

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

MARTIN WENICK

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 25th of October, 2010, with Martin Wenick, W-E-N-I-C-K; and you go by Marty?

WENICK: Martin or Marty.

Q: Okay. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

And Martin, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

WENICK: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey on May 15, 1939.

Q: Could we get a little feel for your family? Let's take on your father's side; what do you know about the Wenicks?

WENICK: My father was born in Manhattan to a rather poor Jewish family. He grew up in an area of Manhattan that is now part of Harlem, and he went to City College of New York for a couple of years and then he received a scholarship from the Knights of Columbus, which was rather unusual. This scholarship permitted him to complete his education at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, from which he received a degree in chemical engineering in 1921.

Q: This is a Catholic organization.

WENICK: Absolutely. And he worked as an engineer until retiring in 1964.

Q: Do you know the outfit he worked for?

WENICK: He worked for a number of different companies, mostly in the lighting industry. Part of his life was obviously shaped by the Depression, which caused him to move around a little bit more than usual, but for the last probably 25 years of his career, he was with a company called Lightolier in Jersey City, New Jersey. He was the chief operating engineer there. It's a lighting fixture manufacturer, which is still in existence today as far as I know.

Q: What do you know about, going farther back, where did the family come from?

WENICK: That's a little harder. My impression is that it came from an area in Lithuania around Kovno -- present day Kaunas. That's all I know on my father's side.

Q: All right. On your mother's side; how far back can you trace that?

WENICK: I can trace that back to roughly the same era with probably a little more accuracy. My mother's family, at least part of it, came from what is now in Poland, near a town called Bialystok. My maternal grandmother -- the only grandparent I actually knew. came here in 1888 at the age of about six years old. She was one of 11 children of a father, who had two wives. His first wife died in child birth, and he married her younger sister. My great-grandfather, Morris Gottlieb, established a wooden packing crate business in lower Manhattan, and probably became a reasonably wealthy man for those times. He lived in the Bensonhurst area of Brooklyn. In those days wooden packing cases were used universally, but were eventually replaced with card board packing materials. I think he had about three sons and eight daughters; the youngest child was only three years older than my mother.

Q: And then your mother?

WENICK: My mother was born in Manhattan, whereas my father had a college education she did not. She went to secretarial school. I think they met, since she was my father's secretary.

Q: Well where- Did you live in New Jersey? I mean, as a kid growing up in New Jersey?

WENICK: We lived for the first three months of my life in North Arlington, New Jersey, so I don't remember that at all, and then we moved to a town called Caldwell, New Jersey, which was at the time at the edge of the commuting district to New York. The train line ended there and the bus line ended there. I grew up in Caldwell, and graduated from Grover Cleveland High School in 1957. My parents lived there for the rest of their married life. My father passed away in 1975; in 1978 my mother moved to Florida.

Q: Well how would you describe, as a kid, growing up in Caldwell?

WENICK: It was a small town, both in size and population. About 6,000 people lived in Caldwell. Everybody knew everybody else in a town that small. My parents had lost a house in the Great Depression, so we lived for the first 11 years of my life in a rented house, belonging to the former mayor of the town. And it was just a quiet little town. There weren't many Jewish families in the town. Many of the men commuted to New York for work. The women in town generally were homemakers in that period.

Q: Did you get a feel- During this time, up through, well your youth, where did your family fall politically or didn't fall?

WENICK: I think my parents were basically Independents. I can remember the election of 1952. I'm pretty sure my father and probably my mother voted for Eisenhower for President. The town itself of 6,000 people was in the western part of the county, and in those days Republicans usually won the local elections. The mayor and city council members were almost always Republicans.

Q: On the religious side how Jewish would you say your family was in your upbringing?

WENICK: As a child, my father had a very extensive religious background. He had a good voice, and could lead services. My mother was probably less religious. Our household was pretty secular. My parents were active in the local Jewish community. I had a basic Jewish education, which involved classes several days of week after public school had let out. My parents were not overly religious, but we did celebrate the major Jewish holidays. We did not keep kosher at home, however.

Q: Well then for a kid growing up what was Caldwell like?

WENICK: It was fun. It was a small town. As I have indicated, everybody knew everybody else. I think as a Jewish kid you periodically experienced some anti-Semitism. It probably was of the type that you would have experienced in any small town in America during that era. I can remember specific incidents.

Q: Can you think of any incident?

WENICK: Yes, absolutely. I mean, it was the name calling that I can remember. When I was about 11 years old, my parents finally decided to buy their own home, we moved into a part of town, which was sort of the wealthier area. We were one of the first Jewish families that had moved into that particular area of town. There was a private tennis club in the neighborhood, but Jewish families were not permitted to join.

Q: Yes, it's a little hard, I think, as times moved on to sort of reconstruct the anti-Semitism but it was there. There was also, there was anti-Catholicism too.

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: I mean, it wasn't all bucolic as one might think.

WENICK: No, I think that's very true. I can recall growing up in a mixed neighborhood with mostly Protestant and Catholic families. As I have mentioned, the Jewish community was very small. There was an even smaller black community, and they were probably families that had come there for household help. One of the adjacent towns, Essex Fells, was solely residential. There were no businesses there, and the residents were almost all very wealthy people. I am not aware that any African-American families lived there, although they performed household services.

Q: Then, did- How did you find school? Let's talk about elementary school.

WENICK: I went to a public school. My recollections are of a small school, which provided a good basic education. I do not recall anything significant.

Q: Yes. Did you like school? I mean, were you a good student?

WENICK: I was a pretty good student. I think my parents put a lot of stress on education over the years, so I think my older brother and I both had to keep our noses to the grindstone. Education was very, very important in our family, particularly since my father who had come from a very poor background, felt that getting a good education put one on a road to a more successful life. And my mother was very supportive of that.

Q: Did- How about as a kid were you much of a reader?

WENICK: I can't really recall. I think yes, that's to say education was important. At one point I remember my father gave some thought to running for a seat on the local board of education, he was so concerned about local education. But he didn't follow through on that intention.

Q: Well then you also- There was a high school there?

WENICK: We went to grammar school, kindergarten through sixth grade, and then there was a seventh and eighth grade junior high and then we went on to the local high school. The high school in Caldwell received students from four or five surrounding smaller towns. So the high school was slightly different in the sense that we had a number of new kids coming from other towns.

Q: Was there much of a sort of foreign influence? I'm talking about immigrant influence there.

WENICK: Very little. By the time I was growing up we were all--my parents I would consider first generation -- born in America, and thus we were all second and third generation born in America. I can't recall any of the kids that I grew up with being from

families that “arrived on the Mayflower”. I think we were all descendants of people who came here in the last half of the 19th century, maybe some early in the 20th century, but I think the last half of the 19th century was where the bulk of the population came from.

Q: Well, born in '39 so you were just becoming aware of things when World War II was over. How about while you were in there as a kid did the outside world intrude much?

WENICK: Not really very much. I can remember a little bit of the Second World War in the sense that my father was an air raid warden in our town. I can remember the air raid sirens going off periodically and how we had to pull our window shades down and darken the windows in this little town which was of no strategic significance to anyone. My father had served briefly in World War I, and he worked at a company involved in producing items for the defense industry. The war did not impact a lot on our daily lives. I can remember that we had some rationing of foodstuffs and gasoline. Since my father was working in a so-called defense industry, we got an extra ration of gasoline so that he could drive to work in Jersey City. Nearby, there was a Curtiss-Wright Aircraft Company, and they were involved in the defense industry and there was a little airport there that even repaired President Truman's plane from time to time - obviously the repair of the presidential aircraft was done after the conclusion of World War II.

Q: The Sacred Cow.

WENICK: The Sacred Cow, that's right.

Q: By the time you got to high school were there any, either in elementary or high school any teachers that particularly impressed you, you know that you still think about?

WENICK: I've seen one of them recently. We had a fiftieth class reunion of our high school class a few years ago, and my twelfth grade English teacher attended. She also served as faculty advisor to the school newspaper for which I was editor. So she's alive, and I think she was important. I remember my ninth grade Latin teacher (Mrs. Benson) very well. The teachers placed a lot of emphasis on learning in this very small town, and that was very important.

Q: As you alluded to before people pretty much knew what you were up to so you couldn't sort of go wild. I mean, all the neighbors kind of had an eye on the kids, didn't they?

WENICK: In those days, yes.

Q: Yes. What- In high school, were you in- have any favorite subjects or not so favorite subject?

WENICK: I guess I was most interested in what they called social studies and world affairs and geography; less interested in English and Latin. I took Latin and French in

high school, I can recall. I'd say world affairs and social studies were my favorite subjects.

Q: Well both in school and at home did the outside world intrude much? I mean, were you watching things on TV, reading newspapers or following anything in particular?

WENICK: TV came late in the sense that I think we got our first TV when my father was 50 years old, in 1950. And before that I can remember there was a boarding house down the street, and somebody there had a television set. Occasionally, a bunch of neighborhood kids were invited in to watch TV there.

But yes, I read the paper every day when I was growing up; we got two papers. One was "The New York World Telegram", and the other was "The Newark News". There was a local paper, "The Caldwell Progress" that came out weekly. And I was an avid reader of newspapers, and followed both domestic politics and world affairs pretty closely as I matured.

Q: Did events both in Asia and Europe engage your attention?

WENICK: My memories of World War II are limited. I vaguely remember the air raid drills, and certainly remember the celebrations marking the end of the war in Europe and Asia. I think, my first real memory is of the Korean War, which broke out in 1950 and ended in 1953. And I can remember we even followed it in school. We used to have a social studies class in which there was a map on the wall, and we plotted the front as it moved up and down the Korean peninsula.

Q: Did- What sort of activities were you involved in in high school?

WENICK: Primarily the school newspaper. In my senior year, I was co-editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. I was also on the high school tennis team in my senior year.

Q: Did you get into hassles with the administration over what you could report or not?

WENICK: Not in those days. Things were very tame in those days.

Q: What were the dating habits in those days?

WENICK: Well I think kids started dating around tenth grade, and became more active probably in the eleventh and twelfth grade when you could finally get a driver's license, and it was easier to move about. As I mentioned, our town was relatively small and in high school we had students from all these surrounding towns. They came by bus, and so none of us really lived that close together. So it was really when you finally had a driver's license and a car that dating became a little bit more active.

Q: The movies important?

WENICK: Movies, yes, that was one of the things. We had a movie house in town. It was one of the local gathering places. There was also an ice cream parlor in town and that was a popular place for dates. In fact at our 50th class reunion, one of the activities was to go back and have ice cream at the old haunt.

Q: Oh yes. Well then, I take it with your family's emphasis on education that university was very definitely where you were headed for.

WENICK: No question about it.

Q: So where did you-?

WENICK: I went to Brown University.

Q: Why Brown?

WENICK: Why Brown? I was accepted there. I was put on several waiting lists, but Brown University accepted me, and I decided to go there.

Q: Did you find, during high school and even- that people were identified by being Jewish or being Catholic or something?

WENICK: Yes, to a certain extent labels existed. The town in which we lived was rather tolerant, but ethnic and religious labels did exist. As we matured and got older, one felt that discrimination decreased. In terms of college admissions, quota systems were probably in play in the 1950's, and these might have impacted on my applications to some major colleges and universities.

Q: Well you were at Brown from when to when?

WENICK: I went to Brown from 1957 to 1961.

Q: What was Brown like when you got there?

WENICK: I think the students were largely from New England, reflecting where the school was located and the times. Plane travel wasn't then what it is now. And we had a pretty good cross section of students. My freshman roommate was an Afro-American, who had gone to a private school in New England. There were three Afro-Americans in our class of more than 600 entrants. And I think it was a pretty serious college campus at the time. Brown had fraternities, but you didn't have to join to have an active social life in town.

Q: What was your major?

WENICK: I majored in history.

Q: Any particular history?

WENICK: European; European history. Largely European history.

Q: Were you getting a good hunk of Soviet history?

WENICK: I took a couple of Soviet (Russian) history classes. In my sophomore year, I started studying the Russian language. It was a period when greater emphasis was being placed on studying foreign languages. I took two years of Russian. Then in the summer of 1960, I received a partial Carnegie Foundation grant for a summer Russian language study program at Indiana University (eight weeks) followed by four weeks in the Soviet Union.

Q: Okay, well that was August of 1960; how did the Soviet Union strike you?

WENICK: I was there at an interesting time. We went to three cities as part of our stay. We had committed ourselves to speak only Russian, even amongst ourselves, during this period to enhance our language experience. We were in Moscow when Francis Gary Powers was being tried; his trial took place just down the street from the hotel in which we stayed .

Q: This is the famous U-2 incident that broke up a summit meeting between Eisenhower and Khrushchev.

WENICK: That's right, because Eisenhower initially denied that there was even an over flight of the Soviet Union. Moscow in those days struck one as part of the Third World. There was a lot of curiosity about us; whenever we were out on the street, crowds would come around us and ask questions about how much money we made and what did our parents do and what type of house we lived in. There was a lot of curiosity about the outside world at that time. The window to the outside world had really opened only a few years previously in the Soviet Union. So it was a very interesting experience and it sort of whet my appetite for further study about the Soviet Union.

Q: Well did you, while you were in high school and all, I mean at Brown, did the Foreign Service come across your horizon?

WENICK: Both the Foreign Service and the CIA had come across my horizon probably around my junior year, when thought turned to think about getting a job following graduation from Brown. And I think the experience of going to the Soviet Union in 1960 probably enhanced that. I took the Foreign Service exam in Providence, RI in December 1960. There was a campus visit by a recruiter for the CIA. I met with him, and eventually took some tests for a job with the CIA.

Q: Well did- Talk about 1960, the election of 1960 was one of those that engaged a lot of people; this is Kennedy versus-Nixon. Did this engage you?

WENICK: Not particularly. You know, I was engaged in my studies. It was my senior year, working on a thesis for my major. And college students in those days I don't think were as politically active, as students became later on.

Q: What was your paper you were working on?

WENICK: I did a paper on Marshal Pétain of France and the Vichy Regime. It was for an honors program in history at Brown.

Q: Well then, did you pass the Foreign Service exam?

WENICK: I took the Foreign Service exam in December 1960, and passed both the standard exam and a Russian language part. I got some extra points for having passed the Russian language exam. So I think early in 1961 I was advised that I had passed the exam.

Q: Well what about the CIA?

WENICK: The CIA was interesting. It wasn't an exam; it consisted of an application and subsequently a series of interviews in Washington. The CIA had a building on the other side of 23rd St. N.W. where most of the interviews took place.

Q: They have a dairy, I think.

WENICK: If you go down 23rd Street with your back to Pennsylvania Avenue it was on the right side where the Naval Medical Center is now. The CIA had a building or two there, and applicants spent a day or two of wandering around there for all sorts of exams. Then there was a meeting with a psychiatrist in one of those old World War II buildings that were on the Mall where the Reflecting Pool is now.

Q: Yes, yes.

WENICK: And then I was advised that if I wanted to pursue a career in the Agency, I would have to go to officer training school and go into the military for a couple of years and then come back to the CIA.

Q: So what did you do?

WENICK: Well in the meantime I graduated from Brown in May of 1961, and I took the Foreign Service orals in June in 1961 and passed them. So I was more interested in the Foreign Service, and I wasn't too interested in going into the military so the CIA really wasn't a major option.

Q: I was wondering, did you know much about the Foreign Service at the time?

WENICK: I don't think so. The Foreign Service was attractive as it offered the chance to travel abroad, and I think that was probably a major plus for me at that point in time.

Q: Oh yes.

WENICK: I noticed that the chairman of my Foreign Service oral panel just died a few weeks ago in Charlottesville.

Q: Who was that?

WENICK: *Smith Simpson.*

Q: Okay. Were you married or-?

WENICK: I was single at the time I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: Do you recall, on the oral exam, any questions that were asked?

WENICK: Yes I do, one in particular. I think it was actually a stroke of luck since it fit into a paper I had just done for some course at Brown, and it dealt with South Africa., It had to do with South Africa and the apartheid system that was coming very much into play at the time. The question was that you are a Foreign Service office stationed in South Africa, and that you have to make recommendations to the U.S. Government as to how to most effectively combat the apartheid policy of the government. And that's the question I can remember most vividly.

I also was asked about the difference between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. I had to acknowledge that I really did not know the difference.

Q: Well, it was, of course, the period, about '61 or so when sort of one can almost say is the American discovery of Africa. I mean, all these countries were becoming independent, and we had to respond to that.

WENICK: G. Mennen Williams, a former Governor of Michigan, was the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs at the Department in 1961.

Q: Yes. It was an exciting period regarding Africa.

So you came into, what, A-100 course?

WENICK: A-100 course. Let's see; I was in the class that started on January 2, 1962. So I graduated from college in May of '61, started graduate school at the University of California Berkeley in the fall of 1961, in history, and did one semester there. Then I received the appointment into the Foreign Service. I was more interested in going to work and starting a career in the Foreign Service than pursuing an academic career, so I only did one semester of graduate work at Cal Berkeley.

Q: What was your A-100 course like?

WENICK: There were 60 of us; 40 State Department officer and 19 or 20, I think about 20 USIA (United States Information Agency) officers so we were a mixed class. The composition of the class was quite mixed in terms of what part of the country we came from. I was about 22 and a half, and there were three others in my age range. The upper age limit in those days was 32. It was an interesting mixture of people. It wasn't all Ivy League by any means. Members of the class came from all sorts of backgrounds.

Q: Women, minorities?

WENICK: We had no blacks in our class, although we had one person of Hispanic origin in the class. We certainly had some women in our class.

Q: How did the course run?

WENICK: We had two sections and two Foreign Service officers, running the A-100 course. Chester Beaman and Thomas Jefferson Duffield were the two coordinators, and largely it was outside speakers, both from the Department and outside who were engaged to come in and teach the classes.

Q: Did- Were you pointed towards anything at the time?

WENICK: Well I hoped that I would get an assignment to a communist country, maybe the Soviet Union following the A-100 course. I had a knowledge of the Russian language, and so that's where my interest was in that time.

Q: What happened?

WENICK: Well in those days first tour officers were never sent to the communist countries, so when we had the opportunity to indicate our preferences I indicated that I would be interested in being assigned to Afghanistan. The US was competing with the USSR in Afghanistan for the hearts and minds of the Afghans so I said why don't I ask for an assignment there. So I put in as my first choice an assignment to Afghanistan, and I got it.

Q: Did you catch up on what was going on by reading the books of Kipling and others on the Great Game?

WENICK: Rudyard Kipling and "National Geographic", which periodically had articles about the country. We always kept our back issues at home when I was a kid so that piqued my imagination and again, as I say, part of it was there was competition between East and West at the time so I thought well, why don't I go there for my first tour.

Q: Sure.

WENICK: And I was lucky. I was lucky enough in a way to be assigned there.

Q: You were there from when to when?

WENICK: I was there from the summer of '62 until the summer of 1964.

Q: It wasn't quiet in the neighborhood but this was the period when India and China were at war for a little while.

WENICK: India and China were in competition. There was a lot of tension within South Asia. The Pakistanis and the Afghans had a border dispute that clouded bilateral relations. During the early months of my tour in Kabul, the Afghans refused to permit any shipments to come across the border from Pakistan. For all intents and purposes, the border was closed to commercial trade

Q: Did- Who was the ambassador?

WENICK: The ambassador was John Steeves, and he was there the entire time I was there.

Q: He was busy doing- Was he doing a lexicon or something like- or maybe not.

WENICK: No, I don't think so. He subsequently became Director General of the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes. Well what was your job?

WENICK: It was a rotating assignment. First assignments in those days were generally rotating. The first part of my tour was in the administrative section and the second part of my assignment was as the Embassy's consular officer. The last year I spent in the Embassy's economic section.

Q: Well let's talk about, as consular officer, had Afghanistan- this is before it was a on the front lines, wasn't it, on the drug route or something?

WENICK: When I was there it was just the beginning of the hippie period, and the young people would come to contemplate their navels in rural areas of the country. There was one area in particular; where they went, which was to the caves in the Bamiyan area. There were two enormous statues of Buddha there, which were blown up by the Taliban in the 1990's. There were also ancient caves behind the statues, and the young people would come to the Consular Section of the Embassy to pick up their mail, and then go on to Bamiyan. As far as I know, the period when I was in Kabul (1962 –1964) was not one in which there was much drug trafficking. There were large poppy fields in the agricultural area of southern Afghanistan, but one did not sense that there was much drug trafficking in Kabul at that time.

Q: Well did you have any difficult consular cases or any interesting ones?

WENICK: No. In those days few Americans came to Afghanistan. Our biggest issue was with some of the American women who had married Afghans. Upon arrival in Afghanistan with their husbands, cultural shock set in. Some wanted to return to the United States with their children, and this created problems, since the Afghans considered the children to be Afghan citizens, and the fathers refused to give permission for the children to leave the country.

Q: I was in Saudi Arabia around that time, a little earlier; we had the same problem. You know, sure the wife can go but the kids stay.

WENICK: And the wife didn't want to leave the children, so that was a serious issue.

Q: How about- What was the political or economic situation in Afghanistan at the time?

WENICK: Obviously part of it was the competition between East and West, and so the Soviets and the Americans were in a form of competition. If we built roads or airports, so did the Soviets; but in a different areas of the country. We were involved in the development of the Helmand Valley in the hopes of improving the economic situation in that area of the country. It was a Third World country, very poor. One of our largest exports was used clothing that used to arrive in huge bales. When I first arrived in Afghanistan, the Pakistanis and the Afghans were in a serious border dispute so the border was essentially closed. We could pass back and forth, but no cargo could move back and forth across the border. In a way it was paradise in those days. The foreign community was small, and we lived reasonably well. We were isolated from the outside world in many ways, but the Afghans were relatively friendly, and my recollections of the two years I lived in Kabul are very positive.

Q: Did we have, as embassy personnel or did you have any contact with the Soviet personnel?

WENICK: Very limited. There was one officer in the Soviet embassy whom I met at a social function, who subsequently invited me to his home for dinner. But that type of contact wasn't particularly encouraged, and contacts between Soviet and American embassy staffs were rather limited.

Q: How about Indians and Pak diplomats? Did we find we were- Around '62, somewhat '63, the United States was giving pretty strong support to the Indians who were in this war up in the mountains-

WENICK: With China.

Q: With China.

WENICK: I mean, I personally didn't have extensive contacts with either Pakistani or Indian diplomats. In a way the interest of each of the countries was to increase its influence in Afghanistan. The Indians liked the idea of having an ally up there in Afghanistan to sandwich in the Pakistanis, and the Pakistanis obviously did everything they could to discourage the warming of relations between Afghanistan and India. The Saudi Arabians were quite active in those days in terms of the activities and the money they poured into Afghanistan.

Q: Did you get much of a feel of how the ambassador operated?

WENICK: Yes. I mean I had a lot of respect for him. Ambassador Steeves was very much respected by the Afghans, because he had earlier lived in South Asia and had a good understanding of the Afghan environment. The DCM was William Brewer. I think Bill's still alive and lives on Cape Cod; Ambassador Steeves is deceased. They were a good team. Certainly, Ambassador Steeves was a good mentor to me. I mean I was included in lots of things that occurred at the residence. I think he knew what was going on, but he was not overly heavy handed in running the embassy. He let people do their jobs. The only episode during which I can recall the ambassador getting particularly exercised was when the American husband and wife team who ran our hospital were accused by the Afghans of engaging in missionary activity. The Afghans asked that they be removed because proselytizing was against the law there, and I think the ambassador was rather exercised that they got their hands caught in the cookie jar.

Q: Did you get to travel much?

WENICK: Actually a fair amount. My first major trip happened because my car was shipped to Iran -- the border with Pakistan was closed to incoming shipments at the time. My car was sitting in northeast Iran, so I finally got permission from the Administrative Officer to fly over to Meshed by way of Tehran to pick up the car and drive it back to Kabul. This was during the Cuban Missile Crisis, so I got to spend a few extra days in Meshed where we had a very small Consulate. When I arrived in Meshed, there was a telegram from the Department of State saying Foreign Service officers shouldn't travel, and so I stayed in Iran for about a week waiting for the Cuban Missile Crisis to resolve itself. Eventually, I drove my Ford Falcon from Meshed to Kabul via Herat and Kandahar. It was a pretty wild experience.

I went to Bamiyan several times, and I went to Khost along the border with Pakistan with a British colleague. (In recent years the Taliban have been very active in and around Khost.) While I was on this trip, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. In fact, I didn't learn about Kennedy's assassination until three days after it occurred when we arrived back in Kabul and saw the flag at the Embassy at half-staff and realized something had occurred.

Q: The- Was the Peace Corps there?

WENICK: The first contingent of the Peace Corps arrived in Kabul about three or four months after I arrived. It was a small group, perhaps nine Peace Corps volunteers and a country director. Five Peace Corps volunteers ((women) lived around the corner from me, I saw a lot of them. They were young, all of us were young, and we did a lot of things together.

Q: Well then, did you- Were you able to use your Russian at all?

WENICK: Very rarely. I did have a teacher for Dari, the local dialect of Persian so by the time I left I could had a basic speaking knowledge of the language. I couldn't read the language, but I had a pretty good speaking capability in those days.

Q: Well then, so '60-

WENICK: 1962 - 1964.

Q: Sixty-four. So then whither?

WENICK: Let's see, I was assigned to Czech language training. I came back to Washington, and did 10 months at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) studying the Czech language.

Q: Had you had any choice in the matter of whether to go?

WENICK: I had wanted to go to the Soviet Union because of my Russian, and as I recall initially I was assigned to Moscow and then for some reason the assignment was cancelled -- probably because I was still single. Eventually, I was assigned to Embassy Prague by way of Czech language training.

Q: How'd you find Czech?

WENICK: Hard. It's one of the older Slavic languages. Both the grammar and pronunciation are harder than Russian.

Q: That's what I understand. Were you- How did- Is there a Czech language and then a Slovak language?

WENICK: The languages are different. If you speak Czech you understand probably 90 percent of Slovak, but the Slovak language has its own vocabulary. And then in Eastern Slovakia it's even more mixed.

Q: Were you getting any feel from your Czech teachers about the country and the divisions of the country and all that?

WENICK: There were three students in our Czech class. The class consisted of a non-commissioned military officer, one CIA officer, and myself. So I was the only student

from the ranks of the State Department. The instructor was someone who allegedly had escaped Czechoslovakia through Berlin prior to the building of the Berlin wall, and had resettled in the United States. A number of years later I was told by people from the CIA that he was an agent of the Czech intelligence service. I don't know whether that's true or not, but I assume it was. Yes, he provided us with a fair amount of information about the Czech lands. He wasn't overly knowledgeable about Slovakia but I think he gave pretty good information about the country.-

Q: Did- I know I took just a little bit earlier, I took Serbian and I certainly got all the prejudices of the Serbs.

WENICK: Cultural differences and prejudices do come through. As I recall, the teacher was from Moravia, and they thought of themselves as Czechs. Czechs sort of look down on the Slovaks as poor peasants, and the Slovaks look at the Czechs as snobs. There is a historic basis to these prejudices, as the Czech lands were administered from Vienna under the Hapsburg monarchy, and Slovakia was administered from Budapest.

Q: City slickers.

WENICK: City slickers. I'm sure that in Yugoslavia with the various ethnicities that exist there, the same type of stereotypes existed.

Q: Oh yes. It turned deadly, you know. I don't think any of us thought it could because that sort of thing just wasn't going to happen again in Europe.

WENICK: Well I think during the years when Tito was in power, he masterfully melded the ethnicities in terms of how he ran the country. The divisions in Czechoslovakia came through as time went on, and Slovakia eventually split off and became an independent country in 1993. I don't think the differences were quite as serious as in Yugoslavia, but nevertheless they existed.

Q: It was- I describe it as more like the North/South division in Italy.

WENICK: Yes.

Q: You know. I mean, those peasants down south and we smart people up north, you know.

WENICK: As I mentioned previously, the differences were in part the result of how the area was ruled. The Slovaks were under the Hungarians, and the Czechs and Moravians were under the Austrians, and it reflected itself in the types of societies that evolved. The Czech lands were, in large part, industrial, while Slovakia was mainly an agrarian society. So the animosities were below the surface, they didn't develop in the same ways as in Yugoslavia, but they eventually led to the division of the country when communism was over.

Q: Well what was your job when you went to Prague-?

WENICK: I was assigned to Prague as a consular officer, and I spent the entire tour there in the Consular Section

Q: What were the consular issues?

WENICK: Well during the period I was there-

Q: This was when to when?

WENICK: I arrived in Prague in July 1965 and left Prague in August 1967. First of all the Czechs had finally opened up the possibility to their citizens to travel abroad to visit families that had been divided since the Communists seized power in 1948. So, all of a sudden we had a significant spike in non-immigrant visa applications. It started before I arrived but certainly continued, and the number of applicants increased. The Czechoslovaks were also interested in taking advantage of academic training in the United States, so we had a fair number of academics who were traveling. We had a few Americans getting arrested for helping people cross the border illegally. We had one major espionage case that took place while I was there. We also had social security payments; largely Slovakian women who were widows of Slovak men who had gone to the United States in the period between the First and Second World Wars.

Q: Did you have a survey while you were there?

WENICK: A survey of-?

Q: The social security payments for the social security people came out and-

WENICK: No. Social security people never came there. And the payments at that time, because of unresolved financial issues, Czechs and Slovaks could not receive their social security payments in Czechoslovakia. They had to travel outside of Czechoslovakia to pick up their money. Most of the Slovaks went to the American Embassy in Vienna where they could receive the funds due them. They usually went to Vienna with a minder who traveled with them and when they came back to Czechoslovakia they were obliged to cash their dollar check, and then receive special benefits permitting them to shop in stores where hard currency was used.

And other issues, we had Americans who had traveled there who wanted to come by the embassy and register, that sort of thing. So we were pretty busy. I mean, I was constantly busy for two years.

Q: What was the espionage case?

WENICK: The espionage case evolved around an American of Czech origin who had in the early communist period worked for French intelligence. He was coming back and

forth into Czechoslovakia and involved in bringing in arms and other items for anti-regime elements. In late 1948 he came in with weapons and with the task of taking a small group of people out of the country. And the weapons that he brought in were used in an operation in which some Czech police officers were killed. The group gathered just before Christmas of '48, and proceeded to the border area. They had a young child with them and it was snowy. They became disoriented, and the child's crying alerted the border guards. So the group dispersed, and most of them were captured, and eventually tried in Czechoslovak courts. But this French agent, Vladimir Kazan-Komarek, hid himself in the border area. He actually took a cyanide capsule the French had given him to use if he felt he would be captured. He took the capsule, and nothing happened. And he managed after several days to get across the border into West German, and he was picked up by the Americans in the American zone. He was then handed over to the French for treatment of hyperthermia -- he lost some toes. He spent about six months in a French military hospital.

Q: Yes, frostbite.

WENICK: Frostbite, sorry. And eventually he migrated to the United States, married and founded a travel agency in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And among other things he represented Intourist, the official Soviet travel agency, and they invited- they organized a trip for travel agents to the Soviet Union in 1966 and he chose to go. He went to the Soviet Union and on the return trip he was on a flight from Moscow non-stop to Paris. The flight was diverted to Prague, everybody was asked to leave the plane and then all names were called except his to reboard and somebody came up to him in the transit hall and said come with us and he was imprisoned. And first the Czechs claimed that he was a Czech citizen and so that was essentially the case. And he was tried and convicted and sentenced to, I think 12 years in prison. I attended the trial although it was supposedly a secret trial, and then he was released about a week later, after a lot of political pressure in the United States; Ted Kennedy was involved and we had sharply reduced the issuance of visas to Czech businessmen and scholars wishing to travel to the United States.

Q: Was it hard for a Czech to get a visa?

WENICK: Visas were very easy. The big test for the Czechs was to get a Czechoslovak exit permission permitting them to travel to the United States. Usually if they were permitted to travel to the United States they left someone behind in Czechoslovakia as a guarantee that they were going to return. So the normal non-immigrant visa program was pretty routine. For academics, there was a program that was called the SPLEX (Special Exchanges) Program, and we had to send the details of the program back to Washington and the institution that was going to employ the person was contacted to see whether the program existed and whether any national security interests were involved. And then we would be authorized to issue the visa. We refused very few visas during that time period.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

WENICK: I had two ambassadors; the first one was Outerbridge Horsey, who was there my first year, and the second year it was Jacob Beam.

Q: Outerbridge Horsey, of course that's a name that sort of rings in the corridors of the Foreign Service; I've interviewed his daughter Sarah. But what was he like?

WENICK: First of all, it was interesting that I worked for Outerbridge Horsey and then Sarah Horsey worked for me. So, Outerbridge Horsey was rather distant in terms of being the ambassador. He ran a pretty tight ship. He followed affairs -- activities in the various sections very closely. Certainly he followed things in the consular section quite closely.

Q: That's remarkable for an ambassador.

WENICK: To follow the consular section. I think it reflected also the times. I mean, Czechoslovakia wasn't in the center of the attention of the United States Government or of our foreign policy. Prior to my arrival there had been some problems in the consular section about visa issuance and other things, so I think it drew his attention to the consular section and so he followed it pretty closely.

Q: Did- Was- Did you have any dealings with the government itself?

WENICK: Well yes. First of all indirectly because of the Americans who were imprisoned there. We were in touch with the Consular Section of the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry about their well-being, about their legal representation and about authorizations to go visit them in the penal institutions from time to time. So I had that contact. Also I spoke probably the best Czech in the Embassy so as a result I was usually invited to events at the Ambassador's residence or elsewhere where Czech officials were present so I did meet some officials. I mean, obviously contacts were limited; Czechoslovak citizens were not really authorized to have contact with us unless they had specific authorization from the Czechoslovak authorities.

Q: How about the, what did they call the security police there?

WENICK: The StB, State Secret Police.

Q: I mean, the Czechs have quite a reputation of, along with the East Germans of helping all sorts of former colonial powers set up their secret police force. Did the Czechs harass you or try to entice you or-?

WENICK: Interestingly, I've just received from an institute, established after the fall of the communist regime, my secret police files for the years 1965 - 1967 and 1981 -83, and I'm not sure they're all the files, but they're rather extensive. I would guess my major comment is that everything that the Department's security office predicted would occur, happened. Suitcases were entered while we were- if I stayed in a hotel. Clearly telephones were listened to. International mail addressed to Embassy personnel was intercepted because in my file are letters that people sent to me from Italy or the United

States. Copies of the original letters plus translations of them into Czech are in my file. Reports on my activities by various people either in the embassy or others are certainly in the files. People were given special instructions before they would have a meeting with me. They would meet with their secret police handler both before and after the meetings. So it was a very big bureaucracy and it helps to explain in part why there was supposedly no unemployment in those-

Q: Well you really wonder in all those places. I mean, I spent five years in Yugoslavia, from '62 to '67, and I keep thinking, somebody, my wife established a Girl Scout international troupe and somebody in the secret- the Yugoslav secret police had to be an authority on this because you know, all this was discussed in great detail over the phone with other Scout mothers, you know.

WENICK: I mean, the amount of material in my file is quite extensive. I've gone through it once and it's almost all in Czech so it's a little tedious after all these years. It's amazing the amount of junk that they collected, and when I look through it and say gee, was there anything of major value that they collected that gave any really useful information about U.S. policy to the Czechoslovaks, I certainly did not see anything. For example, my housekeeper during my first tour in Prague would arrive in the morning and see whether there were any empty glasses in the living room. She would even look for lip stick remains on the glasses so that she could inform her handler whether any women had been to my apartment.

Q: Well how about the blonde honey trap?

WENICK: The blonde honey trap; I don't know. They didn't pick me up. For some reason I was a bachelor out there and in Moscow and-

Q: You were tried and found wanting, maybe.

WENICK: Well, according to the material the Czechoslovak security service collected, I had a number of affairs with different Czech employees of the embassy and- none of which are true. As a matter of fact, I was just in Prague and I saw one of the women with whom I was alleged to have had an affair and I said to her, interestingly you and I had an affair about 45 years ago.

Q: What do you think inspired that? I mean, was this trying, they were trying to embellish the files or what?

WENICK: You know, I think these people, those who were reporting in the embassy or elsewhere had an obligation to report.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And so they would go to these meetings with their handler, and they had to tell them something. So that was the first thing. And secondly the regime sought to create

tensions among various employees in the embassy and that clearly comes through. So that if someone was reporting didn't like somebody else, an easy way to get at them was through the secret police because these files could be used in other ways against people. So personal relationships tended to interfere or get involved in this.

For example, we had a telephone operator at the embassy who had an alcohol problem and at a certain point I talked to her. (This was during my second tour in Prague.) In fact, I was just told I probably extended her life by 10 years by telling her either to get off the juice or you're going to lose your job. According to the file the reason I kept her on was not that I knew she was an alcoholic but she and I were having an affair. So therefore I tolerated the fact that she had a problem.

Q: You know, when you start doing this thing and looking at it and understanding the system, this has a multiple layer effect because this probably meant some handlers were after your alleged affaitees, to say well what is he telling you in bed, or something like that.

WENICK: I mean, I suspect if you really wanted- if you have your file, I mean, what I really have is only a part of the file and while all the files, all materials available at this institute in Prague it's probably- there's a thesis material for somebody if they want to really delve into it because you have to go beyond me to these individuals, other individuals that you sometimes can identify, sometimes you can't, and say, you know, what's in their file?

Q: Yes. Well of course, when you were doing this I assume that you knew that our- that time ago our local employees, these were Czechs who would be reporting to handlers in the secret police.

WENICK: I mean one of the things that that SY's security officer talked to you about before you left for post was that you didn't trust the local employees in the context that they all lived in that society. Thus, they had to get along in that society and that a large number of them at least were involved in reporting on you. The one thing that did surprise me in going through the file -- and I received a list of all the code names against real names -- is that not all the Embassy local employees were being co-opted by the StB. Clearly, the StB had the Embassy covered for their intelligence purposes, and the resources they had were sufficient for them.

Q: Enough is enough.

WENICK: Enough is enough.

Q: Yes. It's a non-society but in one way you- we depend an awful lot, at least in Yugoslavia, I'm sure you did, on getting a feel for the local situation through your employees. I mean, they had to be reporting to their handlers but at the same time they're human beings and you were talking to them about situations and they were, I mean, it was a two way street.

WENICK: Absolutely. I mean, the second time I was there, '81 to '83, I was the deputy chief of mission, so I had a driver, and in the course of things I was with him a lot. You know, you talked about things. And you do learn quite a lot about how the local society operates, for better or for worse, through these contacts with the local employees.

Q: Did you find the Czechs were cut off or pretty well clued in as to what was going on in the West?

WENICK: I think to a large extent they were aware of what was going on in the West because of the transmissions of Radio Free Europe, the Voice of America, BBC, and I think a lot of them did listen to these stations. There was a lot of hypocrisy there and cynicism; hypocrisy that they were reporting. On the one hand they'd be reporting to the police; on the other hand local employees would be asking whether next time you West Germany whether you would you get buy certain items and bring them. And in contrast to service in Belgrade, we could be across the border in three hours, two and a half to three hours so we went across relatively frequently to West Germany for our supplies and so, I mean, yes, I think there was a lot of knowledge about the West. Many Czechs also listened to radio broadcasts from the West, including Voice of American, Radio Free Europe, British Broadcasting Company, so they had a steady stream of information about what was going on in the West.

Q: Did you get any impression of the people you were in contact with or overall how they reacted towards the Soviets?

WENICK: They didn't like them. But they recognized the reality of the fact that they're the boss, and so I think they admired the West much more than they admired the East. But the reality of the situation was that the Soviets were the ones that were dictating the moves. We would- I was there in the post, obviously post '56 period, '65, '67 for instance, and I think most people understood that there were limits as to what the Soviets would tolerate. So this is the reality; let's get along and go along.

Q: Did you get any feel for the advent of the Prague Spring, which was really the next summer, next spring?

WENICK: Well, you know, things had loosened up a little bit. I mean, people were getting visas to go to the United States for family visits; not immigrant visas but non-immigrant visas. The real loosening up started up just before I left. There was a writers' congress, as I recall, just before I left and there was a lot more freed, discussion that took place and it was that intellectual impulse that as time went on gave way to the events of the so-called Prague Spring. But you know, when I left things were pretty frozen. So, not really.

Q: Did you, you were in the consular section and where else did you serve?

WENICK: Only in the consular section. I did two years.

Q: Were there many- Was there much travel of the former Czech or Czechs who had emigrated to the United States right after World War II who came back to visit and all that?

WENICK: Well we had- There were two, there were really two waves of migration to the States; one was between the inter-war period, which was largely Slovaks who came to the United States for economic reasons and then got stuck by the Second World War and couldn't go back. They lived in the States for extended periods, many of them leaving wives and families in Czechoslovakia and that was largely our social security caseload. And then the second wave was the '48 people who left because the communists arrived and they left while it was possible to leave. And we had a bilateral treaty between the United States and Czechoslovakia regarding citizenship, which stated that once the state of war ended- if you became a citizen of one country you automatically lost the citizenship of the second country. The Czechoslovaks ended their state of war, as I recall, with Germany, the mid-'50's. So people who became citizens of the United States after that date automatically lost their Czech citizenship which facilitated people coming back.

Q: Yes, that would be very handy.

WENICK: And that was what was happening. So Czechoslovaks citizens who had lost their citizenship and were coming back to Czechoslovakia for a visit usually came by the embassy to register so that we knew where they were.

Q: Was there an issue, regarding the return of Czech gold looted by the Nazis and recovered by the Allied forces?

WENICK: Oh there was, very much so.

Q: What was that?

WENICK: At the end of World War II, the allied powers recovered gold from the axis powers, and there was a tripartite party commission that was set up to return the gold based on the claims of how much gold was lost by the individual countries. And the Czechoslovaks were one of the beneficiaries of this program. In other words they lost a lot of gold located in their banks. So they were entitled to a portion of the gold that the allied forces recovered at the end of the war. And from the United States standpoint there had been a lot of property that had been confiscated by the communist government after they came to power in 1948. This became an ongoing problem in the US- Czechoslovak bilateral relationship. Czechoslovakia was the last country with which we had a major dispute regarding the looted gold. The issue was not resolved until 1981

Q: Yes. It's just like Hungarian, the Crown of St. Stephen; I mean-

WENICK: Which was in Fort Knox.

Q: Yes. You know, sometimes these residues of wars and all- But at least, you know, there is a legal process.

WENICK: Well there was a process and I was involved in the negotiations for the actual return, which was in late '81, and I actually initialed the agreement for the United States Government and then it was signed later on by our newly arrived ambassador. The gold was finally returned to the Czechoslovaks in early 1982.

Q: Good. Well, we'll pick that up next time. I'm just thinking, this is probably a good place to stop.

WENICK: Okay, great.

Q: Where did you go after here?

WENICK: Let's see; I came back to the Department.

Q: Okay. So we'll pick this up in 1967 when you're back to the Department. Where'd you go in the Department?

WENICK: I went to the Operations Center for a year, and then I went to the office of Eastern European affairs for two years.

Q: Okay, great.

Okay. Today is the 9th of November, 2010, with Martin Wenick, and we're in 1967.

WENICK: Correct.

Q: Alright, I'll turn it over to you.

WENICK: Okay, in the summer of 1967 I left Prague, transferred and came back to Washington. I was assigned to the Operations Center.

Q: Can you describe the Operations- It was fairly new in those days, wasn't it?

WENICK: I guess it had existed for a few years; obviously not as technologically advanced as it is now and there were three State Department officers assigned to each team. There was a senior watch officer, assistant watch officer and an editor. The editor's responsibility was to put out a daily summary that was prepared each night. And then we had representatives of DOD (Department of Defense) sitting with us and there was a director and a deputy director, and then there was another room where they monitored news tickers and incoming traffic. So that was the extent of it. We had a large panel in front of us with telephone connections that could connect to various people, the various agencies or the leadership of the Department.

Q: Okay. Because work in the ops center, one, it's an excellent way to learn what the State Department's about.

WENICK: It was a great-

Q: And it's often used as sort of the breeding ground for future leaders of the State Department.

WENICK: Well for me it was largely a lesson in how the Department works, and so it was a great assignment. I spent about 10 months there.

Q: As I've done these interviews somebody who worked in the ops center it's very episodic because, I mean you're on eight hours and then you leave. What happened on your watch that's sort of memorable?

WENICK: Well, let's see. We did work eight hours on and we had varying shifts. We did a normal day shift, then an evening shift --, 4:00 to 11:00 or 5:00 to 12:00 shifts and then two midnight to the morning shift and then we were off, I think, for three days. I guess the most memorable thing that occurred when I was in the Operations Center was the North Korean capture of the Pueblo -- a U.S. naval vessel.

Q: Oh yes.

WENICK: That occurred not on our watch but it occurred while I was in the ops center and so they took the Pueblo, a U.S. Naval vessel, and held it for a substantial period of time. That's the event that I remember most clearly from that period.

Q: As you did this did you sort of look ahead and figure out where you wanted to go?

WENICK: Well that was one of the advantages of being in the ops center; you saw the whole Department.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And I had just come back from Eastern Europe; I'd been in Prague, been involved in a few things that had drawn the attention of people in the Department. And so I got a chance to get into the Office of Eastern European Affairs, and I took that opportunity.

Q: So this would be '68 to-?

WENICK: July '68.

Q: How long were you there?

WENICK: I was there from July '68 until July '70, 1970.

Q: Who was sort of the, well who was the head of European Affairs?

WENICK: John Leddy; he was the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. I don't recall now who his deputies were. The EUR/EE Office Director was Raymond Lisle and I had responsibility for Bulgaria and Albanian affairs directly and did some work on the Baltic States -- Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania -- since the United States had not recognized their incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1939. And then shortly after I arrived in the office, the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia.

Q: That was '68, on August of '68.

WENICK: August of '68. So for a large portion of that time after August of '68 I was also assisting the Czechoslovak desk officer with various tasks.

Q: Before we get to that let's talk about- what was going on in Albania at the time?

WENICK: Very little was going on in Albania that was of interest to us. Our relations had been ruptured I think in 1948 when they threw out the American embassy after the communist takeover. We owned an embassy building in Tirana. Eventually, the Italians rented the building from us for a number of years. Largely job was to follow to the extent we could what was going on there. And then there was an Albanian-American working at the Voice of America. I guess he was the head of the Albanian service there and he would come in and discuss periodically what was going on in Albania. And the Albanians had a Mission to the United Nations in New York, and so we monitored what they were doing aside from their official UN duties in New York.

Q: Well they were- At that time were they considered to be the close allies of China as opposed to the Soviets or had that developed?

WENICK: They were already closely aligned with China rather than with Moscow; the split had already occurred there.

Q: Well back during the mid '60s and all I remember I would sometimes sit on the shore of Lake Ohrid; I was assigned to Belgrade and I used to go to Macedonia all the time and look across at Albania and I went one time with my kids and I told them, and we're not allowed to go there and they were wide eyed about it.

WENICK: I think my dream has always been to go to Tirana.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: I haven't gotten there so far but maybe now that diplomatic relations have been restored between the U.S. and Albania, on one of my trips to Europe we'll make a short trip over to Tirana. It's just a curiosity. Later on in my career, when I was stationed

in Rome, I did meet periodically with the Italian ambassador to Tirana. They were probably the Westerners most plugged in there, and they were actually using our building for which they were very thankful. So whenever he came back to Rome we had a luncheon to catch up on what they were seeing going on there, which was very little in terms of change. I usually submitted a report to Washington after these luncheons.

Q: Well I got a feel for what it must be like when I met an Austrian diplomat in Belgrade who said that they went from Tirana to Titograd, which is now called Podgorica, I think, in Montenegro for R&R (rest and recreation) and you know, Titograd was, you know, one is it may still be sort of the back of beyond but if that was a relief it had to be pretty-

WENICK: It's kind of all got to be relative in terms of international relations during that period of time. I can recall they had this horrible xenophobia there in Albania; they were building all sorts of defenses along the coast against-

Q: Well they have all sorts of these pillboxes.

WENICK: Right. They reportedly constructed over 700,000 of them.

Q: All over the country, little cement pillboxes.

WENICK: Right, all along the coast, etc., waiting for that invasion which was not going to come.

Q: Yes well I must have helped contribute to the paranoia because every once in awhile I'd be at a cocktail party or something, a diplomatic reception in Belgrade and for some reason I- and I'd meet an Albanian and you know, rather than just turn my back chat a bit in Serbia and I'd always say oh I hear you've got wonderful beaches there. I was just making conversation but he must have thought I was getting ready to figure out where to invade.

WENICK: Between the pillboxes.

Q: Okay well, you had what, Romania?

WENICK: I had Bulgaria and Albania and then of course Czechoslovakia exploded and so-

Q: Well how about Bulgaria? Was there-?

WENICK: Among the Warsaw Pact nations, they were probably the closest and most subservient to Moscow so there wasn't a lot going on in those days. It was a pretty stable relationship which was at a very low level in terms of bilateral relations.

Q: So then we get to the real thing; well, the Baltic States, did you-?

WENICK: Dealing with the Baltic states always left one a little sad because we had the remnants of the diplomatic services of the three countries here. Estonia was represented with a consul general in New York, Mr. Jacobsen, as I remember. Lithuania and Latvia had legations here in Washington. At the time of the incorporation of these countries into the USSR, the United States blocked their assets here. The recognized diplomatic representatives of these states were permitted to draw on those funds. And so each year there were two major things that we did; we used the blocked funds to fund their diplomatic operations here and throughout the world and also there was the annual Captive Nations Message, mandated by the Congress. A proclamation had to be issued each year so those were the two major events. The sad thing was that Lithuania was running out of money, and they were the most expensive since they had the largest diplomatic corps. So it was trying to get them to control their expenses. And they had aging diplomats who still had to live and so it was trying to achieve a balance in terms of their expenses.

Q: So in many ways you were their bookkeeper.

WENICK: Yes. We were their bookkeepers. And, of course, then we had the various ethnic groups here in the United States who were very keen on preserving the recognition of these regimes.

Q: Well what would you say, let's say a group from Chicago would come, I assume from time to time, or somebody would come, Estonians or something; what could you say to them?

WENICK: We could only say our policy was really reflected in our Captive Nation's d proclamation that we issued every year, and secondly we continued to recognize these regimes here. We were one of the few countries in which these three states had recognized diplomatic missions, and they were officially accredited diplomats.

Q: Were any other besides the three Baltic States; were any other captive nations in our proclamation?

WENICK: As I recall, no.

Q: I can't think of-

WENICK: It was an act of Congress that was passed in the early '50's, as I recall, and each year it was a challenge to come up with slightly different wording to reflect the same thing. And then it would be issued by the President on Captive Nations' Day.

Q: Well then let's to go Czechoslovakia because did you have any piece of the action, let's say for the- there was the Prague Spring, wasn't there?

WENICK: The Prague Spring triggered the Warsaw Pact invasion since the Soviets felt that the liberalizations of Czechoslovak Communist Party leader Dubček were going too

far. They feared that the infection of that movement would be passed on to the other countries of the Warsaw Pact, and they certainly didn't want to have another Yugoslavia on their hands. The real action began when Dubček came to power in early '68 and his policies just led the Soviets to decide by August that time had come to put an end to this. And so on August 21, 1968, they took military action.

Q: Well were you and others getting nervous about, you know, what the reaction would be?

WENICK: You know, we always knew that the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine was out there; that is, the Soviets would go take appropriate actions when they believed a member of the Warsaw Pack was threatened, internally or externally. But I don't think there real concern about military action until Dubček was asked to come to a meeting with the Soviet leadership on the border between Slovakia and the USSR. I guess it was probably late July, early August, and he was given an ultimatum. I don't think people were overly nervous and then all of a sudden there was concern in Washington. Attention in Washington in those days was more on other areas than on the countries of Eastern Europe.

Q: On the Middle East, of course.

WENICK: Middle East-

Q: And the '67 War.

WENICK: And we had the-

Q: Vietnam.

WENICK: And I think that the fact that we were engaged so actively involved in Vietnam was, to the Soviets made it much easier for the Soviets to go in without any fear that there would be a military action by NATO. So, they felt they had a pretty clear path to invade which, in fact, they had.

Q: Were you getting any warnings about the forces gathering and all?

WENICK: As I recall in August 1968 there were some indications of Soviet troop movements towards the Czechoslovak border. At the time, people felt that the movements were an attempt to intimidate the Czechoslovak leadership if their liberalization policies went too far.

Q: Did you- Was there any, well any reaction once the Soviet- it wasn't just the Soviets; I mean, the East Germans and-

WENICK: All the Warsaw Pact countries except Romania.

Q: Weighed in.

What was our reaction?

WENICK: Well, in the first place, I think there was a certain amount of chagrin that the invasion had occurred. Then, the reaction was largely statements more than anything else -- i.e. condemnation of the invasion. Dubcek was brought to Moscow with a group of his colleagues, and informed there that the Soviets had been invited in by some of the leadership and so there were discussions and he returned to Czechoslovakia as leader but that didn't last very long.

Q: Was there sort of a-in Eastern Europe in a way a reevaluation that this Brezhnev regime was nastier and more aggressive than had been previously thought?

WENICK: I think the invasion reinforced a feeling in Washington that the Soviets were determined to put out any fires that might occur in their camp, and I think that was probably the biggest lesson of that time. The Soviets hadn't involved themselves directly in entering another Warsaw Pact country since '56 so this was 12 years later and it was a different leadership. In 1956 Khrushchev was in charge in the USSR, and in 1968 it was Brezhnev, Podgorny and Kosygin.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: So it reinforced the feeling that the Soviets were serious about putting down any liberalization in their sphere of influence.

Q: Well how was our embassy reporting at the time?

WENICK: We had a very active embassy there. The embassy became the hub of several things. First of all, we had a number of Americans there at the time of the invasion, including Shirley Temple Black, and one of our first efforts was to organize a safe conduct passage out of the country for this large group of Americans. Also, as usual the press all of a sudden became focused on Czechoslovakia so a large number of the press representatives descended on Prague to report on the Soviet invasion. So the embassy also became a source of information and a safe haven for the journalists. I mean, the journalists actually operated out of the embassy for a period of time. It was a very small embassy; we were limited in size to 25 people and that included five Marines so it was not an embassy that was equipped to handle major things. But the embassy was very capable. The ambassador was still Jacob Beam and the Political Counselor was Mark Garrison who was a first rate officer. The Embassy was very much on top of things in those days, as I recall.

Q: Well, were you following the repression in Czechoslovakia after Dubček was removed?

WENICK: Yes. Our interests were to follow, first of all to see what was going on, understand clearly what the Soviets intended, what type of regime they were going to install there and secondly to see what was going to happen to the leadership. Dubček eventually was sent off to Turkey, as Czechoslovak ambassador. He served out his tour there, and eventually returned to Slovakia. But the main thing was to see what type of leadership would be installed there and how conservative it was going to be. In fact it was relatively conservative leadership. Gustáv Husák became the Party Secretary and the president became Ludvík Svoboda, who had been a decorated general in the Second World War. Svoboda was seen as a military hero but he was more a symbolic presence than a real political leader. Husák eventually became both president and party secretary so Svoboda eventually lost his honorary position.

Q: Do you go back there to Czechoslovakia from time to time?

WENICK: I went there once after the Warsaw Pact invasion on a trip I made to Eastern Europe, but it was Helene Batjer, the Czechoslovak desk officer who had primary responsibility for Czechoslovakia.

Q: Well were-

WENICK: I mean, I did go back in 1981 as Deputy Chief of Mission, but that was much later.

Q: Well we'll come back to that. What about- were we looking at the, sort of the intellectual establishment, which later became very important but at that time was this of interest to us or did we realize that this had potential or not?

WENICK: Well we had been actually cultivating the intellectual circles earlier on in the '65-'67 period. When I was stationed in Prague, we had a very active Press and Cultural Counselor, Bob Warner. That was the one area where Czech nationals seemed a little bit freer or at least more daring in terms of showing up at embassy events since most of these were controlled. And during that period that I was there, in '65-'67, I saw many prominent Czechoslovak intellectual. Václav Havel used to come; after 1989, he became president of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic. Miloš Forman and a number of other film directors regularly attended events at Warner's residence. And it was these intellectual leaders that were in the forefront of those fighting for a more liberal society. After '68 some of them emigrated to the West, feeling the future was rather limited there and those that remained there were pretty much under control. It was a very difficult period for intellectuals after '68. Clearly the Soviets weren't going to tolerate liberalization.

Q: Well the Czechs seemed to have- I mean Czechoslovakia has always been sort of considered a relatively passive country but after the Prague Spring the repression was, you know, from what I gather was really much more severe than in some of the other places. Or at least more severe.

WENICK: The Czechs generally have character traits that are rather dour whereas the Slovaks are much livelier. The Czechs grew up under the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian empire and Slovaks grew up under the Hungarians. The Czechs in general were much more sedate than were the Slovaks. And after '68 it was a pretty grim place. A lot of people took advantage of the initial days after the invasion to flee the country. And then the curtain came down, and the regime kept control pretty much for the remaining period of the communist dominance of the country. So all of that creative movement that you had in Czechoslovakia in the mid '60s, in the film industry but also in writing, that sort of died.

Q: Yes because I, you know, we can still "Loves of a Blonde" and "The Fireman's Ball" and-

WENICK: And "Closely Watched Trains."

Q: "Closely Watched Trains." You know, I mean, pretty good stuff still but that was-

WENICK: That was all during that mid '60 period, leading up to '68.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: Miloš Forman came here and became a major director here in the States and was very successful. But, some of the other important directors in the film industry, never really produced anything more.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: It's a really sad chapter in Czech history.

Q: Yes, when you think about well, I mean so much of the talent and the futures of the people who were squashed in Eastern Europe as opposed to the Soviet, I mean Russia too. I mean, it's one of those great tragedies of mankind.

WENICK: Well you know Czechoslovakia was created in large part because of Woodrow Wilson after the First World War and so it experienced 20 years of independence and democracy. It was one of the few in that area of the world with a world renowned leader, Tomáš Masaryk was well known with an American mother and a Czech father; his mother, I think, was from the Pittsburgh, PA area. So you know, it's a country that had this brief period of freedom and then the Nazis came in and imposed their will on the country for five or six years. After the end of World War II, you had this period between '45 and '48 when the conflict between the communists and others existed, and then in February 1948 the Communists took power. And 1968 taught that the Soviets weren't going to tolerate any divergence.

Q: During this time that you were there and even back, I don't think I asked before, but did Senator Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island pay much attention to you? Because he had closed our consulate in Bratislava, I mean as a Foreign Service officer.

WENICK: That's correct. We were conscious of him. I don't recall him ever coming during the two years I was there. I do recall, however, that we still owned the consulate building in Bratislava. It was one of two buildings we received as a result of payments owed to us by the Czech government for wartime assistance to their military. The other building was the Ambassador's residence in Prague. Claiborne Pell was stationed in Bratislava as a Foreign Service Office when the Czechoslovak Government ordered the United States to close the Consulate General in 1948. The U.S. retained ownership of the building and a caretaker was supposed to look after it. However, at some point the water wasn't drained from the pipes and there was a heavy winter freeze, which caused extensive damage to the building, since the water pipes burst. I can remember going to Bratislava probably in 1966 and entering the consulate building. I walked into the office and there was a desk there with a telephone list. Claiborne Pell's name was on the telephone list. When the Consulate General was hurriedly closed in 1948, they obviously took the official papers and left the library and things like that. And the office furniture was still there in the mid '60s.

I think Claiborne Pell, because of his service in Bratislava, was more associated in some ways with Slovakia than in the overall Czechoslovakia affairs, and he had some friends in the Slovak ethnic movement here in the United States.

Q: Well then, what did you do; you left there in late '69?

WENICK: Let's see. I stayed in Eastern European Affairs until probably the summer of 1970 and then I had an assignment to Moscow but that wasn't to start until November so I went to FSI for four months of a Russian language refresher course, and I did that for four hours a day. I was at FSI August through November until I went to Moscow in November of 1970. For a month in July 1970, I was the State Department escort officer for Blood, Sweat and Tears, a musical group that performed in Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland.

Q: So you went to Moscow when?

WENICK: November 1970.

Q: And for how long were you there?

WENICK: I was there three years and three months; I left in January of 1974.

Q: What was your job?

WENICK: - Well I had a dual function. I was in the political section. The Political Section was divided into two parts, and I was in the internal part of the political section. I

also served as staff aide to the Ambassador (Jacob Beam). I was still single, so I lived in a very nice apartment in the residence. For about a year, I was one of the officers in the internal political section. Then for the last two years or so, maybe a little bit more, I was the chief of the internal political section of the embassy.

Q: When you got there in 1970 how stood relations with the Soviet Union?

WENICK: They were pretty grim; relations were very distant. There wasn't much going on with Brezhnev in control together with Podgorny and Kosygin. We were involved in Vietnam, and they were supporting the North. And we were still getting over this period of their intervention in Czechoslovakia, that was still hanging over us in terms of the bilateral relationship. The period of détente really didn't start until somewhat later.

Q: So who was the ambassador?

WENICK: The ambassador again was Jacob Beam, with whom I had served in Prague. The DCM (deputy chief of mission) was Boris Klosson and Thomas Buchanan was the Political Counselor.

Q: Well when you're talking about "internal," what- did you have a particular piece of the internal action?

WENICK: Yes, I did have a piece of the internal action. First of all, each member of the Internal Political Section was responsible for following several republics of the USSR. We received newspapers every day, and much of our reporting was based on newspapers. Then I was involved with following the domestic political scene, the dissident scene and the Jewish movement there.

Q: What- Did you have any republics?

WENICK: I recall I had responsibility for republics in the Caucasus and also in Central Asia. The Central Asian area was of some interest to me because of my previous service in Afghanistan.

Q: Well did you, we'll move to more central things but with the republics, with Central-Caucasian republics and the Central Asian republics, were we really very interested in what was going on there or was this sort of an aside?

WENICK: This was more or less an aside. Central Asian republics as well as those in the Caucasus were sort of fiefdoms. We were watching them to see whether there was any leadership changes there in those areas that might impact on leadership in Moscow or vice versa. We watched these areas to see whether Moscow was becoming dissatisfied with leadership or with problems in the areas in which case they might take some they actions. Essentially, we were reading "tea leaves". But most of the action was related, in terms of what the embassy did was related to Moscow and the central government.

Q: Okay. Well you dealt with the Jewish community.

WENICK: Right.

Q: Was there an area where- was the Jewish community in the Soviet Union more or less concentrated in Moscow or Leningrad or were they dispersed or what?

WENICK: There were several distinct Jewish distinct communities in the USSR at that time. There was the Georgian Jewish community which was unique in that it was probably the one that was strongest and best organized. It was probably the most cohesive community in terms of maintaining its religious beliefs. It was a pretty active community.

And you also had a Central Asian Jewish community, particularly in Uzbekistan; it was reasonably active. Within the western areas of the Soviet Union, the Jewish community had pretty well been destroyed, and the authorities tolerated just a nominal presence. The same was true with the other religious groups, even with the Orthodox Church, which was very heavily under control and many of the churches had been closed. The Roman Catholic Church was almost totally destroyed. So religion was under serious attack during this period and reflected itself in the nature of the religious communities in the Soviet Union.

Q: Well we're talking about the religious communities and then there's just plain Jews. I mean, that's almost a different breed of cat, isn't it?

WENICK: That's correct. In some ways this distinguished the Jewish community from others because if you were Russian Orthodox you were a believer, and you went to church. For many members of the Jewish community, religion was a very small part of their identity. Their identity was signified by a line on their internal passport which identified them as a specific ethnic group, i.e., Jewish.

Q: Was your work, I mean that particular part of your work with the people who were identified as being Jewish but not particularly of a religious- I mean, was this also a distinct group as far as- or was this group pretty well inserted into all of Soviet society?

WENICK: For instance in Moscow, where we had our best opportunity to observe it, those who were religious were older, and it was a declining population. At the time there were two functioning synagogues in Moscow. The younger people only knew that they were Jewish because of the so-called "line five" on their passports in which they were identified as Jewish and by that time I arrived in Moscow in the '70s there were numerical obstacles to their entrance to higher education and jobs etc. And so the, let's call them the secular Jews or the younger population, they were beginning, largely after the '67 War in the Middle East to have a Jewish national consciousness and that started the efforts to emigrate from the former Soviet Union. So in large measure much of what

we were watching was that pressure from the younger members of the Jewish community to emigrate and the Soviet government's reaction to that.

Q: Well how did it manifest itself?

WENICK: Well it manifested itself in large measure in the younger members of the Jewish community congregating around the main Moscow synagogue on Saturdays, not participating in services but being outside. It was a place for them to meet and to exchange information. It manifested itself in their contacts with the foreign press that was there and letting the press know what was going on, who was being refused or people who were being permitted to emigrate. And at the same time the embassy was watching pretty closely the dissident movement. There was Samizdat -- self-published, non-official documents -- beginning to appear.

Q: This was self-published-

WENICK: Samizdat being some-

Q: -mimeographed-

WENICK: -mimeographed, typed with carbon copies; Samizdat being self-publication. And we were always interested in getting our hands on Samizdat and the foreign press corps was very good about passing on to us in the Embassy the Samizdat material that fell into their hands. It was much harder for Embassy officers to go out on the streets and accept that type of publication.

Q: Well it was- These could be provocateurs-

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: -who were trying to slip you stuff, weren't they, and this would lead you open to charges, maybe persona non grata or-

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: -trying to recruit you into the intelligence service.

WENICK: Absolutely. So that's why we sort of relied on our contacts with the largely the American press corps to get copies of these documents which we could then send back to Washington. One of the major Samizdat documents of the time was the Chronicle of Current Events, which appeared periodically.

Q: What about- What was happening, were the Soviets giving some Jews visas or permission to leave?

WENICK: During the early 1970's it was a very slow movement, very limited. It sort of increased as détente developed and then after the Jackson-Vanik Amendment was passed to a trade bill in Congress in '74, the emigration flow diminished greatly. In response to the pressure they perceived to be from the U.S. Congress. So a large part of our effort was to watch the emigration flow and obviously then you started developing these so-called refuseniks, people who were not being permitted to leave because they had been working in so-called security industries.

Q: One of the things I've talked to people who served in the Soviet Union at various times and found that a good source of kind of what was going on was to go to these educational meetings they used to have. Did you get involved in that; could you describe what this was?

WENICK: Very much so. When I first got to Moscow, the head of the internal affairs section was, Ed Horowitz. Ed was very much into this type of activity, and he got all of us involved. When we'd be out in the street we looked for posted signs about neighborhood meetings. Ed encouraged us to get some outerwear that made you look a little more Soviet. For instance I bought a typical Soviet style fur hat and a long overcoat. You'd be out on the street taking a walk and you would pass an apartment building and you would see signs up announcing a lecture. The Znaniye Society was the one that was most active in this. The lectures could be on domestic or international themes. And we would go to these lectures and with our Russian looking clothing, try to act inconspicuously. We would generally sit in the back of the lecture hall and listen to what the lecturer was saying. Frequently the more interesting part of the lectures were the questions that you got from the members of the audience who were in attendance. So it was a useful way to try to understand the particular lines of concern that the Soviet regime was trying to propagate at the time.

Q: Well did you find, were the questioners serious people who had serious questions?

WENICK: Yes, I mean, sometimes the questions were inane. For instance, somebody didn't get the apartment that he or she wanted and so therefore they had a particular beef. But frequently there were individuals who had some knowledge of what was going on in the world. Some Soviet citizens did listen to foreign radio broadcasts -- Voice of America, BBC, Radio Liberty -- even though the Soviets tried to jam them in populated areas. Every so often someone would pop a question that you knew that they had gleaned from a foreign radio broadcast. It was interesting to see how the lecturer handled that. The lecturers came from this so-called Znaniye Society, and they were people that were trained propagandists. And so that was frequently very interesting.

Q: Well what about, I mean, in the first place, being able to go to these things and being followed? I mean, the KGB give you personally, harass you or give you a rough time or anything like that?

WENICK: I had a particularly rough time because I was following the Jewish issue and so I was subject to a fair amount of harassment in the course of my tour in Moscow. I had

the windshield on my car broken when it was parked downtown. I was actually picking up a member of an American congressional delegation so he sat in the glass, which made a lasting impact on him. So it was an action that backfired in a way for the Soviets. On another occasion, all four of the tires on my car were slashed one day outside of the largest hotel in Moscow. I had my car windows painted green one day. And then there was the standard surveillance that took place. It wasn't every day. We had a reasonably large embassy, and it would have taken massive numbers to follow everybody every day. But you know, when we went to these public lectures, we hoped that we weren't being followed but sometimes we were. Once or twice I can recall a piece of paper was passed up to the lecturer to say that there was an American diplomat in attendance.

Q: Did everybody turn around and look at-?

WENICK: They turned around and tried to figure out who it was. We were helped by the fact we had the Russian style hat and the coat.

But the KGB was pretty active in those days.

Q: Well were there concerns while you were in Moscow about being compromised?

WENICK: Always was. When you're assigned there, when you're assigned to Eastern Europe countries or the Soviet Union you obviously had a session with the folks in security of the Department of State to discuss with you what the issues might be, ways in which the Soviets might try to compromise you. Obviously it's one of the reasons we were very careful about getting documents outside the Embassy. I mean, you just didn't let people come up to you on the street and try to hand documents to you; it was a no-no. Most of the dissident documents that we got, we received on our premises, I mean, in my office. We received very little material directly. I mean, obviously there are people that you met or you dealt with over the years that were provocateurs. In fact, I don't think he was a provocateur at the time, but I can remember being stationed at the American Embassy Rome in '74-'75 period, and somebody came through on his way to the United States. He called me, knew I was at the embassy, and we went for a cup of coffee. He apologized to me because he said that while he was being interrogated by the KGB in Moscow, he had provided to them information about me. So we were aware that this was a possibility, that compromise was a possibility. Perhaps I was a little more of concern to our security people because I was a single officer at the time.

Q: I was going to say, a single officer, I mean, were there blonde young ladies around waiting for you?

WENICK: I don't recall- I don't know. Maybe I wasn't that much of interest to them. I don't recall ever being approached in that sense. So there were disadvantages to being stationed in the USSR as a single person. But, we had a relatively large diplomatic Western diplomatic community so there was a lot of socializing that could go on in that sense and that made it a little less tedious.

My apartment was at the residence of the American Ambassador so the Soviets had pretty good control over who came and went because they had a policeman stationed at the entrance to the residence. I am sure that they had a pretty good idea what I was up to.

Q: It's, yes, when I was in Belgrade I used to- sometimes we'd have a courier run and have it on a sleeper train and all and I vowed that when that beautiful blonde spy came I would certainly keep one knee on the diplomatic pouch and it never happened.

WENICK: Some of the things that you would have thought happened did not happen in that respect. On the other hand a lot of things that the security people warned one about earlier in the security briefing on did occur, and you know keep it in mind.

Q: Were you at the embassy during the, I won't say x-rays but during the, you know what I'm talking about, the omissions on the windows which were considered perhaps to be dangerous and probably were dangerous.

WENICK: Yes, I was, and I have a certificate of exposure to this radiation that was directed at the Embassy. In fact, I did have an office that was on the front side of the building for about two years of my three plus years there. It was that side of the building that got most of these rays, and the Department subsequently spent a fair amount of money doing some surveys about the dangers and about the health ramifications of this Soviet activity. So yes, I was there during a period when radiation was directed at the Embassy.

Q: Well couldn't they have put the equivalent to metal screens or something or reflect that damn stuff right back down on the Soviets?

WENICK: Well once they realized what was going on from their monitoring, they put screens on the windows that mitigated the impact of the radiation. During that period, to the best of my knowledge the Embassy staff knew very little about it.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And it was not- it wasn't an issue that was raised with the staff in any meaningful way.

Q: Were there any demonstrations against the embassy during the time you were there?

WENICK: Yes there were. The Vietnam war was ongoing, so we did have the demonstrations.

Q: Well we were pulling out at that time, weren't we?

WENICK: Well not '70, '71. When I got there, '70, '71 we were still pretty actively engaged in Vietnam. So we had various types of demonstrations, some with the anti-Vietnam themes and then you would get- they would charge up the African students and

so, you know, free Africa campaigns, that sort of thing. So there were various types that would occur.

Q: Did you have any real contact with Soviets?

WENICK: That's always a difficult question. Yes, we did. I mean, I did. I knew some of the artists, and I knew some of the Jewish dissidents. So- and I got to know some of the people in the literary world, for instance Andrei Amalrik who wrote "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?" He was in prison at the time, but his wife lived near me, and I would see her from time to time. I met her through some journalist friends of mine and she would come to the apartment with others to view movies. So you know, there were limited contacts.

Q: Was there much collaboration say with the British, Canadian, French, German embassies regarding information?

WENICK: Yes, that was ongoing. Everybody was desperate for information living in such a restricted environment. As I recall, there was a political officers' group that met periodically; the NATO ambassadors met regularly, and there was a group of us who were following internal affairs. We used to meet I think once a month or once every two weeks. It was also a way to get to know colleagues from the other embassies and then you could develop your own separate relationships with them.

Q: How did we view the politburo at the time? Because we're moving towards the time when it was getting to be really a geriatric outfit. But when you were there, this is a little before that, wasn't it?

WENICK: When I was in Moscow, Brezhnev was clearly first among equals with Kosygin and Podgorny who were also in the leadership. And Brezhnev in those years, I mean he wasn't an intellectual giant by any means, but clearly anybody that gets to the top of the politburo had to be a survivor and had to understand the system. He wasn't facing the health issues that plagued him in the declining last years of his leadership of the Communist Party. What we were more interested in in those days was how the politburo members related to each other and who was in first place and who was in third place and who was in sixth place. You would look to see who was standing next to whom on the reviewing stand on the top of the Lenin tomb on holidays, at pictures that were posted at election time and that sort of thing to try to get a clue who was up and who was down.

Q: Well did you peruse the local papers to pick up bits of, you know, what's going on by getting into sort of the farmer's daily of some province or something like that?

WENICK: Well we did several things. First of all, we read the national press which would have been "Izvestia" and "Pravda" and "Sovetskaya Rossiya," and "Red Star," the military newspaper, and then as I said previously, each day we read more specialized newspapers, and we divided those among the officers in the Internal Political Section. For

example, there was an agricultural newspaper, and “Trud,” the labor unions’ newspaper,, and then each one of us would look at a few regional papers every day to see what they were saying. We were looking to see how they were parroting the national line or whether in fact there would be something that showed a little independence. So reading the newspapers occupied a good portion of our time.

Q: Well I take it at a certain point you developed a certain mindset or whatever focus on being able to look at this turgid prose and pick out items without having to go through all the gobbledygook that communists were prone to print.

WENICK: Obviously first of all it’s a foreign language so you had to- it was always obviously a little bit more work than reading in your own language. So you sort of got a feel for how to attack it and usually you would look at the headline and look at the first few paragraphs and if it- the first few paragraphs didn’t indicate anything significant you just moved on. Otherwise you would never have finished, and you had other responsibilities than just reading the press.

Q: Were there any significant developments or major visits or anything like that?

WENICK: Well détente was very much developing in those days, and Brezhnev came to the United States, and Nixon came to Moscow during my stay. Kissinger came to Moscow on several occasions. I can remember one of Kissinger’s visits; it must have been some time in ’72. He came unannounced even to the embassy or to the ambassador, and he was staying at one of the guest houses of the regime up on Lenin Hills. At a certain point the ambassador was called from the Foreign Ministry and said to stand by, that they wanted to see him later in the day. And this was shortly after the Gulf of Tonkin episode. The ambassador thought he was being called to the Foreign Ministry to receive a protest our activity in the Gulf. So, he asked the political officer who followed Far Eastern Affairs, Stapleton Roy, to stand by to go with him to the Foreign Ministry. Subsequently, he received another telephone call from the Foreign Ministry asking him to come there alone. (Later on in his career in the Foreign Service, Roy became the U.S. Ambassador to China.)

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And so the ambassador went alone and when he got to the foreign ministry they took him to a government guest house on Lenin Hills where he met Kissinger. That is how Ambassador Beam became aware that Kissinger was in town. And the next episode of that event was that we were having a dinner at the residence that night in honor of the widow of Ambassador Thompson.

Q: Llewellyn Thompson.

WENICK: Yes, Llewellyn Thompson. She was in town with a friend and the Ambassador invited her to come to Spaso House for dinner. I was there and the DCM, Boris Klosson, and his wife were also there. At some point during the dinner, the major

domo came to me and said there's a telephone call for me. So I excused myself and went to take the phone call. It was a correspondent from the Associated Press, whom I knew, and they had picked up the fact that Kissinger was in Moscow and wanted me to confirm the story. I knew nothing about it so I could neither confirm nor deny it.

So I went back to the table and a few minutes later there was a second call, which I took, and I came back and it was the one time- I had a really excellent relationship with the ambassador- it was the one time that I saw him get agitated. He said just forget about all those phone calls. And I was sitting next to Harriett Klosson, Boris Klosson's wife, and she just grabbed my hand. She realized there was tension at the table. And then the next day we all found out that Kissinger had in fact been in Moscow.

Q: Well I mean, you know, it was almost- he was national security advisor.

WENICK: Yes, he was Nixon's National Security Advisor at the time.

Q: But it was really- This is Henry Kissinger really playing a game. I mean, looking back on it; show I'm powerful, I can do this and really the ambassador counts for nothing. It was really denigrating to the ambassador.

WENICK: Well it was both denigrating to the ambassador not only in the sense of his title and who he was as the head of the embassy but in terms of his relationship with the Soviet officials and how they viewed him. They didn't have to deal with him, and I'm sure as time went on the ambassador felt that because it was not only that particular visit but Kissinger was dealing directly with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington. So, much of the substance of the relationship was not even in the hands of the Department of State; it was in the hands of Kissinger.

Q: Well the Secretary of State was William Rogers.

WENICK: And I was just going to say-

Q: Who was probably the least clued in of all secretaries of state of modern times.

WENICK: That's right, and that was very visible when Nixon came to Moscow. He had almost no role, he came with Nixon but he was not included in the more important meetings. I don't recall now all the specific details, but certainly he was the odd man out in terms of participation, and the ambassador was obviously not clued in either. And the ambassador had been specifically chosen by President Nixon for the post in Moscow, as a result of his experience in 1967 when Nixon was trying to rehabilitate himself politically. Nixon had lost the presidential election in 1960 to Kennedy, and I recall that then he ran for governor of California in 1962 and he also lost that race. I think in 1962 or so, he said I'm through with politics. But in 1967, when he was testing the waters for a possible run for the presidency in 1968, he traveled through Eastern Europe. When he came to Prague, Czechoslovakia, Ambassador Beam, ever the gentleman, showed him the respect that someone of Jake Beam's nature would show to someone who had been formerly a vice

president of the United States. And Nixon remembered that and so when he was elected president in 1970, he remembered Jake Beam, who was still serving in Prague. Beam was invited to come back to Washington to meet with the newly inaugurated President in February or March of 1969. I can remember picking the Ambassador up at Dulles Airport, and it was during that time that Nixon offered him the ambassadorship in Moscow. So it was somebody that Nixon had chosen specially for the post, and then only to have ambassador's role diminished by the way they acted in the White House was, in my view, a travesty.

Q: And, you know, looking at it this is why, I mean this really, history I think, as a professional diplomat will diminish the role of Kissinger because he's not into these things of playing these games where you had to have the central role.

WENICK: That's right. And by this time once detente started in arms control and our disengagement from Vietnam all coming together at the same time, relations with the USSR was a central foreign policy issue. And it is clear that Kissinger was obviously driving it.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And he wanted to control it, and he did. And I think he even mentions in his memoirs the fact that the U.S. Ambassador only found out about his visit to Moscow once he was there in Moscow. But Dobrynin knew about it long before.

There were other ways that Kissinger's approach to the Soviets manifested itself. For instance, while not overly significant in the context of the direct policy issues, Kissinger made decisions that were not in the best overall interests of the United States Government. For instance the Soviets got Mount Alto, which is the highest point in Washington, as the site for their new embassy compound. Kissinger made this decision despite opposition from the intelligence community because of the location of the new embassy compound commanding a dominant position in Washington.

Q: Yes, because of its commanding position for eavesdropping.

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: Well eavesdropping equipment is- you want to sit on the highest area you have.

WENICK: That was one example. Another example is that we had a really restricted environment in Moscow. Embassy staff travel was limited to 40 kilometers from the center of the city without permission. You had to apply two days in advance. You didn't know until your time of departure whether you were going to get permission or not. The Soviet side never gave you a yes; it was only the no that they gave you. But we did have a dacha; a property that was out probably just within the 40 kilometer range. It was a typical sort of Russian type style compound. There was that one large villa and one small cottage on it, and it was our recreational place. But we had a pretty large embassy so that

your chances of getting the big house were probably once in two years. The smaller residence was the so-called ambassador's cottage, and if the ambassador wasn't using it single people could vie for that and that freed up some of the pressure on the bigger house. Well the Soviets wanted to get a place in the Washington area for recreation and they succeeded because Kissinger approved a very nice place for them on the Eastern Shore of Maryland -- far better in terms of location and potential facilities than we had in Moscow. I don't know whether they still have it now; it's was near Centerville, MD on a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. The grounds were quite large, and the Soviets brought over small cottages for their people to use. It was the type of thing that wasn't major in the context of bilateral relations, but it reflected the times, and Kissinger didn't want to derail anything in terms of his issues by what he considered extraneous issues.

Q: Well he also made too many compromises on rebuilding out- to put up a new embassy too.

WENICK: That came later.

Q: Rather than- He was going to let the Soviets help build the thing, which they loaded with eavesdropping devices.

WENICK: And it had to be rebuilt.

Q: Rebuilt.

Did you feel, although you're obviously pretty far down on the food chain, did you feel that what you were reporting was getting to the right people or was- or did you feel that the National Security Council with Kissinger and all was completely bypassing the embassy and did you- were you really a player in the game or not?

WENICK: Well we were and we weren't. I mean, Washington, even if the National Security Council and Kissinger, chose to disregard things we were reporting on, the dissidents, problems with the Jewish community, issues relating to the leadership, there were audiences here in Washington for that material. So you know, I think when you were stationed in Moscow you felt that you were at an embassy whose reporting had a rather wide audience in Washington.

Q: Well then you left there in 1973?

WENICK: The beginning of 1974.

Q: Seventy-four. How- Had you seen- Did you have a feeling that détente was working?

WENICK: Well it certainly was working in terms of how Kissinger viewed it to be, and there were some breakthroughs on disarmament issues, in which he was especially interested. Vietnam had come to an end by the time I left Moscow, and it reflected itself in a somewhat more relaxed environment for those of us at the Embassy in Moscow. It

was somewhat easier to get appointments with Soviet officials and that sort of thing but did it not impact on how things were happening- what was happening in the Soviet Union? No. It was more in the terms of bilateral relations that you saw some movement.

Q: Well then what did you do?

WENICK: Let's see, I left Moscow in January of 1974, came back to Washington and did a 26 week course in Italian, and then went to the American embassy in Rome.

Q: You were there from when to when?

WENICK: I arrived in July of 1974 and served there until August of 1978.

Q: Were you in the political section?

WENICK: I was assigned to the political section and my specific responsibilities were to follow the Italian Communist Party and the Italian government's relationships with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Q: Well in the first place, this had to be quite a change in climate, both literally and figuratively.

WENICK: Well it was the first time that I served in a Western European post. I think you once served in Naples, so you can understand the differences.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: And coming from Moscow to Rome was like night and day. The Embassy was much different. In Moscow, it was a closed community and one's social life revolved around the foreign community. So I arrived in Rome. The Embassy was very large, and we could do what you wanted to do without restrictions monitored by the host country. Your friends were largely not from the embassy but from the world around you. And of course Italy is Italy. So it was very pleasant.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

WENICK: The ambassador for the first part of my tour was John Volpe, who had been governor of Massachusetts, and had been on Nixon's list for vice presidential candidates in 1968. He became Secretary of Transportation and then later he left that post and became Ambassador to Italy. I don't know exactly when he arrived in Rome; he must have come in '72 or '73; he'd already been there for awhile when I arrived.

Q: What was your impression of him?

WENICK: He was a nice guy. Not at the top of his game but -- he didn't involve himself directly in how the embassy was run; he let the DCM, Bob Beaudry, manage the

embassy. He also had an executive assistant he brought with him, Tom Trimarco from Massachusetts, who was sort of the ambassador's alter ego. Tom worked closely with the Embassy staff so the ambassador pretty much left us to operate on our own.

Q: Okay. Well let's- You were there sort of at the height of Euro-communism, weren't you?

WENICK: Right.

Q: And Berlinguer was the leader of the Italian Communist Party, which consistently garnered about 25 per cent of the votes in Italian elections. Could you talk about what we're talking about when we're talking about Euro-communism?

WENICK: Well the term Euro-communism really evolved from the policies of two Western European communist parties. One was the Italian Communist Party, which was much more liberal and progressive than the other one, the French Communist Party. Both were active players on the domestic political scenes. And the term really related to a form of communism that was diverse from that in the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. A significant number of observers believed that these communist parties were different and that they could participate in a democratic government and accept the rules and regulations that are part and parcel of a democratic system in which there can be alternation of power.

Q: Well how- Since you had the communist party, did you have the apertura a sinistra- the opening to the left? Was that in play while you were there?

WENICK: That had already occurred, prior to my arrival, although the Communist Party was not part of the opening. The Italian Socialist Party had become part of governing coalitions with the Christian Democrats; that was the initial opening to the left. In my time socialist participation in the government was a given. If the Christian Democrats chose to form a coalition with the Socialist Party and with other, minor parties, it was not an issue for the United States Government. The major issue was whether the communist party would enter into government or not. And the other major issue was the nature of contacts that the embassy had with the communist party.

Q: How stood that at your time?

WENICK: When I arrived in Rome, the only contact that an embassy officer, that is a State Department officer, had was with a journalist from a communist leaning newspaper, "Paese Sera" and he was a member of the communist party. The newspaper itself was not an official organ of the communist party. L'Unita was the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party. Prior to my arrival there had been some contact between an officer of the CIA station and a member of the leadership of the Party. And when I arrived there was a change, and the CIA withdrew from their direct contact with this official and I took over that contact. And then there was a debate that went on for awhile whether we could enlarge that contact base, whether it would be only with one official

from the Italian communist party or whether there could be contacts with a wider range of officials of the party.

Q: Well you know this all struck me that when you start playing this game we won't talk to anybody you're cutting off your nose to spite your face. I mean, you know, what was the big deal about not talking to the-

WENICK: Well in Rome the big issue was appearance. When you haven't done something for years, especially given the nature of Italian journalism, and I think also the nature of Italian politics, when you haven't done something in years, once you make a change it becomes a very big issue. The fact that Euro-communism was now coming on the scene and the communist party was getting stronger those who argued against broadening the contacts argued that in so doing we were assisting the communist party by enhancing their status on the Italian political scene. The other side of the argument was we need to increase contacts, since the Communist Party was becoming a more important part of the political process whether we liked it or not, so we ought to know a little bit more about their thinking. Gradually the argument that we needed to know more about the Italian Communist Party and its thinking won out over the argument that we ought to limit ourselves because of the impact it had on the Italian political process.

Q: Well yes. Well what was- how stood the communists at the time you arrived there regarding NATO, the United States? I mean, did we see them as being really different than the hard line communist rule?

WENICK: Well I mean the communist line, the communist party line was that Italy was a member of NATO and they would respect that. That was what they said they were going to do if they became the dominant party in an Italian government. They certainly were opposed to a number of initiatives of the U.S. Government in terms of foreign policy and during this period, while never acknowledging it, it was clear that they had set up ways with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to finance themselves from Eastern European and Soviet sources. It wasn't necessarily direct subsidies, but through import trade. They received a cut from imports from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Communist Party had several factions. There was certainly an element in the party that was more liberal, and one that was more hard line. In fact the President of the Italian Republic today was the secretary for foreign affairs in the leadership of the Italian communist party in the 1970's. So there was a very liberal wing of the party, but there was also a very conservative wing of the communist party. And there was a fair amount of concern in Washington that Italy would not be the ally that it had been in the past if the communists became part of a governing coalition.

Q: How did we view Berlinguer?

WENICK: Berlinguer was a very adroit leader. He had good ties with members of the other parties; he was related to at least one Christian Democrat. He came from Sardinia. And he was, at that time, the unchallenged leader of the party. Nobody else was directly challenging him. And I think if you put him in the spectrum of communist leaders of the

time you had to put him on the liberal side. He was obviously someone that probably felt that the communist party could live within a democratic system or there could a system in which parties could come and go into government. There was a faction in the party that wasn't favorable to this line.

Q: Well what were you doing?

WENICK: Well I was gradually expanding our contacts with the communist party. I started out with one or two contacts; one the journalist that had been an embassy contact previously and then started seeing officials of the communist party and gradually expanding that. Obviously, it was a pretty controlled setting. The communists understood that if they in any way exaggerated the importance of these meetings with the media or anything like that that it would impact on the extent to which we could expand the relations so they were very discreet about it as were we. We normally didn't choose to go to restaurants for lunch at places that were known to be frequented by the media or other parliamentarians in large measure because everybody knew each other.

Q: Well I don't know whether one can characterize it but it seems that the politics in Italy were a bit tribal. I mean, you know if your family was communist or CDU (Christian Democratic you were communist or CDU. There wasn't a lot of shifting around. I mean, the percentages didn't really change a hell of a lot.

WENICK: They didn't change until the election of '75 and in that one the Christian Democrats were the number one vote getters. But the communists weren't very far behind. And in large measure because the socialist party was never a party that captured the imagination of a large portion of the population, it was essentially a contest between the Christian Democrats and the Communist.

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Q: It was, in a way the odd man out in Europe, Western Europe.

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: Because the socialist party or the labor party was, you know, a major player. The Italian socialists just didn't-

WENICK: There were internal divisions within the Socialist Party. They had weak leadership in those days, I think they were perceived as being the most corrupt of the parties.

Q: The CDU.

WENICK: The CDU had the historic role of having the Vatican supporting it. Socialists didn't have that. And a lot of the space on the left side of the political spectrum was already occupied by the communists The communists also benefited from their involvement in their opposition to the fascist regime of Mussolini, particularly in the

north of Italy. This helps to explain why the regions of Umbria, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna (Bologna) consistently had communist led governments.

Q: The red belt.

WENICK: The red belt. And the communists were very active in the resistance movement. They translated that into electoral success in the immediate post-war period. By 1948, the Christian Democrats increased their political strength and then subsequently played a part in all governing coalitions through my tour in Italy. With the communists to their left, the socialists really didn't have a lot of space to expand their influence. I think their leadership was weak over the years, and they were not seen as a particularly good alternative to the communists on the left. And then we had the election of '75 in which the communists almost overtook the CDU. And within policy circles, there arose the issue of who was responsible for losing Italy to the communists. I mean, we are still in an era when the Cold War was very much part and parcel of the American political mentality and so it was a pretty tense period for those of us in the embassy and in the consulates.

Q: Well did you trip over the CIA influence there? I mean, we try to keep- this is an unclassified account but you know it's been in all the papers about how the CDU was a prime beneficiary of money from '48 and on.

WENICK: No, I don't think so. I have no idea about the extent to which they were or were not involved in trying to influence domestic politics in Italy. However, my impression is that their involvement in Italian domestic politics was substantially reduced with respect to earlier post-war periods. We had a staff meeting every morning of the political section, and an Agency officer regularly attended it. He had served in Italy for years. My impression is that he got a lot but gave very little, which is typical. One had the sense that their interests had shifted away from the domestic environment, and they were focusing more on international issues and East-West relations than they had earlier.

Q: Well did you get any feel for the communists- was the communist party more or less led between a, you might say a liberal and a hard line wings or-?

WENICK: Clearly there were splits in leadership. Armando Cossutta was the member of the PCI leadership who was closest to the Soviets. Later on when the major reshuffling of parties took place and the Christian Democrats basically disappeared in the early 1990's, Cossutta led a breakaway portion of the PCI that was essentially very Stalinist in their policies.

Q: Did you feel any relationship between what was happening in Portugal? I think that was during your watch, wasn't it, when essentially there's an officer coup in Portugal and to begin with it was heavily tilted towards the extreme left and I faded out but I mean this was- Was this- Did this have any effect?

WENICK: I don't recall it having any effect. I mean, my sense would have been that the communists would have supported that sort of left wing government but also during this period they were being very cautious because they wanted to gain some measure of recognition from the U.S. Government, and so they were very careful about how they behaved, particularly in their public statements.

Q: How about- Richard Gardner became ambassador while you were there.

WENICK: Richard Gardner became ambassador in March or April of 1977.

Q: He was very much an activist, wasn't he?

WENICK: He was indeed.

Q: How did you find him? I'm getting sort of a weak smile from you.

WENICK: Candidly I found him rather hard to take. He would say one thing and do something else. There was some hypocrisy in the manner in which he conducted himself. I'm being very candid.

Q: Well no, I mean, but how did this, at your- in your responsibility, I mean, were you able to get a clear line of instruction or direction about how to deal with communists? Because in many ways you were right on the leading edge of what our sort of policy maneuverability in Italy.

WENICK: That's right. I guess when Richard Gardner came- I think what you see is the difference between an academic, which is where he came from, and professional diplomats.-

Q: Out of Columbia.

WENICK: He was a professor at Columbia's law school. He had been at State in the Johnson Administration. I think he'd been an assistant secretary of state for international organizations. He saw himself as an active supporter of Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election. He also knew Brzezinski well, since they both were on the faculty at Columbia. I think his primary objective was to be ambassador to the United Nations, which he didn't get, and so his reward was ambassador in Italy. And his wife was of Italian heritage; she was from Venice. I've always felt that there's a difference between academics and diplomats. The academics have the advantage of being able to play around with all sorts of formulas, all sorts of theories and theses; diplomats have to face the reality of the situation, face the consequences of what happens. Richard Gardner came to Rome with the feeling that we should be much more open intellectually, we should be much more open to the Italian communist party, and he, himself, wanted to participate in that. And the other side of the coin being that government policy was that the ambassador did not participate in contacts with the communists, and that the United States was opposed to communist participation in an Italian Government. The administration wasn't really

prepared to go as far as he would have liked. And so there was an internal debate that raged for quite awhile in the embassy over that. In his writing subsequently, Gardner asserts that he was a fervent anti-communist and I think doesn't describe fully the type of approach that he argued in the internal Embassy debates. And this all came to a head in late '77, early '78 and there was finally a statement that I think was released in January 1978 in which the U.S. policy, i.e. opposition, regarding communist participation in the Italian government, was reaffirmed. I think at that point it caused the ambassador to step back a little bit because the policy had been set in Washington. But he was always looking for ways to engage members of the- leadership of the communist party, if he could, and he succeeded at times. It did create some misunderstandings as to the US Governments policy vis-à-vis communist participation in an Italian Government.

Q: Well it must have been difficult for you because this was your job and if you have the ambassador playing around at the same time maybe he's not supposed to and you're, you know, a subordinate to the ambassador; this must have been awkward.

WENICK: It was awkward. It was awkward also in the sense that divisions occurred within the Embassy over this issue, and it was not always a very pleasant development. So eventually it brought this issue to a head and that's one of the reasons why a statement was drafted and eventually released in Washington in early January of 1978. But that didn't keep him, the ambassador, in a way from playing on the fringes.

Q: Yes.

Well, I think looking at the time it's probably a good place to stop.

WENICK: Right.

Q: Where- Is there anything else we should cover maybe next time in Italy?

WENICK: No, I think we're pretty covered the period of my tour in Rome.

Q: All right, so we'll pick it up when you left Rome and where'd you go?

WENICK: I came to the office of Soviet Union affairs in Washington.

Q: Okay. We'll pick it up then.

WENICK: Great.

Q: Okay, today is the 24th of November, 2010, the day before Thanksgiving. This is an interview with Martin Wenick and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy and we are, I think 1978-

WENICK: Correct.

Q: When you're going- you've left Rome and on your way to Soviet Affairs?

WENICK: That's correct.

Q: Okay. You were in the Department in that tour from when to when?

WENICK: I was in the department from the summer of 1978, probably August, until about August of 1980. And I was deputy director for economic affairs in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs.

Q: How stood- You've been away from the Soviet Union for awhile; how stood things in the Soviet Union when you arrived in '78 in Washington and looking at it again.

WENICK: On the one hand there was still some forward movement, building on the period of détente which Nixon and Kissinger had initiated. But the arrival of President Carter in the White House also put more emphasis on human rights. That sort of was the other side of the coin complicating relations with the Soviet Union. At the same time the leadership of the Soviet Union, particularly Brezhnev, was becoming more and more geriatric so the positions in the Soviet Union were becoming increasingly rigid with the realization that there probably was going to be a change in leadership within a short period of time. And then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan came in late '79.

Q: And you were in the Soviet Affairs at that time.

WENICK: I was in the office of Soviet Union Affairs serving as Deputy Director for Economic. And the invasion of Afghanistan in '79 pretty much put relations on a hold, especially on the economic side when sanctions were applied and the United States decided not to participate in the Olympics of 1980. So it was a period of almost no real growth in the economic relationship although I think the business community during that period continued to have some hope that they could expand their interests there.

Q: Well when you arrived to the bureau, this is before the invasion of Afghanistan, also the revolution in Iran, which sort of upset everything everywhere; was there a feeling that maybe the Soviets were mellowing? You had an aging politburo and all and this seemed to denote, I mean, that year that they were satisfied with how things were and maybe we could do better business with them?

WENICK: I think it was pretty much a mixed bag during that period. On the one hand, on the economic side in 1978 and into 1979 there was the hope that we could expand relations. Economic relations had to an extent been delivered a setback by the adoption of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment in 1974 which related to emigration from the Soviet Union. And in early- sometime in early '79, probably April or May, maybe a little bit later, there was a meeting in Moscow of the US-USSR Trade and Economic Council. Two Cabinet secretaries, the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Treasury both participated in the meeting, so there was an expectation that we could expand relations.

Q: And as an ambassador we had sent Thomas Watson.

WENICK: Well he was a little bit later.

Q: But he was also, I mean a businessman. I mean, I think this is all part of a-

WENICK: This was all part of an- He came from-

Q: IBM.

WENICK: IBM, and he was a real gentleman, I dealt with him. I think there was a hope that that economic side of the relationship could be expanded and then the invasion of Afghanistan put everything on a real hold.

Q: Well let's look at it before Afghanistan. Here you are dealing with Soviet economic affairs and you know, it turned out to- in a way that, and correct me if I'm wrong, but the Soviet Union was dying on its feet because of economics. I mean it just- it was just- it was rotten and it was getting worse. Did we realize that or were we- was it on a straight line projecting that this would go on forever?

WENICK: Well, as you know the Soviet Union collapsed in the late '80s, early '90s and I don't think anybody looking at it in that period and even into the early '80s realized that the life of the Soviet regime, i.e. the communist regime, was as short lived as it was going to be. People recognized that the economic situation there was rotten and central planning really didn't work. Working conditions for most workers were poor, and work output of workers was really rather meager. The entire infrastructure of the country was really quite deficient, particularly in the areas distant from Moscow.

On the other hand there was the enormous military power and the presence of the secret police, which led everybody looking at the Soviet Union at the time to believe the regime was going to be far more active and would live much longer than it actually did. And of course every time there was going to be or perceived going to be a leadership transition, it always led to a lot of speculation from the outside. On the other hand it sort of led to more conservative decisions internally as people were jockeying for position and not wanting to get out in front of the crowd in terms of their own positions for future leadership.

Q: Were you getting reports or asking for reports and looking at the economy and saying, gee, this isn't working or what were we thinking about at the time?

WENICK: I don't think anybody in the Washington establishment saw a quick end to communist rule in the Soviet Union. We know that the economy was weak; we knew there were serious deficiencies. On the other hand nobody expected a quick regime change because of the power of the military and the secret services.

Q: When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan around Christmas of '79, did- what was in a way within the Soviet bureau, what was the sort of the instant analysis of why they did it?

WENICK: It was a continuation of the Brezhnev doctrine. It was a communist regime, communist leader, that was potentially vulnerable to other forces and the feeling that the Soviet Union needed to intervene to save it. And then there was one other aspect and that was an historic aspect. I mean, even the czarist regimes had, you know, gradually extended its influence into Central Asia and at that point led to tensions between the Russian empire and the British Empire for that area, particularly Afghanistan and then possibly an outlet to the sea for the Russian empire. So Afghanistan was in some ways always at the center of conflict for the Russian empire and then later on the communist regime, Soviet regime and the outside powers, the West.

Q: How did we view the Soviet Union as, this is again before the Afghan business, as a market?

WENICK: Well I think the business community saw it as an enormous, big market and there was a lot of pressure from the business community to expand relations and to limit the restrictions that were existent in U.S. law at the time. There were export controls and limitations imposed by the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. So the business community saw great opportunities. I'm not sure that all those opportunities were there. The Soviet Union was not in a position to use large sums of money in terms of foreign exchange for purchases and in large measure their imports were on the agricultural side when they had crop failures and the necessities that they saw that would develop their industrial might more quickly.

Q: You know, the agricultural side has always been sort of a major part of the Soviet Union, particularly with the Ukraine, the bread basket and all that. During the Khrushchev period you had this opening up to the virgin lands and all that; had that pretty well been taken care of? I mean, in other words abandon and then they moved back to the traditional-?

WENICK: Well I mean the virgin lands and some development of that area for agricultural production, which has in the long run proved to be catastrophic in terms of the environment. I mean, the Aral Sea has been decimated by the utilization of the waters from it for agricultural purposes. In the '70s there was a realization among the leadership of the country that something wasn't working on the farms. They'd have crop failure after crop failure and the total production wasn't sufficient to feed the population. At the same time it was necessary to utilize hard currency to purchase wheat from the outside world, including United State to feed the population and to fend off any thinking that could lead to unrest. So they were trying, on the margins, new techniques in the 1970s in terms of how they were going to manage and organize their collective farms but nothing really led to great successes, and they had the whole issue of the weather which also frequently limited agricultural output.

Q: Were we trying to do anything to help in this regard?

WENICK: Not extensively. I mean clearly we liked the money and the farming community was very active in pushing for exports of agricultural products to the Soviet Union because it was one of the largest markets that they saw at the time. But we weren't, I think in terms of government policy, I don't recall anything that was major in the way of trying to assist Soviet agricultural developments. It was more in the terms of opening up markets for agricultural exports.

Q: Were you called upon, I mean you and your staff, called upon after the invasion to sit down and say what can we do to stick it to the Soviets?

WENICK: Yes. After the invasion the Carter Administration tasked the various departments with coming up with ideas of what could be done to impose sanctions on the Soviets as a response to their invasion of Afghanistan. And one of them was to refrain from participating in the 1980 Olympics. There were others, I don't recall now specifically what they were.

Q: Well then how did, after the invasion were there any significant developments, economically, that you were looking at?

WENICK: No. The period '79-'80, until I left the office, economic relations were essentially moribund. There weren't a lot of developments in terms of economic developments and trade. Obviously again the business community was anxious to get beyond the sanctions and seek ways to make deals, etc., but nothing ever really took off. .

Q: I'm just trying to think of- Were we- As we were making, you know, working with wheat, were we keeping Argentina and Canada and maybe Australia in mind? I mean, were we all of one mind in dealing with the Soviets?

WENICK: No we weren't. And that certainly created some problems with the business community, particularly the agricultural side. They said we're withholding sales or we're sanctioning the Soviets on the economic side but some of our friendly allies who are in the same markets with us, the Canadians and Argentines for wheat, are going ahead with their sales. So there was some pressure on the government, particularly relating to the competitors. And then at this time, of course. another thing that captured Washington's attention was the takeover of the embassy in Tehran. The hostages were released on inauguration day of 1981 so that marginally impacted on relations. I think there was a hope initially the Soviets might be helpful in assisting us in resolving the crisis but nothing ever came of that.

Q: Well then you left that job when?

WENICK: In July of 1981.

Q: Then where did you go?

WENICK: I went to the National War College.

Q: How'd you find it there?

WENICK: In contrast to many of my colleagues I didn't find it particularly rewarding. I was put off by the military environment and discipline that existed there. I saw it almost as a sabbatical year, and probably didn't get as much out of it as some of my other colleagues. It was a good year for me because I got married that year. I- had a lot more time to make plans for the wedding and adjust to things.

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

WENICK: Through Soviet Affairs. My wife was the Administrative Assistant to Congressman Bill Green of Manhattan. The Congressman was very interested in two things. One was housing and the second was the Soviet Jewry issue, and he was planning to use his travel to the Soviet Union to look at housing as a way to look into the issue of Soviet Jewry. And so I went to the office to start preparing for the trip and the first meeting was with the staff there, who was led by the Administration Assistant who subsequently became my wife. And then there was a second meeting at which the Congressman was present and that was in December of '79. Then shortly thereafter the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and the Congressman cancelled his trip. But subsequent to that my relationship developed, and we got married about a year later

I should mention that during the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid in 1980, we had somebody from the office of Soviet Union affairs there during the entire period. I was there part of it to be available in case there were any defections from the Soviet or East European teams that needed to be handled, but none occurred that I was aware of.

Q: Well then-

WENICK: Then I went to the War College.

Q: Did you concentrate on any particular area when you were at the War College?

WENICK: Not really.

Q: Did you get any feel for the military way?

WENICK: Very much so. It was sort of an education. I really enjoyed the military colleagues, and I think the idea of mixing military officers with civilian colleagues is a plus, and gives value added to the National War College. There were 160 of us; 120 were military officers and 40 were from various civilian agencies, the largest group from State and there were people from Treasury and CIA and others. I think that the mixture was useful. By the end of the course we all had a better feel for how officials of other agencies thought and operated. So in that sense it was a positive year.

Q: Well then, how about trips?

WENICK: Let's see. One of the benefits of the academic year was a foreign trip. I went on a trip that went to Greece and Italy. I'd just been promoted so I became the senior officer in terms of rank of our group.

Q: So you left there in '81 I guess?

WENICK: Left there in June of '81.

Q: Whither?

WENICK: Whither? I went to Prague, Czechoslovakia for a second tour, this time assigned as the Deputy Chief of Mission. Although when I arrived at the Embassy, there was no ambassador so I was chargé d'affaires for about the first five months of my tour.

Q: Well you were in Czechoslovakia from when to when?

WENICK: I was there 1965 to 1967 during my first tour and then July 1981 to July 1983 for my second tour.

Q: What was the state of our relations with Czechoslovakia?

WENICK: They hadn't moved very much since 1967. In fact, I think they had moved to the negative side in contrast to 1965-'67, which was a period of loosening of controls internally. When I was there for my second tour the regime felt threatened by the dissident movement, particularly by the Charter Movement. Havel and Jiri Dienstbier were in jail in 1981. Havel became the President of the Republic and Dienstbier the first foreign minister of the post communist era. And so the regime was very keen to keep a lid on developments there, and our relations weren't terribly positive. The most positive thing is that early on in my tour in Prague, we managed to resolve the gold claims issue that was a left-over from World War II.

Q: Yes, we've talked about that back in the '60s, didn't-?

WENICK: That was something that was negotiated from time to time ever since the gold was recovered at the end of World War II. Efforts were made to return the gold to the various countries from which the Nazis seized it, and the Czech regime was really the last country to get its gold back.

Q: How much was it?

WENICK: Eighteen tons, roughly. I'm not sure but as I recall it was about 18 tons of gold, all kept in the vaults of the Federal Reserve Bank New York.

Q: Well did this change relations with the Czechs at all?

WENICK: Well let's see, we completed negotiations in 1981. Towards the end of the year we initialed the agreement. It was signed somewhat later, I think early in 1982, and the gold came back to Czechoslovakia. But it really didn't lead to much improvement in terms of bilateral relationships.

Q: How does one move 18 tons of gold?

WENICK: You put in on a plane and you ship it. And it was shipped by airliner and one hoped that there would be no airline disaster with that volume of gold and it went into the vaults of the Czech National Bank.

Q: Did you get around much in Czechoslovakia?

WENICK: Yes, I did a fair amount of travel in Czechoslovakia. It was a relatively small country, so much of the travel I did was day trips. We were under a good deal of control during that period. I'd been there before; the Czechs were convinced I was a CIA agent and so during that period they did exercise a fair amount of control over following me and watching my activities. Billy Graham came to preach in Czechoslovakia at the invitation of the Baptist Church there, and my wife and I went to his events in two of the cities, Brno and Bratislava. And my wife's ancestry was from Eastern Slovakia, and so towards the end of our tour we went and did sort of a roots tour of Eastern Slovakia. I had never really traveled extensively in that area of the country, so we spent about 10 days in Eastern Slovakia calling on local officials and trying to see whether there were any traces of her family in the cemeteries in the area, but we really did not come up with very much.

Q: Well who was the ambassador later on?

WENICK: Let's see. Jack Matlock came as ambassador. He had been director of Soviet Union Affairs. When I went to Prague in '81 he was at the time chargé d'affaires in Moscow since we did not have an ambassador there. And Jack was a talented professional.

Q: Were you able to sort of take your- his and your Soviet analyses and put it into the Czech situation?

WENICK: Yes, I think we tried to utilize that. I think we also tried to realize that Czechoslovakia was not at the center of the universe in terms of US foreign policy. He did a terrific job of leading the embassy during that period, and certainly we were able to utilize his expertise in Soviet affairs as we looked at developments there. And he also was great in the way of letting the embassy officers do their jobs without a lot of interference.

Q: After the '68 squashing of the Prague Spring and all, the Czechs, Czechoslovak authorities really sat very heavily on their people, didn't they?

WENICK: It was probably one of the most regressive regimes in Eastern Europe at that time. They had the experience of the Prague Spring and the loosening up of controls that eventually led to the invasion of the country by the countries of the Warsaw Pact. After the Soviet/Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the liberalization process ended. General Svoboda became President of the Republic and Gustáv Husák became communist party leader. Svoboda was gone, but Husák was still party leader when I returned in 1981. The leadership kept a tight lid on things, and eventually had to deal with the Charter 77 Movement. The regime had this challenge of the intellectuals again who were at the forefront of any push for liberalization and the leaders of the Charter Movement that were in prison in the late '70s and early '80s.

Q: Were you able to make any contact with dissidents?

WENICK: Well yes, I did. I had contacts in large measure because I had known Jiri Dienstbier from the '60s here in Washington where he was stationed as a journalist. When I first got to Prague in 1981 he was still in prison, but when his term ended in 1982, I saw him rather frequently. Usually we would do a movie evening at our residence. I would let Jiri know that we had a movie and ask him whether he wanted to bring a group of his friends over. And so they would come. And Jiri was rather clear; he wanted to do it totally above board so that there was absolutely nothing secret about our meeting. The invitation wasn't to be conspiratorial or anything. I would call him, say we're having a movie and if you want to bring people to the house come by and we'll have food -- we usually made pizza for them -- and a movie. So we saw Jiri and a number of the members of the Charter 77 group reasonably frequently.

Q: Basically was this a matter of giving moral support?

WENICK: That's all it was. And also, yes, it was moral support and letting the regime know that first of all the idea of embassy contacts with Czechoslovak citizens should be a normal course of events and it shouldn't be something that was totally limited by the regime. Invitations to Czechoslovak officials were usually vetted in the respective ministry. If it was a businessman, somewhere in the foreign trade organization's bureaucracy, there was someone who decided whether attendance could occur or not. And so attendance at our official functions was pretty well controlled by the regime. We issued the invitations, but who attended was pretty much decided upon by someone in the communist party/secret police apparatus.

Q: Could there be any meaningful discussions with the Czech authorities?

WENICK: Not really. I think one of the things that you realized was that when you met with a Czechoslovak office you were engaged in a game. You were involved in a play in which everybody has a role, and the discussions were controlled by that role. The Czechoslovak officials would say that something was black, and we had our instructions and we'd say it was white and each side would basically agree to disagree at the end of the day. In terms of discussions they weren't the most fruitful. And they were heavily controlled. I mean, there were very few discussions that one had that could really be

meaningful in terms of getting Czechoslovaks in general to talk about anything other than the party line.

Q: Well this must have been kind of frustrating because the Soviet Union, being as big as it is, there were chinks and you could burrow away in different areas whereas I take it in Czechoslovakia there really weren't those opportunities.

WENICK: A couple of things were in play. One is the Czech personality which was much more dour than the Soviets, so I think that could make things difficult. And secondly the regime was very much concerned about its role in society and it wanted to preserve that. And Czechoslovakia being on the border with the West, Germany being not far distant from Prague, and a Czechoslovakia that had been founded largely as a result of Woodrow Wilson and his policies after the First World War, it's the only democracy really in Central Europe in the inter-war period. So there had been this tradition of looking to the West. Czechoslovaks in general looked very fondly to the United States so that was the positive. We used to go around on May 8 or May 9, VE Day, to monuments in areas of western Bohemia that had been liberated by American forces in the spring of 1945. As the war ended, American forces occupied a portion of western Bohemia. And we broadcast on VOA and Radio Free Europe that we were going to be visiting these towns according to a schedule, and I was amazed how people came out of the woodwork and attended the events. You know, we'd be there say at 10:00 and there was always a group assembled. The Ambassador made remarks about the role of American forces in liberating a part of Czechoslovakia from Nazi occupation. People were always there at these events despite heavy secret police surveillance. Subsequently, the Embassy asked the Czechoslovak service of VOA to broadcast a request for information regarding sites in which American soldiers might have been killed or pilots might have been shot down. We received a number of responses and we went out and actually saw parts of planes that were still in people's backyards 35 years after the end of the war. So there was a lot of goodwill towards the United States even though the regime was so rigid in its anti-American positions.

Q: Just out of curiosity, I may have asked you this before, did they ever restore the village, I want to say Lidice I'm not sure of the name.

WENICK: The village was Lidice, and it had been located not far from Prague. The authorities never restored it. There was a monument there dedicated to the folks that had lost their lives in the German retribution for the assassination of Heydrich in Prague, I believe in 1944. He was the Nazi leader responsible for affairs in Czech areas at the time.

Q: Did the, whatever they call the secret police, harass your people?

WENICK: The secret police were called the StB. There was considerable harassment during the two years I was there. We were followed regularly. The secret police had an outpost in the tower of a nearby church where they could focus attention on our grounds. They could see the front entrance and the back grounds of the embassy from their tower. They also had an outpost near the Embassy entrance from which they were able to

control people coming to the Embassy and the movement of our staff into and out of the Embassy. We were followed extensively. I have my secret police files now from Czechoslovakia for the four years that I served there, and I can see that they had a number of local employees who were reporting regularly on events in the embassy. The most serious case of harassment was the planting of a load of marijuana in a car of one of our employees. She went to Germany, and on her way back they had a little police sniffer dog which we had never previously seen at the border post. The dog's name was Hassan. And she was stopped at the border as she returned to Czechoslovakia from Germany. The dog went around the car, and they found the marijuana which they had planted in the car before she had started on her trip from Prague. We were lucky because a Canadian embassy employee was going out to Germany at the same time our officer was stopped at the border coming in, so he saw that she was in distress. So as soon as he got across the border he called the Canadian Embassy in Prague who then telephoned us to say we had an Embassy officer in difficulty at the border point. So we found out about it far sooner than I think the Czechs anticipated. I was the Chargé at the time, and I learned about it at about 10:30 at night. We managed at one point to get the telephone number of one of the deputy foreign ministers, who was very disturbed when I called him. I told him that I was calling because we had an Embassy officer being detained at the border. And so they permitted somebody to go to the border to escort her back to Prague. She was a USIA officer, near the end of her tour. The Czechoslovaks wanted us to withdraw her but they didn't want to declare her *persona non grata* because there would be reciprocity. So they decided that for the remainder of her tour, approximately six weeks, they would prevent her from having any meetings with any Czechoslovak officials. She then left Prague upon the completion of her tour.

Q: Well what, I mean, was this unusual, trying to plant this stuff?

WENICK: I think the Czechoslovak secret services (StB) were always heavy handed. They had this ability to at times go beyond what was, in a way behavior that would have been tolerated, and they took steps which inevitably were going to lead them into some measure of difficulty. We saw that when I was at the Embassy in 1965-'67 and this was another example of the secret police feeling that they had a lot of power in that regime and they could almost do what they wanted without a measure of control. And sometimes it did come back and create problems for them.

Q: Was there much pressure on the part of Czechs who had fled in '68 and gone to the United States, England and all, on you all in Prague from them?

WENICK: Very little. We really noticed very little pressure. They all eventually had criminal cases against them for illegally departing from the country. To a certain extent, the regime welcomed their departures, because it eliminated a segment of the population that harbored negative feelings toward the communist regime

Q: Forty-eight, '49.

WENICK: The forty-eighters. They were not as active for instance as the Polish emigrants who were much more organized in terms of pressure on the U.S. Government to take action.

Q: Well in Czechoslovakia, I think we covered this before but during this time did the Church, there would have to be churches because of Czechoslovakia's, I guess, got Protestant, Lutheran, Catholic, the whole thing, but did they play much of a role?

WENICK: In Czechoslovakia the churches were not very strong, whereas in Poland the Church was a very important counterweight to the communist regime. The churches in Czechoslovakia really were not particularly active in part because Czechoslovak society historically had been much more secular. The most prominent churchman in Czechoslovakia was Cardinal Tomasek. His residence was in a palace right opposite the main entrance to the Prague Castle, and Cardinal Tomasek would conduct services in St. Vitus Cathedral that was in the Prague Castle grounds. He would also appear at various national day events hosted by different embassies. We would usually speak to him on these occasions, and I would call on him periodically at his residence. From my secret police file that I have obtained, it is evident that there were listening devices in the room where Cardinal Tomasek received guests. The various churches were under a good deal of control. There was a Czechoslovak government department charged with maintaining relations with the various religious groups in the country. If an Embassy officer wanted to see a bishop or a church leader outside of Prague, we would call to make an appointment. Sometimes we would arrive for the appointment, and a priest would be out there saying oh, sorry but the bishop or the church leader has been called away. This would be on instructions from the government department in Prague. So as with the dissidents, the Czechoslovak regime recognized that the churches could be a potential threat to them and therefore they kept them under very close control.

Q: How about was there much in the way of interchange between say East Germany or Hungary or Poland with Czechoslovakia at the time?

WENICK: I think it was mostly in the context of the Warsaw Pact that there were exchanges between them, but we certainly didn't get the feel for that while we were in Prague.

Q: How did we feel about the Czech army?

WENICK: Czechoslovakia had a lengthy border with countries which were either part of NATO (West Germany) or neutral (Austria). The Czechoslovak army was therefore on the border in terms of the Warsaw Pact. It probably had a leadership role at least in the event of conflict between east and west. If a land conflict arose between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Czechoslovakia would be drawn into it. The Czech army was pretty well trained and pretty well supplied. Additionally Soviet troops were based in Czechoslovakia, and the military attachés of NATO countries were pretty active in traveling around the country and keeping an eye on their activities and movements to the extent they could. We had travel controls while we were there so there were large areas

of the country that were off limits to us. These limits were imposed back in 1966 in retaliation for controls we had on the movement of Soviets and East European diplomats in the United States.

Q: Well were, at that time did we have pretty much a tit for tat policy on restrictions and all?

WENICK: Very much so. As I said, we had these restrictions on our movements. We were the only foreign embassy that was specifically restricted; we had to ask permission for travel around the country and we had to make sure we didn't travel through closed areas. And the Czechs had means of controlling that because they had police posts on the highways and our license plates were clearly identifiable. So they could easily control our movements.

Q: Yes, I know when I was in Yugoslavia during the '60s I recall D63 was us- No, D60 was America, 63 was the Canadians, 10 was the Soviets and the teens were the bloc countries and all. We used to know all- I mean, we could readily identify them.

WENICK: Well it was the same way in Czechoslovakia. The Soviets and their friends and allies had a set of the numbers. Our license plates started off those of the western block in Prague. So the police could easily identify us by our license plates as we traveled around the country. And I have to say that now, having read through my entire Czechoslovak secret police file, everything that our security people warned us could happen, did happen. (The Czech Republic has established an institute which has collected the secret police files. These files can be accessed upon request to the institute in Prague.)

Q: Okay, give me a feel for- You say you reviewed your file, what sort of- what did it look like?

WENICK: Well it's very extensive. And it has everything from information about my visa applications and pictures associated with the visa applications to pictures of my mother and her sister when they came to visit me in Czechoslovakia 1982. The file has reports from people who were obviously tasked by the regime to contact me and to see whether they could get certain types of information from me. There are reports from collaborators, particularly people from within in the embassy who would report on things they observed. For example, the maid at my apartment on my first tour (1965 – 1967) would report at her periodic secret police meeting that I obviously had women as guests in my apartment over the weekend because when she came in on Monday all the glasses in the kitchen sink had lipstick on them. She would also report on the approximate number of people who had been in the apartment. Reading one's secret police file is kind of like a "This is Your Life" type of episode except some of it is fiction and some of it is real. I have to say at the end of the day that the StB devoted a lot of effort to this endeavor. I don't see anything that they obtained, in terms of operational interest or issues regarding American policy. As an example, the people that followed me always had to file a daily report. They had to report, first of all, what I did. For example, they would file a report indicating that at 12:22 p.m. I left the embassy and reached my

residence at 12:30 p.m. They would then note that I left my residence at 1:43 p.m. to return to the embassy and they would note the route that I had taken to reach the Embassy. And at the end of the daily report each individual on the surveillance team had to sign the report which also indicated what he wore that day and how many kilometers were on the car that had been used. If any money had been expended, that was listed. It's really was an unreal system.

Q: You know, I mean one can only say that the whole security business, one thing or another is a tremendous boost to employment.

WENICK: It had to be when you consider I was one of 25 employees of the U.S. embassy, and they obviously were involved in the surveillance of people from a number of other embassies. So it had to be an enormous apparatus. It's not only the people that did the surveillance, but the reports had to be typed up, and reviewed and signed by a superior. If the surveillance team lost me, by chance, the people who were following me on a given day, had to write an explanation of why they lost me, and it had to be reviewed by the supervisor. I mean, incredible amounts of effort went into this. And as I say some of what is in my file is pure fiction, and some of it is reality.

Q: Well then you left there when?

WENICK: I left there in July of 1983.

Q: Was, by this time, I mean the Helsinki Accords had been signed and all that but were they in the game at all at that point during the time you were there?

WENICK: The Czechoslovaks weren't really in the game at the time. Their human rights record was pretty pathetic in terms of the control over society including the Church and movement of people, etc. .

Q: Well then, so you- What- This is when Ronald Reagan was elected.

WENICK: That's right.

Q: Did that- How'd you feel about that at the beginning? Because Ronald Reagan appeared to come way out of the right wing of the Republican Party. What was your, you might say initial reaction?

WENICK: I got to Prague probably six or seven months after President Reagan was inaugurated. In terms of U.S relations with the communist world, I was what probably what would be termed a hard liner and so I never really felt that the relationship was one in which if we were nice to them that was going to lead to them being nice to us. They had reasons why they followed policies. The regimes of Eastern Europe were under pressure from the Soviets not to deviate much from the Soviet line. The Soviets pulled the strings for most of them. So I wasn't uncomfortable with the policies of Reagan during this period.

Q: Well then in '70- I mean '83, you left. Where'd you go?

WENICK: I left Prague and came back to the Department to become deputy director and then director of the office of Northern European Affairs.

Q: What did that cover?

WENICK: That covered Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland and Bermuda and everything in between.

Q: You were doing from '83 to-?

WENICK: Eighty-three to '86. Three years.

Q: What were the issues that particularly engaged you?

WENICK: For me it wasn't a particularly challenging assignment in comparison with my tours in the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia and even my tour in Rome. Most of the issues were marginal in terms of U.S. national interests. The major issue at the time affecting the area was the efforts for cruise missile deployment-

Q: This is the SS-20 and the Glickum Slickum response.

WENICK: Right.

Q: On our part.

WENICK: Right. And that was-

Q: Belgium was very much involved.

WENICK: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany were most directly involved in this. And much of that was handled by the assistant secretary, Richard Burt, at the time and our office of- RPM; the regional political military so my office was only peripherally involved. We were mostly engaged in bilateral issues.

Q: Yes. What sort of role- Did you have Sweden?

WENICK: We had Sweden.

Q: You know Sweden maintained sort of its outside stance but not- at one time it was downright unfriendly over Vietnam but how stood it during this time?

WENICK: We had evolved from the Vietnam period, which I think were very difficult in terms of the U.S.-Swedish relations. So relations with Sweden were similar to those of

the other countries for which the office had responsibility. The relations between the United State and the United Kingdom were particularly close in this period because of the special relationship between Prime Minister Thatcher and President Reagan. And during this period, if the British did not get an answer they wanted from the Department of State, they would appeal directly to the White House and then the word would come down that British want this, so please facilitate it.

Q: Well how did you feel, particularly with the Belgians and the Dutch as far as the missile business? Because this was- you didn't have Germany, did you?

WENICK: No, we did not.

Q: But I mean, this was a very contentious issue because our- a lot of the political opposition in these countries didn't want us to put a response to the SS-20s in there. I mean, just- they were anti-missiles.

WENICK: Right. The Netherlands and Belgium were in the forefront of the issue, particularly Holland. We had a very active ambassador there. Jerry Bremer was Ambassador in The Hague at the time, and getting the Dutch to go along with the proposal for deployment was one of the main tasks of the era. Our Embassy in The Netherlands was very successful in moving the issue along, despite a substantial amount of opposition in the country to the deployment. We were still living in the aftermath of the Vietnam era, and we had not overcome feelings resulting from the American involvement in Vietnam. And then we had a President who was perceived in these countries to be very strongly anti-communist and from the right of center in terms of his positions. So the governments in this area were walking a tightrope in how they reacted to the question of deployment.

Q: How did you find the embassies, how active were the embassies dealing with you all?

WENICK: Well first of all almost all of the ambassadors were political appointees. The only exceptions, as I recall, were Denmark, Holland and Iceland, where we had career ambassadors. All the other ambassadors were political. Two of them were particularly close to the Reagans, the ambassador in London and the ambassador in Belgium. The other ambassadors received their posts as political rewards. It was, at times, a challenge to deal with the non-career ambassadors. The embassies generally speaking were well plugged in to local communities and local governments. I mean, they didn't have problems with access or anything like that.

Q: Well how about in- here in Washington? You were obviously dealing with the embassies here; were they pretty well served by you all, would you say?

WENICK: I think they were all satisfied. We had very few contentious issues; they were almost all members of NATO or friendly, neutral countries who generally shared our values. We were very responsive to the embassies.

Q: How did you view Finland?

WENICK: Finland had actually a very active embassy here, and the ambassador at the time was very much himself a scholar on Soviet affairs so it was always interesting to see him or have lunch with him because he always had some insights regarding Soviet affairs. The Finns shared a border with the Soviet Union. At this time, they had to make peace with the Soviets and accommodate to the fact that they had Big Brother just on the other side of the border. So that was interesting.

Q: Were we concerned at all about divisions in Belgium, language and all?

WENICK: In that period the problem wasn't as acute as it's become subsequently or at the present time. The divisions in the country made it very difficult to form a national government. When elections were held in Belgium, it always took a period of time to form a government because of linguistic and cultural differences. One of the major issues during that period involved Northern Ireland where the tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities were really quite acute.

Q: Had- Were the Helsinki- I mean, you're looking at it from somewhat of a distance but with your time in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were you seeing the Helsinki Accords beginning to bite into the fabric of European diplomacy?

WENICK: Helsinki was a milestone in terms of what it meant for the countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This was one of the areas -- human rights -- in which, the neutral countries of Europe tended to side with the West because for them there was concern about issues pertaining to human rights. So you started seeing these countries taking positions very close to the United States, particularly on the review conferences that took place after the Helsinki Accords were signed. So regarding the Helsinki Accords, in retrospect it's amazing that the Soviets signed on to them because the Accords permitted the countries of the West, including the neutrals, to engage them in areas of human rights. The Soviets had previously argued that the western oriented countries, when they raised issues concerning human rights, were involving themselves in their domestic politics. But now the Soviets had signed the Accords, so their argument about interfering in the domestic affairs of the country had less weight.

Q: Well you know when you look at it Henry Kissinger didn't think much of the whole thing and I'm sure he's telling President Ford, who was president at the time, you know, and I mean I think the leaders at the top of both things and realized quite what they were putting into motion.

WENICK: I think that's true, and I think from our side obviously we wanted a trade-off, in terms of the other baskets. We recognized that there would be trade-offs if we were ever able to get a final agreement. The United States was most interested in Basket One, the basket concerned with human rights, while the Soviets and their Eastern European allies placed heavier emphasis on the other baskets particularly on Basket Two, which

focused on economic issues. But, I don't think either side realized the significance that these accords would play over time.

Q: Well then you left that in '86?

WENICK: Yes, I left the Office of Northern European Affairs in '86.

Q: Whither?

WENICK: . I became be director of the office of Eastern European and Yugoslav affairs in the Department. I started there in July 1986, and I remained there until January or February of 1988; it was a shortened assignment.

Q: What did this geographically cover?

WENICK: That covered the countries of the Warsaw Pact, the three countries of the Baltic States, which we continued to recognize as independent countries, and Yugoslavia.

Q: Well let's take my old stamping grounds, Yugoslavia. How did we view Yugoslavia during that time?

WENICK: Yugoslavia was important to us first because it was a communist country which had become a thorn in the side of the Soviet Union. And secondly it was very much a leader of the non-aligned movement.

Q: Did we see- You were there until when?

WENICK: I think it was January of 1988.

Q: So just- You were only- You left on the cusp of all hell breaking loose.

WENICK: Right.

Q: Did we see all hell breaking loose?

WENICK: No. Things fell apart in the communist world in 1989. I don't think we envisioned that things would end quite so quickly.

Q: Well were we seeing cracks?

WENICK: I think you saw cracks. Certainly by this time you had Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, and the beginning of *glasnost*. Soviet pressure on the regimes in Eastern Europe was starting to lessen a little bit as the Soviets started to deal with the internal contradictions in their own society. The policy of *glasnost* created major problems for the regimes of Eastern Europe, since it involved moving in a totally new direction with an uncertain future.

Q: Well in a way, looking back on it, the thing that you were dealing with when you were dealing with Northern European Affairs, the SS-20- the introduction of the SS-20 was almost the last- it was the last sort of you might say major offensive attempt on the part of the Soviets to affect things. The idea was to put these short range missiles or medium range missiles in, putting Europe under the gun and not the United States and the idea was this might split the Europeans off. This failed.

WENICK: Right.

Q: Was that apparent?

WENICK: I think it was.

Q: When, you know, when you moved over to-

WENICK: I think it was. By 1986 the decisions had been made on the missiles. The countries of Western Europe had agreed to the basing of missiles, including basing as far south in Europe as Sicily in Italy. So I think that by that time that issue was basically resolved.

Q: And did- What was going on in Eastern Europe while you were there?

WENICK: The regimes were looking very nervously at what was going on in the Soviet Union. In some ways it was a much younger leadership. Gorbachev was much younger than Honecker in East Germany, Husák in Czechoslovakia, Kádár in Hungary and, Zhivkov in Bulgaria. I think they all saw, by this time, a certain amount of potential threat to their positions. The question of the type of leadership in the Soviet Union had major implications for the regimes in Eastern Europe. Poland was a separate case because it had the workers movement and pressure from the individuals such as Lech Walesa that eventually led to Soviets coming down harder on Poland earlier in the 1980's That's when Jaruzelski came to power, but he was he also was somewhat younger. And Poland was a slightly different case over the years because the Church had such an important role there, which it didn't have anywhere else in Eastern Europe.

Q: Well, in a way, with Poland, I mean Poland basically stood astride any invasion of Western Europe and here the whole Polish business was problematic as far as the Soviets were concerned. I mean, but had we- would you say that the thinking was okay, the Soviets have got all these troops here but it just- it doesn't make sense in almost any way for the Soviets to invade, go through the Fulda Gap by this time? I mean, had we really reached the point where this no longer was almost an option of concern?

WENICK: I don't know. My feeling was that military tactics had changed in the sense both sides had missiles that we could be utilized. In essence, the existence of these missiles made, in many ways, conventional warfare somewhat more problematic. But there was always a risk that you could have a small military incident with, forces facing

each other, getting involved in some sort of action. Thus, there was always the potential for a larger conflict to explode. So while the concept of the Warsaw Pact attacking NATO forces by going through the Fulda Gap was feasible, it was becoming less and less likely. We recently spent a day in Fulda, and it reminded me of all the concerns about the Gap

Q: Yes. Did- Were we able to do anything sort of to, while you were there, dealing with the Baltic States to encourage them or was this a sort of an oddity of history and nothing more?

WENICK: I think it was more an oddity of history and nothing more. The expatriate communities were aging by this time, and we were still subsidizing the diplomatic services. By this time, however, at least one of the countries had run out of any of the seized blocked funds that resulted at the time that the Soviets had incorporated them. So it had to borrow funds from one of the other countries. As I recall, Latvian funds were used to help to sustain the remnants of the diplomatic corps of Lithuania. But by this time they were far removed from daily events; most of their activities were focused on the émigré communities in the United States. But nevertheless there was a feeling that we had to continue this practice of issuing a Captive Nations Proclamation, mandated by Congress. I think we're among the very few countries that still recognized them at that point.

Q: Were we- While you were there were you looking- I mean, there was apparently going to be no movement within the states but what about say Hungary; was there a beginning of an exodus, say, through Hungary or other places of people fleeing the East?

WENICK: No. That came really later. The actions of the Hungarian Government really triggered the whole collapse in Eastern Europe. Once East Germans were able to go to Hungary and then proceed to the west without meaningful border controls, the beginning of the end for the regimes in Eastern Europe became possible.

Q: Shrugged their shoulders and said be our guest.

WENICK: Be our guest. And at that point the Soviets didn't do anything about it. But that wasn't happening in '86. The most important development in issues and relationships during that period was the fact that the Deputy Secretary of State, John Whitehead, took a look at the map of the world and realized that the Secretary had issues he was interested in and the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, Michael Armacost, had his areas of interest. Whitehead looked at the map of the world and said gee, where can I find a piece of the pie? And he chose Eastern Europe, and nobody was really interested in it on the seventh floor, so John Whitehead chose to focus on that. And it led to a measure of tension between the European Bureau and the Deputy Secretary's office. Whitehead had never been in Eastern Europe. I think he had stepped foot in Hungary in 1956 at the time of the uprising because he was involved with a refugee organization and went to Austria to help with the flow of refugees leaving Hungary. And so that was his previous one and only professional contact in the area. And he started from the thesis that, if we're nice to

these guys maybe they'll be nice back to us. Roz Ridgeway was the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. In the Bureau, the thinking at the time was that the regimes know what we expected of them and if they were prepared to undertake some of these steps, the United States would take reciprocal steps.

Q: Well did you find yourself caught betwixt and between?

WENICK: Very much so. And I traveled with the Deputy Secretary and his Executive Assistant Marc Grossman to Eastern Europe. My mother had actually done volunteer work with the Deputy Secretary previously, since he lived in the same area I was raised in., so it was in a way that link. I remember one trip in particular. We went to Hungary where he met with Kádár and to Bulgaria where we had a lengthy meeting with Zhivkov. We went on to Romania where he was received by Ceaușescu. I didn't participate in that meeting. We also went to Czechoslovakia, but there he wasn't received by the leadership as I recall. I remember that there was to be a meeting at an embassy officer's house to which a lot of the dissidents were invited, and most of them were detained by the secret police before the meeting. And we also went to Poland. We touched almost all the bases on the trip, and he met with virtually all the leaders. I don't think it really resulted in any meaningful movement in terms of our bilateral relationships, but that was his approach.

Q: Well did he- I mean, what was he getting from these meetings? Did he sort of chat with you afterwards?

WENICK: There was always a certain amount of tension. I would prepare the memoranda of the meetings in which I participated. But the Deputy Secretary had his executive assistant along, and he would dictate a separate eyes only telegram for the Secretary and that was in a different channel. I didn't always see that.

Q: So you felt, I mean he wasn't, you might say he wasn't quite part of the system.

WENICK: Well he had an approach, and I think the secretary gave him leeway. I don't think that the Secretary necessarily shared Whitehead's approach, but he tolerated it.

Q: The secretary was?

WENICK: The Secretary was George Shultz. I'm not sure that the Secretary in his heart of hearts totally agreed with John Whitehead's approach but he was the deputy secretary and it wasn't the center of American foreign policy attention at the time so there was more tension between, I think, the bureau, led by Roz Ridgeway and the deputy secretary than any other areas.

Q: Did you feel the heat from Roz Ridgeway and say what the hell's going on?

WENICK: I had a very good relationship with Roz Ridgeway and I think she understood where my thinking was. But you know, we both had the realization that policy was made

on the seventh floor and there were more important issues facing the Assistant Secretary than Eastern Europe.

Q: Oh yes.

WENICK: And we had to live with it. And I think, from Roz Ridgway's position, she had good access to the Secretary during this period and if there was something that was really egregious, that was being thought about, she was able to short circuit things and talk to the secretary and say, you know, I'm not sure that this is the best course to follow.

Q: Well let's see, then when you left there in '88, you're saying you didn't really see that sort of the satanic place we were really moving at the time?

WENICK: No.

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

WENICK: Let's see; in late fall of 1987 I was asked whether I wanted to be considered for the position of be deputy assistant secretary for coordination in the INR bureau. Shortly thereafter there was a decision made to reduce the number of deputy assistant secretaries in the various bureaus of the Department. So, for several months I was in limbo in terms of whether I would move or not move. Eventually the issue was resolved, and in late January of 1988, I moved to INR to become one of the deputy assistant secretaries. The Assistant Secretary of INR at the time was Mort Abramowitz.

Q: Okay. Well, looking at the time this is probably a good place to stop.

WENICK: Okay.

Q: And we'll pick this up the next time in 1988?

WENICK: Right.

Q: When you move to INR to figure out what you're doing, coordination, which really means dealing with the CIA, doesn't it?

WENICK: It dealt with all of the intelligence agencies.

Q: Intelligence agencies. So we'll talk about that at a very interesting time, coming up.

All right. Today is the 20th of December, 2010, with Martin Wenick, and we're now in 1988 and you're moving over to INR, and could you explain what the job is and then how long- You were there from when to when?

WENICK: I was there from January 1988 until March of 1989 when there was a change of administration, and I retired.

Q: Okay. Well let's pick up the- What were you doing?

WENICK: I was the deputy assistant secretary of state in INR for coordination, and the responsibilities were essentially to monitor the coordination between the State Department and the various intelligence agencies.

Q: What does that mean?

WENICK: It was a mystery to me, too, at the time. I think it was hard to come to grips with the responsibilities of the job. I certainly felt it was in large measure because of the compartmentalization of secrecy and operations by the various agencies. Essentially it was to monitor the activities insofar as they related to the Department with agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency, NSA, DIA and the other agencies involved in intelligence activities.

Q: Well the people who take pictures.

WENICK: People that take pictures, the reconnaissance agencies, the various Defense Department special operations branches, etc.

Q: Well one of the things, I mean obviously one has to tread carefully when you get into this but I was wondering whether you would talk a bit about, without getting into secret detail, but your impression of the take and effectiveness of the CIA.

WENICK: Well that's always hard to measure and in our activities for the 15 months I was in this job a large part of our effort was to essentially monitor the special operations that were going in various areas of the world based on presidential determinations that would authorize these activities. Once a program was authorized and in place, someone from CIA came to Department every week or two to review activities in the program and to answer any questions that had arisen about the program.

Q: Peter Brown.

WENICK: Ken Brown, now at your Institute, was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the African Bureau at the time, and I can recall sitting in on sessions in his office in which there was monitoring of the activities going on in certain areas of Africa. In the course of my career, there were various programs in areas in which I served. Most of them we were not aware of until later, because they were secret. In reality, it was always difficult to measure the success of the various programs. In large measure the public only hears about the failures, when something goes wrong, and I'm sure there are successes. I think largely in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union it was very hard for the operations there, and over time my sense is that successes were more in the realm of people who switch sides or offer to work for us outside of the host country, their own country. In terms of the special operations and the programs that were initiated, some were successful. I mean, look at Afghanistan. The long term effect is certainly mixed, and the short term effect of

the programs that were put in effect succeeded in ending the Soviet occupation of the country, and I'm not sure that the Soviet post period has been as successful in that lots of weapons were left there in the hands of people in a very tribal society. We had success in Panama, where there was an operation to bring to an end the rule of Noriega.

Q: One of the things I'd like you to comment on, to a certain extent and I may be completely off on this but INR has the reputation of sort of- as far as interpreting; we're not talking about operations but interpreting whether things are going better than the other agencies, particularly the CIA, and my feeling is that INR, being small and not having all the layering so if you're the Romanian INR person you're pretty well talking to the assistant secretary or maybe a deputy assistant secretary but you're not going through a layering process where CIA is very big, so if you're going- if you're a Romanian desk officer it goes through three or four stages and in any bureaucracy there's a tendency to qualify and say maybe yes, maybe no, and you end up with a far less solid report; you end up with a very qualified report and therefore when INR says something it's much more, well you might say "active" rather than qualified. Did you have this feeling at all?

WENICK: No. I think in part it depends on the assistant secretary and his relationship with the senior officials in the department on the seventh floor, and when I was there it was Mort Abramowitz, who was an activist, and certainly he and the undersecretary for political affairs, Michael Armacost, had an excellent relationship.

Q: There's Mike Armacost

WENICK: Mike went on to be ambassador in Japan. Armacost, Mike Armacost. Mort had a terrifically good relationship, and so to a certain extent that meant that materials that were developed in INR, wherever it was, on the research side, received attention on the seventh floor. I think the CIA being such a large bureaucracy and having the cache of the secrecy gave it an advantage around town, particularly at the White House. The Director of the CIA had a weekly meeting with the president. And so I think frequently their materials or their views reached the very top faster than materials from the Department. I think the weakness in the CIA was that frequently the people never really were operational in the field whereas many of the analysts in INR were Foreign Service officers who alternated between Washington and overseas postings, and frequently had served in the countries on which they were working. So I think that was a real plus for INR. So I think it was a mixed bag.

Q: Well do you- Were there any issues during this 18 months you were doing this that particularly engaged you or not?

WENICK: Well it was interesting because I think the intelligence agencies, particularly the CIA, tried to keep the Department at arm's length, so that was always the challenge. I think the Noriega operation in Panama was one in which the Department was much more actively involved. I traveled to Panama on one occasion with the Director of INR to take

a look at how things were going and progressing, so that was one of the issues that, you know, we worked on a little bit more closely.

Q: Did you get a feel for how Secretary Shultz used intelligence?

WENICK: Not really. I mean, I think, as I say I think Mike Armacost leaned heavily on Mort Abramowitz during this period, and so I think that Mike was the messenger who would carry issues forward to the Secretary. In terms of my impressions of the tenure of Secretary Shultz, he certainly listened to all opinions on an issue before making a decision in contrast to some of the other secretaries of state. You were never quite sure what Secretary Shultz was thinking. He always sat there like a Buddha when you were at the meetings, but he listened and then made up his mind. I think he was a man with a very open mind on issues, and I think different sections of the Department had their opportunity for input on an issue.

Q: Yes I, you know, many people, when you're asked who is the most impressive secretary of state, George Shultz, among the Foreign Service people I've talked to, comes up quite a bit ahead of, say, Henry Kissinger. Kissinger obviously was brilliant and had ideas but his secrecy and not- sort of bypassing the system seemed to initiate in a way a certain amount of his effectiveness. Right now we're on the Foreign Service, it used to be the Foreign Service Institute, in a word, on the George Shultz National Training Center, and the reason it's named after George Shultz is because he was really responsible for setting up a solid campus-like institute for training people in the Foreign Service. Every other secretary of state one thinks of would not have engaged themselves with forging the tools that he was going to use and most of them came and either saw themselves as an advisor to the president or carried out particular policies or something but they didn't really think about the organization as such.

WENICK: I think that's very true. If I think back over the almost 30 years I was in the Foreign Service and obviously in your first years you don't really get to see the principals as much as you do later on, but I had the occasion to witness Kissinger's modus Vivendi when I was in Moscow and then I saw George Shultz much more frequently during the period I was in the Department. I think he stands out head and shoulders above the other secretaries of the era in terms of being both a leader and a first rate thinker. In a sense you had your chance to make your opinion known, recognizing that the Secretary had the responsibility of making the final decision on an issue. I don't know whether we went over this but when I was in Moscow in 1972 or 1973, and Ambassador Beam was there, there is an example of how Kissinger conducted policy. One day the ambassador was asked to come to the Soviet foreign ministry. It was the time of the Bay of Tonkin bombings, and so the Ambassador thought he was going to get a demarche from the Soviets on the bombings and so he asked an officer in the political section to standby to accompany him. Subsequently, the Ambassador received another telephone call from the Foreign Ministry asking him to come alone. And he went to the foreign ministry, and there he was directly to proceed to one of the Soviet government's guest houses on Lenin Hills. When he reached there, he found Kissinger there who had already conducted a series of meetings with the Soviets. And, it was only at the very end of his stay as he was

preparing to leave, that Kissinger sent for the Ambassador. My impression is that it was a very embarrassing situation for the ambassador.

Q: The problem is that one thinks that Kissinger did these things- I mean, there was- Ego got in the way of policy, I think.

WENICK: I think what was lost in the whole effort was that he only had the advice of his own thinking to go on and that of a small circle around him. Whereas someone like George Shultz used the entire Department in shaping policy, and I think at the end of the day better decisions were made.

Q: Yes.

WENICK: I can recall at some point in 1987, when security was becoming an increasing concern for us overseas, the secretary had all the ambassadors come back from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and we spent almost a half day with him discussing security needs with him at our posts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Q: Well then, you retired in 1989?

WENICK: March 1989.

Q: I mean, did you feel you were a Foreign Service officer, you didn't have to retire?

WENICK: No, there was a change of Administration, so my assignment in INR was coming to a natural end. But also, my time in class had come to an end, and I had not received a limited career extension, which meant my career in the Department of State was ending.

Q: Well then what did you do then?

WENICK: Okay. I was really quite lucky, because I had a job to go to immediately. I left the Department on March 3, 1989, and became the executive director of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, and I stayed there for three and a half years.

Q: All right, let's talk about that. What were they doing?

WENICK: Now this was an advocacy group that was largely involved in doing two things. One was to organize and liaison with the American Jewish community and liaison with Jewish communities elsewhere in the world to promote the interests of emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union and to advocate for increased human rights for those Jews who were going to remain in the Soviet Union.

Q: Well what was the situation in the Soviet Union? This would be '80-

WENICK: Eighty-nine.

Q: Eighty-nine to '92.

WENICK: That's correct. The Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union had peaks and valleys. Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union started in the early '70s and increased for several years. After Congress passed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act in 1974 emigration decreased dramatically. Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union was very limited for a lengthy period of time after 1974. However, with the arrival of Gorbachev on the scene there were gradual increases in the level of emigration and by the time I arrived at the National Conference there was a relatively regular flow. At the same time Jewish organizations in the Soviet Union were feeling their oats and organizing themselves so that you had indigenous Jewish organizations within the Soviet Union itself and in the various republics, (which eventually became independent countries).

Q: Well did you- Were you involved at all with AIPAC, American-

WENICK: No.

Q: -Israeli Political Action Committee?

WENICK: No.

Q: Which is a strong lobby for Israel.

WENICK: They were a lobby for Israel. We maintained liaison with the Israelis through a separate office the Israelis had established, which focused on the emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union to Israel. The Israelis saw the migration of Soviet Jews to Israel as an element of increasing their population as they were facing a much larger Arab population around them. And so the Israelis were putting a lot of effort into this effort of migration from the Israel. We did our own lobbying. We didn't use AIPAC. We were a membership organization, so most of the major Jewish organizations in the United States, were members of the National Conference, which was one of its strengths. The collective power of all of these agencies gave the organization its strength. It's weakness was the necessity to get a consensus among 25 or 30 organizations regarding policy issues.

Q: I would think particularly with Jewish organizations-

WENICK: Absolutely.

Q: You have two Jews and-

WENICK: Three opinions. That was one of the real challenges during that period and the organization had gone through a study and a reorganization before I came on with a view toward sort of strengthening its power and its influence within the Jewish organizations.

Q: What were the, you know, I mean, you're used to, you dealt with the Kremlin for a long time, what were sort of the- what were the, either the power structures or the power structure or the- some elements that were going through your organization that you arrived-?

WENICK: I think the first thing was that you had a group of individuals in the Soviet Union who were leading or establishing Jewish organizations, so that was one group that one had to deal with. And then there was the task of working with the various Jewish organizations that were being set up.

Q: Sharansky was-

WENICK: Sharansky was still in prison when I was there, but he was certainly a symbolic leader of the Jewish movement in the Soviet Union. But there were a whole host of activists in Moscow and other parts of the Soviet Union and there was an organization called the VAAD with branches in the various republics. The VAAD had a national conference in 1990, in which leaders of Jewish advocacy organizations in other countries participated. And all this was taking place at a very difficult time in the Soviet Union; it was falling apart.

Q: Well yes, in '89, your tenure at the National Conference took place at a really interesting time for the Soviet Union.

WENICK: You are right. It was an exceedingly interesting period. As time went on some of the leaders of the Soviet Union, particularly Gorbachev, saw some advantage in currying the favor of American Jewish organizations. In fact, in October of '91, after the failed coup in August, the lay leader of our organization and I had a one hour meeting with Gorbachev in the Kremlin, talking about issues relating not only to emigration but also anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union. On the same visit to Moscow, we had a meeting with the head of the KGB in his office. These are things that never would have happened earlier.

Q: Well did the, when you had these meetings did the Russian side appreciate the situation? I mean, from your point of view the anti-Semitism, the problem of Jews in the Soviet Union?

WENICK: I think by the early '90s there was a realization among the Soviet leadership that they needed to do something, both in the terms of regularizing emigration, letting those go who wanted to and also dealing with issues of anti-Semitism. It wasn't helping them in the world arena. There were four people in the meeting with Gorbachev -- Gorbachev, his translator, Shoshana Cardin, the President of the National Conference and myself. From Moscow, we were going to Kiev for a memorial celebration at Babi Yar in the Ukraine. And one of the things we talked about was the need for the Soviet leadership to deal the issue of anti-Semitism. Gorbachev said he would think about it. A couple of days later one of his senior advisors appeared at Babi Yar and made a statement in which he strong commitment of the government at the time to deal with issues of anti-Semitism.

Q: Yes. It sets-

WENICK: Sets policy tone. Unfortunately, Gorbachev fell two months later. And I think some of his meetings, including his meeting with us in October of '91 were intended to curry favor among different groups and to strengthen his hand in the power struggle that was going on with the Soviet leadership. In the end these steps did not help him, but he thought it might help to increase his image and help his staying power.

Q: Did you have a problem of trying to get your organization involved in other matters of, like the settlements or, I mean, was this, I would assume this would be almost a constant irritant or something.

WENICK: Well we tried to stay away from these issues. Our biggest issue and the biggest challenge we faced was reaching consensus on the so-called issue of dropouts because people were leaving the Soviet Union on Israeli visas and they were destined for Israel. And they would reach Vienna, because that was the transit point, and the majority of them were saying we're not going to Israel, we're going to the United States. And so they were brought down to Italy, housed there for a period of time and then they received their refugee status and moved on to the United States. So this was an issue, it created tension between the American Jewish community and the Israelis, and it was always there.

Q: Yes. Well what happened- I mean, if a Soviet Jew got to Vienna, essentially he or she could say where they wanted- I mean, where they wanted to go and process and all and end up either in the United States or Israel? I mean, they weren't forced to go to Israel?

WENICK: No, they were not forced to go to Israel. They basically made their choice when they got to Vienna and as time went on more and more were choosing to come to the United States for two reasons; one, they had relatives in the United States and secondly, a large number of the Soviet Jews who were not enamored of the socialist system believed that while Israel was certainly a democracy, they believed that they could adjust better to life in the United States.

Q: Well you know, I mean, Israel was basically founded by European Jews-

WENICK: Socialists.

Q: -socialist Jews, which you know, was the same root that communism came out of.

WENICK: Right.

Q: It was all, part and parcel the same thing.

WENICK: Exactly. So it was- There were a variety of reasons why-

Q: It was also dangerous, you know.

WENICK: Some families with children felt that they did not want their children to face compulsory military service, which was the established practice in Israel.

Q: I mean, today, looking at this, I would be dubious about settling in Israel because you're surrounded by a population of- a very growing Arab population and eventually they'll get stronger. I mean-

WENICK: And for some people, especially with children, it was the idea that if we go to Israel they are going to be forced to be in the military because there's universal conscription. Go to the United States, it's much safer. So this was an issue.

Q: While you were doing that, did the case of Jonathan Pollard come up at all? He was an American who was convicted of spying for Israel and all. Did that- Was that-?

WENICK: Only in the sense that as national organization the National Conference on Soviet Jewry belonged to the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, which is headquartered in New York. They periodically got involved in the case of Pollard. It would be raised by one or another of the organizations that were members of the Conference of Presidents, but it wasn't an issue which the National Conference felt the need to take any part in.

Q: The reason I ask is, I've looked at the case and to me it seems pretty obvious that Pollard was passing on naval secrets to the Israelis, including where our nuclear armed submarines were, which would have been of absolutely zero value to the Israelis but he was asked to supply this and the only answer being that this had to be passed on to the Soviets as a way of getting more Jews out of Russia to the detriment of American military safety, which I think is one of the reasons why it's been quiet but all of the movements to get him out our military is adamant. And I was wondering, since there was a certain connection between-

WENICK: We never were involved in it, never saw it. I mean, as I say, it was more, at that point, of a humanitarian issue. Pollard was in jail. The material he reportedly offered to the Israelis did not deal only with issues related to the defense of Israel. Many did not understand why Secretary of Defense Weinberger urged the court to impose such a severe punishment on Pollard. The question was being asked as to why was the United States being so difficult in terms of dealing with him? After all, Israel was a friendly country to which we were selling weapons and providing a substantial amount of aid. As an aside, I was always suspect to the Israelis in large measure because I came from the State Department, which they considered to have a large number of professionals who were not always sympathetic to Israeli policies.

Q: Oh yes.

WENICK: And in fact when I was being considered for the position at the National Conference, I received a call from a member of the Israeli Embassy in Washington inviting me to lunch. I had no problem with going to lunch with him so we set a date for the luncheon. Subsequently, I received a call from the Israeli Embassy officer saying the lunch date was cancelled for some unspecified reason. And I said that's fine too. And only later did I discover that they lobbied the president of the National Conference organization who had selected me to change her choice, because I was coming from the Department of State and therefore was very suspect. And that probably colored the relationship that I had with the Israelis during at least part of my tenure at the National Conference.

Q: Did America's politics intrude at all? I mean, you know, you were- this is- American Jewry is very much involved in American politics and I was wondering whether you found it leaking into your organization.

WENICK: Well it only leaked into the organization in that the perceived strength of the American Jewish community was far less than was perceived. Administration after administration certainly was sensitive to Jewish community views and so I think that tended to open doors to you that wouldn't necessarily be open to an organization such as the National Conference. And I think the same was true in Congress. Over the years the National Conference -- and the community as a whole -- had developed a cadre of strong supporters of free emigration from the Soviet Union on the Hill and consequently the doors were usually opened; it was rare that you called an office and didn't get an appointment. But basically we had this network out there that was very involved in the issue and it had its ability to reach out.

Q: Did you have any particularly strong supporters on Capitol Hill that you can think of that-?

WENICK: Oh yes. Scoop Jackson was a very strong supporter; Senator Lautenberg of New Jersey was a very strong supporter. In fact, Senator Lautenberg he sponsored an amendment, which made it easier for Jews and others from the former Soviet Union to qualify for refugee status. There was a whole series of people around the country who were actively involved in the issue, and, when I first was there, there was even an organization of congressional wives, which included Teresa Kerry (Heinz). At the time, in the late '80s, early '90s it was an organization that had a good deal of strength and influence around Washington.

Q: Well then, after, what, three years there, what happened?

WENICK: After three years there I was approached to become Executive Director of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which is an organization that had been in existence since the 1880's. It was largely focused on helping the resettlement of Jews into the United States, and so it was-

Q: This was HIAS.

WENICK: This was HIAS.

Q: Yes, I dealt with HIAS when I first came into the Foreign Service, along with the Tolstoy Foundation.

WENICK: That's right.

Q: The Lutheran Aid Foundation, dealing with refugees from Eastern Europe.

WENICK: Where were you then?

Q: I was in Frankfurt.

WENICK: Frankfurt, right. It was the oldest of the refugee organizations in the United States. We were part of a coalition of nine refugee agencies that participated in the Department of State's refugee resettlement program.

Q: Were very effective. I was very impressed by this.

WENICK: By the time I joined HIAS the world had obviously changed. When you were dealing with them they were largely the refugees from the Second World War and by the time I came to HIAS, our largest portion of resettlement came from the former Soviet Union. For several years, we were resettling more than 40,000 people each year, which was really large. But we also did Jews and Baha'i from Iran. And I remained at HIAS until April 1998, when I resigned from my position.

Q: Was this in a way a more operational type one; I mean, before you had been sort of lobbying and all this but this, what you're doing now is really an organization that was really taking people and helping them to get settled, wasn't it?

WENICK: Well it was obviously a much larger organization. The National Conference on Soviet Jewry was rather small; I think we had six or seven employees and with a very limited budget. All of a sudden I was head of an agency that had about 160 or 170 employees, people stationed both in the United States and elsewhere with a rather large budget. So it was a much more multi-faceted job.

Q: What was the pattern of Soviet Jews coming to the United States? I mean, were there areas where they went for the most part?

WENICK: Yes, the major resettlement was in New York. I recall that about 50 percent of them went to the New York metropolitan area and within that they went to Brooklyn. The remained went to various areas of the United States.

Q: Coney Island?

WENICK: Yes, they went to the Coney Island area of Brooklyn, which became a Little Russia. If you went in that area, it was just like it was in the Soviet Union in the '70s. It was quite a scene to go there; everything was in Russian, the signs, you know, you'd go to for a walk on the boardwalk and all you heard was Russian. But the American Jewish community was participating actively in the financing of this resettlement program. I mean, the amount of money you got from the U.S. Government for each refugee arriving was \$500 or \$600, I forget now the specific amount, but it didn't go very far. So one of our goals was to try to resettle people around the country so we had large resettlement programs around the United States, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Arizona, Chicago, Atlanta, Miami and in smaller communities. One of the issues at the time was trying to resettle the incoming refugees in smaller communities. But as time went on most of them already had close relatives in the New York city area, and they wanted to resettle near their relatives.

Q: Where was your office?

WENICK: Both organizations were headquartered in New York, and it was an issue both for the organizations and for me. We were living in Washington; my wife had a career here and I didn't want to move. The National Conference already had a small office in Washington, and I went to the New York office for two or three days per week. HIAS did not have an office in Washington, so I established a small office here but I went to New York for three days a week and so commuted.

Q: Well then, did you find this in a way less political and more operational?

WENICK: It was always a mix because the organizations were different. One was basically an organization lobbying for free emigration from the Soviet Union as well as respect for human rights in the Soviet Union. HIAS was really operational, but it had its policy aspects. If the Lautenberg amendment was to lapse it would severely limit the flow of refugees from the former Soviet Union so that was always an issue out there. So we were doing both policy and operations during this period.

Q: Did you get a- I would imagine, what is it, HEW, the Department of Health, would be a big sup- I mean, the agency you more or less dealt with.

WENICK: There were two agencies; one was the Department of State and the other was HEW. Both agencies had responsibility for policy and funding of the refugee programs. So those were the two contact points in the U.S. Government that we focused on.

Q: How did you find the effectiveness of the refugee resettlement?

WENICK: You know, it's always difficult for the first few years. I mean, people come with very little knowledge of English and with skills that that were developed in a society that was different from what was needed at the time in the United States. So you would have someone who was a doctor or a dentist in the Soviet Union. He would arrive in the United States, and he couldn't immediately work as a doctor or a dentist. Overall, in

looking at the track record the efforts were really quite successful. Also a lot of the people were elderly and that made it very difficult for their resettlement but the programs actually were quite effective and some of the people have gone on to very successful careers in the United States.

We had a scholarship program at HIAS, and one of the most interesting aspects of it each year was to see these kids who have been here only two or three years applying to go to colleges and to see the skills and talents that they brought with them.

Q: Well it's just like here in Washington where we had a major influx of Vietnamese where it seemed like every 13 year old girl who came here speaking nothing but Vietnamese off a crowded refugee boat would end up as valedictorian of her high school class. I mean, you're dealing with several societies where both the Jewish society and the Vietnamese, the Greek society, I mean these really push- Koreans, they really push. I mean, there's such an emphasis on education and it pays off.

WENICK: When I left HIAS one of the things my wife and I established was a scholarship fund in memory of our parents. Awardees received either \$1,000 or \$1,500 for the year in which they were chosen. These weren't large sums, but they were of some assistance. The first person to get our award was a young lady from Baltimore who was going to MIT, which was also interesting to us because my father had graduated from MIT. It was very impressive to read year after year the stories of the awardees.

Q: Well then you, after, how long were you with HIAS?

WENICK: Let's see. I was there until 1998, about April of '98.

Q: And then what?

WENICK: And then what? My wife and I had decided that we were going to both leave our jobs in '98. My wife was running the Washington office for New York City Mayor Giuliani, and she had a career in politics. We both decided that we'd had it. And so we decided to leave our jobs. I was not focused on anything in particular; I was thinking of possibly just doing some volunteer work. My wife wasn't sure what she wanted to do and so we took about four or five months off and traveled to Italy. Out of that trip came the idea of running a home based office renting out vacation homes in Italy. So we started a home-based business, and we've been doing that now for 12 years.

Q: Oh great.

WENICK: So it's been something to occupy our time, and I was able to draw upon my experience in Italy. I spoke Italian and knew the country well, so it all came together.

Q: Well there's all this turmoil in Italy; has that had much of an effect on what you're up to?

WENICK: No, I think the American economy has had more of an impact on our business. Our business was really very successful for years; it's less successful now because of the economic downturn.

Q: Yes, sure. Well, I think it's a good place to stop.

End of interview