

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

**PETER F. BRESCIA**

*Interviewed by: Thomas Dunnigan  
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Brescia.]

*Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan speaking on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and the oral history program of the American Foreign Service. The date is May 28, 1999. Today I will be talking with Peter Brescia, who had 30 years in the field of foreign affairs, much of it spent with the United State Information Agency.*

*Peter, why don't we begin by your telling us something of your background, education, experience in the military, etc.*

BRESCIA: I grew up in New York City and went to public school in Manhattan until the eighth grade and then we moved to the Bronx, in New York, where I went to James Monroe High School. In 1940, I went to Columbia College while working part time at the same time.

In 1943, I went into the Navy and after boot camp went to communications school and came out as a radioman third class. Shortly afterwards, I was assigned to a naval patrol craft, PC568. We participated in convoying ships down to Guantanamo, Cuba along the Atlantic coast. Shortly after my first trip to Cuba, we made all necessary preparations to convoy a ship to Europe. Originally, our ship was supposed to go after the convoy work was done into the Mediterranean, however, when we arrived in Falmouth, England we were told our ship was destined for duty in the English Channel. We were there until D-Day. and our ship was one of the minor ships in the invasion and we were off to Omaha Beach on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June.

After participating in the invasion, we were one of the signal ships stationed between from 1500 to 2500 yards off the Omaha Beach. We were at Dog Red and saw the whole operation. At that time, my so-called general quarters station was at a 22 millimeter anti-aircraft gun. I was also the ship's unofficial photographer. I took rolls and rolls of film, which I have never seen. The rolls of film were sent to the Navy, but hopefully one day, I may get an opportunity to see them.

After the invasion, we were on patrolling beach and the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey. One day our ship set off a floating mine and bent our shaft, we were sent to England for repairs. Months later our ship was assigned patrol duty in northern Germany, and our home port was Bremerhaven.

*Q: The war was still on?*

BRESCIA: No, the war had stopped and we were there as a ship patrolling the area early in the occupation period.

*Q: How long did you stay in the navy?*

BRESCIA: I was in the navy until 1946. The ship was decommissioned and I was sent home early February. I was home one day, got into civilian clothes, and then went back to Columbia College. I had arranged with the Dean to enter classes that had already started a few weeks earlier.

*Q: What were you studying?*

BRESCIA: I was studying American and European history and languages, French and Italian.

*Q: What excited your interest in the Foreign Service?*

BRESCIA: Originally, I wanted to become a language teacher. After coming back from Europe, I realized that in order for me to be a really effective language teacher I would have to go and spend a few years in Europe, both in Italy and France. I was on my way to a doctorate degree, but after receiving my masters, I went into the School of International Affairs at Columbia. I decided that the profession of teaching was not for me, that I wanted to be somewhat more active after having lived through the period of the Second World War and visiting some of the European countries. So, I decided on a career in the Foreign Service. I prepared myself for the exams, and in November, 1950, I entered the State Department in the class of November 30, 1950. After three months of German language and another three months of area studies, we went to Germany.

*Q: So, they take a man who has spent his whole life studying French and Italian and send him to Germany.*

BRESCIA: Apparently that is where the Foreign Service needed bodies at that time.

*Q: Were you part of that group that went over to be Kreis Resident Officers?*

BRESCIA: That's correct. Some of our group became Kreis Resident Officers and some were assigned to the entry level positions in the consulates. Remember this is the period of the High Commissioner in Germany. We did not have regular diplomatic relations with Germany. It was still a period of occupation.

*Q: Did they tell you before you left Washington where you would be going to be assigned or were you just assigned to Germany with placement after arrival?*

BRESCIA: We were not assigned to a particular post. We were just assigned to Germany. In my case, I spent three months as a trainee with a senior Kreis Resident Officer, and then was given my own assignment in Dinkelsbuhl, a thousand year old city on Germany's "Romantic Road". I launched my career as a Kreis Resident Officer doing basically public affairs work. We had very few functions that were still part of the military occupation. We conducted a regular cultural and information program. Remember, at this time the German program was similar to our the Japanese program. Later a public affairs officer supervised as many as 25 American officers. I was assigned to the Munich consular district, which was probably the largest consular district in the Foreign Service. It had more Americans at that time than we probably have now in most of Europe. Incidentally, our consul general was Charles Thayer, a fantastic individual.

*Q: And a Russian expert.*

BRESCIA: Yes.

*Q: Can you describe the life of a Kreis Resident Officer? Did you have to do your own administration? Did you do any political or economic reporting? Did you have to hire staff, etc.?*

BRESCIA: We conducted a full program. Although, I was the only American in Dinkelsbuhl, I had three landkreise (three counties) and two offices, which were both staffed by Germans. I was the only American in the area. The closest American was in Ansbach, which is about 40-50 miles away and at that time was a larger town and a military base. I hired people. We did our own administrative work and, of course, we were responsible to our superior in Nuremberg, which was the regional office for northern Bavaria. We had a full program including a very active film program, and we coordinated our adult education program with the Germans.

*Q: English teaching was probably a large part of it.*

BRESCIA: English teaching, but at the same time, it was a program that tried to inculcate into German society some of the ideals we wanted to emphasize after the Second World War, re-education of the German population along democratic lines was our goal. We had a number of excellent Germans who were working with us. In fact, after so many years, I am still friendly and correspond every so often with individuals and former students.

The Director of the Adult Education program has hosted us since then and invited us to participate in some of the ancient festivities of Dinkelsbuhl. We vacationed in Dinkelsbuhl some years ago and he has also had my sons there at one time as well as my granddaughter. So, there was a very good friendship.

*Q: Did you have any American military in your district?*

BRESCIA: We didn't have American military in the three counties that I supervised, but

we had very close relations with the American military in Ansbach. Later on in my Kreis Resident Officer, and also, Amerika Haus director positions, I acted as liaison between the American military and the German officials. For me, it was been a very successful period. I had excellent relations with them, and we worked together cooperating in defusing any sort of crisis that we might have in the area, both in Ansbach and later on in Erlangen, where we had a division commander with the rank of general while I was just a young Foreign Service officer.

After Dinkelsbuhl, I served in Schweinfurt, at the tail end of the Resident Officer Program, replacing Arthur Tienken. I stayed there a short time finally closing the office and transferring to Erlangen, a university town. Our Amerika Haus, cultural center, was at one time a former Nazi headquarters, a beautiful building. In Erlanger I had a lot of contact with the American military. In fact, we were the focus of a lot of cultural programs and very active in sponsoring the 7<sup>th</sup> Army Symphony Orchestra, which was one of the finest musical groups that we had in Germany. They appealed to the Germans. Our program sponsored them in major cities throughout Bavaria. In Erlangen, we had a very active and interested Lord Mayor who was very German but very pro-American. He was a member of the Social Democratic Party and a very good personal friend, as well as a very important official contact.

*Q: I'm interested in hearing you mention Erlangen, that was my last post in the army before I was discharged. Tell me, after Dinkelsbuhl you went to Schweinfurt?*

BRESCIA: Yes.

*Q: Were the people there antagonistic because of the terrible bombing we had given them during the war?*

BRESCIA: No, they weren't. In fact, we made a lot of good friends there. I never experienced any serious antagonism in Schweinfurt, but they did point out that in spite of the fact that we heavily bombed Schweinfurt, and after the heavy bombing, 80 percent of the ball bearing industry was still functioning, of course, it was functioning underground.

*Q: You went to Erlangen after Schweinfurt?*

BRESCIA: Yes. There we worked very, very closely with the University of Erlangen working with Professor Arnold Bergsträsser, who had lived in the U.S. during most of the Nazi period . We did everything we possibly could to help him develop an American Studies program at the university. This was a highlight of our activity Erlangen, in addition, to all the wonderful friendships we developed. Later on, Professor Bergsträsser went to Freiburg University and coincidentally I was later transferred to Freiburg from Erlangen. So, we continued the friendship. There he also had a nucleus of students that were studying American history, American literature and American culture in general, and did their dissertations in an American field of study. Bergsträsser was later sent to the University of Munich and there he supervised a large American Studies program. So, in essence we had both Munich and Erlangen extremely active in the study of American

history, culture and literature. We did everything we possibly could to help him enlarge this program.

*Q: His name seems familiar to me.*

BRESCIA: Professor Bergsträsser was a German who had left Germany earlier and returned after the war. He was a great influence on a lot of students including some of the best thinkers of Germany during the last fifty years.

*Q: In your moving around Germany, what were your relations with HICOG (Allied High Commission), which then, of course, was supreme in Bonn and had an active interest in public affairs programs?*

BRESCIA: We had a very active public affairs program, but HICOG didn't last very long after we arrived. We got there in the early part of 1951, and in May 1955 HICOG was terminated and then it became an embassy. Dr. Conant, who was the former president of Harvard University, replaced Mr. McCloy. Incidentally, one of the individuals that was also instrumental in working in Bavaria, for instance, was Dr. Schuster, who was a former president of City College in New York. He was a great person and did a tremendous amount of work with the German people during the so-called reorientation and denazification period of HICOG. But as you pointed out HICOG was terminated in 1955, and we then went into an embassy mode with an ambassador.

We in the field got a tremendous amount of assistance from HICOG during that period and the resident officers were supposed to be the darlings of McCloy, who at that time was the supreme civilian in Germany and a former Assistant Secretary of War. This cooperation between the field and headquarters continued after HICOG became an embassy.

*Q: You got guidance then from the embassy?*

BRESCIA: Oh yes, we got guidance from Frankfurt at that time where HICOG was established, and also, from our consular supervisors after the embassy was established.

*Q: Did you do any reporting?*

BRESCIA: I did a lot of reporting on our program and what was happening in the area that I was living in at that time. I wasn't asked to do it, but having a great interest in the country and the history and what was going on, I think it melded with whatever we were doing. You couldn't help but report on the attitudes of the people that you were working with or that you had contact with. This trend followed me all the way to the end of my career at various other posts as well. Not only did I do the job that I was assigned to do -- strictly USIS work -- I was always interested in politics. So, my interest brought me into the political field, and I cooperated very closely with the embassy when at an embassy level and with the consulates, etc. Whatever information I obtained, I always made it available to the various sections of our embassy.

*Q: It was much appreciated, I'm sure. I know I used to get a lot of information from my contacts in USIA.*

BRESCIA: Later on, I did even more than that in my posts in France and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan I was able to do lots more of this type of reporting.

*Q: During your posts in Germany when did you come in contact with the concept of the Amerika Haus?*

BRESCIA: When I was assigned to Schweinfurt. The resident officer program was on the verge of going out. Arthur Tienken was the last one there. I took over and it became an Amerika Haus.

*Q: Briefly describe for us the concept of an America Haus.*

BRESCIA: The concept of an Amerika Haus is very simple. It is really an American cultural center. We had a full range of public affairs activities. We had a film program, a cultural program, set up speakers, had relations with the universities, the schools and all the different non-governmental organizations in Germany at that time in the area that I was responsible for. Our aim was, of course, to bring as much understanding of what we, as Americans were, and at the same time make sure that it was a mutual interest with the Germans and that they benefited as well. We had an extensive library because after the war Germany was devoid of books and any cultural activities at all. We were the main focal point in many areas of cultural activities for the Germans. We had an auditorium, speakers that we presented, singers, dance groups, and other programs that we obtained through the activities of our office both in Frankfurt and later in Bonn. So, we were very active. We had a full range of our programs and we distributed our programs throughout the area that we lived in. So everyone was aware that they were welcomed and didn't have to pay anything for these programs.

*Q: Did you ever have any demonstrations outside the Amerika Haus?*

BRESCIA: In Germany, never. The demonstrations come later in my career.

*Q: Have we done away totally with the Amerika Haus idea, or do they still exist?*

BRESCIA: They still exist to a great extent, but fewer in numbers and mostly in the major cities of Germany. We have one in Frankfurt, Munich and major consular districts. So, wherever you find a consulate with a consul general or capital cities, we still have a presence. But not as extensive as we had years and years ago. Don't forget I retired about 20 years ago.

*Q: You spent some time in Bonn?*

BRESCIA: In Bonn, I was assistant cultural affairs officer and my responsibilities were

to work with non-governmental organizations and try to plan programs for the posts in the area. I was primarily responsible for working with people who were fostering European integration in Germany and who would be working with us in harmony on many of the political issues of the day.

*Q: Did you feel that senior embassy officials took any interest in what you were doing?*

BRESCIA: I had a lot of friendships, and I found working with them to be very beneficial. They took great interest in the work. Don't forget, this was 1956 and in Germany things were beginning to move. And, of course, the situation with the Soviet Union at that time was very tense. We worked together as a unit. I always encouraged, for my part working with people in the consulates and embassy. Our program was in total harmony with our overall aims in the country. It didn't deviate at all. There was no hot-dogging, going off on our own trying to do things that were not in line with the overall program that our country wanted in Germany.

*Q: When did you move from State to USIA? USIA really came about in 1953, I think.*

BRESCIA: USIA came about in 1953, and I moved almost immediately. I was given a choice of whether to stay with State or work in the program. I'm really a people person and found that the scope of the work that I was doing in public affairs, in the cultural field and press field was more challenging and opted to go with USIA at that time. Quite a few people did that. In my class, we had some who stayed with State. Bruce Laingen, for one, became an ambassador. We had others who became top officials in USIA as myself ending up as deputy area director. But, you had an option at that time to do as you wished.

*Q: Yes, I had friends who were given this option. Do you have any more comments about your many years in Germany?*

BRESCIA: Well, the years in Germany were really wonderful years in the sense that you were able to experiment. We did a lot of things that were extremely worthwhile. We were heavily involved in educational exchange programs. Even there we worked very closely with the consulates and embassy and our political and economic colleagues. I didn't do too much economic reporting because there wasn't really that great a need at that time, but wherever there was a need and when something came up, I made it my business to make sure that my colleagues in the economic section knew about it.

One of the things in Germany that was fantastic was the fact that we were able to work as young officers with people in the German leadership that later on became important government officials. In my case I worked very closely with Helmut Schmidt who later became foreign minister and then chancellor. He spoke in our program as a member of the workers' union at that time about European integration. He was one of the finest speakers that we had, and we programmed him almost everywhere in Germany to speak. As you know during that time, European union was one of the major political aims of our country. He was an outstanding person.

*Q: In 1956 you moved from Germany to France.*

BRESCIA: That's right.

*Q: How did that come about? Did you request an assignment to France?*

BRESCIA: I was supposed to go to Columbia University to study Czech and Czech area studies at that time. But there was a need in France and on one of the trips of our area director at that time, he met me and I told him my next stop was Czech language training.

The director's next stop was France and he called me up and said that I was needed in France and did I mind not going to the university. I said, "No, I don't." He had me assigned to France as branch public affairs officer in Tours, located in the Loire valley and the area of the major castles of France. We had a branch office there with about four Americans. It took in half of Normandy, most of Brittany and extended from Tours to Nantes and all the way up to Caen, a major university city in France.

*Q: You must have spent a lot of time in your Citroen racing around.*

BRESCIA: Yes. It was a delightful period. I had one of the largest USIS areas of responsibility and I enjoyed it immensely. We worked with all of the major universities. Once again, I got deeply involved in fostering American Studies at the Universities of Caen and Poitiers. Of course, it took me also to the beaches of Normandy where I had been during the war.

The program flourished. We did a lot of work with the young cadets of La Fleche Military Academy, and I worked very closely with the director of studies who later became a USIS (United States Information Service) employee after he retired. We had a wonderful friendship with him as well.

There were a number of highlights during that period. We participated very actively in the twinning of the city of Rennes and Rochester, New York. We had a very active program and I participated in the creation of a bi-national center in the city of Rennes. Rennes still has this library and is still twinned with Rochester. I became very active working with the city of Brest in preparing for the ceremonies for the re-inauguration of the WWI naval monument in Brest. At the ceremony we had the Prime Minister of France, Michel Debré, the chief of naval operations, and the Secretary of the U.S. Navy. What happened was the city of Brest was the main city of disembarkation in the First World War, and when the Germans came during the Second World War, they destroyed the monument. It was rebuilt under the Battle Monuments Commission's program and inaugurated during the period I was in France. I was in France from 1956 to 1961.

*Q: Those were difficult years in many ways for France. They had lost Vietnam and they were losing Algeria. Did you notice any particular anti-American sentiment or just normal French feelings?*



BRESCIA: It was normal French feeling. The political scene was not always the best for us because as you remember at that time a young Senator Kennedy was actively engaged in needling the French concerning Vietnam and Algiers. France went through a very difficult period at that time. The senator of Indre-et-Loire, Michel Debré, who later became prime minister and Early on I formed good relationship. I also worked with and knew a lot of people in the area who worked with Debré during the German occupation and who were active in the resistance. Michel Debré was an activist and a strong supporter of General de Gaulle. He had ideas about the United States which were very similar to de Gaulle, very nationalistic in feelings, but he never harbored any ill feelings toward Americans. He just felt that many of our policies were wrong. We got into a number of extremely heated conversations when he was a member of the senate, but the respect we had for each other overcame antagonism. He mentioned quite candidly that he had no hard feelings about Americans. He loved and worked with Americans, but felt that he would have handled our policies differently.

*Q: That is not an untypical French feeling.*

BRESCIA: He also spoke very glowingly of General de Gaulle. He was very, very loquacious at the Brest memorial ceremonies, both to me personally and to Americans in general. He expressed how he felt and how the French felt. We had very close relations not only with the American military, but with the French military. There was a French military unit in Tours. One of the interesting stories that I would like to relate to you concerned this French military unit. During the very chaotic period between France and Algeria, you remember that Jacques Soustelle at that time was very active and had been an “ally” of de Gaulle. But when de Gaulle promised the Algerians their independence, Soustelle split away and he went into hiding for a period of time. Then suddenly he left the country and no one knew where he had gone. I happened to be at a reception with some very close French friends of mine who informed me that Soustelle was in Algeria. When I got home, I called Paris to inform the embassy. The embassy was not aware where Soustelle was at that time, and was greatly appreciative. Our public affairs officer at that time, Bill Cody, was also extremely well connected with his colleagues and the embassy.

The USIS Tours operation was extensive operating in 24 French Departments. France’s parliamentary system of leading mayors were also members of the senate and chamber or deputies allowed us to develop strong personal and official contacts. And, we developed close contact with most of the prefectures and their centrally administrative heads of various local institutions. Whenever we went to an area where there was a préfet or deputy préfet, we always made sure that he knew we were there and talking with the university or schools or any of the other non-governmental organizations leaders.

*Q: Did you undertake speaking engagements yourself?*

BRESCIA: I did. I spoke both in Germany and France. I did a lot of speaking in Germany and participated in seminars, especially those on American studies. I did the same in

France and also spoke to French students at various university meetings. They weren't always formal but occasionally some presentations were formal.

*Q: Did the ambassador ever get to Tours to visit you?*

BRESCIA: Oh, yes. First of all, the ambassador came down from Paris on a tour of Tours and the city's environs. That was Ambassador Amory Houghton. We had Minister Charles Yost come on an extensive visit. They were also present at many of the functions that we had at that time. Ambassador Houghton was present at the twinning of the cities of Rennes and Rochester. The rededication of the Naval monument in Brest had in attendance the Prime Minister, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, the Ambassador and top U.S. and French Naval officers. The Ambassador and I made an official visit to the city of Saint Nazaire, which had been a former submarine base for the German navy. We had many visits from embassy colleagues. Tours was an important city and many touristic sites. Our PAO (Public Affairs Officer) and deputy PAO would come from time-to-time as well. We had a very active program and whenever I thought the program was interesting enough, I would ask either a USIS or Embassy officer to participate. We also had a big reception once at the Le Man 24 hour raceway to which our Embassy and USIS officers participated in official functions held after the race.

*Q: Did you have American military in your district?*

BRESCIA: Yes. We had a military base in Chinon, which was about 20 miles from Tours. We had a big contingent of air force in Chateauroux where the mayor of the city was a communist. But the relationship between the military and the public in Chateauroux, in spite of the fact that he was a communist, was absolutely exemplary. When de Gaulle decided that the Americans had to leave, the mayor of Chateauroux was absolutely shattered, attesting to the wonderful relationship that the U.S. military had cemented. Very often, I was called in to participate in the resolution of some problems between the France communists and the military. To help the French military had a fantastic Liaison Officer who smoothed over many problems. He was so pro-American that it was almost unbelievable. He did everything possible to make sure that the relationship was always harmonious.

And then, we had a large military contingent in Orléans as well, which was also in my area. One year after the ceremonies at Orléans commemorating Joan of Arc, de Gaulle visited Tours upon the invitation of the Deputy Mayor Royer and Senator Michel Debré. I was introduced to de Gaulle. In a very brief conversation on the receiving line, he talked about the work that we were doing and how wonderful it was to be in Orléans and visit the American military there. This was in spite of the fact that he wanted to remove the American military from French soil. In essence, we were fully integrated into the community without losing our identity. Even the American military at Chinon was community oriented and never had any serious problems. Incidentally, one of my sons was born in Chinon at the American Army hospital

*Q: Were you ever called on to do any consular functions? I was thinking of protection*

*and welfare of American citizens getting into trouble in the district.*

BRESCIA: I didn't have any official consular functions but American citizens did get into trouble. Since we were the only civilian American operation in the area, American tourists, both in Germany and France, would come with requests. Some lost their passports. Some needed other types of assistance. We always helped, but we were never asked to do any consular functions per se.

*Q: Not to go visit anybody in jail?*

BRESCIA: We didn't have any Americans in jail, thank God, but we did render assistance. I remember once in Freiburg, Germany, we had a woman and husband come in who had lost their passports. They were going to Switzerland and they couldn't get there without passports. We were able to help them and facilitated their arrangements. They also needed some money, which, I must say, I got back. We did things like that without any hesitation.

*Q: You had the flag after all and people saw it.*

BRESCIA: Exactly.

*Q: One of my last questions about your time in France is a general one and that is the French are very prickly about their culture. How did they feel about your being there selling American culture?*

BRESCIA: I never felt any hostility to anything American. There was hostility toward a particular foreign policy objective that we were trying to get to them to understand. They didn't like the way NATO was operating, although they had been a member of NATO for a while. But, I never personally felt any hostility, and neither did any of my other officers; I had an assistant public affairs officer, administrative assistant and a British national who had been in France for many years. I had several staff members, one of which was a retired colonel in the French army, who was a graduate of Saint-Cyr, one who had been in the French Foreign Service and came to work as a top assistant and he later became an international civil servant in the European Union operation, a daughter of a university president who was one of our librarians, a daughter of a high civil servant in the equivalent of the American IRS section, and the widow of a military officer. There wasn't any feeling that there was any distinction. We treated them in every sense of the word as colleagues. They were invited by the leading citizens of the community, at times with me, at times without me, so they were themselves well integrated into the society. There was no feeling that they were beneath anybody.

*Q: They were people of substance.*

BRESCIA: Yes. And they were people of education. They were extremely well liked from the driver to the top assistant that I had on my staff. Through them, we established a lot of personal contacts. So there was never really any hostility.

One of the things that we also did in France was when Stanford University wanted to establish a study center for their students they came to Tours and we convinced them that Tours was the place for them to be. The French spoken in Tours was really the best French in the country. We had a French educational institution called Institut de Touraine, which taught French to foreign students. They did finally establish themselves and this was another opportunity to have our colleagues visit our operation. Stanford University still has a branch in Tours. I used to introduce them to French society and French-American relations with a lecture and discussion to all new students. And we also invited them to our home for social functions, mixing the professors and students with our French guests. Once I had the whole group of French students at my home for a reception and introduced them to the Roman Catholic archbishop, who was a very dominant and important member of the society. In fact, the Archbishop had been very active in the worker priest movement in its early stages.

On the more personal, our children attended to French schools, and they were accepted and did very well. There were differences and some friction would often tease them. Being of Italian background, whenever they would get on “their high horse” I would say, “Well, look, I come from a background that even precedes you in many ways.” You know how the French are about their culinary art. Once I added to the conversation, “Well, you know, it was Catherine de Medici who taught you French people how to eat with a knife, spoon and a fork.” But it was always done in jest and accepted in the same vein, with everyone smiling.

Sometimes conversations became rather serious. We were having dinner at the home of a man who was a leading member of the community and also an amateur painter. He came out with some very strange concepts that were very close to Nazi ideology. I said to him that he seemed to talk just like the way the Nazis used to talk. He didn’t take offense. We discussed his attitudes and how I felt about them,. . . At the end we became best friends. In fact, when we departed France, he gave me a painting, which he had done which now hangs in our dining room. He dedicated it to “a far distant cousin”.

With the French it is interesting. You could criticize them, do anything you want as long as you do it nicely and with a smile. Very often they would say, “Mr. Brescia you are just like us. You understand us very well.” And to some extent I think I did. I always had empathy for foreigners. I had studied both the French language and its cultural history with perhaps one of the outstanding professors in our country at that time, Carlton Hayes.

*Q: He wrote the history book.*

BRESCIA: Yes. So, it was second nature to me. Even though my French wasn’t always perfect, it was good enough for me to hold conversations and express myself even in a delicate way.

*Q: Did you do any press guidance?*

BRESCIA: We didn't do press guidance, but we contacted the press people personally and sent material to them through the embassy. We also had an extensive book translation program in France. We would get a lot of the important texts that put across our political, economic and overall cultural philosophy making good use of this book translation program.

*Q: This was translating American books into French?*

BRESCIA: Yes. We also had for a long period of time an extensive program in introducing the French press to the American press. We would send them the New York Times and other newspapers, including the Herald Tribune, that we felt were worthwhile and would give the French an idea of what the American press was like. Then, just before we left France, in cooperation with the American military, we took a group of 20 senior French regional journalists and editors from our area and brought them to the United States for a month's trip.

*Q: Did you go with them?*

BRESCIA: I, as well as a colleague from the public information section of the military, went with them as escort officers. It was a fantastic trip. We had a military plane at our disposal and had an exhausting schedule. So, our contacts with the French press were very, very close. We did not issue guidance but got material from Paris. We would also give the universities a lot of translated books or books in English that they could use. The American studies program at the University of Caen had people who could read English fluently because they also had a good English Literature program. In fact, the head of that department was France's outstanding scholar on Charles Dickens. The last time I was in France we had lunch together. Sometimes, we would have someone from the embassy come and make a presentation of books. It might be the ambassador, political officer, economic officer, or public affairs officer depending on who was receiving the books. The French are very sensitive about being treated properly.

I talked previously about Stanford students. Through our French contacts throughout the city, many French families invited American students to their homes on a regular basis.

USIA also had a very active music and film program. Tours was the center for a documentary film festival. We were very active in assisting in the presentation of American submissions. At first, it was a French national festival and later it became an international festival. That gave us an opportunity to contact people to send their entries into the festival.

*Q: You had a very active life in Tours.*

BRESCIA: It was an active and rewarding one. We also had the opportunity to meet with Alexander Calder, an American expatriate working in France. I haven't talked about all the other activities that we did. For instance, we were invited to the famous St. Peter's Abbey at Solesmes for an Easter Mass celebration.

*Q: The chanting there must have been wonderful.*

BRESCIA: Yes, it was gorgeous. We presented the Boston Symphony Orchestra at the cathedral in Chartres. My area went all the way up to Chartres, 90 miles outside of Paris. Being Catholics, we were also invited to attend a midnight mass at the Cathedral in Chartres. It was a long haul, but we did it once or twice during our stay.

Max Ernst, another leading member of the French community, who was born in Germany, immigrated to the United States during the Hitler period, was one of the outstanding artists of Germany in the period. He was a truly modern artist. There was an American influence in the community, which was rather extensive. Even today in France, you go to Normandy and Brittany and you find no hostility notwithstanding being bombed or shelled. They knew what was at stake and so they took it as it came. Just two years ago, we went and visited the beaches again in Normandy. American flags were flying along with other flags all along the Normandy coast. They continue to celebrate the landing of our troops in 1944 every year.

*Q: That's wonderful. In 1961, you had to leave and come back to Washington.*

BRESCIA: I came back to Washington and was assigned as desk officer for NATO, the Common Market and OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). We supervised programs with our colleagues in the field as well as with State.

*Q: I wanted to ask you about your relations with State because all of those programs were our major European programs at the time. It was in those years, 1961-62, that there was a big push from the Kennedy administration with George Ball and others all behind this.*

BRESCIA: Throughout Europe at that time we had a very active program fostering NATO, the Common Market, European unity, activities with OECD, and with our Scandinavian colleagues whether they were in OECD or not. It was one of our main program functions during that whole period prior to my returning to Washington. When Europe united in NATO, NATO didn't overshadow the Common Market or European Unity, but it all went hand in hand.

I didn't take any field trips to Europe during that period, but we had a group of NATO parliamentarians come for a visit to the United States..

*Q: Did you escort them around?*

BRESCIA: We escorted them around during their brief stay in Washington. In fact, I also have a little memento, a silver tray that was given to me commemorating the visit of NATO parliamentarians. We were in the Oval office and presented the visitors to President Kennedy. I was there with my military colleague who also escorted the group. I

also participated in the NATO ministerial meeting in Canada.

*Q: Did you have any real problems? What were your concerns most of the time while you were in that job?*

BRESCIA: I didn't have any real problems and no real concerns. We worked closely with State Department officers. However, sometimes at this particular juncture I got the impression that there wasn't a really deep understanding of the programs that we had in this field by our State colleagues. It was one of my aims to make our colleagues in State understand what we were doing in the field to publicize and work towards the goal of strengthening NATO. I think when there was a better understanding of USIS functions our relations were smoother. There was a certain feeling of reticence during this period. State officers believed that this was strictly a political function and had nothing to do with USIA. Yet, at the same time, our NATO ambassador in Paris, Ambassador Thomas Knight Finletter, was very interested in our program. He worked very closely with our public affairs advisor to NATO. His press officer later became a USIS officer. She and I worked very closely, she from Paris, trying to set up programs that they could participate in, and actually work. As you know the public affairs advisor to NATO had a totally different function. He didn't have an operating program. Country programs were run by the PAO in each country. So, there was a split responsibility. He would work closely with the appropriate public affairs officer when needed. He provided European posts with materials that the NATO central office in Paris had which could be used in country operations.

*Q: You are talking about the embassy in Brussels and the NATO public affairs advisor?*

BRESCIA: Yes. First it was in Paris and then it went to Brussels. But, this is the period when it was still in Paris.

*Q: This was the period when you were in USIA when de Gaulle vetoed British membership in the Common Market. Did that cause many ripples back here?*

BRESCIA: Disappointment yes, but it didn't cause too many ripples as far as I can remember. There was always a feeling that the British were somewhat reticent anyhow.

*Q: I was with Mr. Ball that day in Germany when he got the word and he was very upset.*

BRESCIA: I can understand Mr. Ball being upset, but I don't think it caused much of a ripple within our country or in England.

*Q: No, except for that minority who was pushing hard for it. After several years in USIA, you were rewarded by going to the National War College.*

BRESCIA: Yes. I went to the National War College in 1963. I wanted to go on the European tour with the college, but I was told that since I had served in Europe for ten years I should go elsewhere. So, I took the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia,

never thinking that I would serve at any of the places in these areas. It was a wonderful year, and we cemented a lot of friendships both with the military and our State colleagues. Of course, the USIA contingent was rather small, we only had three officers. I still participate in many of the programs that the college conducts. In fact, I'm a member of the National War College Alumni Association.

The one wonderful thing there, in addition to what I have already mentioned, was getting to know Ambassador Winthrop Brown. He was one of the finest persons that I have known. I sought his council many times. You have to write a major paper at the War College. The first subject that I thought I wanted to work on was cybernetics. I wanted very much to see if technology could transfer information or knowledge technologically to persons who didn't have technology. If you remember during that period, we were very much fascinated by the fact that we were working in the developing world. How do you transfer knowledge and information from a developed country to a developing country? I thought that some mechanical system could do this, like a thinking cap or doing it when someone is inculcating in the memory bank when someone was sleeping. I was dissuaded because it was felt that there wasn't enough information on the subject for me to explore. Being very interested in Europe they did let me work in that area. My paper was "A European Nuclear Deterrent within NATO".

*Q: Very much under discussion in those years.*

BRESCIA: Yes. And, very much beaten down by the Kennedy administration. I thought this was wrong because I thought Europe should be built along the lines where they could be working with us, but also independent. It strikes a little bit along the lines of what de Gaulle was saying. My working in Europe convinced me that Europe needed to have this for their own self-esteem. You know what happens when a child depends on his parents too long. Unfortunately, I think we are seeing the seeds of this now in the very tragic situation Europe has had in Kosovo and Bosnia. The Europeans seem to be totally immobilized when they have the force, the money, and all the resources they need to act independently. They could not act independently unless we took the lead politically, militarily and financially.

This paper caused a considerable stir in the National War College, as did my presentation. Although I thought; it was very simple and did not think it was necessary to cause that much discussion, nevertheless it did. Ambassador Brown encouraged me to write the paper. He never said whether he agreed with me or not, but he did not discourage me. I was very pleased by that.

*Q: He would. He was that type of individual. After the War College, where were you were assigned?*

BRESCIA: I was assigned to Vietnam in 1964.

*Q: Did we have a large presence there by then?*



BRESCIA: No. I was assigned as cultural affairs officer. The program was a normal USIS cultural and information program, although the information side of it was handled by another officer. We had an information officer and a PAO, who was a member of the country team, occasionally I also sat in at special meetings.

In my office, I had several Americans. I had a center director, an assistant cultural affairs officer, and a binational center director. I was also responsible for branch offices in southern Vietnam – Hue, Da Lat, Can Tho -- and bi-national centers in Saigon, Da Nang and Nha Trang. I visited some of these places during the time I was there. I was not there very long, I must confess for a number of reasons. I found Vietnam fascinating. I personally thought it was very difficult to conduct a normal cultural program while war was going on, especially when we augmented our forces in February, 1965 and our families were sent out of the country to the Philippines. In my own mind, I thought it was ludicrous for us to conduct a regular cultural program. I was not terribly interested in becoming part of the psychological warfare apparatus, although I was asked to participate and help in the some cultural activities with the military. My view of the political and military situation on the ground precluded a normal program. Either you conduct an out and out psychological warfare operation or you conduct a cultural operation which was not feasible. The information side of USIS was more attuned to this. In a way, I made my feelings known. After a while it was very difficult for me to operate.

I was not a very happy camper in Vietnam. Not because I didn't like the assignment. I liked working with the Vietnamese. In fact, we still have a very close friend who we just saw recently and who has written a book on Vietnam. He was the head of the cultural division of the foreign office in South Vietnam when I was there. He and his family and our family were very close. Some of our kids even went to school together. But, I really thought that USIA's role in an augmented military operation was really wrong and there was some strife within my own staff about this philosophy.

Finally I was reassigned. First I was supposed to go to Rome as deputy cultural attaché, but then they needed someone real close and you know how decisions are made. They will send you to a nearby post if there is a need there. Well, the Consulate General in Dacca needed a cultural affairs officer, so I was assigned to Dacca instead of Rome.

*Q: There is a difference.*

BRESCIA: I was very disappointed. But, needless to say, Dacca was a professionally rewarding assignment in the sense that we were able to do things in Dacca that were difficult to do in other posts.

*Q: We will get back to the Dacca situation, but let's return for a moment to Vietnam. I've often wondered what a cultural affairs officer from our side would do there when the Vietnamese had been exposed to a century or two of French culture.*

BRESCIA: To begin with, we had a very active program in Vietnam, mostly before the war became heated. We had an extensive binational center program. We had an extensive

program of book translations from English into Vietnamese or from French into Vietnamese. I was assigned to Vietnam because I spoke French and had lived in France for a number of years. There was a need there and the cultural affairs officer post had been left vacant for quite a while. But, remember this is before the buildup of February, 1965. We had centers in various parts of Vietnam. We had a center in Hue, Da Lat, Can Tho, and binational centers in Da Nang and Nha Trang, but not in the deep hinterland or mountain areas, with the exception of Da Lat. We also had a very good exchange program. We exchanged leaders and I headed the group that made the selections of the leaders both on the political and non-political sides.

*Q: To come to the United States to study?*

BRESCIA: Yes, to come to study or visit. We had a good exchange program of students that we were still sending over to the United States. On this committee, in a true sense of the country team concept, we had representatives from AID and various levels within the embassy representing different interests.

We had had problems with some of the Buddhist monks killing themselves and hurting themselves and I thought it would be worthwhile to send top Buddhist leaders to the United States. I worked very closely with Richard Gard, who at that time was working out of our Consulate General in Hong Kong. He was an American Buddhist who had been hired by the State Department as a consultant. We finally settled on one of the main leaders of the Buddhists in Vietnam, a venerated leader who wasn't an activist in the true sense of the word. He wasn't anti-government, but not much involved in the politics of the day. He went to the United States. After that we sent a couple of young Buddhists. This program helped us form a very good relationship with Buddhist leaders. Whenever Richard Gard came from Hong Kong USIS arranged visits and programs with the Buddhist community. We also formed better personal contacts. Richard Gard was able to help us because he spoke their language philosophically, more so than an occidental. He opened the door not only to understand Buddhism, but also for better personal contacts. We exploited mutual understanding. For as long as I can remember being there, we had fruitful cooperation with the Buddhist leadership.

We also had other targeted cultural programs that we were still able to conduct at that time. We had a very large book translation program. In fact, my friend, who was the cultural director at the Foreign Office, was at one time working with the book translation program. We distributed books on American history, culture, and life in general.

We had an active music program to the extent we could get people to come to Vietnam. Not that many wanted to come.

*Q: Did we have a Fulbright program?*

BRESCIA: Yes, we did.

*Q: Would Americans come to Vietnam in those turbulent years?*

BRESCIA: We had a few. I wasn't there long enough to give you a full perspective. But they did come. We had a lot of Americans from various other universities who were studying Vietnam and they participated very often in some of our programs, when they had the opportunity to do so. We had scholars who were attached to USAID programs and sometimes attached to university programs. So, we had a large group of Americans that were available.

*Q: Were the French resentful of our efforts to sell American culture in Vietnam?*

BRESCIA: The French in Paris were resentful, but they needed our assistance and help and I guess they figured there was no use in trying to do anything about it. But, they always felt that they were superior. I found that the Vietnamese did not resent learning about our culture. The Vietnamese had an open mind to America. As you may know, Ho Chi Minh tried very hard to persuade Americans to let the Vietnamese decide for themselves whether they would be independent or ruled by the French. The Vietcong were very much against our giving assistance to the French.

To answer your question, the French that we met in Vietnam did not resent us. Just a few Vietnamese people that I met at first had a certain feeling that Americans didn't have much to offer. But, by the end of my short stay, they accepted Americans and wanted to know what we could give them, could teach them, if anything. They still had the Vietnamese concept that their culture is a thousand years old and therefore what could anybody teach them. But, nevertheless, they were interested in what we had to offer and they were open to it. We worked very closely with the University of Saigon and I became very friendly with the university's president, who was a medical doctor. He was, of course, extremely interested in the progress of medicine in the United States. He spoke good English.

The Vietnamese-American Association, which was our binational center in Vietnam, had the most active English teaching program that you could imagine. It was there before I arrived and after I left. So, the tendency of the Vietnamese, I think now also from the North, was to be very much interested in America. They take very quickly to new things that they like. They also take very quickly to some of the faults that we have. They made an effort to learn English. The schools were open to us using the binational centers as an entrée. We were not able to establish an American Studies program at the university, because that is where the French thought we should stop. I told my French colleagues that we were only trying to tell the Vietnamese what we were like. It was not a question of trying to supplant the French culture in Vietnam or reduce their status. We were in Vietnam and it was necessary for us to let them know what we were like. As it turned out, we intermingled our programs very well.

*Q: Any other comments on your stay in Vietnam?*

BRESCIA: My feeling is that in the end I was sort of vindicated. You couldn't conduct a normal cultural program in a civil war situation as we had in Vietnam and with our

superior numbers and military materiel. In the end it was decided that was the wrong way to go and one of our senior officers, Bob Lincoln was sent there and pretty much closed the program. He turned the program around where we were no longer tied in with the military. USIA finally took the position that we couldn't conduct an active program while conducting military operations.

*Q: Let's move forward to your period in East Pakistan. You went there in 1965 and it was still East Pakistan at that time. You were the cultural affairs officer. Who was the consul general there?*

BRESCIA: When I arrived, the consul general was John Bowling. He was followed by Lee Metcalf. John Bowling had been a young officer in East Pakistan when the post was first established. In fact, I think John Bowling was the one who started the consulate. He was an excellent Consul General, as well as Lee Metcalf. I admired both of them very, very much. Both ran a very good operation. Both were people that officers appreciated and were great to get along with both professionally and personally.

*Q: How large was the post?*

BRESCIA: The consulate general was a large post as well as the USIS operation. In USIS, we had nine American officers. It was almost like a country operation. Actually, East Pakistan was big enough in population to be a country. We had reading rooms spread out throughout what is now Bangladesh. At one time we had one reading room with an American officer in Chittagong. The American officer was withdrawn shortly before I arrived in July, 1965.

*Q: Did you report to the embassy PAO in West Pakistan or directly to Washington?*

BRESCIA: We reported directly to the country PAO in West Pakistan. At that time, the embassy was established in Karachi. I had program responsibilities also in which we coordinated with the consul general's office.

*Q: Did the ambassadors ever visit from Karachi?*

BRESCIA: Yes, the ambassadors did visit from Karachi. While I was there, we had two ambassadors. We had Ambassador Oehlert, who was previously with the Coca Cola Company, and before him we had Ambassador Locke, who I think was from Texas. When Ambassador Locke came to visit, we went to a small town outside of Dacca and although he was an extremely prickly individual we had a good visit with him. If you remember correctly, it was also a period where there was a tremendous amount of division in Pakistan where many Bengalis felt separate, and there was considerable political agitation. One of the reasons that John Bowling left there sooner than anticipated was that he really felt, and expressed himself, I think, that the two cultures of West and East Pakistan were so different that the way the country was going, it would ultimately separate. This was known to the Pakistanis, and they didn't like it. But, John Bowling was ultimately correct in his analysis. He was a good political officer who had great

analytical skills. When he left the Foreign Service, he became a professor of international relations in a southern college. He was replaced by Lee Metcalf, who had been consul general in Lahore and was a great guy.

*Q: What would be a major problem that you had to wrestle with as cultural affairs officer in Dacca?*

BRESCIA: The Bengalis are very volatile but at the same time can be extremely kind. We worked very closely with the Bengalis. The one problem that we faced was that intellectuals as a public opinion group felt that our aid was being used not to help East Pakistan but to help the upper classes. They did not see that US aid was reaching the masses. But that wasn't true. We had an excellent aid program. We worked closely with the university and the administration to dispel this concept. There were people, both in the political sphere as well as government elites who were suspicious of us. They thought that we wanted to divide East and West Pakistan, and that we were encouraging the Bengalis to become independent. This wasn't true. That wasn't our policy at all. Some of us accepted the idea that ultimately if things didn't change, this is what would happen, but we didn't think it was a good for Pakistan to fall apart.

*Q: Good news is welcome, but other news isn't always so welcome. How were Americans regarded in East Pakistan?*

BRESCIA: We had a very large AID program in East Pakistan, in fact, we had a large country AID program in Pakistan. On the whole I would say we had entrée to wherever we wanted to go. We worked very closely with the government and the military officials. We had military friends in Dacca and saw each other at parties. But at the same time, I must say that we had greater acceptance within the general public. We had probably one of the most flourishing book translation program in the sub-continent.

*Q: Did you translate books into Bengali?*

BRESCIA: We translated our American books from English into Bengali.

*Q: Many Bengalis speak English or understand it.*

BRESCIA: That's true. But, at the same time the younger generation's English was not fluent. Bengali is a real cultural language and is spoken not only in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, but also in the sub-continent in India in the area around Calcutta. These books were read avidly by the younger students. Pakistan had a mixture of both English and Bengali schools. Most though felt more comfortable in reading Bengali. There was a need for such translations and our books were used in most schools and universities. Even in our library the use of translated books was by far superior to the use of books in English. English text books were used extensively, but the percentage of books we had in Bengali from the translation program were read more often. These books concentrated on American history, literature, social sciences and societal texts.

*Q: Was it difficult to get American visitors to come for cultural programs?*

BRESCIA: We got some, but not as many as West Pakistan. There were groups that would go to West Pakistan but not come to East Pakistan. Communications were not that good. We had flights but people didn't want to be stranded in East Pakistan because of the weather, etc. But, we did have a very active music and art program. We also had an active exchanges program with Bengalis going to the United States and a few Americans coming to East Pakistan.

Now, may I add that we had a Fulbright program in almost every country of the world and such programs have always been very active. We had one in East Pakistan as well. It was a great program. We also had a graduate student program. We had specialists that came from time to time who were sent by Washington or at our request.

In Dacca, there was a very important art school and we had a number of students who were interested in American techniques of art, for instance. With the help of Washington, we had a seminar with an American artist who came and spent something like 15 days to a month in the art school. She also worked in printmaking, so they had a seminar on printmaking. It was amazing. The Bengalis are an extremely talented people. This seminar greatly influenced the students and professors. I can't say that at the beginning the director of the school was terribly pleased to accept this American influence. He did not want his students to stray from their classical concepts. But on the whole, I think the Bengali art community were pleased to see a hands-on American artist at work. The Bengalis can be very gentle and yet at the same time they can at times be very cool.

*Q: Did the Islamic character of the country have any influence on your programs or publications?*

BRESCIA: We had to be careful. We didn't censor anything, but had to be careful as to whether or not we should have certain books that may be contrary to Islamic religious principles. Very often we sought advice from religious educators as to whether a certain type of book would be acceptable in our libraries. We screened the books in our libraries very carefully to make sure we wouldn't have a flare up that might cause a minor "revolution" in the country. You had to be sensitive to this. Sometimes we would have books just in English. It usually depended on whether or not you had certain pictures. If you show the prophet in a photograph or even a conception of a photograph, then it wouldn't be acceptable. It was a very sensitive issue that we had to be aware of. Washington and our PAO working at the embassy were also sensitive to this issue. But, it was amazing because they are very secular that we never had any tough decisions to make.

*Q: Are the Bengalis in India around Calcutta also Muslim?*

BRESCIA: During the British empire period, the Bengalis were both Hindu and Muslim. Some of the worst atrocities took place there because you had these people living hundreds of years together, but yet, they were so different in religion. When the division

of the country took place, you had neighbors who were formerly on good relations, suddenly killing each other. They speak pretty much the same language. Bengali is Bengali. What happened was the Muslim Bengalis in India went to East Pakistan and a lot of Hindus who were in East Pakistan went to India. The Hindus were in very small number when I arrived in 1965. We had one Hindu Bengali employee on our staff, the rest being Muslims. The university had one professor who was a Hindu. The division of the sub-continent was a real tragedy, but the history is replete with atrocities on both sides.

*Q: It sounds very much like what we are living through today in Kosovo.*

BRESCIA: Exactly. But, after partition Bengali's (Muslim-Hindi) always maintained good relations especially among the upper crust Bengali society in East Pakistan, many traveled to see a good movie to Calcutta.

*Q: Were the Chinese or Soviets active in Dacca?*

BRESCIA: The Soviets and the Chinese communists were very active in Bengal and East Pakistan. If there was any ill feeling towards America, I think it was fomented basically by them. Of course, we had no relations with the Chinese and the Chinese wouldn't talk to us. But, they were there and very active in thwarting us wherever possible. The Chinese and Soviets also had big cultural programs similar to ours in scope. We didn't have a party that represented the United States, but they had the communist party that worked hand in glove with the Chinese and the Soviets. The Soviets were all over the place, at that time, in spite of the fact that we had an alliance with Pakistan.

*Q: Did you ever get to visit Karachi or other places in West Pakistan?*

BRESCIA: Oh, yes. We used to go to Karachi on a regular basis. We would have country PAO meetings and our PAO from Dacca would go.

Often there was a great deal of discussion with Karachi with the cultural affairs officers in the region about cultural programs. We had a large exchange program in East Pakistan. We sent a lot of students to the United States, and we had a lot of professors coming to the region. USAID had a large education program because they had a lot of programs where they had professors on contract. There was one at the mining university and agricultural university, and Texas A&M was there. They had a very interesting program on administration that taught students principles of administration and management. We had a large American presence in East Pakistan. The Consulate General was one of the largest, too. In fact, on the sub-continent at that time, the consulate generals almost all had FSO-2 officers.

*Q: What about the Indian presence in East Pakistan?*

BRESCIA: The Indian presence was there. But, they kept to themselves more than others. We knew them and saw them socially, but we had very little to do with their programs.

*Q: What about your relations with the British?*

BRESCIA: Relations with the British were excellent. We had excellent relations with the British Council and information service. In fact, the British information service office was not too far from the American Cultural Center, the USIS office. It was an isolated post, so we socialized with other diplomats and the national leaders of the country frequently. The British still maintained the old civil service system they had at the breakup of the country.

A lot of people from the American side were able to visit Calcutta on a regular basis when they wanted to or spend a weekend there, or visit Kathmandu. We had a wonderful trip with the children...

*Q: This is Tom Dunigan, speaking on August 29, 2000. Today I am completing the interview with Peter Brescia, which I began in, I believe, May of 1999. And of which part was not transcribed because of a poor tape.*

*Peter, we were talking about your movement from East Pakistan to Afghanistan at the time we were interrupted. And you asked to go to Afghanistan and see if you'd done your bit in South Asia but was this a preference of yours, or how did this transfer come about?*

BRESCIA: Well, in 1968 when I was due for transfer, I had originally been slated to go to Jordan, and naturally I tried to do as best as I could to try to bone up on Jordan -- from the historical point of view -- and the ambassador at that time decided that he wanted a public affairs officer who spoke Arabic. And unfortunately, in spite of the fact that I speak several other foreign languages, I did not speak Arabic. And, although people have told me that Jordan, in most cases, is an English-speaking country, and I had been there once with the national war college, and I thought that I could really do the job. But nevertheless we went ahead, and he got his Arab-speaking American public affairs officer.

At the same time there was a great need in Afghanistan. Apparently, the public affairs officer had gotten into an unfortunate hassle with the ambassador. And the agency in Washington tapped me for that job. I went to speak to the ambassador and we had a week together before I went on home leave and then transferred.

*Q: By the way Peter, who was the ambassador at that time?*

BRESCIA: The ambassador was Robert G. Neumann, a political appointee. And the ambassador and I got on famously for the first -- within a week or less than a week. And he immediately cabled back to Washington that he thought that I would be able to do the job. And I went on home leave, and then went to Afghanistan in the fall of 1968.

*Q: You were integrated as a foreign-service information officer?*



BRESCIA: Yes, I was a foreign-service information officer. That's correct.

*Q: And, how large was your staff as PA (Public Affairs) over there?*

BRESCIA: We had, if I remember correctly, five Americans and we had, I don't recall anymore how many foreign nationals. But we did have a very large English-language program attached to our cultural center, which was very active and which was very liked by the population, by the people. We had many students. And it was one of the largest outside of some of the major countries in the world considering Afghanistan to be a very small, central Asian country.

*Q: What was the atmosphere in Afghanistan as you got there? I know they've had great troubles since then. In 1968, were Americans well regarded, or not so, or, how was it?*

BRESCIA: Well we had certain restrictions upon American personnel from the embassy. There were certain things that we couldn't do. For instance we couldn't entertain military officers, and we couldn't -- we had to announce every time we went on a trip outside of the city of Kabul, we had to get permission. I usually travelled with the ambassador when he went outside of Kabul, and that was one way of maintaining contact with some of the leaders of the country.

*Q: Could you and the ambassador at that time foresee troubles coming of the type that --*

BRESCIA: Well, I was there for about four years, for approximately four years. And in the four years, towards the end of the fourth year or the third year we began to notice that there was some trouble brewing. And, but, the Afghan scene had been rather interesting; at one time, in one way, it was very faithful to Americans, and then in another way, you had the Communist that had almost a free reign. You had the Russian Embassy that used to publish a lot of material that was contrary to American interests. But we had, in most cases, the sympathy of the people in the Afghan government. In fact even today, in 2000, I still maintain excellent relations with some of the high officials who later became refugees in the United States when Afghanistan was taken over by the Russians, first by the Communists and then by the Russians.

But we had a bulletin that we post for the embassy, and we also used that bulletin to try to counteract some of the things that the Russians were spreading. And I remember, in one instance when I was called in to the foreign office, and the director of information for the foreign office told me that I had gone perhaps a little bit too far. And I retorted by saying that the Russians were the ones who had been on the attack. And if the Afghan government sees the necessity to allow the Russians to do what they're doing, then I thought that we, the American Embassy, should be able to respond since they were using their own official organ and we were doing the same thing.

*Q: Did the fact that the Vietnam War was going on at the time play any role in Afghanistan? Were there any demonstrations against the embassy or against us?*

BRESCIA: No, there were no demonstrations concerning our role in Vietnam. I had had such demonstrations in East Pakistan when I was stationed in Dhaka, but not in Afghanistan.

*Q: I'm sure the Russians stirred up the pot in the Chinese too whenever they could.*

BRESCIA: Well, the Russians and the Chinese were at it too, and most of the time they were at each other. But we were an innocent bystander occasionally.

*Q: Well, as a public affairs officer, what were your principal problems there, that -- as you see them?*

BRESCIA: Well, I didn't have any real, great problems, and we worked exceptionally well with the embassy. The ambassador and I became fast friends and I coordinated all of my activities with other sections of the embassy as well. We had a very active community: both American and international community there. And we had the good will, really, of the Afghan officials and they wanted to keep things on an even keel, but nevertheless, you could tell that their sympathies were really, basically, with the United States.

*Q: So, while they were neutral, they were not tilted toward the other side?*

BRESCIA: No, no, not at all.

*Q: Did you write speeches for the ambassador?*

BRESCIA: No, the ambassador really wrote his own speeches. There weren't many occasions where he did officially make speeches. And I think there were -- as far as I can recall -- no other ambassador made speeches throughout his stay in Afghanistan. He talked to small groups; most of them were informal. No official speeches were made.

*Q: Did we have many people going to the U.S. on the leader grant programs that other officials --*

BRESCIA: We had a very active Afghan-American exchange program. We had quite a number of Americans in Afghanistan. We had a large Peace Corps contingent and the programs were working exceptionally well. And we had a large Fulbright program and we had a large AID program with many contracting organizations from various American universities working within the Afghan community.

*Q: Now, there was a visit by the secretary of state, William Rogers in 1969, were you there for that?*

BRESCIA: I was there for that. It was a very short visit and it went exceptionally well. He was very well received. In fact, one of the problems that the Afghans always brought up was the fact that they thought that we didn't have much interest in Afghanistan

officially. That meant not many high-level American officials came to visit Afghanistan. And Rogers was one of the first -- Secretary Rogers' visit was one of the first when I was there, and he made quite a good impression. And the Afghans also indicated that they wished they had more visits like that.

*Q: Well, then in the following year, you had a visit from Vice President Agnew?*

BRESCIA: Yes, that was also very successful. In light of the problems that Vice President Agnew later had, he impressed not only members of the embassy, but also the Afghan officials. And he had a very, very successful short visit.

*Q: Tell me a bit about the problem with drugs. Was that prevalent at that time?*

BRESCIA: Drugs in Afghanistan, I wouldn't say is endemic to the society, but they're available. And marijuana was used quite extensively. But, you can't say that the Afghan population were heavily into drugs. They sold it, it was available, some people took it. In fact you had marijuana smoked, for instance, in some of the bazaars. But the middle-class and the well-educated people in Afghanistan did not use it at all, as far as I can tell.

*Q: Did we feel at the time that a bunch of the native drugs that you find were finding their way to the United States?*

BRESCIA: Well, not from Afghanistan. I think primarily from Pakistan and some of them from India. But I guess now of course, we know that, later on, a lot of Afghan drugs came to the United States. But we had several missions come over. Ambassador Sheldon Vance came and -- on the program of trying to prevent the shipment of any type of drugs. But the drugs were usually concentrated on the border: the southern border of Afghanistan and the northern border of Pakistan, in the so-called tribal areas. But, you know, as everyone always said, if there wasn't such a demand in the United States for drugs, we wouldn't be growing it. But at the same time, you must understand, it was a very easy cash crop for the Afghan farmers. And any type of program that tried to replace that just didn't work because it was labor intensive and not as easy to grow as marijuana and others.

*Q: Did we have -- at the embassy -- a resident drug enforcement officer from DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) or not?*

BRESCIA: My recollection is that we did have one, yes.

*Q: Did the Afghan government hamper your efforts or not in getting out the word?*

BRESCIA: It did not -- in the sense that we had to be careful of course. And we had to abide by the sensitivities of the Afghan government; and that is not to be blatant about what we did. But we did have our bulletin, which we published and sent to the major leaders of the Afghan society. But they never complained about what we put in the bulletin. And the bulletin gave American position on foreign policy and some -- at times -

- anecdotal stories about America. And it was very, very well liked by the Afghan leadership. And it wasn't propagandistic in the sense -- the way the Russian was. But as long as they allowed the Russians to publish theirs we always had the recourse of saying, "Well, if they publish theirs, we could publish ours." And of course other western countries were also doing the same thing. They were publishing whatever documentation that they had available.

*Q: Was there a domestic communist threat at that time? Was there a powerful communist party in Afghanistan?*

BRESCIA: There was always a powerful communist party. The communist party was rather split there: the ones that adhered to Soviet Union and the ones that adhered to China. And they were constantly going at it. And the university wasn't. And especially the student body at the university was constantly in turmoil, as a result of this agitation from the Left. And the Afghan schools very often were closed. The university was closed for parts of the year, from time to time. So the strength of the Communist Party was always there, both wings.

Unfortunately, the Afghan leadership, according to my point of view when talking to them, feared not so much the Russians, but they feared the Chinese. And it was in a deep and long conversation that I had with one of my friends in the foreign office, who has now passed away. I told him that I thought that the fears should be more from the -- they should worry more about the Russian attempt to control the country than the Chinese. But there was a serious division within the Afghan society. And that was that one of the minorities closely associated with China there come from Chinese stock and therefore there was always this bias against them. Whereas, they didn't have any Russians living in the country so there was no bias against the Russians.

Nevertheless, in one of my conversations with this friend of mine from the foreign office, I told him, "Let's hope that everything goes well and that you people are right, but I have a feeling that the ones that you should worry about are the Russians and not the Chinese."

*Q: What were Afghanistan's relations with its other neighbors, say with Iran and Pakistan, at the time? Were they friendly, were they agitated?*

BRESCIA: When I first went to Afghanistan, and this was in 1968, the relations with Pakistan were not the greatest in that several years before that the border had been closed because of disagreement over what they called the Pashtun issue. The Afghans felt that part of Pakistan really belonged to Afghanistan. The northwest frontier should be incorporated with Afghanistan. And you had a linguistic situation where the southern Afghans and the northern Pakistanis both spoke Pashtun -- or Pashto as they say. And, so that there was this tie and there was this disagreement. And I remember at one time in 1964 the border had been closed and when I went with the National War College to visit that part of the world, we were not able to get into Afghanistan. So we saw the Afghan border basically from northern Pakistan from the tribal area.

*Q: I will say that happened to my visit out there with the war college in '62 the same way. We could stand in the Khyber Pass --*

BRESCIA: That's right.

*Q: They wouldn't let us put a foot into Afghanistan.*

BRESCIA: Yes.

*Q: And with Iran, there were no problems?*

BRESCIA: The relations with Iran were very good, at the time that we were there. You know a portion of the Afghan people speak Dari. Dari and Farsi are very close together, as far as languages are concerned. And they had many of the same habits, many of the same behavioral patterns as the Iranians. But they did get along, and there were a number of visits that went from the Afghan royalty to Iran and so the relations were good.

*Q: And with the Soviet Union they were relations, I guess?*

BRESCIA: The Soviet Union were relations that they were ever careful and they tried to be non-aligned. Although, in sympathy, we were always well received by the Afghans. And I can't say -- the Afghans made the, you know they sort of paid lip service to this neutrality, but they really know what the Russians really thought of them, that they really didn't consider them as equals. And they resented that. It was always an underlying feeling of this lack of equality with the Russians. And the Russians did look upon them as inferior.

*Q: And they had a long history with Russia too?*

BRESCIA: That's correct. Yes, that's correct.

*Q: Well, I gather from your earlier remarks that your relations with the ambassador and the other members of the embassy staff were quite good?*

BRESCIA: We had a fully integrated system and the ambassador was a great man. He was a scholar, as you well know, formerly a historian from southern California. And he was appointed by President Johnson, and served in Afghanistan for over six years. He was still there when I left. And I was there four years.

*Q: So the Republican Administration kept him on?*

BRESCIA: The Republican Administration kept him on, yes. He was one of the individuals who agitated in California during the 1964, I think, presidential election where he was part of the Republicans for Johnson.

*Q: I see.*

BRESCIA: And then the Republicans kept him on, yes.

*Q: Well, those are my main questions about your time in Afghanistan. Do you have any other comments about that Peter?*

BRESCIA: Only the sad aftereffects of the take-over, one of the communist parties when they finally overthrew the king. And later on, the death of my very, very close friend, Spike Dubs, who was ambassador at the time, at the time of the takeover. And, although I had been out of Afghanistan by that time, upon reflection I think we should have been -- there was nothing really that we could do, but I just hoped that we could have given them a bit more moral support than we did. And the takeover by the Communists was really sanguine. It was terrible. And some of my friends were just, not only assassinated but butchered as a result of when the Communists took over. And the person I had this previous conversation about whether he should beware of the Russians or the Chinese, was one of the individuals who was assassinated.

*Q: I do have one further question. Did we have a full complement of military attachés at the embassy, or did we have a military mission of any type?*

BRESCIA: We had a military mission. We had a full complement. At one time we even had a plane at the disposal of the air attaché. But it was there for a very short time while I was there. But we did have an army attaché office, we had an air attaché office, and we didn't have a naval officer, but we had really top notch individuals from the Defense Department acting as attachés.

*Q: Well, of course the Afghan navy is not world renowned in any case.*

BRESCIA: No, hahaha.

*Q: Well Peter, after your four plus years in Kabul, the time came for you to move. But you didn't move very far. You moved right next door to Pakistan, to Islamabad. Was this a transfer you had requested?*

BRESCIA: No, this was not a transfer that I had requested. In fact I had never really requested a post. But I was called by Washington to ask whether I'd be interested in going, and I said, "Of course." But I had already served three years in Pakistan, that was East Pakistan at the time, but I didn't realize -- I didn't think that the next three years would be spent in Islamabad. But Islamabad was the new capital and it had excellent living quarters. And also an opportunity to work a little bit more -- a little bit freer than even in Afghanistan, although we had had our problems in relations between Pakistan and the United States at that time. This was in 1972.

*Q: Just after the '71 war then?*

BRESCIA: That's right, right after the independence of East Pakistan into Bangladesh.

*Q: In which we were accused of tilting toward Pakistan, as I gather, and against India?*

BRESCIA: Well, that was the accusation, but I don't think that we really tilted. We just wanted to, you know, bring a peaceful solution to this very difficult issue.

*Q: When you went there as public affairs officer, I presume your staff was considerably larger than it had been in Afghanistan.*

BRESCIA: Yes, we had branch officers in major cities like Lahore and Karachi, and we had an office in Peshawar, right on the frontier. And we were also in the process of trying to build a new center and place it in the capital city, the area that was considered the capital city of Islamabad, because our office had been in Rawalpindi. And the embassy was in Islamabad, which was a not too long -- not too far -- it was about a fifteen-mile drive.

*Q: Pakistan, when you got there, was a truncated country, having lost the eastern part of its territory, where you had served and with which you were quite familiar. How do you contrast the two branches of Pakistan?*

BRESCIA: Well, I have a phrase in making the contrast. Bangladesh, which was formerly East Pakistan, was really a Bengali culture. And the Bengali culture, I say, is very artistic. It's a dance sort of a -- a dance society, a dance behavior, whereas West Pakistan was a lot more severe. And well, a lot more religious from the point of view that it adhered closer to the dictates of the Quran than you had in East Pakistan. And it was in West Pakistan you had poetry, which was the dominant cultural trend. And the languages were different. You had Bengali in East Pakistan and you have Urdu in West Pakistan. And that in itself, the Bengali language is a sing-song language and the Urdu is really a little bit more guttural. And the two were always at odds with one another. Although they were both Muslim -- the majority of people were Muslim -- the religion really, although played an important part, I dare say that the distance between East and West Pakistan, and the language patterns and the behavior of the people was totally different.

*Q: When you got to Pakistan were they still mourning the loss of East Pakistan, or had they decided to forget that?*

BRESCIA: To some extent they were still mourning the loss of East Pakistan. But I think it was evident that they would get over it real quickly. They disagreed with the role that the Indians played. But then they had only themselves to blame for that because of the rather harsh means that they used in trying to subdue the East Pakistanis. And that was not appreciated by anybody. But the relations now between Bangladesh and Pakistan are fairly good so I don't think that that was a long lasting problem.

*Q: What were your problems mainly in Islamabad as PAO (public affairs officer)?*

BRESCIA: Well, the problems that we had -- we had a very active program. And it was a

large program. We had a budget of about 5,000,000 dollars. But at the same time, we had certain restrictions due to the ill feeling between America and Pakistan as a result of the separation of East Pakistan. There were certain things that we could do and certain things that we couldn't. For instance, we couldn't contact the military. That eventually broke down. In fact, at the end of my three years in Pakistan we had an active growing program of American studies with the Pakistani military. And I was also given free reign to visit some of the outlying military posts in Pakistan.

So the relationship, which was rather cool when I arrived, by the time I departed three years later in 1975, was a very good relationship, very good conduct. And I could conduct the program almost anywhere that I wanted, and contact any individual, any official within protocol -- any Pakistani official, that I wanted. And I could roam the whole field with the headquarters -- with the ministries. Both the Ministry of Education -- and then I was also invited from time to time to some of the functions that the military attachés had. And I met a lot of the military officers and that was only one of the reasons we were able to establish this contact. But they hungered for contact with Americans. And they themselves didn't like the imposition of not being able to contact Americans freely without notifying the military office in Pakistan.

*Q: Did Ambassador Byroade take an interest in your work there?*

BRESCIA: Yes, he did. Just as Ambassador Neumann took an interest in what we did, Ambassador Byroade did. The interest was different: he just wanted to know what we were doing. And I kept him informed on all aspects of the work. And he had a considerable input from time to time in the activities that we did, as well as other members of the embassy. And we used a number of embassy officers to travel throughout Pakistan as speakers.

*Q: I was going to ask whether we were allowed to speak freely and travel all over the country.*

BRESCIA: Yes we were. So, as far as I know, we never had any real problem. And then with the assistance of the various consuls general, both in Lahore and in Karachi, our program was integrated with them, too. We also enjoyed excellent relation with USIA (United States Information Agency) and the consulates, very closely together in getting speakers out, qualified speakers from the embassy staff, both political officers, economic officers, and others. If they had a special interest in the subject matter then they would go out.

*Q: What was the extent of the use of the English language while you were there? For instance, did you have to have programs teaching English, or is it widely spoken?*

BRESCIA: When we were there, in Pakistan, English was widely spoken. They had two major newspapers that were English-language newspapers. And almost all officials of Pakistan spoke English. I didn't come across a single one that didn't have English as a language. In fact most of the time, English was their primary language when they were



growing up. They all went to English-speaking schools. And it was only when Bhutto, unfortunately, felt the need to go to Urdu -- but certainly not for his own children -- that things started getting a little bit flaky. And in fact a lot of military officers, some of the senior military officers that I met, rued the fact that they no longer had the type of contact with western officers that they used to have before. The early officers that I met in both East Pakistan and Pakistan, were originally trained at Sandhurst. And they felt that that was very important for them and gave them an outlook that was slowly disappearing in the Pakistan military. And unfortunately I think we see it now, where a good portion of the Pakistan military is really -- I wouldn't say overly religiously oriented, but -- and certainly not fanatic -- but not pro-West as we used to have it in the early days.

*Q: Today we read a lot about the dispute over Kashmir. Was that a problem in the early '70s when you were in Pakistan, or was it bubbling at the time?*

BRESCIA: Well, Kashmir was always a problem. And it's something that the Pakistanis always felt bitter about: the fact that the United States and the other members of the Western Alliance never really pushed -- pressed the UN (United Nations) to resolve this issue. And never pushed India into adhering to its original beliefs that, as Nehru said, that Kashmir could be resolved through a \_\_\_\_\_. And that Kashmir would be resolved without war.

The Pakistanis are terribly, terribly disappointed by the support that they have not received from their friends, mainly the United States in the United Nations on this particular issue. And it was constantly brought up in discussions that we had both in East Pakistan and also in West Pakistan later on. And they felt bitter about it because they felt that the American friendship -- the friendship that they had extended to the United States was not being really reciprocated in the type of -- in helping them resolve this issue with India.

*Q: Were we concerned with what could be regarded as Pakistan's close relations with China during your period there?*

BRESCIA: Basically, I think we were concerned, but, as you know, we used Pakistan to get into China, to reestablish our relationship. Pakistan was the intermediary. Interestingly enough, one of the top persons in the foreign office, who had the rank of ambassador, happened to be in the Pakistan embassy in Beijing. He became a friend of mine. Although he didn't divulge any secrets, he did say that his office was mainly used as the intermediary in cementing the relationship so that Nixon and Kissinger were able to go to China and break the log jam. But, we never felt it was not in our interest. After that, we welcomed any kind of good will that could be fostered with our arrangement with China.

Just the other day I attended a lecture on Pakistan and its nuclear program. One cannot overestimate the fear that the Pakistanis have of India. They still feel that the Indians want to reunite the subcontinent under Hindu domination. It will come up in many different ways. I don't think most Americans are willing to accept this as a legitimate

fear. Pakistan is a very small country compared to India. The resources of India do not compare with the resources of Pakistan. Pakistan is poor in manpower and natural resources and is unable to compete with India. This is one of the points I always made with the Indian DCM in Kabul in our many discussions. He would try to get me to see the Indian point of view to an unreasonable extent and I would ask what Pakistan had that made the Indians fearful. It seemed to me that Pakistan had some legitimate reasons for fearing the Indians. What I'm trying to get at is that in spite of the good relations that Pakistan has always had with China, I was very interested to hear what the speaker said the other day that most of the stuff the Pakistanis got, they got from North Korea. They never got it from China. So, I think China is very, very careful about this. But, China has been a silent, goodwill partner for the Pakistanis. I think they were well on their way to achieving what they wanted even when I left in 1975. I don't think they would have exploded a bomb first because of the fear that they have of India.

*Q: Twenty years ago when I was in Holland, there was a great to-do about the Pakistanis having the centrifuge technique from Holland that is very useful in enriching uranium. The barn door was closed after the horse was gone as we often do here.*

BRESCIA: They have a superb scientist who is leading the program. He has a Dutch wife. We were good friends. I was also good friends with the Dutch ambassador and the British military attaché. We played tennis together.

*Q: The British had a real presence there I take it in Islamabad?*

BRESCIA: The Pakistanis also had some brilliant people. They are very good mathematicians, physicists and chemists. It is only the resources that they don't have. Otherwise, I think they may even be ahead of the Soviet Union, I am not sure. The Indians are no slouch themselves, but there is this inordinate fear that they have to satisfy. The Kashmiri group that is agitating in what is now Kashmir controlled by India are never going to give up. They don't have the strength to fight the Indian military directly, but they are going to carry on a guerilla type of warfare for a long time.

*Q: I guess you have to live in Pakistan to absorb that fear.*

BRESCIA: Yes. It seeps in in conversations with people who you know want to have good relations with India but they feel they can't trust India; especially the Hindu nationalists.

*Q: Well, your time in Islamabad ended in 1975 and you returned to Washington where you became deputy assistant director for South Asia, meaning about six countries. Was this an assignment that you requested?*

BRESCIA: No. It was an assignment that seemed to follow the normal course. I started off handling South Asia. There was a separate deputy for North Africa and the Middle East and then one of those jobs was eliminated, and I became deputy director for the whole area in my last couple of years there.

*Q: Who was your chief?*

BRESCIA: I had two. Ted Curran and David Nalle.

*Q: Were you in liaison with State?*

BRESCIA: Yes, all the time. I attended the assistant secretary for the Middle East's morning briefings. I worked closely with our colleagues at State. Both groups when led by Joe Sisco and then by Roy Atherton.

*Q: What were your principal duties or preoccupations? Was it largely administrative or did you get into substantive matters?*

BRESCIA: I got into substantive matters as well as budgetary matters. The deputy director of the area has responsibility to oversee the budget in the area and settle disputes of allocation of funds. Then we had, of course, the flair-up in the Middle East (1975) soon after my arrival in Washington. I wasn't involved with the Arab-Israeli conflict. At that time USIA had a Deputy assistant Director for the Middle East.

*Q: Did that include Iran hostage?*

BRESCIA: The Iran hostage situation was my responsibility. Iran was not the responsibility of the Middle East division as it was in State. So, I had a lot of dealings with Henry Precht and with the deputy assistant secretary and attended most of the interagency meetings on the Iran hostages that were held. We worked hand-in-hand with the Middle Eastern bureau of the State Department. It was traumatic for me because some of the people that were held hostage were close friends. Bruce Laingen was a State classmate of mine. I was essentially responsible for sending a number of the officers to Iran who were being held hostage. I knew them and their capabilities and knew they would do well. I was not only professionally involved but emotionally as well. I contacted the families and talked to them; some of the families like Barry Rosen's I talked to his mother as well as his wife.

*Q: Were you aware of this mission to rescue the hostages?*

BRESCIA: No.

*Q: It was held pretty tight, I know.*

BRESCIA: I didn't get involved with the military aspects of the crisis.

*Q: That was handled by the White House.*

BRESCIA: Yes.

*Q: During your time in USIA one of the most significant things was the Afghan coup and the Soviets moving into Afghanistan. I'm sure this gave you many anxious moments. Was there anything we could have done to forestall that or was it fated to happen?*

BRESCIA: Well, they say that nothing is fated to happen, but given the fear the Afghans had of the Chinese, and I think it is basically racial, they were not able to see that the threat was not from China. The Chinese communist group that was functioning in Afghanistan was not terribly strong. But, you see the Afghans have a segment of their minority which is very close to the Chinese. They also are split on religious differences. You have Sunni and Shia in Afghanistan. Interestingly enough, the Shias are mostly from the Chinese side. So, they have always had this great fear, I guess stemming from ancient history. They never thought that the Soviets would want to invade them. They saw no reason why the Soviets would want to take them over, although trouble in Afghanistan meant that there would be minorities in Afghanistan closely allied with minorities emotionally on the southern border of the Soviet Union. This is why I felt the need to tell the former Director of Information and Press at the foreign office that I really believed that the greater fear was from the Soviet side, not Chinese. Unfortunately, they weren't prepared to accept that. Daoud was a great nationalist, but he was not pro-West, nor pro-Soviet, but he was willing to take the Soviet minions, Afghans who had Soviet tendencies into his government and build on that, but wasn't able to control them. Things spun out of control. You had a king who was weak in the sense he didn't know how to make the necessary strong decisions. You had basically a weak and splintered army in Afghanistan. So, a lot of us were very worried about Afghanistan even while I was there.

*Q: Ah, this was before the coup?*

BRESCIA: Yes. We were worried that things could boil in the wrong direction. That the Russians could find some excuse to come into Afghanistan given that propitious time. We expressed this view without any hesitation. Our embassy was aware of it and at the same time we also had a lot of feedback from USAID people who were in the field and felt there were a lot of problems in the country that were not being addressed. The king could never really get his Loya Jirga, which is the body that was ruling Afghanistan, to unify the country. He wasn't moving fast enough to unify the country. On that basis, given the way things were going, it was bound to happen.

*Q: It wasn't the most surprising thing in your life.*

BRESCIA: No, it didn't surprise me at all.

*Q: It apparently surprised President Carter. Now, turning to another subject, in 1977 Indira Gandhi issued emergency regulations including censorship, etc., cracking down on the Indians. How did we react to that?*

BRESCIA: I don't recall that we issued a strong statement about that. The Indians were also very unhappy about receiving information through satellite. They were in favor of the movement in the United Nations to prevent other countries getting information. We

fought that movement all the way. Indira Gandhi wasn't interested in getting us to "pollute" her society. She was not a great friend of the United States, in fact, I don't think she was even a friend of the United States. Interestingly enough, the former Indian DCM in Afghanistan that I used to argue with all the time became her private secretary. He, by strange coincidence, was Muslim. He was married to a Hindu girl from an upper middle class family, who was highly educated, very artistic and a dancer. Mrs. Gandhi paid no attention to anything that we suggested. When Ambassador Moynihan went to India she kept him on a string for a long time before she condescended to see him. If I remember correctly, he finally got so discouraged that he let it be known that if Mrs. Gandhi wanted to talk to the American ambassador he would be ready to talk to her. He was not going to make any more effort to see her. This was relayed to me by some of my colleagues in the embassy. That was one of the times he came to visit us in Afghanistan. We had a very interesting country team meeting with Ambassador Moynihan. Mrs. Gandhi was not interested in anything that was American.

*Q: And Moynihan had gone out there with the best of good will.*

BRESCIA: Yes. He was an outstanding American and friend and advisor to several American presidents.

*Q: I believe there was some concern in the mid-'70s about your country of Bangladesh moving into the Indian and Soviet orbit and forsaking its friends in other places. Was there anything we should have done and how serious were the Bangladeshi?*

BRESCIA: You mean before independence?

*Q: No, after independence.*

BRESCIA: After independence, I think there was serious consideration that they may move into the Indian sphere of influence. But, I didn't think that was a possibility because of the religious differences. The division of the subcontinent was so tragic and there was still so much sorrow over it with many families split. Not everybody moved out of India. A lot of the older Muslim folks stayed. Sons and daughters left because they felt they had no future in India. There was an attempt on the part of the Chinese, but once again, the Chinese didn't have the strength and the Soviets were a little bit too far away. The Chinese were also too far away from Bangladesh.. I think they were there mainly to counteract the Indians and Soviets.

In addition, the water problem was never solved between India and Pakistan or even now between India and Bangladesh. Although the Indians helped the Bangladeshis become independent, they were not willing to do anything to help them after independence. They may have been pushed a little bit in the '70s but not to any great extent.

When Sheik Mujibur Rahman became president, he just didn't rule the country as was expected. He didn't establish the kind of government he was supposed to. He didn't help the people to the extent they thought he would. In other words, the fruits of independence

were long in coming and the people suffered quite a bit. But, the trauma of what the Pakistanis did against the Bengalis before they separated -- the murders, the massacres -- were typical of that part of the world.

*Q: Pakistanis against Bengalis?*

BRESCIA: Oh, yes. There is also the language difference and the religious difference. The Bangladeshis are basically Sunni and Shias and the Pakistanis are Sunnis. There is a question of whether Bengali or Urdu would be the predominant language of Pakistan. It was supposed to be based on population, and although there were more Bengali speakers in Pakistan than Urdu, Bengali was not chosen.. The Bengalis did suffer economically after partition because of a very unfavorable balance of trade.

*Q: Talking about Pakistan, in 1977 Mr. Bhutto was overthrown. What effect did that have on our programs or our policy there?*

BRESCIA: I don't recall, with great precision, what effect it had on our programs, but I think they did not suffer very much. As far as I can recall, our budget for Pakistan was pretty much the same as it was before.

*Q: We didn't lower it?*

BRESCIA: No. We didn't close any centers. When we had retrenchments they were mainly based on Washington directed reduction in manpower either of Americans or nationals. We didn't interfere in the Bhutto downfall and we had pretty good relations with General Ziaur Rahman, the general in charge. Incidentally, he was Commander-in-Chief of the Army when I started programming with the military school. I had met him several times at the home of the military attaché and at the school.

*Q: In 1977, there was another change in your area. Mrs. Bandaranaike was out in Sri Lanka and tension apparently increased between the contending parties down there. Did we take any part in that struggle?*

BRESCIA: No. We didn't take part in it. We had very good relations with Mrs. Bandaranaike based on personal relations. We had a staff member in USIS who was very close to Mrs. Bandaranaike. She was a great person and knew everyone who was important in Sri Lanka. You could even talk to Chris Van Hollen about her. He would verify how valuable this person was, not only to USIS but to the embassy in general. Whenever you had any question about how an individual thought, she would be the one who you asked. We had a very good but small USIS operation in Sri Lanka. Mrs. Bandaranaike was a prickly sort of person, but in the end, unless I am wrong, I don't think that we ever had any real serious problems, even with her successors, we continued to flourish.

*Q: And yet the civil war goes on there.*

BRESCIA: Yes. It is a religious thing too. You have a strong Christian minority in Sri Lanka who are well educated and well placed over the years and then you have the Tamils that feel they are being subjugated by the general population and decided they wanted separation. The Tamils in the beginning were helped by the Indians and whether India is still helping them, I don't know. I don't see what India has to gain from it.

When some of these movements get going....The Bengalis would have been perfectly happy to remain part of Pakistan, I think, if they had been treated fairly. But over the years, from 1947-65, when I got there, they were being constantly downtrodden. Development in West Pakistan was far greater than in East Pakistan. They were in the majority as far as representation was concerned but didn't get their just representation in the Pakistani parliament. The army should have had more Bengalis in it. It is not that the Bengalis were starting from a base lower than the base in West Pakistan. It is not a racial problem as we have in the United States. The Bengalis were well educated and prized their culture just as much as the West Pakistanis did. The West Pakistanis were poets but so were some of the Bengalis and some of the Bengali literature could compete with Urdu literature in Pakistan. The art of the dance is revered in Bangladesh, whereas in West Pakistan there is a more severe religious attitude. The educated Bengali was not very fanatical, he was very secular.

*Q: Well, Peter, I think we have come to 1980 and I believe that was the year you retired having had a long and very interesting career in the Foreign Service. Would you recommend a Foreign Service career to a young person these days?*

BRESCIA: I would like to say yes, but you and I grew up in a Foreign Service that was quite different than it is today. It seems that there isn't the family unity in the Foreign Service today that there was then. And there isn't the bipartisanship in the political structure that we lived under and worked under during those years. I feel that our leaders from the end of the Second World War to the time I retired. We worked under some fantastic people. The one period I was unhappy about, as you know, was the period when Dulles did not criticize McCarthy. We had that disgraceful period going through our libraries when they wanted to take books out of our libraries. We had people coming in from Washington without anybody knowing and acting as visitors going through the libraries looking to see if we had any books that they considered subversive.

*Q: Hopefully we have done away with things like that. Do you have any views as to whether or not State should reabsorb USIA?*

BRESCIA: I must say one thing, Tom. I felt for almost 30 years we have been working well as a team, State and USIA. I think it is going to lead to greater confusion. I don't know that State was ready to absorb USIA. By that I mean, physically ready to absorb USIA. My feeling is that if something is working why break it up. We had good relations as colleagues. I had good relations before and after and we are not saving anything. We worked according to the policy instructions of the secretary of state. We never had any hassle of whether the United States Information Agency was going to go off on its own. I didn't see the reason for it, to tell you the truth.

*Q: I agree with you one hundred percent but apparently the decision has now been taken and is irrevocable and we have to make the best of it.*

BRESCIA: There is no question about that and I think we will work together. I think our people will go in and work as they did before because of the past. I hope maybe this will be a better thing for the future. I am not sure.

*Q: Well, Peter, I want to thank you for your very revealing comments. This is Thomas Dunnigan signing off on May 28, 1999 in my interview with Peter Brescia.*

*End of interview*