

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

JAMES S. ELLIOTT

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Elliott.]

Q: Okay, today is October the 5th, 2005. This is an interview with James S. Elliott, and it's being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Well, to begin with Jim, when and where were you born?

ELLIOTT: I was born in Hobbs, New Mexico, September the 1st, 1940.

Q: Can you tell me something about your father's side of the family.

ELLIOTT: Well, yes, my father's side of the family came I think probably at the end of the eighteenth century. My first ancestor was captain of a sailing vessel between Norfolk (Virginia) and Liverpool (England). So he founded that part of the family. I think there's a branch of the family that stayed basically in Georgia. This captain founded a plantation in Georgia, and his two oldest boys basically just took off. They went across the South basically ending up in Texas. It's in this process that I acquired some American Indian in my background. There were at least two Indian women. The one most close to me was my paternal grandmother who was Choctaw. My father grew up in Oklahoma and spoke Choctaw actually but went into the oil fields. Actually he apparently was a very good student, and all of his teachers actually wanted him to go to college and even offered to pay for it. But my grandfather was a no-nonsense type and thought that wasn't necessary for his boy. So my father went into the oil fields and he became a wildcatter. Wildcatter is one who takes a rig and several crews and goes into new area looking for oil. One of those places was Hobbs, New Mexico. So that's how I happened to be born there.

Q: Now on your mother's side, where do they come from?

ELLIOTT: Well, I think they probably come originally from Northern Ireland, I'm guessing. But I only know about my grandmother who was born in Missouri and came west in a covered wagon and settled on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River in Texas. I don't know a lot of the history of how she met my maternal grandfather, but he was a farmer in a place called Streetman, Texas near Corsicana, if you know Texas. My mother was the youngest of, I believe it was, twelve children. So that, it's quite a span there. Her sisters were really more like her aunts, and my grandmother had her very late in life. So they basically were Texas, and in fact that's how my father met my mother is because his

father lived in a town near Streetman, which was called Fairfield. When he came to visit his father, he met my mother.

Q: Do you have any connection with the Choctaw side of your family at all?

ELLIOTT: Not anymore. Of course my grandmother died. I have always been interested in it. I just have never had time to go back and really look, and it would be probably in Oklahoma. Of course the Choctaw were driven out of Mississippi, and they were part of the Trail of Tears. There is basically a reservation, Choctaw reservation, Choctaw nation in Oklahoma. I just have not really ever had the time to go back and track it down.

Q: Well, did you grow up in Hobbs? Tell us where Hobbs is located?

ELLIOTT: Yes, I grew up in Hobbs, graduated from high school there. It's right down in the southeastern corner of New Mexico about five miles from the Texas border and about ninety miles east of Carlsbad Caverns.

Q: What was Hobbs like when you were a kid?

ELLIOTT: Well, it had about in its heyday about 40,000 people, and it was the fourth largest city in New Mexico, basically founded on agriculture and oil. So it was, I would say, a fairly typical kind of American childhood, and high school. One of the more interesting things that happened there when I was coming into high school was integration. That was the period, and it was tumultuous for a while, but after black children started coming to school it just died down. Everything went very well and very smoothly.

Q: Was there any reflection of the White Sands Proving Ground or any of that sort of thing?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course we were very aware of it. But it was simply like a, from our point of view just an interesting part of New Mexico to visit. Visiting the White Sands is very like going to the beach without the ocean, very white sand.

Q: Did, how big was your family?

ELLIOTT: I had three brothers. So that meant four sons. I was the third.

Q: Now what was sort of home life like?

ELLIOTT: Home life was, my mother stayed at home until we were in high school basically. So we had that kind of typical upbringing of that period. Not so typical now. My father was away a lot of course. He still was looking for oil and stayed in the oil industry until he died.

Q: Did you mother go to college?

ELLIOTT: No, she didn't. She also was a very good student. But at that time in Texas that was considered quite enough education for a girl.

Q: I would say in the majority of the foreign service officers I interviewed, their family, their parents did not finish college. Women might have gone to normal school to be a teacher, but that was about it.

ELLIOTT: Well, my father remained something of a scholar. It was expressed more like as a biblical scholar because we were from a Protestant background. But he had awful lot of books and maintained something of a library.

Q: How about you, were you a reader?

ELLIOTT: Yes. I was definitely a reader. That was an escape from the ordinariness of Hobbs, New Mexico.

Q: Did you have any particular books that stick in your mind as a young lad?

ELLIOTT: You know I've always been very interested in historical fiction. Unfortunately I didn't follow the scholarly route in reading nonfiction. So I acquired a pretty good knowledge of history, but it was suspect most of it.

Q: Well, I know what you mean. Kenneth Roberts is a big favorite of mine. Looking back, was Hobbs basically a relatively small, but picket fence-type town or—

ELLIOTT: Well, it was basically. There were an awful lot of, a lot of transient people because of the oil industry. So there was a part of it that was pretty rough and tumble, roughnecks perhaps. There was a pretty significant Latino influence because there were a lot of migratory Mexican workers, and that of course was another section. But for most of us it was pretty much picket fence, not a lot of crime, certainly not drugs. About the most we did was drink more than we were supposed to.

Q: Of course, and smoke too.

ELLIOTT: Yes, actually I even took up smoking for a very short period. But that I abandoned that. I didn't abandon the beer as quickly.

Q: What about recreation for kids? What did you do?

ELLIOTT: Oh there was football in the streets. Neighborhood games, there were parks where you could play tennis and that sort of thing. But recreation was, as we got to be teenagers was movies and dances, the sort of normal high school kinds of things.

Q: By the time you hit elementary school, did any subjects turn out to be both favorites and less favorites?

ELLIOTT: Well, I was a pretty good student. I did very well in English. Of course I did well in history. I wasn't as strong in math, but of course I was able to do it. But still history and English and literature were more interesting to me.

Q: How much did the Hispanic side of town intrude?

ELLIOTT: Not very much. Probably if I went back now, it would be more. But at that time it was pretty much removed from—I suppose actually we had integration. So in high school we had Hispanic students and black students. But I wouldn't call it a strong influence.

Q: In your family, you mentioned Protestant. What sort of form of Protestantism was it?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was called the Church of Christ. So it was something like the Baptists, but there was no music in the service.

Q: What about politics? Do you recall where the family fit in?

ELLIOTT: Not a very political family. My parents would of course know the representatives and so forth. They were not very political, and so I didn't grow up with that. I mean, we watched the conventions, the political conventions and so forth. It was basically a Democratic household. We knew we were Democratic. But I would not call it a political household. We didn't sit over dinner and discuss politics.

Q: What about world affairs, did that--?

ELLIOTT: I was more interested in that than my family. Of course, I because I read a lot and was interested in history and government. I followed those things more than the rest of the family.

Q: By the time you got to high school what sort of things were you doing in high school?

ELLIOTT: I was doing mostly my lessons. I wasn't really an athlete. So I wasn't part of athletic teams. We were of course very interested in what we were doing on Friday and Saturday nights. But we no matter how late we got in, my mother always had us up to go to church on Sunday morning. Dating, the sort of angst of teenagers; that's a stressful period.

Q: Movies, was that--

ELLIOTT: Oh a lot of movies, and of course we got television. So television became something of an entertainment as well.

Q: Did you either summer or after school get jobs?

ELLIOTT: I worked in small, in part-time jobs since I was, even before I, the first thing I did was in Odessa, Texas. That was one of the places where we moved. I said I grew up in New Mexico. We spent a period of two or three or four years away in Odessa, Texas, but it's very similar. But I worked in grocery stores as a bag boy even then. I think I, in Hobbs I did things like worked as a Western Union boy who delivers telegrams. As I got a little older I began to work in the summer in the oil fields.

Q: How, I don't think of New Mexico as being an oil place. How, was there quite a bit of oil there?

ELLIOTT: Quite a bit, yeah, especially in the southeast quadrant.

Q: Was it sort of tied to Texas fields?

ELLIOTT: No, they're independent. It's the Permian basin and that area.

Q: How did your father do? Did he strike oil?

ELLIOTT: No, he didn't really. He discovered a lot of oil for a lot of other people. So he worked for drilling companies. He was very successful in what he did. Unfortunately he wasn't doing it for himself. He was doing it for the company.

Q: While you, in high school did you have any teachers who were particularly inspired you or got you thinking beyond Hobbs?

ELLIOTT: Well, I wouldn't attribute that to my teachers. My mother especially raised all of us with the idea that we would go to college. There just wasn't any question about that. So I always looked beyond. In fact, in some respects a failing in my life is that I'm always living in the future and that I'm always looking forward. So I don't fully appreciate the experiences that I'm having because I'm thinking this is just a way to get through something to a better goal. So that's the way high school was for me.

Q: Well, in high school were you, you say your mother was pointing you all towards higher education. What were you thinking about? Did you have any idea what you wanted to do or study?

ELLIOTT: Well, I at that time even thought that law would be interesting. But my mother didn't encourage that. We were pointed towards things that were practical, because they had gone through the depression pointed us toward jobs that would be more or less depression proof. So that meant business and accounting and that sort of thing.

Q: Where did you go?

ELLIOTT: First, the first school I went to was called Eastern New Mexico University which was in Portales, New Mexico. I don't know 110, 20 miles north of Hobbs.

Q: What sort of a school was that?

ELLIOTT: A land grant State school, of course. But it was a university. So one could've done almost anything there, generally speaking. I mean all of the subjects were offered. All of the majors, I chose economics. I did a double major, economics and accounting with two minors. One was business administration. The other was theology.

Q: Oh, why theology?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course I was from a fairly religious family, and this was, this actually had a chair from the Church of Christ in the theology department. So I took enough courses to get a minor. My interest was waning at that point. I was more interested in literature and arts and other things than theology.

Q: Now you mentioned that your interests had been history and literature. What happened to make you chose economics?

ELLIOTT: Those others are not practical. On the other hand this was the American system where you have to do so many credits in history and so many in literature and so forth. So I did extremely well in my English and literature courses.

Q: You were at the school from when to when?

ELLIOTT: The first baccalaureate was from, let me think, excuse me, 1959 through 1962.

Q: Did the Kennedy phenomenon hit you or not? I mean because this was something that engaged many young people at the time.

ELLIOTT: Well, it did. Of course I was in university at that time. As it turns out when I graduated, I went to work in Phoenix, Arizona for an accounting firm that no longer exists, Arthur Anderson and Company. At one time they were called one of the Big Five.

I interrupted that process for six months to go to the Coast Guard reserve, came back to Phoenix in the summer of 1963 and worked there as a public auditor and business consultant until November, almost November and decided that I was too young to spend my life with miles of yellow paper with numbers on them. I simply kicked over the traces, told the managing partner that I was going to work my way around the world and took off. He of course told me that I had already established a pattern and that I was not going to be a bum. It turns out he was right but I took off and the first place I landed was Los Angeles.

Q: Had you traveled anywhere before this?

ELLIOTT: Not really. I'd gone up to Colorado. I'd gotten a Libertarian scholarship to go and study in Colorado around Colorado Springs. But this was the first. And I just took

off. So I got to Los Angeles. I wasn't quite sure. I was thinking in terms of working on a boat, but of course that's very difficult because you have to be a member of the union and so forth and so on. I took a plane to Hawaii, and I arrived, what was it? November the 22nd. I remember seeing the news headlines of Kennedy's assassination, and of course by the time arrived in Hawaii that's all that was on the news.

Q: What did you do in Hawaii?

ELLIOTT: Well, I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do, but as it turns out the easiest way to make a living there was again in public accounting. So I worked for Ernst and Ernst, another one of the Big Five. But it was one of those things where I really wasn't any more considering it as a career, and so it was a way to make a living. So then I spent the weekends on the beach.

Q: How long did you do that?

ELLIOTT: I lasted until, this was from November until August or maybe even July of the next year and I realized that I really needed to go back and do something with my life that was a little more serious than just rambling around the world.

Q: Well, was there sort of a beach crowd that you could hook up with there?

ELLIOTT: Well, there was. I don't know if you'd call it a beach crowd. I just met people casually. We formed a group. Some of them were native Hawaiians, well connected in Hawaii. Others were howlies like me from the mainland. It was very interesting period of just sort of exploring relationships and recreation. I did some scuba diving, that kind of thing.

Q: Would you call this as part of the hippie movement?

ELLIOTT: Well, hippies of course were well known in California and in the West. Less so in Hawaii. In Hawaii you're already living this kind of relaxed lifestyle anyway. So the hippies were not something that people saw.

Q: Well, then was there anything that sort of caused you to decide I'd better get on with it?

ELLIOTT: There wasn't anything specific in terms of like a traumatic experience. It's just you can only spend so much time on the beach. If you're driven the way I was at that time.

Q: Sounds like your Protestant background was beginning to take hold.

ELLIOTT: Absolutely. As I said the managing partner of Arthur Anderson was, he understood that immediately, but it took me, I had to experience that before I came back to do more serious things.

Q: So then what did you do? You're talking about 1964.

ELLIOTT: That would've been, 1964 I went back to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque and enrolled in pre-med. Of course I was working to support myself all this time. But the coursework was not very stimulating. It was beginning physics where they had you measuring corners of the room. That to me was boring. But the language at that time that they were sort of recommending, you needed a language was Russian. So I was taking Russian, and I was just so much interested in the Russian than I was in physics and science. So I simply switched to basically to major in Russian. Because basically I was determined that this time around when I went back to pursue education that it would not be what I was considering practical but something I really was interested in.

Q: Well, you had mentioned before you were in the Coast Guard reserves. New Mexico doesn't have a coast, does it?

ELLIOTT: Well, doesn't have a coast but, well my uncle, one of my uncles, one of my father's brothers, two of them actually, were in the Coast Guard during World War Two. They were from Texas, but they were still in the Coast Guard. This was a time when the draft was very active, and I simply decided to go into the Coast Guard reserve to do my military activity. Of course, served in California for, you asked if I had been anywhere before. I had gone to California in the Coast Guard. I had forgotten about that, San Francisco.

Q: What were they training you in, small boats or—

ELLIOTT: Well, at that time you couldn't be an officer if you were in the reserves. That's changed. But so you had to go through the basic seaman training, and then you have some sort of specialty. Mine was radar. The most interesting part, see I'd totally forgotten about this. Most interesting part of serving in the Coast Guard in California was that we took a couple of cruises. One was down to Mazatlan, Mexico and the other was to Canada to Vancouver. So that's sort of whetted my appetite for getting out into the world. So throwing over the traces in Phoenix and taking off was not such a new experience.

Q: Well now when you went back to University of New Mexico, which was in Albuquerque, was this post-graduate work?

ELLIOTT: Well, it would've been something in between because I had graduated. I had a bachelor's degree. So whatever I did would have to be beyond.

Q: How long did this, how long were you doing this, '64 to--?

ELLIOTT: 1964. That academic year because I was there very influenced by my Russian teacher. She was a Russian émigré from a, high born from Russia and had a, she was married to a German professor. She also had a Ph.D. in German but also did French and Italian I think, which is not unusual for Russians from that class.

She had at least five languages that she spoke very fluently. I was simply very impressed by her, and I realized that I was going to do graduate work in Russian. Or I had decided myself that I was going to do that. And we talked about where some good schools were, and she said, of course Michigan and Indiana and all those sort of Midwestern schools were pretty good. So I just decided I would go to Michigan and took off and went to Ann Arbor. When I arrived I was surprised that they were reluctant to admit me because this was, what I was doing was I was arriving to study for at least a master's in Russian and I had had no correspondence with them. I was really naïve in that respect. But they told me that if I got an A in the summer course, they'd let me into the summer course, intensive summer course. That if I got an A in that they would admit me. So I made it.

Q: Well, how much by this time because we're talking about 1965 I guess.

ELLIOTT: This was summer and fall of 1965.

Q: How much does the background of Cold War, your knowledge of thereof intrude or influence?

ELLIOTT: Well, that made Russian more interesting of course because the Soviet Union was the enemy, and so Russian was very exotic and that, I guess I wasn't following so much the details of the Cold War. It was just a, it was sort of a presence out there. I knew that there was this enemy the Soviet Union. Russian would be very useful in that respect.

Q: Did something as peculiar as the Foreign Service run across your radar at all?

ELLIOTT: No, no. Not really. Not at that point because I was very committed to getting a Ph.D. right away in Russian. So that was my goal.

Q: I imagine your first winter was a shock.

ELLIOTT: I don't remember being so appalled by the winter. I didn't actually mind that. If I was studying Russian, I had to be interested in the icy landscape.

Q: How did you find the courses there?

ELLIOTT: Very challenging, but to me it was all fascinating. The whole process was fascinating. The school was fascinating. There were so many different kinds of people there. The classes of course were challenging, and particularly, I had had very little exposure to Russian. I mean, I had the one year at New Mexico and I had the intensive course in the summer. Of course, in the fall I was thrown into advanced literature courses taught only in Russian. So that was a real challenge, and of course you had write your tests in Russian and so forth. I did find that challenging. But I studied a lot, and I just sort of hung in there and did it.

Q: Did you have much Russian history?

ELLIOTT: Yes, we did. We did a lot of Russian history because I also did a certificate of Russian and East European studies. So we systematically went through, I mean of course the, when you do a Ph.D. course, you get not just the history. You have to know the context in which literary works are taking place and when literary people are writing. So it's all interactive.

Q: How about sort of modern Soviet life and all? Did that—

ELLIOTT: Of course that was very interesting, and as it turns out I was lucky in that there was a Russian émigré who had founded the department in Michigan who allowed one student to live with her because she was elderly and retired and so forth. So I had that benefit of interacting with her and practicing my Russian, but also she had a scholarship founded in her husband's name that sent one student a year to Russia. So in 1967 I went to Leningrad. I think we might have been either the first or the second group of American students to go. So I spent a whole summer in Leningrad and then a couple of weeks traveling around before going on to Western Europe.

Q: What was your impression? How was schooling in Leningrad?

ELLIOTT: The overall experience was of course made a huge impression on me. The classes were Russian classes. They were, I wouldn't say they were necessarily superior to what I had at Michigan, but being in the culture itself was awesome. Meeting students, Russian students and practicing all the time my language and getting to know Russian culture, which to me was at that time was very intellectual. I mean, all of the students that I met were serious, and they talked about serious things, and they weren't frivolous like a lot of American students are. So that had a strong impression on me.

Q: Did you get any feel for the big brother watching you or the Soviet system per se.

ELLIOTT: Well, I just assumed that was taking place. We were out one night with a group of students, and I mentioned and by that time people bought the posters or whatever as mementos. I was complaining that I couldn't buy a Russian flag. All they had were these tiny little things. I wanted to get, actually it was a Soviet flag. This guy, I said, this student said, "Oh you're looking for a flag." He turned around, and there was a flagpole, and he just climbed up and stole the flag. This big red, it was Russian Federation flag. Well, I was appalled, but I couldn't refuse it after he had done that. So of course I had to take this. That's an offense that gets you sent to Siberia at least. So I had this flag with me, and I had it concealed all the time. I just assumed they were watching me, and they were waiting for the right opportunity to pounce. But I was afraid to take it out and bury it because I was afraid that would be an insult. So I had this flag with me all the time. When I, we got ready to get on the plane and leave. There were two entrances. There was Air Austria and we were in line. I got up to get on the plane. The guard wouldn't let me on. I never understood why, but he wouldn't let me on. So the travel agents took me around to the other entrance, and that guard let me on. All this time I was

sweating. I had this flag hidden on my person. I don't know if big brother was aware of this, but I had the impression that he might be.

Q: What about, you say the students were serious, but were you picking up things about how they felt about America or their own authorities?

ELLIOTT: A mixture. Of course these were largely dissident students. They were not the party hacks. So they had probably, and I don't remember the details, but probably unrealistic ideas of America. But when we were traveling, of course we had official guides. I mean these were student guides that were stamped with approval. There you saw, I mean they were clever in that they weren't so clearly doctrinaire. But they would always in any discussion they would bring around the Soviet point of view, which is, I mean it's normal, normal. But I didn't have the impression that they were just mindless robots.

Q: Well, coming out of there, did you come away with any impressions about whether the Soviet Union, how things are going, America or anything like that?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was pretty early at that point to perceive what actually would happen. I mean I did have some insights into that later when I was studying at Stanford. But at that point I think I just assumed that the Soviet Union was pretty strong and that it was quite the enemy of the U.S. and that we really did need to pay attention to what it was doing. In other words I really wasn't questioning our mindset, the U.S. mindset at that point.

Q: Well, where were you in 1967 when the race riots and all that and all that grabbed public attention?

ELLIOTT: I was in graduate school; in fact I was at a party of that was given by the head of the department. So it was a large group of people, a lot of East Europeans, Russians, and so forth, and that was the night that I think that (Dr. Martin Luther) King was killed [April 4, 1968], and so we were basically there watching the race riots on TV.

Q: Did you get involved in graduate school with any of the social movements of the time?

ELLIOTT: I was of course in retrospect very oriented toward my studies and spent most of my time working on my classes. But of course Michigan was the place where a lot of groups were represented. I recall a representative of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) came there to talk, and so there were a lot of very liberal students, but they were mostly undergraduates who had the time to do that. But SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) was represented there.

Q: What about Vietnam?

ELLIOTT: Vietnam is something that we were all aware of. I wasn't personally threatened with Vietnam duty because I was in the Coast Guard reserve. We weren't

getting the return of the veterans when I was in graduate school. I became more aware of that when I went down to teach at, after I passed my prelims and went down to teach at the University of Tennessee. That was actually when so many of the anti-war protests were going on. My colleagues were very aware of this, my university colleagues, and some even went to the largest demonstration here in Washington.

Q: Did the Coast Guard reserve ever call up or not?

ELLIOTT: No, they never did. That actually the Coast Guard reserve was significant for me for the six months that I was in it and traveling. Other than that there was not much of an influence.

Q: You did your prelims, how long does this Ph.D. process?

ELLIOTT: Let's see. I started in the summer of 1965 with the intensive Russian course, and I went to work in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1970. So that was a five-year process of doing everything for the degree. I guess I had to pass prelims before I went. So I passed the prelims, and so I had, it was at Tennessee that I worked on my dissertation.

Q: How did you support yourself?

ELLIOTT: Well, you mean in graduate school? I got scholarships. I had of course student loans. I was trying to think. Maybe I had some student loans from undergraduate school, but I don't think so. So I either, I had student loans and scholarships to support myself until I--. Of course when I passed prelims, I went to work teaching to Tennessee.

Q: During this time was there a significant other or did you--?

ELLIOTT: I met my wife at Michigan, and she was also in the Russian graduate program. We got married in 1968, and my first son was born in Ann Arbor in the summer before I went to Tennessee.

Q: What were you teaching at Tennessee?

ELLIOTT: Well, the agitation of the anti-war demonstrators and so forth altered a number of programs. So eventually we developed not only Russian but Serbo-Croatian, which I taught because I was working on a dissertation in the area of Serbo-Croatian. We did Russian culture--this is one of those courses that was developed--and Russian folklore.

Q: What moved you over towards Serbo-Croatian?

ELLIOTT: Well, when you do Slavic linguistics, which was my focus in graduate school, you do Russian, of course, which represents the Eastern bloc, Slavic. You also have to do a South and a West Slavic language. So my South Slavic language was Serbo-Croatian. I found it interesting, and I did well in it, and I found a topic to work on that was the first

translation of the Bible into modern Croatian by Bartol Kašić. He was actually a Jesuit priest in the, I guess, in the sixteenth century.

Q: Well, now taking the Bible to Croatian, the Catholic Church has always been a little bit careful about biblical translations. What the translation is old or modern Croatian?

ELLIOTT: This translation was into Croatian as what was almost modern Croatian, and it was simply a manuscript that existed and the original was held in Rome of course. I did go to Rome and talk to scholars there and try to look at other works around it. But it was certainly open for—because I was focused on it not from a theological point of view but from a linguistic point of view.

Q: Well, I know on the Serbian side there had been a great change in the writing, in spelling and all that.

ELLIOTT: You mean the shifting from Glagolitic to Cyrillic probably.

Q: But were you doing this in Latin letters.

ELLIOTT: They were Latin letters, yes.

Q: Did you travel to Croatia at all?

ELLIOTT: Well, actually I went to work there in let's see the summer of, or the spring of 1970 I guess, the spring of 1970. In fact I was there when my first son was born.

Q: What was your impression of Yugoslavia in those days?

ELLIOTT: I liked it a lot. The Croats--and of course, I was working in Zadar which is right on the little island as you go, right on the coast--were warmer and more friendly and more open and freer than the Russians. So it was quite a contrast with my experience in Russia. Even though it was the Communist country there was just simply no comparison. There was of course a lot of Italian influence on the people there. So that was, I actually became more interested in Croatian and in Croatia than I was in Russian. It was, the scholars there were very open to helping me do this because they were interested in having somebody work on these texts as well.

Q: Well, now speaking of being in, working on a Catholic subject in Croatia at that time, were you picking up the great divide between the Orthodox Church and Yugoslavia and Serbs and the Croats and all that?

ELLIOTT: There was definitely the divide, but it really was more political than religious. I don't think, that was an aspect of it, but I mean you could hear periodically political harangues by Croatian nationalists. This was a period when Croats would arrive in Belgrade and demand a translator. So this was all very theoretical. But I tried to basically avoid that kind of controversy because I was focused on something much, much earlier.

Q: This was the subject in which you got your Ph.D.?

ELLIOTT: Yes, the Ph.D. was in Slavic linguistics, and the dissertation was on this Croatian topic?

Q: You got your doctorate when?

ELLIOTT: I let's see, 1974, I believe. So it took me about four years of teaching full-time and writing to finish the dissertation.

Q: So this pointed you towards an academic tract obviously?

ELLIOTT: Yes. I devoted myself quite a bit to it. I began to focus on things like business Russian however as an area of research. You have to publish. There wasn't a great deal that, a great deal of interest generally in Croatian topics, and I had a business background. So it seemed logic—that was the time when we were beginning to think in terms of trade with the Soviet Union. So I began to focus on that. I eventually wrote a book on teaching Russian for trade negotiations with the USSR.

Q: Were you teaching Serbo-Croatian to at the same time?

ELLIOTT: I did. I taught Serbo-Croatian. There was a, it was kind of interesting the way it worked out. Of course there weren't a lot of students that would normally been interested in Tennessee in Serbo-Croatian. But there was in the speech department, which is really focused on teaching deaf children to speak there was a professor in Zagreb who had developed theory that they were following, and so these, the faculty members really or graduate students wanted to go there and study in Zagreb. So they needed some Serbo-Croatian. So they were the, in fact I even went over to the speech department to do the teaching.

Q: Did you find yourself, you know we keep using, bounce this term around, Serbo-Croatian, which no longer I guess is, now it's either Serbian or Croatian or but—

ELLIOTT: We made an effort at that time to take no side in the U.S. so we always used Serbo-Croatian. Now of course when I was in Croatia, it was always Croatian.

Q: I remember, I've been served in Belgrade for some time and took Serbo-Croatian, which is basically Serbian. I remember thirty years later coming back as an election observer in Bosnia, and at one point I was using my almost completely forgotten Serbian and I was speaking. I said, to a lady, I was saying, "I'm sorry my Serbian's not very good." She said, "You're not speaking Serbian. You're speaking Bosnian." So I learned to adjust myself and say okay. If it makes you feel good, I'm speaking Bosnian.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, Bosnian was not something that was a linguistic concept. It's social.

Q: No. Well, as you were playing with these things did you run across anything that really became quite a bone of contention, Macedonia for one, between the Greeks--?

ELLIOTT: Well, I visited Macedonia at which point I decided to go to visit Greece, and so I ended up... It was when I was actually there the first time as a student. So when I finished my period in Croatia, I decided to travel down to Greece. I took a bus to some place and happened to meet a student who was there, and he decided that why should we pay these bus prices when there were people coming around asking for riders. So he and I went with I have no idea who he was, but he was just somebody who was--. It was sort of like, in Europe especially in Eastern Europe anybody who has a car often turns it into a taxi. So that's what our driver did. So he drove all through the night through Montenegro and down through Kosovo before dropping us off at a place where we could catch a train to go onto Athens.

Q: Do you know which pass?

ELLIOTT: I don't know which pass it was, but I do know it was really mountainous and beautiful country.

Q: Beautiful country but so scary too.

ELLIOTT: Especially at night. But that was my only experience in going to, oh no it isn't. Then when I served in Yugoslavia later, I took my family down to Greece, and we came back and drove through Macedonia. So that's my only experience from Macedonia.

Q: Well, then so how long did you stay at the University of Tennessee?

ELLIOTT: Twelve years. I one of the things that I used to do with my students was, there's not a lot to do with a major in Russian. So I used to encourage them to take the exam for the Foreign Service because I thought that would be a way for them to use their Russian. But I began to feel a little bit dishonest because I had never done it. So I just decided to take the exam so that I would have that experience in talking to them. So I did. I didn't really expect to pass it. I knew it was a real challenge. So I did sort of a global political survey, and I took the written exam and I passed it. So then they invited me to an oral, and again I, it was for experience. I really didn't expect to pass that stage. But it didn't turn out to be such a challenge for me because a lot of it was--. Well, it was like essays and then an in-basket exam. The scenario is you're leaving. So you have to leave instructions for your subordinates to do whatever needs to be done. Then there was unmonitored discussion and solving of a problem, which wasn't such a challenge because of course I didn't, coming from academia I was used to discussing and making an effort to include everybody and so that, after that day I passed that. I discovered that once you passed those two hurdles and you had foreign languages, then they suddenly became interested in you. I don't know what it's like now. The background investigation went fairly quickly, and so I started this whole process in January and by Thanksgiving they were offering me a job!

Q: Well, how did, what was your feeling between academia and the Foreign Service? By then you must have been well down the tenure track or something.

ELLIOTT: Oh, I was an associate professor, and yeah, I was doing just fine but that was also at a period when inflation basically just left academia behind. So I had a wife and a mother in law and two children to support, and suddenly there was this opportunity--. And I had been actually a little bit antsy, a little bit uncomfortable in academia because it was sort of routine too much. I was looking outside anyway, and this was the opportunity that came along and it looked good. As it turns out it was ideal for me because it allowed me to do, use the foreign languages, move around, travel, change the scene every two or three years yet maintain the same administrative structure. So for me it was ideal.

Q: Well, when did you come into the Foreign Service?

ELLIOTT: I came into the foreign service in [March] 1982. I was forty-two years old.

Q: How did you come in? At the bottom as a junior officer?

ELLIOTT: As a junior officer.

Q: How did you feel? I mean, you must've been the old man or were there others?

ELLIOTT: There were some others because that was a period when you also could come in at a mid-level if you were a minority or something like that. I was a minority, I had claims to minority status with my Indian background, but that was not part of what I was about. So I just came in and did the whole thing from the start as a junior officer.

Q: How did you find your junior officer class? What was its composition?

ELLIOTT: Actually the average age was about thirty-two or three because most of them had been to graduate school. Some were older. I mean there was a Hispanic former priest who was coming in the consular corps and some other minorities. So it was quite a diverse group, a fairly talented group and congenial. Everybody was congenial.

Q: Did you, were you hoping to get into a Slavic country or--?

ELLIOTT: Actually I didn't really, I always wanted to do something new. Every time I get an opportunity. I don't want to do what I've already done. So I bid on Saudi Arabia. I had the oil background. That would have been useful. So I bid on Saudi Arabia, and everybody thought I was a shoe-in. But because I bid on a large number of posts, one of them was Zagreb, I went around and met people in the department who were sort of the people in charge of these. One of the people I talked to was the guy who was going to Zagreb as the consul general. When he found out that I spoke Serbo-Croatian, he was in the personnel in assignments, that's where I went. Usually it doesn't work that way they tell me.

Q: Who was the consul general?

ELLIOTT: I'm trying to think of what his name was. Yes, Donchi, Don Donchi, and he bragged about sending people and assigning people everywhere else except that position, saving it for himself.

Q: You were in Zagreb from what 1982 to 1984. What were your duties?

ELLIOTT: I went here as the vice consul and I was supposed to do one year as head of the consular section and one year doing political-economic reporting. The Consular and Administrative Section Chief, Richelle Keller, a consular cone officer, just decided that CA (Bureau of Consular Affairs) should not be paying for this rotation into political-economic for these vice consuls. So she got it cancelled. Well, so it didn't exist anymore. Now, how that worked I don't know, it just didn't exist anymore. So she decided after my time in the Consular Section, she'd let me rotate into being admin and she would do all the consular work. That meant she would do all the visa work and all that sort of thing, and I would be the admin officer. Worked out just fine for me. I enjoyed being the admin officer.

Q: What were the politics of that part of Yugoslavia at the time you were there?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was very Croatian. That even was reflected in the embassy-consulate's relationship in that there was animosity between the FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in the consulate and the FSN was in the embassy. Of course I was so busy as always it seems doing other things and especially doing the admin work that I really didn't ever get into the political reporting. So I can't really comment very authoritatively on that.

Q: Well, I know when I was chief of consular section in Belgrade, this is back in the mid-1960s, as you know the names of the months are different in Croatian and Serbian. I'm sure every Serbian knows what the Croatian names are. But I couldn't get my local employees to tell me which was what. It was the attitude thing. You really couldn't get them to comment on their Croatian knowledge.

ELLIOTT: This was the height of sort of nationalism and so that was true of the Croatian government. As a junior officer I really had very little interaction with the officials especially after I became an admin officer.

Q: How did you find working in that environment because you were using local hires. You were very much involved in the business of the consulate.

ELLIOTT: Well, for me it was like second nature, but I had not been in bureaucracy long enough to know what risks I was taking. So I would decide for example first thing we needed to do was a public access control project. When I first came there, people would come in applying for a visa and lean over my desk. I mean they'd just walk in. So there was no, there were no barriers whatsoever. So the first thing I did was actually construct

some barriers when I was there as the vice consul, so that at least people didn't just walk in and sit at your desk. But then there was these big doors and so forth that needed to be put into the entrance to the consulate. Lots of problems to overcome because of the stairs coming down and so forth.

Well, that's the kind of thing I related to very well, and so what I would do was simply go out and find a contractor and negotiate a price and do it. Well, this was also a time when we were getting a little extra money because the dollar was going up. I was doing all these things basically without asking for any money or very little money from Belgrade. It worked very well and I was good at that. Actually I had more trouble with the bureaucracy of the embassy where the admin counselor [Ed: 1982 Vincent Farley] was sort of appalled by what I was doing, how was I paying for this and that sort of thing. I was just going out and arranging all of this. So he was very negative and confrontational, but the ambassador noted some of the OI (Official-Informal) correspondence going back and forth, and he just noted that it seems that the embassy was being very negative about something that he regarded as basically positive. So it went away.

Q: So who was the ambassador?

ELLIOTT: The ambassador was David Anderson [Ed: Ambassador Anderson served from August 19, 1981 to June 26, 1985]

Q: David started his first job overseas as vice counsel in Belgrade in my office.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, he was good in that respect.

Q: Well, then did you and your wife and family get very much involved in Croatian society or—

ELLIOTT: Well, more so than the American community thought we should because when I arrived I was fairly...oh, I don't know idealistic, and I had these two kids that were going into the fifth and seventh grade. So I got there, and I put them in a Yugoslav school. It was stressful in that, for them especially. But the older one had a friend who was an English speaker with him all the time so he could translate. The younger one didn't have that. So he would come home at night and I'd have to help him with his Croatian. So that was, they were doing correspondence course, American correspondence course. So they did get very much into the culture, and they still have fond memories of Zagreb. The second year however I let them go to the American school, and they did so with relief. But the younger one skipped a grade. He had done enough between the correspondence course and the Croatian school that he was just ahead of the American system.

Q: I mean were you picking up from your Croatian contacts that things were going to blow up eventually?

ELLIOTT: No. No. In fact you mean the war? Actually I was really quite surprised because at that point, I mean there were tensions between Croatia and Serbia, but Bosnia was where they mixed and they mixed well and there was always my impression was far less tension in Bosnia than in either of the two extremes.

All the Bosnians that we had in the consulate were the ones that were the least ideological and the ones that adapted to everybody better than either the Croats or the Serbs. The Croats were very arrogant, but I had not too much contact with Serbs.

Q: They just don't, don't mix and they work at it.

ELLIOTT: Right. Right.

Q: After Yugoslavia where did you go?

ELLIOTT: I came back to the Soviet desk, which was a logical sort of assignment for me. I was an economic officer on the Soviet desk. That would be from 1984 to 1986.

Q: How were relations with the Soviet Union at this particular time?

ELLIOTT: Well, they got rather tense because of the shooting down of the Korean airliner. [Ed: On September 1, 1983, the Russians shot down a Korean commercial airlines flight, KAL 007.]

Q: Yeah, over the Kamchatka peninsula.

ELLIOTT: One of the things that I did was track visitors. I was in charge of the closed area program, and I worked with the FBI in that respect. So it was definitely adversarial.

Q: Were you also doing economic work?

ELLIOTT: Yes. I don't think we were aware of the weaknesses of the Soviet economy. I mean we thought that in theory that it couldn't work very well because they weren't assigning real costs or proper costs to the expenditure of assets. But we didn't realize how weak it was. We knew that they were not able then to put it into any kind of production in an efficient way. We knew there were large inefficiencies. But we did not yet know how weak it turned out to be when (President) Reagan really began to press them.

Q: Was the great divergence in economies because of work of computers and development of computers, was that a factor at this point or not?

ELLIOTT: Probably it was a factor. I don't know that we were so much aware of it. We didn't realize how poor their computing abilities were, and we also didn't realize what a huge contribution to efficiency the growth of IT would be here.

Q: Where were you getting most of your information on the economy, was it the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) or from embassy reporting?

ELLIOTT: The thing is when you do economic work in the Foreign Service, you're not really doing a lot of original research. So what you're really doing are the day to day operations that fall in the sort of economic realm but that aren't really, not really research and not really very analytical. You do more analytical reporting from post than you do when you're in the U.S.

Q: How did you find the Soviet desk?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was a dynamic place, very busy. Always something going on, a lot of travel, not for me personally, but a lot of back and forth travel and trips that people would come back and report on. Every morning there was this intensive period getting ready for the noon press briefing. Lots of drafting that had to be done immediately. Very busy. Of course there's constant interest in the Soviet Union so a lot of phone calls that we had to respond to.

Q: I've often thought that to get into something like that you're so busy that you're looking at an awful lot of trees and missing the forest.

ELLIOTT: You don't, you can't stand back and look at where everything is going.

Q: I mean this is of course the most astounding thing I think that came out of the end of the Cold War was our overestimate of the Soviet, of the strengths of the Soviet Union.

ELLIOTT: Well, for one thing I don't think we really had that much detailed information. Maybe the CIA did. I don't know. But, if they did, they didn't seem to get out the information of the weakness, the real weaknesses of the Soviet Union.

Q: Well, on the economic side were we looking at the ethnic cracks in the system?

ELLIOTT: Well, people were aware of ethnic tensions, and they were aware of the fact the real population growth was in the Central Asian ethnic groups rather than in European Russia. Yeah, there was a lot of talk about that. In fact, after I came back from my third assignment which was to Islamabad, I went to long term training in Stanford to get a master's degree, and at that point in the economic department, I actually wrote a paper theorizing about the demise of the Soviet Union. That was in 1989. Of course, all the professors thought this was theoretical, that couldn't possibly happen. Of course it did almost immediately after I left Stanford.

Q: You weren't there to bask.

ELLIOTT: No.

Q: Now, this was the Reagan Administration, which was doing some things that had repercussions in the Soviet Union. I mean we were building up our military, Star Wars thing and all. Were we seeing these policies having any effect on the Soviets?

ELLIOTT: Well, I think certainly toward the end of the 1980s many people were aware of the stresses and that the Soviet Union was very weak and that if they tried to keep up with us militarily that the economy simply wouldn't support it. I think 1982 or 1984 was early for that observation, but when I was in Stanford in 1989, I think a lot of people were aware of it.

Q: In 1986 you're off to quite a different change of locale aren't you?

ELLIOTT: Yes. I went to Islamabad in 1986 and stayed until 1989. I extended a year so my younger son could graduate from ISI (International School of Islamabad).

Q: What were American relations with Pakistan in 1986?

ELLIOTT: Actually they were pretty good. At that point we were still pretending that we didn't think they had a nuclear program. So there was a large U.S. AID mission, maybe the second largest after Cairo. There was a lot going on. Pakistanis at that point tended to like Americans, not that there weren't the conservative elements building, but we didn't come in contact with them very often. Certainly between Zia and the government and the ambassador for example there was a fairly close interaction.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

ELLIOTT: When I first went, it was Dean Hinton. It was his last year there. My first year was his last year. [Ed: Ambassador Hilton served from December 1983 to November 9, 1986.]

Q: He's one of the major figures in American diplomacy. How did he, of the era, how did he operate?

ELLIOTT: Of course my contact with him as a junior officer was not too intimate, but he was fairly informal. He allowed us to wear open necked shirts in the hotter part of the year. He himself wore them. He was kind of a no nonsense guy. A little bit tricky because if you wrote something that he didn't like, he wouldn't necessarily tell you what was wrong with it. He'd just send it back and have you correct it. I remember in fact one instance where I had written some comments for him about a book that was published. Of course every writer in Pakistan always sends their books to the ambassador for his review. He kept sending it back. Lauralee Peters was the Economic Counselor. She couldn't figure it out. Maybe after the third time we finally figured out that I had said, "I've read this book and," and since he hadn't read it, she guessed that he didn't want me to say that. Sure enough when we took it out, things were fine. He also was noted for absolutely illegible handwriting.

Q: Oh boy. Did he have a secretary who could do it?

ELLIOTT: Um hmm. He did. Most of the time so we relied on her. I don't remember her name at this point. But actually I was lucky with him. If he really didn't like something you had done, he could be very abrasive, but I just was fortunate in what I sent him. He was an economist, and of course I was an economic officer. So what I sent him, he tended to like. So we got along fine.

Q: Where did, how big an economic section was there?

ELLIOTT: There were counselor, two officers I believe, a secretary, and while I was there they added a third person who was going to be the special representative to Afghanistan but in our econ section. Then of course there were others collated with us. I don't even remember how many of them there were.

Q: Well, how much an economy did Pakistan have then?

ELLIOTT: Well, Pakistan of course is a poor country. It didn't, I can't really remember the GDP (gross domestic product). Income per capita was something like four hundred dollars or less. It was certainly not a large economy and it was based primarily agriculture, and for the U.S. that meant still a lot of textile exports, and so because we were such a market for their textiles, they tended to listen to whatever we had to say. So I focused largely on trade and also on technology imports. We had to rule on any computers that came into the country and so forth.

Q: How were relations in general, and then we'll talk trade-wise with India at the time?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course, in Pakistan there's always tension with India. So relations with India were not good. The U.S. of course always had a much larger mission in India, and from the perspective of Islamabad it always looked as if there was favoritism toward New Delhi. That was one of the more difficult parts of the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan.

Q: Was there an effort on the part of our ambassadors to expose each staff to perceptions from New Delhi and Islamabad?

ELLIOTT: Well, we did go. But it was very often not business related but more for tourism or for the schools. The schools were competitors, and so when Islamabad was playing Delhi, officers, the parents of the children often would go.

Q: Well, the war in Afghanistan was going on with insurrection or whatever it was called, wasn't it, at the time you were there?

ELLIOTT: It was. I don't really remember the details at this point. We were aware that there were a lot of families who had military-related families in Pakistan who had become rich on the arms trade that was going into Afghanistan to oppose the Russians. It

was largely that aspect of our relationship was very much under the domination of the CIA and the station chief. I don't remember the pretext for their establishing a special representative, but that happened while I was there, and I can't remember if it happened under Dean Hinton or a couple of ambassadors later. There was Dean Hinton, then Arnie Raphael [Ed: Ambassador Raphael served from June 24, 1987 to August 17, 1988, when he died in an aircraft crash that also killed President Zia of Pakistan.] He was replaced by Robert Oakley. I believe that actually happened under Robert Oakley. [Ambassador Oakley served from September 1, 1988 to August 29, 1991.]

Q: Were you there when a special representative was attached to the section?

ELLIOTT: Yes.

Q: But it was obviously not, I take it, he was doing something. He had a different portfolio.

ELLIOTT: He was, and it happened under Raphael, because there was tension between Raphael and the, and I heard it primarily through the comments of DCM Beth Jones at the time. He tended, the representative, tended to be very, and I just can't call his name right now. He was an FSO-1 political officer and adamant that he was going to be independent of the ambassador. He was not going to be dominated by Islamabad. So there was tension in terms of what they did, but I never knew the details of it.

Q: When you say textiles were a big part of export trade to the United States, was this just plain cloth?

ELLIOTT: It was usually the lower end of textiles although now Pakistan has developed some higher end clothing. At that time it was largely gray cloth, and they also were, there was always some suspicion and controversy over whether or not they were doing just third country exporting in order to increase their quotas to the U.S..

Q: In other words they were sending it off to—

ELLIOTT: To the Gulf and the Gulf, then it went on to the U.S.

Q: What would gray cloth be used for?

ELLIOTT: Anything. Gray cloth is simply the unbleached basic material that people use for many things, curtains for example. Gray cloth would then be taken and processed further in the U.S., dyed and so forth. Gray cloth was simply meant that it was undyed.

Q: Was this textile business in competition with our mills in the United States, which made it very politically sensitive here?

ELLIOTT: It was always a controversy, and of course we had quotas because the domestic industry always had a lot of political clout in Washington and the unions as

well. So they perceived it as competition. I don't really think it was that much competition because our mills no longer were producing that kind of stuff.

Q: So the U.S. and Pakistan were at different levels?

ELLIOTT: We're at the high end really, basically of textile production.

Q: How did you find the Pakistanis? Did one develop contacts with the Pakistani society?

ELLIOTT: Yes, they were always very accessible, interested in interacting with people at the embassy. If for no other reason than to lobby for visas. I also had contact with the Indian diplomats there. It appeared to me that the Pakistanis were much easier to deal with than the Indians. The Indian bureaucrats were very arrogant and very conscious of their independence. The Pakistanis were much nicer people. They didn't necessarily do what we wanted them to do, but they were much nicer.

Q: Do we get much of a feel for what was happening out in the countryside?

ELLIOTT: Well, we certainly had no restrictions as to traveling. The internal political people probably would be able to answer that better in terms of what was actually happening politically. But we were able to get out to, certainly to the cities. We didn't do a lot of economic work in the villages. But it was still a feudal society, an agricultural society. The politics were pretty much dominated by the big landowners and the big families.

Q: Now I mean, were you, I've heard people say they would be guests of a landowner who would own a dozen or more villages.

ELLIOTT: Oh yeah. That was, that's what I mean by a feudal society.

Q: Were we getting any feel at the time, I mean I realize this wasn't your particular area of concentration but about Islamic fundamentalism and all?

ELLIOTT: Well, I think we got some at that point. Things merge a little bit for me because I had a second tour. By the second tour it was an important part of the relationship. But at that time I think the madras schools were just getting really started. A lot of them were funded by probably well meaning people from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. They were just really beginning at that point, and also it was still not something that was settled in Afghanistan, which of course had an important, I think, impact on the development in Pakistan of the fundamentalist movement.

Q: What about the poppy trade? Was that alive and well in Pakistan?

ELLIOTT: It was. In fact I can remember visiting the poppy fields and even having somebody take a bowl and show me how they cut it to get the sap out of it.

You were asking about fundamentalists. Once when I was visiting in Karachi we happened into an office, and I don't really remember what the industry was even. But he had a visitor who launched into to everybody's embarrassment a kind of anti-American diatribe. So particularly in a place like Karachi this stuff was bubbling along and developing. It was by no means really open. It was all pretty much underground at that time.

Q: What about the political life? There was Zia and then who replaced Zia?

ELLIOTT: Let me see. Who was the fellow who when, then when the plane went down. He was another landowner, Punjabi, but I can't really remember his name.

Q: Well, was the government pretty much a one-man, one-party rule while you were there?

ELLIOTT: Well, it certainly was dominated by Zia. But of course there was a president who didn't play a large role except in change of government. I just can't remember the name of the fellow who replaced him. But it was largely dominated by the prime minister.

Q: Were the Bhuttos in, I mean well, Benazir at this point, was she in the country and was of interest to us?

ELLIOTT: My God, it was Benazir Bhutto I believe who was if not then, not long after. There might have been a transition, but yes, she definitely was there, and she was elected for the first time while I was there. That of course was, she was very popular and of course was a landowner also and married a wealthy guy. But the man she married was really a problem for her because he was extraordinarily corrupt, almost openly, and there were rumors at that time that he would attend cabinet meetings and sometimes be disruptive, and it was said at one time that they disagreed and he even slapped her. Well, but that for a Pakistani husband that's not so unusual and particularly from that level. Well, I think all Pakistani men tended to be pretty chauvinistic but to have that happen to the president was awkward, prime minister I should say.

Q: For economics, was there much really interesting happening or was this a country where we had big political stakes but the economics were minor?

ELLIOTT: Well, economics were always important politically, even though it was small amount of money in terms of U.S. of exports. Because the economy was so always so precarious and because we were interested in them politically, whatever we could do to sort of shore up the economy, the assistance. That's why we had such a large mission there, USAID mission. So economics were important politically.

Q: What was your reaction—you were there when the plane went down with President Zia and our Ambassador Raphel on August 17, 1988. How did that hit our embassy?

ELLIOTT: Well, everybody was simply stunned. They really, they were just sort of numb for a while, sort of in denial for a while and also at the same time working almost twenty-four hours a day because there was so much interest from Washington and so much publicity. I can remember even though they had of course somebody on duty in the front office twenty-four hours a day, and our political counselor Lauralee Peters did a lot of that. So I was there backing her up. The department provided us an open phone line practically all the time. Of course the country just stopped for several days.

Robert Oakley came out as the next ambassador [Ed: On August 18 Ambassador Oakley received a recess appointment, which was confirmed by the Senate October 17, 1988. He presented his credentials on September 1, 1988, and departed post August 29, 1991]. Of course that was a little bit awkward for Raphel's widow because there was a rumor that Oakley wanted that job when Raphel got it. So that was awkward. But he came, and then sure enough he was appointed ambassador after the funeral. In fact I don't think he ever left. I think he actually came virtually as the ambassador to be.

Q: Was there noticeable change in how the embassy was run afterward?

ELLIOTT: Well, the two men had very different styles. But Oakley also was kind of a no nonsense down to earth kind of person, and so he also could be very abrasive. So in some respects, he was in no means on the level of Dean Hinton as ambassador, but there were some similarities of style. Whereas Raphel was very collegial in his management style.

Q: What was the embassy analysis of what happened when the plane went down?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was, we couldn't determine any evidence of sabotage, and so we had to assume that it was an accident. The Pakistani government took the opposite, exactly the opposite view. They couldn't determine there was an accident. So they had to assume it was sabotage. I never heard any other resolution than that.

Q: I recall the embassy was attacked and burned in 1979. How leery was the staff; you might say yourself included, the embassy at that time looking out for mobs and afraid this might happen again?

ELLIOTT: Well, that, everybody was always aware of that. So we monitored very carefully sort of the mood in the city, and then of course there was really heavy security presence. But there were other things that happened while I was there. Let's see, Salman Rushdie published his book. Of course he was a British citizen, and it was published I think in England. There was a British information center, the British Council. I was a small operation, and it was somewhat in a market, not on a main street. Whereas the U.S. Information Agency had its office right on the main drag in the downtown area. So the mobs basically attacked that instead of the British Council. I can remember sitting in my living room and hearing shots. There were some shots, and one or two people were killed. Seems like they attempted to burn it also. But nothing came of it. That dissipated after a day or two.

Q: Well, then, go to 1989, where did you go?

ELLIOTT: What's of more interest is my route home, which was through Beijing. I arrived there with my wife and son. One other son was already in the U.S. When we arrived there were no lights. It was dark and there didn't seem to be any transportation. I had set this up just to go in and spend a couple of days looking at the wall and that sort of thing and back out. But it was dark and no transportation, and we couldn't quite figure out what was going on. So we didn't know how we'd get to our hotel. But there was a bus where obviously foreigners were getting on. So we just pushed our way, you had to actually fight to get onto the bus.

Q: This was June of 1989, I assume.

ELLIOTT: It was. We were taken to a hotel because this largely was a group of people who basically just got on the bus with them. We were taken to a hotel, and then we found a way to get to our own hotel the next day. What we had done was arrive the day of Tiananmen Square massacre. We had no idea what was going on. Of course you would've thought that they would've notified people on the plane, but they didn't. So we, I spent all the time I was there getting down to the Japan Air Lines booking office and getting a way out. It was very interesting because what I had to do was get a taxi from the hotel that would take me down there, and it cost five dollars or something. We drove past and around burning hulks of cars and so forth. After I got my business done and finally found a taxi to take me back, the price had gone up to thirty-five dollars to get back to the hotel!

So I was simply going, we were going through there, and we went to Japan for a short while before going to the Department in transition to long-term training at Stanford. So I was only in Washington for the summer before going on to Stanford.

Q: What training was this?

ELLIOTT: It was the economic training, I was an economic officer so I was doing a master's at the Food Research Institute at Stanford.

Q: How did you find this? I've heard people say that particularly mention Stanford that their economics was a little bit obtuse or a real problem to study.

ELLIOTT: Well, I didn't discover that at all. It was real challenge for me because I didn't have very much math, and even though I had an economic or rather, yeah a master's in economics, it was old enough not to have been so almost completely mathematics in the methodology. So I took advanced, a refresher course at FSI before going out. If I hadn't, I probably would've run shrieking from the room the first day. Because professors would come in, and they would start writing the formula on the board, and they would finally get toward the end of the board, and they would turn around and say, see, and then erase it. It was that aspect of it was not very helpful but this was the Food Research Institute. So it was basically developmental economics for third world countries. That was fine

plus you were allowed to take courses in the regular economics department and also in the business school. So for me it was quite useful.

Q: Well could you get away from as I say these mathematical types. Did it make any sense or—

ELLIOTT: Well, of course when you're talking about basic trade and developmental economics, they had to really speak English. But in some of the basic economics courses, I just had to really gut it out. In some of the business school courses I made a mistake and took a more advanced course, which was highly mathematical. On the whole I think I got quite a bit out of it. Certainly the faculty at Stanford were all high quality, but they were all so sort of supportive, and they wanted you to succeed and you had that feeling. So it was not like it would've been necessarily at Princeton. The atmosphere was different.

Q: So you came out really, your courses were pretty well focused on Macroeconomics and particularly with development. So then what did you do?

ELLIOTT: Well, that's when I came to work at OMA in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. I went back to the department.

Q: OMA is—

ELLIOTT: Office of Monetary Affairs. That was of course purely macroeconomics, and what I did there was I worked primarily to prepare the department each month for the Paris Club meeting. So we were working directly with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Treasury. I was there from 1990 to 1992.

Q: Was this 1990-1992 period when the International Monetary Fund and World Bank were running into real problems of money that they had lent out couldn't be repaid.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, and a lot of European desired to simply cancel debt particularly for African countries and other developing countries. Of course Congress was opposed to that. So one huge project that we did was work out with Treasury a system by which we could agree to reduced debt or at least reschedule it in a way that we weren't just wiping it out for the country. They still had to pay it, but they got more time in which to do it.

Q: Well, what was the feeling? Some of my interviewees suggest some countries would take whatever money they can get--it's probably unfair to some countries--but with no real intention or interest in eventually paying it back.

ELLIOTT: And there was absolutely some question as to where the money actually ended up.

Q: Yeah, well, this is of course the other side of it. In Africa, so you go to a country like Saudi Arabia or something where a whole lot ends up in the infrastructure. There may be

corruption, but stuff gets out to benefit the people. I'm told in Africa a lot of it just doesn't get.

ELLIOTT: No, it doesn't. It probably ends up in Swiss bank accounts.

Q: Well, was there any feeling of why do we do this?

ELLIOTT: Oh of course. That was the U.S. view, certainly the U.S. Congress's view. But there is always been, even the Brits have always wanted to be a little bit more lenient maybe because they had closer ties to Africa. But they've always, and there were very liberal elements in Europe that kept wanting to give them another chance. They would, you would have these people that would go there and work primarily in poverty or trying to alleviate poverty, and they thought that we were rich countries and that we should do something about that. That's a strong selling point. But then there were the more fiscally conservative people that were saying something like what you were saying that what's the point in creating these big debts which never get paid back and eventually get either rescheduled or forgiven and then just so that they can be given more money.

Q: Again I suppose the bottom line is the money doesn't seem to go any, I mean go anywhere positive.

ELLIOTT: It doesn't seem, what we sometimes had the impression of what it did was provide fairly lucrative lifestyles for a lot of bureaucrats in the IMF and the World Bank and for tiny, tiny handful of people in Africa and some of the other developing countries. And that was basically it. We were footing, the taxpayer was footing the bill.

Q: Well, during the time you were there was the State Department saying we want to be lenient to make sure that Uganda or Kenya or Tanzania or what have you is favorably disposed to us. It makes relations easier and all that.

ELLIOTT: You might have found that attitude on the desks among political officers, but you didn't find that very much among economists particularly in OMA. I mean OMA was staffed by people who had economic training, and so they really tended to look at it with economic eyes. That was our job at that point, that was how it is in a bureaucracy. You have certain things you have to do. You have to get ready to consider, I did, had to get ready to consider each country as it came up in the Paris Club. But I don't think that we were highly supportive of the process, the overall process.

Q: Who were the most say liberal in the Paris Club being what—

ELLIOTT: Paris Club is of course an association of the developed countries, largely developed countries--although Russia was in there—who held the debt of developing countries. So they got together in order to treat all the countries the same so that you wouldn't have one country forgiving debt and the other country raising interest rates et cetera. So at least everybody was supposedly treated the same.

Q: Was there a move afoot essentially to withdraw American participation in this?

ELLIOTT: Not serious a move to do that.

Q: Why not?

ELLIOTT: Well, I don't know that anybody ever really ever seriously thought it was feasible to do that. I think it would've been too awkward to and the, in our relationships in general. I think it would've had a huge impact, the thinking might have been that it had too strong an impact on our relationships with our allies not to participate in that. There was, there are of course obviously in the U.S. there is also a group of people as in many of the European countries, committed to development assistance. They recognize that as one of the difficult parts of development assistance, but that didn't mean that they wanted to abandon the endeavor.

Q: Well, were there enough bright spots of where developmental money had been invested by the, was it World Bank or International Monetary Fund, had been invested in countries where you could see a positive result?

ELLIOTT: I think that there was an assumption on our part that there was, but I don't remember being a part of actually systematically evaluating that to decide whether or not we should continue doing it.

Q: How did you find your relations with Treasury?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course we had a lot in common, but in terms of our outlook they were fiscally conservative and so forth. But there was a lot of competition with Treasury because we viewed it as a domestic agency that was really at that point trying to expand its international operations at the expense of the State Department. So at that point we were still in charge of the U.S. delegation to the Paris Club, but after I left that, we lost that and Treasury took it over, which they were trying very hard to do at the time I was there.

Q: Did you feel that tension?

ELLIOTT: Oh constantly, yeah. It was always there. There was a, their tendency to try to ignore what we were saying although ultimately our deputy assistant secretary was the representative, actually was the head of the office of OMA who was the regular representative.

Q: Who was that?

ELLIOTT: It was, well, it was Joe Saloom most of the time I was there.

Q: I'm trying to get a hold of him. He's dealing I think with Iraqi money right now.

ELLIOTT: Is he retired?

Q: Yes, he's retired. Did you find frustrating dealing with something, one, that Treasury was trying to take it away from you; and two, I would think this whole idea of working with the third world and being very dubious about doing much good, would be kind of discouraging.

ELLIOTT: It was if you allowed yourself to sit around and think about it. But good FSOs (Foreign Service officers) don't really do that so much as they look at what is the immediate fire that has to be put out. So we spent an awful lot of our time putting out brush fires rather than looking at the broad picture, and of course we wouldn't have had very much into whether or not we continued the process anyway.

Q: Well, then this would be, you were there during such a, well the Bush administration, Bush I wasn't it.

ELLIOTT: Well, that's another thing that happened when we were there was the invasion. So we, that was a very intense period.

Q: This is the Gulf War.

ELLIOTT: Exactly, August 1990.

Q: What did this cause?

ELLIOTT: Well, we had a lot of intense interaction with treasury and largely it was looking at financial issues and how were we going to get people to contribute to help finance the war and that was fairly successful.

Q: We almost made a profit on that war.

ELLIOTT: Almost. But, we are making up for that now.

Q: Oh yes, in Iraq. Oh my God. Well now, in 1992 what was your next assignment?

ELLIOTT: Well, I was posted to the Treasury office in the embassy in London, but en route I went to open the embassy in Tashkent. That was the time when they had thirteen embassies that were to be opened, and it was very difficult to staff that operation, and so they were taking, in my case, an interim chargé to get the embassy up and running.

Q: Were you doing this in Tashkent from when to when, this would be?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was only from April to June probably.

Q: Well, isn't Tashkent the capital of Uzbekistan? What was the situation when you got there?

ELLIOTT: It was the most intense work I've ever done because they had the idea that they would staff all of these embassies with exactly the same four officers, no secretary, no Marines. Of course the agency had provided a certain amount of administrative assistance, communications, and satellite phones basically to send cables. So we had classified information in the embassy, but no way to protect it. So there had to be an American there every, all twenty-four hours. The safes were in my office. So the first night I was there, I was there twenty-four hours.

Q: What sort of, in the first place what was our embassy like?

ELLIOTT: Well, actually Uzbekistan was probably luckier than many. Most of them were established in hotels because there was really no other place for them. In Tashkent there had been a sort of a mission, real estate mission, earlier before we started the process to try to locate places. This mission found what was built to be a community center, and so it was not a bad building except that the vast majority of it was open, empty, sort of hall in the center with little offices around it. So a large part of the space was totally wasted, and you couldn't hear anything in there anyway because of the reverberations. But it looked okay, so we did have that. We didn't have very much security. There was just sort of a regular fence around it, and we did have supposedly some police security. It wasn't very effective, and while I was there, I was in my office one day, and I heard this huge crash. I started down the stairs to get to the first room, which was the visa section and the entry, and all the employees were rushing up the stairs toward me and saying, "Don't go down there. There's a gunman." And sure enough a gunman had come along, deranged, former policeman and had broken through with a pistol the main glass entrance and had come in, and everybody else had fled up. So we were sort of in a hostage situation for a while. Then we began to try to negotiate with this guy who was down in a corner office through that large open hallway. Of course I, they didn't want me to go down there and get personally involved in it. But viewing from an overlooking area I did as much as I could to control the situation, and I think, finally we figured out who he was and that he wanted asylum, but he had this pistol. So I sent the message back that I would come and talk to him, but he had to give up the pistol first. So that went on for a while, and then the police actually came in. They really didn't even ask permission. They came in the embassy, and they took him out. They got him to come out without gunfire. What happened to him, God knows. But it ended okay. But we immediately had all the employees of course were totally, their nerves were shot. So we just stopped worked and had a lunch and tried to calm them down. So that seemed to work.

Q: How did you find the Uzbek authorities at that point?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course Karimov who was the president had been the party boss before was very interesting. He was a total autocrat as I think most of them were in that part of the world. But he was very interested in establishing relations with the West and particularly the U.S. So he was accessible. Most of his bureaucracy didn't have very much experience. But they were accessible, and so when I, I was the second in a series. I

wasn't actually the first person to get there. My predecessor took me to meet Karimov when I first arrived, and he was sort of from the old school where he wanted to interact with him the way they had interacted with the Soviets, which was very confrontational. Of course I could see that wasn't getting very far, and I tried to be just a little bit more matter of fact and open. When he would get very aggressive, he wasn't even letting the translator translate. We both spoke Russian of course. But there was a translator, and we were supposed to do it in a normal way. I just told him finally to hold on and let the translator finish.

I then was pretty active with, particularly in the economic field trying to get assistance to them, getting answers for them, helping them to start developing their banking system and also inviting American businessmen to come looking for business opportunities and had a number of large public meetings. Ultimately that seemed to have had an effect on, I didn't have much contact with Karimov after I first met him until I was getting ready to leave and made a final call. That time it wasn't this formal set up where, when I first arrived it was with a large room and a table between us. He took me in into just a small little room where there was a table and we sat and had tea when I left. So I felt I had made some progress.

Q: Well, what was Tashkent like at the time?

ELLIOTT: Well, Tashkent was, we didn't know in Washington very much about Central Asia. But Tashkent originally, what had a very long history of being something of a cultural center for the entire region. It looked relatively new because it had largely been destroyed by an earthquake. So a lot of Soviet-style architecture, a lot of sort of Soviet-style cultural activity. I mean there were several orchestras and sort of a theatre that was active. So on the whole not a bad place to be. In fact a little bit better than Moscow at that time because Moscow was really almost like a Wild West. In Moscow the streets were deteriorating. It was cold. No food was available. This place was sunny, a large market with lots of fresh vegetables and certainly no street crime like there would've been in Moscow.

Q: What were we interested in there? I mean, in this small mission with limited staffing.

ELLIOTT: First of all we were just trying to get relationships up and running and established. So I think we were already looking--maybe this is a little bit premature--but we were already looking at them as a place where in the future it might be useful from the viewpoint of defense to actually establish a relationship with them apart from the relationship with Moscow. So that would've been two things there. The one would've been simply in a sense encircling Moscow with people who were more open to relations with us. At the same time that has always been an area I think with Iran and Afghanistan and so forth where we would've been interested in other kinds of military relationships.

Q: Well, did you feel that we were in competition with the Russians at this point? I mean did they have military contingents there?

ELLIOTT: They did. They still had them down at least along the border. I didn't know a lot about that. That too would've been more the CIA's activity at that point. But the Russians were very definitely a military presence still there.

Q: Were the Turks trying to get in there?

ELLIOTT: The Turks were there before we were, and they the only ones who had an embassy right downtown in the sort of the old prestigious area. They had taken over a three-story mansion. When I was there actually, I think I went to a public ceremony where a new Turkish ambassador was welcomed. That's when I noticed Karimov preferred Russian, very much preferred Russian. I think that's what he regarded as his native language although he knew some Uzbek at the time. He didn't know it very well, and so we had translations into English, Russian and Uzbek.

Q: Well, now did you get any feel for Uzbek's view of some of their neighbors, which I guess would be Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan?

ELLIOTT: Kazakhstan, yeah. Well, I didn't get so much a view of the Uzbek's relations with them as much as the U.S. at that point was very much putting most of its hopes on Kazakhstan because that president was making all the right noises. Of course they were interested in Kazakhstan anyway because that's where the nuclear weapons had been. The U.S. was most interested in Kazakhstan at that time. Kyrgyzstan not very interested and when I was there Kyrgyzstan actually experienced an earthquake. I never actually went into Kyrgyzstan, but I went on a trip down right along to view the damage that was done in Uzbekistan from the earthquake. But Kyrgyzstan was just even more primitive and less developed than Uzbekistan. Never heard anybody mention Turkmenistan. We had somebody there, but that fellow there had always been very difficult to deal with.

Q: Did you feel any tremors coming out of Afghanistan at the time?

ELLIOTT: No. I think there was what I was aware of was not so much Afghanistan as that Karimov was almost paranoid about conservative Muslims coming up, basically more from Iran than from Afghanistan.

Q: Were we concerned about that at the time?

ELLIOTT: I think that we did take that seriously and certainly did what we could to help him. I mean we also were concerned of course at that point by anything that was fundamentalism. So we took that seriously, and we used it as a point to establish a closer relationship.

Q: Well, then after this tour where are you going?

ELLIOTT: To London. Quite a change.

Q: Yeah. [laughter]

ELLIOTT: I think it's the only developed country that I ever served in.

Q: What, you were there from when?

ELLIOTT: I was there, this was a three year tour so from 1992 to 1995. While I was there I extended to go through 1996, but as it ended up I didn't stay that long. I was in the Treasury office. I was the state representative to the Treasury office. My primary goal was macro-economic reporting, and primarily I was taken up with forecasting the UK economy.

Q: Well, I would think that given our close ties to the UK, you could practically get down to whomever handles statistics on their side and say, what do I send back?

ELLIOTT: No, it didn't work that way. I mean we, there was a lot of published statistics. Their Treasury, of course, was very accessible to us. We could go and have a meeting any time we wanted. But we maintained our own tracking of the economy, and we had our own model and did our forecasts. In fact even though it was a Lotus model on a PC, I could accomplish as close an estimate as the London Business School with its huge computer model. I could come as close, not as detailed but as close to actual results as they could.

Q: Well, was this just a matter of well, we're going to do it, but it sounds like two people working with the same figures of using the same essentially (_____)?

ELLIOTT: Well, there was something like thirty institutions in London that had their own forecasts. So one of the things I did was track and report on what were the other forecasts.

Q: Well, what did this do for anybody?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was used by our Treasury, U.S. treasury to do its world forecasts, but I ended up actually spending as much time talking with the Fed in Washington as I did in Treasury. We reported all this systematically to the U.S. Treasury. But the Fed, the people who tracked the UK were constantly calling me and discussing trends and what I thought was going to happen with a particular aspect of the economy.

Q: Where did you see the British economy at this point?

ELLIOTT: Do you mean, how was it?

Q: How was it particularly when one compares it to so much of the European economy which is—

ELLIOTT: Well, it was sounder at that point. This was after Thatcher, but of course Major was continuing more or less her policies. I can't remember the exact year that she fell, but I think she fell before I got there. I think Major was the Prime Minister—

Q: No, no, no. Thatcher was still there at the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait [Ed: 2-4 August 1990].

ELLIOTT: Yes, Thatcher was still there [Ed: Thatcher was PM from May 1979 to November 1990] and in fact Thatcher was the one that put the steel in Bush's backbone.

Q: Don't get squooshy on me or whatever.

ELLIOTT: Right. So it was very, if she wasn't still in power, it was very soon after she had fallen. So she had brought the unions under control, and it was basically a conservative, fiscally conservative government. When I first went there, the pound was very strong against the dollar. That changed somewhat while I was there. But it was quite high, like close to two dollars to one pound, and then it went back down to more like 1.60. Also the Brits themselves somewhat separate from Europe so they weren't pulled into a lot of the problems that Europe had.

Q: Well, what, being there and being the European, it was a European Union by this time, wasn't it?

ELLIOTT: Oh yeah. In fact that was the period when they were trying to get the criteria established for the Euro.

Q: Well, weren't you sort of looking at particularly France and Germany which have these very high social costs?

ELLIOTT: And Italy of course with run away inflation.

Q: So you must've been sitting in a pool of stability practically, weren't you?

ELLIOTT: Relative to Europe.

Q: Relative to Europe. What were the people you were talking to viewing the European Union?

ELLIOTT: The Labor Party was wanting to get closer. The Conservatives were wanting to hold their distance. There wasn't a lot of change from Thatcher's point of view.

Q: Why would the labor unions want to get closer to the European Union?

ELLIOTT: Not so much labor unions as the Labor Party because they were more interested in forming a strong union, European Union. The Brits, the conservatives have always been suspicious of getting too close.

Q: Well, I suppose the labor would also see that the dominate powers in European Union were France and Germany where the unions, Socialist party essentially, had a lot of social benefits that they were dishing out.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, of course the labor was interested in that. More inclined to participate in let's see, Brussels I guess was the capital of the center, than the conservatives everywhere.

Q: Did, how did you find the officials you were dealing with? Were we all reading off the same hymnbook or not?

ELLIOTT: At least in the issue that I dealt with. I think there might have been some more tension with aviation and open skies and that sort of thing, but in terms of the financial issues we were pretty much in agreement.

Q: How about agricultural policies both in the United States and in the UK?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course we were always critical of their subsidies and pretended that we didn't have them or that they certainly weren't nearly as pervasive and disruptive as the European--what is it, I can't remember the term they use. The European Agricultural something, which referred to their subsidies.

Q: Looking at it as an economist, not as a member of the administration, how pervasive were our subsidies to our agriculture?

ELLIOTT: I think we've always subsidized a few things like rice and sugar that should not be subsidized. At one point I think we were subsidizing cotton. But I don't, I'm not an agricultural economist. So I haven't followed it in a great detail. But we still, we shouldn't be producing any sugar at all in this country, but we still are and rice as well probably.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

ELLIOTT: Oh, I just these are, the only one I remember was Admiral Crowe, but he wasn't the first one. [Ed: Admiral Crowe served from June 1994 to September 1997.] He took over from this fellow whose name I simply cannot remember. It was, I should remember him because he was very well received in England, friend of the court, and was a career ambassador, which is unusual. Yes, Ray Seitz. [Ed: Ambassador Seitz served from June 1991 to May 1994.]

Q: Did either ambassador pay much attention to the economics of things?

ELLIOTT: Well, we had to come and give them briefings periodically. But it, I don't think they were really focused on it.

Q: Well, I'm just trying to think about it. The economics of the UK really aren't—

ELLIOTT: Well, there's a lot of trade. But it was sort of functioned more or less according to the market and so there wasn't really a huge impact on political discussions. In fact this was the period when, because the language was the same, that Washington got into the habit of simply picking up the phone and talking directly to their counterparts in London, and the embassy often was bypassed.

Q: This of course happens in Canada too.

ELLIOTT: Right, oh I expect more so with Canada.

Q: Cheaper phone rates.

ELLIOTT: Not that anybody worried about paying the bills but they just did. In fact I think that's happening more and more around the world because so many of the officials speak English.

Q: Well, did you run into any particular issues or problems during this time you were there?

ELLIOTT: No, I didn't actually. This was a period when in some respects I sort of lost focus on my own career because it was a place where, a little bit like the department, you come in to the embassy and do your work and then everybody goes in separate directions. So I've never been one really to hang around with the embassy crowd, but in London I mean there was simply no reason for it. So I lived in Bayswater right next to the park, walked to the embassy, even walked home for lunch. Ran in the park every morning. There was the theatre. It was the first time that I ever, after being in the foreign service where I began to realize that there was a life apart from what I was doing at the embassy and my career. So I really got to the point where I was coming in and doing my work, and then, it was like living in the U.S. almost.

Q: Well, you left there when?

ELLIOTT: I left early. I was supposed to leave in the summer of 1996, but I was getting restless because you can do so many forecasts of an economy and then you've sort of done that. So I knew I was, it was the bidding season, and I had started looking around, and I'd always wanted to go to Moscow but the timing never worked out because I had the language, and so I would always be bidding a year ahead of time or something. They actually had a position there that they couldn't fill or hadn't been able to fill. It was the chief trade officer. So they actually asked me to curtail and go and I did. So I went to Moscow. It was first of November 1995 that I arrived in Moscow.

Q: And you were there 'til when?

ELLIOTT: 'Til the summer of 1997. So it was a regular two-year assignment.

Q: You were assigned as chief trade officer. What does that mean?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was a fairly large section. They even had a Treasury attaché there. They had a person from our section that was working with Treasury. They had let's see—they had people who were doing oil, petroleum, but I was primarily working in issues such as World Trade Organization accession for Russia in areas of controversy over steel imports, textiles. Those were the big issues. Textiles, steel, and then working on ways to liberalize their trade system, their imports, that sort of thing.

Q: You were there in 1995. What was the situation in Russia at the time when you were there?

ELLIOTT: Well, our relationship was pretty good. That was the time of Yeltsin. Socially I think that was the freest time the Russians have ever experienced. So there were no restrictions on our fraternization. We were still in the old embassy. They had a huge camp of contractors there building, redoing the new embassy. I didn't live on the compound. So I wasn't very much involved in the embassy life. I socialized primarily with Russians. I lived completely across the city but one metro ride in a building that had been populated by diplomats for a very long time. Totally riddled with listening devices and run by the KGB [Ed: initials for the Russian of Committee for State Security, the main security agency for the Soviet Union from 1954 until its break-up in 1991], that sort of thing. But I didn't experience the feeling of very much surveillance. When I first got there, I think they checked out to see if I was who I said I was. There was one instance where I was going toward the embassy having got off the metro, and I just dropped a paper into a wastebasket, and a woman fairly clumsy woman if she was KGB almost knocked me down dropping something on top of it. I assume that was to mark whatever I had dropped in there for them to come along and look at. In the apartment itself there was once I came back and I discovered that, I knew they had been there because they had moved the mattress and had not put it all the way back. Then one day I came home and I realized there was something strange in my bedroom and I couldn't figure it out, and then I realized they had taken one of the doors off my wardrobe. What they expected to accomplish by that I don't know. Whether it was just to show me that they were there or that they could listen and whatever. I reported that to the security office, and we basically just got a laugh out of it because when I came back the next day they had put it back. That's really, I'm sure they listened to every conversation, that sort of thing, but it would've been very boring for them.

Q: I keep thinking about people who spent almost their entire lives listening to domestic conversations of diplomats of various—

ELLIOTT: Hideous existence.

Q: I mean anybody who would listen to my wife and myself when I was in Yugoslavia, particularly on the phone. My wife spent a lot of time on the phone organizing an international Girl Scout troop. Now somebody in the UDB (State Security Directorate) at

the time must've become quite proficient in knowing how to put a Girl Scout troop together.

ELLIOTT: Well, I of course talked to a lot of Russians, but none of the Russians that I ever talked to seemed to have any feeling that they were bothered. I had Russians over to my apartment. That was a period when you could just go to a club and meet people and invite them home. Even they were willing to come because they weren't afraid.

Q: What were our major interests in these fields? I mean what was happening here?

ELLIOTT: Well, we were, I can't remember big political issues at that time, but we were interested in helping them develop a trade system, import-export system that would allow them access to the World Trade Organization. We were interested in their not dumping steel in the U.S. I remember hosting a lot of customs delegations. We also hosted several textile discussions. I don't remember that we had really huge problematic issues. Most of those meetings went fairly well. Again, because it was Moscow and because I had Russian I was as interested in just my own personal life and meeting people and that sort of thing as I was in the professional aspects.

Q: Well, I imagine there would've been at this particular period a booming Russian desire to meet foreigners, to practice, to learn about other places, say now we're one of you and we're all--

ELLIOTT: And to me it was the same because I was meeting Russians for the first time and getting sort of acquainted with what were the problems in their lives and how they could cope. This was a very difficult time for them of course.

Q: Oh yes. Well, I mean their economy was going down rapidly. In fact wasn't the oil—

ELLIOTT: Oil has always been their mainstay. Although I don't remember that was a particularly high point for them at that point because a lot of their fields were drying up because of poor methodology. The price of oil wasn't that high, well, it was for the Russians, gasoline was very high, but for us it wasn't. A lot of your time and effort was taken up with just living. I mean the difficulties of getting what you needed, taking care of your car in the winter, all kinds of things like that. The climate is a challenge.

Q: Well, then how about was it, was there a lot of crime in the streets and problems of that nature.

ELLIOTT: There was crime. In fact people used to experience it even close to the embassy where a lot of these gypsy urchins would actually slice the back pockets of diplomats and steal their wallets. I never experienced it myself, and I was out a lot, on the metro, but I was almost always with Russians. I just didn't spend a lot of time wandering around by myself.

Q: Were you looking at the development of a sort of, the robber barons, these were the—

ELLIOTT: Right, yeah. We followed that of course. That was a big issue. That, but that was somewhat in the purview of the Treasury and that was how privatization was developing. We followed that, but it wasn't my primary issue. Privatization was a big issue it seems to me. The exchange rate was always a problem, always an issue, but those were not my primary issues.

Q: You mentioned steel. What was happening in steel?

ELLIOTT: They were being accused of dumping in the U.S., and of course that's always controversial. But we were threatening them with dumping duties, that kind of thing.

Q: Were they turning out a particularly good steel.

ELLIOTT: No, it was poor quality and it was the lower end as usual. But very cheap. So our steel industry which also has been traditionally very politically connected kept us busy.

Q: Oh yes. How did you find dealing with the Russian government officials in this period?

ELLIOTT: They could be difficult. But they were accessible. We would go periodically for meetings with them. Not confrontational as it would've been under the Soviet time. It's not that there weren't plenty of old Soviet-types there, but it simply wasn't at that point in their interests. I think it might be more difficult now than it was at that time.

Q: Were you running across the problem of the Soviets, one, adjusting to no longer a completely controlled economy and two, the fact that you no longer had Uzbekistan and other places as a continuous supply chain?

ELLIOTT: That was particularly true, what you just mentioned was particularly true for textiles because a lot of textile mills, in fact we went to visit some of them that were experiencing great difficulties. They were looking for ways to improve their situation, improve their exports and that sort of thing, trying to learn from us because they had been used to having this huge supplies of material at less than economic cost. So when they really were forced to deal on a market level, they were just simply going broke.

Q: Well, did you see industry beginning to make adjustments to a different world?

ELLIOTT: No. At the time that I was there, the things that we were reporting on were all of these large industries that had produced things that were related to defense at huge social costs because you know how Soviet factories were where they provided education and housing and so forth basically producing nothing. So they weren't, nobody was getting paid. They weren't able to meet these social costs. Nobody got their salary. We saw a time where people were largely supporting themselves by finding sort of under the

table deals or black market jobs to support themselves, growing their own food, that kind of thing.

Q: Also particularly difficult for pensioners, wasn't it?

ELLIOTT: I don't know how they survived actually. They weren't getting paid their pension. But if they had been getting it paid, it was like the equivalent of ten or fifteen dollars a month. So those were the people who truly lost out. The ones who had saved all their lives and had counted on this pension to live a fairly comfortable life basically had nothing. I never understood actually how they could survive. A lot of it was by bringing food from the countryside.

Q: Yeah. There was still only about a generation away from the countryside.

ELLIOTT: Well, many of them, in fact even KGB ladies who ran the desk in my building would talk about just waiting to get out in the summer to get their hands into the soil. So every, people tended to have what they called the "dacha" (country cottage), it really was usually just a tiny little garden in a shack but they called it a "dacha". But they actually produced quite a bit of their own food that way.

Q: When you left there in '97, what was your feel? Whither Russia from the economic point?

ELLIOTT: That was a real question mark I mean because they were, when I left they were still in the throes of this transition from a controlled economy to free economy. Already you were seeing some of the people that had technical education and technical expertise developing their own companies, but you didn't see any kind of production going. It was only after I left that when the price of oil began to go up that the economy tended to sort of stabilize.

Q: Were sort of the same people running the bureaucracies as before? I mean were they, how were they doing?

ELLIOTT: It really didn't seem as if they had adapted at all. They were still trying to operate basically the way they had always operated. I didn't see any enlightened people on the ministerial level. Some of them were a little bit more adept politically or bureaucratically than others. But it was really hard for them. In fact, and this is what ten years later, they still aren't members of the WTO.

Q: Well, were you dealing with almost a deluge of both nonprofit people coming in to help the Russians and business people who were coming in to make a deal and all this?

ELLIOTT: There were, in fact there was a very large American Chamber of Commerce, lots and lots of NGOs (non-government organizations), very large aid mission. Again not making much progress. They were there, I think USAID's primary reason for being there was to develop democracy. Everything revolved around developing democratic

institutions. It was a little bit like watching them operate in Africa, not much progress, and certainly a lot of the NGOs came and went. A lot of American businessmen we saw particularly in petroleum but in other areas as well would come in with high hopes. The Russians were always trying to encourage them because they had no investment and they needed it for an investment, encouraging them to develop an investment climate--that was one of my other issues—that would attract people. In fact, you would get cases of people coming in and starting up investments, but almost inevitably once it became a going concern, the Russians would simply take it over and essentially kick out the Americans.

Q: Did you see much development in the way of, I guess you'd call it, commercial law?

ELLIOTT: We saw a lot of discussion and trying; that was also part of the WTO issues was showing them that without that, and landownership was another one, that they wouldn't make much progress. But you didn't actually see it develop. But a lot of discussion about it, but not too much movement.

Q: Well, then after your two years there whither?

ELLIOTT: Back to Islamabad. I was assigned as the economic counselor in Islamabad. I was there from 1997 to 2000.

Q: How did you feel? I mean, did you feel you were going from one place not doing very well to another place not doing very well or was there a difference?

ELLIOTT: Well, very different. The problems that Russia faced were quite different from Islamabad. Going back to Islamabad in a way was encouraging, although the economy was in dire straits. But at least the relationship was better, and I felt like I was going to at least to be interacting with officials who were interested in what I was saying and interested in trying to solve some of the problems.

Q: What was the government like when you got back there?

ELLIOTT: In that respect it was fairly corrupt. Sharif was the prime minister. Again this is always somebody from the landowning class. That when I got there, he was not popular. People were really put off by the corruption. They were also, some of the issues that I dealt with was, in dealing was to help American investors in energy at least have a reasonably even playing field against local companies. There was an awful lot of favoritism being shown to Pakistani companies or people with connections to Sharif.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

ELLIOTT: When I arrived the ambassador was Tom Simons. [Ed: A career Foreign Service Officer, Ambassador Simons served from January 25, 1996 to August 24, 1998. His oral history is posted at ADST org.]

Q: How did we view Sharif?

ELLIOTT: As I just said he was somebody who was not effective, somebody who was corrupt, and of course when the coup came there were really, nobody shed tears for Sharif?

Q: Was the embassy ready for the coup [Ed: October 12, 1999]? Did they see it coming?

ELLIOTT: No, I don't think they were really ready for it.

Q: But was it more or less a feeling that this can't go on?

ELLIOTT: I don't think we realized it had come to that point. But it happened quickly, and it was over quickly and there was no bloodshed. So it was one of the easier coups for us to accept and the fact that absolutely nobody mourned the passing of Sharif.

Q: What happened to Sharif?

ELLIOTT: I think he reached an agreement to go abroad basically, to avoid prison. That was the best solution. Of course Benazir has always been there in the background advocating her own return to power, but I can't remember now. It's strange. I've forgotten whether or not she actually went through a period, but I don't think she did when I was there. Basically she was in exile as well. She was trying to avoid prison.

Q: How had the climate in Pakistan changed when you came back?

ELLIOTT: Well, their relationship in some respects was more tense because that was after Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in May 1998. So there was no AID mission. I had to pick up all of the things that AID would have been doing. There was a lot of controversy over airplanes that they had ordered, purchased, paid for and then that we had not delivered, because of the nuclear tests. Even though we went through all kinds of gyrations to show them what we would do for them if they did not and how much better off they would be if our support and assistance. But they just couldn't help it. The Indians had exploded another one and so they had to do it.

Q: Were we aware of the role of Dr. (Abdul Qadeer) Khan, the Pakistani nuclear scientist?

ELLIOTT: No, that happened after I left. He was actually caught I guess, and I don't think he was really prosecuted. He was allowed to resign or whatever. But we always knew that he was, and of course that would again have been the purview of the agency, but we were always aware that he was a suspicious character.

Q: It became clear that as the head of the Pakistani nuclear establishment, he was selling stuff to Libya and to Iran and to North Korea.

ELLIOTT: That was suspected, but I don't think we had proof of it. So we really were not importing any, allowing any computers to come in or anything like that. Anything that would support their effort.

Q: Do we feel this is a little bit futile? You know computers can be bought elsewhere.

ELLIOTT: Yes, we were aware of that, but that wasn't going to change our policy. At least we weren't going to facilitate it.

Q: Well, do we have a feeling of while we were doing this the Germans and the French were sort of—

ELLIOTT: There were a number of cases where we tried to establish that they were actually doing that. I don't think we really succeeded maybe once from Norway.

Q: Well, was your job mainly one of shutting things down?

ELLIOTT: No, it was one of trying to develop assistance programs. While I was there a fellow who was very high up in Citibank, Shaukat Aziz actually resigned from Citibank and came there to be their finance minister. So I worked a lot with the IMF and some with the World Bank following what projects they were doing. I received a lot of people from even the Gates Foundation for example. So we were trying to improve the investment climate, a number of things like that. In fact while I was there we had a couple of things develop. I just can't suddenly remember the name of this investment agency that works with USAID, forgot.

Q: You can fill it in later.

ELLIOTT: Yeah, I've forgotten the acronym, but at any rate they had lost their agreement, and we got that established again. OPIC, Overseas Private Investment Corporation. A number of things like that.

Q: Was Pakistan a place one could invest in?

ELLIOTT: Well, certainly a lot safer to invest there than in Russia. In fact some of the largest investments were, as I said, developing hydroelectric power, other kinds of power company—power stations.

Q: How about sort of the climate, well let's take Karachi to being with. Karachi seems to be a pretty violent place anyway.

ELLIOTT: Well, at the time that I was, this second time, I was unaccompanied, and everybody moved in conveys because it was almost like a place under siege. The consular section had been closed. .

Q: What was the threat?

ELLIOTT: The fundamentalism, bombing attempts.

Q: How about the embassy?

ELLIOTT: Of course we've always had a lot of security, but the embassy had a lot of setback and a wall surrounding it completely. So we, while we were very security conscious everybody, most of the officers still lived out in the city. We had pretty free movement. The second year I was there, the summer I went away for R and R (rest and relaxation), we had an evacuation because that was the time when they bombed some terrorist sites in Afghanistan. So there was an evacuation. That was a year of fairly tense relations within the embassy because for a long time dependents couldn't come back, and eventually they began to trickle back. But the last summer I was there things became more and more tense, and we had terrorist attacks actually on the embassy where they'd actually fired rockets at the embassy, at USIS (United States Information Service), and at one other site [Ed: November 12, 1999]. They all missed, except that USIS got hit. But the embassy was missed completely because the rocket was fired from a vehicle that was just simply left over behind the embassy, and the springs in the car sat down as the rocket fired. So it went over, hit the World Bank.

Q: Was the World Bank doing much there aside of being hit by rockets?

ELLIOTT: It was doing quite a bit. They always have been working of course in poverty programs so they do a lot in education, women's issues.

Q: How did, looking at it from your perspective, was progress being made in poverty and women's issues?

ELLIOTT: Yeah, I believe that there really was some progress being made. Of course there'd been a long history of assistance. But a lot of, I think progress was made in education and certainly women had more access to assistance than they would've had otherwise.

Q: Did the Kashmir issue intrude much?

ELLIOTT: It was always there. Hotter at sometimes than others. It was an area where you of course only could visit with escorts, military escorts. All of the congressional delegations would go. I never actually made it to Kashmir. At least not along the line of control But it was always a controversy. That was the issue of course that kept tensions with the Indians constant while I was there.

Q: Were you there when it looked like there could be a nuclear war with India?

ELLIOTT: Yes.

Q: Could you describe these events and how we were responding in Islamabad?

ELLIOTT: Well, I suppose not long after they exploded the devices. Kashmir heated up. So the question was, I don't think it was ever seriously, I don't think we ever seriously believed that there would be a Indo-Pakistan nuclear war, but we just had to examine the possibilities and have some kind of scenarios as to what would happen if they did. That of course was primarily a political issue rather than an economic issue. But since we were normally used to tensions and security threats, I don't think it made any particular impression.

Q: Well, what was the nuclear development doing to the economy? It was pretty expensive stuff, wasn't it?

ELLIOTT: I don't think we had any good statistics on that. Obviously the resources they were using on that they weren't using on education, but then Pakistan has always relied on donors to do most of their social development. So I think in some respects it freed them up to actually have those resources, to use on their nuclear program.

Q: Did you get a feel, I realize you were in the economic field, for the role of the Pakistani army, particularly the intelligence service and the government?

ELLIOTT: Well, there were always, I don't think these were really open discussions about not very open about the role of the intelligence. You wouldn't have those in an open country team meeting. We were aware of them. We were aware that they were not always helpful. We weren't quite sure why they were not more affective at curtailing the development of the fundamentalist Madras. The Madras though and those conservative elements in them were always a subject for congressional delegations and always something that we brought up with the president and we were always assured that they were making progress and that they were going to reduce the development, but they never did.

Q: Was the trade in textiles still a major issue?

ELLIOTT: Well, textiles were an issue, but of course since it was less of an issue because we were doing away with quotas, and I don't recall that we had a lot of controversy with textiles when I was there, the second time. It simply was no longer the issue that it would've been if they were trying to increase their exports via the third countries.

Q: Was trade with China much of a factor when you were there?

ELLIOTT: Well, there was a lot of trade with China. We saw it in the silks and so forth. There was always a lot of sort of trade delegations coming from China to talk with Pakistan but I don't know that they actually there was a lot of substance to the trade, but Pakistan was interested in keeping a close relationship with China vis-a-vis India. In terms of, there might have been actually a missile element, but China wouldn't need anything from Pakistan I don't think in that respect.

Q: How did Afghanistan play at this point?

ELLIOTT: In Afghanistan the Taliban were in charge at that point. So the embassy was closed. We had primarily people from the Islamabad embassy going because of refugee issues. The refugees were along the border, and I can't remember how this developed. We met with the Taliban, and I think we tried to there in--. They had a representative there in Pakistan, and we visited the embassy periodically just to check on it to see how things were going. I don't think we were very successful in having very many aid missions. We would've been interested in doing what we could for women's issues and education and that sort of thing. But the Taliban pretty much shut that down.

Q: How did you, did you talk to Taliban officials?

ELLIOTT: Once or twice. I can't remember what the economic pretext was for that. It might have been the opium trade.

Q: I interviewed Bill Milam who was ambassador at one point to Pakistan. [Ed: Ambassador Milam served from September 10, 1998 to July 6, 2001.]

ELLIOTT: He was there when I was there.

Q: He was saying it was like talking to people of the fourteenth century.

ELLIOTT: Well, in a way that's true. They were, which wasn't surprising. I mean they were very fundamentalist, very fundamentalist Muslims. They still had to maintain the same lifestyle. They didn't, they would leave their shoes at the door, basically sit on the floor, but you can see that kind of thing in almost any movie that deals with Afghanistan.

Q: Well, you left there in 2000. Where did you go afterwards?

ELLIOTT: I was assigned as DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) to the Embassy in Conakry, Guinea.

Q: Ah, another well developed country in west Africa.

ELLIOTT: Oh. [laughter] Very developed.

ELLIOTT: Oh I went there in the autumn of 2000. After six weeks to almost two months of French. So they were desperate for somebody. The ambassador had left suddenly. [Ed: Foreign Service career officer Joyce Leader was ambassador from September 29, 1999 to July 7, 2000.] They had allowed the DCM to leave, and so they were just trying to throw somebody in there very quickly. So I think that was a mistake for me to allow them to give me only two months because you really need French in a place like Guinea. Most of the government and influential businessmen have studied probably in Paris. They don't, not so many of them speak English, and even if they do, they prefer French.

Q: Well, how did you survive? Did you essentially have an officer who could work with you?

ELLIOTT: No. I just gutted it out. I did what I could. I tried to continue studying there. When I had a really important meeting on a ministerial level, I would take a translator. But I often took them and didn't use them. But I had them there as sort of as a security blanket.

Q: What sort of government did Guinea have at the time?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was called, it had a president who was basically president for life. It had an assembly, but it was really very much a one-man show.

Q: Who was that?

ELLIOTT: Oh what was his name? It's gone right out of my head. [Ed: Lansana Conté]

Q: Well, first, were American interests in Guinea

ELLIOTT: Well, we did have some business interests because of the bauxite. So Alcoa was there. That was the largest economic interest. We also were interested in the refugees who were being basically driven out of Sierra Leone. So there were large groups of those. We had a fairly substantial aid mission. Because of Liberia and Sierra Leone, Guinea assumed more importance probably than it should have because it was a government that wanted to work with the U.S. You had a lot of congressional interest in those sort of war-torn countries, but they came through Guinea because that was a convenient place.

Q: What was happening in Liberia and Sierra Leone that caused Guinea to have so much importance?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course the civil war was taking place in Sierra Leone, but it was being largely fomented by Charles Taylor in Liberia. Of course we had always had more of an interest in Liberia because of the American slave connection. Charles Taylor was for everybody persona non grata, and he was encouraging the rebels then to misbehave in Sierra Leone. The refugees were all flooding over into Guinea. So we took on a certain amount of responsibility for them, and we also were doing whatever we could to encourage the Guinean president, who hated Charles Taylor by the way. So that was one of the reasons why he was interested in the alliance with us. But to support the refugees, and of course we had interests farther down in Nigeria. So Nigeria and Guinea sort of bounded this very troubled West African area.

Q: Was Libya a factor at that time?

ELLIOTT: Libya was a factor in that it Qadhafi was a supporter of Charles Taylor and was accused of great mischief in that region trying to also support anything that was counter to the U.S. Also there was the Muslim factor. Of course Guinea is a Muslim

country. Liberia is not. Sierra Leone had a mixture. So Qadhafi tried to get influence in Guinea without very much luck. So he went where he could find an audience.

Q: Were we concerned about the stability of the Guinean government?

ELLIOTT: Well, we were concerned about the lack of democracy in Guinea. We were sort of, as we often are, in a bind where the person whom we would not normally want to support at all was in fact supporting U.S. policies. Of course Guinea was, while I was there Guinea was elected to the Security Council. So we were frequently mining them for support for our positions in the Security Council.

Q: How did we find that they responded?

ELLIOTT: They did normally try to respond positively. That was one of the things I spent an awful lot of time doing. However, when they clearly didn't think it was in their interests, they didn't go with the U.S. The U.S. mission to the UN was often I thought not terribly helpful because every two or three days they would send us a demarche to go in and talk to them about issues which we had already discussed, and the government had already given us an answer. So that was a sort of a thorn in our side. We were getting cables directly from U.S. UN rather than from the department.

Q: Yeah, this can be really annoying to a country to be having somebody on their back all the time.

ELLIOTT: Right.

Q: On issues that often don't concern them one way or another.

ELLIOTT: And it often seemed to happen when I was there as chargé, rather than when the ambassador was there. So then that also was, in Africa nobody is interested in number two if they can possibly speak to number one. So they were always aware that it was the deputy chief of mission/acting chargé as opposed to being the ambassador and the Guineans were very rank conscious.

Q: Well, how did the ambassador situation work out?

ELLIOTT: Well, as it turned out they rushed me out there for no reason because they got an ambassador, Timberlake Foster from, who had been, was an old Africa hand basically and was just finishing in, let's see. He was in Mauritania, and so they sent him down. [Ed: Ambassador Foster served in Mauritania from November 11, 1997, to October 3, 2000.] He arrived. He was there for most of a year. He was really quite good. The Guineans liked him, and he was effective. He was effective in the country. The problem was that he had specific points of view and was not shy about telling Washington. Washington sometimes just didn't want to hear it. So he came from Mauritania where he had questioned U.S. policy on their approach to the so-called slavery issue in Mauritania.

So life for him was a little bit difficult in that respect. He was very good, very effective in Guinea, but he was retiring. So he just stayed from November [2000] to July [2001].

Q: Then what happened?

ELLIOTT: Well, then there was a period of maybe two months or so before Barrie Walkley who had been DCM in the, let's see where he had been. He had been in the Congo. He came up to be ambassador. [Ed: A career FSO, Ambassador Walkley served from November 22, 2001, to February 10, 2004.] He was a former USIS officer.

Q: How did that work out?

ELLIOTT: He had very good French and was fairly active, was well respected, and they liked him pretty well I think.

Q: Were there any particular problems in dealing with the Guineans?

ELLIOTT: I wouldn't say problems. As I've already alluded to the biggest problem we had was in getting them to go along with us in the Security Council. They tried to actually be as cooperative with us as possible. We always had problems, business problems with business people, small businessmen really, but they were, that was my problem because they were coming in to me for assistance. That's when I really began to uncover the depths of corruption in Guinea because the court system there was simply, it was just simply went to the highest bidder. Openly people would go and sit with the judge and tell them how much, and then she would receive the other party and see how much they were going to give. That's the way it went. The American business, or people who were affiliated with the Guineans who were affiliated with the American businessmen, it put me in an awkward position because they would then begin to discuss what they were doing, and of course Americans can't do that. That's illegal. That was a problem.

Q: How did you deal with this? I mean, American businesses came to the embassy and say what do we do? So, what did you do?

ELLIOTT: Well, I would do my best to explain to them what they were up against and explain to them that this, I would reiterate the U.S. law to make sure that they understood what that was. We would weigh in with the appropriate ministers when they had legitimate complaints or problems. But that's about all we could do.

Q: How was the social life in Conakry?

ELLIOTT: Well, I had come from a place in Pakistan where there was at least two to three receptions every night. There was a lot of socializing with influential Pakistanis. In Guinea my impression was that, the expatriates socialized. Of course, there were official functions, but it was really very difficult to form what you would call really a friendship with the Africans because they were fairly insular, and they also, if they were being

friendly, they wanted you to do something. That's the way it worked there. Whereas you always pursued the people who could help you. So if they were being friendly and nice, it's because they might even bring their passports of their relatives and so forth then expecting you then to get them visas. So I didn't find it easy to form close friendships there.

Q: Did you get any feel, was there Guinean colony as something in the United States?

ELLIOTT: Oh definitely. There were lots of Guineans most of them got there by hook or crook. Somehow managed to get green cards, and of course were—that was a big part of the workload of that mission and that was the consular section.

Q: What were they up to in the United States?

ELLIOTT: Anything that they could—I couldn't really tell you they were involved in specific businesses. They were very often dubious characters, and every week we had a plane dropping off people who were being deported from the U.S. As I said we were pretty, kept pretty busy with the, the consul, they only had, we only had one junior officer who was assigned as the consul, and she of course worked day and night. People would come to her home trying to get visas. So that was a chore.

Q: Did we have any involvement with training troops or doing things of that nature?

ELLIOTT: Actually we did. We had a very active military attaché and fairly successful, fairly well received because of course the president was a general, the only general actually in the country. In many respects the elite were closely associated with the military. This attaché worked hard at setting up training. Some of it was fairly successful in terms of, what did they call that? It was helping them to develop an understanding of civil rights. There's a specific term for it, but I don't remember at this point. We also took several of their officers, of course, to the U.S.

Q: Were we making any attempt at bringing the judiciary up to snuff or not?

ELLIOTT: We did try. I'm pretty sure that we had, that USAID had a fairly active program. It's kind of hard for me to remember the details now. USIS did a lot of seminars. We made a lot of effort to support the dissidents and provide opportunities for them to talk and do speeches and that sort of thing under the auspices of USIS. Well, is it called USIS anymore? I guess not.

Q: Did you have any high level visitors from the States and all?

ELLIOTT: We had a lot of congressional visitors. Before I came I think the Secretary had actually come. [Ed: Secretary Albright visited Conakry on October 18, 1999.] But we didn't get, I don't remember we had a secretarial visit. Lots of STAFFDELS (delegations of congressional staff assistants) and CODELS (delegations of congressmen). Of course two or three military VIPs.

Q: Why would they come there?

ELLIOTT: Part of it was the training facilities. Part of it was, I can't remember the details now. They were trying to foster cooperation among the West African nations. That is to sort of develop an African-based cooperation. So Guinea was one of the places that they were hoping to play a positive role in that.

Q: Well, did you find when you were going after the UN votes that Guinea was pretty well wedded to the positions of the Organization of African States?

ELLIOTT: No, I didn't. I mean they participated in that and gave it lip services, but they were really wedded to their own interests. I was just trying to think of examples. There were times when they went more with the Africans, but I can't remember a specific example at this point. Most of the time they did try to support us.

Q: Were terrorists a problem?

ELLIOTT: We were always worried that they would be. I can't say that they were. We were watching, there were an awful lot of Lebanese there. So we think that Hezbollah was active there, but it was more like collecting money. Most of the businessmen there were Lebanese. So we were always watching to be sure that the really conservative Muslims weren't penetrating and fostering dissidents with the government. We did have once or twice where Pakistanis were tracked into the country, but nothing really ever came of it.

Q: You were there until when?

ELLIOTT: Until December of 2002.

Q: Did domestic American politics impinge on your representations in Conakry? During the Bush Administration our attitudes towards certain things including the United Nations and Europe and some of our commitments changed. Does that translate at all where you were?

ELLIOTT: Well, yeah. One of the issues that we were constantly badgering the country for support on was the Bush administration's refusal allow Americans to be come under what is it—the World Court?

Q: Yeah, military—I can't remember, the World Court.

ELLIOTT: Of course that's one of the issues where I was looking for an example. That's one of the issues where ultimately they tended to support more the European point of view rather than the U.S. point of view.

Q: How about the role of France when you were there?

ELLIOTT: France was sort of, France had a difficult situation because they were, they were the dominant country and culturally, linguistically, historically except that--. I can't remember his name now, but the president before the one when I was there--and eventually I'll remember his name--had been basically first very much wedded to the French, but then he was a communist and eventually threw out the French basically. That was one of the problems that Guinea had is that when the French left, they basically destroyed all the infrastructure or took it with them.

Q: Sékou Touré.

ELLIOTT: Sékou Touré, that was the one. He was very definitely a Marxist. I don't know if he was really a communist. He tried to replace the French with Russians, and there were still a lot of Russians there in the educational system, a lot of the people had studied in Moscow. But eventually that waned, and the French were still, culturally they were still dominant. But politically the president didn't trust them, didn't like them and sort of played the U.S. against the French.

Q: Do the French have any, the Russians by this time really didn't have much representation then did they?

ELLIOTT: They had a huge embassy, which was mostly empty. So they had an ambassador and maybe four or five officers. I think a lot of the teachers and so forth still lived on that compound.

Q: Well, did you find that as often seemed to happen, the Russians came looking to us for help and companionship and all that?

ELLIOTT: Well, they certainly were open to interaction among the expatriates. They were not I wouldn't say influential at all. The French, the Canadians, of course they were French speaking, the Germans—

Q: Scandinavians.

ELLIOTT: Well, I guess they were sort of representative, but they were not especially prominent. The Canadians and the French were, the Canadians and the French and the Germans were sort of a cabal.

Q: Were there anyone trying to get landing rights for military or anything like that?

ELLIOTT: We didn't have any trouble with that. That was maybe another reason why the military was interested because the president would allow us to land there when we needed to.

Q: You were there during 9/11 then.

ELLIOTT: Yes, I was.

Q: How did that play?

ELLIOTT: Actually that was at a time when we were sort of between ambassadors, and the president actually came and called on the American community to express his condolences. Of course everybody was very supportive.

Q: Well, then were you getting any intimation where there power struggles or conflicting things in the African bureau? Did you get any feel for the politics, the Washington politics in your department at the time?

ELLIOTT: No, not really. Guinea was not their priority. There was a great deal more interest in Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire. Of course they were interested in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Nigeria, all of those countries were of greater interest to AF than Guinea. So we didn't really have I wouldn't say we had great difficulties with the bureau.

Q: You were blessed I guess.

ELLIOTT: Yeah. I think there were often were problems around the continent, but we didn't have too much of that.

Q: You left there in 2002. Whither?

ELLIOTT: Well, I just didn't know quite what to do because it had become clear to me that I had three years before mandatory retirement age. I really needed to go back to the U.S. to establish the salary high three years to calculate the retirement pension because at that time Washington local pay went into the salary base. Overseas you earned less and your retirement was less than someone who retired in Washington. So it was much to your advantage to be there. I hadn't been in Washington for ten years. I had never done anything on the Hill so I decided to do the one year Pearson Amendment program.

This decision worked out fairly well because from Africa you're supposed to find your own job on the Hill, and I had found one, but it was with a very conservative senator, which didn't really conform with my philosophy. But I had found it and it was something to go to, but by the time I got there, the arrangement lasted only like a month or a half. They treated it as something less than a commitment, and said, we're actually talking to somebody else right now. So I started looking around and found a real job with the permanent subcommittee on investigations, which was under Senator Carl Levin of Michigan. So, at that time I was working on the side of the majority, and it's the, it was a real nest of Democrats. I've never worked in among people who were so liberal. I found it quite interesting actually.

Q: Well, you did that for a year. This is 2002-2003. What sort of things, what were you doing and what sort of things did they investigate?

ELLIOTT: Well, of course the permanent subcommittee on investigations basically is looking at things that interest Levin, or at that time interested Levin for his legislative initiatives—

Q: What we're talking about.

ELLIOTT: Well, they were looking into tax shelters. An accounting firm would concoct some sort of structure whereby for a minimal investment, in some, theoretically some venture they can produce vast losses that are basically book losses which the person then uses to avoid paying income tax. These of course are for wealthy people.

Q: What were you doing?

ELLIOTT: Well, I was simply, I was actually going through the email of the officers that we, in these accounting firms that we had identified as being sort of the ones who were pushing the tax shelters.

Q: Well, were others feeling the pressure from these accounting firms, whom I assume were big contributors to political parties and others. Were you feeling—

ELLIOTT: No, I don't think we got so much pressure from that angle. We did a lot of interviewing of attorneys who had participated in this. But in terms of influential contributions bringing pressure on us, we didn't really experience that. That would be very hard to do with Levin because he was sort of immune to that stuff. He's extremely well established, long time, very secure seat and has, I don't think has ever depended heavily on that kind of contribution.

Q: How about the people you were working with? How would you describe them?

ELLIOTT: Well, it was in a way it was a surprise because my experience with CODELS meant that I had basically been mostly dealing with personal staff as opposed to professional staff from committees. So my impression was not very high of the quality and of the experience and qualifications. These people, however, were really specialists. They were mostly all attorneys, and they'd been doing this for a while. They were very dedicated, and they knew exactly what they were doing.

Q: Did you develop a feel for the accounting firms?

ELLIOTT: Well, I actually have an undergraduate degree in accounting, and I had already experienced working for Arthur Anderson right out of college. So I already had some idea of what accounting firms were like. It became quite clear that things had changed drastically. When I was working for Arthur Anderson and company and I think it was true with all the accounting firms, they would've been very conservative, very committed to integrity, that kind of thing. Whereas I got the impression that all that had shifted with, maybe with the high times of the 1980s and 1990s. It was all just, anybody would do anything to make more money.

Q: Is this really a new breed of cat?

ELLIOTT: That was certainly different from what I had known right out of college. Like the Enron people where they, I couldn't see any difference between the accounting people and the Enron officers who had really basically stolen millions of dollars.

Q: Where was Carl Levin coming from? Was this politically motivated or was it sort of—

ELLIOTT: No, he's very committed to improving corporate ethics. So that's what he was after basically.

Q: Well, after what you saw, was there any result by the time you left?

ELLIOTT: Unfortunately I had to leave just before the hearings got underway, but they had extensive hearings maybe a month, a month and a half after I left.

Q: What was the result?

ELLIOTT: Well, the accounting firms were working very hard now to extricate themselves from these disclosures, and I don't know really know what the level of the fines will be for the accounting firms. But see that's not something that Congress would do anyway. Congress, these hearings just, they sort of bring out what's happening, and they're for the purpose of legislation. But it's the IRS then that would pick up on this and prosecute.

Q: Then you left in what, 2003?

ELLIOTT: Yes, in July.

Q: Where did you go?

ELLIOTT: I went to the office of Cooperative Threat Reduction in the Office of Secretary of Defense. This was interesting because Levin had been very active in developing the Nunn-Lugar Program, Cooperative Threat Reduction Program with the former Soviet Union. His name wasn't on the legislation, but apparently he was very interested in it and had always been very active in supporting it. So, having that connection was useful although it didn't play a role in my getting the job. I just simply competed for it. This was in the State-Defense Exchange Program.

Q: So you were in the Pentagon.

ELLIOTT: Well, actually I was in an office building in Roslyn, not the Pentagon itself. I was there for two years, 2003 to 2005.

Q: Until retirement.

ELLIOTT: Yes.

Q: Okay, what was the responsibility of this office?

ELLIOTT: Well, what I was doing when I first came, I was supporting activities in Russia where they were well into the process of building storage facilities for nuclear materials. But they had another program that was new to Cooperative Threat Reduction, which was called the Weapons of Mass Production Proliferation Prevention Initiative. So the office had congressional approval for that. They had funding for it. They had had people going to the countries, the four countries, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, trying to get something going. But absolutely nothing had come of it. So they wanted somebody in the policy office to sort of take that over and organize it and get it moving.

Because I had experience and because I had Russian and so forth, they just sort of dropped me into that. So I became responsible for establishing the program. So what we did, what I did first was to draft documents that would outline what I thought should be done, and this is--if I haven't told you already--it's basically border security, helping these countries establish border security technology and procedures that would prevent any weapons of mass destruction passing across their border. The idea was that there are uncontrolled materials in Russia or at least the parts of Russia that are now independent flowing south. So I had to decide what basically would be the outline of the program that what we would do in a given country and draft the documents to be given to the implementing agency, which was the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. It's a basically military organization that then would be in charge of contracting and construction of the project itself. Then I had to negotiate agreements with each of the countries to allow this, and that was enough to get the program up and going.

Q: How did you find negotiating? Was there, were these governments sort of like Russia and Kazakhstan, how did you find they responded to this?

ELLIOTT: Well, we didn't do it with Russia. This program is working with non-Russian, former Soviet Union countries. So they all differed. They each have a different character. Ukraine is difficult. They're more like the Russians. But of course it's complicated because all of the activities have to be covered under what's called the CTR umbrella agreements. So I inherited a lot of baggage, a lot of programs that had been, or earlier agreements that had been created for other purposes. I had to amend all those or work out something that would work as an implementing agreement under the umbrella agreement. One of the reasons they had trouble getting this program going is that the people who were in charge of this simply just hadn't a clue about agreements. I didn't know much about them either. I had to just learn it all sort of on the spot. But my predecessors made a lot of mistakes. They might have started an agreement that had all kinds of problems. So it wasn't necessarily the former Soviet government that was difficult. There was a mess of cables around the computer, sorting those all out and getting approval from the lawyers in Washington for the agreement was a chore. That is, it was more difficult to

negotiate and get approval through the interagency process because the lawyers were extremely vigilant in being sure that the government's liabilities are covered, that it—. Well, I won't go into the details of the agreements because most people, their eyes glaze over when you start talking about it. That was the hard part. It wasn't actually interacting with the governments. The governments were interested in this. They were anxious to have it. It's big bucks.

Well, what seemed to me big bucks. I mean as a CTR program it was small. But we're talking about what was it, forty million a year. Well, if you're in the State Department, forty million a year is a lot of money, but compared to big DoD programs, it's a pittance. But to the former Soviet Union governments themselves this sounded like a lot of money.

Q: Where did we see the threat at the time?

ELLIOTT: Well, the threat was, and I have to admit that the intelligence community was really woefully uninformed. Originally when they tried to get this program up and they went to the intelligence agencies to get an idea of where the routes would be and what was actually happening. Basically the intelligence community said, "Well, you probably know more about that than we do." So we ended up having to just theorize basically that they would be smuggling routes, following shipping routes. Gradually there began to emerge a little bit more information particularly in the Ukraine for example as to what the routes would be. In many, in Ukraine actually though we worked, we were working on the border with Moldova primarily because that's what the government and the embassy wanted us to do because they had other problems in addition to the theoretical possibilities of WMD (weapons of mass destruction). They had all kinds of more conventional arms that are flooding out of Moldova in this territory down there that was not even under the control of Moldova, but still heavily influenced by Moscow where there had been a lot of storage of weapons. Parenthetically, in theory or by rumor there were WMD. There was WMD there, but we didn't know for sure. So it was basically the southern border where we decided to start. You have to limit where you can work somehow. You can't just work on everything at the same time. So that's where we started in Ukraine.

Q: What were we doing with this money? Were we, was it essentially a bribe to a former Soviet republic not to do it or something like that?

ELLIOTT: No, no, no. No money ever went to the country itself. This was a project where we would, for an easy example, one of the first programs was in Uzbekistan. We helped them establish monitoring devices on all of their ports of entry where there were traffic routes to help them identify any kind of radioactive device or material that would be passing through a port of entry. With communications systems from these--of course they had nothing originally--from these ports of entry to the central location in the capital as a means of control. That's the kind of thing it was. So it was hardware largely, hardware and know-how that we were providing.

Q: Well, speaking of know-how although it wasn't on your route, were you picking up what was happening out of your old Pakistan?

ELLIOTT: No. Pakistan we didn't we didn't work on at all. I recall discussions at DETRA (Defense Threat Reduction Agency), the implementing agency about our working there but that was not in our instructions from Congress.

Q: How successful do you consider this program?

ELLIOTT: Well I had managed to get agreements with all of the countries except Kazakhstan, which has the slowest bureaucracy in the world. They were just ready to sign. In fact I think they have signed now. But that was the longest negotiation. All the others we had working agreements and we had projects up and running.

Q: What was Kazakhstan's problem?

ELLIOTT: Just very slow. Very, very slow. I think there were rumors that the Russians didn't really want to encourage us because with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan we were working in the Caspian Sea and Russia regards the Caspian Sea as its own lake. They didn't think that the U.S. should be involved out there at all. So they didn't really, we had already moved quickly with Azerbaijan. Of course Azerbaijan was looking for help. Kazakhstan has a great deal more oil revenue, and they were much more independent.

Q: How did you find the Pentagon? I mean I'm talking about the defense establishment, working within that.

ELLIOTT: Very bureaucratic, and they have their own culture that's very different State. I think State is much more, it's smaller partially. That's one of the reasons that it, much more efficient. There's a great deal of sort of internecine strife in the Pentagon. It just, a huge bureaucracy. Not, I was appalled in some respects by the contracting process in that you have this whole agency DETRA, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, that's staffed by military officers. Some of them are assigned there. Some of them are retired, and there are a lot of contractors. They basically don't do anything except contract out the projects to the private industry. So you have this huge agency that is just doing nothing basically but contracting the projects, for example, that I was giving them to do. So by the time you get through that, that in itself is a huge expenditure. Just DETRA, supporting DETRA, and then they contract out these projects, I think the profit that the private sector making was pretty large. So that it would end up taking multiples of thousands of dollars to do anything that if I were just going out and finding somebody in the city to do something it could be done for a fraction of the price. It's partly Congress's fault because they have implemented so many rules to be sure that nobody is profiting that it becomes very cumbersome and costly process. They seem to be willing to pay that price rather than have any hint of anything, any kind of corruption.

Q: How is your connection back to the State Department during this time?

ELLIOTT: I interacted of course with the State Department. It was useful actually for my office because I understood how the State Department works and where to go and how to get in and that sort of thing. But I didn't feel as if I were part of State. I really while I was working in this office in DoD, I regarded myself as an employee of DoD.

Q: Well, then you retired, we're talking about this year.

ELLIOTT: Yeah.

Q: You've already in a sense distanced yourself from the State Department, hadn't you?

ELLIOTT: I had quite a bit. Of course I hadn't worked in the building, in the department for thirteen years. Because I was overseas ten years. That's a long time. Then of course back in Washington I wasn't actually in the department. I worked in the Senate and then in DoD. So in many respects State now to me is a distant agency.

Q: You must have just finished taking the Retirement seminar. How did you find that?

ELLIOTT: Career transition seminar. I did everything I was supposed to do and I did it religiously. I found that they really covered a lot of the issues in terms of how to go about getting a job, some aspects of what you're going to be experiencing as you go through this process, sort of the touchy feely stuff. They continued to be fairly supportive in terms of sending job announcements and all that sort of thing. So I think in terms of understanding of the process and getting information, it's about as good as you could expect and probably better than any other program that exists. But in a sense it's theoretical. I mean it really doesn't really focus on, and maybe because it's very difficult to do, but the kinds of jobs that State Department officers can realistically expect to get. For people who are in the administrative cone I mean all that stuff is useful, but they don't really need it. The administrative cone jobs are the ones that, I mean people who come out of that are the ones with the skills that are, they are the ones who can send a resume and get a job because they have basically what the companies are looking for. For most of us that were in what were called substantive positions, we have to find some way to transition into something that's really more technical. So they don't do a very good job on that. Maybe because that's so individual you have to do it yourself.

Q: Okay, well, then so we've got you out there in the world now.

ELLIOTT: Yes, and it's still, I think it'll be a year of transition. I don't really think I will know what I really want to do that soon, sooner than that.

Q: Great, well, I want to thank you very much.

End of interview