

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

EARL KESSLER

*Interviewed by: David Reuther
Initial interview date: February 23, 2012
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[Note: Mr. Kessler died before completing this interview]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History interview with Earl Kessler. Today is the 23rd of February, 2012, and we're in the Washington, DC suburbs of Northern Virginia. This interview is being conducted under the auspice of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm David Reuther.

Earl, one of the exciting things about this interview is your career spanned 11 secretaries of state. But let's start at the start. Like myself, you're a Pacific Northwest boy; born in Portland, I believe.

KESSLER: Absolutely. Born in Portland in December 1921 and grew up there.

Q: Can you give us a brief sketch of your parents, where they were from?

KESSLER: Yes. My father was born in California and moved to Portland as a young man. He had a married older sister living in Portland. So that initially drew him to Portland. He had no particular training to do anything, really. In those days of course not too many people are going to college. Anyway he got a job in Portland but he didn't like the job and he was with another fellow that came up with him and they decided they just didn't seem to find any employment that they thought was interesting. They saw an ad in the paper saying we need two young men to learn the typewriter repair business. They thought that would be interesting so they did it. At one point the fellow that came with my father later returned to San Francisco, but my father stayed. He learned the business and later he became very active in the business and to make a long story short the owner of the business later made an arrangement, you can buy my business if you just pay me a little bit every month. A very nice man. He didn't have any family to leave it to but he wanted to help my father so it was very lucky for my father. So that set him up in business in Portland and he later became the president of the typewriter association in Portland, Oregon. I've seen clippings as he was interviewed by the press several times and he was a modest businessman, not terribly wealthy but a modest businessman. I went to the public schools in Portland and later did a first term at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

Q: And was your mother a Portland girl too?

KESSLER: No, my mother was from Minnesota. Her father was born in Minnesota and so was her mother. And she came West because both of her parents passed away and so she was virtually an orphan, you know, and so the aunt and uncle who lived in Portland took care of her and raise her from the time she was something like 10 or 12 years old, and so she was- that's how she got to Portland and so she lived in Portland.

Q: What was high school in Portland like?

KESSLER: Well I went to a very large high school, Grant's High School, Ulysses S. Grant High School. Interestingly, it was used as the backdrop for the 1995 movie Mr. Holland's Opus. That was quite a well-known movie filmed years later at my high school.

Anyway, it was a large high school and I was very interested in anything to do with foreign things; I enjoyed that sort of thing. We had a teacher there that was very, very wonderful. She was a remarkable woman, and she had a Master's degree, which was not too common in those days for a high school teacher to have a Master's degree. She coined the phrase, "Pacific Rim" and she was- I read this in the paper several times later- that she coined the phrase "Pacific Rim" and she had a class called "The Pacific Rim" and so it was a terribly interesting class and we were assigned different countries to study all around the Pacific Rim. I got so interested that I told her I was interested in the Foreign Service; she said it's terribly difficult to get into but you can certainly try and so forth.

I remember "civics" class; they called it "civics," now I guess I don't know what they call it nowadays but it was called "civics" in those days, government, I suppose it's called "government" now. Anyway, we studied the various government departments and so on; I studied all the departments and later we had to do a paper and present it in front of the class and describe the department, Department of Interior, Department of Commerce and all that sort of thing. I took the State Department and I focused on the Foreign Service, which I thought was the most interesting. So I gave a speech about the Foreign Service. To get the necessary background information my civics teacher recommended writing the Department of State, in Washington, D.C.. So I wrote to the Department of State, Washington, D.C.; it took weeks and I finally got something back though. And a lot of information and so then later, much later, I wrote another time.

But anyway, I made this presentation on the Foreign Service and everyone sort of thought it was kind of interesting. I then went on to try to a major in international relations and I didn't get too far because as I mentioned, I went to the University of Oregon and I could see the courses weren't terribly geared to that sort of thing. In the meantime I had written again to the State Department and they sent out a booklet on the Foreign Service test. I think it was one of the very first ones that came out where they even had some sample questions. And so basically, looking at that I thought well, I'm sort of wasting my time here but I didn't know what to do.

So I took a bus from Portland up to Vancouver, British Columbia, because I didn't have very much money. Of course, my dad thought I was absolutely out of my mind. I went in and talked to the consul general stationed there. The consul general was very amused that I had come from Portland and he was a very nice man, and he said "Well listen, I've heard great things about the new setup they have at University of Southern California," and he said you know a very well-known authority on international relations, Dr. Rufus B KleinSmid- who was internationally known at that time and I was told at that time, but I don't know if that's true or not, but he was in the "Guinness Book of Records," that he had the most decorations of any American living or something- foreign decorations. I don't know if that's true or not. [Ed: USC credits itself with establishing the country's first school of international relations in 1924, but also suggests its school is the third oldest. Nevertheless, USC materials note that "Von KleinSmid was recognized as 'one of three of the nation's most distinguished citizens' through the National Institute of Social Sciences Gold Medal Award. On an international level, von KleinSmid received awards from 20 national governments for his achievements."]

Anyway. He said USC was focused on international relations and it would be very good. But he also said of course the other universities are all on the East Coast, and he suggested the best would be Georgetown University. So I returned to Portland and told my dad. He said well I can't afford to send you to Georgetown University, that's out of the question. It would cost a fortune to do it, to get in there, if you could get in, and second the cost of travel. And my dad had never been to Washington in his life and no one that I ever knew in those days had ever been to Washington.

Q: Now to what do you attribute your interest in international affairs?

KESSLER: I think one aspect was my father who was always terribly interested in ships and as a young boy he frequently would be going around the area on business where the ship docks were. I, too, used to love to see the ships. And he was very interested and I was interested too and on more than one occasion we would see people getting off some ship; these were sort of a combination passenger/freighter ships And Dad would approach them and ask, "Are you trying to get into town?" "Well yes, we were told a few blocks up we could hail a taxi." He said, "Come on, I'll be glad to take you," and with that I heard a lot of interesting conversations that Dad had with some of these people. And there was one shipping line that had a lovely combination cargo/passenger vessel. I doubt if it carried more than 50 passengers but it was a very nice ship and it sailed all the way from Copenhagen to Portland the last stop, and it's amazing. So later on Dad got in contact with one of these fellows as he was driving around one time, and he said I can take you boys, show you the ship if you'd like. Oh, I was crazy to go. So that's how we got sort of in it.

One day the German navy came in and a big ship came in and the flag was flying half-mast and I said, "Dad, I don't understand. Why is its flag at half-mast?" He said well it's because the king of England just died and he said out of respect, since they have diplomatic relations with England, that's why they lower their flag and all. [Ed: King George V died January 20, 1936] So he took me aboard because he was anxious to go

too, and we went aboard ship and I had a wonderful trip, wonderful time, and I got very interested.

And then as I was graduating from high school Alexander Kerensky came to town on a speaking tour.

Q: Kerensky, the second Prime Minister of the Russian Provisional Government until overthrown by Lenin and the communist in the 1917 October Revolution!?

KESSLER: Yes, the former premier of Russia. You know, the famous communist. You know he later came to the United States and he had this tour and all and Portland was a very culturally oriented city at that time and the mayor of the city of Portland introduced him and my dear friend, whom I later joined down at the University of Southern California. He went direct to USC because his father had gone there and his older brother had gone there.

Anyway, we got tickets and we went to hear Kerensky speak, which was very interesting. He couldn't speak very much English, he had an interpreter, but I thought it was fascinating, being part of it at that age, you know, and to hear that this man who at one time had been the head of the entire Soviet government in the very, very early days. Of course he didn't last too long but he was the virtual prime minister of the first communist government in Russia and then he had a fallout with Lenin and I don't know why he left but he had to leave in a hurry and I think he had to get out to save his scalp, I don't know. So you know, all those little things added up and to a great interest in things foreign. [Ed: Kerensky fled Russia to France and stayed in Paris until Nazi Germany attacked westward in May 1940. Paris fell on June 14, 1940.]

Q: Well while you were in high school of course the war starts in Europe, September 1939; you probably would have been aware of these events.

KESSLER: Oh yes, oh yes, of course terribly; we followed the war a great deal, yes, and everyone sort of thought we'd get in the war sometime, eventually, but Roosevelt kept saying publicly that he hated war and he was not about to get us involved in war. But he did everything he could to help England, he did everything, and we had the lend/lease program and we would- we had all these freighters that we would turn over to the British. I think they paid a dollar or something to lease them and all these ships.

Q: Now, after your short start at the University of Oregon, you went down to University of Southern California in Los Angeles. Now that's a drive.

KESSLER: Well, I took the train and my friend who accompanied me to see Kerensky with me was already down there, because he went directly from high school. So I had a connection and he and I took a train to southern California. His parents were good friends of my parents and so I had a wonderful time down there. Oddly enough, one of the professors in international relations school was from Spokane (WA); he had relatives in Portland; and they knew my father. So I had a connection at USC and a good friend

with one of the profs. I had just one class from him, but then he said, “You know, we can’t be good friends if you’re in my class because it just wouldn’t be a good idea.” So I didn’t take any of his other classes, but we used to see each other, we’d frequently have dinner together. Very nice man. And later when my parents visited me in Los Angeles why he got together with them and one time when I went on home leave on the train he took the train at the same time that Bill and I did and we were together on the train and we got off at Portland, he continued on to Spokane.

Q: What kinds of courses would you be taking at this time then?

KESSLER: Well they had just all sorts of international relations courses. They sort of had world history, of course, naturally for general background, and world government and all that. But then we would branch out to some area that we thought we’d like to concentrate on and I took the Far East. I had a Chinese professor and then I had another professor who had served, in all places: Shanghai. He was retired foreign service. I think later he was selected out, but at that time I had never heard of such a thing. He was a relatively young fellow, so I think he was probably selected out. Anyway, we thought he was our god. My gosh, he was a Foreign Service officer and he’d been all over the world and so forth and he had wonderful tales to tell.

We had Delta Phi Epsilon on campus, which was a national honorary Foreign Service fraternity, but they did not have a house there in USC, I don’t know why. But one of the biggest fraternity houses at Stanford was Delta Phi Epsilon. And I don’t know why, no one ever suggested that I should go to Stanford. At that time Stanford didn’t have the reputation it has now. It was just considered another very good school. At the time everyone thought they were going to have a very good school, including the University of Washington. And also UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles) and (University of California) Berkeley, you know.

So anyway, that’s the situation. I had another Foreign Service officer who I think really was retired, so that made three Foreign Service officers as professors. They spoke so interestingly on the Foreign Service and they told us all sorts of stories, which made the courses interesting. At that time women didn’t seem to have any interest in international relations, so the classes were mostly male.

One interesting thing about USC in those days is then we had a lot of exchange students. Then we had a special club on campus and I was pretty active in that club because they also wanted to have Americans in the club, of course; the whole idea was to intermix with these exchange students. In many cases they were stranded, they couldn’t get back home, so we had French students, we had British students; we had students from all around. One of my closest friends was a Turkish student, of all things, and they were stranded and the University of Southern California was so good to them. It said, “Now don’t you worry; we’ll take care of it. You’ll be in the dorm and we’ll feed you and no charge for any tuition until later, when the war ends, if you can do it you can reimburse us because they said you’re stranded and we understand.” Of course we had students

from the Orient. At that time, it was before Pearl Harbor, but in many cases they couldn't do very much. And then after Pearl Harbor, of course, why they were completely cut off.

In all this I thought that China would be the most interesting so I concentrated on the Far East, particularly China, and- but I didn't study Chinese, I don't know why. As I look back I don't know quite why I didn't because they did have it, they did teach Chinese there at the university.

Q: So when did you start at USC?

KESSLER: I graduated in '43 because the last year you couldn't take any vacation in the V-7 program. You had to study right straight through. So I didn't graduate until October and so I'd say I probably was at USC three and a half years.

Q: You would have been on campus then for Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. How did that affect peoples' attitudes?

KESSLER: Oh we were absolutely astounded and no one could believe that it had happened. We had a Japanese-American boy in one of the classes and the professor ordered him out of the class and we were so upset though because he was a very nice fellow so we all left the class with him. And the professor later had to apologize. This is a Japanese-American boy, he's an American citizen. He's a great guy. And there was a lot of animosity towards the poor chap and he's American so it was greatly unfair because I don't think more than maybe five or seven were a danger to us but you know, they rounded them up, put them on trains, put them in virtual concentration camps. It was a terrible episode in our history the way the Japanese-Americans were treated. They had to leave their businesses. They had to pick up everything and they were only allowed a couple of suitcases and off they were shipped.

So anyway, after I graduated of course I later went in the Navy and they said you're going to be a cryptologist and three of us lined up and-

Q: Now you went into the Navy V-7 Program. Did you join that before you graduated or immediately after graduation?

KESSLER: Oh yes, while I was at the university. The program guaranteed that you could stay in to get your degree. That is the whole point. Because they felt and I think the university probably had a lot to do with it; they said look, we're going to collapse. You've got to keep some students in our university. And at that time even an awful lot of girls didn't bother to go to the university you know. They graduated from high school and they worked for a couple of years and got married and you know how that thing worked in the old days, you know; the girls got married very- and they didn't- the average girl wasn't terribly keen on being a professional career woman and so that was the situation.

Q: So the V-7 Program was a program to ensure a supply of young naval officers and yet make sure people got their education. Now, you graduated from USC in October 1943 and went right in to the Navy. So, what the Navy enlistment like?

KESSLER: Well we- It didn't require much of anything really. We were called 90 day wonders and they had a 90 day course there in Great Lakes, Illinois, and then was assigned to go to Washington, D.C., of all places. Here I said hey I'm joining the Navy, why am I going to Washington for God's sake? So I went to Washington and I was told I could be a cryptographer. We had a machine there, it was kind of like a telex machine. It was not the type of machine that we actually used but it was a similar type. So we had to practice and practice on this machine and practice reading tape and all that sort of thing, you know, and of course the tapes were what- the tapes were all different.

Q: Where was the cryptology school training conducted?

KESSLER: We had a whole floor at the National Press Building in Washington, entire floor. And it was very- they were sort of secretive. I don't know quite why because everyone- everyone that was- I didn't know anything about it but anyone who's interested in that sort of thing knew, they knew all about cryptology and they knew there had to be cryptologists. But anyway we were not allowed to wear uniforms; we were not allowed to say anything. We were told we had to get housing on our own and they gave us a list of people that had volunteered to take people in. The Admin(istration) fellow was very nice; he said now look, some of these areas aren't so good and some of them are better. So, he said take some of these addresses; they're the more upscale houses and better neighborhoods. Another fellow and I, we went and this very nice couple, they took us in and they couldn't have been nicer. They charged us; they said, "Well, the last couple of boys we had paid such and such." It wasn't very much as I recall. And they said, "Is that okay with you?" You know, I think we could have probably gotten it cheaper. They didn't do it for the money; they just did it to be patriotic. And they had a little boy and later we sort of babysat the little boy sometimes for them and we were almost sort of like family. They were such nice people. In all of our times in Washington, why I don't think we ever made better friends than that couple. But unfortunately I lost complete track of them and I was always so sorry about it. The last I heard he was- he worked for the government. He was just above the age for the draft so he was not concerned about the draft and later I heard he was transferred to Puerto Rico but I completely lost track of them.

Q: How long did this basic training at the National Press Club last?

KESSLER: Oh I don't- It wasn't- I would say- I don't remember. Maybe three months.

Q: And then you went out?

KESSLER: Well, then I was assigned to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. The rumor was, the scuttlebutt was, that that's where we would be shipped out to the war, you

know. But, we never shipped out to anything. I was put on a plane and was flown to Honolulu.

At the time I was under the illusion that I would be assigned as a cryptographer on a ship. By that stage of the game, however, I was not eligible as they had some very experienced cryptographers on certain ships and I never did get on a ship. I tried and I tried. Everyone tried but very few ever made it. And so later, after the war ended, I was flown back to the mainland. So my brilliant naval career was such that I never set foot on a naval ship, which was a great disappointment to me.

Q: And when were you released? I assume some time after the war in the Pacific Theater ended in August 1945. The State Department Biographic Register says you joined the Department in October 1946.

KESSLER: Yes, yes, but there is a connection between my Navy experience as a cryptographer in Honolulu and my interest in the Foreign Service. Remember I told you about going in the library?

Q: Oh yes. Cover that again.

KESSLER: Well I hadn't been on base very long. There was all sorts of in-processing that took a while. I had to take all sorts of pictures for i.d.s and this and that. It was a very guarded base there; it had Marine guards all over the place, difficult to get in and out. Anyway, the situation was that I was pretty busy the first few days and finally after I'd been there I don't know how many days, maybe a week, I had nothing better to do and I'd never been to the small little library on the base; so I went into the library. It was fairly crowded, it had some tables around and a lot of the tables were for two people, some of them were for four. There was only one vacant chair at this table for two where there was a fellow there writing away. So I thought, well I guess I can sit there, because after all, there was a vacant chair, it was for two people.

So I very quietly sat down and I had started reading a magazine but I couldn't help but notice on the table in front of me was an envelope that this fellow had just finished. It was to Miss So-and-So, Reykjavik, Iceland. And I thought that's sort of peculiar. Then I looked again, he was just finishing up another letter. He was sealing it up and so forth and he put that down. He was very busy and then he had a little pocket dictionary. I noticed this next letter was for Senorita Such-and-Such in Asuncion, Paraguay. And then another one using a Portuguese-English dictionary. And he was writing away, writing away, checking a word here and there and so forth. Finally, he sort of sighed in relief and looked up. "Oh," he said, "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't know you were here, I didn't notice you. Let me take some of my stuff away." And I said, "No, I don't need any space." He introduced himself, said I don't think we've met. And I said no. And he said where are you assigned? And I told him and he immediately knew that I was a cryptographer, so to speak, and so was he.

One thing led to another and I said, "I don't want to appear nosy but I said how can you be sitting here in Hawaii writing to a girl in Iceland and another girl in Paraguay and another girl in Brazil?" He laughed and he said, "Well I'm a Foreign Service officer on military leave and my first post was Reykjavik and my second post was Asuncion and then I was only a year in Asuncion and they needed somebody urgently and so I was transferred to Rio de Janeiro. And while I was in Rio through the help of the Naval attaché there he told me how I could go about getting into the Navy." He continued the State Department had an agreement that if you really wanted to go into the service they couldn't prevent you and they would allow you, but they didn't encourage it because they said look, you can serve your country just as well by serving us overseas because we need people overseas and we're having a terrible time getting people to and from the posts, of course, and we need people, blah, blah, blah, and so it was one of those things.

At that time State wasn't terribly encouraging for people to leave but they wouldn't stop you. So what he was telling me was that he joined the Navy when he was in Rio and then later he was eventually assigned where we were in Honolulu. We became very close friends. Later we served together at one post and later he got married and so did I and our wives met and our paths crossed frequently and he only died just about six months ago. All these years I kept in touch with him.

At that time he transferred from the Foreign Service to the Civil Service because they offered him a big, big deal salary-wise and so he was the head of the passport agency in Honolulu. In later years in went to Honolulu to administer the Foreign Service oral exams in Honolulu. Well of course I would see him out there and spent weekends out at their home which was only two blocks from a beautiful beach in Kanaloa.

So all of these things sort of added up, you know, but at that time I was also interested in foreign trade, because I'd heard lots of interesting things I talked to people who'd been with the Bank of America, served all over the world with Bank of America. And then there was a fellow from Johnson & Johnson that I met with- this is all in the service, of course. He had been to several different foreign countries and I found, you know, I wasn't so sure, you know, because in most cases I got the definite impression they made more money than the guys did in the Foreign Service, which was very true I found out later. So anyway that was the situation.

When I finally came back why I agreed to meet my friend, whose name was Lynn, and we met in Washington and we got a small apartment together. He helped me a great deal. He found out who I can see and bypass the normal personnel setup. He advised if you get involved with personnel, you may not get anywhere. But if you can go and see this one guy, he was the head of the career service, the entire career service, and if you can ever get to him he has great influence and so he could probably do something. So I found him and I finally got an appointment to see this guy and he was a very, very nice person.

Later I found out all about him; he had quite a brilliant career, this fellow. He was a retired full colonel and he was the head of the entire career service for the Army and played a very valuable role with the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in World War II.

And he was a veteran- and he was very amused; he said you've come all the way from Portland, Oregon, to here to look for a job as a diplomatic courier? And he laughed. And I said yes, sir. And he said well that takes a lot of nerve, and I said well, I didn't know- I thought it was the best way to approach it. He said, "Tell me about yourself. What have you got there?" I had a little booklet with me with my background stuff. "Well," I said, "I'm a graduate of the University of California, I'm a veteran. I have top secret clearance." "You have? Not just secret?" "No, I have top secret clearance." "Really!?" And I showed him my transcript? He was very meticulous though and reviewed my USC transcript. So yes, sure enough, I graduated from the University of Southern California, I had decent grades. He continued, "Well, maybe I could; we need couriers desperately but personnel's a big hassle. They seem to fool around and I can never get through on the security." He said, "I'm having a terrible time recruiting diplomatic couriers. Maybe I can do something because in this case if you have top secret clearance; technically the State Department doesn't recognize military clearances. But, I can probably get it expedited."

So anyway, to make a long story short, he said come and see me in about three days. So I came to see him in about three days; he said Earl, he said, it's looking pretty good. He said now I'm going to give you a whole stack of papers to fill out and he said it will take you all day to do it but he said you plow through it. So that's how I got started.

My application bypassed personnel pretty much and I don't know how he did it but anyway one day he said, "I've also got another group pretty ready to go." And so I think there were six of us, seven maybe. Anyway, he said now we need you anywhere where we have an office. So he said, "I can't guarantee where but you have a choice of Paris, Cairo, Frankfurt, Panama or Shanghai. You can't all say Paris!" Now Shanghai, I thought wow, and no one wanted to go to Shanghai because the publicity was terrible in those days about Shanghai. You know, is it going to collapse or isn't it, what about this, what about that. Will Chiang Kai-shek be able to hang on and all that sort of thing.

Q: Just to back up for a moment; State records say you joined the Department in October 1946 and you went off to Shanghai in July 1947. So some training and then off to post?

KESSLER: Yes, I had to make one run to South America with an experienced courier to get a feel of it. But that's basically it. Meanwhile, he said I was to be given the rank of lieutenant colonel, and I thought he was kidding. Oh, I should go back to say one thing. He was a little concerned about sending me to Shanghai. He said, "You're only 25 years old. I'm not too sure about sending you to Shanghai. It's a dangerous area you're going into." He said, "You probably don't realize it but you're going to be flying around in some very difficult areas and air travel is difficult and it's not all that safe and some of these places, if things turn for the worse, and they may, you're going to be in a real, practically a war zone. Furthermore, you're going to be in other areas, other places where it's not as bad as China but there's all sorts of unrest and turmoil and blah, blah, blah." I said I'm sure I can look after myself and blah, blah, please let me go to Shanghai. He said well, alright. So the reason for the assigned rank of lieutenant colonel; he said, was to get me to post. The last time he sent a courier to Shanghai it took

him almost a month to get there because there's no, of course, commercial airline going there, there are no passenger ships going there; the only way you could possibly get to China was to fly a military aircraft. And of course, naturally, the military were interested in getting the military going and they couldn't care less about civilians.

So anyway, I had this assimilator and it was issued by the Pentagon. It was an official thing; it wasn't some little thing that he did. It authorized me the assimilated rank of lieutenant colonel. Therefore he said only a full colonel or above can bump you of a military flight, so, he said, you shouldn't have too much trouble. He said don't think you're going to go, just fly straight through, no. Because he said they're going to fly in segments and you'll go from San Francisco to Honolulu and then you'll go on another plane from San Francisco to Guam, another plane Guam to Tokyo. But it won't go straight through; he said that's not the way it works. I don't know why, don't ask me, it's the way the Army works it.

So he said you're going to be maybe bumped off a day or two one place, day or two in the other but he said you should go pretty fast and then when you get to Tokyo I want you to spend three full workdays in Tokyo to coordinate with the State Department office there, even though of course MacArthur was the supreme commander, and oh my goodness, and the State Department was kind of an afterthought, you know. And anyway, also I had to talk to the head of the courier office there in Tokyo, the Army, because the Army took care of getting stuff into Shanghai, so they explained in Washington that I would not be going back to Tokyo, that I was still servicing Shanghai but from there.

So I had a reasonably good trip and I had a couple of days here and a couple of days there and everything worked out quite well except on the trip one situation arose. There was some sort of an engine problem and the pilot said I think we're going to have to stop at the island of Majuro. And I said Majuro? And he said yes. And some of the people on the plane seemed to know where it was; I didn't know where it was. And so we stopped in Majuro and it was a small little Navy, not an Army, and it was on the verge of being shutdown. I think it was a lieutenant commander who was the senior officer there and he and his wife invited a few in for a light lunch and the rest of the gang had to go in the- it was sort of a mess place. Our hosts were so impressed I was from the State Department that they sort of treated me as the honored guest, you see, and there were several other lieutenant colonels aboard this plane and they were not terribly pleased about this. But this poor lieutenant commander there in the Navy, he thought that I was some- must be some important person to be on that plane. So anyway, we had a nice lunch there in Majuro and they showed us around a little bit and then off we went. And so it was a nice, interesting trip. [Ed: Majuro is part of the Marshall Islands. Wikipedia notes U.S. troops seized the island on January 30, 1944, but found that Japanese forces had previously evacuated their fortifications and moved to Kwajalein and Eniwetok. Majuro became one of the largest anchorages in the Central Pacific and was the most active port in the world until the war moved westward.]

I arrived in Shanghai and the Army gave me a ride to the consular general and I didn't know what else to do so I just walked in the door there. It was in a big space there already, one of the tallest buildings in Shanghai, actually. So anyway, I walked in and I asked somebody where I should report and they said go see so-and-so; so I went to that office. There was a woman there, very- not too elderly but I thought she was about ready for the grave. She might have been maybe 55, you know. So anyway she said, Oh, well, well, well, and who's your father?" And I said, "I beg your pardon?" "Well, you must be the dependent of someone. I responded, "I'm here for an assignment." She was flabbergasted; so I presented my documentation. "Oh, really, well, oh, you're a diplomatic courier, oh really?"

So she sent me to the diplomatic courier headquarters and the guy was so glad to see me. He said he didn't know if I was going to ever make it or not, but I wasn't really dead. He said we're going to put you up in the hotel which was practically right across the street, put you up there because we have leased, I think he said four floors, and we'll put you up there. Then tomorrow morning you report back. You have to first go and see the consul general. He's very fussy, he wants to know everything; who's assigned to that post. And he gave me a little bit of a rundown on the consul general. He said the consul general is Mr. Cabot, and that didn't mean anything. He said haven't you ever heard of the old phrase, in Boston only the Cabots speak to the Lodges? And I said yes, I had. Well he said, that's our Mr. Cabot. That's one of those Cabots. And he said that he was a rare Foreign Service officer, he didn't use special privileges to join the Foreign Service, but of course he advanced very rapidly, and they offered him a job as ambassador and he turned it down. I was told he particularly wanted to be consul general in Shanghai, saying he wanted to be where the action is. And so I thought here's a real gung ho guy. [Ed: State Department records suggest the Consulate General was re-established in Shanghai in August 1945. Monnett B. Davis was appointed Consul General in March 1946 and was replaced by John M Cabot who arrived in Shanghai in November 1947 and closed the mission in 1949.]

So finally I went in and he was a very austere rather looking man and tall and he got up and he looked at me and at first I thought maybe, you know, something's wrong and sit down. He said, "How old are you?" And I said, "I'm 25." Twenty-five. He said, "I saw something about your assignment, but I thought it was a typo." How can the Department be so- I don't know what he said; how could they be so crazy, sending a 25 year old in this atmosphere here in Shanghai. He said, "Young man; we don't know what's going to happen. We really don't know what's going to happen." "But." he said, "we have outlying consulates and you're going to have to be getting in and out of those consulates and it's going to be very dangerous. And also some of the areas you're going to be going in and out of; for instance there's all sorts of turmoil down in India because they're demanding their accelerated independence and you're going to have problems in Calcutta, and he said there's a lot of unrest in Burma and also there's an independence movement now going on in the Dutch East Indies." I said, "Mr. Cabot, I said first of all, I'm a graduate of the University of Southern California in international relations and I sort of majored in China, actually I didn't really major just in China but in the Far East

but anyway I'm not afraid of danger and I think I can look after myself." "Well," he said, "but if something happened I'd feel sort of guilty. I don't like this; this is not right."

"Look," he said, "they're trying to build up the embassy in Manila. I know the ambassador in Manila, the new ambassador, and I think I could maneuver and get you assigned to Manila. Now Manila's a nice place and it's a beautiful area to be assigned, you'd love it and it's a safe place." "But," I said, "I want to be a diplomatic courier." "Well," he said, "there are other good jobs around, you don't have to be a diplomatic courier." But when I insisted he relented.

Q: Now let me ask; it sounds as though your assignment is just not to courier classified material to China-based posts but also connecting China with other posts in Asia?

KESSLER: Oh, good heavens, yes. Then anyway, he says well, I'll discuss it with Mr. [James B.] Pilcher [Ed: who arrived in Shanghai in March 1946], that is the second in charge. Just as I was leaving, he asked whether I spoke Chinese? I said no, I don't speak Chinese but I said I'd be willing to try, to learn. Well he said, you might consider a sleeping dictionary. And I said thank you and so I finally got out and asked my colleague what's a sleeping dictionary? He said it's a Chinese girl. He said you get a sleeping dictionary, that's how you learn Chinese much more rapidly. He said I don't happen to have one, but he said all the guys do, and he said you can find one very easily. I couldn't believe quite what he was saying. So I looked around. I wasn't used to Chinese girls particularly and they didn't look all that interesting. So to make a long story short I served two years and I never learned any Chinese.

Anyway to answer your question my supervisor said I was going as far south as the embassy in Wellington, New Zealand, and as far east as New Caledonia, but he said I don't think you'll make it to Tahiti because we're closing down the Tahiti, the French are kicking us out because they're having some nuclear tests going on soon and they want us out so I don't think we'll be able to stay so you probably won't make it to Tahiti but you'll definitely make it to Nouméa, which is the capital of New Caledonia. And he said you know, Australia's a big area and he said you know, we have consulates in Adelaide and Melbourne, Brisbane, we have an embassy in Canberra, way out in the Indian Ocean at Perth. He said you have no idea what you have ahead of you, and so forth. And then he said you're going to go to what was called the Strait Settlements in those days, now it's in Malaysia, and Singapore and Burma and you'll meet the courier that's coming all the way from Cairo. You're going to have to exchange your material in Calcutta and what he brings you'll bring back and give to the fellow there. He'll take all the way back to Cairo and from Cairo it'll go who knows where. Who knows where and so forth. And then he said so, are you up to this? I said I think it's wonderful, I'm all set. He also added that I would go as far north as Vladivostok, which pleased me because that's another place I was dying to go to.

And so that's the way we got started. My very first trip was to sort of break me in a little bit, put me on the train, overnight train to go to the embassy in Nanking. And so I went to the embassy in Nanking several times on the train, which was uneventful but I did

enjoy being in Nanking and the reason I was going, spending so much time in Nanking is because it was the capital of China and where the other embassies were from whom I had to get visas for all my travels. I was told in Washington not to waste time with this visa business in Washington; they can do it faster in Nanking. But you know, they weren't very fast and those embassies there, some of the guys, consular officers only met you maybe a couple of hours in the morning or a couple of hours in the afternoon; that's all they worked. Some of the embassies closed at noon. Fortunately the British embassy could give me a visa for variety of stops because they were British colonies; the Strait Settlements was a British colony, so was Singapore, so was Burma and so was India. But the Dutch were real fussy and of course I had to have a visa for Dutch East Indies but the Dutch embassy, they weren't all that- they were very slow about giving me a visa.

Anyway, it took me days to get all these visas for some of these places. At that particular time the Australians didn't have a consulate in Shanghai. And the British could not give you an Australian visa, nor would New Zealand do it. So I had a lot of things to do.

Let's backtrack a minute and explain the logic behind this lieutenant colonel business. I was told I had to have this assimilated rank because if I didn't I would never get on a flying boat out of Hong Kong. At the time I didn't know what he was talking about and sort of put it out of my mind. So then when I got to Shanghai and the guy said now look, the airports of all these countries, most of them, have been damaged during the war or they're in the process of enlarging them to take the bigger planes or they're repairing them or one way or another or sometimes they're in areas or they're putting- going to plan a newer airport anyway, and he says there's a lot of politics going on. And to make a long story short, when you go to any of these places you have to take the flying boat. I wasn't really sure what a flying boat was, but, well, they were the British-built Short Sunderlands, which were used during the war, and I didn't know that, and they could only land on the water. They were wonderful, these flying boats as they called them, and they converted these into very comfortable accommodations and they were very nice. Although tickets were terribly expensive, there was a long list to get out on one of these flying boats because it was the only way you could get out. And so I had to have this priority or I'd never been able to get a seat on the flying boat.

I was told you fly into Hong Kong, you go on to Singapore. And then at Singapore you have to change and that flying boat, you wouldn't believe it, will end up in Southampton. And I couldn't believe it. It goes all the way to Southampton and never lands on land, it can only land on water. And so that's what I did.

And you mentioned earlier about Bangkok, we landed there on the river there in Bangkok. And so anyway, I made these wonderful trips and they were very comfortable and they had double decker, they carried about, I'd say maybe 40 passengers, something like that; they didn't carry a lot. And they had very good service and fairly good meals and the upper deck, why you had- they had mattresses and pillows and so you could go up there and you could leave your jacket and your tie off and sprawl out and take a siesta. And it was very comfortable, very nice. And then if there was a woman above they had a special area where they had a curtain so she had privacy for her but in all the trips I made

on those flying boats only once did I ever see a woman on them and she was the wife of some ambassador, I don't know who she was.

Anyway, the flying boats were very, very slow though. They were not very fast. But they were comfortable and that's how we got around. In Calcutta we landed right on Calcutta bay. They had excellent facilities there in Calcutta. And in Burma there, also we had very good facilities in Burma. And then from there they went on to- I don't know where they went on to. I know one of the passengers one time, he was getting off at Malta so apparently they landed in Malta. And then they landed somewhere around the Suez area there somewhere, I don't know. And then from Malta he said they went to Marseilles and then Marseilles to Southampton was amazing. But there's a lot of politics because apparently they wanted to, shall we say limit the normal air because they wanted to keep their passenger ships going and they had two big passenger ships that were- they were converting because when the war started they were converted into troop carriers, of course. But then it took a long time to get them refurbished and all that sort of thing. But these two large ships and one of them was one of the queen's [Ed: Cunard Line ships were named Queen and then the name of the monarch, e.g., Queen Mary.] Now I don't know which one it was but one of those, one of the queen's, who apparently was during the war was in some harbor that was- that the Germans didn't- I guess it was camouflaged maybe or I don't know but anyway, it was saved. But one of the other queen's was sunk.

Anyway, that's the situation and so it was politics and I think they could have gotten through somehow but anyway. And then later, before I left one of the first beautiful ships from England did arrive in Hong Kong and from then on they had some service. And then later they founded BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation), which is now British Airways. My first trip then was all the way to Calcutta, which is terribly interesting and I really enjoyed it.

Then another trip I made, Hong Kong to Singapore, and then I got to Singapore and then that was a fascinating trip. I went from Singapore to Surabaya in the Dutch East Indies, Surabaya to Darling, Australia, Darling to Rose Bay, Rose Bay to Sydney. And then- I had a lot of time in Sydney because I had to go to all the consulates. And the embassy in Canberra was just getting started and there was great reluctance to move to Canberra; it was not popular- it was not a popular move.

Q: Well where had the American embassy been located up to that point?

KESSLER: The embassy at that point had been in Sydney and people didn't want to go to Canberra; there's nothing there. There was no proper school and some of the wives refused to go. It was a terrible place. So when I was there walking around there there's nothing but pretty much vacant lots and there'd be a sign, future home of the Philippine embassy. So when I was there, the only embassies that were in business, the British High Commission was, the American embassy was, I think it was the Indian embassy was in business and one other but none of them were there, they were all under construction, and the city was- it was sort of- it was just in the process of being developed, shall we say.

And so the people in the foreign office and the people in the government offices and so forth in Sydney, they didn't want to move there. It was a great hassle and there was a political aspect to it. Some say that a change in government was due to that; I don't know if that was true or not, but anyway. But finally they got Canberra going and now, I haven't been there now; I've been to Australia several times since but I didn't go to Canberra so I don't know but I've talked to people that have been to Canberra recently who say now it's a very attractive place, very attractive place. But it's just far enough away from Sydney though that you wouldn't want to live there if it wasn't nice.

Then after I'd finished Australia then I'd take another flying boat and then I went from Sydney, I'd go to Auckland, New Zealand, and then from Auckland I had to go overland or by land plane to the capital of Wellington. They couldn't land in Wellington but apparently the harbor was so busy it wasn't safe. And usually I took the plane but once I took the express bus, which was very comfortable, very nice, and so I took the bus one time just to see the scenery and it took all day and they stopped twice for sightseeing and I had a wonderful trip and I enjoyed Wellington very much, it was a very pretty city. Auckland, not so attractive. But Wellington was a very attractive city and that's where the embassy was and that's where all the other embassies were.

Q: Now on these trips, is it like in the movies where you're handcuffed to your pouch?-

KESSLER: No, absolutely not. No, that was a lot of baloney. However, we had seals so that they couldn't be tampered but we were never supposed to leave the pouch out of our hands. We went to the toilet we took the pouch with us. We took a shower we had it right outside and so forth.

Q: Now, the necessity for this kind of pouch service is that electronic communication is quite minimal and most Foreign Service reporting at that time is via paper.

KESSLER: Oh it's all paper. There was almost none of the other. And you know, in those days they had charts they'd want to send. They'd be classified. Pictures sometimes would be classified. Elaborate reports would be classified. Sometimes publications would be classified. And sometimes you'd fly into a place and they'd have to answer the materials I brought as fast as they could, so that I could take it back, maybe the next plane. Usually I was at a stop two or three days and take it back. So I had time at all these places.

And another aspect of it, which I can't talk too much about and you'll understand, is that we had a lot of other assignments just to keep our eyes open and check on things because we could get in anywhere where no one else could hardly get in. It was virtually impossible for awhile to get into Burma. They were very strict but they couldn't stop us. And I got to know the king's messengers very well. Of course that was a very prestigious title in England to be a king's messenger and they were all retired senior military and some of them- and one of my closest friends, he was a Sir Somebody, and I got to know them quite well because we would frequently run into them on the planes, and our instructions were if you had to leave the pouch, it's perfectly safe to leave it with a king's

messenger. And they had the instructions which was you could always leave the pouch with the American diplomatic courier. So we'd be sitting there sometimes waiting for the same flight and all of a sudden well I've got to go to the bathroom, why I'll leave my pouch with him, or I'd take care of his pouch.

And our instructions were if you ever were in a place that there was absolutely no American consulate of any kind and you couldn't keep the pouch, you wouldn't think it would be safe to keep the pouch with you, go to the British consulate and they will take care of you, and you're authorized to turn the pouch over and they'll put it in their safe. And that only happened once. And once the plane was sputtering away and I didn't think we'd ever make it but we finally did and we overshot the airfield, went into a huge rice paddy, and it took them several hours for them to rescue us off the plane because it was just like a quagmire and they had a military thing finally take us off, amphibious sort of thing. And this was in Haiphong and Haiphong was in northern Indochina in those days, now Vietnam.

And so anyway, sitting next to me was a very nice French fellow, spoke very good English, and he was a representative for one of the big French newspaper chains. I knew there was no American consulate there so I asked him if there was a British consulate? Oh yes, there's a British consulate. He said there's a funny little man there, he's all alone but I think he's soon going to have another fellow joining him because the fellow went away on home leave and there's someone coming out later but this fellow's a very nice elderly man. So I got to the British consulate there. It had already closed but they had a sign, in emergency press this button, so I did and this was maybe 8:00 at night, something like that, and this fellow came out and he was in his pajamas and his robe, and he saw me and he saw the pouch. Oh, he said, for goodness sakes, do come in. And he was so nice to me. He said you know, this is very exciting for me. He said I've never had this happen before. He said of course you can put your pouch in my vault; I'll make sure that it's perfectly safe. I said I'm sure you will. And he wanted me to stay at his place. He said I don't think it's safe for you to be in a hotel. And I said well, I have a friend aboard ship- aboard the plane that was nice enough to say he'd put me up. That was this French fellow; he had a big place there and he used to have another correspondent, I guess, living there with him but the correspondent had taken off, I guess. And so anyway, I didn't spend the night with him but I left the pouch and I had a very interesting time with this French fellow who later visited me when he had some kind of business in Shanghai.

So anyway, that was the only time I had the situation come that I had to put my pouch in another consulate.

Q: Now what you're saying is you were stationed in Shanghai and you worked out of Shanghai connecting all these-places. Were you the only courier in Shanghai?

KESSLER: Oh no, no, no, of no, of course not. When I got there, there were, I think I was number six, I'm not sure. And these fellows had been there to open up the office to start the courier thing going because the military pouch system did not serve the remote areas where State was opening consulates. Of course the military had the naval base in

Tsingtao. It was a good sized base and they had military bases in certain places but usually not where some of our consulates were and they had nothing in Manchuria.

And so the whole situation was very, very complex and time consuming. For me to make a trip to Australia, by the time I do all the consulates and then go down to New Zealand and maybe go out to New Caledonia, why I'd be gone a month. And in some cases we couldn't complete our rounds; we didn't have the manpower. At that time, I think, the complement was supposed to be 12 couriers. That finally got up to 12 after I'd been there maybe a year and when they finally got up to 12 then it was very, very- much easier in some respects. On the other hand, not so easy within China because the situation in China was just slowly deteriorating. And finally I'd go to some of these places and I couldn't get out because no commercial airline could get in there.

The Army had a special intelligence branch which had airplanes, and they'd get me out sometimes. And there was one time. See, they had a series of warlords and the key thing was if the warlord would stick with Chiang Kai-shek or not. And some of them, I guess they thought they'd be on the winning side so they went over to the commies and one after another caved in. And so when I made this trip across into Xinjiang Province, across the Gobi Desert, I had to go in a Chinese Army plane, and on the way the plane was hit by lightning. I didn't think we'd ever make it but we finally did. It was sputtering, we were going down. Finally the pilot got the engines going and we finally got there. This was a trip to the consulate in Tihwa; the city's current name is Ürümqi. And in those days why, this warlord was very powerful. And I don't think he had so many men, it's just that it was such a desolate part of the world there but he did control a great area.

Before I went to Ürümqi, Tihwa as it was called in those days, I happened to know another courier who had been there, one of the old, old-timers. They were all leaving soon after I arrived. Anyway, he asked if I played tennis. Now he knew perfectly well I did because I was always playing tennis. And he laughed. Take your tennis racket, he advised. He said the general's crazy about tennis. And he said it'll get around and you'll be surprised, you'll be surprised; you'll probably be playing tennis with the general, the warlord, and I couldn't believe it. So that's exactly what happened. I wasn't there a couple of days in the consulate, and the consul there was a very colorful man, he was very famous. Paxton was his name. I think you may have run into that name if you did a lot of interviews of old China hands. Paxton was very well known. He was on the USS Panay when it was fired upon and he made dramatic efforts when he finally got back to the Department, wearing the same bloodstained shirt.

[Ed: Japanese aircraft attacked the American gunboat USS Panay while it was anchored in the Yangtze River outside Nanjing, the capital of China at the time, on December 12, 1937. Aboard were five officers, 54 enlisted men, who were evacuating four U.S. embassy staff and 10 civilians during the Japanese attack on the city. The Panay was sunk; three men were killed, and 43 sailors and five civilians were wounded. See <http://www.usspanay.org/attacked.shtml> for mention of Paxton. State Department

records suggest that J Hall Paxton was assigned as consul to Tihwa from October 1946 to October 1948.]

Anyway, he and his wife were the only two people there and then finally a vice consul arrived. [Ed: State Department records suggest the new vice consul was Robert Dreesen who arrived in September 1947]. So I made the third American there and I was there about a month, I guess, more or less, and they didn't have room for me but fortunately the adjoining compound was the British compound. The British had not sent someone back out so it was completely empty. They left the keys and everything with the American consul who gave it to me to use; so I stayed in the British consulate.

Q: Why were you in Tihua for a month?

KESSLER: Because I couldn't get out. This Army plane didn't make very many trips and we had to plead just to get on that flight to get out there and then I had to plead to get back. But fortunately, I don't think had it not been for the warlord I wouldn't have gotten out when I did.

Q: Did you get a chance to get into northern China, Beijing?

KESSLER: Oh, I saw a lot of Beijing. Good heavens; I was in Beijing a lot of time and I was in Tianjin, I was in Mukden, I was in Changchun, which is now Shenyang. It's way up north there in Manchuria and once I had a hairy experience getting out of Changchun.

I got there and the Army pilot was a guy I knew well because he was always sort of rescuing me. "Look," he said, "I'll give you such and such an amount of time. I can't stop the engines." This is in the wintertime and it was cold, freezing. He continued, "I can't stop these engines because I may not get them going again so I've got to keep them going. I only have so much gas and I need to get back to Mukden. I cannot stay beyond such and such an hour. So coordinate our watches now so there's no misunderstanding. I'm leaving; even if I see a car approaching, honking, and if I'm on the way out I'm not going to stop, I can't." He goes on, "I'm glad to help the State Department but I'm not going to die for the State Department. So you better make it."

Part of my job on this trip was to get the consul general out of there, and I don't want to go into details of that. But anyway, he was close to your nervous breakdown. At that time he's all alone because they'd evacuated everyone else. He volunteered to stay. I had to get him out and destroy some stuff. He took one car and I took one consulate car, and the reports were that the commies were right- about ready to come into the city on the other side. And so we got out there and we did have enough time to make the airfield. He was so concerned, because oddly enough, the most amazing thing, just three or four months earlier they'd sent a new car into Changchun, so he said we can't leave this beautiful new - I think it was a Ford or a Chevrolet - this beautiful new car. I said well what are we going to do with it? I said we've got to just leave it. I said keep the engine going, just keep the engine going, but then we realized we couldn't get the key out and have the car running. So I said well we'll just leave it and we'll take the keys with us.

So anyway, we left those two lovely cars. Mine wasn't lovely but the other car was certainly lovely as far as the Chinese would be concerned, and so we left mine running and we finally flew out and that was Changchun.

Q: Now, this would have been the time where there were a lot of Marines in northern China.

KESSLER: No, they were all gone by then. When I first arrived in early 1947 the Marines were on their way out. I can't recall ever seeing any Marines in Beijing at all. Of course it was Peking then. And I don't recall seeing anything. Actually there was very few military; you'd see very few military in Beijing. I never saw any military in Tianjin but we still had the naval base in Qingdao and that was a good naval base, a big one. It had very, very nice quarters at the officers' club and I'd stay there and it was kind of a nice place and there were still some old Russian families living there. And there was one place that had delicious Russian pastries. When they started leaving they left in a hurry and I don't know when they left but I know the last time I was there was in 1947, and 1948. I never got to Qingdao again.

But we had to look out for things, you know, just listening to people. I'd ask questions, you know, I would say, I heard about this, what do you think about? Is that true or-? Oh no, I wouldn't believe that. I'll tell you this is what's probably going to happen. Yes, I could pick up of a lot of information. And then sometimes I could see a lot of interesting things from the plane. These flying boats didn't fly very high. And I would be able to get in when the average person was having a difficult time getting in and in some cases we couldn't even get some of our operatives back into their posts. It wasn't easy.

And then my saga of- Vladivostok's another long story. That's quite interesting; to me it was quite interesting but I think you might want to record that.

Q: Please. Tell us about Vladivostok.

KESSLER: Well I'd been wanting to go to Vladivostok ever since Portland days because the Russian ships occasionally would come in when I was in high school. I went down with one of my buddies. At that time I don't know what possessed us, but we decided we were going to trade cigarettes with the Russians, who were coming off the ship. To have some Russian cigarettes; that was a big deal. So we went down there; it wasn't dark but it was getting towards and there was a fellow there. He was pacing back and forth, an American guy. He said hi boys, how are ya? You looking for something? Well I said, we're, you know, we thought we might trade and get some cigarettes from the Russian sailors. And he laughed. Obviously he was FBI, I suppose, maybe the local police but he was interested in the cove; he was watching things.

Anyway. Soon a couple of sailors came off and I didn't know any Russian, just a little, but we went up to them, mumbled some introductions, and shook hands. They didn't

know any English, we didn't know any Russian so we took our cigarettes out and ah ha! In those days there was one cigarette that was longer than the others, Pall Mall.

It was a long cigarette and they liked long- they liked that cigarette. And then Bill had Viceroy with him and they liked that Viceroy for some reason.

In fact we brought a collection; we came with all the brands. We came with Camel, Chesterfield; we had to see what they liked. Lucky Strike, too. But the ones they liked best was Pall Mall because it was long and Viceroy because it had a little tip on it. Those were two they liked. So we were really big shots during high school because of our Russian cigarettes. And we were really big shots. And I gave them to a couple of my teachers, too; my civics teacher there, who was so nice to me, and I even gave it to this woman who coined the expression "Pacific Rim," and she was quite a character; she smoked.

But anyway, this was in 1947 and one of the girls I knew there was White Russian, big White Russian, grew up there, living in Shanghai. The White Russians were sort of in two tiers; some of them were very poor. I don't know how they ever made their way to China but I think they spent all their money getting there and the poor people, they didn't speak Chinese, it was very difficult, and the Chinese didn't have much use for them. So we'd go in the restaurants and they'd be the waiters and sometimes, you know, waiters and clerks in some of the stores and so forth but they were smart, they learned Chinese in a hurry; a lot of them did, anyway. But there were just a lot of them but then there was the one that had the money; there were a lot of wealthy ones there, very wealthy, and this girl that I knew, White Russian girl, and I dated a lot; her father was very instrumental in this group. They had their own organization and he was instrumental in that and- I learned a lot about them and so forth.

She was working with a big aid program, UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) or something. Yes, I think it was UNRRA. And she had a good job there; she wasn't just a secretary, she had some kind of a- sort of assistant job there and she spoke good Chinese and she spoke fluent English and I got to know some of her friends. We got to know a lot of them. She was always telling me all sorts of interesting things. They knew the ones that were commies and a lot of those White Russians were communists. I don't know how they got imbued with it. They fled but then later there was a lot of propaganda going on there for the communists when I was in Shanghai and the biggest consular general there in Shanghai was the Soviet Consulate General.

So anyway, she said you know, there's some new people coming in here and they're from Russia and no one knows quite what they're here for. Then later we were told they were military intelligence guys got the information; that they were agitating. Not the White Russians that I was familiar with. And the deal was, come back to the Motherland. We want you back. Motherland wants you back. Come back to the Motherland. And it made a very convincing thing and here you are in this strange land, there's no future to this land and and blah, blah, blah. And

Of course, a lot of it made perfect sense. You know, these were poor people, a lot of them didn't have much of a future. They were in an alien country. So anyway- The rich ones, though, they weren't going to fall for this. They had a good deal going in Shanghai and they owned the only restaurants and shops and I was told that the real owners of the hotel where I - I never moved out of the hotel. I eventually got a little small suite, but anyway. Quite by a fluke. But anyway, I never moved out of the hotel because it was so handy. I crossed the street into the consular general. And just another block to the American Club.

So anyway, all the desk clerks and everything were White Russians and the very expensive restaurants in that hotel served sort of specialty Russian food and all of the waiters are Russian and all of the desk clerks were White Russians.

So anyway, finally, lo and behold, sailing into, I think it must have been Hong Kong, I got word that this beautiful new, relatively new anyway, passenger ship arrived flying the Soviet flag. And they spent some time in Hong Kong and apparently it also spent time in Singapore. I think it was a sort of a "show the flag" because they had a nice passenger ship, I guess. Anyway, they were going to go on to Vladivostok. But the ship didn't come to Shanghai right away. I don't know why they spent so much time in Hong Kong. That I never could find out.

But anyway, Russian officials were saying absolutely no, you could not get up to- you couldn't get a visa, you couldn't get into the Soviet Union. The boys from- not the diplomatic couriers, they didn't have a base there, but they always had an officer trying to make the trip. They refused him to get on this Trans Siberian Express. And boy, the relationship's very strained. And so they had one excuse after another. One was they were repairing the rails, but that wasn't true because the consul there in Vladivostok would go down all the time checking and the Trans Siberian Express would arrive from Moscow and he spoke fluent Russian and he would talk to some of the people and so forth. And then they kind of said well it's going through a military base that's being established and so they couldn't go. Which is not true.

Anyway. They were stranded, the consulate in Vladivostok, a two man post. They were stranding him because in the old days they had the cars and plates and things, these cars, plates, whatever you wanted to call them, they could only go for so long and they'd run out of them and so their only communication with the embassy in Moscow was regular telegram. Of course they'd send it in code but that was too- that wasn't because they- they didn't know if that code was broken or not; they had no way of knowing. So it was a very touchy situation.

So anyway, it was blown up and this and that and the Soviet consul general said sorry, I have no authority to give a visa. Finally the State Department, they finally sent out a very high ranking- I don't know who he was, I can't remember; his name was Smith though. I remember the name. He later was on the plane that was crashed in the Pacific on his way back. He was very high rank and he talked to Perry, he got through, and he talked to General MacArthur. And this is the story I'm told because I can't verify it but I

think it's true because I heard it from several sources, that finally MacArthur issued an order that absolutely no diplomatic courier from the Soviet Union could enter Tokyo until an American diplomatic courier left for Vladivostok. So I pleaded that I could be that person. I was successful.

As for the White Russian community, many families were kind of split up. Some of the guys were more adventurous and a code system evolved for those who went back. They were supposed to write, I'll write you as soon as I get there and I'll say, oh thank goodness, my headache is completely gone, now I feel wonderful now, thank God for that, you know. That meant it was wonderful- a wonderful place where they were treated beautifully and all that. Or if he said well my headache is just sort of so-so, I'm hoping it'll get better, that means it was just so-so, it wasn't all that great. And then if they said oh, my headache is much worse and so forth, I'm going to maybe have to see a doctor about this, it meant it was really the pits. And of course the rumor then came back that they were being sent to the salt mines. Of course I don't know how true that was. Anyway, the bottom line is never, to my knowledge, and this girl certainly should have known a lot and I talked to her father even, no one ever heard from those people. Never heard.

Anyway, I finally got the visa. So I went down to the Russian consulate in Shanghai to get it. I even had to have specialist thing in Russian, so they had to get somebody coming in the consulate general there to do the whole special credentials in Russian and oh, big deals. The consul I met only spoke some English, not an awful lot. I think he spoke a lot of English but... Anyway, he said oh, he said I'm sorry but he said I cannot authorize a visa unless the traveler, the diplomatic courier appears in person. So I said I am the diplomatic- He said you are? Because I was always very young looking, but I grew a mustache to try to make myself a little bit older. He said you're the diplomatic courier from the United States, from the consular general here? Yes. Oh. Well he said, I have to see your passport. Now in those days you could put get extra pages in your passport; these were fold up pages. Although my passport was issued on October 24, 1946 – and signed by Dean Acheson – by now I had a huge passport. I could stand and it would unfold down almost to my ankle with all these extension pages because I was traveling extensively. In those days every time you turned around someone was stamping your passport. So I kept these passport and of course later when I got back to the Department they said no more, you can't have any more extension pages, , you have to get a new passport. But anyway, out there I could get away with it and so I thought it was great.

He said, well, if you care to come back this time tomorrow maybe we can work this out and so forth. He didn't say he was going to do it. But he said I'm sorry, I'll have to keep your passport. And I was told ahead of time that it was okay to give them the passport, all they wanted to do is make copies of all the stuff and it was okay to do it. And so I gave him my passport. And so I went the next day and so he said well, he said, you can sail on the Ilyich, and the name of the ship was the Ilyich and of course Ilyich is the famous Russian writer. The Russian consul continued that he don't know about coming back, he had nothing to do with that but I had a visa to go to Vladivostok and a visa to

leave Vladivostok. He said it's up to the Chinese, anything else. But of course I didn't worry about that.

Accommodations on the ship were interesting. They said if you want- if you will sleep on the deck or sleep on the deck chairs, we'll take you free back to Vladivostok but if you want to have a cabin then you pay so much, and then if you had a cabin with private bath you had to pay so much more. And they had two suites aboard ship, which were very, very expensive. They quoted me the price of a ticket for an outside cabin with a private bath and I took it. So to make a long story short, oh, for the ship to enter and exit Shanghai, going up the Huangpu is quite narrow in some places and so the White Russians would line up and wave good-bye to everybody and all that stuff. A big deal. And my girlfriend also waved back to me.

So off we go. But anyway, before we sailed the captain came down to see me. I think he was just curious. He said I hope you are- he spoke quite- not a lot of English but quite good English- he said I hope you're comfortable. And I said well, I said, yes, I guess- it wasn't a very good stateroom; I had a little tiny porthole and it wasn't very much, you know, but anyway I'm- And I said well I'm kind of surprised, I said, since this was supposed to be the pride of your passenger line and so forth, and I said I'm a little surprised that it isn't a little bit more commodious. Oh well really, and finally he put me in a suite. So I had one of the two suites. The other suite was never occupied. So anyway, I had a great suite. My goodness.

There was a young officer there. He was, I think, third mate or something like that, but he spoke quite a lot of English. And I asked him about his English; where he had studied and so on, and he said, "I also spent some time- many trips I took to a place called Portland." I said, "Portland? You mean Portland, Oregon?" He said, "Yes, I think that's what it was called." He said we went up the Columbia River. I said I'm from Portland and asked him a lot of questions. He had been to Portland; he absolutely had because at that time there were more frequent ships going and he had been to Portland and I guess had several days and then went back; I don't know. Of course, at first I thought he was trying to make my friendship for obvious reasons but later I really was convinced he wasn't. But anyway, he said well we must meet for conversation and so forth, but he said you know, I can't get too friendly with you; you know how the political situation is. Because this is the height of the Cold War, I said I understood. But I said I don't want you to get into any trouble but I'd love to have a chance to chat. Once he came after me and escorted me to the crew dining area, they had a small dining room so he ushered me in, and they are all Russians there and they're all speaking Russian, they all kind of looked at me and- because I didn't know what they were saying but I think they all were convinced that I spoke Russian and I knew Russia. And I just know that but I didn't.

So anyway, the next night- the next day something, this third mate came, he said the captain wishes you to have dinner with him. I noticed the captain wasn't in the previous dining room but that's nothing unusual; a lot of captains have their meals served in their quarters. So anyway, so I joined him and he said you're from Portland, and I said yes,

captain. He said I've been to Portland I think four times or something. And then I asked him the same old questions, such as what did you do for recreation? He said well the best place, the place that we enjoyed the most in Portland, he said oh, it was a great place, it was the Gaiety Theater. My God, the Gaiety Theater had a very controversial reputation; it was a burlesque show, burlesque house. So I knew this place because I had sneaked in there myself on occasions after DeMolay meetings. So anyway, we became pretty good friends but still I was very cautious but he was a very nice man. And so from then on, not every night but it wasn't- it's not a long trip but the ship didn't make very much fast time- didn't make very fast time but I think we were out four nights, as I recall, because we left Shanghai in the evening and so that would be that night and we arrived in Vladivostok early in the morning so I think we were probably out four nights; it was a slow ship.

Anyway, that was it. At one point he told me there was a, he called them "the political agent" aboard and he said he's watching all of us. So I know who he is but he said if I all of a sudden, we're in the middle of talking and I just start walking away, why, you'll understand. And I, you know, if he asked me as I say I'm just saying hello, how are you, and so forth. Anyway, he told me all this stuff and- but he says, he said he's a very powerful- he's from the KGB [Ed: Committee for State Security was a security agency of the Soviet Union from 1954 until the end of 1991]. And later the captain so much as said that but he didn't come right out and say that but anyway, I know that the captain was- the captain was in charge of that ship but this other guy was- had considerable power. And he was- I think he was- he was probably KGB.

So anyway, we arrived and before we arrived in Vladivostok we stopped in a place called Khupta and I wanted to get off the ship because we were going to be there all day long and I wanted to get off the ship and they wouldn't let me off. And so I really got mad and the captain, he did everything he could and there was some guy there that seemed to be in charge so I made a real fuss about it and I said I'm going to, as soon as I get to Vladivostok I'm going to report this to the consul there, it's going to go to Moscow and they'll refer this to the State Department in Washington and the Soviet ambassador is going to be called into the State Department and very likely it will get to the desk of President Truman. Well, they were la, la, la. Well, they finally let me get off. And there wasn't much around there. I don't know what they were talking about; that little town was trying to get started.

So I hiked around and there was a little bluff and I thought maybe I could see something on the other side of this big bluff. And down there I saw workers and I could see in a minute they weren't Russians so I went down there and they were Japanese prisoners of war. I went down there and I talked to a lot of them and they didn't know much and of course I knew nothing about Japanese. Finally a little guy came up and he knew quite a little English. In the meantime, before I left Shanghai I was given this special little cigarette lighter that had a camera and I could pretend like I was lighting my cigarettes and I could take a picture. I didn't smoke, so it's a nuisance for me but I would light up and then I'd snuff it out, while taking a picture of this thing. It was very clever. And so I took the pictures and I got a lot of pictures and I was told this, now I can't verify because

I don't know but I was told later that those pictures ended up in the United Nations to prove that the Soviets still had Japanese prisoners of war even though the war was over. How truthful is that I don't know but anyway I turned the pictures over to the consul general and he said well, he said, I'll turn this over to our people. He said everyone should see this. He said I think everyone should see this. So I don't know whatever happened to them.

Q: Once you got to Vladivostok what were your duties?

KESSLER: Looking around. Nothing else. I had no duties.

Q: So you had nothing to deliver, nothing to pick up?

KESSLER: Why yes, I delivered, yes, but I couldn't pick anything up because I wasn't leaving. The ship continued on. I can't think of the name of the places up there; can't go up there. And then it came back again and we didn't know it came back and it came back I guess and just say it came back one night- one day and left the next and we didn't know it, no one told us. They were supposed to tell us but they didn't. I couldn't get on their ship. And I was delighted that I couldn't, of course. I loved it up there, I had a great time. And when I'd go walking sometimes I'd be followed but not by any one person because they had a designated person there in every neighborhood, shall we say. And this person had taken it upon himself to- you know, because obviously I was a foreigner, they could tell that, and some of them were pretty good, some of them were real, you know, complete amateurs. I'd turn around real quick and the guy, he turned around. And one time I turned- when the guy was fairly close to me I turned around real fast and walked real fast towards him and I knew a little bit of Russian then and I asked, I said one moment please, one moment please, and I offered him a cigarette. Oh, he was delighted but he disappeared.

But a lot of times no one followed me and I could do most anything. And they got me into the- they called it the Yacht Club; I never saw a boat. But there was a little beach and the water was so cold. Of course I was used to it, having gone to the beach at Seaside Oregon. But the water was freezing even in the heat of the summer. So I would go swim. The beauty of it was there were a lot of Russian girls there but the consul said, now don't get too friendly with any of those girls. They're all mistresses of the big shots here in Vladivostok so don't get very friendly. And they'll come down sometimes virtually unannounced to pick up the girls or something and so don't get too friendly. But the girls are very friendly. Oh my gosh. This American guy, some of them spoke a little English, some nothing. It didn't make any difference. And the ones that didn't know some English, why they would translate for the others. They were really nice girls but every once in a while a guy would show up and they were always sort of very watchful. I guess he'd pick up his mistress to go for a little respite at the- wherever they went.

The morning I arrived in Vladivostok aboard the Soviet ship I was having breakfast and I didn't really pay much attention and then later when I got out on deck I saw all sorts of

their flags and there was a band playing and a lot of uniformed officers with all their medals on and so forth and a newsreel camera there, all this and that, and I thought what in the world is going on? I knew it wasn't for me so what in the world's going on? I couldn't imagine who it could be because you know, as I say, the other suite aboard ship was not occupied so there couldn't have been another VIP (very important person); of course they would be in that other suite I would think. So I couldn't understand. And then finally they were very clever; they sort of- I watched them position and so they got very poor looking people getting off, then they had a couple of the very- there were some people that were quite well to do that were on that ship and had paid extra for their private cabin and their private bath and they were all dressed up. And so they got- sort of interspersed. So as soon as they got down the gangplank the cameras are going, they got down on their hands and knees and kissed the soil. And then the next person would come and do that. Apparently they were all told exactly what to do and then the guys that were all dressed up in their dark suits did the same thing and all this was taken on the Soviet newsreel. So it was very interesting. And then they all went into the buses and then of course they were never heard of again.

Later we heard from the embassy in Moscow that there's widely, widely played throughout Russia was this theme of how wonderful it was and how thankful these poor people were to be able to come home to Mother Russia. And it was a big propaganda deal. And the curious thing is, as far as I could ever find out no one ever heard from any of those people. I thought it might be of some interest because it shows how clever the Soviets were in those days. They took every opportunity to keep the public informed about how wonderful it was for them to be in the Soviet Union.

Q: So how did you get out of Vlad?

KESSLER: Finally another ship showed up and it was a smaller ship and an older ship and I left on that ship. And everything was quite nice and there again I met a- By the way, when I was in Vladivostok this guy said he wanted me to meet him. He said we can't meet- Oh, the captain by the way, was very friendly to me. He said I'm sorry, you know, I'd love to have you to my home in Vladivostok but he said you know, the political situation, I can't do that, you'll realize that. I said of course, captain, I understand completely. And I never saw him again.

But anyway, this fellow that was third mate on the ship, he said let's meet, so we'd chat and so forth, so we'd meet at this beach and then we'd swim out and we'd talk out in the water. But we couldn't say- he said I've got to go now. So finally he said could you meet me in this place? I think you'll find it very interesting. And the consul said don't go, it's a trap; it's an obvious trap. You're going to go there, they're going to stuff something in your pocket, it will be evidence that you're spying or something. Don't go. But I went anyway because he- the situation, I was not assigned to that consular general in- the consular general of Vladivostok. I was there but I was just- I suppose if the chips were down I suppose he probably could have but he didn't attempt to really order me but he didn't want me to do it. I went anyway. I didn't think it was anything and it wasn't

any trap. He was very nice, we had a very nice time in a nice little, small little- little place there and we had dinner together. We had a nice time. A lot of vodka.

Coming back I met a fellow also on the ship and we talked a lot and I asked him, he spoke some English; these guys, it always surprised me how many would speak English and he was also- But he'd never been to Portland but he had been somewhere else. So anyway, we talked and we were good friends. And he said- And I asked him if the political agent aboard? He said no, not on this trip. So he could be much more friendly.

My accommodations weren't as good; there was no suite on this ship or if there was they didn't put me in it. But it wasn't bad. And then the Chinese wouldn't allow the ship to dock so we sat out in the harbor of Shanghai. Not the harbor but out in the area there; you couldn't come right into the normal dock. Of course the docks weren't right on the Bund; it was quite a ways away really. But then there was some flap with the Chinese and the Soviets. They were always- had very rocky relations also in those days with the nationalist government of course and while I was in Vladivostok the consul said- he said I want to get up to Khabarovsk or something, whatever the name, and it was a city about two and a half hours north of Vladivostok inland and there was a Chinese consulate there, of all things. They used to have a Chinese consulate in Vladivostok but the guy went home on home leave and never came back and no one ever showed up again. But there was a consulate there and there was a vice consul there in this Khabarovsk. Anyway. And we had to get special permission and there was one fellow there that was from the foreign office in Moscow, he was a diplomatic agent. We were the only consulate in Vladivostok so he had almost nothing to do. And he was quite friendly but he was a real Soviet though.

So anyway, we went back and forth and finally he got permission for us to go and the consul there. Jack Sweeney, who spoke fluent Russian, told me under international law we have a right to visit a consulate in a country that we have diplomatic relations in and that we have a perfect right to go up there on official business to discuss our business with the Chinese vice consul there in this place. So finally we finally got the credentials and they stopped us three or four places. We got up there and there was the flag flying, the nationalist Chinese flag flying, and so we went up there, rang the bell and everything- and nothing happened. I rang it again and I happened to notice the curtains sort of parting and obviously someone was looking to see who it was but wouldn't open the door. So finally Jack waved his American passport and then he had in his glove compartment an American flag you can put on the car if you want because he was the principle officer and he would use it on certain- on national holidays when he would go and he had a flag, American flag on. So he took the flag out and put the flag up so this guy that was peeking, whoever was peeking he could see American flag.

To make a long story short, we could never get in; he never opened the door. So we finally turned around, went back home. Never showed- he would not open the door.

Q: Now, working out of Shanghai, did you have an opportunity to run into some of the principal officers at the embassy in Nanjing, like Ambassador Leighton Stuart?

KESSLER: Well. I did run into him. I had made a trip and he was very interested in Xinjiang Province. And not many people had gone there and I think- to my knowledge. Before I went, there were only, I think only one other courier had ever gone there. I'm not sure about that; maybe two but I don't think- And after I left, why, I don't know if anyone ever got there after I left or not; I really don't know that.

So he asked, what's Tihua like now. He'd never been there but apparently he'd studied a lot about Xinjiang Province and how far could we get- and wanted you to- could you ever get towards the area where they call Tannu Tuva? And I said we tried once but we would hear a gunshot and they were just warning us to get away. But we couldn't get to the border of the Soviet Union in that area. Never. There were only limited roads out of Tihua in those days and they weren't in very good shape. The Ambassador was , and he was also very interested in knowing about the Uighurs. And while I was there why the consul and his wife had a dinner party and the princess, the Uighur princess invited him. She was a very colorful person and she spoke a little English. She arrived in a horse drawn carriage and she was the last of the royalty of the Uighurs, apparently. And I attended the dinner party of course and she was very friendly and so forth. She had never been to the American consulate before and so forth and so on. I don't know whatever happened to her. She was a woman I'd say pushing 60 and she came with some fellow that lives with her who is not her husband, though, by the way, he was just some aide or something.

During that visit I played tennis with the warlord and Paxton was beside himself. He said my God, Earl, you can't let that- you can't beat the general. Well of course I was 25 years old and this guy was old enough to be my father; of course I can beat him in tennis, for heaven's sakes. He was a pretty good tennis player but I was lots better than he was, not that I was any great tennis player. And I enjoyed playing tennis with him and of course I later had a very nice relationship with him but it wasn't all that easy to make sure that he didn't lose because there would be a whole bunch of the officers around watching the game. Of course at that time he didn't win a set. His side went ahhhhh, claps and cheers. I don't know how he did it but my God, he shot, one after another hitting them right on the line and I couldn't get them back. At one moment you're doing great, you know, and he was winning and then all of a sudden he didn't do very well. You know how it is in tennis; I mean, you can go into it so far and then you're sort of not doing so well. And I did pretty well and I could get around the court so much faster than he could.

Anyway, then- I didn't know- I was obviously winning and I didn't- I couldn't- I didn't know what to do. And then I hit a very, very- one right to him that he could have lobbed over my head so he was capable of doing it but he didn't and God- Finally, finally, he won. It was add and then finally it was his add and anyway.

So he had a wife and daughter and his daughter was about 16 and she was studying English and she was a very cute girl and she just adored me. And he said if you can help my daughter with her English I'd be very, very grateful. And so- But of course I had to be very careful what I did with this girl. So what we'd do is we'd walk in the park there;

there would be other people around and so forth and so on. And of course Mrs. Paxton said now you be careful of that girl; now you never can tell.

So anyway, two different times the general invited me for dinner and Paxton himself had never been invited to dinner and his nose was out of joint, so to speak, and he was really very annoyed that I sort of had the in with each warlord and he didn't and of course it was only because of the tennis. So it's interesting what a tennis racket could do. And he told me a lot of interesting things, which I reported, and so the ambassador was very interested knowing all about it and he was interested in knowing about the general. He never met him but he'd heard a lot about him and that was my- I only had one encounter really, with the Ambassador and it wasn't really a long chat with him.

Dr. Stuart was- he seldom came to the embassy, he stayed in the residence most of the time, and the embassy section chiefs would have to go to him and so they'd go and discuss things in his you know, elaborate office there, and his son went to the embassy, that's what I was told, and I don't know quite why but I think he didn't have any interest in running the embassy, didn't know anything about it anyway so why should he be bothered with the embassy? He was a very scholarly man and I think he- I was told he made- he sent through the Department- to the Department some very insightful reports and he was a very, I think, quite effective and the Chinese adored him because he had a terrific reputation in China and the Chinese just thought he was wonderful. That's why he was named ambassador, because of his reputation with the Chinese. They thought, we'd get Dr. Stuart in, maybe we can do something, get at something going because the situation was very, very tenuous at the time.

Now, General Marshall, I only met him very briefly. And he was interested in all things. I couldn't understand why he was interested in Indochina. Of course, at that time, well, as I told him, I said, every Frenchman said it's a lot of nonsense, troublemakers, the whole thing was ridiculous and every Vietnamese is untrustworthy. Anyway, the local people, they'd say, ah, the French won't last more than another year at the most, at the most. And it's true, you know, and they didn't last very long because they lost the battle of Dien Bien Phu. The poor old French were finished. [Ed: The battle of Dien Bien Phu was fought between March and May 1954 and resulted in a French defeat and withdrawal from Vietnam.]

Q: Now, off on the bureaucratic side of things, the diplomatic couriers reported to whom in the embassy?

KESSLER: We reported to the administrative officer but it was only sort of a technicality. We didn't see much of him. We had a supervisor there for the courier service and he was an old timer in the Foreign Service and- his name was Grotjohan [Ed: one A. W. J. Grotjohan, according to the State Department Foreign Service List, January 1, 1949, was a communications officer who arrived at the Shanghai consulate in July 1947] and he had also been courier supervisor in Frankfurt and somewhere else.

Q: And he would make up the pouches or you guys made up the pouches?

KESSLER: Oh no. They had a big pouch room and we had oh, three- at least three clerks that did all that. We didn't have anything to do with making up the pouch. As a matter of fact we just pick up the pouch. Sometimes we had no idea what was in it. It wasn't any secret. Sometimes I would go ahead of time to see what they were putting in. There's no secret; I mean, I could see it. And when I take it to the post and they'd open it and lots of times they'd open things in my presence; sometimes they'd want to discuss it with me.

We also had unclassified pouches too, a tremendous number. Some were used for personal, not Department mail. You know, we were; if I'd want to write a letter home to Portland, why, if I put it in international mail it would take maybe two months to get there. On the other hand, they had an APO (Army Post Office) when I first arrived then later that was closed. I mean, APO though took forever and a day; it wasn't very rapid. But anyway, later they put me on the country pouch which was opened right there in the pouch room of the Department and they would in turn put our letters in the mail and go to Portland. But you had to put a Chinese stamp on it for the mail to be sent off to Portland. because the pouch room in Washington wasn't about to be putting stamps on personal mail. The way we got around this thing because of postage, well you know, it wasn't much but in those days we thought it was, we could buy- a stamp there was very- a good looking stamp, which cost us about one penny. So they put that shiny stamp on the letter in China, then they put it in the mail, it was in Washington; no other post office in Washington would deal with this. As long as it had a stamp on they'd deliver it, so our mail cost us one cent to get a letter from Shanghai to Portland, Oregon. And then finally then we could use this system for small parcels. Of course, when I first arrived though they had a big PX (Post Exchange). But later the PX just phased out. But on one of my routes they had a big PX. So we had no real need for personal parcels and I don't think my parents ever sent me any package; they didn't need to. There's nothing I wanted. I said don't sent me presents; there's nothing I could possibly want.

Here's something I remember from that time about this. I made a trip to Australia and I got to know some Australians very, very, very well and so I was out with this guy and we were at the beach with some of his Aussie friends. After our swim we were in the change room and I was getting dressed, you know, and so zipped up my pants and all of a sudden this guy said- next to me, what are you doing? I thought maybe I got my shirttail caught in my zipper or something. There's an Australian phrase they used to use- I forget what it was now- anyway. And he said do it again. I said what do you mean, do it again? He said yes, close your pants. They'd never seen a zipper before on pants. And they called all the guys around and my God, I had 20 guys around me and I had to show them the zipper on my pants. They'd never seen one before. This was Sydney.

So the next time I went to Sydney I went to the PX first and I- I don't know how I got to know this guy, I think through tennis, really, and he was a real nice fellow, and he was- I don't know what he was- anyway, captain maybe, and he was head of the PX and so I said can you get me some zippers? He said what? I said for men's trousers. Oh yes, I guess I could; yeah, I can do it. So by the time I made the next trip he had just received

them so I brought a whole bunch of zippers to my friend and he passed them out as- Everyone was oh my God, this is-

Q: Now, organizing your trips, was there some sort of roster for the couriers?

KESSLER: Well, it was usually who's available. It should have been nicely done but you couldn't do it. The airlines in those days weren't exactly predictable. Sometimes you'd say there'll be a flight leaving on a Thursday and it wouldn't leave on a Thursday.

Q: So you're illustrating you could go out but you might not be able to get back.

KESSLER: Exactly, exactly. And sometimes, you know, Shanghai was very foggy in the wintertime, heavy fog, and days at a time there's no service in or out of Shanghai by air because they couldn't land. And of course they didn't have the sophisticated equipment, you know, the communications so things were visual flight rules. Sometimes they couldn't see. I'm not exaggerating, many times, three to four days in a row, no traffic went in and out of Shanghai because they couldn't get in. And sometimes they didn't want to leave. One morning, I was supposed to leave very early and I'd been out real late at a party that night and I looked out; fog, I couldn't even see across the street hardly. So I thought thank God, so I went back to bed. Then later I got up and it's still foggy so I went back to bed again. And so finally I got up and I went to the American Club, had a long, big breakfast featured in the American Club in those days, piping hot apple pie for breakfast. I finally went into the office and found out the flight did go. The fog lifted later; so very quickly they cleared at the airport and the flight did go and I wasn't on it. And boy, oh boy, my supervisor, he said what? You're here! And the pouch that I was supposed to take was here. But then within 15 minutes word came through that the plane had crashed into the sea. It was in the paper that my name was on the passenger list and so then everyone thought that I was a goner.

Q: Goodness gracious. And when did you leave Shanghai and what was your next assignment?

KESSLER: Yes. See, when I departed Shanghai my two years were up. So I can't say I left because the city was falling or anything like that. My two years were up so they called me in and they said look, it doesn't look good and if the commies take Nanking our goose is cooked, so to speak, because there was nothing between Nanking and Shanghai to speak of and there was already massive desertions in the nationalist army because they weren't- half the time they never paid them. And at one time on the streets of Shanghai you could find a guy in a uniform, an army uniform, begging for money. It was a terrible situation. And I could never understand why such an intelligent person that apparently Chiang Kai-shek was, but how could he allow this thing to happen?

Nevertheless, conditions in China did impact me. After confirming I was in no hurry to get back to the States and that my parents were, my boss asked me to go to Honolulu. We'd like to keep you there maybe, you know, four, five, six months but maybe not. We'll see what happens. Maybe if they hold Nanking and maybe Chiang Kai-shek gets

his house in order, gets his act together, then maybe you can come back and we'll- and then we'll- you know, help us out for maybe a month or two and then you can go home on your home leave and so forth.

Well anyway, I went to Honolulu and he said was told they were sending someone from the Department over and so the two of us were to set up a tentative office in Honolulu. Tentative office; it may be permanent, but it may not be. We'll just have to see what happens. But he said we've got to be prepared because the Army has already stopped its service to Australia and New Zealand and apparently they did have off-and-on some sort of a service but all the U.S. military had gone, all the military had left Australia and New Zealand so there's no- obviously there's no connection, no reason to have a military courier going into Australia and New Zealand if there's no military, except for military attachés at the embassy.

So anyway, I said sure, great, so I volunteered and I flew to Honolulu but it wasn't as if I was leaving the city in haste because that was not the case. And I arrived in Honolulu and this fellow, Jack Grover, G-R-O-V-E-R. He died and so did his wife die years ago. by the way he was a very fine fellow- and there's a building at the new FSI (Foreign Service Institute) named after him.

Anyway, he had had considerable experience in working out of Washington and so forth. Very nice fellow. So we were there together, the two of us. Actually I got there before he did and I had talked to this captain and explained the situation and they were kind of phasing down too, you know, the war was over after all, you know. Everything was phasing down. So he had plenty of space. He said sure, I can fix you up an office here and we have a little vault you can use, we'll move it in. He was very accommodating, very nice person. And he said look, he said you can stay at the BOQ, there's a very nice wing at the BOQ and I'll get you into that BOQ wing and you can stay there as long as you want. I said well it wouldn't be very long because either we're going to stay here for awhile or we're not. Anyway, and it turned out I was there really for at least- well over a month, probably two months.

Anyway, we got things pretty well set up and so forth and Jack arrived and he was a big help and he handled certain things and I handled certain things. So we made runs at that time then from Honolulu to Sydney. And then there was a flap so I had to spend some time in Sydney, I can't remember quite what the reason was but there was a difficulty there about something and I ended up spending oh, three or four weeks at one time, another time I spent three or four weeks in Sydney. So I sort of divided my time between Sydney and Honolulu for some time. Then of course they couldn't hold Nanking and of course exactly what was predicted happened; the communist forces moved right on into Shanghai, everyone was evacuated. The Department didn't know what to do with them so they sent them to nearby embassies, Hong Kong and Singapore, and the situation of course was bad in Indochina so they didn't go there and a lot of them went to the Philippines and so forth, some went back to Washington and so forth.

I want to note that eight months or so before I left Shanghai, or maybe a year before I left Shanghai, something like that; Pan Am finally started service to Shanghai; thank God for that. Maybe 10 months, anyway, Shanghai was finally on the circuit. Shortly after that or maybe the same time, it seemed to be very close to each other, Northwest Airlines came in. So then we were in business; then for the first time beautiful big American passenger ship finally arrived and that was the big President Cleveland and American President Lines had the beautiful, beautiful trans-Pacific ships, gorgeous ships; they had the President Hoover, the Monroe, the Wilson, the Cleveland, and there's another one and they're beautiful ships. Their earlier name sakes had all been sunk during the war, every single one of them were sunk by the Japs so this is a brand new ship, the Cleveland, and then shortly after that there was another brand new ship that was called the Wilson.

And for the first time tourists finally could come to Shanghai. Not many would do it, would come, but they'd had a few. I used to play tennis a lot with the head of the American Express office and he was all excited the first time actually tourists were coming into Shanghai. And three months later or so, why things start crumbling and crumbling. Finally Pan Am and Northwest both said well, we're going to make- we'll only guarantee one more flight so that's your chance to get out. I wasn't there at the time but I've been told this by several who were there. Northwest the same thing. And finally only had the last flight.

But I was there when the last ship sailed because the ships were very- they were everywhere because boy, that's a bad situation getting in there. It was very narrow and boy, if the commies ever got in they were going- The Army itself wouldn't have to get- just a bunch of saboteurs could get in; they could really cause trouble. So anyway, while I was there the last ship sailed and it was a tearful thing because that was just before I left Shanghai, just before I left Shanghai the last ship left and I said good-bye to some of my friends and we- and the consulate took over just about everything on that ship and later I met them in Honolulu when they stopped for the day and just had a lot of fun.

Q: This would be 1949?

KESSLER: Yes. Yes, 1949. I left Shanghai in November- I arrived in Shanghai just before Thanksgiving. I remember that very distinctly because I hadn't been there just a few days and one of the fellow diplomatic couriers invited me to have Thanksgiving with him and some of the other fellows at his apartment. And I remember that distinctly and I was there exactly my two years; after that I never got back to Shanghai, never got back. And after I left Honolulu then I went back to the Department and went on home leave.

Q: Hello there. Today is the 15th of March, and we're returning to our conversation with Earl Kessler.

Q: Now we had left where you came out of Shanghai. Now, you got as far as Honolulu. How long did you stay in Honolulu then?

KESSLER: Oh I was there at least six months, seven months, and then I sort of divided my time between Honolulu and Sydney because we were in a situation; the poor posts in Australia and New Zealand. They were cut off because the military had stopped its courier service. The military didn't have any real reason to have it down there very much, apparently, and they just assumed that we'd have to take over. And we did. We had, in Australia, we had the embassy in Canberra and then we had consulates in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and off the Indian Ocean there Perth, and then in New Zealand we had the embassy in Wellington and the consulate in Auckland and then we also had the consulate out in New Caledonia which had to be- occasionally had to have something.

Q: So all this post was service out of Honolulu?

KESSLER: Yes, that was our-

Q: Now what would be the kind of things that you'd be taking to these posts?

KESSLER: Well for instance in New Caledonia they'd already given us warning that- they gave us something like three months to close our consulate in Tahiti because they were doing all sorts of tests on the nuclear ground and they didn't want us nosing around. So they insisted we close our consulate in Tahiti and we were very interested in knowing what the French were doing on this business. So the only closest consulate to that area in the South Pacific was the consulate in Nouméa, New Caledonia. So he had to receive some highly classified material off and on and he would get some very interesting material because some of the- some of the natives would go back and forth and so forth. It's a long trip though it's amazing in those days they didn't travel tremendous distances in small boats because in that part of the South Pacific, outside of the typhoon season, why it was relatively calm. And so he went out there; he would have to have some material and he'd have to get material back.

Q: So a courier was not just taking papers and reports; a courier had responsibility for equipment.

KESSLER: Oh absolutely; on one trip he had telegraphic material out there had to be replaced. That's why Vladivostok for awhile was out of commission. The only thing they could do is commercial telegrams. I had to get some material out there to them so they could establish their cryptographic capabilities, shall we say. So anyway- and also in New Zealand there was some activity going on with the Antarctic and it wasn't just the Soviets were involved or anything like that but there's- you know, the Soviets did have and still do have a large chunk of the Antarctic and actually one of the biggest stations in the Antarctic today is a Soviet Antarctic area.

And so I guess there was some relationship to them but what they wanted to get in was some charts and maps and things that were highly classified. Why they were so highly classified I don't really know.

Q: So while you were sitting in Honolulu somebody was bringing material in a pouch from Washington for you to distribute to Asian posts?

KESSLER: That was the military, yes. We did not go to Washington. The military, of course they had huge facilities in Honolulu.

Yes, you see I had a nice office at- in Pearl Harbor, and when I first arrived I stayed at the BOQ (Bachelor Officers' Quarters) there, sort of a naval base there, very close to- just adjacent to Pearl Harbor and then later we got a very nice small apartment complex in Honolulu. But for awhile I was there and there was the full Navy commander there who was sort of my liaison and he had a big security area so I could keep all my classified there and he was the one that arranged all the stuff that had to go to Australia and other places.

Q: Now this is 1949; how many couriers, State couriers, were in Honolulu?

KESSLER: Well when I arrived there were one other fellow and myself and then three other arrived.

Q: Now, you personally served Australia, New Zealand, the other guys served-?

KESSLER: Well I was- I sort of did everything but I don't think the other ones ever got to New Caledonia and usually they wouldn't get to New Zealand but they would also occasionally have to go to Australia. Because Australia, that was a long trip, you know.

Q: Well that was my next question; how did you do that, were there airplanes?

KESSLER: Well fortunately Pan Am did have service but my golly it was a long trip. We'd start, for instance, in Honolulu then they'd get as far as Johnson Island, then have to refuel in Johnson Island and then they'd go on to, gosh I guess it was Fiji next and then from Fiji we'd go to New Caledonia. No, not New Caledonia, we missed New Caledonia; we'd go from Fiji, another island there, I forget now, and then we'd finally end up Sydney. But it was a long trip and it took forever to do it and Pan Am had the only routing at that time. Later the Australian carrier Qantas started going out there. And then going from Sydney to Auckland, when I first arrived there why you had to go on a flying boat and we'd fly right into the harbor there in Auckland and then you had to change planes there to a land plane then to go on to embassy in Wellington. That would be the end of the line, Wellington, that was as far as we would go. There's no other place to go

Q: These posts must have been very excited to see you because you'd have a personal mail.

KESSLER: Oh, you see, the old China hands, I think they must have had at least 50 percent of all the officers in China were old China hands. In other words they were usually born in China to missionary parents, grew up in China, were bilingual in the

various dialects, Mandarin or Shanghai dialect or Cantonese, whatever, and they loved China and they'd go to the mainland for school and the various religious organizations were very, very good about that in helping them to send their kids to college and they were very brilliant people and they thought it would be wonderful to join the Foreign Service and of course they would go back to China because in those days very few Americans spoke in Chinese so of course they all went back to China. And so it was all over China and neighboring areas and so then when the collapse of China took place, why the first place they did send a lot of these people, of course there's Australia, New Zealand and other places around. So everyone had questions about the community. Oh, what's the latest on so-and-so? Oh, did so-and-so ever stick with his wife or is he still playing around on the side and did she catch up with him? All that sort of thing and all these scandals. And when I was a diplomatic courier in Shanghai, of course, no one had access to Time magazine in these outer consulates or by the time they get it, it would be so old. So I'd always pack up six or seven of the latest Time magazines and as soon as I arrived I give it to them, you know. And then sometimes the wife would say oh, I've been trying to do this but I can't get such and such. I'd say write it down and if it's not heavy- I can't put anything in the pouch but I said I'll do my best- and then I'd bring- I'd go to the PX and get whatever would be available that they'd want. And those poor women; sometimes they couldn't get hardly anything, you know. Well, stuck in Chongqing or Kunming, Manchuria, even down in Formosa. So they were really cut off. So, of course, they'd treat you with open arms. In addition, many times you'd have to stay with them, there's no hotels, no decent hotel. So pretty soon, I was kind of a member of the family.

Q: Now the Honolulu assignment ends in June of 1949. You said you came back to the Department.

KESSLER: Yes, I came back to the Department and then I had a wonderful opportunity to go into all the embassies in Central and South America, rearranging diplomatic courier operations and so forth, and that was a wonderful assignment. And that lasted over a long time, six, seven weeks; I had to go to every embassy and some of the consulates throughout every country in Central and South America and in the Caribbean area those islands where we had consulates. We didn't have too many but we had some, we had quite a few actually. We had Jamaica and Barbados and Trinidad and an embassy in Haiti and an embassy in Dominican Republic and so forth.

So anyway, then while I was gone on a courier run I received my assignment to, of all places, Athens. So I was delighted because I had heard so much and read so much about Greece. They said there's a huge administrative setup there; it's called JAS, Joint Administrative Services. And it's a big operation and you're going to have to be in charge of some of the segments of it and one of them, and the one we want you to focus on is travel. I said travel? I said I couldn't book a person around the block. I don't know anything about travel arrangements. I've done a lot of travel but I never, you know. No, they said, you're not going to be making bookings, but you're going to have to know what it's all about. And so I was put under the sort of tutorship of this woman who's very nice and she'd been in the Department for six or seven years. She was only my age

but she was in there since an early age. And we became very, very close friends and she invited me over for dinner a lot and so forth and tell me all about her fiancé, that they were getting married as soon as he returned. He was in Saudi Arabia and he didn't want her to go out there and she didn't either.

So anyway, she taught me the Department's travel regulations. You've got to know the intricacies of travel. She said that travel is a very, very complicated thing and you've got to know it. Now, I didn't think there was anything much to know but anyway. Now, for instance, if you go by ship you're entitled to a stateroom that has a window or a porthole. And she said the shipping lines will pull every trick in the world, if they think they can get away with it. For example, they'll put our people, , State, AID, whatever we're talking about, in a stateroom that was an inside stateroom. The traveler didn't know the difference but when they'd later find out and they'd be furious and so forth; but it's too late and so forth.

If you'd go by train, if it's more than four hours you're entitled to an executive car or the first class car or Harvard car, whatever it might be called, and you're entitled to it. And nine out of 10 times you make a booking and say I want to take the train somewhere so they'll just put you on the train, they won't put you in this special part of the car and so forth. But you're entitled to it and the government's paying- is going to be paying for it so you should get what you're paying for, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And then I learned all sorts of things about travel orders. The normal travel order would be, I assume, they always say approximately three days, four days. And so you arrive in any given spot for business and you think well, I'll only be there a day or two, but your orders will always read approximately three days. But it's also good for a fourth day. So if you want to stay an extra day and do a little sightseeing or whatever, why, stay the fourth day and put it on your voucher. It will be processed right through, no worry. But if you stay a fifth day then you have to get your travel orders amended and that could be a problem, but maybe not, but it very well could be. So if you're going on a trip and you want to do some sightseeing, you know, and so forth, be sure to arrive at your post on a Friday and so you have the weekend. And be mindful of the holidays. In those days if a holiday's on a Thursday, why Friday would be a holiday. So always look ahead of time to see if you can work your trip in to hit one of those times where you have Thursday off, Friday off, the weekend off, you know. Or if the holiday is on a Tuesday Monday will be off. And that's standard in all of Europe and almost everywhere. But it wasn't in those days in the States.

Q: Now, it sounds to me like you had started off on the courier side of things being the leg man, taking the pouches around; now you've got a desk job. Was that a conversion or somebody just said you're going to be the inside?

KESSLER: You know, I still thought I want to join the Foreign Service but I said my job as a diplomatic courier has been so unusual that I really didn't know what's going on in the consulate too much. I got to know those people very well and I got to get a general idea of the purpose of the post and all this and that; but I didn't see the nitty gritty.

Therefore I'd like to get a job that I can see what's going on in an embassy. After all, that's the important thing. And well, so I was assigned to Athens. And of course it took me one solid month to go from Washington to Athens because I knew all the travel regulations, I played the system, and it took me one solid month. Of course I could have jumped on TWA (Trans-World Airlines) which had service in those days and I could have flown there in a day. But it took me one solid month. And of course everyone is all, what happened to you, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Q: That would have- that meant you probably came some by ship, did you?

KESSLER: I sailed on the Queen Mary and then I wrote to my boss, and I said I'd like to see some very close friends that live in France and is there any way I can get some consultation in Paris? He said oh absolutely; so I got consultation in Paris. And he said definitely I want you to stop off in Rome because- anyway. So then I talked to this woman who was so nice there in Washington and she had just been back from Athens because she had to go out; she said it's a mess out there. She said you don't realize it; everyone thinks Athens is just another European city. She said well of course they are very proud of the fact, don't call them anything else but Europeans, but she said they're completely cut off. She said they do have air service but the train service no longer works. In the old days, of course, they took the through car from Paris to Athens.

But Yugoslavia was very difficult in those days and they wouldn't allow any through trains, so Athens was completely cut off except by ship or by TWA, which was the only American airline flying in. They did have the Greek airline and occasionally they had a flight; not too often, oddly enough.

So anyway the situation was that Athens was really cut off. So I arrived there after a month's journey and was told us there's a British woman in charge of travel for the embassy. I said a British woman? Yes, she's in charge really and you'll be her boss but she does all the work. She's a wonderful person, she's bilingual, she was born and raised in Greece but her parents are British but she doesn't get into a lot of this stuff and she really doesn't understand some of these travel regulations and it's a mess. But anyway I got in there and I found that I was in a building, it was a huge- a good sized building, several floors, covered almost a city block, and that was JAS (Joint Administrative Services). And it was quite a distance from the embassy. The embassy was a relatively small building and I had nothing to do with the embassy. Except, since I played a lot of tennis, I got to know some of the fellows very well but I didn't have any business connection with the embassy. I said I wouldn't go there officially, and no one else from the embassy ever came over to JAS except to go to the snack bar.

Q: You're calling this the Joint Administrative Services building; what was joint about it?

KESSLER: We- Administrative Support, they handled all administration for AID (United States Agency for International Development). AID at that time had more Americans than the State Department did. Also for all the other agencies, CIA-

Q: So centralized administrative services for a variety of agencies-

KESSLER: The military are very clever. If it's something they didn't want to do, they would have JAS do it. But if it's something else, well then they would bow out of it. AID had standardized travel regulations, but it wanted to do some of the things on their own because they could get away with a lot of things that we wouldn't be able to get away with. And so it was rather complicated.

Q: And so the different agencies had different travel regulations?

KESSLER: Well to a certain extent. But basically though, for real travel, no, we did all the travel but for other aspects of it.

So the problem is, AID, they call themselves sort of a big regional office and I couldn't figure out why they'd say that since we were cut off from everything. But anyway, I wasn't there more than a week and some fellow came along and introduced himself, he was from AID, and he said you know, the executive officer would like to meet you. I said oh, okay, I don't know why. So I went into the executive officer and he said oh, I'm so glad to meet you and so forth, we've been hearing lots of things about you. Did you have a good trip? Anyway, he said you know, you're half mine. I said I beg your pardon? He said you're half mine. He said AID is paying on a reimbursable basis half of your salary so you're half mine. And I said- I couldn't believe it. So I said well, okay. And he was very nice and so forth; and so forth and so on I got my- As soon as I left his office I went straight to the personnel office and talked to the personnel director who was a very experienced woman, and she looked- she said I don't know about that; she said let me look it up. And sure enough, she says they are on a reimbursable basis, yes. They're paying half of your salary. So she laughed and says you're half theirs.

So a week later I got a message that the director of AID would like me to come by at my convenience. So I thought that was a command performance and I went in there. He was a very jolly fellow. He was about 65 maybe, something like that, and sit down, so forth, and he said do you know how to work the system? He said you know you're half mine. I was getting used to this; at first I thought it was a joke. I was getting tired of being half somebody else. So anyway, have a drink, and anyway, a big slug of bourbon and he drank like anything but he never showed it. Anyway, he was the former mayor of San Francisco and he was a real politician and he was a very nice man and a typical politician. And I got to know him quite well. And then he asked me if I would do certain little things for him, report only to him, and I hesitated to do it and I asked personnel again. They said well, you probably should do it as long as it doesn't interfere with State. But if it has anything to do with State Department then don't do it and let us know what it's all about and this is strictly AID.

So I had a nice time and I had a wonderful experience except I didn't know anything about the work of the embassy. I didn't know how the Foreign Service operated because in a normal embassy, the travel section is nothing. It's maybe one or two clerks that did

the bookings. But here, my God, every time you turned around these people all wanted to go to- all over Europe. To go to Europe they had to fly to Rome and then they'd want to take the train and they all wanted to go sightseeing and doing this and doing that and my post is overwhelmed and therefore it was impossible. And the guy in Rome said you're driving us crazy. He said you know we'll do anything we can to help you but we're just flooded with this stuff and we don't know what to do and you don't give proper notifications, the trains don't run all that frequently. And it was a mess and so I had a big problem on my hands. And Athens at that time was under a virtual American occupation. All the cars had special plates. Not diplomatic plates, special U.S.A. plates. Everything around was American and there was a small diplomatic list but only a few of the senior officers in the embassy were on that list and other than that, why, it was U.S.A. All the military, they had the U.S.A. plates. It was virtual occupation.

Q: Where were you housed? What were your-?

KESSLER: Well, this happened before my time but not very much before my time. They didn't know where to put people. They're having all these new secretaries come in not know where to put them. So they went out and they leased two of the big resort hotels in a place called Kifisia, and that's about 12 miles out of Athens and it's a little bit higher and it's a bit cooler, much cooler, really, in the summertime, and they leased these entire hotels but with the proviso that they had to have all the rooms with a private bath and therefore there was a lot of construction had to be done but they made outrageous amounts of money for this. I was assigned out there and I got to know the housing officer very well because he was a very good friend of mine, one thing another and the hotel I was in was the best hotel of the two because it had a very lovely dining room and pianists play when you go to the other room for your after dinner coffee. Oh, it was very nice and so forth. So I got a small suite and he said now if some family comes in I'll have to move you but hopefully I can maneuver it and you can stay, and I did, I never moved. So I had my, not a big suite, but one with a tiny balcony so I was very happy and I had a good time. But I didn't know anything about the embassy operations.

Q: Right. Now, the Greek civil war had just ended before you got there.

KESSLER: It just ended but there were certain pockets where there was still some fighting by the- I don't know-

Q: What was the local economy like?

KESSLER: The local economy was terrible. And they were sort of living off the Americans, really. And the Greeks, the Greeks had had lots of money, they didn't care. And there wasn't too much of a middle class and it was a terrible economy for the poor Greeks. There was no housing in Athens to speak of and we were all scattered away around the suburbs and we had our own mission bus to and from these areas and I did get my car in, which was a new Studebaker and it was the latest model.

It was quite something, and I was going along one day and all of a sudden there are sirens coming along and sort of waved me over, a procession I guessed, and so I got over there and then this car came to a screeching stop and a guy came out and he said His Majesty would like to see you, sir. I said His Majesty? And so I got out of the car and when I met the king he said I would love to be able to get in your car and take a look at it. He said tell me something about it. He said I've never seen a car like that. Anyway, he was a very nice man and he said do you suppose I could drive it a little bit? And I said of course, Your Majesty. So he drove it around a little bit. He told me a story; as a young man he'd been on- worked at the Ford assembly line incognito and he knew all sorts of things about cars. And he said no one knew who I was and he said I had a wonderful time. He spoke fluent English and he was a very nice man.

So anyway, we had our own mission plane and an American pilot who was under my jurisdiction, of all things. We had a big consulate in Salonika. And so we had to get up there, back and forth all the time. They did have a little boat that went up overnight but it was not very good accommodations and no one really liked to take it. It was terrible on the ship and so forth. So I could take that plane any time I wanted to and I could always manufacture an excuse to go up. Interestingly, one of the boys that was in my graduating class from USC was the vice consul in Salonika, so I got to see him and things worked out quite nicely. And the most interesting thing I can think to tell you about Greece is Mount Athos. Do you know anything about Mount Athos?

Mount Athos is a theocracy and no females have been allowed into Mount Athos in several hundred years. It's very famous. And several books written about Mount Athos. And it's a very dangerous place and very hard to get into. But by sheer luck I happened to meet the newly appointed governor of Athos who had to be a bachelor because no women are allowed and unusual because mostly governors all had to report to the prime minister but he reported only direct to the king. When he came up for his first trip to Athos, he invited me to come along. And so I said I don't want to go along, though, could I take a friend of mine, so this friend of mine from the embassy and the consulate at Salonika came along with me. Now modern Greek is very difficult. We had members in the embassy and JAS also, not many but a few who had majored in college in Greek. But that was classical Greek and there's a big difference. They couldn't understand anything. They could read some of the city signs, but they had trouble reading the modern Greek and they couldn't understand speaking. And therefore it was very difficult- Of course we did have some Greek-Americans in JAS and a couple in the embassy but not too many and I'm surprised we didn't have more but I guess they couldn't find them, didn't want to join the Foreign Service.

So anyway, I went up there and I had a very interesting time and went by mule back and they had 20 Eastern Orthodox monasteries there, a one day trip by mule apart. I won't go into it but it's a most interesting thing. Sometimes look up, since you're interested in research, look up Mount Athos; it's a very fascinating place. And one of the monasteries, to go in they make you drop your pants, by the way, to inspect you so there's no playing around. No female can get in there disguised as a man, you see. And about- I think we went six days by mule back. The peninsula containing Mount Athos is very famous and

when anything has to be done, each monastery has a little part of the seal and they have to put all the parts together and then they put in the ink and then they have to stamp it. So if one monastery objects nothing can happen and it's very, very, very complicated.

So anyway, I'm going to say one more thing then forget about Athos. One of the monasteries we finally got to and I was told it existed was a Russian monastery. So we finally got there and the czarist flag was still flying and they'd been there and these guys had just escaped from the commies. It was amazing. The youngest one there, I remember, the guy in charge there, the monk in charge, he had a very fancy title; he said we have a youngster here, and I think he was 76 or something else and they're all in their 80s and 90s. And the Greek interpreter refused to go in there. He said nah, he said they have a reputation, you know, maybe I wouldn't get out. No sir, he wouldn't go in.

Anyway, they weren't very friendly at first and then they said can we help you, we'll be glad to sit- but they didn't offer us to get in. So I explained, I said well I've come a long ways and I'd like very much to see your monastery and we don't really have a place to stay. And anyway, I said I have fond memories of Vladivostok. Vladivostok? And finally another fellow came along and- they brought us in but still didn't offer to put us up but they brought us in. He said you've been to Vladivostok? I said oh yes, absolutely. Oh, he says, and then he said well, did you see our famous cathedral there? He said isn't it a lovely sight to see the sea there from there? I said I don't think so. I said I guess there's another cathedral but the main cathedral there you don't see the sea from the cathedral. And then something else; he says, you know, you've really been to Vladivostok. He couldn't believe it.

So anyway, we were invited to stay and we had a very interesting time. And that was Mount Athos; look it up.

Q: Now how long were you assigned to the embassy in Athens? You arrived in December 1949?

KESSLER: Oh, I was there two years. I think two more months maybe. And while I was there I had a little chance to travel around the general area quite a little bit thanks to my association with AID. And USIS (United States Information Service) had a wonderful setup where they had a very lovely sailboat and they went all around the islands and they would stop at the islands and they would show slides of the United States and explain about the United States and all this and that and the captain was a Greek but he spoke English but there had to be an American aboard, just for the presence and so forth and so on. It could be a woman also they said and so they invited a woman to come and she spread the word, don't go, she said, because you had to share the bathroom with the captain. And she said I didn't trust that captain very much. So none of the girls wanted to go. So anyway I never signed up for anything but you can sign up for it, you can go, and finally they said listen, you've never gone; why don't you go? So I did and it was very interesting. And I think it was a good program because these people on those islands there, they didn't know anything about America and they showed the slides and they had the Greek interpreter and so forth and it was a very good public relations project

and I particularly liked it because I had two weeks of a free cruise through the Greek islands.

Q: When did you leave Athens?

KESSLER: I left Athens, it was summertime 1952 and I left with a very close friend of mine. I took the ship to Naples and then I took the beautiful American Export Lines- in those days they had beautiful ships- from Naples to New York; no wait a minute. Let's see; I was assigned Madras, India, and I took the ship all the way into Beirut. Then I flew from Beirut to Delhi. I had to have consultation in Delhi. And then I took the train all the way from Delhi to Madras, which caused a lot of confusion with the embassy. They were all upset about this, they said no one's ever done this before and I said well I have a perfect right to go by train. They said well no one's ever done it. I said I don't care if they've done it or not, I have a right to go by train. Then they said it's very complicated. My God, I didn't know it would be so complicated. I had to go to Cook's (Travel Service), they had to get a bedroll for me and pillow and sheets and so forth. My lord, what a time.

So anyway, I got on this special first class car which I shared with only one other person. And he was a retired British colonel. And he looked upon me and of course I was kind of young looking for those days and he- well, he said, young man, he said it must be quite an excitement for you to be in a foreign country. And I said, well, I said, I'm delighted to be in India but I've been here before several times but only to Calcutta. Well, he said, really? You've been to Calcutta before? And I said I've been to a lot of countries, colonel. I always called him colonel. Oh really, he said, you know. Well he said, I've been to 14 countries. I said well, I've been to lots more than 14 countries. Oh really? And I showed him my passport and my passport was about this thick, you know, because you had accordion pages because I would always keep my same passport. Finally they insisted that they couldn't give me anymore pages so I had to give it up. You know, all because in those days every time you turned around someone was stamping your passport. And so he couldn't believe it, you know, he couldn't believe it. So he returned it to me after that. I should donate that passport to ADST, shouldn't I?

Q: That would be very generous. We do have use for such historical items. So you arrived in Madras?

KESSLER: So I arrived in Madras and I was three months in the hotel because I couldn't find a place to stay. Finally I found a place to stay, a very nice penthouse apartment. They said now look, you're going to be the admin officer and the consular officer. I didn't know anything about consular work. They said well, the local employees will do everything. All you have to do is sign. I said well I'm not signing anything; I need to know something about it. So they had me, before I went to Madras, it's kind of a brief consular training thing so I'd at least know something about it.

Q: Where was this training conducted?

KESSLER: At FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

Q: At F- There was an FSI at that time?

KESSLER: No, there wasn't. No. Come to think of it, wait a minute, let's see. No, I don't think there was an FSI. I think it was right there in the Department. I know that. I can't recall for sure. Wait a minute, let's see. When I left Athens- Yes, there was FSI, definitely. Because when I left Athens FSI existed. Definitely, definitely.

So anyway, I arrived there-

Q: Was that an individual class or were there-

KESSLER: No, I was- no, it was just individual.

Q: Okay.

KESSLER: And I learned a little bit, not much. And they said you got to take this big manual, you know.

Q: The Foreign Affairs manual.

KESSLER: Well, God sake, you know. You know, they could have the whole- and there's three or four of these books on consular things alone. My lord. So anyway, every night I'd take it home and I'd read some of it and so forth.

Anyway. And so I was the political- administrative officer and the consular officer and they said now, a little later, we can't give you the title of vice consul because the Indians are very touchy and they say we are allowed so many vice consuls in the country because they only have so many vice consuls in the States or something. And it didn't make any sense to me. I didn't care anything about the title; that didn't mean anything to me. I said I don't care about that but they said we can guarantee you before you leave Madras you'll be vice consul. And it's true. By the time I left Madras I was commissioner vice consul in Madras.

Q: Well let's talk about Madras a little bit. Who was your boss and how big was the mission?

KESSLER: Well my boss was Robert, Robert Taylor, Bob Taylor. He was a very nice man and he was later selected out of Madras. He was a typical type. He was born and raised in India. His wife was born and raised in India. Missionary parents and he spoke Tamil which is the local language in south India. It's rather difficult to get a Tamil speaker because too many of the missionaries, I gather, in the old days were up north because the climate was better.

So anyway, he spoke Tamil and he was an ideal candidate for the job as consul general in Madras and I got the impression that most of his other posts had all been in India, probably because the Department thought all missionary offspring were good. He was a very nice man, but he wasn't the best consul general. He didn't seem to focus very much on it and I don't know how he ever became consul general. I think it was just because of his language ability or something. Anyway, unfortunately, even though I liked him very much, I had a few run-ins with him. One day I was still at the hotel; hotel breakfasts weren't terribly good but they did have good apples, they imported apples from Australia, so on the way to work I'd take an apple and chew on the apple as I walked to work. And he was going by some day and he raised hell with me. He said you can't walk around the street eating an apple. He said you're in the consulate here; you can't do this in public. And so finally I altered my time a little bit and then I would put my apple in my pocket and I'd take a bite and I'd put it right back in and so forth.

And anyway, he was selected out and then the second in-charge was Mr. LaFreniere. Everybody I meet I think they're nice people because I loved them all and LaFreniere was a very close friend of mine. Actually we communicated back and forth up until just about four years ago and then he passed away. Al LaFreniere, his last assignment before Madras was as the principle officer in Azores. He was the acting consular general there for quite some time; I think six, seven months at least. And then who arrived, who later became even a closer friend, oh God, what was the name? Here we are, Hank Ramsey, yes. He arrived in October 1953. Hank Ramsey was the consul general was there when I left. As I recall, his next assignment was the Department and then later he was consul general in Karachi.

Q: What kind of a building was the consulate in?

KESSLER: We had a nice, new, relatively new building. The ground floor was the USIS library and then we had the entire second floor. USIS itself was in a good location and they had about the similar situation, but their building was much older. And then we had a USIS American in Trivandrum, which was another city in south India on the Indian Ocean. And then we had an American in Bangalore, Bangalore. Actually USIS at the time had as many Americans as we did, really.

And we had a head of the political section, he got into some kind of trouble; he was called back and it was the McCarthy era, he was, I don't know, they thought he was associated with something and they called him back, he never returned. And we had a lot of turmoil there in personality and then a woman came down and she was from Delhi and she was the economic- head of the economic- I think there were only two economic officers as I recall; she was the head of the economic section.

Madras had a duty officer roster and there was frequently trouble at the ports but she couldn't do it because it was unsafe for her to go down to the port area after dark. It didn't bother me but some of the other guys were furious, saying this is not fair that she was not taking her part and her share of the responsibilities. When she's on duty and if something comes up down on the port, why then someone else has to go and she doesn't

go. She could be a bit difficult and she wasn't terribly popular and she was more British than the British in some respects; she'd been in India a long time. This was Edith Wall, so, for instance, you'd go to her house and the boy who was serving the meal would have to wear white gloves. That was a British tradition, you know. It was unpleasant or unsavory to have a black hand serving you, you know, a dark hand so she had- you had to wear the white gloves and he had to serve you and she was really British you know. Of course you go to the British they always did that. I mean, it was considered, well I don't know, distasteful, I guess, for a black hand or a dark hand to be serving you at the dinner table so you'd have to wear the white gloves.

Q: Now you had consular responsibilities; that meant you would-

KESSLER: Yes, that's how I got around it. So I had to go to Trivandrum frequently, which I loved to do, and then I had to go to Bangalore, which I could drive to Bangalore and that was about a, hm, two and a half, two and a half to three hour drive to Bangalore.

Q: Still with the Studebaker?

KESSLER: No, no. No, I sold my Studebaker in Athens when I left. The king didn't buy it. But no, I bought a new Chevy Impala; it was the only Chevy Impala in all of south India. And there was only one other American car there and I kept seeing it and then all of a sudden I went to the club there, swimming club, social place, everyone met there except some of the British did not. The British had their own club when we arrived and they did not accept Indian memberships. Absolutely no Indian could become a member so the embassy passed the word no one in any of the consulates; no one in the embassy could join any club that did not allow an Indian to be a member. Because after all it was an independent country, after all. So we had two clubs. So anyway, this club though was very, very, very famous because it had a huge swimming pool. It was wonderful and it was very hot in Madras year round.

So anyway, I had to go out to these places and then I'd see this other guy with an American car so- he was at the club and finally he introduced himself and he was- he had a Buick and he was a young Indian fellow, had just gotten his Master's degree from Columbia. So through him I finally got to know some Indians and particularly some Indian girls. Well, Indian girls were kind of friendly, but are very standoffish. So finally I got to know an English girl and an Indian girl and so forth. One day I suggested and outing with a good friend of mine and said to the Indian girl let's go do something ; I said Bill and I will come by and we'll pick you up. Oh, she said, I can't. She said let me explain to you, Earl, let me explain. My parents are not at home to the British. I said, what, I don't understand? They're not at home to the British. In other words any British fellow is not welcome in our home; no Englishman is welcome to our home so he can't come into our home.

So anyway, that was the situation but I got to know a few others and then a young USIS fellow came through. He was just a young fellow and he was the utility officer and he did a lot of good. He got some of the young people going and his wife finally got a

bunch of- some of these young, very-well-to-do girls. Well, it just wasn't done. A girl didn't appear in swimsuits, just didn't, it just wasn't done. And she finally talked to the mothers and said you know, in Delhi they did it. Of course Delhi is an international city and of course really the only Indian girls that went to the club in their swimsuits were girls that had been brought up in Europe because their fathers were in the diplomatic service or something or other, they were educated abroad and they went. And so finally a couple of mothers said well okay, alright, provided you're with her all the time. And so she said I'll be with her all the time and I'll teach them how to swim. So she had a little swimming class and she was marvelous and she got some of these girls going. Through her I got to meet some Indian girls finally.

Q: Now, in your duty as consular officer, I assume most of the visas were non-immigrant?

KESSLER: Yes. They all were non-immigrant. If it was immigrant it had to be referred to the embassy. And as for visas for visitors why almost no one from Madras ever went to the United States. But there was some type of medical conference of some sort and I remember two, well two of the doctors in Madras did attend that and I had to give them a visa for that. And then there was some kind of a religious thing going on and a couple of- See, they had what was called the ashrams. We had a huge one there headed by a woman. She called them Mother something or other. Oh, it was very complicated. And we had several Americans in that. They were completely brainwashed and one of them was very, very wealthy, he came from an extremely wealthy family. I can't remember the name now but it's a name that was very familiar to me at the time and he would come in to pick up his mail all the time and I got to know him and he did go back and forth occasionally and I'd have to give him a visa sometimes. No, he didn't require a visa; I had to give him a special something or other so that he could in turn get a exit from India because you had to get an exit visa to leave India in those days. I got to know him quite well. And other than that I had almost nothing to do in the consular section but I had plenty to do in the administrative section. There was a lot of activity going on and I finally got to know what an embassy was all about.

Q: What were some of the main administrative things you handled?

KESSLER: Well first of all, I had to go out and negotiate some leases for housing. And that was not easy because they were very leery about leasing to foreigners and then the difficulty was I had to insist on getting a diplomatic clause in the lease, which was required by Washington, of course, if you were transferred on official orders the lease could be broken. You had to have that for a government lease. And well, the landlords say well, I've been doing this; in six months maybe this guy is going to be transferred to Solan and blah, blah, blah. There are a lot of complications and sometimes there's a lot of money. Nevertheless, they loved the Americans because they knew they got their independence through our efforts. They knew that; they knew the history because Roosevelt- it's been documented, you know, that Roosevelt had an understanding with Churchill that we'd go in, we'd do this, we'd do that, but at the end of the war that they would facilitate the independence of India. And they knew that and we were welcome in

any home but of course you'd- very difficult to meet them but finally I did. And of course being the administrative officer there's a lot of business that they did with us and lots of money. So of course if they got big business from us they'd welcome me into their homes and liked me and all that stuff, you know. Then we also had the problem of leasing the libraries and the housing for the USIS people in Bangalore and Trivandrum.

Then we had a lot of shipping problems. At that time Madras was the second busiest port in India; the first was Bombay, second was Madras and the third was Calcutta. We had a tremendous number of American ships going in and out of Madras. These American ships sometimes became my problem. Sometimes they'd want to get rid of one of the sailors because they were causing so much trouble on their ships. I don't know why, but they'd always seem to get rid of them in Madras. Now signing American sailors off and on ships it tedious and has a lot of complications due to U.S. law and international maritime agreements and this and that, and we had to have stuff notarized and signed, sealed and delivered.

Q: Actually, wasn't one of the main responsibilities of the old consular corps to sign seamen off the manifest and-

KESSLER: Exactly. In the old days that is sometimes that's the only thing they did. In the old days sometimes there'd be one little man assigned to some little port and that's all he'd do. In those days he could pocket the money that he would get and that's how the consular agent lived. Because there's so much- anyway- so much you could charge for notarization, so much for this, so much for that and so forth.

Q: Did any of these sailors get out of hand in Madras?

KESSLER: Oh yes, all the time. We had three of them while I was there that were charged with murder. And we had a terrible time, constantly trying to have business with them. And there's a big red light district there around the port area, of course, as in most ports, and they would get into all sorts of trouble and drunken brawls and it was just a terrible thing and I'd have to spend a lot of time with the captains of those ships and got to know them quite well in some cases. Every once in a while, they'd fly a guy all the way to India to replace someone. It seemed there was always a complication. Indians were very, very fussy in those days. The replacement would have to have a special thing on his passport stating that he was just in transit. Well sometimes a ship wouldn't come on time; some were just tramp steamers. But they' all flying the American flag though.

Then it would start. He's not in transit; he's been here for two weeks. Then he'd be there for two weeks and wouldn't have any money and what are we going to do? Then we'd try to, you know, and the awkward thing was there wasn't one American there that represented these American shipping things in Madras. There was the guy that represented all that stuff was a Frenchman and he seemed to have the corner on all that stuff and he was a Frenchman and he didn't care anything much about us. As a matter of fact I think he deliberately dragged his feet because he wanted everything to come out by French ships.

Anyway, it was a big mess. And then the Indians say well he's overstaying his visa and he should go to jail. And I'd say you can't do that because it's beyond his control. If the ship is delayed or something, why you can't- You know, they'd go around in circles and go around in circles and so-

Q: So you had a lot of business with the Indian police authorities?

KESSLER: Oh, the police authorities and the immigration people and also there was some degree of suspicion that some of those sailors were smuggling. Gold was still being smuggled all the time because the Indians, everything they turned around they want Greek gold, you know. And there were no gold mines in India at that time anyway; I don't think there are anymore. I don't think, I don't know. But there was a lot of smuggling going on.

Also we had jurisdiction of the French colony called Pondicherry. That was in our consular district. And for some reason I was the one picked to handle Pondicherry because the consul general who was later selected out, he had a run-in with the governor down there for some reason. I don't know, this is before my time. Anyway, he didn't want to have anything to do with it. He said Earl, Pondicherry is your baby. I said well, okay, because I loved to go to Pondicherry because it's a delightful place really.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

KESSLER: Well I'd have to go down there because every once in awhile there'd be a seaman problem. These seamen were clever and if they wanted to desert ship they knew that the Indians would track them down like anything, but if they go down to Pondicherry they can get away with it. So what they'd do is they'd jump ship in Madras and they'd take off to Pondicherry, which is only a three and a half hour drive. And they had buses going down there and anyone could just go and get a bus ticket and everything and you could go down there and these seamen would have papers and the French were free and easy and they didn't care, not to go back into India, oh no. Boy, they were fussy about anyone coming back into India but no problem going out. So these- a lot of these guys knew all about this and they'd jump ship, head for Pondicherry, and at Pondicherry there's all sorts of little tramp ships going anywhere, who knows? They'd vanish into the woodwork. You never knew whatever happened to them.

So I'd have to go down there lots of times and then of course I'd get into in trouble in Pondicherry. Most of them didn't speak a word of French and it was very French to go down there and the Indians, you know, they're typical Indians, running around in their baggy pants and the girls in their saris and everything. They scarcely speak a word of English; nothing but French. And all the street signs in Pondicherry are in French, completely French. And the average person in Pondicherry never went into India. It's amazing. The governor down there, he was quite respected among the political scene in Paris. And of course he would have to go back and sit in on the parliament because he had a- unlike ours, you know, it's like the delegate from say American Samoa; he has no

vote in Congress. He can sit there, the American can request time to speak but he has no vote; whereas this guy, he had a vote. And so he would- Apparently he was in charge of one of the very important committees, I was told, so he was a person of considerable political, shall we say, clout.

Q: Did you get a chance to meet him?

KESSLER: Oh, I'd meet him every time I'd go down there. He'd always break open a bottle of champagne and sit out on the veranda there and have cold champagne. And his wife was there sometimes, but she was in Paris I think more times than not. They had a regular ship that stopped in Pondicherry coming from Marseilles and then continued from Pondicherry it went as far as Singapore and then, let's see, yes, Singapore. Then there was another one that they could pick up in Singapore and go to Indochina. The French also had direct, really very nice ships from Marseilles to Saigon but they did not stop at Pondicherry. So it was fairly common for some of the British that had been there so many years, just for a change they'd take a French ship and go back home that way. So they'd go down to Ceylon because all the French ships stopped in Ceylon, they'd pick up the ship in Ceylon, sail to Saigon, Saigon they'd get another ship to Hong Kong, Hong Kong they'd go across to Vancouver on the Canadian Pacific ships which were beautiful in those days, take a train from Vancouver to Montreal and pick up the ship on the St. Lawrence and on to England. They'd pay a little out of their pocket but it was frequently done by the senior people that had the money, not the poor people that were working there for peanuts.

But you know, it's terrible; they'd get these young fellows out there, they couldn't drink. Of course they were young fellows, they weren't married. Of course I wasn't married either as far as that goes. So anyway, then they'd get these fellows out there and pay them terribly low salary and they'd have to live together and they called them chum rates and there'd be a big house and they'd have eight, 10 of them living together and they'd have common mess and they'd have a British woman sort of in charge of the place. They called them chummeries and that was common.

Q: Now in the admin and consular section, the consulate in Madras, did you have Indian Foreign Service nationals?

KESSLER: Oh yes. Oh absolute yes.

Q: And they understood the manuals and the American regulations?

KESSLER: Yes. Oh, this one fellow had been there some 20 years. He was a walking encyclopedia. If he said I've checked everything; I'd sign it. If he was on vacation or something then I would have some hesitation about it and I'd want to check myself. But this fellow had been there 20-some years. He would break in young consular officers. Of course, we had women on staff too, not just men, women too, in their saris, they were very colorful and they were very attractive too.

Q: Did you think the staffing was adequate to the tasks that the consulate had to perform?

KESSLER: I think probably we could have used another officer for the simple reason that we should have probably spent more time out of Madras. I think probably it didn't have to be a State officer; it could have been USIS. Probably better USIS but someone that's free to travel around. You see, south India contains some of the small little states and some of the cities, good sized cities. They have so overpopulation in south India, everywhere in south India- in India, and I think we didn't fly the flag enough in a lot of areas in south India that we should have and I think that someone should have had the responsibility of sort of getting around and talking to schools and they're great on small colleges and they had a lot of them, I think; we'd call them maybe a junior college or something but anyway they called them colleges, and speak to the students.

Q: I notice in May, 1953, Secretary of State Dulles comes to New Delhi and was wondering if they called in people from the consulates to help them with a secretary of state's visit.

KESSLER: I did not participate in that trip. However, one time I was up in Delhi on business and friends of mind up there - friends that I'd known in Athens before, some that I'd known even in China - said oh it's going to be full moon; we'll go down to the Taj. You want to go? I said sure, it sounds great. So I went to Taj. To make a long story short the next morning there had been lot- oh, it was beautiful, the full moon on the Taj is awesome.

Anyway, they all slept in and we'd had more than a few drinks, of course, and they sort of slept in but I couldn't sleep for some reason so I went up and got my swim shorts on and the hotel had a nice big pool and I went in and jumped in the pool so I swam around and I saw this one other person in the pool but I didn't pay attention. Pretty soon we collided and we both laughed because it was a big pool and the two of us and we collided. And he was American. He said you're an American. I said yes, you're an American. And he was a very nice man but he sure looked familiar, he sure looked familiar but I didn't know who he was. And I'll swear but I knew, I just knew I'd seen his face somewhere and so forth. We talked and we swam together and chatted and finely I realized he was Adlai Stevenson, Democratic Party candidate for the presidency of the United States. He was there and we ended up having a cold drink there on the side of the pool, we had a long chat and he was curious about what I was doing here and why I was there. And he'd never been to Oregon, he said that's one place I want to go; here I am in far off India and I've never been to Oregon. I said well you've missed plenty because India is a wonderful place but there's no place in the world like (Howard) Prairie Lake National Park. [Ed: Stevenson travelled in India in May 1953 as part of an extensive, multi-nation trip abroad after losing the November 1951 American presidential election.]

Anyway. So he said well I'm here and so forth; tell me about south India. And I told him. You know, that sounds interesting. He said I'm just here with an aide, he said,

maybe I can get down there. And I said well I'm sure you'd find it most interesting. I didn't think anything about this conversation. So anyway, went back to Madras on the train, because I love the train ride, it's fascinating. Anyway, the consular general called me in and said Earl, he said, how do you know Adlai Stevenson? Well, I said, I don't really know him. I said I bumped into him in a swimming pool. Well, he said, he's particularly asked if you would be his escort officer while he's in Madras. Oh, he's coming. And he was kind of annoyed with me because he'd like to be the escort officer. So, his nose was a bit out of joint. Anyway, Adlai Stevenson came. He wasn't there very long, I think maybe three days. I was particularly interested in having him see the famous ruins in Mahabalipuram, which were world famous archeological ruins. So I took him down there, which is an all day trip and that was it.

But I loved Pondicherry even though it was a source of trouble sometimes, rarely but sometimes. There would be an American on one of these ships, these French freighters, they're usually just French, and I could never figure out why. But anyway an American sailor would end up in Pondicherry and then they want to go up into India. Now the Indians- they were very suspicious, they were suspicious of anyone foreign, and they, you know, and oddly enough they had- there was no Indian consulate in Pondicherry because they had strained relations with France. What they really wanted was the French to get out and get out gracefully but get out and the French weren't about to do it. Of course later they were forced to do it but anyway in those days they were sticking it out. The French had several other colonial positions in India, you know; they had Pondicherry, they had Chanda Nagar, they had two others. They had four, four, actually four little pockets.

Q: And the Portuguese had Goa.

KESSLER: Anyway, because there was no Indian consulate in Pondicherry, these Americans couldn't get a visa to get into India and therefore they'd write to us and send us a telegram and so forth. And I'd have to go to the immigration people there in Madras and say look, these are Americans, they have a perfect right to come to India and we have diplomatic relations but they can't get a visa therefore will you kindly make arrangements so that they can arrive and then they can come. I will make sure that they understand and they'll report to you and get a proper visa and so forth. The Indian officials were fussing and they want this and they want that.

Q: As you say India was newly independent so they'd probably be very sensitive to all aspects of sovereignty.

KESSLER: Absolutely. And they didn't like the idea of having the French in places like Chanda Nagar. I've been there and it's a terribly- it's a small little place. You can walk around it in two hours. But there's a flag was flying and a French resident. It was a terribly interesting experience going there. Anyway, they had Chanda Nagar, which is north of Calcutta, and that's how I got there was when I was in Calcutta once.

Southward they had Pondicherry was the big one but then they had two other small ones and the Indians wanted them out and they wanted the Portuguese out of Goa. Of course later, you know, later they invaded Goa and there were a few people killed and of course the port of Goa had a few consular people but they didn't have any army or anything and of course I think within two hours the Indian army completely took over the colony of Goa. And at that same time though in the United Nations India was going this business, you know, of peace and this and that and non-intervention, non-intervention and this and that and so forth and yet they moved into Goa and took over the place. And they did it with fighting, it wasn't easy. Now the French moved out, there was no fighting with the French. I wasn't there when they moved out but I was told there was no fighting whatsoever; the French finally just folded up their tents and jumped aboard ship and off they went.

Q: Now when did your tour in Madras end?

KESSLER: Well, I in arrived in September 1952 and departed post in in late 1954. Let's see. I'm just trying to think what time of the year it was I went down to Colombo and then I picked up a Dutch ship, beautiful passenger ship going from Indonesia to Holland but I didn't go that far; I jumped off and got off the ship in Naples because I had a good friend in the consulate in Naples.

Q: What was your next assignment?

KESSLER: And then that was from Madras then I was assigned to Washington.

Q: You were saying there was the Trieste first.

KESSLER: Well yes. Actually I was assigned to Trieste but I never went there because the guy said, he said it's a dying post; he said get out of the assignment. He said you'll never get anything by closing a post. You can make waves and all that opening a post but you never get any credit closing a post so just stay out of it. So it seems to me that that was the time- I'm just trying to think now- yes, that would be the time because I left the ship in Naples and later I took the train up to Trieste and then later I, yes, yes, and that would be-

Q: Because you went from Naples to Trieste. You actually looked at it?

KESSLER: Oh yes. I said I'm going to see what I was getting myself into. So I was assigned vice consul in Trieste and I took the train from Naples to Trieste, which is- which is just a day and a night on the train. And then my idea was that I would take the train then from Trieste to Paris then I'd fly Paris to New York. Because I wanted to get home for- Oh, I know. I wanted to get home for Christmas. I'd promised my parents faithfully I'd get home for Christmas. So I would normally have taken the ship then across but I forewent that and I decided I would go- I'd fly. So I got home two days before Christmas Eve on my home leave. So that's true.

Q: Your Trieste story is interesting because in November 1954 State Department records have you arriving in Trieste.

KESSLER: But I never went to Trieste, never went to Trieste. And the reason was I was promoted in August 1954 and that helped me because then they said well, Your rank is higher than the job. A little bit higher so I had a little assistance, shall we say, in getting out of the Trieste assignment.

So, I was assigned to Washington. I was assigned in the Department to the Refugee Relief Program, RRP. And I'd never heard of that before in my life. I seem to always get involved in some of these peculiar things. And so anyway, okay, I said RRP, and then I had- and I was in a separate office, I was not in the State Department, not main State but in one of the annexes and they had on K Street, just a block from K Street. RRP had the big headquarters and they had very lovely accommodations there and the head of the thing was a very prominent politician and-

Q: Who was that?

KESSLER: Oh, I don't know his name now but he was very high up. At that time it was- the Republicans were in and Scott McLeod was technically really the head of the RRP and- well, not head of it but he seemed to be pulling the strings and of course McLeod was involved in the witch hunt, you know, everyone is supposed to be a communist during the McCarthy period. [Ed: Scott McLeod was the Administrator of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs (SCA). The State Department's Foreign Service List, July 1955 lists Mr. Kessler as assigned to SCA as of April 1955. A Department phonebook in 1955 notes that the RRP was located in State Annex 11, which also housed the SCA Bureau's Office of Security.]

Anyway, the head of the RRP had a more impressive office than I've ever seen any ambassador's office. Actually I was just a floor below him [Ed: Room 508] and I can't think of his name now because I didn't know him very well but a very nice man, I think, but very, very-

It seemed to me that most of the people in RRP were very political. They were all political appointees. I was one of the few non-political types there.

Q: Now refugee programs had a varied history in the State Department. What bureau was this under?

KESSLER: I guess it would have to be the consular because they were all hired as consular officers.

And these guys, they would bring them in at much higher rank than they deserved, had no experience in the Foreign Service, in many cases and they weren't terribly bright. But the point is my job was to hire a bunch of these people. And I said well, okay. So I have this book and I had started questions and I could page the book so if they came in and

they were Italian speakers I'd get the Italian page out, you see. I could memorize all this stuff, you know, it wasn't all that difficult, but you see I could follow it and all these people thought I knew Italian, you see. And so I could evaluate their ability in English and in Italian because they had to know English and Italian. Most of the time they did know English but not always, it's amazing. And I saw some social workers there in New York that didn't know hardly any English. I guess they worked only in Little Italy or something and they didn't use very much English anyway. Of course, they had to be American citizens and they had to be college graduates.

Q: Who were the refugees were RRP was supposed to be dealing with overseas?

KESSLER: Well they would be all those from the occupied countries there, you know, and they seemed to have a very lenient situation there. I think almost anyone could declare themselves a refugee and they didn't do much checking, I don't think. Of course, all these people that were kicked out of Eastern Europe, of course, before the commies moved in or just after the commies moved in, they could qualify easily. I would test their ability and they were Slovak speakers and Italian speakers, Greek speakers, French, some Portuguese, and I could never understand why Portuguese could qualify because they were neutral during the war but anyway they seemed to. And they would say you've got to hire them, you've got to hire them and we'll train them but they never got much training but I don't think they did much when they got to the post but I don't know. I think they just stamped everything that came along but I don't know that but anyway. It was a bad scene because they were brought in over career people in some cases and that wasn't fair.

And then later it was supposed to be a temporary program; it was supposed to definitely end, it had a finite date. But then when that finite date came along, I think it was five years or something, then they were supposed to be out of a job. But oh no, they have a deal something, they could convert over and so forth. They couldn't convert over to be an FSO but they could convert over to something or other. But it was not a very well arranged program. But they would be consular officers when they went overseas and they would interview these people and I guess check their qualifications to be a refugee, I guess, and their papers, which I'm sure half of them were forged, and that's what they did. And I talked to some of the consular officers later that dealt with them a lot and they said you know, these guys were, you know, they weren't very effective but they seemed to have unlimited money. And I don't think State paid for anything. I don't know where- I guess RRP had their own funds and I think they paid for these peoples' salaries-

Q: This program probably emerged from the displaced persons circumstance at the end of the war.

KESSLER: Yes, yes, yes. That was a big program. And also from Asia. Also from Asia some of the- because you see some of the people- let's see now, I'm just trying to think. Some of the people from the Philippines had to flee. Some people from Formosa had to flee or felt they should flee. And I, for instance- A lot of the White Russians in Shanghai, they had to flee, they had to get out. For instance, my girlfriend at the time and several

others, they all ended up in the Philippines because they had to get out because they knew, if they stayed and those commies moved in those White Russians would be really in trouble because they had their chance to go back to the Motherland and they refused, why then they were enemies of the Soviets.

Q: Now how was this office organized? Who was the boss?

KESSLER: Well as I say this one fellow seemed to- this one man, he seemed to be- he had his big office and he was in charge. I don't know his name, I don't remember, I really don't. I didn't have anything to do with him except rarely.

There was one fellow there that was very senior; his name is Rieger. He was very senior there in RRP and by golly he got into the State Department. He said oh you wait, and he said, I'll get in. And by golly, I don't know how he did it, he got in, and years later I was in Tel Aviv and who was administrative officer there in the embassy in Tel Aviv? Rieger. And he was an FSO and how he did it I'll never know. [Ed: In October 1955 the Deputy Administrator of RRP is listed as Pierce Gerety and the General Manager as John F. Rieger.]

Q: Because all the people in this office were not FSOs-

KESSLER: Yes. Usually Foreign Service Reserves.

Q: And how big was this office?

KESSLER: Oh well we had- we had, I'd say, four floors in a good sized building there off of K Street. Four floors. And when these people would come in then they'd go in through the normal personnel channel at State because they were assigned by State and every embassy would request an X number of these RRP officers and they would handle these people. Because for instance in some of those places like Naples and Rome they needed them because they couldn't take care of all these refugees so they had to have people to help and they- if you're a refugee-type you went to the RRP people and they- If you were just John Jones that lived six blocks away from the embassy in Rome, why then you go to the embassy and you were a consular officer and he was familiar with the paperwork that you had to have and so forth.

Q: In addition to your admin responsibilities to hire these people, what were other responsibilities the office had?

KESSLER: Well my office was strictly- for the most part I'd say just recruiting. And I'd have to go up to New York frequently and I'd have sometimes two other people with me and we would go to the New York State employment office there and they'd have very nice accommodations for us and they would advertise it in the paper that Department of State representative or representatives would be in New York at such and such dates and such and such hours and they were interested in people who were fluent in both languages, whatever the other language might be. And they had to be- they had to have a

college degree and I'd say most of them, not all but certainly I'd say over half of them, were social workers. I never realized New York City had so many social workers. But over half of them were social workers and they had their GS numbers, I don't remember anything about that because I was never a member of the Civil Service but they had they had their GS numbers and they were all ages. Sometimes they were quite young, sometimes they were 40 years old. I don't think we'd ever take anyone over 40 but I think that 40 was the cutoff as I remember. Sometimes they were very impressive; most not. And we had some real weirdos; some of them were really practically in drag and they'd come in, the left hand, how do you do? How are you? And I couldn't understand how they could be social workers but I guess maybe that's- they were in that area- type of population where they were helping out or something and-

Q: In the State Department telephone book at one point it- in the spring it lists you as in the Refugee Relief Program. But by the fall it says you're assigned to the personnel office of the Personnel Operations Division (POD).

KESSLER: Well-

Q: Is it they just changed the name of the office?

KESSLER: Well they were always changing things but it seems to me they said well we'd like to get you back here in State. But really I was doing the same thing but it's true; I had- there again I had a split thing. I spent- I usually spent the morning over at RRP and then I'd spend the afternoon over at State. And I had an office in each place.

So, I was in the employment division of the Department of State and all the people there were Civil Service. I was the only Foreign Service-type there. Everyone else was- including the big, big chief of the entire thing there, who was very high rank. I think he was GS-14 or something. I don't remember his name now because I- I didn't have very much to do with him. Oh, I remember. It says Howard Mace. Yes, he was a director of that office; he was, I think he, Foreign Service, one of the very few in the Foreign Service. I remember that distinctly. But he was Foreign Service and later, oddly enough, he was the administrative officer in the embassy in Tokyo when I was in Kobe. Howard Mace. [Ed: Mace was Chief of the Division of Personnel Operations in the Office of Personnel, or PER/POD.]

Q: So it sounds as though this Washington assignment was an admin/personnel assignment?

KESSLER: Yes, admin/personnel. But I can't say I really got into the nitty gritty of things. I was floating around and interviewing people. We'd have to give them a grade and you know, give them so much grade for this, so much for that and so much for this and so forth. But it's interesting because, you know, you see some terribly interesting people and some very peculiar people. It's interesting and I enjoyed it; I thoroughly enjoyed it. And of course I loved being in New York and I had a great time in New York.

The bosses were always throwing things at me, you know. One time they said hey we need somebody to go down and give the written exam in Louisiana. Would you help us out? So, I said sure, now I've never been to Louisiana except passing through on the train. . So I took the train. I had a wonderful time but of course in those days it wasn't all that simple. I got down there and got things going, fine. We always used a government building if possible and with the help of the- oh they called them the buildings officer we would get set up. Really; I didn't do much of it; I had to check to make sure that the proper space and this and that.

All of a sudden the candidates came in. And then some black fellows, a couple of black fellows, and so finally one of the whites said, may I speak to you, sir, alone? I said yes, of course. He said sir, he said, you know, we can't take an examination in the same room with the niggers. Oh? Well, I said, why? Well, he said, you know, this is the South, sir, this is Louisiana. We just can't do it. Well, I said, what would you suggest I do? Well, he said, maybe if we had separate rooms. I said that's out of the question. Actually I could have done it but I said I couldn't possibly do it. This is the space we have and so forth. Well, he said, we can't do it, and I'm speaking for the other white boys here.

So I got on the phone with Washington and fooling around, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You handle it, which I thought they'd say. So I got a hold of these white boys and I said look, you guys. We have in the Foreign Service black ambassadors, we have black consul generals, we have black consuls, we have black- we didn't have very many but we had a few. I said do you realize you're joining the Foreign Service and your first boss could be a black- I didn't say the "n" word? And I said think about it. Your first job and your first boss could very well be a black- of course that's an exaggeration but it's possible- could be a black, because in the embassy in Athens we had a black officer. And we had him later; just as I was leaving a black officer came into Madras just as I was leaving. So I said you could have a black boss. I said the ambassador could be a black man.

So anyway, I think there were six of the white boys, six or seven, and all but two of them left. So I asked the two of them not to sit in the same table together. They said well, okay, I really want to go in the Foreign Service, I'll take my chances. I said okay, so you know, can't say you haven't been warned. So they did it and they scattered around and I finally checked later; not one of them ever passed the Foreign Service test so it was kind of an exercise in vain but anyway. You run into all sorts of interesting situations.

Q: Now your next assignment in September 1957 was Mexico City.

KESSLER: Yes, I was a regional personnel officer.

Q: How did you get that job?

KESSLER: Because I was already in personnel, I knew the right people. Oh later, later in personnel I was moved from this RRP thing to an assignments placement officer in the Department.

And we'd meet once a week and we made all the assignments. If you were in the Foreign Service and you're out in Bangkok and you're departing post because your assignment is finished, why we determine your next assignment. I didn't do it but collectively we did it but everyone had their own regional responsibility, you know, their own bureau. So FE, Far East, of course I don't know what it's called now, and EUR for Europe and ARA, of course, for Latin America. I had Washington assignments.

So anyway I was the Washington assignments officer but I sat in the same table and we all worked together. But of course ARA, if they particularly wanted you because they knew you spoke beautiful Portuguese and they had an assignment in Rio and you're the ideal candidate, they wanted to get you. But you also had a terrific record and they wanted you maybe to go to Tel Aviv and you had just exactly the type of background they wanted for this job in Tel Aviv and this guy would argue, say well, it's not all that important because he speaks- an awful lot of German spoken and this guy knows German, he passed his German, he knows his German so we need him in Tel Aviv and you can get someone else for Rio. And you go back and forth and then finally there'd be a vote of the group. I didn't make my vote, my vote wasn't in on this. And then of course you might say I want a Washington assignment and maybe there's a good reason. Of course usually you have good reasons. You know, if someone said I have to get back because my father is very ill and my mother is not in too good condition and I have no brothers and sisters and I really have to have a Washington assignment, so I could go in and I could get pretty much what I wanted because I could say now look; for compassionate reasons we have to give this officer a Washington assignment. Or he may come in, I particularly want to get a Washington assignment because while I'm in Washington I want to complete my work so I'll get my Master's degree at George Washington University. There would be a dozen good reasons so I could usually get anything I wanted so mine was a very easy job.

Q: That raises an interesting issue. Since the personnel system has changed so much over the years, how much influence did the individual officer have in identifying jobs or making his wishes known?

KESSLER: Very little. Very little. You could put up a beautiful argument for something; they wouldn't much attention to it. If they needed you in Rio and you had Portuguese and no one else particularly wanted you, you went to Rio. Now you may say I don't want to serve anymore in ARA. This is my fourth post in ARA. I want to get out of ARA. You'd go to Rio.

Q: And it was a fairly small group of people that were making these decisions.

KESSLER: Oh yes, just each bureau, each bureau. It worked because, of course, the Foreign Service is not very large. It's small, so in the assignment's process, each bureau was powerful, and I represented the Department. And I sort of said it, why don't you have different Department officers handling this part? And they said no, no, no, because

we're putting Foreign Service officers, we have to have an FSO in doing this. So okay. So that's what I did and that's true.

So, off I went to Mexico City and I drove to Mexico City and that was another big thing. Well, we've never had anyone drive to Mexico City before and I said why not? Well, we just never had anyone drive to Mexico City. I said well, I said by the regulations, if it's a paved road you're allowed to drive and you get your mileage paid. OK, then here's your new arrival date. By that time they had tightened up a little bit; they were free and easy before, now you sort of had to give a date certain that you really would be arriving. But they had no objection so, anyway, so I couldn't get anyone to go with me so I thought my parents might like to join me. So they did. So they came out on the train, we drove all the way to Mexico City, a lovely drive, and I sent out as regional personnel officer. I very conveniently got my orders to include consultations at a couple of consulates on the way, of course, and so we had a very nice trip.

Anyway, in Mexico at the time we had 11 consulates and the embassy made 12. So it was a big set up and still is. They've closed maybe three out of those 11; we still have a lot over there. Oh gosh, they're all over; we got Tijuana and (Nuevo) Laredo and Matamoros and oh, what's the one that does- what's the other one from- well anyway. And then we have Chihuahua and then we have Mérida and Tampico and several others. Anyway, at that time though we had 11 and there was 12 counting the embassy.

And so when I got in there the ambassador, who was Robert Hill [Ed: Hill served as ambassador in Mexico from July 1957 to December 1960], he said Earl, he said I know you want to get settled but you're single so it shouldn't take too long and what I want you to do is get settled a little bit and then start off. Now I want you in the course of the first year to visit every single consulate. I want you to spend at least- well, he said, there's some places there is only one man so he said I guess two days if you can do it.

Anyway, so he said I want you to visit all the consulates and I want you to spend as much time as you think you should. And he said and I particularly want you to spend considerable time in Guadalajara because there's a lot of problems in Guadalajara. And oddly enough Matamoros, there's a lot of problems there; oh, what a mess. And also in Mérida; they had a funny little consulate in Nuevo Laredo with (Ben) Zweig, Z-W-E-I-G as the consul and he was all alone.

Anyway, the ambassador was all over the place. There was Sonora. Mexicali, yes. Matamoros, oh that was a bad one. Oh yes, Smith, Merlin Smith. Merlin Smith was a very difficult man. He lived across the border in the States and he would commute every day across the border. He was the consul, all alone in Matamoros. Well, yes, he had a vice consul. I guess while I was there, at the time when I visited him, he was all alone. This guy might have been on home leave or something. Anyway. Smith insisted on flying the consular flag at his home flagpole, in Arizona there. And for some reason some guy complained and he wrote to the State Department and complained, and it wasn't right, who is this man flying this flag and this and that and the Department got involved and the embassy got involved and the ambassador got involved; I don't know

what in the- He said Earl, for God sake go and find out while you're there what in the hell is going on with this damned flag. So I explained to this guy, I said you're not authorized to fly the consular flag outside of the consular district and therefore your consular district ends at the border of the United States so you can't do it so just stop doing it and forget it. He wouldn't do it. He said by golly, he said it's my flag, I'm the consul, it's a consular flag and I'm flying it. He wouldn't do it. Oh, the mess we had. And then we found out he was cheating on all sorts of things and there was a big mess. Anyway.

So anyway, but we had a lot of problems in Guadalajara because the wife of the consular general was making overtures to some of the younger FSOs. You can't imagine the- you're in personnel, you think oh, it's nothing, you just fool around and fool around with some papers and so you have no idea of the problems. What a time we had with this situation with the wife and of course he denied it and some of the officers said it was terrible. Sitting next to her she'd be rubbing your leg and God, it's terrible, making overtures to them and she's the wife of the consul general. It was very awkward for some of these young fellows, you know. You can't imagine the problems. Oh, God.

And then he- and then he did terrible efficiency reports and he would just- everyone was just awful. And he would say well, at my age I'm still so many hours studying Latin or something and this officer isn't doing anything on the side. I can't see that he's improving his education or this or that and he'd mark them way down, mark them, just mark, everything was way down. He was- oh, he was terrible. And so- But the point is, he was the principle officer and you know, who would be reviewing? There's no one who could be reviewing the evaluation because no one ever went there. The ambassador had never been there. And then he said well you've been there, you be the reviewing officer. I said well I don't like to be the reviewing officer, I don't know really enough about it and I don't like it. If I say something against him why he'll say who is this guy refuting my- He was three days here or five days here. Oh, you know. So stay away from personnel. So anyway, that's it.

Q: At that time, we're talking the late 1950s, what did a personnel evaluation look like? You're saying there was a reviewing statement; did the officer have a chance to say anything?

KESSLER: At first you never knew what was being said about you, absolutely not.

Q: It wasn't even given to you?

KESSLER: No, no, no, no. You never saw it. Later, and they said you have to give a copy to the person. But that was much later. Now, what the year was I don't know but anyway it was much later. And then we got a copy of it- well, the damage was done. They'd give you the copy after they already sent it in. So then they finally having a special arrangement so finally every officer is supposed to sit down and discuss at least twice during the year the performance of the person that they review. And sometimes they did it; half the times they did or they'd say well Joe, you know, well I'm supposed to review; you're doing okay and any comments you have? Well no, and so forth. And

later they'll say all sorts of critical things about you and what are you going to do about it?

And so then they finally said now- and this is when I was in Mexico City, later, just at the end, the regional personnel officer- I mean the personnel officer at the post, it's up to him or her to review the efficiency reports and then to discuss it with the ambassador if you feel that something looks not quite right. Well, how do you know it's quite right? In other words, there must have been eight or nine consular officers there in Mexico City and I had nothing to do with what they did or what they didn't do and how am I to refute what the consul general said there? It put me in an impossible situation. It was a terrible situation, really.

And then later what they did and one officer did this to me, one of my bosses, he didn't show it to me; he just sort of read it. And it contained, some very, very flourishing remarks, this and that, and later you could look at it when you got back to the Department; well then it's too late by then. Anyway, I wanted to look at it and he- some of the things he said he did not put in my report. He didn't say anything bad about me but he said enough that I wouldn't get a promotion, let's put it that way. You know, you can say nice things but not nice enough. You can do that very easily.

One boss got mad at me, and I understand why, because - this is another post- he arrived and he said I come in every Saturday for a half day and I would expect everyone else to do it, and I said I'm sorry, I don't come in every Saturday morning. I said if something important, if something worthwhile then of course I'll do it, or if there's something I'm behind in my work and I have to get caught up yes, of course I will. But just routinely come in Saturday, I'm sorry I said; at that time I had, I think three or four kids, and I said I spend Saturday with my family. Well, he said, I guess other people have families too. So anyway, to make a long story short, I told him very emphatically a second time that he would not see me Saturday mornings unless there's something special. If there's something special, of course. So I got off to a bad start and from then on it got even worse. So I knew he wouldn't say anything very promotable. In other words he gave me a good report but 1,000 other people get good reports and they don't get on the promotion list. That's the way it works.

Q: Now in Mexico City assignment, you say there's about 11 consulates or consul general; how did you get around to- did you drive?

KESSLER: Well I'd have to fly. No, because I could have taken the train to- yes, I did take the train to- once I took the train to Monterey because they did have a fast train to Monterey but other than that it's very slow trains and they didn't have parlor cars so I didn't travel by train. But you could go by air; they had a good airline in service there and you could fly to major cities.

We had no consulate in Acapulco and one time for some reason I had to help- I'm always helping out someplace, you know. The economic section should handle fisheries things and for some reason the guy was on home leave and the other guy was sick or something

and so the head of the economic section, who was a really nice fellow and I liked him very much, he said Earl, could you help us out? He said there's a slight problem down there in Acapulco. Slight problem. Huh.

One of the American fishing boats was caught within Ecuadorean waters and there was a big flap. They ordered the ship into port and they confiscated the fish and practically confiscated the- took over the whole thing and I was supposed to sell that thing. Well it wasn't easy and you know, we were in the wrong; we were in Ecuadorean waters and they proved it. And I said well, you know, there's nothing that I can very much do and I said well, can't you let the ship go? I said look, this happens in the Gulf of Mexico every once in awhile, a Mexican ship goes into American waters and we work it out. And I said just because it's here in the Pacific, you know, why are you making such a big deal out of it? You know how fishermen are; they fish where the fish are, they're there and it's awfully hard to see where the international line - where your waters are - it's usually 12 miles, you know, but not necessarily. There's all sorts of gimmicks on that. So finally they agreed to let the ship go; they confiscated all the fish, but they wanted to put the captain and the crew in jail over this. I had a terrible time fooling around with that.

And so, you know- then I had, every once in awhile, a problem with a tourist with some big problem down there and I would have to go down. We had a fellow down there that was an American; he ran a hotel and he seemed to have some sort of a tie in with an American travel agency and he was very- he had very cheap rates and he'd get some real crummy people down there and then he'd have problems; he didn't pay his- he was responsible for paying taxes, he didn't pay his taxes, and I don't know why I had to get involved but I did. There was always something going on.

Anyway, I enjoyed it and after Mexico City, I got married in Mexico City.

While I was in Mexico City, they were very free and easy on your home leave address, the address used when your orders were written. Do you remember that? You could say anything. So I put down that my home leave was in Hawaii. You know, why not? And then somebody else telling me yes, but what if you're assigned, you know- that's okay but say you're in the Orient and they'll only take your wife so it's a risk. And I said well, I'll take that risk. I've already been in the Orient and I'll take my risk and so forth and so on. So anyway, I put the thing down. At first though they wouldn't pay for Hawaii so I put it down anyway, knowing they wouldn't pay but I knew sometime they would, they'd have to. And another fellow was- he was from Alaska and he said look, he said I stick with my home leave address in Alaska. Sooner or later they're going to have to pay. It wasn't fair. In the earlier days if you were in Alaska or Hawaii they'd only take you to the closest port, you know. They'd pay your way to San Francisco but then if you're going out to Hawaii you had to pay yourself. And to take you into Alaska, they'd take you as far as Bellingham, Washington, and from there you're on your own. So they finally changed those travel regulations.

So anyway, we had a honeymoon in Mexico- in a resort in Mexico. Later, on the way to the next assignment Baghdad, we took our second honeymoon because by that time it

was authorized to travel to Hawaii and since I was already established in Hawaii I took her on a beautiful Ambassador Line liner and we had a wonderful cruise both to and from Hawaii for our home leave.

Q: I'd like to cover a couple of things. In your earlier assignments overseas you said you weren't located even near the embassy. I presume now in Mexico City you're in the embassy, your office is in the embassy.

KESSLER: Yes, and when I was there we were in one of the taller buildings in Mexico City. But we did not have the whole building. The downstairs was Sanborn's, which was a very famous American company that moved in there in the early days and they had restaurants and gift shops and Mr. Sanborn made millions and millions and he finally sold out to the Mexicans but it was always called Sanborn's; it is today. You go to Mexico City and one of the biggest shops there in Mexico City is Sanborn's. Everyone speaks English, they sell the English daily newspaper there in Mexico City and all the Americans going to Mexico that do any research of any kind they'll know the Sanborn's.

Q: Now today's embassy is not in that location?

KESSLER: No, no, no. But they had that and then I was on the tenth floor, had a beautiful view, and the ambassador was two floors ahead, he was on the twelfth floor. And then on the very top we had a very nice restaurant and beautiful view and we had a lovely restaurant there, it was a very nice setup. And the beauty of it was, on the way out everyone stopped by for a drink you see; the bar was on the ground floor at Sanborn's because they had a nice cocktail lounge and all that sort of thing.

But every once in awhile- One case, one of the Marines- one of the Marines got drunk and he punched this guy in the nose and the guy happened to be president of the American Chamber of Commerce and I got involved, of course, because I was the personnel officer. I don't know why I had to get involved but I had to get involved. Oh, we have all this stuff coming up unexpectedly.

And then FSI (Foreign Service Institute) set up a special school down there in Mexico City. They're in another location. And so I had to handle that sort of thing and then they had this linguist from FSI come down who was a PhD in linguistic studies and all that and he had two assistants and they brought in people from all over Latin America for advanced Spanish, advanced, so you had to pass certain exam and then if you qualify for that you could go to this special school. And it was a three months course. It was quite a setup and they had all these local- national tutors and I had to get involved in that because of all the personnel issues.

One of the assistants, who is a good looking young fellow, he got one of the daughters of a very, very, very prominent family there pregnant and the two brothers announced publicly that they're out to shoot him dead on sight. So we had to spirit this guy out of the country. I had to get the air attaché involved. I said look, they're watching so we

can't get into the airport. I said we've got to sneak this guy out; because they had their own aircraft there.

Well, later the air attaché, who became quite a good friend of mine, flew the ambassador to one of the consulates where they overnighted. But the air attaché had too much to drink and he ended up in a whorehouse, overslept and the ambassador's trying to get out of there and we didn't know where he was, he wasn't in the hotel; we didn't know where. Finally found him in this whorehouse sleeping it off and the ambassador was furious.

The next day he called me in, this is Ambassador Bob Hill, he said he wanted me to listen to his conversation. So he got on the phone, of course he was a real politician, and he called the secretary of ARA, and hey, Jim, I don't know what the name was, hey Jim, this is Bob, I'm down there in Mexico, yes, yes. He said look, I'm having a little trouble with the air attaché. Can you just ease him out? I want you to send him orders so he's gone within the next 30 days, but have a finite day that he has to report into the Pentagon. He said, I want to get him out easily, no scandal, no this, no that, time for farewell parties but I want him out in 30 days and just, whatever language you use I don't care what it is, just get him out but don't give him any indication of anything, I just want to get him out, okay? Sure enough, it happened, by golly. Later I saw the air attaché and he said Earl, he said, by gosh I'm assigned back to the Pentagon. He said, I'm kind of surprised. And I said well, congratulations.

That's the way when the ambassador was a close friend of (President) Lyndon Johnson and Lyndon Johnson frequently had him up for weekends at his, very close friends. And later he was offered to be the assistant secretary for administration and he said oh, no. He said, I insist on being the ambassador to- I think it was the United Kingdom, as I recall. He was very prominent and his wife had most of the money but he wasn't that prominent so finally he had to settle so when he left Mexico he was the ambassador to Spain and later became ambassador to Argentina.

And then after Mexico we went to Baghdad.

Q: Now again, was this transfer under the old personnel system, you just got a letter one day, or had you been angling for Baghdad?

KESSLER: That would have been the last post I'd ever think of. The post I always wanted, you know, you could put down a preference of post; I always said I want to be the consul in Fiji. That was my choice. Because beautiful beaches, the consulate had a lovely sailboat and your consular district handled all sorts of these wonderful, beautiful South Pacific islands and that was my choice and as close as I ever got to Fiji was, I don't know, not very close.

So anyway, we went. Maybe six weeks before, on the cover of Time magazine, was a cover, flaming cover of the complete, what would you call it, anarchy in Baghdad. They murdered the king, they murdered the queen, they murdered the prince and there were four or five Americans, very prominent Americans representing oil companies that

happened to be there on business, their bodies were dragged through the streets of Baghdad. It was a terrible thing. And I get my orders for Baghdad.

I hadn't really told Martha where we were going because I didn't know where we were going. At this time I hadn't quite popped the marriage question; this is about, I guess, it was about two months before because I didn't pop the question until much later. Anyway, so you know, so finally I told her; I said we're going to go to Baghdad. Wonderful, she said, 1,000 nights in Baghdad. Well I said I don't know if we'll be there 1,000 nights but we're going to go into Baghdad; what about it? She said well it sounds like fun, so she was okay with it.

Q: Now you arrived in Baghdad on January 10, 1960?

KESSLER: Yes, that's right. It was winter. They needed me right away so I would have liked to have taken a ship but I couldn't. Anyway in those days going by ship was difficult because at that time regulations required you have to go on an American ship and there are hardly any passenger ships going into that part of the world. So I couldn't have done it if I probably wanted to.

Although there was some very clever ways to do it, because they had Point Four- do you remember such a thing as Point Four? It's an AID program which earned us local funds. That's how I got on this beautiful Dutch ship when I left India because I checked through the embassy and yes, we have some funds, and I said okay, I'm going to use X amount of Point Four fund to pay my fare from Ceylon to Naples. And they said yes, you could do it. It's technically, you know, you're alright. So that's how I got on that Dutch ship.

On to Baghdad we flew on SAS (Scandinavian Airlines System); they wanted to put me on Pan Am but I didn't like the routing there so I insisted on Scandinavian Airlines and we stopped off in Copenhagen on the way and there was a beautiful snowstorm and we had a wonderful time, had a great time. Then we arrived in Baghdad and I'm telling you, the heat, got off the plane and it almost hurt your nostrils it was so hot. My God. This is wintertime. Ooh. And little did we know what it would be later in the summer, but it was hot for us, anyway, coming from the snowy Copenhagen.

We were put up in the hotel, which I later found out were in the same accommodations as one of these big shots from New York who had been dragged through the streets. I never told Martha that. Anyway, we were in the hotel for, oh, at least a month, I guess. Finally we got a new house, a really lovely place, brand new. This guy was very clever; he was a very wealthy man, he had three new houses. Actually he owned another one but he had three new houses so he gave two to the American embassy and one to a Belgian businessman and the other one wasn't just a house it was a big area there and he gave that to the Soviet embassy and that was their commercial attaché's office. So he's playing all the cards, you know, so he's a very clever man.

Later he invited me to a special luncheon and so forth and so on. I thought that was very nice. Anyway, I went and I was seated there and of course in the old days the host used

place cards, you know, to seat people. You saw the seating chart as you went in, told where you're going to sit. You remember that stuff. So I went in and sat down; the guy on my right, he was from the embassy of Mongolia, guy on my left, he was from the embassy of Czechoslovakia, I think, and then the guy across the way was from the embassy of Cuba, the other guy around the way, he was from the embassy of Vietnam. And then another guy not too far away was from the embassy of North Korea. Now this guy was very clever; he put me around people I couldn't talk with because we had no diplomatic relations and our guidelines were if you meet them you could say hello, good morning, how are you, and move on; no conversations. That was our guidelines in the embassy because you were constantly running into some of these people, you had to. And so I couldn't say anything because this guy, he was very clever so he had all these people around me. I couldn't say anything so I just sat there. Because I couldn't talk to them because we had no diplomatic relations, it wasn't authorized.

So finally I was there and my wife and I received a very fancy invitation from the ambassador of Czechoslovakia. So I went to see the CIA station chief there who I had known earlier and we were pretty good friends, and he said okay, he said, you've got to go but he said, be very careful what you say and try to find someone that looks like they've had quite a bit to drink. And therefore he gave me a few things he'd like me to bring up, topics and so forth. But he said be very careful what you say, just don't you say anything and you can sound it out, and if he asks a lot of questions why, you can give him vague answers but nothing specific. And if he doesn't ask any questions he's probably just genuinely being nice, curious.

So off we went and of course we- you know in Baghdad in those days - they had no street signs. If you had an invitation you had to send a map to your house with your invitation so you would know where you are if they had no street signs. And if they did they'd be in Arabic anyway. So anyway, we got completely mixed up and then we finally saw a car that looked- it was a Škoda, I believe it was, made in Czechoslovakia, and it had diplomatic plates so we followed that. We said well they're going to this embassy so we'll follow that car. And went to this place and went in. There were people around sort of- music was playing and they were sort of playing cards and it seemed peculiar and people started looking at us. Finally a man came, he said, in English, he said may I help you. And I said well, and I showed him the invitation. Oh, he said, oh, for the ambassador's reception, oh. This is our recreation area. He said please, let me take you, I will take you, you follow me in my car.

Finally, we got to the embassy and they showed a film which was most interesting which was in English and it was terribly, terribly interesting. Later we had drinks and a lot of chitter chat and I learned quite a little bit to help the CIA guy. This guy was very outspoken and he'd had a bit too much to drink and he didn't ask me any penetrating questions; he just loved to talk and he'd talk about things and I talked about things. And my wife made sort of friends with his wife and later she got to know the wife because the wife went to the same hairdresser. So that was our experience in Baghdad.

My assignment in Baghdad was as consular and personnel officer. Well, the consulate in Kirkuk had just closed when I arrived; but we did have a consulate in Basra so I did have to go down to Basra and they did have a lot of personnel problems down there so I had to go down there quite frequently, Martha went with me at least once or twice.

During this assignment we had two kids born in Baghdad, but the State Department said you have to have the birth done in Beirut. Now, we had a doctor in the embassy in Baghdad so I talked to the doctor. I said for God's sake, I mean, women all over Baghdad are having babies all the time. Why do we have to go all the way to Beirut to have a baby? Well he said, whatever the regulations- I mean whatever the Department says you've got to go by. He stepped out of the way. So anyway, so we had to go two different times to have our two daughters born in Beirut at the American University in Beirut. And the same doctor that brought into the world the king that died some years ago in Jordan that was the same pediatrician that took care of the birth of our two daughters. And of course Beirut's a lovely place and we loved Beirut, they had a nice guest apartment for us.

Q: Here you are a personnel officer again; who was your immediate boss? And how big was the section?

KESSLER: Cary, Ray Cary was the admin chief. The personnel section had one, two, three, I had one American working for me and his name was (Michael) Dowling [Ed: who arrived at post in July 1961]. His father was the high commissioner, our high commissioner to Germany and he never let anyone forget that. Ambassador John Jernegan [January 1959- October 1962] was falling all over himself over this young fellow because he was the son of the really big shot; he was our high commissioner there in Germany. There was another fellow working for me but he was- he was- he was some kind of- very low rank, staff. But Dowling was an FSO and he was directly under me and I think we had four, five, six, six local employees, I'd say six local employees and they were all Assyrians; not Syrians but Assyrians. Our embassy, all of our employees were Assyrians except for one or two that were true Iraqis and one of those almost ready for retirement, actually retired while I was there and then the other fellow was the only one left. The ambassador said please do something; we've got to get some real Iraqis working for us, not just a minority. In those days the Iraqis really treated these Assyrians like second rate citizens; they really treated them because they were Christians and they didn't have any use for them, they didn't want them. But they couldn't get rid of them, there were just too many of them. So it was a very touchy situation.

We had a lot of trouble on the personnel problems anyway so I had to go down to see the head of the English department of the big university there and I asked him, I said Doctor whatever his name was, I said we really want to get some of your bright young graduates to work for us in the embassy because we pay very good wages. They don't have to stay with us too long, but it's wonderful experience for them, also an opportunity to polish up their English and so forth, blah, blah, blah. He said Mr. Kessler, you know perfectly well I can't help you. He said as long as you have your present Jewish policy there's no way a self-respecting young man would ever work for the American embassy. He said you are

such close friends with Israel, Israel is our- what is the word he used - devout enemy so a friend of a devout enemy is your enemy and therefore to young people here in Iraq you are an enemy and they'd never come to your embassy to work. And that's true. In the two years that I was there I could never get one Iraqi ever to work for us in the embassy.

And then I went to the foreign office and met the very senior officer there who I became very close friends with. Actually he bought my car when I left. At that time the Soviets had control of, I would say, they had pretty much control of the government. May be not quite, because we had Qasim, Qasim was the dictator and he was a very strong man and he resisted. And he resisted and I think the Soviets felt that they couldn't push it too much and so they had already infiltrated the foreign office, they had already infiltrated several of the other departments of the government and they were slowly but surely just in the process of taking over Iraq.

We saw Iraq a lovely, wonderful place. I'm very fond of archaeology so I really liked it there. Anyway, the point is that we couldn't do it; we couldn't go anywhere, you see, you couldn't. There was about a 17 mile coast and after 17 miles there they had a big barrier there with guys with rifles and everything and they'd turn you around so you had to have a special pass to get beyond that barrier. And there were very few roads going out of Baghdad in those days. So for us to get out we had to get special permissions and it had to go through the foreign office and it required a formal foreign office vote. You'd think you could have some sort of normal relationship, you know, and say hey listen, you know, we'd like to get a pass so we can go, you know. No, and you had to make a formal submission and you had to list the names of the people and their titles and their rank. I was second secretary and this man named second secretary, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then they had to have it something like five days in advance but then they wouldn't let you know, because you'd always want to go on a Saturday because we worked, of course, on Friday; they didn't but we did. But anyway, they wouldn't let us know until Friday late in the afternoon; there'd be a messenger come with the reply and very frequently they'd say permission not granted. So you'd make all these plans, then you couldn't go. So it was really- it was a hassle and it was really- it wasn't more- it was more than just an annoyance; it was really- it was a hassle, really it was.

And if you did get permission then you could go out and do your exploring. I was old-fashioned; I was using a shovel and doing all that. The Iraqi guide said the shovel mustn't. Here, take this stick, that's all you use. I said what do you mean? Oh, they said, anything you'll find around it will be no more than three inches below the surface and probably less than that so you just use a stick and dig. You just go around because it's constant shifting of the sands therefore you go to the same place and find absolutely nothing. You can go by the next day, exact same place, the next day you can go and you can find all sorts of things because it's a constant shifting of the sands so there's no such a thing as digging, no digs. That's a waste of time. And it's marvelous and sometimes I found coins and little things and so forth. Finally, I found one little seal and the curator of the museum said it was a Sumerian. It would have been worn by a princess in the Sumerian era there, a little seal she'd wear around her neck. I still have that one.

Nevertheless, there'd usually be a guy, every once in awhile you'd see a guy with a gun, though, and the system was if you found anything of any consequence you had to turn it over, you couldn't keep it. Well of course you'd keep small things like coins and fragments of pottery and things like that and my little seal was about as big as my thumbnail.

So anyway, they watched us all the time and they monitored your phone. So the guy, I guess would be busy or sleeping, you couldn't get through so then you'd have another number you would call to have your monitor activated to monitor your phone. So then you finally could get through, knowing he's listening to everything you say, of course. Well, one day, Martha was giving a recipe to one of the other wives about apple pie, I think it was, and she was going on, now you're this and then you shake two teaspoons of this and a tablespoon of that and whatever it was. Finally the guy says, excuse me, ma'am, excuse me, ma'am. I'm trying to get this down. I think my wife would be very interested. Could you repeat that list? So she repeated it so he got the recipe to take home to his wife.

Anyway, that's the way it was and you couldn't do anything on the phone because it was constantly monitored. At another time, a Spanish-speaking woman came and she was the wife of the commercial attaché of the British embassy in Baghdad. She was from Guatemala and had heard somehow that Martha could speak Spanish. So the two would get on the phone with this woman in Spanish and of course the poor monitor, he didn't know two words of Spanish and so oh, they had a big commotion and they said you've got to speak English. So they would do a little bit in English and then they'd go back into Spanish and of course the Iraqis thought they were both super spies, I suppose, but they'd just be talking about nonsense, you know, where'd you go to find such and such and what store do you think has this.

Of course the international mail was impossible to do anything very much, so we had an arrangement with the embassy in Beirut, which had a very small military set up there in Beirut and they had an APO. So you could send your mail to that APO address. Then somebody would have to go to Beirut, and there's always someone wanting to go to Beirut anyway, so once a week someone would go out and bring back the mail from Beirut. That's the only way we could communicate.

Anyway, the embassy there was brand new. When I arrived it was an old dilapidated place, terrible place, terrible place. But then we moved into a beautiful, gorgeous, gorgeous compound, which of course is in the green zone now, and just gorgeous. Oh, I'm telling you, of all the offices that I've had in the Foreign Service that was by far the most impressive, beautiful office. And the ambassador's office was outrageously impressive, beautiful, beautiful. And then we had a huge swimming pool, we had tennis courts, we had volleyball stuff and hoops for the basketball and we had the Marines, special quarters for the Marines and then we had another special quarters for the single secretaries that wanted to live on the- we wanted them to live in the compound. And beautiful residence for the ambassador, of course. Just a beautiful, beautiful place. So-

Q: Who was the ambassador?

KESSLER: John Jernegan, who was a career FSO, was there when I first arrived. Right off, they said well first thing you've got to go and present yourself to the ambassador. So I said oh, okay. And so I went in and the ambassador's secretary didn't seem to be there but there was another woman whom I later found out she was the DCM's secretary but I didn't know; I'd just arrived, of course. She said oh go on in, go on in; the ambassador's expecting you, I think. Just go on in. So I went in and I saw a little man there. Well, he wasn't little. He was very, very dark. Well, he could have been Irish- Iraqi on the street in the way of his color, and he was fiddling with his worry beads and so forth. And I thought oh my God, I guess I'm in the wrong office; that must be a local employee and I'm in the wrong office I guess. As I was turning around, I heard oh, Mr. Kessler, come on in, come on in. It was Ambassador Jernegan and he was a real, real Arabist. By God he spoke beautiful Arabic and he'd been most of his posts, I gather, in Arabic countries and he spoke beautiful Arabic but oddly enough his last post before going to Baghdad, he was as DCM in Rome. And he hated Rome he said. I said how could you hate Rome, Mr. Ambassador? He said I did not like any part of it.

So anyway, he's very informal so when I say we became very casual friends but since he was very much into archaeology I got to know him better than a lot of the others did because a lot of them had no interest in archaeology and we'd always go out together; I got to know him quite well. And he was and his wife was very nice.

So anyway, he would always be playing with these worry beads and it was just- it was very unusual and yet he was a very, very smart guy and he knew the Arabs and I think they respected him and he stayed there because I know we had a big 1,000 night party for him when he spent his 1,000th night in Baghdad and he was a very fine man. And so we had a good tour there and we loved our new home there overlooking the Tigris River.

Martha and I by sheer coincidence got to know the newly appointed minister for tourism. Did I said minister of tourism? There's no tourism, you couldn't get into the country. It was very difficult to get in the country. The average tourist could never get in because they make it so difficult. How could there be a ministry of tourism when there's no tourists? It's true there are some other Arabs that come in, the wealthy Arabs would come in, yes, that's true. But anyway I got to know this guy and to make a long story short he said oh, you ought to go and see Kurdistan; it's magnificent, he said, and so forth, and I said well I'd love to go and so forth. Okay, he said, I'll make arrangements, you go, but you've got to have a driver that speaks Kurdish- yes, Kurdish. So, one of our embassy drivers did speak Kurdish. He was Assyrian but he spoke Kurdish, thank goodness. And anyway, Martha and I took off and we got as far as Kirkuk and then we were followed a lot of the way but not all, not all. Finally arrived different places, found a very nice hotel which he recommended. It was amazing. And it was chilly, very chilly because it's high altitude in Kurdistan, it was very chilly. It's a very interesting country and this is not too far from the Iranian border. So anyway, and we stopped at a beautiful waterfall called Gali Ali Bag and so forth.

So anyway, we awaken the next morning and there was about four inches of snow on the ground. And he said I don't believe it. And it was Easter Sunday. How is it possible? Here we are in Iraq, supposed to be in the middle of the desert and sweltering and here we are, four inches of snow, and the driver had never driven in the snow in his life. Now, another fellow that came with me, because I wanted him along too, and so anyway we made it. We had to spend a whole day there. We couldn't leave because of the snow and then it melted and so forth. But we had a lot of very interesting times there and we were followed later when we got to Mosul, then we were followed and all sorts of things.

Q: The staffing of the embassy at that time was actually quite interesting. The DCM was Roger Davies, I believe.

KESSLER: Yes, he was later assassinated, you know, in Cyprus. He was a very nice fellow, a very nice fellow. When the ambassador left why I was standing next to his wife waving good-bye and so forth; she said well, she says my husband may be the chargé d'affaires but I'm the chargé des rabbits, because they left the kids- the Jernegans had two kids; they left the rabbits in the care of Mrs. Davies.

Q: Right. Holsey Handyside was there, commercial-

KESSLER: Yes. And he later became ambassador to- oh, I can't think, some small little country. And then later- I knew him off and on- then later I ran into him in the hallway there in main State and said what are you doing? And he said well you wouldn't believe it. He said they're assigning me to work on the new telephone directory for the State Department. And he finally resigned in disgust. I think they just wanted to ease him out and so that's what they did. They sure did a good job of it anyway.

Q: Hume Horan was there.

KESSLER: Yes, Hume was there. He was a junior officer and he was of course a terribly interesting man and he spoke Farsi, which didn't do any particular there in Baghdad but he should have been assigned to Iran, but he couldn't because his step-father was living in Tehran at the time so he couldn't have been assigned there. No, it was his real father, his real father was living there and his mother had remarried this guy by the name of Horan and so he couldn't go. So he was in Baghdad and he was a good junior officer, unlike the guy whose father was the high commissioner. But he was a good officer and he was moved around, as they did, you know, junior officer as his first post they moved him around and I think he was in the economic section more than any other section but I'm not for sure on that. Anyway, he later came back and Ray Cary liked him so much because he was an extremely nice guy and very brilliant, he assigned him to and got him assignment to Harvard to go to one of the special assignments there at Harvard and he got straight As, because Ray Cary told me about this later. He said you wouldn't believe it but Hume got straight As in everything he took at Harvard. Then he got his Master's degree if he didn't already have one; he may have already had one, I don't know..

Q: I understand the embassy community had a boat.

KESSLER: Yes, we had a boat and it'd take you cruising down the Tigris. And then one time it went ashore; it hit a sandbar. The people had to get out and at that time there was a group of people down there weren't terribly friendly and anyway it caused a lot of concern and everything and so from then on the ambassador said no more and the boat was never used again. And actually later it was sold because it didn't make any sense and I could see his logic. I think in the old days when they only had one bridge across, why maybe it could be used for security reasons to get people from one side to the other side or vice versa. But if it got to that point that boat wouldn't be of any use; the wind would take care of that boat in a hurry so it didn't serve any purpose. So anyway, it was sold. It went out of existence while I was there. I never took it but I remember one of my secretaries did and she said that it wasn't terribly interesting, she didn't think.

Q: Seeing the security situation one of the interesting things at that time, I believe, was Iraq was making threats against Kuwait. And in fact that led to Ambassador Jernegan's being PNG'd (declared persona non grata) later.

KESSLER: Yes, I- see, that's after my time. Yes, I'd left. But they were always having problems. When we first arrived, for instance, Iraq had no diplomatic relations with Iran but the largest setup for the embassy was the Iranian embassy, before the new U.S. embassy opened. They had a beautiful big setup and huge gardens and so forth. And I remember when I arrived the- one of the old time local employees said oh you ought to see it in the old days. They'd have all the lights going and they had some of the most beautiful parties and so forth. And no diplomatic relations so you never existed.

And then I went- I think I was there maybe a month or two and all of a sudden they broke relations with, I think it was Oman for some reason. I don't know why. And then they broke relations with Kuwait for awhile. But then they- later- and then of course they had this UAR, the United Arab Republic was Egypt and Syria. Anyway, then they broke with them. So awhile they didn't have diplomatic relations with them. And I remember distinctly there was a fellow I used to play tennis with who was with the Egyptian embassy there and he had to leave. And then they would come back. And then finally before we left they finally resumed diplomatic relations with Iran. And then there was a beautiful party given and we were invited, I don't know quite why. And oh, just gorgeous, my God, it was fantastic. It was a huge, huge area and they had it all lit up and this and that and of course the finest caviar was served, of course, and oh, I'm telling you.

Q: Now this was the post that you had the air conditioned car in?

KESSLER: Yes, yes. That's my air conditioned car. You know, one of the fellows, one of the fellows even wrote back to the Department a cute little memo saying that he took the temperature in his car was a hundred and twenty something and none of the cars in the motor pool had air conditioning; but one of the officers did! When I first arrived with my air conditioned car, the ambassador didn't have an air conditioning; but he later- he later- he got it.

And so anyway, day in, day out, day in, day out, the temperature during the day would be about 105 to 110 every day, every single day, all during the summertime, five, 10, sometimes up to 15 days in a row. Now, in those days they didn't have disposable diapers so Martha would have all these diapers so I'd help her. We'd go up to the roof of the house; they'd be, you know, wet, just pin them up to dry, all these diapers because at that time we had these two babies you know, and so we had these diapers. And then by the time we finished we could go immediately back and they'd be dry because of the heat and we'd just pick them up again and be absolutely, completely dry because of that heat.

But oddly enough- of course we had no air conditioning in the houses but the houses were beautifully cool because they had these air coolers they called them up on the roof. So they had this water, it would be fairly cold because it would be coming from underneath the soil, and it would not be warm water, and then this big roller thing circulated and every room had a vent, just like we do here for air conditioning and there they'd have a vent for the air cooler and the entire house would be cool and it was wonderful. And this thing would just keep going and keep going because the water would just keep going, cooling off. Now, it wouldn't be real, real cold like an air conditioner but it would be cool so it was pleasant, you know, absolutely pleasant and we would sleep always at least under a sheet, the hottest time of the year under a sheet and in the wintertime, of course, in the wintertime- we had a fireplace in our home in Baghdad and we'd have a fire in the fireplace in the wintertime of course.

Q: I would suspect that the diplomatic community is fairly small.

KESSLER: Yes, it was very small. And the Arab embassy didn't mix much socially, you seldom saw them. However, we did, of course, we have very close friends from the British embassy. The Italians had an embassy there but a very small one. The Spanish had an embassy there. I don't know why they had one; I could never figure out but they had one. Of course the Cubans had a good sized embassy there and I used to play tennis- I probably shouldn't have but I'd play tennis with this guy; we'd go way down and play tennis back of where everyone is, we'd separate, because he wasn't supposed to be playing tennis with me and I wasn't supposed to be playing tennis with him but he was a good guy. In those days I still remembered a lot of Spanish and he knew some English so we had some a good time.

Oddly enough the Yugoslavians had an embassy there. Why, I'll never know. The Yugoslavian ambassador was very friendly. He had spent a lot of time in California; I could never figure out why because I don't think the Yugoslavians would ever have a consulate in California. What he'd be doing in California I could never figure out but he had spent quite a long time in California and he spoke warmly of USC (University of Southern California). I asked him a lot; he knew everything about Southern California and definitely he'd been there. He'd taken some courses at USC and because of that I got to know him a little bit. The CIA station chief said that guy's a real mystery. He said we can't figure this guy out; why he's here we don't know. It doesn't make sense. He's not close, apparently, to the Soviet embassy. Of course you know the Soviets and the Yugoslavs were always bickering back and forth and Tito of course you know, he was a

thorn in the side of the Soviets. So we could never figure out why he was there and they didn't trace him at all. They don't know why he was there but he was very friendly and he spoke good English and well, that's it. He was there all the time I was there; he was there when I left.

And the Italians had a big contract for all the telephones in Baghdad. How the Italians got it I'll never know. And the telephones never worked properly. But anyway, the Italian embassy got it and they had all these technicians that would be coming down-coming all the way from Italy to Baghdad to repair the telephones. Well they were always in disrepair. So these technicians practically lived in Baghdad and the Italians though, by golly they got a big contract. They had all the telephones, entire system of Baghdad was done by the Italians and that made Holsey Handyside furious because he's commercial attaché there.

One of the guys though that was quite friendly was on the Lebanese ambassador's staff. I never knew the ambassador particularly but I knew one of the officers and they were quite friendly.

Q: Now you talked about having to go to Beirut for the birth of your children. What were the main communication connections with Baghdad? Who was flying in-?

KESSLER: In those days they were called MEA, Middle East Airlines, which was based in Lebanon. They had very good service and they had non-stop service to Beirut from Baghdad but unfortunately when Martha felt she had to go why, the plane was completely filled and therefore we had to take, I think Iraqi Airways because Iraqi had service, by the way, to London; Iraqi Airways had service to London. And one of the local employees in my section, actually, he at one time had been a steward aboard the flight to London and he knew London very well and of course he spoke very good English but he was Assyrian, not Syrian.

In this case we couldn't get a direct flight to Beirut, so we had to go to Syria first and then we had to get off the plane there, and then had a terrible time. The embassy hired a car for us and then we drove from Syria into Beirut. It was a harrowing trip. This guy, I think had been smoking a lot of that stuff and he- oh my God, didn't think we'd ever make it but we finally did. And then the administrative officer in Beirut was Ray Sena at the time, was a very old friend of mine and his wife served with me in Athens; she was an FSO but she resigned when she married Ray. You know, you probably heard about Ray; he was a very colorful picture. He was a senior Foreign Service inspector for some years. He died many years ago.

So anyway, that's about it, you know. So we had no trouble getting in and out of Baghdad. Later Pan Am came in. When we departed post Martha and the kids left first because Martha's father had just passed away and she wanted to get home and I was only two months short of leaving anyway so they got advance orders for her. So she and the kids got on the plane right there, Pan Am. Pan Am had one flight a week and it was just to show the flag and apparently they agreed to do it. The in-coming plane was almost all

empty practically; who would go to Baghdad, you know? Tourists couldn't get a visa, it was very difficult. And the Iraqis are very clever. You could not take Pan Am unless you were going to New York. You had to have a New York ticket. So you couldn't take Pan Am, say, from Baghdad to say, let's see, Beirut or say- take it to say Vienna. You couldn't do that. Or London; you couldn't do that. You had to have a ticket to New York and oh boy, they were fussy on that. And we had to get special permission and this and that. The ambassador was ill at one time and they medevaced him to Germany and Lufthansa did have a flight that stopped in Beirut just to Baghdad just to refuel and then it went on, I forget where.

Anyway, but oh, a lot of foreign office notes flying back and forth. They finally gave the American ambassador permission to take Lufthansa to Frankfurt for medical purposes. But they controlled it very carefully so if you wanted to fly anywhere in Europe you had to take Iraqi Airlines. Iraqi Airlines. Not MEA, Iraqi.

Q: So it was just a protectionist thing.

KESSLER: Exactly, yes. I took Iraqi Airways when I'd go down to Basra, there was no other way to get there, there was no highway or there was a trucking route but it was very precarious.

Q: Good afternoon. It is the 24th of April and we are returning to our conversation with Earl Kessler. We've finished a description of the embassy in Baghdad, and you left in early 1962. Your next assignment was to the consulate in Kobe-Osaka Japan and you arrived in May of 1962: In those days how was one assigned? Did you have any control at all? What exactly was your assignment?

KESSLER: Control over one's assignment, no, none whatsoever, no. In those days Consulate General Kobe-Osaka consisted of a main office was in Kobe and the sort of sub-office, which you might call it that, in Osaka. But later, because of the development of Japan, why, Osaka was becoming more or less as a Chicago of Japan. And Kobe was, well it was still the big shipping center but shipping was on its way out in those days, slowly but surely; very, very active port but still it wasn't the same old thing as in the old days.

When I arrived (Robert) Chalker was the Consul General. He loved Kobe and he was against moving the office but it was sort of bantered around in the embassy in Tokyo that probably it should be Osaka-Kobe because Osaka really was more important in many respects than Kobe. But most of the foreign business community lived in Kobe because it had beautiful housing and it was a relaxing place and it was right on the water and was just a very attractive place and a very lovely club and so forth, so that they would commute so that every morning there was a train and they had a special car. It wasn't restricted to the foreigners but you'd seldom ever see a Japanese in that car. All the foreign businessmen as well as some of the consulate people too that are assigned to Osaka, they would go over and they'd have their coffee and sometimes their breakfast on the way to work to Osaka and then they'd get off the train and work in Osaka and take

the train back to Kobe. But that was the routine. And the train took about 45 minutes, something like that, and to drive that distance would take an hour and a half probably. But the train went right straight through, non-stop practically; I think it stopped once or twice, very briefly, and the trains in Japan always worked just like the Swiss trains, right on time, and so that was the life.

Good old Chalker was from the old school. Every time a U.S. naval ship came through, he liked to board and so forth and so on, and he would get into his swallowtail coat and his striped pants, his top hat and he would go and he was quite a well known man and the naval officers just thought he was wonderful because they loved all that pageantry and loved doing it. Of course, the commanding officer of the ship, whatever the rank might be, he might be a captain, he might- and sometimes it was an admiral, wanted to return the call to the consular general and they'd always give him a plaque from the ship. Consequently the consular general's office was loaded with plaques, wallpapered practically, with these lovely and sometimes very interesting plaques from the various ships that called on us.

Clark left and I was called up to the embassy. This was before the new Consul General actually arrived. They told me, now look, you're going to be in charge of the Kobe office because the new consul general is going to be in charge of Osaka. Technically he's also in charge of Kobe but you're going to be in charge of the office because we understand the consul general doesn't really want to spend much time in Kobe. And so I said well I don't run around with a swallowtail coat and a top hat. I said, you know, really. And so they said no, this wasn't necessary, that he was the only one left that did it. Heretofore all the principle officers in all the consulates there where the ships would come in would have their top hats and all that.

So anyway, the new consul general arrived in July 1963, Owen Zurhellen. He said he didn't want to have much to do with Kobe and as far as he was concerned I was the principle officer since you're the senior consul; you're the senior consul so you're running Kobe as far as I'm concerned. I'll come over once in awhile when I have to. Well, he didn't come over very often because he was very, very busy in Osaka and his primary purpose was dealing with the big industrialists, you know. Mitsubishi, for instance, he had a good relationship with Mr. Mitsubishi and some of the others and he was concentrating on Osaka.

Osaka was a city that was twice the size of Kobe, probably three times, because I don't know they had definite borders but Osaka was quite a ways, though, from the water and the dock area was rather difficult to maneuver and not terribly attractive; as a matter of fact it was pretty bad. Most of the ships didn't stop in Osaka because it was more complicated for unloading their goods, picking up cargo and all that stuff. So Kobe was still the main port when I was there for that part of Japan. And they had a survey and they said that actually that Kobe was the most active port in all of Japan and second was Yokohama. However, Yokohama wanted to be the first and they challenged that and they spent a lot of time arguing over number of ships versus tonnage coming in and out. So I think Yokohama beat them in tonnage but number of ships was Kobe or something.

So, I was the senior consul there and I had a lot of dealings with the mayor but the mayor said I'm not about to receive these naval officers. I'm too busy and I don't want to be bothered with it. He also said the British navy came in there; every year a couple of naval craft from Chile of all places. We had the Indian navy come in; the Italian navy would get there somehow, and the Canadians. And so he said I haven't time for that and I'm not about to do it and the only time I'll do it if the top admiral of the entire Pacific area comes I will receive him. And that was Admiral (Thomas H.) Moorer, who later became the, oh, whatever he was called, the-

Q: You mean Thomas H. Moorer who served as Chief of Naval Operations (1967-70) and as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1970-74)?

KESSLER: Yes, yes. Admiral Moorer. Do you realize we averaged an admiral a month and I couldn't imagine how in the world could there be that many admirals; and then he explained that they had all sorts of these admirals that scarcely had been on a ship before. They'd been in intelligence, they'd been in all sorts of other, various branches but it had been some years that they had been on a ship. So they wanted to go out in the blaze of glory and said that they were a commanding officer of the USS Whatever. So they would come through there and they wouldn't be on the ship very long; they'd fly them to Hong Kong and they'd get on in Hong Kong and made the trip from Hong Kong to Yokohama and they had their farewell then and they had- it was because- they left being the commanding officer of the USS Such and Such and so forth and so on. So we averaged about once a month, and-

Q: Let me get this straight now. What is your title exactly?

KESSLER: I was the consul in Kobe. I was a senior consul so I was the one in charge of the office.

Q: And how many Americans were assigned to Kobe?

KESSLER: Well, we had one, two, two other consuls and one, two, three, three, I guess three other vice-consuls and we had a CIA office and that was about it.

Q: Now, this is 1962. How does one get to Japan in those days?

KESSLER: Well by that time they had passenger ships going and the American President Lines operated and of course they'd been operating for many, many, many years. During World War II they lost all their passenger ships; not one survived. Not one to my knowledge, only one slightly damaged but it was out of commission.

Anyway, they built two brand new ships; the President Cleveland, the President Wilson were beautiful ships in those days, absolutely beautiful, that put us on par with the ships crossing the Atlantic. Absolutely gorgeous ships. And they had a regular run from San Francisco to Honolulu, Honolulu to Yokohama, Yokohama, they would skip Kobe;

they'd go Yokohama, then to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Manila, Manila back to Hong Kong and then from Hong Kong they would go to- stop in Kobe, and then Kobe to Yokohama, Yokohama back to San Francisco. And that's how most people traveled in those days but you could go by air and Pan Am had service to Tokyo and then you could take the train from Tokyo. And in my case, when I went I took the ship across but they wanted me to have consultation in the embassy so I- I was there for awhile, about a week or so. And then I took the train from Tokyo down to Yokohama. And it was the bullet train; in those days it was the fastest passenger train in the world and it traveled up to 100 miles an hour in a few places. And it was a very unusual train; it was very sleek and very comfortable and they had a very fancy lounge car, a special car, first class car and I got a lot of fuss and bother because I said by travel regulations I'm allowed to go first class and they said well no one ever does it. And I said I don't care, the travel regulation, read them. So they finally had to cave in and so I arrived in that first class car. And by the way, by going the first class car I made a contact with a very, very important man there, in Kobe, and he was a great help in many respects, officially and unofficially.

Q: Now the consulate in Kobe, was it in an older building?

KESSLER: In Kobe we had a beautiful compound. We had, let's see, about one, two, three, four, about five apartments. This is new, after World War II, and we had a very modern building, which was two stories, and it had a basement. And on the ground floor we had the consular section and then upstairs we had, well the CIA was upstairs and I had my office upstairs and one of the fellows was political/economic so he had his office up there. And another fellow, he just did anything; he did most anything around. He was a junior officer.

Q: So everybody lived on the compound?

KESSLER: So everyone, no, no, actually. Over in Osaka, you see, they had the same number of people over in Osaka. So we had people scattered around but I would say, let's see, the consul general's residence about halfway between Kobe and Osaka, a little bit closer to Osaka than Kobe, but that was a very difficult area to live in because it was very old, established residential area, very hard to get property. But we'd owned that property for years, going way back to World War I days and very valuable property. But we in Kobe, we owned one, two, three homes, three houses, and then we leased a couple of others and so the lion's share of the people, even if they did work in Osaka they lived in Kobe. And some of them on the compound in Kobe.

Q: Now if Kobe's a major naval stop you must have had some interesting American citizens' cases?

KESSLER: Well yes, the political section was very busy because first of all, every time there's a naval ship there's bound to be some sort of problems. It's inevitable. I don't know quite why but it is. And therefore the consular section kept very busy. Some of the fellows would get involved in fights in these bars. You know, in any city, particularly a port city, you have these sleazy bars where the merchant seamen and the- types- of all

types from the ships, they get together and they get drunk and they fight over prostitutes and they- same old stuff, you know. And we had all sorts of problems and increasingly the amount of tourism. Tourists would come to Kobe- they seldom came to Osaka because there wasn't anything much to see in Osaka; but Kobe was very charming and had not far away an old magic castle, it had all sorts of things that tourists would be interested in seeing. Not too far away up in the hills they had a typical Japanese way of life and all the ryokan [Ed: according to Wikipedia *ryokan* (旅館?) is a type of traditional Japanese inn that originated in the Edo period (1603–1868)] are real. You know, and some of the tourists would particularly want to stay in a ryokan and they had them sort of a little bit nicer for the American tourists, a little bit more comfortable, shall we say, for the American tourist, not- not the- not the block pillows but a decent pillow that they could sleep on. They all, of course, all slept on the floor because they thought it was a big deal. And the ryokan were geared to taking care of some of these tourists and had- at least one person spoke some English. But if you go too far in the countryside, no one would speak any English, but it was very, very- lots of fun, shall we say, lots of fun.

Q: Now you were saying you dealt with the mayor a lot.

KESSLER: Yes. He was not anti-American but he was anti-nuclear and that was our problem and we were constantly having upheavals, not upheavals, that's an exaggeration- we were constantly having demonstrations, shall we say, against the Americans because of the nuclear thing. Hiroshima was in our consular district and naturally it would spill over and the feelings were strong. There was a political party there, I can't recall the name offhand, it was basically leftists and pro-communist, and the CIA people were sure they were getting funded from the Soviets. I don't know if that's really true or not but anyway, they seemed to think so. So we had a lot of demonstrations and a couple of times we had, I would say, two or three hundred people yelling, with posters and everything outside the consulate. And we had a wall around the consulate, completely around the consulate, compound in Kobe, completely around it, and with only two entrances.

By the way, on the compound we had servants' quarters and they had the baths for the women and it was a very beautiful. We also had a huge pond in the garden of the consulate compound and we had one of these beautiful, gorgeous, gorgeous carp, presented by the mayor of Kobe when the consulate was inaugurated, and the value of that beautiful- I would call it a huge goldfish but of course it was a gorgeous, very fancy name of a carp; they said the carp was worth probably, and this is way back of course, you know, but that those days it was worth at least \$1,000. Then they had all sorts of other fish and we had a bridge over the pond. We'd walk over the pond to get to work. So I lived in the down floor of a three bedroom apartment on the compound and I'd just walk over the pond to work. So it was very convenient.

But the demonstrations got considerably worse and then we decided, I don't know why, whoever it was made a big mistake. They came out with a first nuclear-driven vessel and of all places, sent it to Japan. I could never quite understand that. Any other place I think it would have been well received out of just curiosity, maybe, if for no other reason. But

it was not well received in Japan. And tried to make it so it was not military they had a group of American businessmen aboard the ship. It was not a naval ship, by the way, it was a commercial type ship, huge, I'd say combination cargo/passenger type of ship. Good size. And the businessmen, they would try to get groups of businessmen they could talk with and so forth and we'd try to arrange it for them and so forth and then they'd go from port to port. And in Osaka they did not stop. And in Yokohama, because of the huge military buildup, why I think the Japanese were a little bit afraid that you can do too much because there was a huge- a huge U.S. naval buildup and they couldn't get too close anyway, so.

But in Kobe, why there was nothing there. Militarily, we had a small little Army detachment down there. So that caused tremendous upheaval and at one time why, there were so many people outside. It was very difficult and so the- we didn't know quite what to do, but, of course, you batten down all the hatches. Finally I decided I'm going to see what's going on. So I had my senior Japanese employee there and I went down and I opened up the gates and I went outside and I said I want to speak to the head man there and so forth. And I did. He didn't speak any English but he said, well, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and I said well, I don't think so, let's talk about it, so I invited him in. And I said you can take two other people in with you, only- only two others. So he picked two others and so he came in. And I- and the CIA guy was furious with me; he said you can't- if you ___ open the door they'll take over the consulate, blah, blah, blah. Anyway, they never did anything like that and we had a very nice chat and I said I understand your point of view, in a way, but I said you must realize that this is not a military operation and so forth and in the advancement of science, blah, blah, blah, all that sort of thing. And well yes, and so forth, and I said anyway, what I'm going to do is, I'm going to submit all your viewpoints, and I'm going to submit it to the embassy and the embassy will in turn submit it to Washington so it will be considered in the highest of- in the high echelons of Washington. I can't do anything more here. And he said yes, he understood and so forth, and they read off something in a scroll and they left me the scroll. They did all that. So I said I'd appreciate now if you'd just quietly ask everyone to go home. And that's exactly what he did and it was all over. And that was the biggest one. It was in all the paper in Japan; I even have a clipping somewhere of it. Anyway.

That was the biggest anti-American thing but the official viewpoint of the municipal government was stay away from the military, the American military. They wanted our money because these guys coming in, they loved their money because they went to the bars, the restaurants and of course all the geisha houses and the this and the that. And buying souvenirs and they loved the money but they didn't like the idea because in many cases they still had relatives that were killed in the bomb that we dropped, you see, in Hiroshima. So I had to go to Hiroshima on business several times and oh boy, we had a USIS office there with a big library and so forth and an American USIS officer. He was a very nice fellow and he was there to try to placate things and the city fathers left, of course, one building standing as a reminder of the war and it's still standing to this day

And we had a huge atomic energy something or other, a very fancy name, and there were several Americans running that for research purposes and they would have the survivors

come in periodically and they would monitor their health to see the effects of radiation on these people. Some of them would die during the process and some would continue on and they'd give him his treatment if they thought they could do it. And then we had- I guess- I don't recall the exact number but we had at least, I'd say, six Americans down there and the director was very- a good friend of mine and I would always see him, and his wife was there and he was a very renowned physicist and expert of some sort. He was an MD and PhD and everything in the world. He was well equipped for the job and he was highly respected and we had that there all the time I was there and it lasted for many years. I don't think it would be there now because all those people would be dead. But it monitored these people until they died, really, of the effects and the- what this and that of the nuclear- of radiation effects on the human body.

Q: You're talking about the mayor. As the chief of the office in Kobe; what other Japanese officials were you interacting with?

KESSLER: Well first of all, from time to time we'd want to get special dispensations of things for the consulate. If you had a house, the rules were unless you must park your car off the street and not park it in front. And we finally got an agreement that those of use on the consular list would get an exception because we didn't have that many houses and it wasn't that big a problem but these houses didn't have any garages. And what would be these wealthy people, they would their garages miles away and they'd have drivers and they would go and get the car and pick the master up and take him to work and so on. But the average, you know, the guy there that's assigned to the consulate, he's a vice-consul but he doesn't have the money for all that stuff but he needs his car. And also I had to explain to him we have a duty officer and the duty officer has to have immediate access and the duty officer can be living anywhere; we take turns being a duty officer. And therefore, I said, you know, we have to have this. And I said yes, one thing is true but we don't have someone on duty all the time and if something happens in the middle of the night, something, why, we don't have any driver on duty in the middle of the night in the consulate. So it's not like he can just lift up the phone and have the consulate send a car to pick him up. That's one of the things we had to deal with. Finally, we got that out of the way.

And then there was that business on taxes. If we were on the consular list, just like an embassy officer on the diplomatic list, why we were okay, exempt from taxes. But we had administrative staff, American administrative assistants and consular assistants; we had code clerks in Kobe. They weren't on the official consular list and the Japanese didn't want to let them have duty-free privileges. And of course there was a technicality and you know, they had a good point and all that, but I had to explain to them, I said look. It's kind of ridiculous and what you're doing is you're confining the consulates and they're going to have fewer and fewer people because most people won't want to serve here. And you want to have consulates here, you want to have the international presence because that's what Kobe's all about. And then I'd go through all this. Finally we got it but it took six months, I guess, after I arrived.

Q: It wouldn't be something the embassy would negotiate?

KESSLER: Well in those- No, the embassy didn't get involved in that. No, they didn't- they didn't get involved in it. I discussed it. Well actually Howard Mace, who was the Consular for Administrative Affairs at the embassy in Tokyo, was a very, very- He was the, probably the second highest person in personnel in the Department before he came to Japan. Howard Mace technically was my boss when I was in personnel in the Department, over two different assignments there. I only saw him once in a great while because he was head of the whole works there. But he was the admin consular there and so forth and- but I didn't know him and he was very friendly with me, I must say. But he said well, they don't need duty-free privileges in Kobe- in Tokyo, yes. In Tokyo, there they had, my gosh, they had- You've been to Tokyo haven't you? You know what they have in Tokyo. Why, you don't need to ship things in from the States; they've got everything right there, my gosh. And also, they have the big- big FPO (Fleet Post Office) and then APO (Army Post Office), and we didn't have any APO or FPO in Kobe. And he said it's not a big deal. He said our secretaries come in, they don't have an awful lot of stuff and they don't carry a lot of furniture around with them.

Q: You notice he's working off the military supply.

KESSLER: Yes, and they have a huge com- huge warehouses there where they have furniture, they have- you name it, what they have. So the problem didn't exist in the embassy in Tokyo because Tokyo was a very unusual embassy because it was so large and it had everything, you know, there're vast apartments there and it was a big difference.

Q: You mentioned one of your staff people was a communications guy; what kind of communications did you have? Were you confined to just sending classified to Tokyo or could you send classified to Washington?

KESSLER: No, I don't think- I'm just trying to think; we didn't send anything that would be highly classified without going through the embassy. But we did have- And also I think the FBI got it; it said mark- most of the classified stuff, actually, out of Kobe. He was a very active person and politically, oh, there was only so much you could go on the political side because the student organization is well entrenched and everyone knew who they were, there was no secret about it. They were constantly putting articles in the local papers and there was no-

Q: So let me ask you this: what was the most important reporting that was coming out of Kobe?

KESSLER: Shipping. Shipping. And related to shipping, of course, was the inauguration of Americans putting their factories in Japan. So we had the Arrow Shirt Company putting in a big setup in, well, it was between Kobe and Osaka. And I got to know the head of the- well, there were two Americans but I knew the head of it quite well because I helped him with a personal problem he had there and he was a bachelor and I had him over for lunch occasionally and Martha knew him. And he would have me come

over and he'd say, now, I'd like to see our operation. I wanted and I brought one of my officers- the guy that was sort of doing some economic work, he was sort of the economic officer; I had him come with me so we could see what was going on. It was very interesting. All the equipment was shipped in from the States. At that time a good deal of Arrow shirts were made there in Japan and they could make the shirt, he told me, make the shirt there about 40, he said about 40 percent cheaper than they could make it in the States.

And then JC Penney moved in and set up. And then, oh, Clayton something or other, a big place called Clayton something, and they- what in the world did they do? They're from Texas and they moved in, I think five families, as I remember big operation there and they had something to do with textiles and furnishing wool to the Japanese. I think they were in the wool and textile business as I recall. Big operation. And Clayton something or other. And their headquarters were somewhere in the Southwest; I think it was Texas or something like that. But they located strictly in Osaka, and they had their own compound but it was, there again it wasn't really in Osaka. Osaka was a place that you didn't live in, you went to work there, you didn't live there. And they had their own compound though and they had some very desirable houses and after awhile why, one of the families was going to leave and the head of the operation there was telling me that he didn't know if they'd be replaced, and I was trying to get one of those houses for the consulate. But he said no, he said we've got to hold on just in case. He said housing is so scarce, and I could never work out anything.

Then we had an American in- who was there; he was the honorary Greek consul was an American citizen, of Greek extraction, but he was an American citizen. There were only two Cadillacs in Kobe. The dean of the consular corps, who was the Peruvian consul general, had one, and the honorary Greek consul had the other. And the CIA guy was absolutely positive that this guy was involved in something because he lived in a very- and he was living with a Japanese girl but he had a very expensive home there and he had this very late model Cadillac which cost a fortune because the Japanese, you know, were trying to promote their automotive industry and they really charged tremendous, something like 200 percent, taxes to bring in an American car so they didn't want any American competition, they wanted to sell their Toyotas and their Nissans and their- and the head of Honda I got to know a bit and the headquarters of Honda was down there in Hiroshima, close to Hiroshima actually, not within the city, and in those days they made a three-wheel car and that's how Honda started, as a three-wheel car right after the war. That's what sold like hotcakes and they made lots of money off those three-wheeled cars; they were scooting all around the place. And they were pretty clever and a lot of the Americans wanted to ship them back and I would tell, if they wouldn't ask me I would tell them, look, you can't bring them in the United States, they won't pass our standards, our emission standards and so forth, you know, but some of them did anyway but a lot of them didn't know, they really didn't know, particularly a lot of the women on the cruise ships. Oh, look at those cute things, I'd love to get- And then a fast talking Japanese would sell them one, we'll ship it for you, X number of thousand dollars and we'll deliver it, and they'd have this wonderful car, little three-wheeled car delivered but they couldn't use it because it wouldn't pass any of the emission standards. Typical.

So anyway, that's many of the cases that we did. We kept very busy and as for the communications every once in awhile we'd hear something very interesting about this leftist organization. We would simply report it to the embassy and every once in awhile the director of the atomic health situation down there, he would pass on some information to me which I would pass it on to the embassy, and I would send it classified because it really was classified. So the code clerk kept very busy. He was also a very busy guy; he was single and he had an apartment in the compound and he caused a lot of commotion because he was constantly bringing in these Japanese girls that he'd pick up in the bar and have them stay a week or two with him and the wives would go down sometimes if their maid was busy also, they'd come down to throw in something in the communal washing there, you know, what do you- laundry mat, you might call it, and they'd see this girl, you know, and they'd think she was a maid and certain hours the maids were not allowed to do that, only for the Americans. And some of these girls would get real mad because they'd talk back to them, they'd say I'm not a maid, and so forth. And this guy, he caused a lot of commotion and he was but a likeable guy.

At one point we had a fellow from the Department of Interior come and he was going to be advising on some irrigation construction work in our consular district, but he had a lot of reporting to do and some of his reporting he wanted to send it back classified. And he said I- he said it's not national secret or anything but he said I really- we need it to go classified because it's important that we do this. And I never saw what it was so I really don't know what it was but we took his word for it because he was a GS-15, as I remember, and he was a very nice man. And he would get his mail from the consulate there, he'd come in once a week, and then he would have a- have his- he was constantly on per diem so he made a lot of money and he would send in his stuff and we'd help him get some of his stuff sent to the embassy in Tokyo because apparently there's an office in Tokyo, I guess, because he sends a lot of stuff to Tokyo.

Q: Now during this time what responsibilities did the office in Osaka have?

KESSLER: Well, I guess strictly business because as I say, most of the guys lived in Kobe and worked in Osaka. There was every conceivable outfit and- I'm trying to think which- we had a- we had the Bank of America in Kobe but they had Chase Manhattan in Osaka and we had a very small little Bank of America in Kobe, very small but Chase Manhattan had a big, a big, big bank in Osaka. And when they had an international trade fair, this was The International Trade Fair, not just a local international trade fair, why it was held in Osaka. All sorts of regional things would go on and they'd be headquartered in Osaka and the consul general, Zurhellen; he was a very, very accomplished linguist. He was a Japanese language officer and he was a Marine officer during World War II as an interpreter. And other than that, why, he wasn't very popular and he hated the Navy, hated it with a passion, absolutely hated it with a passion, that's why he would never go aboard ship. That was another thing. All these ships coming in; you'd have to go and be piped aboard ship and then you have to- You've seen that, have you? Were you in the Navy at all or-?

Q: I've seen the movie.

KESSLER: So I go aboard and am met by- and they're announcing you as the American consul. Then another guy comes and he takes you and then you meet the executive officer then he takes you in to see the admiral or the captain. And then you- and he serves you coffee and you talk and the captain was all this and this and this and this. And some of them are very nice about it and we do what we can. And some of them expect just all sorts of things which we couldn't do or we wouldn't do and I developed, though. Some of them kept coming back and coming back and I would develop very close relationships with some of them.

And finally I got more out of them than they got out of me because we were having all sorts of problems with the consul general's home, the whole heating thing was collapsing and this and that, so this guy said oh. And I said look, there has to be something we can do. You've got people aboard. Oh yeah. He said I'll send some of my men over, and they sent them over and they fixed the whole thing, you know. And then we were having a big something or other in the consulate and we wanted to serve typical American ice cream but you know, we couldn't get anything. Local ice cream was good but it wasn't typical American ice cream. Oh sure, then my God, there were containers like this full of ice cream. And they'd give us- And every time they'd come in they'd give us the latest movies with the idea that we had to show them right away so we had to return them before the ship left. So whenever the ship is in, it's movie night! We got all the latest movies.

Mostly we had a good relationship but some of them were very overbearing and I remember one admiral coming in and I sat down and I hardly just got sat down he said, well I want the following, let's have them done while we're in port. And he started reading them off. I said Admiral, one moment. I said we can't do any of that except this; I could do that. What? You know. And he said well I want to have it a dance organized and he said I want to have young women to show them- my younger officers to dance with and have a social thing. I said Admiral, there are only two single American or- not Amer- foreign women in Kobe to my knowledge, and it's a small enough community for a community you'd get to know there are only two and one of them is already engaged to another guy, another businessman there, and the other girl was not in Kobe at that particular time. Even if she would have been I know she wouldn't have done that. And I said Japanese families would never allow their girls to do that. It's just- it simply isn't done. They're not anti-American but they wouldn't want to do it and we can't do it. However, I said, we could arrange maybe something for the sailors because there is a girls' school here, kind of like an equivalent of a junior college or something there, the girls' school, and maybe, if it was properly chaperoned and the dance was in their school, maybe it could be arranged. I said I can't promise but maybe.

Well, he was more interested in the officers than the enlisted men of course. Then he wanted this and he wanted that and I- and he said I want the- I want to have a party for the officers because some officer was retiring, I guess, and he's executive officer or something. So I said okay, I can do that. So I knew the head of the Kobe Club, which is

the club there, old English club in the old days, of course, but then they had to break down and allow Americans because there weren't Brits left to keep the thing going but I was told in the early days before World War II that Americans weren't particularly encouraged to join the club; it was very difficult to do. Very, very British.

Anyway, he said well okay. So we arranged it and what a mess. These guys came in, they were all officers, and they got completely drunk and the place was in shamble and I went up there and really- and they were dancing with one another, they were completely drunk. What a mess. And that's the last time I was ever able to get any party, anything for the Navy in the Kobe Club because they ruined it. They had a good party, I guess. I don't know if they ever remembered it, to think about it, but anyway. What a mess. And so, you know, some of these fellows wanted everything and they wanted- One admiral said we have groups that do football and was there another football team in the area and I said they don't play football here in Japan. However, I said, they do baseball; do you have a baseball team? No, I don't have a baseball team aboard. Well. And someone would want something else and a lot of it was- what is- women, of course, and I said you know, I said we're- I said the consulate is not in the pimping business.

Q: You sound more like the concierge at the hotel.

KESSLER: Exactly, yes. Well anyway. But you know, but some of them were very nice and some were really very nice. And some of them would be repeats and they weren't the admirals. Some you'd see an admiral twice. But some of the others would repeat and I got to know some of them and they were very nice. And they'd invite Martha and myself and sometimes they'd say bring another couple, and I'd get various couples, Americans in the business community to come along.

In the shipping industry, of course we had the American President Lines, we had the States Line, United States Lines; they're the ones that ran the big United States- the America Across the Atlantic, you know. They had a huge fleet of freighters and then they had another line that I can't think of the name of it and of all places it was headquartered in Portland, Oregon, which of course is where I was raised. And I have pictures in the Foreign Service magazine of the captain there and myself and Miss Kobe on the inaugural visit of this big special, special freighter. And it was in the Portland newspaper, the Oregonian, and all that stuff.

Q: Now, during this tour in November 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated.

KESSLER: Yes, and that caused probably a complete week of the consulate being closed, practically closed because we were working full-time on that. It was a tremendous situation. We had the condolence book and it got around and so the Japanese, we had at one time a line about two city blocks waiting to sign the condolence book.

Q: Now, how did everybody hear about it in the first place and-?

KESSLER: I think in the press. In Kobe, you know, there was a local English language newspaper and there were two Japanese papers so there were three papers there, daily papers.

Responding to the assassination was sort of an “in” thing, I think, to do. And also the wealthy sent flowers. All of a sudden, my God, we had flowers, beautiful baskets, beautiful displays, wreaths, my God, and we didn’t know what to do with them. So everyone take something home, you know; we simply didn’t know what to do with them. We had a big sort of a van thing, they didn’t call them vans in those days, they called them carry-alls, and I’d stuff this carry-all with nothing but flowers and send it to the local hospital. Then I’d think, who else could I send it to? And then I sent it to well, a large school where some of our staff had gone to school there so I sent it to the school. Oh yes, I sent it to the- to the- every consulate, the head of every consulate. The Peruvian Consul General Osario, his name was Osario; he was a very close friend of mine and he was the dean of the consular corps, and he said I think that was the nicest thing for you to do; he said did you do that? And I said well I thought it would be nice if everyone had some flowers so I- I didn’t know what to do with them but I couldn’t, you know, what could you do? And then of course we had to meticulously record the names of the donors.

Then we had to get a form letter and I said, you know, it would be nice if we could get the ambassador to sign all these things, because he was very well known, Ambassador Reischauer was very well known in Japan. So I talked him into it so finally yes, and they had a stamped that they stamped his name on all these things. But they were very pleased that the ambassador stamped the things and appreciate their-

We had to have a special mass and since Consul General, he said I’m not getting involved in this thing. He said the Kennedys are Catholic and I’m not Catholic and I’m not getting involved. He said you- And I said I’m not Catholic but my wife is. He said get Martha. We finally dug up a Catholic priest that I didn’t know existed. Anyway, and so we had this special mass? And I said I don’t know, just the top mass you got. So we had a mass and a special thing and boy, it was a- And he said I’ll need the biggest church in town. So I forget which is the biggest church was there and I had to talk that guy into letting this service being held, I forget what this church that was, some sort of Lutheran or something or other. And so then we finally got the church going and we got- and it was a smashing success though. The Catholic priest did a very fine job and he was a very nice fellow and we had a good service and we had wild, lots of press coverage, you know. The Japanese were fascinated with this whole thing and then they were very saddened by it too, very saddened by it.

And then we thought well, finally, it’s over. But there were two women and the anniversary. Every single month on the anniversary they’d send a huge, big blob of flowers. We didn’t know what to do with it. So I talked with the head of this- his name was Wabanabi-san; I said what are we going to do? Well he said you can’t- there’s nothing you can do, you have to accept them. My response was, I don’t like them to waste their money on this because you know, it’s not as if the president was buried here.

We could send them to a cemetery. What do we do with these flowers? And they're terribly expensive, those flowers, oh terribly. Well he said, you're just going to have to accept them because you just can't do it. They'd be insulted if you told them that you really thought this was unnecessary because they'd take it the wrong way. And I said if we explain that maybe we could, instead of having them buy the flowers and sending the flowers that they could make a little sort of a special donation and we could in turn give it to some poor charitable organization? No, no, he said that wouldn't work, no, it wouldn't work. So every month and until the day I left we received these flowers; and these of course are very wealthy Japanese. The money wasn't that important to them but the point was- And then- And I felt badly. Finally Martha had a lot of flowers. And the Japanese, you know, they're so, you know, individually they're so gentle, they're lovely, gentle people but try to get on a crowded train and they'll elbow you out of the way and they'll do everything and they're the rudest people on the face of the globe. They're completely different people when you get a mass group of them than when you get them individually.

Q: Now, talking about the way the American mission was organized in Japan, I presume from time to time all the consul generals would be invited into Tokyo for conferences or to seek out ambassador. Did you go to those or did the consul general of Osaka-?

KESSLER: Yes, there would be Tokyo meetings, but I would not go unless Zurhellen didn't want to go. Anyway, he- oh, he was very- oh, he rose to the top because of his language ability. He was not very well liked; he had a very difficult personality. The Japanese detested him and- but he was, oh, he brown nosed the ambassador.

He later became head of the political section. I think he later became DCM in Tel Aviv. But I give him credit, he spoke quite good Japanese and he was an unusual man but not- he was not Mr. Personality and he just- he was constantly correcting the Japanese and that irritated the Japanese and he was not popular. Later, much later on an inspection trip I went to Japan and they- we were talking about him and they said oh, the dishonorable consul general. Good gosh, he really had a terrible reputation. But the ambassador thought he was wonderful and so did the DCM; they were old buddies and so forth. Later Zurhellen became the ambassador to Suriname [Ed: March 1976-June 1978] and, I was told this, that they offered it to about five people and finally Zurhellen, he always wanted to be an ambassador so finally he took the job. What a terrible place, I can- I've been to so many posts all over the world but I can't think of a post that's- has absolutely nothing going for it is the post there in Suriname. But he was the ambassador there.

When Andrew Young, the ambassador to the United Nations, apparently he went to some of the countries that no one else ever went to so he went to Suriname. This is what I've been told by two different people there on the ground there. I was not there. Anyway, Zurhellen apparently had them out for a reception, Andrew Young and a couple of his party, had them out for a reception and across the road a huge sign, "Mr. Young," or something, "Please remove your ambassador."

While Zurhellen was a very unusual man; his wife was the nicest person in the world. Anyway, that was the situation. Zurhellen, he died years ago and I think that he accomplished certain things. He was a smart guy but he was- he was- for instance, conference of mayors from the western part of the Pacific, you know, Oregon, Washington, was held in Kobe and I think the mayor of Portland was there, the mayor of Seattle was there, the mayor of, I think it was either LA or San Francisco was there and there was another mayor, maybe San Diego, and that. And Zurhellen, Zurhellen was very- not very social, shall we say, so he didn't want to have any part of it. And so he said well, this is what you're going to do though, because he was always deciding what-everything should be done and sometimes we'd do it, sometimes we wouldn't but anyway. And his idea was to save money he was going to serve drinks that was Jell-O. Jell-O; you know, you put this water with Jell-O and it's liquid and put it out in a big bowl with lots of ice-

Q: You mean Kool-Aid sort of thing.

KESSLER: Sort of, yes. And that's what he served as a punch. And God, it was awful tasting and these guys wanted a good drink, you know, they'd been out and most of them didn't like sake and they, you know, they wanted- And oh, what a mess it was. God, it was something.

The sister city of Seattle was- the sister city of Seattle, what was it? In those days sister cities were very important. Oh my, it was a big deal. Kobe, I think, was the sister city of Seattle, as I recall, and the sister city of Portland was Sapporo; there were other link-ups. Anyway.

They had another thing on the sister cities and then we had- governors came through and Governor Hatfield of Oregon came and I have a picture of that. It was also all over the paper and my father said oh, I opened the front page and I saw your picture with Governor Hatfield. Anyway, Hatfield came and he spent about three days in Kobe and he said I'd like to go up and see Kyoto and all those things and so I arranged it and I went up part-time with him and then I sent a couple of the local employees to go with him, and he said I don't- he said I don't want you to take a lot of time, and I said well I can assign someone else. No, he said, just leave me alone, I'll be fine. And so he was there and he was deeply impressed with Kyoto and the shrines and all that and he was- Later I ran into him in Seaside, Oregon, and he remembered me and we chatted and so forth. He later became a senator, of course, and he always said look me up, I never did because I didn't have any particular reason to do so.

Q: Did you have any interaction with Ambassador Reischauer or his DCM, John Emerson?

KESSLER: Only once when he came to Kobe. He came to Kobe and the Japanese American Society, which headquartered in Kobe, not Osaka. The real power, it was true, Zurhellen was right; the real power was Osaka because that was the Chicago of Japan, it really was.

So the Ambassador came down and I had to go with the head of the Japanese-American Society, I knew him fairly well, and he was the head of the Bank of Japan in Kobe. He had been some years in Sydney with the Bank of Japan and he spoke good English. And he arranged a lot of it too - actually he did more work; I didn't do much on it. So Reischauer arrived and he had with him his interpreter. So anyway, Reischauer got up to speak and he spoke in English and well, they just couldn't understand it. But, everyone just assumed that the ambassador was speaking Japanese; it was just- it was an assumption, you know. But they spoke in English beforehand a bit because a lot of the people there didn't speak Japanese; they were a member of the Japanese American Society but they didn't speak Japanese and a lot of them, I'd say 75 percent of the big shots there did speak some English in the Japanese American Society.

So the next day he was invited to speak to- with the, what was it? Some other organization there. What was it now? Something- I can't think now. It doesn't make any difference but he was asked to speak a second time, he was only there two days, he spoke one day and then another time at this other place, and that was strictly Japanese and they asked him to- they said please, the head of the organization there, the Japanese American Society said Earl, he said look, please explain to the ambassador he'll have to speak in Japanese because most of the people there will not speak English or would prefer to hear it in Japanese. So I relayed that to the executive assistant of the ambassador, whatever he was. So anyway, so he- he'd get going and then he'd stop. Duh, duh, duh, duh, he'd correct the interpreter. And then he'd go no, no, no, no. Oh, he was very- he could be a little bit- well, he was a former professor and I think he treated his interpreter sort of like one of his students. My God, if his Japanese is so good he corrects his interpreter, you know, but he spoke a little bit, not very much in Japanese. And later I was told, this is what I was told by the guys in the embassy because I didn't- I didn't really have frequent contact with him. On this trip I had a lunch with Reischauer with the consul general, Zurhellen and myself and head of- head PAO (public affairs officer) and we had lunch together and with him was- with him was also someone from the embassy, I forget who it was. So anyway, that's my only connection with it.

But apparently, this is what I heard from the guys in the embassy and I think they must know, he explained that Japanese is so difficult and he doesn't- and in his position as American ambassador he cannot make the slightest grammatical error, therefore he feels he has to speak in English. But of course they said that's ridiculous because the Japanese are so pleased to have people speak in Japanese and they wouldn't- they would just assume he'd make some slight little grammatical errors, it would be normal because Japanese is a terribly complicated language. My gosh, for a Japanese language officer, you know, they go so many months in Rosslyn [Ed: site of FSI language school] and then they're assigned to FSI's Yokohama Language School. Then they're in Yokohama for, I don't know, six months, nine months, and they're not supposed to speak a word of English unless they absolutely have to. And then they come back and I've seen these young fellows come back; we had two of them in Kobe and they- I'd say what's he saying, I hear something on the- Well, we can't quite follow as he speaks too fast. It's not easy. They said- He said we can read it much easier than we can speak it but yet he

said you know, so many characters; it's a terribly complicated- But he said you know, we keep studying characters, characters, characters, and it's never ending.

So anyway, Reischauer was very popular though. His wife, you know, was Japanese and he was very, very popular and everyone, though, couldn't understand why he didn't speak more Japanese since he was so well known for it but since he was internationally famous and Kennedy, of course, had apparently- I don't know if this is really true but I heard about it several times, that Kennedy was- had him- he was- Kennedy was in a couple of his classes and that's why he got to know Reischauer and then when he became president he said that's the man for Tokyo- that's the man for ambassador of Japan, which I think was a very good choice. And he- I think he did very well but of course I was not in Tokyo but from all reports I think he did very well.

Q: Now the officer in the embassy that would be looking administratively at the consulates would be the DCM, John Emerson. Did you-?

KESSLER: No, not really. The guy that was in charge of all the consulates was the consul general in Tokyo and he had; he was a regional consul general; his title was consul general. He was the regional consul general for all the consulates in Japan and for the life of me I can't remember his name now. A very nice man. Every time I'd go to Tokyo he'd always take me to lunch. Very nice man, and when my parents came to visit me in Japan why he said now look, he said if you let me know when they arrive we'll help them out. He said you know, older people, it's difficult for them to drive and so forth.

So anyway, I can't think of his name now, but you see, we had consulates in Sapporo and Nagoya, Kobe-Osaka, the one down there, Fukuoka. And yes, Naha. And just before I arrived we had a consulate in, where was it? In Yokohama. And later- Did we still have the consulate in Yokohama when I was? I don't think so, no. I think they closed the consulate in Yokohama, I think while I was there

It was kind of silly because you know, Yokohama is so close to Tokyo that it's just kind of silly to have a consulate in Yokohama.

Q: Toward the end of your tour a new consul general comes in, Stegmaier. Zurhellen moves up to the embassy

KESSLER: Yes, he did, he went to the embassy. So anyway, Stegmaier arrived and he was principally an economic officer and his last post was director of AID in one of the Caribbean countries; I think it was the Dominican Republic, as I recall, something like that. But he was also a Japanese language officer. I don't know why he landed up in the Caribbean; I'm not too sure; typical though.

So anyway, he was a very, very, very nice man, very respected and the Japanese liked him and he would come over much more often but not all that much. He was also primarily economic and he was very busy in Osaka. He didn't come over really that much and the only one that came over was his wife to learn Japanese language. I'd see

her all the time and she'd always come in and she was very friendly. And anyway, they had a daughter and she was in the Canadian Academy, which is a very well known school in that part of Japan, had been there since a year- Oh my gosh, it goes way, way back and why the Canadians ever got that thing going I'll never know but it was a Canadian academy in Kobe and it was a typical high school, American high school, but it was more American than Canadian, actually, there were very few Canadians, there were a few, and it was called the Canadian Academy and all the teachers were Americans or Canadians and it was a private school and it was very well known. And a lot- some of the kids from all around Japan, foreigners would send their girls- it was co-educational, it wasn't just girls, and they had dormitories and so forth. The Canadian Academy had a colorful history and the director of the Canadian Academy was- he had a PhD and he was very, very- he was a Sinologist. But he spent all his time in Japan. You know, very queer or very interesting. Anyway.

So that's the situation in Kobe. Then I had the- this was classified; we decided- they called me up to Tokyo and Zurhellen was supposed to come and I'm supposed to come. Well Zurhellen didn't want to come for some reason, I don't know why. He was a very peculiar man. I could never figure him out. I think the only reason he didn't want to go was because he wouldn't be seeing the DCM because the DCM was on leave or something. He didn't go to Tokyo unless he saw the ambassador or the DCM and this time the DCM wasn't supposed to be there. It so happened, why, the DCM was there when I got there.

Anyway, the program was as follows: (President) Kennedy had decided we're going to have a buildup in Vietnam but it had to be top secret, and how are you going to get stuff to Vietnam? So it was all arranged, the CIA was heavily involved in this. So we would ship the stuff, the munitions and the material, all that stuff, on various freighters to Kobe. Why Kobe I don't know. And this is how I got to know so well this honorary Greek consul because half the time they're on Greek freighters. So we became very close friends later.

So anyway, it would come in and they would unload at night and then they'd be transshipped on other freighters to Vietnam, Indochina in those days, of course. And, because the French were still there, only tenuously but they were there. So anyway, that worked out for awhile and we had a small army group there and I never knew quite what they were there but the head of the army group was a major and I got to know him a little bit, only because I was hounding him all the time. We wanted- if he- as long as they were there they could justify a very small little PX (post exchange) and finally they got- we got a little tiny PX there; it didn't have much but at least it was a big help. But he said well, I don't know; I said look, we have a perfect right to do this, to participate in this, blah, blah, blah. I hounded that poor guy to death and I think to shut me up he finally- he got a little PX going.

Anyway. So these ships then go on and that worked for awhile but then you can't keep something like that very secret and I don't know, it's sort of- I don't know how-

Q: What's the timeframe for this?

KESSLER: Oh, I don't know. Let's see; I left- see, I was there three years-

Q: Well Zurhellen came in 1963 and left in 1964 so it's probably the 1963-1964 period?

KESSLER: Yes, yes. And- so anyway, there was a big Marine base that was within our consular district just the other side of Hiroshima, Iwakuni, I think it was. Iwakuni, that was in our consular district and I had to go down there occasionally on business and the commanding officer there was also a very nice man and they would always put me up and oh, they were so nice to me. And I don't remember his name now but God, he was a nice guy.

Anyway, things were going for a little bit. The word got out. I mean, it just- you know, it was just too phony. I mean- And I don't know but I think the Greek consul there, I think he may have blabbered something. Who knows? He had to know, he had had to know something, it just didn't make sense. I mean, a ship coming in at night and then loading there and then first thing in the morning, very early morning, get the stuff off on another ship and then for manifest purposes, you see it was quite simple. They had ships coming in to Kobe and unloading at Kobe and then ships leaving Kobe, going- well, there's no real connection, you see. It sounded great in theory and on paper but- I don't know how classified all that really was but anyway that's what went on and it went on for quite some- it went on after- until after I left. I don't know how long it went on but I don't think it could have lasted too long but anyway, the buildup was so that the- they would send in advisors, of course, and the advisors would not wear American uniforms or anything and I don't think that- they just stand out like a sore thumb; didn't make any difference what they wore. And so, you can't have Americans running around in any foreign country that they don't stand out like a sore thumb and so I can't think that that was very successful. But anyway, that's what they did. But I spent a lot of time on that; I had to spend a lot of time on that. Oh my gosh, I'd get-

Q: Exactly what were you doing? What was your responsibility?

KESSLER: Well I had to arrange for the- lots of times the ships couldn't be exactly on time so I'd have to arrange- sometimes they had- we had three big bodegas there, three big winter houses which we leased and we'd put all that stuff- and sometimes it might be there a day or two before they could get it- get this Greek freighter in and get the darned stuff out. And so I had to arrange for all that space for the stuff off the ships and then sometimes there'd be a problem with the seamen. You know, these freighters, they had the dregs of humanity as crew members. Not that they are all that way, no, not at all, but they do have some really tough customers and they would get into trouble, of course, and we had- we would have, you know in this case a fellow that the girl claimed that he beat her up and she was a prostitute of course and therefore she went to the police and the police grabbed a hold of it and they got him. And oh, the captain of the ship said I'm not sailing until we get that man out of jail because it's not right, it's not fair. Oh, the big- oh. There's always some little trouble, you know.

So anyway the harbor master, I didn't know terribly well but I got to know him a little bit. He didn't speak two works of English so I had to- always had to have an interpreter with me and I think the interpreter who- I think he'd probably- he'd have to know something's going fishy around there. I could have- but the Japanese- the Japanese officers there, the Japanese language officers there; they were very reluctant to get involved in things that they didn't seem to understand or didn't want to dol. I don't know; they were a peculiar group.

Q: Did any of this responsibility require you making reports to Washington? Is there cable traffic on this?

KESSLER: Well not too much. Occasionally there'd be a big demonstration in Hiroshima and we would make- I didn't do it but one of the political officers would go to Hiroshima and make a report on what went on in this big demonstration in Hiroshima. At the drop of a hat they were having anti-nuclear, anti-this, anti-that and sometimes there'd be an American- anti-American but not-

Q: Right. But any consulate reporting on this ship situation?

KESSLER: Oh, well yes. I would have to sort of- progress reports, yes, I'd send progress reports, yes, all the time, and they were classified; classified but nothing spectacular or anything, it was just routine, you know, SS Such and Such arrived one day late, however it- it was able to pick up cargo and sail such and such a time. And I was told due to arrive in Saigon such and such a day. Just routine. But if there's something unusual I would report and I don't recall- there were a few things unusual but not much.

I must say, very few people knew anything about it and- Oh, I know, I know, I know why the- I was just trying to think, why wouldn't the Japanese language officers get- I know now why because they weren't- I was not supposed to say anything to them, you know, to anybody because Zurhellen and I were the only two people that knew. That's right and I remember that now. And the guy that came down as interpreter to me, he could only go so far and then he couldn't get into certain aspects of it. I would tell him this is a big deal to the consulate in Saigon and they were- had a shortage of ships and they had to do it this well and so forth.

Q: Now you were having to liaise with the honorary Greek consul from time to time?

KESSLER: Well that's because there were so many of these Greek ships. And yet he- I suspect he would have to know everything because these captains of these Greek freighters knew perfectly well where they were going and I would think he would say now why are all these- why is all this shipments coming out of Kobe going to Saigon? Normally there wouldn't be any particular reason. But on the other hand he never mentioned it to me and I never mentioned it-

Q: If this stuff was explosive, storage would require certain safety precautions.

KESSLER: In what respect? I don't know. Maybe there weren't any explosives. I would think there would be. But some of those freighters would have refrigerated cool areas because we'd get a lot of refrigerated stuff coming in. But I don't know to what extent the explosives would be there. And I never saw the inside of one of those freighters; I never went aboard any of them. Later I went aboard some of the Greek ships but never those, I never went aboard those because I was afraid there'd be no reason for me doing so, I'm afraid it would attract attention, yes. But now later I got to know the consul quite well and I used to enjoy Ouzo and so he said come on, where we're going the captain will give us some.

Q: You'd already stationed in Greece years before.

KESSLER: I loved Ouzo, yes. And I like Ouzo with a little bit of water and lots of ice. Good drink. So anyway. He very frequently said come on, we're going- the captain will give us some Ouzo and we'll see if we- And he always would give me a bottle to take home and so forth. And I had another fellow in the consulate in Kobe, Ray Eiselt was his name, E-I-S-E-L-T. He'd also been in Greece earlier and he loved Ouzo so I'd have him over for an Ouzo.

Ray Eiselt, by the way, is still living. Zurhellen was known for given terrible efficiency reports and he gave him a terrible report and so Eisai got so mad and disgusted he resigned from the Foreign Service, he went over to the Department of Commerce. And he joined in the Foreign Commercial Service of the Department of Commerce and he ended up being the top commercial attaché in Vienna and also in, I think in Frankfurt before the big move to Bonn. And he was very close friends of ours, both he and his wife. And by the way a former diplomatic courier, by the way.

All the diplomatic couriers, you'd be surprised. You think oh, a bunch of errand boys. Oh yes? One retired as a professor at Chapel Hill- he later became a professor at Chapel Hill, which was a good university in those days; I don't know anything about it now but in those days, you know, in North Carolina there it was considered a very good school.

Anyway, another one became a very high executive there in Honolulu. He left the Foreign Service when we were assigned to Honolulu and he was with Castle and Cooke and he went right up to the top and he was a very top executive there. Castle Cooke, that was one of the original 12 families, you know, of Hawaii in the old days, the missionary days.

And then another one, another one became a congressman and then another one became the attorney general of the United States. Not the attorney general of the state of Utah but the attorney general of the United States, Tom Clark. And Tom was a courier; I went on courier runs with him. And he was never in the Orient, but before I went to the Orient they had me go on a couple of trips to see what it was all about and it was kind of nice to travel with him. We'd go to an embassy, cars were there and all sorts of flourishes and

embassy officers would have us over. Since I was traveling with them they'd always include me; I don't know why they would.

So anyway, Tom Clark, of course, is a flaming liberal and not terribly well liked. I must say he was not very well liked and as a matter of fact one of the couriers, they didn't like him at all, but I liked him, I didn't have anything against him. I didn't agree with his political perspective. And I followed him and it was an interesting career he had. And then Saddam, all this came up and then I was a bit surprised when they- it went on the news- I think it was Tom Brokaw, I think before he retired or maybe what's his name that took over; anyway, they said well, you wouldn't believe it but an American attorney has now arrived in Baghdad to take over or assist in the senior matter the defense of Saddam Hussein by the name of Tom Clark. And I was not in the least bit surprised, not the least bit surprised. So he was in the trial there and he was frequently in the press. Now what's he doing now? I don't know.

Q: Today is the 2nd of May, it's another month, and we're returning to our conversation with Earl Kessler.

Now Earl, we finished the assignment to Kobe-Osaka. You've been to Baghdad. You seem to be on an effort to hit every bureau in the Department and your next assignment is the embassy in Quito. Exactly what was that assignment and how did you get it?

KESSLER: Well you know you turn in a preference list which would maybe be helpful to you or may not be. But anyway, I would always say I'm interested in going to a place I've never been before, country I'd never been before or in my case I'd been to so many countries; maybe I'd just pass through for a few days but you know what I mean, lived there for awhile. So they mentioned Quito and I said well that sounds good to me. I knew Ecuador was a charming country and had no objection whatsoever; I was all set to go to Quito.

My arrival in Quito was a little bit strange. I took the ship from New York to Guayaquil and the normal thing is that you- the ship would arrive there pretty late in the afternoon and so people usually spent the night in Guayaquil and then you'd fly the next morning into Quito. That was sort of the routine. But the fellow that met me, actually a fellow I knew in old days in China of all places, he said wait, I'm getting you out right away because they're expecting a strike and you could get stuck here. So I got on the plane and arrived there a bit early and unexpectedly, sort of. But they did get a call through to the Embassy, which wasn't all that easy, long distance wasn't all that great in Ecuador at that time.

So anyway, in August 1965 I got to Quito and a fellow met me and he said you're my new boss. I said great, how are you? He was very nice. So get me to hotel and I said where is this hotel? And he said well, it's two blocks from the embassy and so forth. But I asked about the Intercontinental Hotel, because that is "the" hotel. And they always said the rates are more than your government per diem. So I said well, I don't want to go to the Intercontinental; I'm a creature of comforts. And I took a look at this other hotel

and it was okay but you know, I wanted a big swimming pool because I like to swim and all that stuff. So anyway, I decided I'd pay over my per diem and stay at the Quito Hotel, the Intercontinental, at least for a few days anyway I got my bearings of the place and so forth. He invited me to dinner that night. It was a Saturday and- no, actually it was Friday, I got to the embassy on a Friday and it was late in the afternoon and many of the Americans had already gone but most of the local staff was still there. Since it was a Friday afternoon naturally, why, people took off early and so forth. Anyway, I met some of the local staff and along the line I remember I met one man and he said well I have to tell you about him; he's very interesting and he's in charge of all the translations, he does all the foreign office notes, and he had five people under him translating and it's a big operation, actually, and that's one of the things we have to do, blah, blah, blah.

So anyway, he introduced me around a bit and I met a few people, not too many Americans, that is. he said since you're here, and most people don't even know you're here, tomorrow night if you're free, you know, would you like to have dinner? He said I'm a pretty good cook, not terribly good but pretty, and I said sure, that'd be great. He said he only lived about five blocks from the hotel and told me how to get there and they're short blocks and so forth. He added that by the way, it's very informal.

So the next evening I went down to the lobby down there to look at a couple of the gift shops and just to look around a little bit. They were closed but I could look in and so I sat around there to wait because I was a little bit early to start my walk. All of a sudden I saw a couple come in, white tie, tails, decorations, and his wife in a beautiful flowing gown, and pretty soon two or three other couples came through the hotel and another couple came through and it was quite a sight to see them, and they all had their sashes and their decorations and quite a parade with all these people coming in. And then I got ready to leave, I thought well, it's about time, and then all of a sudden I sort of got up and I was on my way out and then some man said oh, Mr. Kessler, how are you? May I present my wife? And I didn't know who in the world he was but he was obviously- he was Ecuadorean. Anyway, I met the wife and I didn't- but I remember his- I made sure that I remembered his face because he obviously- I had met him when I made this quick tour of the embassy, and I thought who in the world could he be? But anyway, I had a nice time with this fellow who later became my right hand man and I told him about my incident. Oh, he says, that's Dr. Kazeem. I said who is that? He said well he's the guy in charge of all the translations and stuff; he says he's a very interesting man. He's a graduate of Oxford, comes from an extremely wealthy family here, and he gave me the whole story; he's only doing this because he wants to do- he just wants to have something to do and unfortunately his son died fairly recently and that was a big blow to him but he's a wonderful man, he's terribly interesting and also his hobby is making liqueurs. I said what? That's his hobby. He's also an amateur chemist of some sort. Makes wonderful liqueurs.

Anyway, I had an interesting experience getting started in Quito because it's very unusual. So anyway, I finally got going and I met the ambassador, Ambassador (Wymberkley DeRenne) Coerr [Ed: ambassador to Ecuador from March 1965 to October 9, 1967], who was a very nice man. He was a career Foreign Service Officer on his

second tour as ambassador and he was very, very cordial. And I met the DCM, Sam Lane, who was a very elderly man. Lane was a very nice man. He only had one more post then he retired.

So I was taken to my office and I met people around, all that sort of thing. And then a fellow came bouncing in and called out Earl Kessler? And I said yes. He said- And I can't remember for the life of me; it's Earl Lubinsky head of the political section. And so he came in, he sort of took my arm and so forth and fooled around with my hand and I realized- and then I remembered, just barely, let's see, what am I supposed to do.

It's one of these silly things, you know, of the fraternities, you know, you know he's a brother because you have your secret thing, you know. And so I had this thing, you know, I don't know, am I supposed to do something about his fingers and do this and then we knew that we were brothers, Delta Phi Epsilon. And he hugged me, in fact. My, he was so happy to see me. And he was from USC and he was about oh, maybe 10 years older than I was. A nice guy. And we became very good friends.

Anyway, getting back to Delta Phi Epsilon, the foreign service fraternity was a very big organization at one time and they had- they had honorary- it was an honorary fraternity. Now, if you didn't have a fraternity house on campus it was an honorary fraternity, but they had these honoraries at several universities. I mean, I was told they had a very big house at Princeton and then they had a very big house in Georgetown, which you know, a fraternity house as such and so forth. And later, it's another story, but later I ended up not finding a hotel room and staying at the Delta Phi Epsilon house there in Georgetown. I don't know if it still exists or not but I suspect it does; although that was up until 20 year ago anyway.

Q: Now you're in the admin side of the embassy. Can you give us a description of your job?

KESSLER: Well when I first arrived I was- technically speaking I was supposed to be the GSO (General Services Officer) but of course as is usually the case I got involved in a lot of other things and we didn't have a professional security officer there so they said you're going to be post security officer and the Marine guards are going to be under your supervision. Marine guards are Marine guards and there were a few complications there, more than a few. And I got involved in all sorts of things and shortly after that why the new administrative officer arrived and his name is Gershenson, Bob Gershenson, and Bob arrived in July 1967.

Gershenson, he was the admin officer and I don't like to say too much on personalities but he caused a lot of problems and he had a huge slush fund and he used the slush fund to buy a car and that caused all sorts of complications because you couldn't put it on the official roster, the car, because it wasn't a- you couldn't- the post doesn't have the authority to buy a car. A car has to go through GSA (General Services Administration) and the whole operation, you know. You can't just go and buy cars at a post except for

most unusual circumstances and so it was kind of a difficult thing. And so anyway, he caused a lot of very unusual things.

At one point I went back to Guayaquil because we were administrative support for them, so we had to provide a lot of things for Guayaquil. Guayaquil was a power center, you know, the commercial center, the banking center, the powerhouse of Ecuador, just like Sydney is for Australia. There's nothing in Canberra except just the government offices but the economy of Australia is centered in Sydney. It's the same with Guayaquil and Guayaquil's a larger city, much larger than Quito and therefore there was a lot of activity and they had a big consulate there, very big consulate general there in Guayaquil so I spent- I had to spend some time down there. And also there was a big USIS presence in Ecuador and just my luck, why a couple of the leases were expiring so I had to go to some of these outposts like Cuenca and Ambato and other places because the American there didn't have the authority to sign a government lease and I had to go because I had the authority to sign a government lease but they didn't.

Q: Now there's no admin officer for USIA operations?

KESSLER: No, there was no USIA officer. There should have been but there wasn't. But he wouldn't have had- he didn't have the authority anyway at that time. I don't think they had it anyway. I don't think so because I remember the Library of Congress in Nairobi, he had to come to me to sign a lease. I remember he didn't have the authority; I had to sign it. And I'm not going to sign anything I don't know anything about, so I had to sort of-

Anyway, I was very busy with all sorts of things and the security became very, very big because at that time they decided to have a crackdown on draft dodgers who fled the country during the Vietnam War and a lot of them went into Mexico and even though they were an American citizen the idea was you had to ferret them out, explain to them that unless they come back to the States and face the music. So you had to ferret these people out; I had a police lieutenant assigned to me and we had to travel all over Ecuador finding these guys and explaining it to them thoroughly and some of them had dual nationality and therefore it really affected them because they just assumed, since I'm dual national I can- I'll just go back, you know, and I explained that they could not go back. If they did there were a dozen ways they can be picked up, checked on, this Social Security number if nothing else and so forth. So that took a lot, you know, a lot of-

Q: This duty fell to you instead of the consular officers?

KESSLER: I would think so. No, consular had nothing to do with it. It was considered security and all these cases came from the regional security officer in Lima. So all the cases, they didn't come to me direct, they came from Lima, Lima to me. And then I'd do the reports and all that, go back to Lima and then Lima, he would take- send them to the Department. That was the way it worked. And occasionally he would come down, and his name was also Earl, and we became very good friends. And he would come down occasionally, not very often but occasionally he'd come down.

Then we had a situation there that one of the USIA, no, it was USIS in those day, so anyway, one of the officers there was caught in a homosexual setup there in Quito and he refused to resign in a big sting and I got a- spent a lot of time on that and he was fairly high up in USIS and so forth. And I had to get proof. Well I was new at the post, relatively new, and I didn't know this guy very well and he seemed like a nice guy to me, I didn't know anything about him. In those days, you know, they were really anxious to try to eliminate anyone that was- of course in those days they said "queer," remember? They never used the word "gay," they said "queer." And "gay" was a perfectly respectable name. You could say oh, I met so and so and I had a gay time. And now you don't very well say that.

So anyway, then I talked to one of his secretaries and she said well, once in awhile he came in with red or pink laces on his shoes. And then I got something else, a very unusual thing, shall we say, and then finally- he finally- he agreed to go back to the Department, to USIS headquarters. He later retired- later- he was actually kicked out. And then he later became a foreign student consular for the University of the District of Columbia, something like that. That's the last I ever heard of him.

But all these things take time, you know. That's so- You asked what I was doing. Well, we had a problem on housing. There was a very great shortage on housing and I had to cajole these landlords into extend leases and of course they weren't about to extend a lease and they got a huge increase. And then of course the FBO- FEO was very, very fussy about funding and we have to go around in circles. And I didn't have the authority. So then the landlord would say well I want X number of sucres and I'd have to go back then to FBO, will you approve my signing a lease at this and that? Absolutely not, no. He's gauging us. And sometimes they were but sometimes they had a legitimate right to raise a lease, considerably, because after all, it's supply and demand.

Q: Now, how large an embassy would Quito be and I'm assuming you're talking about embassy officers living off the economy, that is, they're leasing individual houses?

KESSLER: Well most all the housing was individual leasing but we did have, I'd say, let me see; a rough guess, I would say we had maybe 10 houses, something like that under government lease. But I know the house I lived was privately leased. What was it? In other words I had to pay- I had to pay the emb- First of all, you're not allowed to privately sign a lease unless the embassy approved it because you've got to make sure you've got a diplomatic clause in it and several other things so that technically speaking the lease I had on where we lived in Quito, technically speaking it was a government lease, but I was paying the rent. And whereas if it's a completely government lease residence why of course the embassy paid the rent. Now there's a difference.

Q: So, Quito was a post where embassy officers received a housing allowance, yes?

KESSLER: And I was getting a housing allowance since I paid out of my housing allowance and as it is, why, I was consistently paying a little bit more than my allowance

for that house but it was worth it. We had three children and a nanny and we needed this- And I had a hell of a time finding that house because I was there a solid month in the hotel before I could find a place to live and they told me, though, they warned me, they said housing is tight so you better- since you have small children you better keep them where they are and- because you'll be in a hotel probably about a month.

Q: And so you arrived alone because of the housing situation.

KESSLER: Yes, yes. I was there a solid month before I could find our house, which turned out to be a beautiful place. My family was at my wife's parents' place in Mexico City. They had a great big place and servants and so it worked out fine.

Q: Can you give us a sense of how large the admin section was?

KESSLER: Let me explain a little bit more about this because it's very, very complicated. After I was there awhile, someone from the Department came down and they described to us a new program called IAS, Integrated Administrative Services. And there had been two posts that had successfully implemented this program. Now, one was a small post and it went to a medium sized post and that was Monrovia, Liberia. And then we are going to be the big posts. And so that was the situation. And they said it'll take over a year to implement and so forth and we'd hear further but just give us time to think about it and so forth.

Anyway, the general feeling was well okay, he'd said there will be a director and there will be a deputy director then and everything falls under chief of mission authority.

So anyway, everyone just assumed the administrative officer in the embassy would be the director of IAS. It just seemed logical. And therefore the deputy would be the executive officer over at AID, which made perfectly good sense. And that was just the situation. And then later they announced that the new director of the IAS, would be so-and-so; his name was Adams, I forget his first name, and he would be the director[Ed: one Alton Adams is listed in the Foreign Service List of January 1969 as arriving in September 1968 with the title of Executive Officer with AID]. And Bob Gershenson then, who was administrative officer of the embassy, would be the deputy. And Bob Gershenson was furious over this. He said never in my life I've got to work under an AID officer. He had a lot of things against AID and he was not very much of a fan of AID. And he said it's not going to happen. I'm not going to, absolutely not. And so he- there were a lot of shenanigans and so forth, I won't go into all of this, but he managed to get some documentation that he had all of a sudden a heart condition and so forth and so forth. And anyway, it's a long story. Anyway, finally he maneuvered it and he got a direct transfer from Quito to Montevideo, Uruguay around September 1968. Bob Gershenson left and shortly after he left we were inspected. So that would be there, inspection; because it's over here, I have it in this thing. So all of a sudden I became the deputy of IAS, and it took forever to try to- and the fellow that arrived, by the way, I liked immediately. He was sharp, he was professional, he was terrific, very, very, very outstanding guy, and we became very good friends. And-

Q: A formal inspection consumes a vast amount of embassy time. In 1968 my notes say that Inspector Spencer came in that delegation, which inspected Quito. How does the embassy prepare for-

KESSLER: Well, it starts when they send a questionnaire; a thing that they would like to make sure is done before they arrive. And it's a long thing, pages. Well, it's not so much for the political section or the economic section, but it's a long elaborate thing. Then, my goodness, it's a bit long for the consular section. There are a lot of questions about welfare and immigration visas, visitors' visas, and looking out for American citizens-extraditing American citizens from the local jails and all that sort of thing. But in my case and for the administrative section, oh, there's a tremendous number of things. But boy, if you checked it and they came and checked it and they find that you didn't do it, boy, you're in real trouble. Because after all they only had limited time at post. The average inspection would be maybe four days, five days, sometimes six days.

Q: Now you were saying that the inspectors' delegation had multiple people on it and they supposedly had area specialties?

KESSLER: Absolutely. They normally would have- they'd have four people normally; one would be political, one would be economic, one would be admin and one would be consular. And later they decided we need auditors because after all that's very important. And of course I didn't know anything about auditing, I wouldn't know anything about it and the average budget fiscal officer, he or she, but usually he, he knew an awful lot about such things. Nevertheless, he wasn't a professional auditor and these were professional auditors. They came in and they were called audit something inspectors. Wasn't that a phrase they used? And they were right with the inspection group and they were included in everything and all of, you know, any big thing where all the inspectors were being included you could always find that fellow there. They were not second rate citizens at all. And they probably came up with some very good things because some of those embassies were cooking the books like mad, including my friend Bob Gershenson, and I had tried to put out some of his fires after he left.

Only thing that I can remember about the inspection, was this was apparently the first time a woman had ever been a Foreign Service inspector and she was on the inspection team and she did the administrative inspection and she knew absolutely nothing about administration. Anyway, we got away with murder because she knew nothing, absolutely, about it. She was no more experienced in administration than I was in consular work, say. Well I was a little bit experienced in consular work because in Madras I did serve as combined consular officer and administrative officer.

Anyway. The woman that was doing the admin was- I don't know what her background was but it certainly wasn't admin. That's the only inspection I ever knew that had an inspector doing admin that didn't know admin, but that was that one; she didn't know. I've been in, let's see; one, two, three, I've been in four inspections and usually the inspector was very meticulous and very clever, very clever. But if you say- you tick it off

that you have- that your, say, your- what's a good question they might ask? Your security clearances for local employees are completely up to date, say, and you check it off and then they find- and see, well let's see now, you have such and such, he was brought into this embassy three weeks ago, let's see his clearance, whole clearance, and at times you wouldn't have it. You'd need it in a hurry and this- you put him on but later they get the clearance and of course that was a no-no. And all sorts of things. Maybe-

Other subjects that come up are inventory, property control, dealing with the Marines. All sorts of things, you know, and dealing with- do you have a designated doctor that's designated as the official embassy doctor? Now, if you have a resident doctor there from the State Department of course that wouldn't apply, then you'd say NA, not applicable, but if you didn't have it in that space of those early days very few embassies had a doctor in residence, very few, and therefore some cases they'd say well, you know, three or four or five good doctors; how can we decide on one? But by regulation there had to be one that is the official embassy doctor. He had to be bilingual, he had to be- had considerable education, medical education in the United States. And if that could not be met then you had to have a reason for saying there's no doctor here that has medical- his medical education was in the United States and therefore that is not possible for- but you had to make a notation.

Q: Now, the time that you were in Quito, you were designated the integrated admin supporter program poster child, so this was an inspection of that system too.

KESSLER: Yes but it was so early in the game that they- as I say, this woman didn't know anything about it and actually it was not a big deal, it really wasn't.

Q: Now, at the end of the inspection the team goes back to Washington and then they send out a list of recommendations.

KESSLER: Oh yes. But each inspection team can do what they want. Some don't send very many. Some will. I'm just trying to think; in some cases they were very critical. Which one was it now? Oh yes, they were very critical of Quito, come to think of it, on the political side. They felt that the political reporting was too far slanted towards this Velasco thing and it should have been more current with the present political situation in Ecuador.

Q: Now, you're representing the admin side of the embassy-

KESSLER: But in IAS I was not- I was not- I was supposed to be IAS.

So- Let's see. Shortly after that then we were able to get a lot of things done but we had, you see, the mission in Quito was large because we had a big NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) tracking station and there were probably 10 families and all sorts of other people on contract and that was a terrible headache for us because those that were government employees, they could use our commissary but those

who were on contract could not use the commissary. And there was a lot of terrible commotion over that. And in many respects I was for the poor people on private contracts because after all, why should they be not allowed to use our commissary? But I was overruled on that.

We had an AID mission that had more Americans than the State Department contingent. Big AID mission, and it was just- And the head of the AID mission was very political. I don't remember his name at all. Other agencies were represented at the embassy; we had the Department of Commerce, we had the Department of Labor, and then we had a big USIS presence, a big USIS presence, and they were all over the place. And then we had military attachés. It was a bigger attaché situation than I'd ever seen before. They had all sorts of enlisted men working and I was never sure quite what they were doing but anyway it was a big operation there and the head of the- they called it the mil group, the military group, and the head of the mil group was Colonel Cameron. And we became very close friends and that's another story but anyway.

So then there was another group of military there but they were not part of the mil group; they were part of some other military setup and they were at odds because there were two or three colonels at almost the same rank and they resented the fact that Colonel Cameron was a little bit- had received his commission I think a year before a couple of others and therefore he outranked them. And oh, all that stuff. And so they had that group.

And then they had the Geodetic Survey. The Geodetic Survey I was familiar with because I had dealings with them in Mexico City. And they had a big group there, the Geodetic Survey people. And oh, what else? There was something else there. And of course a big AID- a big CIA operation there, a big CIA. The station chief for CIA was a good friend of mine because he was the deputy station head in Mexico City and we used to play tennis together a lot and I knew him very well.

So anyway, then there was another organization; I think it was Food and Mouth Disease or something they were doing, I never knew quite what they were doing. There was a plan to absorb the consular general in Guayaquil into the IAS, but I kept telling my boss, the AID officer who was the director, I think you're biting off too much. You can't do this, it's just too much. I said I think you ought to just confine it just to the embassy and AID and USIS and the thing, just- and forget about Guayaquil. No, no, he- I guess he had his instructions from Washington, I don't know, but he insisted no, we- We had a very difficult time trying to do everything and a lot of people were very pleased and a lot of people were not and the idea was we'd eliminate all sorts of administrative employees. Well the people that did administrative work at say, NASA, they didn't know anything about our regulations, they didn't know anything about anything; they just knew about NASA. Yet we were from here to take on all that because this is a big operation. It was a nightmare.

Q: So the fact that each agency might have different rules was a complicating factor.

KESSLER: Well it was- some were- some were- some were combined, what's the fancy word for it? They were- anyway. But others were not. Like AID and USIS; in some cases we were all together but not in others, not in others. And for instance, AID was quite separate in many respects and so did USIS in some respects.

One of our challenges was that the local airline, which was Ecuadorean Airline, had several crashes and so the ambassador ordered that no one was going to fly that airline. And one of the AID officers said the hell with it, because- he said this is nonsense and he went ahead and flew this airline and then there was a big stink because the AID director stuck up for his employee, of course, and there was a showdown on that. And there was always something going on.

Q: Now, let me ask you, Quito then was this experiment in combining the different agencies' admin functions. Does that mean somebody came down from Washington to walk you through what they wanted you to do or you were given cable-?

KESSLER: No, this guy that arrived was an expert. He was the expert; he'd done the other two. He'd done the other two and he knew exactly- he was a very, very, very, very smart guy. The concept was wonderful on paper but it just wouldn't work and he was- but he sure tried and he did his best and I did everything I could to try to help him and I did a lot to help him. And after I left I tried to keep in touch and then he left and the whole thing collapsed. I think it just collapsed under its own weight. And it didn't last more than two years or something after he left, I think, and then it just collapsed, gradually it went out of existence. In the end the consul general in Guayaquil was the second highest ranking officer in Ecuador. He outranked the DCM in Quito. So that- And he had definite ideas and by golly, he wasn't going to put up with a lot of this nonsense. And oh, you can't imagine the maneuvers that are going on.

Q: Well now, you're key to the admin side, keeping the embassy going, whatnot; what was the embassy building like?

KESSLER: We had a compound building that was serving- actually I think it was quite new, I don't know when it was built but I was impressed with it, a beautiful compound and we had a beautiful office space and spacious. Inside the compound we had the commissary. It was big enough to put the commissary in it. It was a huge operation. And the commissary was a very, very well stocked. An American woman was in charge of the commissary. She was very good at it. And then the consular section had their own separate building, oh, I'd say about a half away. And they were completely separate and therefore I had a lot of dealings with the consular section and NASA, as I say, was way out, 45 to 50 minutes away. The geodetic survey people, they were out, at least an hour away, so they were spread out but the chancery, that was a beautiful compound and we had a wall around it but not terribly high. Later they raised the wall but when I was there it was maybe 12 feet high, something like that. And inside we had a lovely snack bar and they served good food, they served lunch and breakfast. And then we had a patio where you go out for your coffee in the afternoon. Oh, it was a beautiful setup.

Q: Now, as the admin officer you'd also be in charge of the communications people, radio guys, couriers.

KESSLER: Yes, yes. Yes well, the diplomatic couriers, they did not, at that time they did not go into Guayaquil; it was an airport transfer and I didn't have any connection with the diplomatic couriers, rarely. And once I had to go out and talk to the director of the airport and then I found out that yes, there would be a diplomatic courier so rather than have two people go out I said I'll take care of it. And I got- But the diplomatic courier was someone I'd never seen before.

But the communications, yes. They had their own setup and had all the gadgets on the roof and they had the top floor, the entire, virtually the entire top- yes, it was I think, all the top floor of the main building there was devoted to communications. CIA had their own communications setup, of course. They were supposed to run it through the ambassador but half the time they didn't. They had their direct communications and a lot of things that were going back and forth which the ambassador never saw or didn't know anything about. They had everything separate and they had a big operation there in- and I knew a little bit more about the operation than most people did since my old tennis partner was the station chief.

Things were going pretty smooth for awhile and then we had terrible unrest with the students. I sensed as soon as I arrived that there would be a lot of turmoil on the local government and boy, there was. And they had a fellow by the name of Valasco and he was apparently the virtual dictator of Ecuador some years before I arrived and he was a leftist and they had a terrible time, finally they got rid of him and he went into exile in Argentina and in staff meetings, why we'd go around in circles, how we can keep Valasco from coming back and yes we can, no we can't, no one in the political section or the CIA could ever agree on anything like that and anyway it was a very- a lot of unrest, shall we say.

So one morning I was about ready to go to the office and I got a call from one of the fellows in the embassy. He said Earl, he said, I'm so glad I got you. Don't take your car out. I said what? He said there's been a coup. I said oh, really? Of course coups are fairly common anywhere in Latin American; you don't worry much about coups. Sort of, you know, every once in awhile there's a coup somewhere. So anyway, oh, there's been a coup, and he said look, he said, you can't drive. I said what? What do you mean I can't drive? He said you won't believe this but this is the truth; what they've done is they have these huge industrial tacks like in building a house maybe or something, and they've scattered these tacks all over the main thoroughfares. There were three main thoroughfares going into the heart of the city and they've got every one of those with these tacks so if you start to go you won't get far, you'll be punctured and so forth and so on. I said I can't believe it. So fortunately I lived- it was a pretty long walk but if the weather was nice, as it usually was, and I had plenty of time and I was able to get a little sleep because it's terrible there socially; the normal thing was they'd open the buffet table at midnight so you wouldn't get home before 2:00 in the morning and sometimes 3:00

and yet with no one there at work before let's say maybe 10:00, well heaven's sakes the embassy opened at 9:00.

So anyway, I walked in and finally I got to the embassy and then they decided and it was proclaimed there'd be a- the government of Ecuador would be controlled by the junta and so it consisted of the general of the army, the general of the air force and the admiral of the navy, and that was the junta. And since the army was the biggest I guess contributor to this coup, why the general was the first really president, really, although he didn't use- never used the word of president of the country. And then he was only going to be in for something like six or seven months, I don't know how long it was but it wasn't quite a year, as I recall, and then one of the other would take over, maybe the air force would take over and he'd be in so long and he'd be the head of- head man. And then after that the admiral would take over and he'd be the head. Well of course you know that thing would never work, of course, you know.

Anyway, after about another nine months or so they start squabbling among themselves, which is only normal. And they were all terribly egotistical men, they're hotshots, and the admiral had his definite ideas and the air force general had his ideas and the regular army general would have his ideas. So you know, they'd never get together and so it was a constant thing and therefore the government sort of disintegrated and so forth and the admiral, he had lots- a lot of influence in Guayaquil and then the consular- the consul general had a lot to say as a second. He was a second senior officer in all of Ecuador and he outranked the DCM and he had a lot to say about sticking up for the admiral and all this and that and the only reason they had an admiral is because of the Galapagos Islands. Other than that they would have no reason to have any navy but because of the Galapagos Islands of course they did; they had to have. And the air force really wasn't much of an air force and they wouldn't have had any real reason to have an air force because of the Galapagos Islands which was little over 700 miles off the coast of Ecuador and they were smart enough to know we've got a good thing going out there but they didn't know what to do with it but they really protected it.

I was dying to get to the Galapagos all the time I was there, four solid years, but I was never successful. I could have gotten a ride on the air force plane but they just flew a turn around. I'd just be one night and come back and then to stay there you couldn't do anything. They went just to this one island where the Darwin Institute was, that's interesting, but other than that you couldn't do anything unless you had your boat, your own boat, because you know the Galapagos has a total at least 15 islands and you couldn't get around. There's no commercial way of getting around and so as one of the fellows in one of the embassies did go and he said it's a waste of time except to see the Darwin Institute. He said I couldn't do anything; I tried to go on the island, that's where the only place where they have an airport. And the airport, by the way, we built, the Americans built during World War II. And so anyway, that's why they had an air connection.

Anyway, finally the junta was overthrown in March 1966 and then we had another president and he was- By the way, when we had the junta they'd sometimes change the

foreign minister and sometimes you'd never know. Now see he's the foreign minister, but he's not going to be there too long. It was a big mess. Then when the foreign minister had a car accident with one of American army majors who had had a bit much to drink, and to make a long story short he punched the foreign minister in the face and if that didn't cause a big uproar. It didn't exactly warm up our relations with the government since the foreign minister was punched in the nose by an American major.

The major was spirited out of the country in the middle of the night. They got him out of the country. Of course they had all sorts of planes; that was one nice thing being in Quito; I could- and sometimes I had a real, real urgent need to go to Panama for procurement and things. Other times I had no particular reason but I had very important procurement reasons because of Martha so I'd go there.

There seems a plane went to Panama, every other day, constantly going. They had to get their hours in so they loved to go to Panama and they'd fly to Panama and have a good time because they had a big casino and they had lots of girls and they had oh, duty free for everything, the Canal Zone had a wonderful thing going. Oh, that Canal Zone was wonderful.

Q: So that's where people would go for R and R (rest and recreation) and -?

KESSLER: Well when I was in Quito we didn't really have R and R. You'd have to take your leave. They didn't have R and R. There's no reason for it. A popular thing in those days, they had these beautiful passenger ships that went from New York, through the canal and they'd stop always at one or two of the Caribbean islands and they'd stop in Bonaventure and in Colombia, then to Guayaquil, then they'd go on to Lima. Of course Callao, as the seaport of Lima, which is close by, and then they'd go down all the way to Valparaiso and then they'd come back again. So the popular thing was you'd pick up the ship in Guayaquil, get off in Lima and then go to see Machu Picchu and all the wonders and then the ship would go on down and on the way back you'd take the ship back from Lima to Guayaquil. And they could do the whole thing in two weeks and that was a popular thing so many, many people did. Some people'd go to Miami; they had direct, non-stop flights, of course, to Miami and on the coast of Ecuador they had beautiful beaches and therefore a lot of people would just go to the beaches there and fly to Guayaquil and rent a car or drive; you could drive to Guayaquil, it was a full day's drive but the problem was it was very high and you had terrible fog and sometimes you couldn't really make it and others- it was kind of iffy.

Remember the altitude of Quito. Our house was at 9,200 feet high in the house and every once in awhile a cloud would come right through. All of a sudden it would be dark and so forth but it would go through, maybe three, four, five minutes and dinner would be- At first I thought my God, what's this? Someone said, well the clouds here, some of them will be very low and they come right through this residential area where we lived and as I say it was it 9,200 feet where we lived. And where we used to go sometimes it was 10,000 feet and that's very high. And in this one place, one of the fellows insisted I go

fishing with him and it was up to 11,000 feet and boy, I felt- I was glad when we got out of there.

That was a constant personnel problem; some people couldn't take the altitude. They just couldn't take it. And it could affect anybody; age had nothing to do with it. And we had some of these big strapping 20 year old Marine guards come in there and they simply couldn't take that altitude and therefore we'd have to ship them out and get replacements. The altitude was a very serious thing and all sorts of American tourists would have trouble some time; they'd just keel over dead. And the poor old consular section was pretty busy handling American tourists because if they had a bad heart condition they'd go anyway, even though they were warned. A lot of them would go anyway. So that's ridiculous; I'll only be there two days, what's the difference? And we said well- And then some that didn't know they had the heart condition and they would have a terrible time so the altitude was quite a factor in the personnel side of it.

Q: Now when you first arrived at post, Ambassador Coerr is then; the DCM is Sam Lane. It's a big embassy; how did the ambassador and the DCM run the embassy?

KESSLER: Well the ambassador was a career Foreign Service officer so he knew what was going on and he did, I thought, a very good job. And Mr. Lane was an old-timer but he was on his way out for retirement; he wasn't too active in doing that sort of thing and he didn't really get involved but the ambassador himself did.

To digress just a minute, sometimes when I would walk I'd go by the ambassador's residence and every once in awhile the ambassador would be going out and he liked to walk; every morning he'd walk to work. So he was very friendly, when I passed by he would call out; I'd have to wait of course and then we'd walk together. One time it started to sprinkle. Wait, wait, wait, wait, Earl, I'll get an umbrella. So he went back in and gave me an umbrella and we'd walk together and he was, I think I probably knew him better than an awful lot of people. And so he had a wife who was his second wife and she was much younger than he was, much, much younger, and she had him around her little finger. And so he called me aside and he said now look, when- I forget her first name- when so-and-so calls for anything, if it's anything big, do nothing, you refer it to me, he said, or she'll go wild on this stuff and she'll want this, want that, want that; she hasn't a clue what a budget is. And so forth but she could still maneuver him around.

And so in the meantime, I forgot to mention I don't know how long it was when- before Gershenson arrived there was a fellow by the name of Claver came in as administrative officer and he didn't last more than, I don't know, six or seven months and she insisted he leave the country because she had crossed swords with him somehow so he was kicked out of the embassy. Very nice man. And so he- I didn't even bother to mention because his tenure was so short but he later selected out and he got back to the Department this woman ruined his career. I never knew the whole story; it's hard to say.

But anyway, the ambassador was on top of things and he also spent some time because the consul, the head of the consular section in Quito, I don't know if you remember when

I first started you said how'd you ever get interested in the Foreign Service? Remember I said I was sitting at a table in the library and this guy was a Foreign Service officer and he said I'm a Foreign Service officer on military leave. And I said oh my God, you're the first FSO I've ever met that had actual working experience. And his name was Len Damron and guess who head of the consular section in Quito? Len Damron [Ed: Everett L Damron arrived in Quito around October 1967]. So Len would tell me all about her and the ambassador.

You know, I think the ambassador was very effective. But also he had a way with him and some people thought he was sort of overbearing, I don't know, and anyway he immediately clashed with the president, the new president of Ecuador. I don't know why or how and they had stormy relations and to make a long story short why the ambassador was given 30- I think 48 hours or something, very short time, to leave the country and they said if he's not out of the country by that time that the government of Ecuador would not be responsible for his safety. So he more or less had to leave and he left in a hurry [Ed: On October 7, 1967 the government of Ecuador requested Ambassador Coerr's recall and he left post, October 9, 1967.]

Ambassador Coerr later came to the Department and was assigned to some esoteric department, I never knew what it was. He lived in Reston with his- and I never- I never saw him at his department but one of the USIS people did because they were in the same building and they said can you imagine? He had this mansion in Quito and then- and then he ended up in just a sort of nondescript apartment in Reston. What a comedown. I think he retired in 1976 and died in 1996.

Q: As one of the senior admin officers you would have become deeply involved in July 4th parties.

KESSLER: Yes, we had a big one and there were quite a few Americans in business in Quito, oddly enough, and there was an American Chamber of Commerce. They suggested I should join and I did and I met the president because he came in on businesses, and he was a very wealthy man and he was into all sorts of things. He was the agent for Mitsubishi, for National Cash Register, a couple of the other big American outfits and he had a big thing going also in Guayaquil. And I don't know how it was; I think he asked me, he said, well where were you before you came here? And I said- and I said well actually my last post was Japan. Japan! Oh really? Where were you in Japan? I said Kobe. Oh my gosh. And then he told me his whole life history. He was born and raised in Japan. His parents were missionaries; he learned to speak Japanese before he learned to speak English. And he said so after the war, after the war he was an interpreter during the war, of course, in the Navy, and after the war why he wanted to get a job, he needed a job like everyone else, and he went to the National Cash Register Company, which was very big at that time. And they liked him and so forth and so all of a sudden they said well, we've got your assignment for you, and he was assigned to Guayaquil, Ecuador. Guayaquil, Ecuador, he said, I don't know three words of Spanish. I'm bilingual in Japanese. And they said oh, we've got all sorts of people there that know

Japanese and our office is completely staffed. If you want the job you go to Guayaquil, Ecuador. He said well I needed a job so I went to Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Anyway, later, every once in awhile there'd be a Japanese freighter come in, there'd be a problem and so the port authorities there, no one spoke any English and the authorities had no one on hand in Guayaquil that spoke Japanese, and they found the word got around, oh Mr. So-and-So, he knows Japanese. He helped them out a lot and he just did a lot of things for them, a lot of things he didn't have to do, he just felt sorry for them because he had that language. And he helped them and the word trickled back and finally someone, I don't if it was an ambassador or not, someone from the embassy in Quito, the Japanese embassy, came down and asked him if he'd be willing to serve as the honorary Japanese consul in Guayaquil. So he accepted it and so he was the honorary Japanese consul in Guayaquil for years. And his wife was from Paraguay and Martha being from Mexico, Martha was born in Mexico City; she's a Mexican but she's really half French because her father was born in France. Martha, of course, was naturalized as soon as we got married. But anyway, so they got very friendly because yak, yak, yak, yak in Spanish. So to make a long story short we became very close friends and actually we spent, I think maybe it was two years in a row we had Thanksgiving dinner at their home and so forth.

Anyway, it's interesting how these things evolve around, you know, that the same guy that had his letters written to all these people, he would end up in Quito. You know, it's amazing.

Q: Now, the work that it took to put on a July 4th party; who paid for it and who-?

KESSLER: Well, we asked for some donations from actually the Chamber of Commerce because businesspeople, we didn't say you had to pay such and such; we asked for donations and they gave us some money and they gave money and some of the organizations there, like say NASA, they gave us some money. AID and USIS, they didn't because they were considered part of the embassy. Anyway, we got a big, big area what used to be for sort of fairgrounds and we took over the whole place. In this fairground was a big swimming pool, a huge swimming pool, really, the only public pool in Quito as far as I know. We had a big setup and the kids could go swimming and we had all sorts of three-legged races, one bag races and all that stuff for kids and all that stuff, children's stuff, and we had a very nice time. And the ambassador was the master of ceremonies, more or less; he enjoyed it. And then after he left why the new ambassador had nothing- he wouldn't have anything to do with it, the new ambassador. But (John) Jack Crowley took over as chargé and he was chargé after the ambassador was kicked out why Jack Crowley was the chargé and he was there for- I think he was chargé about a year, it seems to me, because we were so furious that Ecuador would kick our ambassador out that we weren't about to send another ambassador down right away so Jack really lucked out and he was chargé for- I think it was about- around a year, I think.

Q: Ambassador Coeur was PNG'ed (persona non grata) in October 1967 and the new ambassador, Edward O. Sessions, didn't arrive until September 1968. About eleven months.

KESSLER: Yes, that's about right, yes. And well Mr. Sessions was a political appointee and he never let it pass that he could tell you and he told you constantly, his call to fame was he was the deputy postmaster general of the United States.

He was a very, very interesting man. He was very tall and very dignified and he had a wife that was a holy terror. So he arrived and I- and Jack asked me to go down really just to help out because he said I think there's going to be a lot of commotion with the ambassador arriving because I'm told he has all sorts of stuff and I'm not sure that in Guayaquil that people there don't know enough what to do.

Anyway, I went because I more or less had to. So I went down with him and so forth and the ambassador introduced me to his wife and immediately she said, has my car arrived? I didn't know anything about a car. I didn't know she's- Oh well, I said we had- well, I said, we have a motor pool, you know, and the ambassador, of course will have the limousine. Oh no, I want my personal car; has it arrived? And I said no, I'm terribly sorry, it hasn't arrived but I said I wasn't aware that a car was coming but I said I can certainly try to check. Well, this is ridiculous, she said, I want my car here. I said, now this is your personal car? Yes, it's my personal car and I paid big money to send it here, you know, that sort of thing. Oh, she was ooh, ooh, ooh. So I tried to placate her. Jack said later I'm awfully glad you came along. He unloaded her on me. So anyway, so anyway finally got- I don't know why or how it happened; one of the big trunks just didn't arrive or was stolen under our noses or something and it had all the shirts of the ambassador. Ah, so, and he was a big man and they didn't have any size that he would fit in all the stores. He was a very big man, 6'2" or something and a bit overweight and so forth. Oh God.

So anyway, Mr. Sessions came from San Francisco and I don't know quite much about his background other than the fact that he was deputy post master general of the United States. Now Sessions' appointment was in the last months of the Johnson Administration. We were all sort of curious, you know, because he won't last long because Johnson who made this appointment announced he was not running for re-election because of the Vietnam mess and so we were kind of curious. And so finally he told me, and I think probably everyone else because I doubt he would say anything special to me, that he also was a very close friend with Senator Somebody who was the chairman of the foreign relations committee, who was, I think he was a Republican. So even though the Republicans taking over from- I guess the Republicans took over from Johnson, didn't they? Anyway, because of his connection with his senator he stayed on and he stayed on and on and on and on.

Q: Yes, the election was November 1968 and Nixon won and took office in January 1969.

KESSLER: So anyway, to digress a minute, why, the job as GSO, the guy sort of left and we covered this job as GSO. And lo and behold we received word from the Department that this man is coming in as a GSO. He was 50-some years old. He was a retired colonel in the Marine Corps and- No, he was not the GSO, he was assistant GSO, I think; now there's several there. He was not the main GSO; he was assistant GSO. And the main GSO was a guy about 33 years old but very experienced as he had several posts because he started real young. And here's this 50-some year old man going to be having a boss that's 30-some years old, and being a colonel in the Marine Corps. Actually, as Bob told me later, he said you know I was only a lieutenant colonel, they just, you know, they bumped me up to colonel when I retired. And I said well, I suspected that.

So anyway, he was a lieutenant colonel, he was a very important man in the Marine Corps but he knew nothing about the State Department. Anyway, the point is the ambassador, Sessions, he said well, he said- of course he knew nothing either, he said well, he's a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps, by God he's probably a good man. And I tried to- everyone tried to- everyone rounded around. The personnel officer, she was very good. And everyone rallied around. Of course he's a very good man, he's a wonderful man, a brilliant man, a warrior or whatever; he doesn't know anything about State Department administration. Well, he can learn, he's a smart man. So he- the ambassador refused to change the assignment and I don't know if he could have or not, I don't really- I think he could have, though.

Anyway, so this guy arrives and I thought oh me, oh my. And he was the nicest guy in the world. Call me Buck, and he was a real nice guy, just a nice guy. He said you know, I don't know anything about anything you guys are doing but he said I can learn. And I said well, you've got a real problem on your hands, and I said you know, if you really don't think you want to be here I imagine if you request it and we would back you up you could probably get another assignment. Oh well, he said, and I explained. He said oh, I don't mind working for this young fellow, he said, I don't mind, that doesn't bother me at all. He said you just tell me what to do, he can tell me what to do and I'm fine, he said, don't worry. So it worked out and he played it beautifully. He would suggest, you know, I wonder if it would be an idea if we did this, you know. And of course this other guy who's the boss, you know, and then he would do it. And he'd sort of get the credit for it but this guy played it beautifully but he knew, he was very experienced. He didn't know regulations but he said I can learn those. So I said you better get the book and take this book home and read chapter after chapter, that's what I did when I got to Madras, I knew nothing about consular work and I'd take the consular manual home and of course there were four or five manuals but I'd take them home and every night I'd try to read some of it to learn about the consular section. So you've got to learn about the administrative so he did. Anyway, he was a very, very fine man and he took over and the Marines, he was their god because oh, a lieutenant colonel. And I said one thing; Buck, you cannot use your title because it will complicate things like no end because we've got colonels all over this place, they're coming out of the woodwork. No use of the title and tell this gunny sergeant and to insist on the guys no reference to you as colonel. And it worked out fine, they never did.

But anyway, by this time the Marines weren't in very high esteem and there was a problem here and a problem there and they got mad, they had to simulate a mock attack, to counteract if someone went over the walls. And the CIA guy, my friend, he was furious. He said this is terrible, this is showing what we might do. We don't want to show what we might do. Maybe he had a point but the boys just didn't-

Anyway. So he was against the Marines and so forth and so finally this Buck, Buck was a great guy and he got these Marines lined up and he said, I think in a meeting so he had the Marines- all you guys are good swimmer? Yes. So he had the Marines give swimming lessons and through my connection with the guy in the hotel I got them to be able to use the pool certain hours, on slack hours, and they gave swimming lessons to the kids and the kids adored these Marines.

Q: Kids from the mission, mission family.

KESSLER: Yes, yes. And he got the kids, he had, you know, sort of beginners and then medium and ones a little bit more than that. And he did- And then of course what happened? The kid would come home, he said oh gosh, you know, he says I'm doing real good on the back stroke and he's going to work some more with me on my back stroke. And Jimmy this, Jimmy- Finally he said- the mother or the father, who's this Jimmy anyway? Now, which one is he? Oh, he's that real nice Marine. And then Jimmy's saying why can't we have him over for dinner some night? Well, okay. So they invite this guy over, he was a nice fellow, they liked him. And other families would do the same thing and pretty soon these poor Marines who had been were completely shut off and I was one of the worse, too, I never thought about inviting a Marine to our parties. I should have but I never did. I just never did. It wasn't as if I thought I was any better than they were, it just didn't occur to me.

So anyway, the Marines were starting to get invited and they were members of the larger embassy family. And there were a couple of bad apples and he got them turned around and oh, that guy did wonders. Just having this guy, he was- everyone just, you know, the Marines were so impressed. And then the Marine Ball, they got oh my God they got- Buck had his dress uniform and he had a whole bunch of medals and ribbons and stuff and he, by golly, oh boy. Of course, Marines in their dress uniforms is so cool. So anyway, everything worked out fine.

Mrs. Sessions called me one day. She never called me Earl, oh, very formal. She said Mr. Kessler? Yes, how are you, Mrs. Sessions. She cut me off short; there was no small talk with her. I want you to get- I want you to contact somebody in my- I want to get a plumber down from Miami to take care of my toilets. All three of them are not working properly in the residence therefore- I don't know how many they had. Well I said- Well she said, one of these natives, she always called them natives, you couldn't shut her up, even if there were other Ecuadoreans around. She'd still say natives. Ah. So anyway, I said well just because one came over and couldn't do it, I said you know there's some very reliable plumbers here. I said I personally don't know who they are but I'm sure there are. Oh no, I want a plumber from Miami to come here and do my- So I said Mrs.

Sessions, I said, you know, we have a budget and that means we only have so much money. And I said you know, it would cost a lot of money to get a plumber to come, in the first place. Second, round trip airfare from here, put him up in a hotel, I don't know how long it would take them and I don't know what tools he'd need, wouldn't know what tools, and I said you know, I said give me a chance to see if I can't get a local plumber that can repair your toilets. Well, very well, but if this doesn't work I'm going to discuss this with the ambassador. So I finally got that squared away.

Anyway, a few days later, weeks later why, she was fussing about something else and I said Buck, would you do me a big favor? Would you go over and just sit for maybe three or four hours to see that something is done properly? He said sure, I'll do that. Well he probably got over there and there was nothing much for him to do and I think probably she had a sort of a woman in charge of the residence or the servants, and I guess they invited him for coffee so Buck said sure, I'll go in and have some coffee. So he went in, in the kitchen, not into the dining room or anything, in the kitchen and had his coffee and Mrs. Sessions was looking for him and she saw him there and boy, she came back and got on the phone, she said you get this bloated frog, I remember her exact words. Well he was a bit overweight. Get this bloated frog out of my house and I want him out immediately and I don't want to have ever see him again. And so I had to get Buck out and so I had to go over and check everything. You know, I didn't know anything about plumbing so I pretended like I did, and we got him out and so she- And one time she was so bad that the ambassador - with other people around - ordered her to go upstairs. He said if you don't go upstairs I'm going to have the Marines to carry you up. The Marines outside in the guardhouse. They were a terrible couple.

So Mr. Sessions finally didn't feel well. He said I think I have to go to San Francisco to see my doctor. So he got permission from the Department to go to San Francisco for medical and she of course went along. So she said now, I want my car shipped so I'll have it for use when I arrive in San Francisco. I said Mrs. Sessions, by the time that we could get your car to Guayaquil, put it on the ship, because there are ships going but they stop other places, they don't go non-stop from Guayaquil to San Francisco, they've got to stop two or three places probably, and then get it to San Francisco and then it's true, the dispatch agent, I'll get in touch with him and he can expedite the clearance and everything. But I said you won't have very much time to use your car unless you're willing to wait a long time when you get back here because if you're coming back with the ambassador... Oh no, no, that's ridiculous, you should be able to do it and I know it can be done, you just do it. And I said well, we'll do our best but I said I'm telling you, Mrs. Sessions, that it's not going to be here when you return to Quito because it will be impossible. It may be very soon after you arrive if we have real good luck but I said it's all departures of these ships and I don't know those departure dates and I don't know when the ambassador decides to come back, and blah, blah, blah.

So anyway, she got back and of course the car wasn't there and she raised hell with me, complained at me and complained with the ambassador and he said pay no attention to her. He said this goddamn car. So she spent about- to ship that car to San Francisco and then ship it back to Guayaquil, she spent almost, you know something like, oh, two or

three thousand dollars, you know. It was very expensive to ship cars back and forth. And she demanded that the car not be driven up from Guayaquil; I said well we can have it driven at the same time as other embassy vehicles. Oh no, no, no. So we had to cart this big lift van with the car all the way from Guayaquil to- Anyway, she paid the money though so that was it.

So that's life in Quito. Now then you say I didn't have anything to do; I had plenty to do.

Q: Now, at that time, part of your security responsibilities to be aware of local politics. This is the Vietnam War period- were there any anti-American demonstrations?

KESSLER: Yes and that inflamed the students. But it was therefore the Vietnam problem, apparently.

The USIS had installed a very large, beautiful library, very modern, very nice, and it was located, of course this was before my time, located just half a block from the university, the national university. It was an ideal location for the students, you know, they could go and check the books and research and whatnot and so forth. The library also had different programs and so forth and so on but it was a beautiful setup. Well, it wasn't quite so beautiful later, when I was there, so one morning why the PAO (public affairs officer) came rushing in my office, said Earl, he said, can you come with me quickly? He said there's a big demonstration and they're attacking the library so can you come with me? You know the police chief. He said I can't get anywhere with him. And we went, rushed down, rushed to the police chief, I knew him fairly well, and the police, they were just stalling, you know, they could have nipped it in the bud but they didn't, they didn't nip it in the bud. And so anyway, the students finally got a log, I don't know where they got this log and a rather large log, very large log, and they all carried this log and they rammed it into the front door and broke the front door down. It was a very sturdy front door. And there must have- I don't know how many students just to carry it, by golly. They got in, they banged it in and they smashed it in and got into the library and ransacked the library. And then they attempted to start a fire but by that time we finally- the police got involved and finally they kicked them out and finally stopped the fire but the police were- they didn't want to get much involved in this.

We also had demonstrations all the time, off and on, around the compound. Then they decided that they had to increase the height of the wall so they did that and as far as I know they were never able to get over the wall but it was a terrible thing and they had all this glass, you know, jagged glass. Of course we had it around our house. Actually we had it around our house and there were a lot of robberies, a lot of robbers in Quito, and we didn't have guards. We had all this, it was already there when we got there but it had this jagged glass and you couldn't crawl over it, by golly.

Q: Were there demonstrations at the time the ambassador was PNG'ed?

KESSLER: No, he left very quietly. No, he left very quietly. There were no demonstrations that I recall and I went out with everyone else; a whole bunch of us went

out to say good-bye to the ambassador when he left, to show our support and so forth. And all the agencies sent somebody and it was- we were all sorry to see the ambassador go but he crossed swords all the time with the president and- There were different stories; some say that the ambassador was overbearing and he asked for it and he got what he deserved. I would have said absolutely not and so I don't know.

And then along came an interesting situation; the Punta del Este conference. Punta del Este; Punta is point, este is east. So it references the East Point of Uruguay, that sticks out, and it's a very fashionable resort, area, very fashionable, very upscale. And beautiful homes. None of these little beach cottages or anything; beautiful homes. And two very luxurious hotels. And I would say probably whatever a figure would be, maybe 70 percent from what everyone told me, about 70 percent of the big homes are all very wealthy Argentines and that was the- because the beaches for Buenos Aires are a long ways away and they weren't really as good as these but they were a long ways where this is simple. Every night there was a night ferry that left and the next morning you were in Buenos Aires. I mean from Montevideo. And so the Argentines used to take that ferry and of course you could drive if you wanted to, you could drive over to Montevideo. It would take- I don't know how long it would take, I never did it, but anyway you could do that. And they did have a little sort of a commuter air service that you could take that. And some of the wealthiest, of course, they had their own helicopters and there was a helicopter pad there in Punta del Este. And so they finally decided-

So anyway I didn't pay much attention to this conference, although it was widely publicized that there's going to be this multi-national; every head of state in Latin America including of course, Canada, of course; every Latin American head of state would convene and then after they had their conference then every single foreign minister would get together. So it was really two conferences, one after another. It was a big deal.

As I recall the man that sort of was more or less running the situation was Idar Rimstead, Idar Rimstead, and he was a big shot when I was in personnel and I didn't know him terribly well but I knew who he was and he knew who I was. He eventually became, I think it was deputy assistant secretary for something or other. Anyway, he was the guy in charge, Idar Rimstead, and as I look back I think maybe he's the one that thought of my name, I don't know. Anyway, out of the blue a cable comes in, asking the embassy to release me for a period of time to assist in the conferences in Punta del Este, Uruguay, and they asked if I would be- if I could possibly get there a week before the conference started. And so Jack Crawley, who by then had reverted back to DCM called me in. He said Earl, he said, you don't know it but you're going to Uruguay. I said- I thought it was kind of a joke and I said oh yes, well where are you going, Jack? And he said no, look at this. He said the ambassador said well if they want him to go, we can't say no; so I went to the conference in Uruguay. At the time I thought being there a week ahead of time was kind of ridiculous to me but boy, I could see why; it was absolutely amazing, it was incredible, and I've never seen anything before in my life like it nor have I ever since, but let's break off for now.

Q: We're returning to our conversation with Earl Kessler. You were saying you'd just been suddenly assigned to the Punta del Este conference to backup the embassy in Uruguay, which itself is probably a pretty small embassy; that's why they're asking-

KESSLER: Yes, that's a very small embassy. Of course Uruguay's a very small country too, very small.

And anyway, they couldn't possibly staff this thing. It was just incredible. And they had to get people from all around, all the neighboring Latin American countries to help out in one way or another, particularly secretaries. My goodness. And secretaries and well, just everybody, really, anybody that could help. So anyway, when I- of course it's a long flight to get there and I flew- my friend, the head of- the Panagra (Pan American-Grace Airways) guy there who was station manager and head of Panagra. That was the airline in those days, Panagra, that was partially owned by Pan American but Pan American did not have the western side of Latin America. Pan Am had all the Atlantic side but Panagra had the Pacific side and it was a very fine airline and so forth.

So I said, well I told him what I have to do and so forth and so on, and I said of course, I'm quite sure that that flight will be so completely filled that I'll have to go first class. He said oh yes, definitely; he said yes. And I said of course you can furnish something to that effect. Oh yes, sure. So off I went. It's a long flight and the service in first class, they just kill you with kindness and-

And then I arrived in Buenos Aries and then- Oh no, I arrived in Santiago and then I had to change planes to get across to Buenos Aries. It was a beautiful flight over the Andes. Gorgeous. Lucky I had a clear day.

Then I had to change to this commuter flight over to Montevideo and then from Montevideo, the embassy, they were shuttling people back and forth all the time. It was about, ah, two and a half hour drive from Montevideo to Punta del Este. So I finally got there and there was one fellow sort of seemed to be in charge; I'd never met him before. And he said Earl; he said, I don't know what anyone's going to really do. He was a conference officer and he was very good at conferences but he said I've never seen anything quite like this before. But he said anyway, he said we're just going to have to be, all of us just putting out fires because fires are going to be starting all over the place.

So anyway, the next day I went in and so forth and talked to him and he said oh my gosh, he said there are four planes coming in this afternoon. I said four planes? Yes, four planes, cargo planes. And I said why would there be four cargo planes? Oh, you wait and see. So anyway, one plane came in and there were just- I'm telling you, these were pallets, not just cases, but pallets full of Poland Water (i.e., a brand of bottled water). And I just couldn't understand it and so finally I talked to some guy from the White House and he said, the president only drinks Poland Water. But I said I, you know, I said I've been to Montevideo before, you know, this is my first time to go to Montevideo and they pride themselves with the wonderful water they have and the wonderful springs they have and also the fine bottled water they have. Oh, but the president would never, never

touch that; he only drinks Poland Water. Well my- Egods, the amount of Poland Water that was unloaded was enough for the president to bathe in it every day.

So anyway, we had all that and then we had all sorts of stuff coming in. And then all of a sudden you had huge amounts of sort of miniature motorcycles. I'd never seen one quite before but they were sort of miniature motorcycles. And then the White House guy said oh, that's for the Secret Service. Oh, I said, really? Yes, he said, they'll be arriving probably tomorrow. And I said okay; what are we going to do with these motorcycles? He said well I think the best they just leave them here and then we'll cart them off, we'll bring the Secret Service out and then they can jump on their cycles and take off. And I said okay. And then they had all sorts of food stuffs and frozen this and frozen that, all sorts of stuff. Oh, the president is bringing his own, too, he's bringing two of his chefs along with him. And the only food that he- that they cook and it's- most of it has to come from the White House, I guess, obviously. The steaks in Montevideo were famous. The steaks in Buenos Aires had always been famous but it was common knowledge that half that meat actually came from Montevideo. But anyway, it had the finest steaks in the world, you know. So, oh, anyway.

The next day all sorts of guys came out of another plane and they were all Navy Seabees and a whole bunch of them, my gosh. Anyway, to make a long story short, these Seabees got together and I'm telling you, I never- would never have believed it if I hadn't seen it; within say four days they constructed a beautiful setup. A building, a temporary sort of type building; they had a snack bar, hamburgers, hot dogs and milkshakes and all that sort of thing and then they had a little place for tables and so forth. And they had- they served breakfast and lunch and dinner and they had sort of a lounge area there. It was incredible and they did this in about four days. Incredible. They worked around the clock. I must say, they were hard working guys. Of course there were lots of them; I don't know how many.

Q: They set this up out at the conference site?

KESSLER: Well, the conference, actually, the conference itself was held in the Victoria Hotel there and it was in sort of what you might say kind of close to downtown, Punta del Este, and that was about maybe three miles away, two or three miles away.

And then more people start coming in, coming in and all sorts of stuff. So they said we all got together to see the home where the presidents go to stay and this was donated by a very wealthy Argentine family who for some reason, I don't know how they got involved with President Johnson, I don't know, but apparently they must have had some connection and they turned their house over for his visit. Well, the house wasn't air conditioned. Well it was a beach place and a wonderful breeze from the ocean there and it wasn't unusually hot and I don't think any place I've been-

Q: Johnson is from Texas.

KESSLER: I don't know why they felt that it had to have air conditioning but anyway so they put in portable air conditioners all around the house. And then someone said well these drapes, the president likes to have complete darkness for his sleep so these drapes won't knock out all the light so we've got to get some special drapes. And then we had to get ahead of Montevideo and they had to fool around and the guy, finally he gets the measurements and they get this and that and then they had to get some people to come from Montevideo to install these special blinds or whatever they were so the light wouldn't get in and bother the president.

And then they said we got a real knotty problem; we think you're the person for it. And I knew uh oh, uh oh. The president wants to have a place where he can take a nap in the hotel where the conference is going to be held. Well, I said, is that any big problem? Oh, absolutely. First of all, they can't even put up all the heads of state because they want all the suites and they want all this and that. And every, you know, every single country in Latin America, you know, there's a lot of them. Central America, South America and independent countries in the Caribbean, you know. Dominican Republic, Haiti. There's another one that had just declared independence. And Suriname, Guyana. You add them all up. Anyway.

Well so I went down to see the guy who was in charge, the head of the hotel and he was a very nice fellow and we chatted and chatted and talked. And I said you know, we've got to get some space for President Johnson, you know, he's- you know who President Johnson is, you know, he's the most powerful man in the world and he wants to be able to take a nap. And he said there's no place. He said I've even given up my living quarters. He said I can't- he said I don't know what to do. But I said there has to be some way of doing it. We went back and forth and well, I guess if I cleared out some pantry area or something maybe we could- And then the Secret Service had to get in and make sure that they could be around, they had to be around him all the time. And anyway- And then he said- but he only sleeps in a king size bed. Well, in those days king size beds were not normally used and- in Latin America anyway, they were virtually unheard of. They had what they called- I guess we'd call it queen size but they didn't have the kind size much and this is a custom built something or other so they had to fool around, they finally got this bed up from Montevideo. Everything had to come from Montevideo. And then he wanted- had to have a rocking chair. Well, rocking chairs weren't popular in those days in Latin America; they just weren't popular. And finally some American family, I think in the business community there in Montevideo, did have a rocking chair so we finally got a rocking chair up there for this and that and so forth. Then he was- but the bed was a big, big hassle and he said I can't understand; he said you know, we're fairly fast paced in the conference, we don't have too much time for sleeping. Well, finally we got it. Oh, God.

So anyway, in the meantime all of a sudden why a whole bunch of guys arrived and these are Secret Service all dressed up in their Navy blue suits, dark ties, and all wore a hat. Well, this is a beach resort so it would be like going to Cancun or say Ocean City and parading around in a business suit there on the boardwalk; they stand out like a sore thumb. So anyway, off they got on their little motorcycles and off they went. And then

they were going all over town, all over the place and of course finally the word got, you know, you can't keep anything secret, somehow they got the word out that they were Secret Service and of course to the local population it was the biggest joke they'd ever heard of, these guys running around and wearing a hat, in their suits in a beach resort and of course oh, here comes some of those Secret Service guys, and they'd wave at them. Oh, it was a circus.

So anyway, to make a long story short, the president never used the bed, never used it. Whether he used the rocking chair I don't know but he did not use the bed. And they did a lot of maneuvers in the kitchen of this house. Anyway, this family really lucked out because they spent thousands upon thousands of dollars on that house. So they lucked out. I think they probably were smart enough to know, maybe.

So anyway, we find out- I don't know where- I guess it was in the morning time or maybe it was in the afternoon, I don't know, but anyway I came there, I had to go up there for some reason, close to where the president was staying, and all of a sudden I saw these men at a distance and they seemed to be trying to push a limousine and I couldn't imagine what it was so I went out of curiosity and went up there and oh, come on, help us. Help do what? Help us move the limousine. I said doesn't it work? Oh yes, it works fine but we don't want to start the engine, it might disturb the president. Can you imagine? And these are really big shots and they're out trying to push this. So I turned right around, I said thank you, thanks but no thanks, and I walked away. I was the hell with it, pushing a car just because starting it might interrupt the president is ridiculous so I walked away, I didn't have any part of it.

Anyway, the White House people, they were very arrogant, very demanding; the president wants this, the president wants that, and I don't think the president probably knew a lot of that stuff but it was true, though, he only drank Poland Water and he had special chefs, he only ate that food, and when he went to the reception there and the president of- which was hosted by the- I think it was the- I'm not sure who hosted it. I think maybe the head of the OAS (Organization of American States), I'm not sure. Probably the head of the OAS. And they served, of course, a lovely dinner and so forth but the president hardly ate anything and he ate before he went. And he was very fussy about his food, apparently. So anyway, he decided that he would- according to protocol he had to get together with all the presidents and they finally decided well the best thing to do would be for every president to come in and meet with President Johnson in his office, this very fancy office setup, because he can't be running around all around and so forth and so on and after all, you know, most of these presidents, they want to get on the good side of the president because actually they wanted their money coming in every year, their aid money, and so you know, they didn't mind. So that was the system. He would sit there and they'd usher someone in and Mr. President, President So-and-So of the Republic of Honduras or whatever. So anyway, the door didn't quite shut one time, and I've heard this from two different people and I'm sure it's true because they didn't- they were not on duty at the same time and they heard it twice. Anyway.

So anyway, the door was open and the president had a loud voice, he had a very loud voice, so he said, oh God, he said, another one of these piss ant country presidents coming in here. And boy oh boy, that got out and they heard it and he always used that word "piss ant" something. He loved that phrase, piss ant. I think that's a Texan expression, maybe. So anyway, that didn't do us any good. And also he had this annoying habit and I don't know why they- I don't know- I just could never understand when they left he'd present them a ballpoint pen, which was his signature, Lyndon B. Johnson. Well you know, you don't give a president a ballpoint pen and some of these presidents were very powerful, like the president of Brazil, the president of Argentina, the president of Chile; they were very powerful people, really. You might give it to the president of Suriname but you know, that's what he's giving. And so he held- I think he was there three nights and then he left.

Then the secretary of states had their visit and who was the secretary of state there at the time? Probably Dean Rusk. Yes, because when Kennedy was assassinated Rusk was Secretary of State. You remember Kennedy made that famous remark, he said- they were talking about the government and the ANC, this was a press interview or something, and he said well, I've done very well but the only agencies that I couldn't- he said dealing with the Department of State was like dealing with a bowl of jelly- Jell-O. You can't work anything out, it just slips between your- you can't work with those people. And that- after that it was a public statement he made, Kennedy.

So anyway, the foreign ministers' thing went very well and I didn't have any particular reason to have any connection with him, obviously, and it went very well and it lasted longer than the presidential and then finally they came with the final proclamation, that they agreed to disagree. That was the final on that. So that was the result of that operation.

And then the Seabees came in and they dismantled that building, they dismantled the whole thing, and by golly in three days or so you'd never know it existed.

Q: And the building was for the press or the support staff, the president's support staff?

KESSLER: No, this was a building with its snack bar, the restaurants, all that stuff. No, it was for everybody. You know, there must have been probably, I would guess maybe 40 people, 50 people there helping in one capacity or another. I'm talking about Americans, counting American secretaries. Oh, one group, half the plane was American secretaries flying from Washington.

Q: So the building and that were for the American delegation.

KESSLER: That's right and everyone else helping out. This was a park. But it was not for the Ecuador- the Uruguayans; it was for the Americans, and the Uruguayans I don't know. You know see, Uruguayans couldn't use that place for some reason.

Q: Let me ask this; you were invited to participate in this but who's was your on-site boss; where were the orders coming from and how did you know what to do?

KESSLER: I don't know. They came from Jack Callahan via cable. Idar Rimstead; he was the big boss. He was there, on the spot all the time. Well, I shouldn't say he was on the spot all the time; you didn't see much of him. He was- I saw him a few times and so forth and talked to him a few times but he wasn't around too much. I don't know what he was doing.

Q: You must have had daily staff meetings. This is what we have to do, dah, dah, dah.

KESSLER: Not much because, as this fellow said, he said there's going to be constant things- we can't sort of systemize it, we can't- But we finally arranged so we'd have- I think there were five or six offices and we would take care of that area, sort of, and I took the area that was the closest to the beach. By luck that was where, oh, what's the famous jeweler? Oh God, what's his name? Oh, very famous. Anyway, it's not important. But anyway, there was a Brazilian outfit that came in and they had these very, very, very upscale jewelry shops and they had them throughout all of Latin America, every one of the big intercontinental hotels and they would be very famous hotels; there'd always be a- I can't think of the name now- one of these jewelry shops and they had a jewelry shop there and that is located just about a block away from where I was and so all these big shots would come there to buy their wives or their mistresses kind of a bauble of some portion, you know. The sales girls were very good looking girls; they were all Brazilians, they all spoke good English, very good looking and they were very clever, you know. Oh, flirty-flirty but they never went out with anybody because I got to know one. I never took her out but I got to know one reasonably well. I never took her out though but anything. But she said oh no, we'd be fired if we're ever caught going out with any customer. But she said we flirt around a little bit.

It was kind of interesting where I was, because I'd see all these big limousines come up and the president of this or the foreign minister of that and they'd go in and a lot of them buy new clothes and things; they'd pay \$10,000 for a necklace and some earrings, you know, they had the money. It was a nice place to be assigned; so I arranged to have my swim every afternoon. It was slack during the afternoon because a lot of the people sort of took a- well, it wasn't a siesta country, really, but a lot of people took naps in the afternoon. So there was nothing much going on. Nevertheless, I had an arrangement where a colleague put the blind down in a certain window so I knew that someone was coming or that someone was there; so boy, I'd shoot up from the beach up quickly, you know. But I spent a lot of time- I spent every day, a few hours at the beach, which came with the territory, I thought, you know.

Q: How was the support from the regional bureau? From time to time you'd have to ask them for bodies or resources or help with-?

KESSLER: Well, of course, our biggest need was budgetary and so we had to justify what we needed for whatever we wanted to do and we wanted to expand this or expand

that or do this or- And then FBO was a very big- in those days FBO was very powerful and you couldn't do hardly anything without FBO's approval. And you couldn't even make a- like in the ambassador's residence in Nairobi- in Quito, we wanted to make a slight alteration, I forget what it was now. Oh yes, for security reasons why they wanted to block out one entranceway to the house and put in just another room so it wouldn't look awkward but they didn't like this other entranceway because it was way in the back and the regional security officer felt very strongly about it. And we had to get FBO approval and they refused to give approval. And when I left it never happened; I don't know what happened later.

But as for the political side well, I'm not too sure. My big connection with the political was my friend, who was head of the political section, Lubensky. And he called me in one day and- well actually he told me we're going to go and see the ambassador. Jack Crowley was out of town somewhere, I don't know where he was. Anyway, we went in. I was kind of puzzled why we'd be going in to see the ambassador. Anyway, he said so-and-so was leaving post very soon, a month or so; we want you to transfer and take his place as a political officer. So we offer you this job, you'll be political officer, you should be political officer, your background, your education, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And the ambassador said supported the idea, so forth. He said are you willing to accept it? And I said with all due respect, no. I don't want to be a political officer. Well, you know, what's the big idea, you know, is something wrong with a political officer? I said no, of course there's nothing wrong with being a political officer but I don't want to be a political officer. I like to be in management, admin; I like to have a problem and solve it, really solve it. You either solve it or you don't solve it usually, in most cases. And I like to have- that's the sort of thing I like to do. If I have a problem with a landlord, he's going to kick us out of a very sought after house, that's my problem. I've got to extend that lease one way or another. That's my problem. Maybe I'll succeed but maybe I won't but that's my problem. And if there's a problem about this, a problem about that, blah, blah, blah.

Then later my friend Lubensky, he said you know, you're nothing but a glorified clerk if you're in admin; glorified clerk, that's all you are. And why don't you do something substantive in your life? And I said well, I said substantive, you know, that's a term that's bantered around but it doesn't have much meaning to me, really. Oh, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I said well, I said, let me tell you a few things I've done since I've been at the post. And I said I've got the differential from 10 percent to 20 percent, so that affected every American in Ecuador. Ten percent isn't a lot of money but it is money and you get a big salary like you, pointing to my friend, why that's quite a little bit, 10 percent. And then I said I got a cost of living; before we arrived we did not have a cost of living so I got a cost of living. And then I was able to keep three or four houses in embassy hands; it took a lot of work and finally I was able to do it. And that was- I consider it a considerable plus because it would have disrupted families, it would cause a big mess and most of them were due within a period of about three months, the leases were due, and that would have been a terrible mess. And they were occupied by very senior officers in the

embassy and so forth. And also, I said, there was a fellow that'd be- he's a real pain in the ass, I said. He was always complaining, he wanted his wife, wanted her to have new furniture in her house and he was always fussing with me and complaining and so finally I called her up and I told her, I said look, we have everything ready; we're going to move everything you've got in your house out and we're going to put all new furniture in your house. And that happened. And I said you know, and of course he knew that he was the one that was badgering me all the time because his wife was badgering him. He said you'll make life much easier, for God's sake, if you get her off my neck and get some new furniture in the house.

So I said, now tell me what have you accomplished? Well, we've kept the Department informed about the local scene. Well I said, they can read the paper and be informed. I said actually some of the stuff I've read in the paper are terribly good because you know, one of the main reporters from the big newspaper in Miami was permanently stationed there in Quito because the Miami paper featured activities going on in Latin America; not much in the Far East but in Latin America, yes. And so anyway, so what are you- Well, I said what more; I said you do all these wonderful reports and some of them, I said, of course are better than others. I had to get a little dig in, you know. But I said by and large they're very good reports. I would read them because we had a chron file there. I give Ambassador Sessions a lot of credit; he said I want everyone that's interested to be able to read every report that goes out of here. And so we had a classified room and so you'd go in there and I'd do it every single day, I'd read the reports. Economic reports, some of them I could understand, some I couldn't, but I could understand the political reports and all the other reports, of course we couldn't see the CIA reports but a lot of reports covered some very, very tough issues.

The nephew of this guy who is the deputy minister of such and such, he must have- he wants a visa to go to the States and we enquire and we find that he's- he's not married, he has no job possibilities, he doesn't have any real skills and therefore give him- we can give him a visa- a visitor's visa but that's only good for, at the most in those days they had one only good for three months. I think later they had one for six months but this was only three months and then he'd have to leave. And he wanted a regular one, you know. And you know, went up to the ambassador, you know, because this is a big deal, you know. If we turn this thing down this guy had considerable say in the government and we already had very tenuous relations with the government and that was a big deal. And so it finally ended up for Ambassador Sessions to decide and my friend, Len Dameon, was head of the consular section, he refused to sign the visa and so Ambassador Sessions had to sign the visa. Of course the ambassador has the authority. So that was the situation and well, that was about it. And so I think that pretty well covers it.

Q: You mentioned something that's important to understand the depth and importance of the admin function and that is the cost of living survey and the post differential. Can you give a little background on what these are and why they are important to the morale of the community?

KESSLER: By the way my friend later, of course we were very close friends, and he said you know, you were right. He said you know, I think you're doing a lot of substantive work. And I said I think your reporting is terrific, which I did; he was a very, very smart man, very smart man.

Anyway. Well, on the cost of living, that's a very time consuming thing. What I would do, I'd get the wives. Wives had nothing better to do and they were good shoppers. And I get the wives in and I say look, would you like to make a little- a few bucks on the side? And yes, why not? I wouldn't get the head of the economics wife, no; she probably wouldn't be interested in two extra bucks but you get the wife of a communicator, wife of an administrative assistant of some sort or wife of a whatever, they love it and they're good shoppers because they're the one, you know. And then I give them this and they go around to the local shops and meticulously write down a can of Campbell's mushroom soup costs X number of sucres, which equals so much U.S. dollars. And then go to another shop, what that was, and another one and another one. At least three. And then, what is the cost of that soup at the commissary? And it would be pretty close to it because it's very expensive shipping all that stuff down to Guayaquil and up to Quito. And so, in other words the commissary was a great convenience but saving was not all that much. But, compare that price with what the normal price would be if you go to Safeway in the United States and it would be 50 percent more than stateside. That's how you calculate your cost of living. And you go right down the line; the cost of a haircut, cost of women to get her hair done, the cost of going- go to a place and buy a pair of shoes. Not just food, all sorts of things. Toys for the kids. The cost for orthodontic work. Boy. The cost of orthodontic work is very expensive in the States but overseas there's usually only one or two doctors that know anything, if you're lucky to be in a post that has one. And they charge astronomical. Of course the average American health plan doesn't include orthodontic work.

And they would go out and this would go on for a couple of, oh, three weeks maybe, and I'd have a whole bunch of these wives and they'd, you know, they'd take their segments and they'd go out and they'd very meticulously- I'd review them personally. And sometimes I'd say no, no, no, no, this doesn't look right. Well, I thought that. So go back to that shop. Every once in awhile they'd be ordered out of a shop and I said don't let it bother you and just leave. And make a notation that you were asked to leave the shop immediately because they did not want to provide this information to the American embassy. And that's how you get your cost of living. It's a very tedious, long process and these wives were delighted to make some extra money on the side. And I'd just put them on a quick little contract and we would always find money to pay for them.

Q: On cost of living you and your staff then would put all those survey pages together?

KESSLER: Oh, absolutely. It would be all reviewed in Washington and they were very careful in reviewing them, too. But they would usually support you. Actually, I never had a refusal in my experience.

And then the cost of living, that's out of- that's a touchy one, that's a touchy one post. I mean, not the cost of living but the post differential; differentials are very touchy one.

Q: Because the post differential is some percentage of your salary for being assigned to that post.

KESSLER: Yes, it's terribly complicated and also you've got to have other extra dimensions it and one is the health situation, okay, can you get proper health care there at the post. That's important because there's no American doctor there and the local doctors do not have what we would call normal, proper training where do you go to get your medical? Go to the dentist, you have to have a filling. Well, the dentist is- that's not likely that dentist went to American dental school and he might be good but he may not be.

Oh wonderful, I must tell you when we were in Baghdad Martha had a problem with her tooth. Oh gosh, she was having a problem. She just had a plain toothache and so we went and I enquired and this one doctor's supposed to be very good there in Baghdad, very good. He's Iraqi but very good, he's supposed to be, according to the local staff and so forth and all that. So she went there and oh yes, sure, sure, sure, and so he pulled the tooth. Unfortunately he pulled the wrong tooth. So that's a good example.

So anyway. Then there's the climate. Climate has a big thing when you are talking quality of life at post. If you're in a place where it's 110 degrees in the shade, like it was in Baghdad for about six months out of the year, seven months, why boy, oh boy, that can really, you know, it's just terrible. And we had these- And this- in these days, you know, they didn't have disposable diapers and we had these little two small kids in diapers. Martha and I would go up on the top of the roof and we'd hang up the diapers; by the time we finished we go back and then pick them up again because they'd be dry, it was that hot, 100 and- many times it would be 112 degrees. And so the climate's a key element in the post differential, whereas in other places it's just the opposite.

Q: However about altitude?

KESSLER: Well yes, the altitude affects a lot of people and a lot of people just never felt quite right. And they would have to make a point of going down to Guayaquil; and of course we were pretty good about that; we tried to give them orders to go down for orientation or something so they could- Even Mexico City; it was amazing in Mexico City. It's only 5,000 feet in elevation approximately, but we'd have tourists keel over there in Mexico City. But some of the people in Mexico City, why, some of the businesspeople, they would have homes also in Cuernavaca because they go down to Cuernavaca to get away from that altitude. That's a big factor. Although it just could be the opposite; it was too cold, you know. If you're in one of these- say you're in Leningrad, which later became St. Petersburg, why I'm sure that they got a good differential there because of the terrible cold weather there; only about four months out of the year is it decent weather. And other times it's terrible; 40 degrees for weeks and weeks and weeks below zero.

So that's the way it goes. Then also another one was security and that's a big factor in some places. It was very difficult so in some places, you know, the guy going to work would have to have the mirror on the roller and you have to get down to watch, see if there's anything planted under his car overnight. That was terrible in some of those posts. And so security was a big factor. Sometimes why, they would say please, don't go out after dark. So you know, it was confining. You couldn't have normal social gatherings some nights because the security people say absolutely not.

One of the biggest and nicest beaches when I was in Athens, every once in awhile there'd be an alarm, they'd say no, this coming weekend no one's allowed to go to such-and-such beach because on the way to that beach, why there was a pocket of problem makers so that's a big factor.

And then the safety religious practice was a factor too. A lot of people are very religious, particularly the Jews and the Catholics and some of the others and very religious and if there's no church there that's a very unpleasant situation for them.

Q: Now the post differential, is that like the cost of living where you're working off a checklist?

KESSLER: No, not really, no, no. It's just you have to explain it. If you have something going for you, explain it, you know. Because of the altitude in Quito we were having constant problems with particularly new personnel coming in and some of them can take the altitude and there's no problem whatsoever. But others are having continuous problems; others simply we'd have to have them assigned elsewhere. And then I would cite the X number of Marine guards, young healthy Marine guards, in the last year we had to remove two Marine guards because they simply could not take the altitude. That's, you know, you spell it out, spell all these things out.

Remember the old story about, Lord Somebody, who retired from the British Diplomatic Service and he was asked what would be your best advice to a young diplomat. The answer was: one, always tell the truth but never all of it. And second, before you go into a long meeting always go to the bathroom.

So, as to the first suggestion, we had a situation down in Guayaquil where one of the Navy guys goes out drinking with a prostitute there in the dock areas and ended up with his throat slit. He was found dead. And so that is something I could add to the post differential report. And I said some areas, I didn't say anything about Quito, Guayaquil, some areas there's a danger factor here because there's some anti-American sentiment and there's the usual thing of tremendous poor people here, and there were in Ecuador, particularly some of the Quechuan Indians versus the wealthy people and so forth. And this is example for- as an example within, whatever it was, three months, an American was murdered- was found murdered and so forth. I didn't say Guayaquil; that gives the impression, you know, that oh my gosh, an American was killed down there and so forth.

Q: Is this a report that you must file each year?

KESSLER: No, not really, no, unless they- There again, if they- there's no real regulation when I was there that you had to do it any particular time but sometimes of course if it- well, you see, another thing too, is that would be something that the inspectors would look at. But of course the inspection thing was another thing. Technically speaking the inspectors were supposed to try to hit every post at least once every three years but it didn't ever happen. There are just too many posts and they didn't have an inspection corps big enough to handle that sort of thing and therefore if a post hadn't been inspected in say, six years, and no reports have come in. But usually you say- say if you're satisfied with what you have you'd say nothing but if you wanted to increase your allowance of some sort why then of course you try to justify doing so. But cost of living is various; it's a very complicated thing. But all these factors enter into it and then also where do you go for vacations? Some places, why in those days they didn't have this R&R thing. When I was there they didn't have it. That came about later, much later.

Q: Now, at this time, when you first were assigned to Ecuador, was it a two year assignment? Because you ultimately were in Quito four years.

KESSLER: Yes. And we went on home leave after two years and came back for two years.

Q: So it was a four year assignment with home leave or-

KESSLER: No, I was a two year then I pulled a few strings and got an extension for another two years.

Q: So you quite enjoyed it.

KESSLER: Loved it. One of our favorite posts.

Q: At our next meeting we have a new administration coming in and the Kessler family goes to a new post.

KESSLER: That's about it. Kenya yes.

Q: Okay, thanks Earl.

[Ed: Mr. Kessler's obituary in the October 2012 Foreign Service Journal continues: The family's next move, in the summer of 1969, was to Nairobi, where Mr. Kessler served as general services officer. Staying on the African continent, he was next assigned to Embassy Freetown. After 17 years overseas, Mr. Kessler returned to the Department in 1974 and taught administration courses at FSI. He then moved to the Board of Examiners in 1977 and worked on recruitment and issues that arose from the passage of the new Foreign Service Act in 1980. He stayed with BEX until his retirement in 1986,

and later performed several WAE (When Actually Employed) assignments for BEX in retirement.

End of interview