who was sixteen at the time. She was a very pretty blond with long hair.

Q: What were your instructions regarding these independence talks?

NELSON: We had a watching brief. There may well have been some instructions to which I was not privy. I think we probably talked to the government in Portugal. It would have been stupid not to. We certainly wanted the Portuguese to know that we supported the independence process, and I am sure that we offered any assistance that might have been helpful. I am sure the CIA was active among the Mozambicans and the Angolans. But the embassy had no instructions beyond watching and reporting. We knew that we could encourage the participants to reach a satisfactory resolution.

Q: Did the Hickenlooper amendment play any role in the expropriation process?

NELSON: No, because the American interest was minuscule. Our share of the Anglo-American Corporation was very small. We were more concerned with the policy of nationalization because as an aid donor intending to beef up Zambia's economy we found the government following policies which we felt certain would retard economic growth.

Q: Did Kaunda expropriate out of pique or was it part of carefully considered policy?

NELSON: I really don't know. My speculation is that in part it may have been out of pique. Kaunda had a tendency to act that way. I don't know where he got his advice, but he did act emotionally when he was angry with somebody. I doubt that in this case that was the sole reason. After all, it was a major decision. It probably stemmed more from his belief that foreign ownership of the mines was not working; and, therefore, they should be taken over by Zambia.

Q: One of the most pernicious influences in the former British colonies - and some French ones as well - were the doctrines perpetuated by such institutions as the London School of Economics - labor influenced policies and Fabian socialism. They preached nationalization as a solution to many economic problems. It was given full vent in Tanzania. Were there economists in Zambia that were talking this way?

NELSON: This school of thought might have found some receptive ears in Zambia. Kaunda's close friends were people like Nyerere. It is quite possible that he got advice from him. Or Nyerere might have suggested that he talk to someone who spouted that economic philosophy. I don't know for sure that that is what happened, but it certainly could have. Kaunda certainly had a socialist bias, but I don't know really how he came to make the nationalization decision.

Q: You left Zambia in 1975. Where did you go next?

NELSON: I returned to the Department, but there was no job for me. That fall I went to the UN General Assembly as a member of the U.S. delegation. I was the African "expert" to help the permanent African expert in the U.S. mission. We had a couple of experts for each region, but the African experts really were busy covering fifty countries.

Pat Moynihan was our ambassador to the UN at this time. He was a very colorful and forthright person. He was a wonderful story teller. One would never want to miss one of his staff meetings. There was a lot of activity. He was also a very intimidating person. He had very strong opinions, and you argued with him at your peril. I certainly never did, and I don't think that others in my position and personality did. It was a whole new experience for me. We worried about southern Africa and the Middle East. In those days, we were on a real losing streak. The only countries that voted with us consistently were Taiwan and Israel.

It was an interesting time because Moynihan liked to be outspoken. There was no restraint on him since we had nothing to lose. He really let loose on several occasions which made him quite popular in the American media. He spoke out and thereby also gained respect of the U.S. government. We didn't make much mileage in the UN, but we had a lot of fun doing it.

I was trying to sway others to side with us. That was a hopeless task. I would go to the

delegates' lounge and look for people to talk to. In some ways, it was a desolate kind of job. I would try to find delegates and talk to them about what was going on and talk to them what we might do for them if they would help us. It was essentially a lobbying task.

The most interesting action was in the Security Council, but I was much too junior to participate in that. I have always resented that. All in all, my assignment to the UN was a great experience. I got to know a lot of Africans and learned something about the UN. As I said, we didn't get very far, but we were flamboyant. The populace loved it.

Q: Was there any effort to link UN votes to U.S. aid? Did it have much effect?

NELSON: As I suggested, there certainly was. I don't think we were quite that blatant to make the connection overtly, but I don't think we left many in doubt about our implications. We would say that we could not get Congressional appropriations unless the country did so and so. We would shift the burden to the Congress quite properly.

The big event as far as I was concerned was the appearance of Idi Amin, the murderous president of Uganda. He spoke to the General Assembly. He is a big man, who is still living in Saudi Arabia. He strode to the microphone and spoke in Swahili which brought the house down. Nobody had ever spoken for Africa in Swahili. Many thought it was the greatest thing that ever happened in the UN. He spoke for about two minutes and then handed his speech to his ambassador. He moved to a throne that had been placed on the stage and looked over the delegates. It was a ludicrous sight. The poor ambassador couldn't read very well. He was ever after referred to as the "reader." He stumbled through the rest of the Amin speech, which was primarily a denunciation of the U.S. and great laudatory praise for the Africans which were doing so much good and anti-Israel and South Africa. Then the General Assembly adopted the resolution equating Zionism with racism, which really made us hot under the collar. Moynihan was out of town for this performance. He was in San Francisco speaking to the Commonwealth Club. When he heard about this issue, he raced back. He called me when I was on the floor, wanting to know where the longest applause took place. I couldn't really remember because Amin's speech had been applauded all along. Moynihan of course wanted to know what issues seemed to be close to the hearts of the delegates. It was a performance that the Africans loved because they viewed Amin as the first leader to speak their feelings. They loved it and passed the anti-Israel resolution which passed handily. That was an explosive time and a great time for Moynihan's bombastic style.

There were a number of U.S. delegates who were political appointees. Pearl Bailey, the singer, was one of them. She was delightful with a strong personality. I loved my association with her. One day we were sitting in our places in the Assembly when the Cuban delegate stood up at the podium lambasting the U.S. It was really a terrible attack on the U.S. I don't remember what stimulated it, but it was awful. We were totally unprepared. There is a right of reply. Bailey asked me whether she could deliver our reply. I said: "I guess so." We raised our sign so that we would be recognized. She went on the podium. She was so good. She took the Cuban to the cleaners - ad lib all the way.

She just wasn't going to stand for that propaganda. He denounced us as a racist society. Since she was an African-American, she showed what a lie that was. It was great; it was a delight. She had a lot of strength. Her husband was a jazz drummer. She always mentioned him when she talked about her profession. She never wanted the sole spotlight. I gained a great respect for her. At the time, she was appearing in "Hello, Dolly." Once she appeared in costume at the assembly. I went one night to see the show. One of her former colleagues, a former white dancer, was in the audience that night. Pearl asked her to come to the stage. She asked this lovely old lady to dance a few steps. It was the sweetest gesture. It still gives me an emotional twinge. Pearl was an angel!

Q: Did you have a better appreciation after your UN experience of the list of demands that we ask embassies to transmit to their host governments?

NELSON: I don't think that is an exercise in futility. On occasions, we got some results. We learned about mutual interests, which we might not had done if we didn't have these exchanges about the UN. Either side might not have known where the other stood and why. So I think from that point of view, the exchanges are useful. Some of the work we did was quite useless. We try to sell our point of view all over the world even though much of it is unacceptable to other countries. I think one of the advantages of the work in the UN is that is can humanize people. It can help to develop personal relations and therefore access. That is very helpful when something really important comes along. Some of the work seems somewhat ridiculous, but over all it is helpful. You can chuckle with the president of the Chad over some of the foolishness. That can help.

Q: Were we perceived by Africans as sort of the enemy when it came to southern Africa issues? Or were we viewed just as misguided?

NELSON: I think we were seen as misguided. Some of our positions seemed incomprehensible to the Africans. We had power, we had money; they thought we could solve the problems in one day if we wanted to. In general, I think we were liked and had the resources to accomplish anything we wanted to. After all, we had put a man on the moon. The South Africa problem seemed easy to solve when compared to that feat.

Q: Did you find yourself spending a lot of time explaining our position on South Africa?

NELSON: Yes, indeed. Sometimes it was awkward; sometimes what you said fell kind of flat, but we understood why.

Q: With Moynihan in charge, was there much anti-UN feeling in the U.S. government that was evident in the Reagan administration?

NELSON: No, I don't think there was an anti-UN view. I think many did not see the UN as a very useful institution. We were already in debt to the UN.

Q: After your UN assignment, you went to Congressional Relations (H). Right?

NELSON: I was there for a short time - for less than a year. Our biggest challenge was the Panama Canal treaty. There was enormous resistance to the treaty in Congress. I must say that Congressional Relations is in an odd position. By statute, it is not supposed to lobby. What else is it in business for? We "passed information" or "advised." In fact, I think we were lobbying, but nobody challenged what we were doing. It was a very interesting experience. I enjoyed it tremendously and would have liked to stay there for at least two years.

I spent most of my time trying to sell the Panama Canal treaty. I had to learn a lot about it and tried to stay a little ahead of the Congressional members and staff. So I had to study the background and keep current. Much of that I did by talking to the experts. It was a whole new experience. As I said, I enjoyed it although selling does not come naturally to me. In fact, I don't like it, but that is what we did in Congressional Relations, and I learned to live with it. I thought the audience would be much different from that with which I had dealt before. It turned out that it wasn't that different. The Congress is made up of human beings like the rest of us. They had certain powers that others did not have, but essentially they were like others. I learned to have a great deal of respect for the members and the staff. As I mentioned earlier, my grandfather had been a senator for forty years, although I never watched him working in Washington. I used to spend full days on the Hill two or three times a week. I was impressed. Most of the congressmen were very responsible, "down home folks."

I remember once talking to a Texas congressman who was very candid with me. He was near the end of his career, but he wanted one more term. He told me that although he really agreed that the treaty was necessary, if he voted for it, he would not be re-elected. And he wanted that last term. He didn't say that he would vote against the treaty and its implementation, but if he did it would cost him a great deal. That was representative of the views of several others although none spoke so starkly about the situation. So I found working with the Hill an uplifting and enlightening experience. A lot of people who have worked with the Hill for a long time, did not have same reaction as I did.

Q: After that experience, you went back to the field.

NELSON: Right. I apparently made an incredible record in my short stint in H. I am not sure why that was the impression, but people seemed to be more than satisfied with my performance. I had one exciting moment when I was one of two people on a list for ambassador to three lands: Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana. Kissinger was the secretary at the time. He knew the other fellow on the list, Don Norland, and picked him. I don't blame the secretary; I probably would have done the same thing. But it was an exciting moment; it was fun.

Then Personnel came to me and said that they wanted to send me to South Africa as DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). I was told I could take or turn it down; there would be no argument; the decision would be entirely mine. But those were still the days when you

went to where you were assigned. There was no bidding system. I really wanted to stay in H. I was not particularly interested in South Africa. My oldest children were in college by this time; only my daughter would have accompanied us. I knew that she didn't want to go to South Africa. She had serious objections to the apartheid policy. She had been there. She had another year in high school. My wife had recently gotten a wonderful job - the first for a long time since she had stayed home with the children. She became the executive secretary to the dean of the Catholic University Law school. They were involved in some interesting work, such as gun legislation. She was very happy and I really was very reluctant to have her abandon that job. But we had kids in college, and we looked at our financial situation. We were quite mercenary about this: the tax situation, the mortgage costs, school costs and all other expenses. Overseas, we would have been eligible for several allowances; we would have gone broke unless we went to South Africa. So we decided to go.

It was a good decision as it turned out. It was very interesting. Both of us were able to be useful.

Q: You were there from when to when?

NELSON: From 1976 to 1979. The ambassador was first Bill Bowdler. I had replaced Bill Edmondson, who came out as ambassador in 1978.

Q: In 1976, what was the political situation?

NELSON: It was a key period. The Johannesburg township of Soweto went into rebellion - mostly the young ones. This was the beginning of the end. Even the white regime recognized then that it had to do something. When I was deputy director of southern African affairs, I went out on an orientation trip to South Africa. I was full of missionary zeal to get rid of apartheid, not understanding the situation at all. I participated in many discussions lasting well into the night with both blacks and whites. One old white Afrikaner said to me, in the wee hours of the morning, that I was absolutely correct that apartheid could not survive, but that that wasn't his problem. It would be his grandchildren's problem. So there was a recognition that apartheid had to end. After the young people in Soweto rioted and a number of people were killed, everybody remained nervous because the turbulence continued even after the riots had passed. So it was a very interesting time.

Q: When you arrived in South Africa, who was the government and how did we deal with it?

NELSON: Botha became president in 1978. We engaged the government more and more during my tour. We didn't work directly on South Africa's internal problems. Rather we concentrated on trying to achieve independence for Namibia. There seemed to be possibilities because there were several groups in South Africa - Germans, South Africans, the colored population and the blacks, primarily the Ovambos - and some

political parties which seemed amenable. So there were possible allies in South Africa. Don McHenry, a very talented African-American, came out and started a process to gain independence for Namibia. We brought the French and the Germans and the British in to join us in this effort. So we had a consortium to work with the South Africans who were willing to consider some new status for Namibia. No one knew exactly what that status might be. So we began to work on some kind of process that would ultimately bring independence to South-West Africa. The development of this process was in the works through my entire tour. I think it moved pretty well, but we could not bring it to fruition. But we developed a framework which was not used right away.

Relationships with South Africa turned sour and we invoked sanctions and other pressures. But the framework still existed and when the time was ripe and an opportunity to move came along, that framework was used. It was not current but bringing it up to date was not a major challenge. So it was a useful achievement even if it did not pay off for several years. Secretary Cyrus Vance was involved, and he visited South Africa. He was not only a very nice guy but pretty effective with the South Africans. During the development of this framework, we also began discussions on independence for Southern Rhodesia. That was less successful, although there was some progress. We held some clandestine meetings with Ian Smith in South Africa.

Q: What was your role in this work?

NELSON: I was part of the group that worked on these issues. I made several trips to South-West Africa and I attended one of the meetings with Ian Smith.

Q: I gather from what you have said is that we put apartheid aside and focused on Namibia and Southern Rhodesia.

NELSON: That is right. It was something akin to what we are trying to do in the Middle East; work on peripheral issues saving the hardest to last. In cases like those, it is important to develop trust and show some successes. In South Africa, we didn't have a clear road-map of where we were going. We knew the objective, but no one was certain how we would get there. In the end, we played a catalytic role because the final decisions could only be reached by the people living in the region. A lot of people in the U.S. didn't understand that. A lot of Africans elsewhere didn't understand that. They expected the U.S. to impose a solution. That can't be done. It does not work. The final resolution must be left to agreements reached by the people living in the region.

Q: What was your impression of the white South Africans you were dealing with?

NELSON: They understood that current situation would have to change. But they resisted because change was a frightening prospect. I don't think they were so concerned with retribution as they were with the question of what could be done with all the blacks. They were all poor, and there was no environment within which they could prosper. That was a hazardous prospect and still remains so today. Little progress has been made in raising the

standard of living of the blacks. They got freedom, but few economic benefits. That was the challenge that the whites foresaw. Many of them of course were very privileged and very well off. In the parliament, there was a member by the name of Helen Suzman, who was the sole representative of the Progressive party. She was delightful and fought for the abolition of apartheid all the time. The Liberal Party represented mostly the English speaking population. The Afrikaner party represented most of the whites and the power structure and then there was Helen Suzman who nipped at their heels all the time. She was a very bold woman. She still lives, but has no role any more in South Africa. She was one person I met in 1969 when I visited South Africa on my orientation trip. Then I saw her periodically during my assignment there. Eventually, she managed to get a couple of her colleagues elected as well. The government finally had to give in to her because she became so well known around the world. She saw Mandela many times while he was in prison; she spent a lot of time with Winnie Mandela. She was prolific in her edicts, which put more pressure on the government. Her participation gave the black population and other anti-apartheid groups hope that someday, the situation could change.

The government behaved horrendously, torturing and putting Steve Biko and a few others to death. Most of these atrocities were perpetrated by security forces.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the security forces were operating on their own?

NELSON: I don't think so. Perhaps at times they operated on their own because the orders were probably written in such a way to give them great latitude. The author of those orders may well have written so broadly because he - or they - hoped that the security forces would conduct themselves as they did. The ANC (African National Congress) had religiously followed non-violent methods until about the 1970s. They struck to their principles for a long time, but their approach was met with violence. Finally, they decided that their approach was not working and began to fight violence with violence. They then also committed some atrocities.

Q: What did we do about Soweto?

NELSON: Congressman Dingell came out and said that we would open a USIS office in Soweto. And we did! It was an interesting experiment which was pretty successful. I don't know that it made a lot of difference, but it became a protected place where some of the restless youths could come and find shelter. They would use the facility as a place to talk, and some may even have used the library. I and others would go there periodically and meet with these young people. It was an American presence right in that community. It became a small chink in the apartheid armor.

Most South Africans showed no concern about this USIS facility. Interestingly enough, they were not strong enough to resist us, which suggests a lot about how they saw their future. The general rule in the American community was when you hosted a social function, you invited a mixture of guests - white, black, colored, Indian, etc. I don't remember one official social occasion when we did not host a mixture of guests. These

occasions were therefore consistently interesting. One would find white people sitting down with other communities, getting addresses and phone numbers and having some frank discussions. I don't know whether it led to anything, but the white people had experiences in our homes which they never had before. One hopes that had some impact. There was a readiness particularly in the black community to compromise, not to be vindictive, to find a solution. There was the same sentiment in the white community to a very substantial degree. But it was most noticeable among the blacks, at least with those we came into contact. They were ready to work for solutions, not demanding full satisfaction all at once, but to start a process to dismantle apartheid. Some guests would call to say that they had been stopped by a policeman who would suggest that they spend the evening at home. There was a lot of harassment. The police knew whom we had invited because the invitations were made telephonically, which were tapped. The security system worked well.

The regime did a lot of dumb things like arresting the wrong people at the wrong times which only served to stir up the black population. At the request of the ambassador, I did a lot of work exploring the various forces at work in South Africa. One of the vocal groups was the religious one: there was the Dutch Reformed; and the Anglican for the English speaking population; the black population was all over the map. Some belonged to Dutch Reformed, some Anglican, but most in mixed kinds of churches. So I had a very interesting time learning about the religious sector in South Africa. I am not a very religious person. I don't know much about churches, but I wandered into that community and met all kinds of people like Bishop Desmond Tutu, an Anglican.

In one of the townships outside Pretoria, there was a church with a nifty choir - adults and children. For three Christmases, we invited them to our house. We would also invite all of our South African friends - neighbors, officials, etc. They would mix with the choir people. It was a very interesting mix, almost emotional. The choir would sing and then mix with the whites at the party. The blacks would take the initiative to make these contacts; the whites were very hesitant. It worked like a charm; everyone had a an absolutely glorious celebration. It was fun.

Q: As DCM, did you have any problems with young officers who were unboundedly against apartheid and who were probably quite vocal in their objections?

NELSON: Of course. We had crusaders. The officers were pretty responsible, but some of their wives were less inhibited. One or two of them tended to get into trouble. We had a number of shanty towns which had sprung up as the blacks left the rural areas to find employment in the city. These enclaves, built on empty property owned by someone, would become huge and very unhealthful and also became breeding grounds for the restless. The unemployment was very high. One of the temporary solutions undertaken by the government was to bring in bull dozers and wipe out these shanty towns. The inhabitants were forewarned. But one of the wives would go to the shanty town scheduled for removal and sit down in front of the bull dozer. There was a report that early one morning this deed had been undertaken. It was not true, but I became very concerned

because I thought that the Foreign Ministry, having seen the report might well declare that family *persona non grata.* I checked with the alleged perpetrator in the wee hours of the morning and ascertained that she had been in bed all night long. Then at 5:30 a.m. I called the Foreign Minister and told him that if he heard that story, it was not true. Since I was chargé at the time, I said that before he took any action, I would be happy to talk to him. I repeated that the story was just not true. The Foreign Minister, Pik Botha, was very able, but had a short fuse. Fortunately, my call was enough to head off any action by the government. I don't know that Botha would have invoked sanctions, but based on his history, he might well have. The story had appeared in the early newscast which I had heard. It may have been deliberately planted to cause trouble.

Q: Did you have any African-American officers in the embassy?

NELSON: Yes, we had one, Joe Segars, and his wife Elizabeth. This was a very courageous couple. He was a commercial officer. I had met him during my year at the Senior Seminar. For my research paper I had gone to Tokyo to examine its pollution problem and what remedies the Japanese were undertaking, and he was a commercial officer there. One day he came to me and told me that he had been asked to go to Pretoria and asked me what my opinion was. I said that I didn't really have an answer, I could not put myself in his shoes. This was a decision that he had to reach on his own, but I did tell him what I knew about the situation. I didn't think that the people would be tough on him personally, but I was pretty sure that he would run into trouble wherever he went outside the official environment. But the Segars, husband, wife and little son, went to Pretoria. They got a comfortable house with a swimming pool in a white community. I think it worked out pretty well. He had a job; I think it was harder on his wife who stayed at home with her child. She has told some wonderful stories, which I am sure were very distressing to her at the time they took place. For example, she would answer the door bell and people would say: "Is anyone home?" One day, she was out at the pool. She had requested a repairman who treated her something awful. Working for a black woman was very tough for this Afrikaner repairman. After a while, he told Elizabeth that the repair job was done; she then asked him whether he could install a phone at pool-side. She didn't really want that phone, but she just wanted the repairman to suffer some more. He finally did it, but I am sure he was very unhappy. They encountered prejudices wherever they went - e.g., traveling on the train. But I thought they were very courageous. He eventually ended up as ambassador to the Cape Verde islands.

The experience that the Segars had in some ways illustrated the views of many South Africans. Many of them opposed apartheid. They knew it was wrong. One of the early chinks in the apartheid system came when the private schools began to integrate; it was against the law, but they went ahead anyway. The Segars' son went to one of these schools. There weren't many blacks in these private schools, but there were some. The bastion of the South African educational system - the medical school of Stellenbosch University - had black students. They didn't live in the dormitories, but they did attend the school. The university in Johannesburg was integrated. So the system was slowly - very slowly - being broken down by the South Africans themselves. In 1969, on my

orientation trip, I went to a factory. There I was told that certain positions were reserved for whites - these were all the skilled jobs. But I saw a black man running a fork lift. I asked how that happened. I was told that he was a "sweeper." They obviously had found a way to dent the system.

Q: The Carter administration moved to sanctions. How did the embassy view sanctions?

NELSON: That is right. It was much more aggressive than the Reagan administration. We did not think that sanctions would be very productive. It was not an approach that would produce any positive results. We were concerned that sanctions would cause more problems for the black population, as indeed they did. My sense at the time was that time was not ripe for such an action because it would cause more damage than good.

Q: Did the South African government give the embassy a lot of grief over the sanctions?

NELSON: No; at least not to me. The ambassador may have heard more complaints.

I can't remember any difficult problems we had with the South Africans about sanctions. I don't know what discussion had taken place with them. That was the ambassador's bailiwick, and I didn't really get involved. When I was chargé, I did have a meeting with the South Africans about the Namibia negotiations. They didn't enter those negotiations willingly. They felt they had to, but it rankled. Don McHenry was the lead U.S. negotiator on South-West Africa. This meeting included British, French and German representatives, as well as the South African foreign minister. The president of South Africa, John Foster, chaired the meeting. He had received a false report about McHenry and took the opportunity to lambaste him. He called him a "reverse racist" and vindictive with no integrity. No one spoke out to defend McHenry, despite the fact that all the other delegations and the foreign minister knew the report that had set off the president was untrue. So I had to respond to the president. I told him that with all due respect, he was working from a false report and that Don McHenry was one of the finest individuals on earth. I went on to say that when McHenry said something, you could be assured that it was true. That was the only time that I ran into criticism of what we were doing.

Q: When you left in 1979, what were your views about the future of South Africa?

NELSON: I was afraid for it. I was very attached to the country. We had made a lot of friends, both whites and blacks. These were not enduring friendships, although in some cases I wished we had kept in contact. I kept in touch periodically with Helen Suzman, but that was about it. There was one black minister with whom I wished we would have stayed in contact. He was the religious leader of one of the Cape Town's townships. Just before we left, we were going to pay him a visit to say good-bye. I was pulled off to do something else. The situation in Cape Town was very unstable with riots and stone throwing incidents. It was not a secure situation, but my wife went ahead and met with the minister and his wife. There were sad goodbyes. The minister gave her a blanket for me. It was a cheap cotton blanket with an African design on it and I still have it. I became

very attached to it.

I thought that we could try to influence both sides to reach a mutually acceptable solution, but in the final analysis it was their dispute that only they could resolve. Most of the South Africans wanted a solution and it was up to them to find it. It may well have been a solution that we had not anticipated or planned for them.

Q: You left South Africa in 1979. What was next?

NELSON: I was assigned as diplomat-in-residence at Arizona State University for one year. I left there in June, 1980. The university was in Tempe, close to Phoenix.

Q: What was the diplomat-in-residence program?

NELSON: At that time, there were about 40 diplomats-in-residence. It proved an opportunity to re-familiarization with the U.S. The main contact of course was the academic community, which is a special part of our society. It was an opportunity to learn while teaching. If I had to do it again, I think I would have done more teaching than I did in 1979-80. Many academic institutions and certainly Arizona State was not really prepared for us. They thought it was a good idea, but really didn't quite know how to utilize these Foreign Service officers. So we lost a lot of time while the institution worked out this problem. In the first semester, I did not have a course to teach. In the second semester, I was given a small seminar, consisting of about six juniors and seniors. We discussed South Africans affairs and I thought it was very neat. It was a lot of fun. The students were a very mixed bag, but they all were very stimulating.

The most exciting experience that I had was when I had to opportunity to travel throughout Arizona to the community colleges. It was fun to be at Arizona State and to contribute to their academic efforts. My presence in Arizona was noted by academics, and I was invited to go to various community colleges. In fact, this activity snow-balled. The community colleges were just becoming an important part of Arizona's academic efforts. My appearances there gave me a real opportunity to become acquainted with Arizonians from all walks of life. The community colleges were popping up all over the state. The student bodies tended to be small, but they consisted of people, young and old, who attended for a purpose. They did not attend college because that was what one was supposed to do. They had clear academic pursuits either to specialize in one subject or another or to clear up a bad high school record or just to get an associate degree which was required in their particular profession. They knew exactly what they wanted to do and where they were going. There were a lot of more senior people who were pursuing continuing education opportunities. They were interested in just learning more. So the community colleges had a large mixture age-wise, ethnically, and by economic groups. They were very stimulating and quite different from university students. At Arizona State, there were 50,000 students, 90% of them commuters. I had never experienced that type of environment. There were parking lots all over the place reaching to the edge of the desert. It was a very fine institution, but the motivation of the student body - all young people -

was very different than that found in the community colleges. So I enjoyed the community colleges more than I did Arizona State.

Q: How were your discussions of South Africa received?

NELSON: I had realized that people in the world get stirred up by a lot of things. That may have not been typical of the Vietnam war, but in the case of South Africa, segments of our society - certain age groups, particularly college students - get worked up about certain issues, but they do not do it in large numbers. I am referring to that 10% that makes a difference. The rest of the people have other matters on their mind more closely related to their everyday living. That is the way it was on campus. There were some students who were interested, but they were by no means the majority. When I would give a talk on South Africa, all those who were engaged - pro and con - were all there. Some wanted to learn, some just wanted to make trouble. So there was a lot of give and take, including some unpleasantries. On a campus of 50,000 students, I might get 500 to listen to my lecture; they were the only ones that were interested.

Q: Was there a black student movement at Arizona State when you were there and was that involved in the South Africa issue?

NELSON: There were a couple of black students in my class. They were very level-headed, very interested, intellectuals and not emotional. I also had an American Indian in our seminar, a Hispanic, a couple of Anglos and a few who took the course just because they had to fulfill some academic requirements. But we did not have a black student movement.

The major issue which took center stage while I was at Arizona State was the occupation of our embassy in Tehran. We had a lot of Iranian students on campus. That issue attracted attention, but again only by a minority.

Q: Did you find yourself explaining the rights of diplomats and diplomatic property and things like that?

NELSON: Not a lot. On occasion, I was asked about those matters, but it was not a hot subject by any means. I did spend some time talking to students who were interested in the Foreign Service. I suggested to them what they might want to study if they wanted to take the exams.

When the Iranian problem arose, there were a lot of questions. I was asked what the likely scenario might be and how it might be resolved; no one knew the answer, but there was considerable speculation. There were some who were interested in the origins of our difficulties. The media was generally the main source of information for the campus community. I should note that the majority of the student body probably did not know that I existed. As I said there were 50,000 students; and one got lost in the campus in a hurry. So there was only a small group who knew of my presence. But it was a great year

for us. My wife and I enjoyed it tremendously; she got a job as a secretary to the head of the biology department. So she was on campus every day. We become acquainted with a number of the faculty members and a handful of students. And then, as I said, I developed contacts all over the state through the community colleges. Some of these institutions were so new that they were still operating out of trailers; they had no buildings finished yet. There was real energy in these community colleges; they were bound and determined to make their mark in the academic community. The faculty was mainly young and it had that pioneering spirit one often sees in new endeavors. It was just neat!

Q: During your year in academia, did you keep in touch with the Department about your next assignment?

NELSON: I never really did make the transition from being a good soldier doing what one was ordered to do to politicking on the next assignment. So I didn't lobby for my next assignment, but somewhere along the line, while at Arizona State, someone suggested that I be assigned to Carlyle as the Department's representative to the Army War College faculty. When asked, I said that it sounded interesting, but I asked whether the commandant had been asked. I thought that he might have some say. I suggested that my wife and I visit the College and see what it was like and whether the commandant thought we would fit in. So we did that and hit it off with the faculty, even though this was quite a different atmosphere from any to which we were accustomed. The State Department representative is not just a faculty member at the Army War College; he or she is a deputy commandant out-ranking the other deputy commandant. Of course, I couldn't take command of anything, but we really had status. I am sure that the military might have some adjustment problems, but this had been a practice for many years, so that we were not breaking new ground.

Q: You were in Carlyle from when to when?

NELSON: I was there from August 1980 to June 1984 - four years.

Q: What purpose in the military academic hierarchy does the Army College serve? What does it do?

NELSON: As I understood it, the Army War College was to provide a family experience for soldiers who had not had any great opportunities for that. From the group who attended, it was assumed that the leadership of the Army would come, as well as other services that attended. The job was to familiarize them and become involved in the society which they were supposed to defend. Up to the time they arrived in Carlyle, they had been only taught how to kill and break things. This year was an opportunity to tell them why they had done what they had done. It was very good. It was a good place for younger officers and families to become re-acquainted with their families and their colleagues. Of course, we had war games, using computers and other fancy equipment, and academic studies. The stress was on learning about the history of their country, the world and languages, politics, economics, mathematics - all sorts of information that was

not strictly related to military duties. It was an advanced liberal arts education. There was a lot on international affairs which was my responsibility. We had some very useful and informative trips to places like the UN and places like that. Good speakers were brought in from Washington and from all over the globe to spend time with the students. I didn't teach any courses, although I participated in some of the seminars. I was working on giving a course on the media and the military; I developed an outline for such a course which was a subject dear and close to the heart of the military which is still an issue today - which I don't think will ever be solved to satisfaction of both sides. But it never came to fruition.

We had about 30 international students - generals and colonels. I worked a lot with them. I traveled with them and brought a lot of people from Washington to speak to them. I worked on curriculum development and other miscellany.

Q: How were the students coping with the trauma of the post-Vietnam experience and a powerful Soviet Union?

NELSON: I think they were not trying to change their basic orientation. I do think they were trying to add to their understanding of the world. There was some anti-military sentiment still in the U.S., sadly misguided, I might add. What we had in Carlyle was in general a cross-section of the upper intellectual strata of the U.S. We had a bunch of smart people. They really wanted to learn. They realized they didn't have the whole picture. Most were quite open-minded. It was an outstanding group of American citizens. I was very humbled and proud to be among them.

The College would annually bring in plain citizens from various part of the country - at considerable expense, I might add - to be heard by the officers and to listen to what the Army people had to say. They would live with the students for a week. These people were influential in their communities. The Army hoped that they would leave with a positive experience, which they would communicate to their communities. Most of the time they left in a positive frame of mind. A few did not. On my travels, I found a couple of people who were really down on the military. I invited them to join for a one week visit. They did come and were refreshed by their experience and reevaluated their positions. They found out, as I did, that these officers were quite representative of a cross-section of our society. They were American folks who happened to be in the military. Of course, there were some things that the military missed as the civilians missed some things about the military. John Shalikashvili was one of our students. He became the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

It was a mind opening and a mind bending experience for all of us. I thought it was excellent. Some of my colleagues who have been at other military institutions do not speak as glowingly about their experiences as I do about mine. I think they all learned something, but I found it highly valuable. It reinforced my view that military officers are the same as the rest of us, just doing a special job.

Q: Did you spend time trying to convince the officers that diplomats are not a bunch of effete sophisticates, but also solid citizens?

NELSON: Sure. I think my wife and I were highly successful in doing that. But we didn't have to make any special effort. Just living with these people was enough to make them understand the nature of a diplomat. Our appreciation for them was very evident. In return they appreciated us.

Q: What kind of backstopping were you getting from the Department?

NELSON: Not so much from the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs which had nominal jurisdiction over all personnel assigned to military colleges. It had many fish to fry. I should say that the word "college" is really misapplied to these military schools. They are really graduate education. There was some thought given to change the name, but once a word becomes part of the lexicon, change is very hard.

Chet Crocker was the Assistant Secretary for Africa. He had a high level meeting with some foreign representatives on, I think, South Africa which he held at Carlyle. My wife hosted the delegates. We had a couple of very good Foreign Service students. They mixed with the military quite well. I think that attendance at a military school is not everybody's cup of tea, but I think for most FSOs it is a good experience.

Q: I think it also true that at least in our generation, most of the officers had served in the military, often in combat. So we had a good appreciation of what the military does and thinks. We know for example that the military is run by the top sergeants. We also know that many of the officers and non-commissioned officers are quite capable. Now we may have a situation in which most FSOs have not been in the military; they may therefore had very little, if any contact with the military and could easily have formed mis-impressions of the military.

NELSON: I think you are right, and that mis-impression happens much too often. If they would only stop and think, they would understand that they may not have the complete picture. But of course that is true for all of us. All of us have prejudices stemming from lack of knowledge.

Q: You finished at Carlyle in 1984. What happened next?

NELSON: We left the Army War College with great regret. My wife had been diagnosed with lung cancer before we left. She was operated on there in Carlyle by a fantastic surgeon. She was well on the way to recovery when we left. She was loved by that community. She was a real part of it. She had been a great help to the families. She is that kind of person. People sought her out for counseling and advice. There were a lot of domestic difficulties and problems. She was a good listener and then gave her counsel. So she was very highly regarded in that community. She loved it there.

We didn't really know much about cancer and really didn't know what questions to ask. Nobody really told us much. For example, we did not ask whether any remnants of the cancerous cells remained. If there were, the chances were good that it would recur in some other organ. We didn't know that.

We came back to Washington. I didn't have another assignment. I was put on the promotion panels and that was very interesting. But my wife suddenly developed a brain tumor. So we started dealing with this problem day by day. Steroids helped to keep the tumor under control for a while. She underwent radiation therapy. She did ok for a while. She had people visit her and got around. She was even able to attend our daughter's wedding in California. That was a big event. We thought she might have licked it. But came January and she started to decline, dying in June, 1985. Most of the time I spent with her. When the promotion board work was finished, the Department just let me be. It didn't bother me, and I was able to spend time with her until her death.

At that time, I was asked whether I would go as ambassador to Swaziland. I was heart-broken that my wife could not have shared that with me. It was very hard. I told the Department that I needed a little time to consider the offer. I talked to my children and told them that I thought that I could not do the job without their mother. My daughter asked me what her mother might say. That was obvious, and I accepted the offer.

Q: You were in Swaziland from when to when?

NELSON: I went in the fall of 1985 and left in the fall of 1988.

Q: Tell us a little about 1985 Swaziland.

NELSON: Things were coming unglued in South Africa. Mozambique was in considerable disarray. The Portuguese had left, and a civil war had broken out. Those were Swaziland's neighbors. So Swaziland had to host a lot of refugees and some freedom fighter groups who used Swaziland as a base. They did not make the white South Africans very happy. Under pressure from their shareholders it became a haven for businessmen who had conducted their affairs in South Africa. For example, Coca Cola moved its South African regional headquarters to Mbabane. Swaziland at the time had a population of less than one million people. It gained a little from this business migration.

Swaziland is a country populated by only one tribe and, therefore, does not have tribal conflicts. The Swazi tribe is an off-shoot of the Zulus. They both speak the same language. It is a monarchy, a very tradition-bound society which is highly dependent on chiefs for leadership. The population is polygamous with a few exceptions. Its basic industry is farming with a large number of South African farmers managing the plantations of pineapples and other citrus fruits. It also had a large timber industry run by South African concerns. It had a very good reforestation program. They grow pine trees even though they are not indigenous to Swaziland. Swaziland produced paper pulp. There was some industry. In general, Swaziland did reasonably well economically even though

the economy was totally dependent on South Africa.

Swaziland generally stayed out of trouble. It was a convenience to South Africa. It was a convenience to rebel groups as well. It was something akin to Switzerland in a way. It had good relationships with its neighbors. There was probably not an overriding reason for us to have representation there. But that was true for so many other countries as well. The only good reason I can think of is that it gave me an opportunity for an ambassadorship.

The people were very kind and very accessible. They were very secretive about their odd traditions. Swaziland had a parliament with elections of a sort. There were political groups which vied with each other in peaceful ways.

It was a pleasant experience. We had a small assistance program with which my current wife was involved. She was a contractor in the community radio business.

Q: Was it considered a front line state? Did the ANC or comparable groups use Swaziland as a base for raids into South Africa?

NELSON: Swaziland was considered a front-line state, but not aggressively so. It didn't like to be part of the South African problem. The South African government, probably with some justification, lodged protests on a couple of occasions that Swaziland was being used by raiders. But I don't think Swaziland was ever a major base of operations. We didn't have any South African raids in Swaziland to secure the border areas. There probably were agents of South Africa who did their job, but we didn't have any public interventions.

Q: What about the Mozambique conflict? Who was fighting whom in 1985?

NELSON: I am not sure that I remember. It was mostly a power struggle with very little ideology. There were people who wanted to overthrow the socialist government. Machel and Chissano were supported by South Africa and by Southern Rhodesia. So there was an external influence. Machel was not reluctant to accept aid from the Soviets or the Chinese. It was a messy, undefinable conflict. As a matter of fact, my wife and I were going to visit Mozambique to visit the great game park. But we canceled because the trip was considered a little too hazardous. It could have been done, but Mozambique was too unstable to take the risk. It got worse after 1988. Bill De Pree was our ambassador in Maputo. He survived without any damage. My wife and I did drive to Maputo to visit the De Prees. When we tried to get back to Swaziland, the Mozambique army stopped us at a road block they had just thrown up. With great glee, they forced us to empty our car. Everything had to be taken out. We had tennis racquets and balls. These soldiers forced us to show them how to use them. So we stood in the middle of the highway hitting the ball back and forth. We followed their orders without complaint. Finally, the officer in charge released us, and we had to repack all our goods which had been strewed on the highway. One of the soldiers finally couldn't stand it anymore, and he came to give us a helping hand. Mozambique at the time was not a very stable place. People had real

trouble on the highways. We didn't, but others did and so traveling in Mozambique was somewhat of a risk.

The capital of Swaziland is Mbabane. It is about 5,000-6,000 feet high. The climate was very comfortable. The country has lowlands, which are tropical and hot. Some of that land was very good for citrus fruit planting. The higher elevations were very good for pineapple. The forests were also in the mountains.

Q: How did you deal with the government?

NELSON: Everybody was accessible, the foreign minister, the first private secretaries of the ministries. We probably knew all the ministers and their first secretaries as well as people at lower echelons who had some influence. We had good access to the prime minister's office. We did a lot of waiting. You would make an appointment for a certain hour and then wait and wait. To see the king was big deal with all sorts of ceremonial trappings. I think there was a lot of influence exercised by older hangers-on in the royal house. They may have been family members, but there were others as well. All of them had been at the court with the king's father - King Sobhuza - who had been put on the throne by the British. He had seventy wives and an untold number of children. So there were a lot of princes in Swaziland. King Mswati III was in a British boarding school when the British decided to put him on the throne. He was going to attend Sandhurst but never made it that far. He was very young when he assumed the throne and that I think made him quite receptive to the council of elders that his father had collected. These people were very conservative and traditionalist. They had no inclination to change society, even if they had known how.

But the king was accessible. It took some work, but it could be done. Seeing him was not necessarily useful. I think the more important objective was to find the person or persons who were advising him on the subject we wanted to discuss. I don't think I ever figured that power structure out. Perhaps my diplomatic colleagues were more skilled at this than I was, but it always had me stumped. So seeing the king was really not of much use. On occasions, he would summon me when he wanted something. These were material things. He was building an enormous new palace. We had some reservations about that expenditure of public money. We had an assistance program. It didn't seem quite right that Swaziland should spend so much money on a palace when its basic needs were going unmet. That really bugged us. His majesty wanted to furnish the palace. He had gotten some quotes from an Italian manufacturer which he thought were outrageous. He asked me whether I could help. I suggested to Washington that a contract be arranged with some North Carolina furniture maker, but no one was interested. So I never gave the king an answer and he never followed up. There were a couple of requests like that.

When the king was crowned, Maureen Reagan came as the president's representative. That was an interesting time. She was very good. She may have been difficult in some ways, but she was an outstanding representative. The king got a big kick out of her. I think she enjoyed her trip. Of course she had her special aircraft and had a lot of staff

with her. It was a big event for little Swaziland, not to mention our tiny embassy.

Q: I have heard that Maureen Regan was quite firm, but also very smart and well prepared. She was one that should not be crossed.

NELSON: That is right, but she wasn't bad. When things were going well, I was "Harvey;" when she wasn't happy, I was "Mr. Ambassador." So I knew right away when trouble was brewing. I think she enjoyed the trip, although I am not sure that she was convinced it was worth all the time and expense involved. I wasn't either. But it was a nice visit. We had a wonderful evening at the residence with all of the staff. She was very gracious. I had collected for some reason a number of cheap wind-up toys, kangaroos that jumped, cars that go around, etc. She asked that I bring them out and she put them on the coffee table, and she tried to get them moving all at one time. She stayed late into the night and the staff had to be there because none of them could leave before her. She was having a wonderful time. She was a very good sport. She did all of the official mandatory things that were expected. It was fun.

Q: We were still involved in "constructive engagement" at the time. We were quite active in southern Africa. Did Swaziland ever play any role in our efforts?

NELSON: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any contribution that Swaziland made to the process. They were pretty much in the pockets of South Africa. There was a railroad which cut through Swaziland on the way to Maputo, which was a port. It was essentially a South African enterprise. That was interesting because South Africa did not have very good relations with Mozambique. But business was business. We were not too happy about that development because the railroad was being built by South Africa and it had the potential of interfering with the sanctions we had imposed. That was just an example of the Swazis playing the South African game. On the other hand, they really didn't have much choice. The Swazis really couldn't afford to participate in the pressure that we and others were trying to apply to South Africa. They weren't really interested in our policies they were getting along fine. And we didn't really pressure them to change. I did encourage them to take certain steps, but we didn't insist. Some time they would help, such as a vote in the UN. But they didn't help us in any significant way as far as South Africa was concerned.

While in Mbabane, I remarried. My new wife was an Australian. She was born and raised in Melbourne. Her mother was a radio drama script writer. She wrote for some Australian radio series. When my wife was about seven years old, she asked her mother whether she couldn't write her into one of her episodes. She liked to act and wanted to have the opportunity to try radio. Her mother did and that was her start into radio. She pursued that career both as an actress and a writer and as a producer. After that came television. But during all that work she pursued academic studies. Her first love was music, particularly opera.. She joined a traveling university musical group who put on musicals around Australia. She has a gorgeous voice even today. She says that if she could live her life over again; she would have concentrated on opera. She was married and had two

children; her husband deserted her leaving her to support the family. I should mention that she was not a good student in the usual subjects. In fact she failed high school. But she worked until she got into a university which opened all sorts of horizons. She became a teacher in a very good girls' private school. She applied for a scholarship to go to England or for a Fulbright scholarship to teach in the U.S. She was accepted in England and for the Fulbright program. She really didn't like what she had heard about the U.S. She wondered why that was since she had never been there. So she accepted the Fulbright scholarship.

She taught in a high school in Cincinnati. Her kids were with her, and she still had to support the whole family. She returned to Australia as was required by the Fulbright program for a couple of years. Then she returned to the U.S. I am not quite clear why she did that. She didn't think much of our education system. It was not nearly as demanding on the students as were the Australian schools. She did return to teach, but at one point she became fed up with our system because she was being paid 2/3 of the salary that male teachers were earning. She just couldn't accept that discrimination.

While teaching, she also did some part time work for radio and TV stations. When she became available for full time work, she was contacted by one of the Cincinnati TV stations. She became involved in their science program. That really started her career. Somewhere along the line, she was asked whether she would be interested in helping the assistance program in Kenya which was using radio to disseminate information. She accepted and then stuck with the assistance program, finally ending up in Swaziland.

Q: How much work did you do trying to get the Swazis to vote with us in the UN?

NELSON: Quite a bit. We always had one vote or another for which we wanted as much support as we could gather. As I said, they were very helpful when they could. If the vote would cause them trouble with South Africa, then they wouldn't play. They had to worry about their own situation first.

Q: Was there much of an American community in Swaziland?

NELSON: Very small. There were Britishers and South Africans and Southern Rhodesians. We still have friends in those communities, but these were people who came to Swaziland - or their parents did - and just stayed even after they retired. One of our friends who was a South African lady and her husband started a weaving shop. We have some very fine drapes which came from her. They left South Africa because they just couldn't stand the apartheid policies of the government. They are now in their 80s and still living in Swaziland. They also manufactured some of the drapes in the Kennedy Center. Their son became a member of the Swazi parliament for a number of years. Then there were few other South Africans who followed that path because they couldn't stand the racist policies in their country. But the white community in Swaziland was not very large.

Q: What about the diplomatic community?

NELSON: Very small. The Israelis had a mission - they would establish missions wherever they could because they were not welcomed in a lot of countries. The French were there as were the British. The Dutch had representation as did the Mozambicans, the South Africans as well as one or two others. There was a tradition in the diplomatic community to have a weekly luncheon. They were very boring. When one of us would leave, we would be presented with a small silver plate signed by all of the other foreign ambassadors. There was plenty of room on the plate for all of the signatures.

Q: Were there any major issues during your tour?

NELSON: I don't remember any. There may have been some incidents, but nothing worth remembering. I think one of the problems was that we were too damn comfortable there and too well accepted. We could deal with any problem quite amicably and quickly. So I don't think we had any major issues while I was there.

Q: You left Swaziland in 1988. What was next?

NELSON: I was planning to retire since I was going to be 65 at the end of January, 1989. I had not received any forward assignment - that is one of the hazard of being an ambassador because if you don't have a new assignment within 90 days, you have to retire. But one day, as I was walking into the cafeteria, some one asked me whether I would be interested in going back to the UN for the General Assembly meeting. I discussed it with my wife and agreed that I should go to NY.

So the last three months of 1988 were spent at the UN. That was great fun. Vernon Walters was our representative to the UN. He was a very smart and a very nice man. Maureen Reagan also became part of the delegation. One of the princes of the Swaziland royal family came. He was anxious to accomplish something so that he could go home with good press. I could only think of a photo opportunity with someone prominent. So he wanted to be in a picture with Maureen Reagan. Then he would also have his picture taken with General Walters. Walters was always willing to accommodate people who had requests like that. So I arranged for the prince to have his picture taken with each of them. I asked Maureen whether she would have breakfast with the Swazis. I knew that her schedule was filled, but she readily agreed. Then we went to the Waldorf Astoria which was the American representative's residence and had the pictures taken there with Walters. The Swazis were very happy. It was very nice. I saw Walters about a year later, and he said that he had never gotten a copy of the photograph. He had remembered, what a mind!

My wife was writing a textbook at the time, so that New York was an ideal assignment. She set up in an apartment on the 35th floor of some building, within walking distance of the UN. The book was quite successful. So it was a very interesting time. The job was the same as before, trying to deal with 50 delegations.

Then I retired.

Q: What have you done since retirement in 1989?

NELSON: I really retired from foreign affairs. I became involved with my wife on her work. We bought a house in Great Falls and we spent time working on that. I had a wood-shop there. We had a garden to tend. My wife traveled and I went with her. We re-established face-to-face contacts with the children. I was asked to take on another three months at the UN in 1990 and we did that. I was getting pretty good at buttonholing delegates in the lounge. By this time, I also knew some of the African delegates from previous General Assemblies. That was very important because it takes so long to become acquainted with these delegations. Knowing some delegates made the work so much easier. I thought that knowing some would make me much more effective. I could get to them rather easily and was able to explain the U.S. position and ask for their support. We drove to New York with all the stuff we needed for our three months stay. That last assignment was a nice finale.

I did think that it would have been good had the Department asked me to attend the 1991 assembly meeting as well. By this time, I would have known the delegations well. It would have been useful. I suggested that a younger officer should accompany so that he or she would have become acquainted with the African delegations and the process so that a new generation could have been trained. But the Department doesn't work that way.

Q: I think that brings us to the end. Harvey, thanks very much for your contribution.

End of interview