

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

ROBERT KNOPEs

*Interviewed by: David Reuther
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Q: Today is the 12th of May. This is a foreign affairs interview program with Robert Knopes. This interview's being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, I'm David Reuther. Bob, let's start off by picking up some of your background. When were you born and where are you from?

KNOPEs: I was born in Janesville, Wisconsin on February 3rd, 1932, in Mercy Hospital. I grew up on a farm about a mile north of the town. Janesville had two claims to manufacturing fame. One was the Parker Pen Company, founded by George Parker, a native of Janesville. The other was a General Motors plant that produced both trucks and automobiles. Almost every family in Janesville had someone working in either Parker or GM.

Q: Now, you were saying you have a farming background.

KNOPEs: Yes.

Q: Where are your parents from?

KNOPEs: My parents are both locals, both from farming families. My grandfather Knopes came from Luxembourg, arriving in the United States about the turn of the century. Grandmother Knopes came from Germany, near Berlin, about the same time. They met in Janesville and were married in 1900. They bought a small farm, about eighty acres, south of Janesville, near little town called Afton. My Dad was the oldest of five children, three boys and two girls. By 1916, the family had outgrown the small acreage. My grandfather bought a farm of 160 acres north of Janesville. This is where I grew up.

Q: Hm.

KNOPEs: He paid \$100 an acre for that farm - \$16,000 for 160 acres of prime, arable land. My father told about moving the herd of milk cattle through the town of Janesville.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: Dad's job was to keep the cows from eating the flowers on people's lawns as they went through. My mother's side of the family was from Ireland. My great-grandfather came from Ireland, one of five brothers who took up farming in Rock County. Janesville is the county seat of Rock County. The boys came over one after the other. Each bought a farm and raised a big family. My grandfather married Annie Manogue, also from an Irish immigrant family. My mother was the second of their eight children. My father loved the life of a farmer and was the only one who stayed on the farm. One of his brothers went into the trucking business, the other had a career with Wisconsin Power and Light Company. The oldest girl was a secretary until she married and had her own family. The youngest contracted tuberculosis, for which there was no cure at the time. She died at age 19.

Q: You were talking about herding the cattle through the town. What kind of farming --

KNOPES: This is dairy farming. We had about 30 cows which we milked twice a day. We raised 20 or 30 pigs for market, and 100-or-so chickens for eggs and meat. We raised oats, corn, and hay to feed the animals. In summer the cattle grazed in 40 acres of woods. My mother took care of the chickens, sold the eggs to the grocery store in town, 30 dozen eggs at a time.

Q: Hm!

KNOPES: Mom saved money from the sale of eggs. After about 15 years she had saved enough to redo the kitchen. That's all in my book about growing up on a farm. If you want to look through it you can add anything you want from that. Growing up on that farm was quite an experience, one that served me throughout my life.

Q: Now, you were born in the midst of the Depression.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: How did that impact the finances -- farm finances?

KNOPES: Well, farming is not a business you go into to make a lot of money.

Q: Well, you were well primed for government employment.

KNOPES: *(laughs)* That's right. Being on a farm, we grew just about everything we needed. Eggs and milk were always on hand. We had an orchard with apple and cherry trees. I climbed the trees and gorged on cherries before the birds got them. Most of the apples we ate right away, though some we stored in the cool basement for the winter. In the summertime, we grew lettuce, tomatoes, beans, peas, sweet corn, and carrots in a garden. My mother canned everything. During the winter we were still eating the things we had grown in the summer. We grew our own potatoes and stored them in the

basement. In the spring we cut those that were left into pieces -- each piece with an eye. You know, potatoes have eyes. When planted, each piece grew into a potato plant. So, except for staples, like sugar, salt and flour, we were self-sufficient. We did all right during the Depression.

I mentioned that Parker Pen and General Motors were the two major employers Janesville. The factory built tractors before it was bought by General Motors. GM was the primary employer of men in Janesville. I think a third of my high school class went to GM when they graduated, as their fathers had done before. Unfortunately, the plant closed in 2008, a bit of a blow to the economy in Janesville. Parker Pen, I think, had been sold to Cross Pen some time before. Manufacturing was gradually moved out of Janesville. There were few employees left when it actually closed. The General Motors plant also had been downsizing over the years. Truck production was phased out, then the night shift was eliminated. When the final blow fell, only a few hundred people were laid off, though several local suppliers or parts and services were affected.

Q: Earlier you said, "And that was in the book," the book that you're referring to is this one that, entitled Any Damn Fool Can Be A Farmer --

KNOPES: Right, right.

Q: -- Growing Up on a Wisconsin Farm. It was published by Badger Books in 2005.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: And a lot of this early material --

KNOPES: It's in there.

Q: And I'm just looking through the photos. There's a fire?

KNOPES: When my parents were married in 1930, my grandparents moved to town and turned the farm over to my father. They shared profits fifty/fifty. We have the deed to the farm going back to the very first owner, in 1855 or 1860. So the buildings must have been built between 1860 and the turn of the century. The fire was started by a steam engine that provided power for a threshing machine. The boilers of those steam engines were fueled with coal and wood. Sparks and embers often flew up from the chimney. This day a spark landed on the dry shingles on our barn, setting them afire. My mother, the first to notice the flames, ran out to tell the men, but she was too late. Flaming embers dropped into the barn, which was full of fresh hay. A mild wind was blowing, spreading the fire from one building to another. Certain that the house, too, would burn, some of the men began carrying furniture out onto the lawn. But the wind shifted, and the house was spared. Every other building was lost.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: So Dad started over with all new buildings.

Q: What year was the fire --

KNOPES: 1932, I was about six-months-old.

Q: Oh.

KNOPES: It was a big event for us. A traumatic event for my Dad. But barn fires were not uncommon in those days. I saw quite a few when I was growing up.

Q: Well, growing up in Janesville there's a wider world outside and World War II starts for the United States in 1941. You would have been nine-years-old.

KNOPES: Nine-years-old, right, right.

Q: Where were you of those --

KNOPES: My school was a two-room school about a mile from our farm. There were only four of us in my class, four boys. A girl joined us later, just before we graduated. One of my classmates was very interested in what was going on in Europe. His father was Canadian, so he had a little more interest in the pre-Pearl Harbor war that was going on in Europe. I got interested through him. We kept up with current events by reading the Janesville Daily Gazette. After Pearl Harbor our family was more closely involved with events because the Janesville Tank Company that was with the 32nd Division had been sent to the Philippines in 1941. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines, we knew those people. Two of my mother's cousins and several friends were there. We read about the retreat to Bataan and the final stand on Corregidor. There was no word on survivors until much later. We read about the prisoners' death march to Cabanatuan Prison. Some died on the way, but most of the Janesville tank company survived. This was all reported in the Janesville Daily Gazette. That drew me into following what was happening in Asia. Both my mother's cousins died of malaria in the prison camp. It was a major story for Janesville, and for our family, too.

Q: And you're at the, you know, 10, 12, 13 year --

KNOPES: Yeah, right, right.

Q: -- frame and are aware of all these events. Did any - -I mean once the war started, did Janesville, the young men of Janesville --

KNOPES: Oh yeah, a lot went. There were many we knew. Friends and future uncles, men that married my aunts after the war. One future uncle was stationed in India and made regular flights in C47 supply planes over The Hump to Kunming, China. He had some interesting stories.

Q: Oh.

KNOPES: Another served on Saipan as an airplane mechanic. One friend was a military policeman who escorted German prisoners of war to camps in the United States. Their stories were interesting. Other than the men of the Janesville Tank Company, I didn't know anyone who was actually in combat.

Q: But as you were growing up and the war ended, these men spoke of their service?

KNOPES: Yeah, my uncles did. I never got to talk to the guys we knew who came back from the Japanese prisons. Things had changed after the war. The friendships were not renewed. One interesting thing about Janesville was the conversion of the General Motors plant to making artillery shells. After the war every employee was given one of the shell casings. For a while I saw one in every house I visited. They were about the size used in the five-inch guns on ships I was on in the navy.

Q: (laughs)

Q: When the war ended the plant was converted and --

KNOPES: Went back to making automobiles.

Q: -- the women that worked there came back to the farms?

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: I mean what was the post-war adjustments that you saw?

KNOPES: Well, nothing really changed at the General Motors plant. They went back to making automobiles. I think Parker Pen didn't stop making pens. Pens would have been useful in the war effort. The soldiers we knew came back to either work at GM or they became farmers. They were real Janesville people, real Wisconsin people. They were drafted, served their time, came home, and picked up their lives.

Q: Well, now you're a teenager living on the farm. I suppose a number of duties and tasks fell to you.

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: Talking about picking up the eggs.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: But --

KNOPES: I started driving when I was about seven or eight. My father put me on our old truck. I couldn't reach the pedals, but he said, "We're going to pick up the hay. I'll put it in gear. You just follow the windrows." He had raked the hay into long piles, windrows we called them, that circled the field. I drove the truck pulling the hay loader that would pick up the hay and bring it up to the wagon. At first I drove a team of horses on the wagon while my father loaded the hay. When I was big enough to turn the wheel he moved me up into the truck. Dad set the throttle on the truck to go about four/five miles an hour. No power steering on those things, so I struggled to turn the corners. One day he sent me home with a load of hay. He said, "Drive it down and park it behind the barn. We'll unload it later. Just turn the engine off." When I got home I thought I was good enough to make a complete U-turn to get into our yard by our house. I made the first turn, but not the second. I didn't think of turning off the ignition. The truck kept going, over the picket fence and up onto the porch of my house.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: So that was a learning experience. From then on, if I thought I could do something, I gave it a second thought just to be sure. Dad didn't say anything. He just rebuilt the fence. *(laughs)*.

Q: (laughs) Now, when did you start high school?

KNOPES: 1946. Five of us finished Dillenbeck grade school in 1946 and started high school in September. The school was in Janesville on the Rock River. I rode the school bus every day.

Q: Now, the high school and its classes would be bigger than the elementary school.

KNOPES: Yeah, our graduating class in 1950 was about 300. The school was ninth through twelfth grade. There must have been 1,200 kids in the whole school.

Q: Was this the first use of bus transportation --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- or you had bus for --

KNOPES: No, this was the first. We all walked to grade school - about a mile each way. If it was raining or snowing I got a ride to school. Once the snow stopped, we walked. In January and February it was pretty cold sometimes.

Q: Now, in high school is there a particular class or teacher that you thought -- grabbed your attention?

KNOPES: Well, I was a farm boy so I took agriculture class and joined the Future Farmers of America, one of the high school clubs. Mr. Wiseman was a great old guy, taught the agriculture course and led the Future Farmers. I did not plan to be a farmer but what we learned about crops, animal husbandry, and management were all very useful. My main interest in high school, though, was the band, playing in the band. I took up trumpet in eighth grade, and really liked playing. I was in the band and orchestra all four years. That was what I enjoyed the most, though I was not close to the band director. I was not academically inclined and more or less drifted through high school. My ambition was to be a musician, go to music school, or join a band or orchestra.

Q: What type of music were you thinking of when you --

KNOPES: Well, that was the era of the big band. They had great arrangers and excellent harmonies. Hearing those trumpet sections and trumpet solos took me far away from the farm. There was Louis Armstrong, Harry James, and a Wisconsin boy, Bunny Berigan. That's what I aspired to. It didn't work out. Why, I'll tell you later (*laughs*).

Q: (laughs) But your interest in music, did that teach you the benefits of practice --

KNOPES: Oh, absolutely. I loved to practice. And if you want to move forward, that leads us into the next step. I graduated from high school in June of 1950, the same month North Korea moved south.

Q: June 25, 1950.

KNOPES: Yeah, exactly. Just a couple weeks after my graduation ceremony. Before long, guys I went to school with got those letters from the government inviting them to report to their draft boards. There were no exemptions for farmers this time. I decided not to wait to be drafted. I went to the post office and talked to the navy recruiter (*phone rings*) --

Q: Oops. After that telephone interruption, we'll go on. So you hit the navy recruiter, the navy had a band.

KNOPES: Yes, it did, and a music school. The recruiter said, "Just sign these enlistment papers, go down to Great Lakes, and take an audition." My mother was supportive. I went to my father and said. "I'd like to join the navy and take part in their music

program.” He said, “Well, if that’s what you want to do, go ahead.” As I said in the book, this was a big step. I was leaving the farm, leaving my Dad to pick up all the jobs I had been doing for the past four or five years. I signed the papers and my folks drove me to the navy induction office in Chicago. I passed the physical and was sent to Great Lakes Naval Station for the audition. I never thought it might be a problem. In fact it wasn’t. But that goes back to your question, did taking up trumpet teach you the value of practice? I loved practicing trumpet and I was always trying new things. I could sight read anything put in front of me. So all the arrangements the navy chief musician put on the music stand, I breezed through. At one point he asked, “You haven’t seen these before, have you?” I said no, of course not. Practice may not make perfect, but it helps with auditions.

Q: Oh, OK.

KNOPES: I was a good reader and I was on my way to the Navy School of Music in Washington.

Q: Now, were you making any money in high school with your --

KNOPES: Not very much, no.

Q: With the band.

KNOPES: Very little. I was paid about \$100 for playing summer concerts with the Janesville Municipal Band. After graduation I played a few jobs with a small dance orchestra. I didn’t care about the money. I was doing it for fun and experience.

Q: Now, just for background purposes, your folks knew that you would be moving on and off the farm --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- in some future -- now, is there a brother that --

KNOPES: No, I had a --

Q: -- stayed with the farm?

KNOPES: No, no, I was abandoning my father to the farm

Q: So no other sibling.

KNOPES: I have a sister, but she couldn’t have taken over the farm. After World War II, while I was in high school, the economy improved a great deal. Demand grew. We got

more for our milk; the price of pigs went up. By 1950, we were making a pretty good living. So after I left, my Dad was able to put some of that money into labor-saving machinery - a gutter cleaner, and a silage unloader, a machine that, with a flip of a switch, would load a cart of silage from the silo to feed the cows, a job that took me a half hour. There were a lot of labor saving devices by the 1950s. We had a combine that harvested grain right in the field. A few years before we cut the grain, set it up in shocks to dry, loaded it onto a wagon to take to the thresher. With combines, corn pickers, and choppers, everything was done from the field. Dad and two neighbors jointly bought some of this labor saving machinery and worked together on harvesting. Things worked out all right.

Q: So how long did they stay on the farm after you left?

KNOPES: Well, they had no interest in leaving that farm.

Q: So he worked right up to 19 --

KNOPES: Well, I was trying to think. He was still milking cows in 1961 when I went in the Foreign Service. I think he finally sold the herd in the late 1960s. That was his retirement. He rented out the land after that. My folks stayed on the farm, they stayed in the house. They never wanted to go anywhere else.

Q: Well, speaking of going someplace else, you leave Janesville, Wisconsin and go to Chicago as the first part of your navy enlistment.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: That must have been quite a transition to begin with.

KNOPES: Well, no. Until I got to boot camp things just moved along. I was too excited to experience change. Once I passed the physical I was sworn in with a group of other recruits. No, I don't think I was sworn in then. I passed the physical, then went to Great Lakes for an audition. I was not in the navy yet. I think if I did not pass the audition I didn't have to join. But I never considered that possibility. I stayed overnight in a dormitory. and in the morning passed the audition. I think I was sworn in by the chief musician who tested me. Then I joined a recruit company. I attended all the required classes but was not issued a rifle, as all the others were because I became a member of the boot camp band.

Q: (laughs) How long was boot camp?

KNOPES: About two months, March and April. March in Great Lakes, was pretty cold, I'll tell you.

Q: But you're from Wisconsin!

KNOPES: Yes, I know! But the wind that blew off the lake when we were marching was very chilly. That was a cold couple of months. One interesting memory about boot camp was the cold morning we stood along the highway that goes from Chicago to Milwaukee to salute General Douglas MacArthur as he went by. President Truman had relieved him of command in Korea and he was on this triumphal tour of the United States. He had some association with Milwaukee and was going there to visit. We didn't know why we were out there until someone said, "That's MacArthur."

Q: Hm, I wonder if -- because if you went into the navy in 1950 --

KNOPES: No, it was February of '51.

Q: So after Great Lakes.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Boot camp, where'd you go?

KNOPES: To Washington D.C., specifically the Naval Receiving Station in Anacostia. That's where the U.S. Navy School of Music was located, right along the Anacostia River. There were about 200 students and maybe 75 instructors. We studied music all day long. Several veterans of World War II had been called back. My bunk mate had to leave his position as tuba player for the New York Philharmonic. We studied music theory and basic composition, but the program was primarily instrumental, preparing us to join one of the many bands on bases and ships around the world. The course was between 10 months and a year, depending on when your instrument needed in a band somewhere. At music school I discovered Washington D.C., the first big city I had ever seen. I can't remember which bridge we used to cross, but it was a short bus ride into Washington. We went in, listened to music at local bars, and saw a lot of movies. None of us were yet 21, but you could drink beer at 18 (*laughs*). We enjoyed ourselves. All the great musicians of the time -- Stan Kenton Sarah Vaughn, Louis Armstrong, -- played in Washington. There was something going on all the time. For aspiring musicians, it was a wonderful experience. Unfortunately, we didn't pay much attention to the history or anything else in Washington.

I started music school in early April, 1951, and finished up just before Christmas, with an ongoing assignment to the band on the USS Boxer, an aircraft carrier. I was home for Christmas. After two weeks leave I set off to San Diego to report to duty on the Boxer. At the naval base in San Diego they said, "The Boxer's not here. We don't know where it is." They found it in San Francisco and sent me on my first airplane ride.

Q: Wow.

KNOPES: A navy plane, a four-engine prop job with canvas seats along the bulkhead.

Q: How did you get from the East Coast to San Diego?

KNOPES: I took the train, sat up for two and a half days. It was a long trip.

Q: Oh, so you didn't get a sleeper, you --

KNOPES: I didn't get a sleeper. I probably should have, but I didn't. I was brought up during the Depression and learned to be frugal. Our family was very frugal. My mother was scared of flying so we didn't consider that. Train was still the accepted mode of travel in those days. So I took the train and saw a lot of the United States. Going through the Rocky Mountains was spectacular. It was another eye-opening experience for me.

Q: Going back to Washington at this time, Washington's a fairly segregated place.

KNOPES: It was. I've thought back on it but I don't recall noticing it. I can't recall whether I really saw those signs, "Whites Only," or whether I read about them later and I transposed them into my Washington experience. There were a few African-American music students but I didn't get to know them. Some of us, all white, once went to hear a band, maybe Duke Ellington, at the Howard Theater in what was then called the Negro part of Washington. We were the only white faces, and I remember feeling a little out-of-place. Later, I served with a very talented African-American in the Boxer band. A barber in San Francisco refused to cut his hair but he didn't talk about it. He did complain about the attitudes of some of the officers from the South. But as far as Washington was concerned, I didn't notice it at the time. No.

Q: So you finally find your ship.

KNOPES: Found my ship, yeah.

Q: What is the Boxer?

KNOPES: Aircraft carrier.

Q: Ah!

KNOPES: I was amazed at the size of it. I arrived at dusk and saw this gigantic gray hulk where I was going to live for the foreseeable future (*laughs*). The flight deck was 888 feet long. I went up the gangplank, saluted the officer of the deck, and started a new life. A seaman from Janesville met me and took me to the band compartment.

Q: Oh, for Pete's sakes.

KNOPES: Yeah, he was a fireman. I don't know how that came about, how he happened to know I was coming. I didn't see him much after I got with the band. It was a very big ship. At that time, every capital ship had a band of 14 to 16 musicians. We had four trumpets, two trombones, and a baritone, five saxes, and a rhythm section -- piano, bass, and drums. We played a concert of dance band type arrangements for the crew every day at noon. We played marches for refueling at sea and ceremonial occasions. I think I have played every march ever written. In the San Francisco shipyard the Boxer was being prepared for its second tour to Korea. San Francisco is a lovely town and the band members, who already knew the town well, gave me an excellent introduction. Since our home port was San Francisco, I got to know it quite well. We sailed for Korea in March, stopping in Pearl Harbor for combat readiness drills. During the week we sailed and drilled off Oahu, then spent weekends in Honolulu. Our next stop was Yokosuka, Japan, to get everything we needed for operations in Korean waters. Then we sailed to the war zone.

I was on the ship for three years. Except for the year in music school I spent my entire navy career on the USS Boxer. We made three cruises to the Far East. The first two during the war. The last being in readiness and showing the flag in various Asian ports. The first cruise was the most exciting. There was a fire on the hangar deck. A gun went off accidentally and it hit the loaded gas tank of a plane. The hangar deck was packed with planes fueled and armed for early morning sorties to Korea. Fuel, bombs, and ammunition exploded. We were still in our bunks when the fire alarm sounded. We headed for our battle stations. I didn't get to mine. Watertight doors had been secured by the time I reached the next deck up. The fire suppression system was going full blast and water flowed down to lower decks. The watertight doors were not particularly watertight. Water was rising slowly in the compartment where I and several others were stranded. The ship started to list. We heard the thud of bombs going off. I was not concerned until a chief petty officer, whose ship had been sunk in World War II, said, "We're all going to die."

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: I guess I hadn't thought about that up to that point. Fortunately, he was wrong, but it was a close thing. In the after action report on the fire the captain stated that the ship was close to losing all power, which would have put the vessel in serious jeopardy. When the crew did get the fire under control there was nothing on the hangar deck but melted pieces of metal. It had been an inferno. Nine or 10 sailors died. Several who were blown overboard or who jumped to save themselves were picked up by accompanying destroyers. We returned to Yokosuka a new flight deck and replacement planes. We were back with the Seventh Fleet in a few days. The Boxer went into dry dock for a complete overhaul when we got back to the States. We got extra time to spend in San Francisco, which was fine with me.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: I loved it.

Q: Well yeah, because if you're in the band and the ship is under repair in San Francisco, what do you do?

KNOPES: Well, we still played. We played "Colors" every morning as the flag was raised on the fantail. If there was no construction being done on the hanger deck, we played a noon time concert. At night we played jobs around San Francisco - USO (United Service Organization) dances, Enlisted Men's Clubs, things like that. The time we spent in Japan and other countries on those three cruises is what headed me toward a career in the Foreign Service. I got interested in Asia. After the armistice was signed in 1952, I think it was '52 --

Q: '53.

KNOPES: '53, oh, was it? Yeah. That's right. My first cruise was 1952, the second cruise was 1953. We were operating off Korea when we got the word. With the end of hostilities, the Boxer sailed south to visit Hong Kong and Manila. The more I saw of Asia the more I was fascinated by its history, people, and culture. About that time I began to realize I was not a real musician. I was a good trumpet player, but I was not a musician. Most of the other guys in the band had a natural gift that I could never acquire. I faced reality. With more practice and experience, I could be a better trumpet player, but I'd never be a real musician. I decided to learn more about Asia. I was discharged in February, 1955, went home to Wisconsin, helped Dad with spring planting, got a job in summer construction, and applied to University of Wisconsin. My plan was to study Japanese and Japanese history. Wisconsin did not yet have a course in Japanese. The Asian language was Chinese. So I ended up as a China hand rather than a scholar of Japan. That's what the navy did for me, got me into a career.

Q: With your interest in Asia and the ship coming back to San Francisco, did you realize that San Francisco itself was the center of, of Asian --

KNOPES: Yeah --

Q: -- culture?

KNOPES: Yeah, quite a bit. I wandered around Chinatown and ate in Japanese and Chinese restaurants. I hung around in bookstores with books about Asia and in museums with Asian art. Yes, San Francisco was a starting point for broader study.

Q: At the time that you went to Hong Kong, this was the -- what was the movie, "The World of Susie Wong," or?

KNOPES: Well, there's that, and "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing?"

Q: "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing," right.

KNOPES: *(laughs)* Yeah, both of those.

Q: Of that time frame, so that's what Hong Kong would have looked like.

KNOPES: The Boxer anchored in the center of the harbor, which was extensive then. Much of the harbor has been filled in and developed over the years. Yokosuka, Japan was a collection of two-story wooden buildings. Hong Kong was a conglomeration of Chinese and colonial, new and old. Colonial buildings with arches on every level lined the waterfront. The Gloucester Hotel with a huge lobby and arcades, the classic post office building, and real movie theaters captured our attention in Central. In Wan Chai we wandered through open air markets and checked out the bars. It was just fantastic, another new world for me. Hong Kong was even more intriguing than Japan.

Q: Take a break?

KNOPES: Take a break, yeah.

Q: We're returning to our conversation with Bob Knopes. While you were in the navy things were going on, one of the first Quemoy-Matsu crises came up. Would you have even noted that?

KNOPES: No, I don't think so. That'd be in the '50s?

Q: '54, yeah.

KNOPES: '54. Might have heard it at the time, but I don't recall. At sea one doesn't get much news and in port one's attention is not focused on international affairs. You know, sailing down to Hong Kong might have been a show of support for Taiwan.

Q: Now, accommodations on a carrier, we're not talking great luxury.

KNOPES: Oh no, not at all.

Q: Did the band --

KNOPES: Well --

Q: -- together?

KNOPES: -- The band shared a compartment with the quartermasters. They were the guys who actually steered the ship, standing at the wheel and following orders on direction changes given by officer of the deck.

Q: Hm!

KNOPES: There were 30 or 35 guys in a room not much bigger than this room. Maybe 40 x 40 feet. The bunks were four high and two next to each other. There were four or five of these rows -- yeah, there must have been about 35 or 40 men. It was pretty close living (*laughs*). This was just our sleeping compartment. The head, the toilet, was on the deck above.

Q: Mm-hmm.

KNOPES: I was going to mention one other thing about what we did when we were underway, when we were operating off Korea. We were at sea a month to six weeks at a time. So we refueled and replenished at sea. Tankers came alongside. The two ships maintained the same speed and direction. Hoses were pulled across between the ships and we would refuel. Then another ship would come along and winch food and mail across. A third ship would transfer bombs and ammunition. During this process, from about 5:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon, the band played. We had stronger lips than any civilian musicians. We played for 8 to 10 hours day at least once a week. Of course, we got breaks for meals and between ships. The guys who were working seemed to appreciate the music. Marches were a diversion for the men slinging bombs around and trying to get these huge hoses between the two ships.

Q: Now, when did you get out of the navy?

KNOPES: We returned to San Francisco in the fall of 1954. The Boxer was one of the oldest carriers (built in 1945), so needed more repairs. I thought I would serve out my enlistment on the Boxer. To our surprise, the navy announced elimination of bands all shipboard bands. We were disbanded (no pun intended). I was assigned to the band on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. I couldn't have dreamed of a better assignment. I would have a chance to explore the museums, visit jazz clubs and hear concerts at the Opera House. The band at Treasure Island was a full concert organization and played a lot of concerts in the area - high school assemblies, outdoor concerts, and official ceremonies. The dance band played regular dates at USO functions and clubs on base. Living accommodations on base were not bad but I had had enough togetherness during my time on the Boxer. I got a room in San Francisco, near the Opera House, bought a car, and commuted out to Treasure Island. I spent my last four months transitioning to civilian life. I got my discharge in late February 1955.

Q: And what did you do? Did you go home?

KNOPES: I went back to the farm (*laughs*).

Q: Went back to the farm?

KNOPES: Yeah, I went back and helped with spring planting. You don't forget that, driving the tractor, working the soil. And as I said, I applied to the University of Wisconsin and was accepted for the fall term.

Q: And you would have had the GI bill privileges.

KNOPES: Yeah, I did. I like to tell my grandkids that when I went up to Madison to enroll in the University of Wisconsin in September I walked around in a big gym collecting IBM cards for the classes you wanted. At the end of the process the cards were run through a gigantic computer, and I was registered. My tuition for the first semester was seventy-five dollars (*laughs*). It cost about the same amount for my books. A grand total of \$150 a semester to go to the University of Wisconsin in 1955. The good ol' days (*laughs*).

Q: Now, if you weren't academically stellar in high school and you had the navy break --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- what's it like coming back? You're an older student probably.

KNOPES: Yeah, but I was interested now. I really wanted to do it, to learn things. I knew what I wanted to do. I was going to be a good student. But it was hard. I just couldn't retain all I had read. Things didn't come together very well. There were a lot of veterans at UW and an office to help if they had a problem. Apparently my problem was a common one. The office had a machine specifically to help one concentrate when reading. It drew a curtain slowly down the page so I had to read line by line at a steady pace. It only took a couple of weeks to get me focused on what I was reading, which in turn helped my retention.

Q: Now, there would have been the first couple year's necessary courses.

KNOPES: General courses, yeah.

Q: And then you picked your major.

KNOPES: Yeah. That wasn't too easy. I was still interested in Asia but I didn't know what path to take to find a suitable major. I was interested in liberal arts, history, economics, philosophy. But I had to have certain number of credits in science. I took geography, which covered climate and weather as well as land formations. The next term I took a pre-med biology course and learned *everything* about the human body. These

have been the two most useful courses I've had outside of courses for Asia. I took survey courses in English and comparative literature. I'd read a lot of magazines and some novels, but these courses introduced to the classics and good writing. I had not done much studying in high school and not been in a classroom for four years, so the transition to life in a university was at times trying. But I knew I had an opportunity and I wasn't going to waste it.

Q: Now, in college they probably had a language requirement.

KNOPES: Yeah, I --

Q: What language did you take?

KNOPES: Well, I took German, because of the family background. Between my junior and senior year I went to Germany and looked up some of our relatives. Having some basic German was very useful.

Q: Mm!

KNOPES: I began Chinese in my junior year. The Chinese program was new, organized just three or four years before by Ms. Zhou Guo-ping, who was also my student adviser. Ms. Zhou was from Shandong province, a very nice lady. There were only 4 or 5 students in my beginners class. Three stayed on for the second semester. Another vet, who had studied Chinese in the army, and I were the core of Ms. Zhou's Chinese program. Other's tried but dropped out.

Q: How did -- what major did you finally pick?

KNOPES: Well, I finally picked history, with an emphasis on Asian studies.

Q: Now, Wisconsin in fact was one of the early institutions that had an Asia program.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: And was well respected. So who, who were some of the teachers in that that you recall?

KNOPES: Eugene Boardman was my major professor. He got his PhD from Harvard after the war and came to Wisconsin. He taught both Japanese and Chinese history, a little bit of Southeast Asia, too. He was a very nice guy. We kept in touch for many years. Unfortunately, he died young. Some illness that took him quickly. We corresponded regularly and when I was in Janesville on home leave I always went up to Madison to have lunch with him. I kept in touch with Ms. Zhou, too. It was good to go back when I could really speak Chinese with her (*laughs*). The spoken Chinese I got in two years with

Ms. Zhou we went through in about two weeks at FSI, the Foreign Service Institute. As for the Asian History Department at the University of Wisconsin, Gene Boardman was basically it.

Q: Now, he would have picked up Japanese language in the marines.

KNOPES: He was an interpreter. He served in many of the battles in the South Pacific campaign. He donated some material to the Marine Corps Library. I was always planned to take a look at it but never got around to. You know, down in --

Q: Quantico.

KNOPES: Quantico, yeah, Quantico. Well, back to Wisconsin. During my first two years I took the required courses and tried out some subjects I thought would interest me. I took a course in psychology but was not inspired. I tried economics. That was too dry. History seemed to be the one that fit me best. Gene was a patient teacher who knew that a group of students from Wisconsin didn't come with a lot of background on Asia. To jump back a bit into my music activities, I joined the Musicians' Union in Madison and began to get calls to play in local bands. Before long I was working two or three nights a week. I got a steady job with a polka band, sometimes traveling 100 miles to a dance hall. I was making good money, supplementing the GI Bill, but it's hard to get up for a morning class when you get to bed at 3 AM. So I took a job with a dance orchestra that played at a country club right there in Madison every Saturday night. During the week I took other dance jobs - Dixieland jazz at fraternities, dances in Madison. That's how I got through school.

Q: In the Asia area, things are, are coming forward from time to time. You have the second Quemoy Crisis in '58.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Are these kind of newsy things becoming more familiar and interesting to you?

KNOPES: I was working with Gene Boardman by then and I'm sure we followed it. At that point China was still locked tight. Most Americans still supported Chiang Kai-shek and the Republic of China on Taiwan. Quemoy and Matsu reinforced support for the ROC. In our classes we were trying to figure out what was happening in the People's Republic of China, when it would decide to begin to interact with the rest of the world. About that time Gene Boardman set up a meeting with of a young lady, not from Wisconsin, who had just come back from the PRC. She was completely overwhelmed with the New China. I don't remember much of what she had to say, but in retrospect it was simply starry-eyed gullibility. She was overwhelmed by the communes and socialist equality. We were impressed because she had been there and nobody else had (*laughs*). Of course, at that time only the most skeptical visitor to China was not deluded by

outward appearances and exaggerated claims. Diplomats, journalists and academics from many countries wrote books lauding the New China. We were reading them all, not realizing at that time how the wool was being pulled over their eyes. I should mention that Gene Boardman was one of the first academics to lobby for more contact with the PRC.

Q: What kinds of papers were you writing for you classes? Do you recall any?

KNOPES: We wrote book reports on assigned readings but I don't recall writing lengthy papers as an undergraduate. In graduate seminars we wrote and discussed papers on the politics and economy of the PRC.

Q: Now, you graduated in June of '59.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: With your bachelor's in history?

KNOPES: Yes, it was in history. Asian history. We called it Asian studies, but I don't think my degree was actually in Asian history.

Q: Now, what made you go ahead and do the master's program?

KNOPES: Well --

Q: After that?

KNOPES: -- Gene Boardman had a grant to do a bibliography on Asia and asked if I would like to work with him on it. The grant included a stipend for a graduate assistant. I took him up on it. In addition to my course work I spent hours in the library searching out books on Asia. Gene gave me long lists of books he was considering. I'd check them out, write a short précis and discuss their suitability with Gene. I was also doing research for my master's thesis. I see you've got the title of it somewhere in these papers.

Q: Ah.

KNOPES: I did see it..

Q: What was the thesis?

KNOPES: Well, I looked at it last night, you had it written in there somewhere.

Q: Oh, really?

KNOPES: It was: Chinese Students, The Kuomintang, and the Chang Tso-lin Government in Northern China 1924-1928. Gene knew a Chinese gentleman living in Madison who had been a student in Beijing during the '20s and '30s. The basis of my thesis would be interviews with Mr. Lee on student support for Chiang Kai-shek's northern expedition. I supplemented Mr. Lee's recollections with material from documents and newspapers from the period. There were several English language newspapers in China at that time, as well as books with first-hand observations. I finished writing in the summer of 1960, took an oral exam, got my degree and left for Washington, D.C. During my graduate year I had been recruited by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). They noted my interest in Asia and my study of Chinese. They flew me to Washington for a couple of interviews and said, "After you graduate we'll have a job for you." Well, I went out but there was no job for me. They reneged on their promise. I had a contact in my congressman's office who took an interest in my situation and called the CIA for an explanation. Two CIA representatives traveled to Capitol Hill to tell him that the position promised to me had been filled in-house. There was nothing available now. In the long run that was the best thing that could have happened. I know now I wouldn't have worked out in that organization at all. But, I still needed a job.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: After my friend talked to the CIA reps, he said, "How about USIA (United States Information Agency)? I just got this recruiting announcement from them. They're giving the test for USIA in a month or so. How would you like to try that?"

I knew less about USIA than I did about the CIA, but I said, "Sure, I'll take the test." I passed the written exam, then waited *months* until scheduled for the oral, which I also passed. And here I am.

Q: Now, the test in the oral, was it different for USIA --

KNOPES: I think it was.

Q: -- than Foreign Service Officers?

KNOPES: Yes, they had separate tests in those days.

Q: Do you recall about what time you took the oral?

KNOPES: Well, let me see. I got my MA degree in the summer of 1960 and came to Washington soon after. I think I took the written test in November, 1960. Then came the long wait for the oral. I was running out of money so I took a job at Woodward & Lothrop over the Christmas season. I stayed on as manager of the toy department. Retail was not the career I had in mind. When I got time off during the week I went into Washington to leave my resume at government offices. In March I was interviewed and

offered a job with the international trade office of the Commerce Department. It sounded interesting but turned out to be paper shuffling, writing form letters, and filing. I was with Commerce when I took the oral exam, so it must have been in May or June of 1961. In late summer I got a telegram from USIA offering entry as a Foreign Service Career Reserve Officer at the phenomenal salary of \$6,000 a year. I made about \$2000 at Woodies and maybe double that at Commerce.

When that offer came two of us had to decide on a new career. Karen Rilton and I had been married in Mt. Kisco, New York in April. We had met in a graduate history class at UW and planned to be married after I started my job with the CIA. We were able to set a date after I got the job at the Commerce Department. Karen had come to Washington while I was finishing my MA and got a teaching job at Richard Montgomery high school in Bethesda, Maryland. We talked about the offer, especially the career reserve title. Career was fine, but reserve seemed to indicate some restriction, something temporary.

There was a State Department officer seconded to our office in the Commerce Department. The FSO said, "Don't worry. USIA is solid. My brother-in-law is part of it. It's a solid organization. Take it. Don't stay here." My future was settled.

Q: Can you characterize for us the tasks that you had and the oral interview?

KNOPES: I think there were three USIA officers there. One of them, Mr. L. K. Little, had spent years in China. They asked questions about American history, international relations, and why I thought I was suited for the foreign service. Then Mr. Little asked me in Chinese about my study of Chinese at Wisconsin. I replied in Chinese and that was it. I was in! (*laughs*) I'm pretty sure I would have passed anyway but my clear interest in Asia and a little Chinese helped.

Q: Hm!

KNOPES: No role-playing or any of the things candidates have to do these days. It was an interview. I remember a question about our relations with African countries, which I knew something about, and one about the Gadsden Purchase, which I didn't know at all. We also covered American politics, society, and culture. That was it. There were 13 of us in that USIA class. Howard Hardy was the senior in the group. Howard was African American, in his mid-thirties and already had served several years in the civil service. Howard was over the age-30 limit that existed then but he was able to join, bringing experience and maturity to the group. The youngest was Jodie Marek, just out of college, 22 or 23. The rest of the group had either worked as journalists or had graduate degrees. One had a PhD. One had done all the course work but was still working on his dissertation. Only four of us made it a career. The rest left USIA within the first three years.

Q: Actually, could you go through a -- you came on board with USIA and then you 13 joined --

KNOPES: A100.

Q: -- the A100 course, which is Foreign Service boot camp.

KNOPES: Yeah, right, exactly. We were told we were the first USIA group to join an incoming State Department foreign service class.

Q: Oh.

KNOPES: I think that's probably right. We went through the A100 course, which lasted about six weeks or more.

Q: About eight weeks.

KNOPES: After completing A100 we went back to USIA and worked in each of the elements -- the press unit, educational exchanges, VOA (Voice of America), and motion pictures.

Q: Now, let's go back to the A100 course.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: It's a fairly large group.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: What did you think of the presentations in that A100 course?

KNOPES: It was a basic introduction to what we would encounter in an overseas embassy, as you said, a boot camp. We were taught the basics of writing, memos, telegrams and memcons. There were lectures, too, but I don't recall the subject or content. We took a class trip to Philadelphia, where we met the mayor and talked with officials about city government. We then went on to New York for briefings at our UN (United Nations) mission and a tour of the UN building.

Q: Now, this mix of USIA and State, did the USIA guys huddle together over in the corner, or?

KNOPES: We in the USIA group didn't know each other that well either. We were together only a few days before we joined the A100 class. The USIA group had a lot in common so we spent more time together, but I met a lot of the A100 officers.

Q: Do you recall any of the A100 people that sort of stuck with, you know, seemed to be interesting, seemed to --

KNOPES: Not so much, no. I got to know a few of them but after the course we in USIA went to learn our own trade, to work in USIA offices. Three of us from that A100 course were assigned to Thailand. Murray Zinoman and I went off to Bangkok and another went to the consulate in Chiangmai. I have been in touch with Murray over the years but I think the other officer left the foreign service.

Q: Anybody look like they fit the stereotype of sons and daughters of the rich East Coast elite?

KNOPES: There were a couple from Ivy League schools who I didn't get to know. One had already written a book about the Middle East. I was impressed by that, but not interested enough look it up (*laughs*). On the other hand, I think the majority of the class came from public universities and smaller schools.

Q: So returning to our conversation. One of the things I want to make clear is that the administration of USIA and the administration of State were quite separate. So do I understand that you got your cable from USIA, you started with them, you filled out your administrative paperwork, and they said, "Oh yes, we're going to assign you to this State Department A100 course."

KNOPES: Right.

Q: So the 13 of you traipsed over there. Now, where was USIA headquarters?

KNOPES: 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Q: Now, this is the start of the Kennedy administration.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Was any of that atmospheric impacting on --

KNOPES: Well, to some --

Q: -- people's choice of these jobs?

KNOPES: You mean of the people who came in with USIA?

Q: Yeah.

KNOPEs: No, because we were all in process before the election.

Q: Yeah, you would have passed the exam before that.

KNOPEs: I was still waiting to take the oral. The great thing as far as we as new FSOs were concerned was that Ed Murrow would be director of USIA. I think he was one of Kennedy's first appointees. We thought that he would raise the profile and effectiveness of the Agency. And he did.

Q: Absolutely. Now, after your eight weeks of A100, what were you assigned?

KNOPEs: We went back to USIA for orientation. We learned by doing, working in the various sections of USIA. I started in the Press Section which sent out a daily wireless file, published magazines, and supported field posts with other materials for placement. I worked in the East Asia area office to see how desk officers supported posts in the field. We spent time at the Voice of America and in the motion picture operation, which acquired and produced films used around the world.

Q: So these junior officer training assignments at USIA headquarters lasted what, three or four months each?

KNOPEs: No, only two or three weeks each. They were fairly short. Just long enough to see what was going on but not long enough to take on a substantive job. We were observers rather than workers. My class joined USIA in mid-September, the A100 course took us almost to the new year. On arrival, the personnel office informed us that before going overseas we would have to test at Spoken 2-Reading 2 in a world language - French, German, or Spanish. I had no problem communicating in German when I visited my relatives in Cologne in 1958, but I only got an S1-R1 at FSI. To satisfy that language requirement, I was sent to FSI to study French. That was about the same time the personnel officer told me I would be going to Bangkok, Thailand. I passed the basic test in French but never spoke another word of that language.

When I got the assignment I went home and I told my wife, "We're going to Bangkok."

"That's fine, where is it?" she said.

I knew a bit about Thailand from history courses, but we got out the atlas to see where it sat in relation to the rest of Asia.

We made plans to leave for Bangkok in July, 1962. Our first son had been born in January and would be six-months-old when we headed for Thailand. My final assignment in Washington was the Southeast Asia area studies program that lasted a month or so. There were many FSOs preparing to go to Vietnam, so it was a big class.

Q: Who were the kinds of speakers that would come to the --

KNOPES: There were talks about the different culture in each country, what to do and what not to do when fitting into another society. I remember only one speaker, Kenneth Landon. He had spent 10 years in Thailand as a missionary and filled our ears with interesting stories about Thai life and customs. His wife wrote the book Anna and the King of Siam.

Q: He was British.

KNOPES: No, he was American.

Q: Mm-hmm.

KNOPES: He had lived in southern Thailand and told about life and politics in the villages, as well as in Bangkok.

Q: So you are assigned to Bangkok, you leave in the summer of 1962.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: How does one go to Bangkok in 1962?

KNOPES: After visits with my wife's parents in New York and mine in Wisconsin, we flew from O'Hare airport in Chicago to San Francisco, We spent a day or two there, then headed to Tokyo. Propeller planes of the time had limited range. so we stopped in Honolulu to refuel. The airline provided us a day room at the airport so we could rest before the long flight to Tokyo. I don't know if everyone got a room or if it was because we were traveling with a six-month-old. It was a long flight across the Pacific but comfortable because we were booked first class. Chris, our six-month-old, traveled in a bassinet attached to the bulkhead in front of our seats. That was our first and last flight in first class on government orders. Travel regulations changed before our tour in Thailand ended. From then on we flew tourist class.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: We spent a day in Tokyo to adjust our body clocks and see some of the city. Then the final leg to Bangkok, with a stop in Saigon.

Q: What airline was this, do you recall?

KNOPES: It might have been Pan Am. I am not sure. During our stop in Saigon I got off the plane and was knocked over by the heat and humidity. I'd never felt anything like that before. Bangkok was the same when we arrived about midnight. We walked across the

tarmac to a shed. Luggage was brought in and thrown in a pile on the floor. The Bangkok USIS JOT, Jerry Tryon, met us and helped direct the porters to our bags in the pile. There was no carousel and absolutely no order to the process. Once we found our luggage, Jerry took us to the Erawan Hotel. There was a creaky, bamboo crib for the baby. Karen and I collapsed on the bed and fell asleep despite the shaking and rattling of an ancient air conditioner in the window. In the morning we awoke to bright sunshine, looked out the window, and realized we were in Thailand. It was great.

Q: What did you understand your duties were going to be before you arrived?

KNOPES: Well, this was a training assignment. A JOT moved from one USIS section to another, working with the officer in charge, much like our orientation program in USIA. I started in the Press Section and became acting press officer for a couple of weeks when the press officer got sick. I quickly learned that the local staff, the Foreign Service Nationals, were talented, skilled professionals who knew their job and didn't need much direction from a JOT. After press I moved to the Cultural Office, just in time to help the assistant cultural officer with that year's American Field Service program, interviewing, selecting, and preparing about 25 Thai high school students for an academic year with an American family.

Q: Yes.

KNOPES: We traveled around the country to interview talented young students. It was great fun and a real introduction to Thai education and society. Then I was sent south to observe how a branch post set up an exhibit at a provincial fair, this one in the town of Nakorn Sri Thammarat. I don't think I worked in the Admin Section. I spent some time in the motion picture office, but what they did was either too technical or too routine for me to get deeply involved. To learn about branch post operations I filled in for the branch PAO in Udorn when he went to Hong Kong on R&R (rest and relaxation). The training program was a good introduction to how a major post operated. I think I contributed a bit to the operation. I was ready to move on.

Q: Now, I understand at this time there's branch PAOs at the consulates, but also a large USIA program that went in separately into the villages --

KNOPES: There was only one consulate at that time, in Chiang Mai. One was later established in Udorn. Branch PAOs in USIS posts in Korat, Ubol, and Songkhla were representatives of the embassy and the US government.

Q: In addition to those places --

KNOPES: Oh, the MDUs (mobile development units) --

Q: -- USIA had a --

KNOPES: Yeah, the MDUs. These were the main part of my job when I was later assigned to Songkhla. I had hoped to go to Chinese language training after my JOT tour. As my JOT year was coming to an end, the area director came out from Washington. We talked about an ongoing assignment. He said, "We're not going to send you to Chinese language training, but how would you like to go to Songkhla as BPAO? From there you can count on Chinese language training."

We liked Thailand. I liked the idea of being in charge of a branch post. I said, "Songkhla sounds interesting. Yes, I'd like that."

Q: Now, was the consulate in Songkhla there, or?

KNOPES: No, there was no consulate when I was there. One was set up later, after USIS was closed down. I visited Songkhla in 1978 when I was USIA desk officer for Southeast Asia to visit a Vietnamese refugee camp. After the fall of Saigon many Vietnamese fled by boat and ended up in Songkhla on Samila Beach. I had lunch with the consul. There was no USIS. When I left Songkhla in 1965, there were plans to increase the number of branch posts in Thailand because of the buildup in Vietnam and what was perceived as a communist threat to Thailand. By 1970, there were 15 branch posts in Thailand. Three in the south. Then the policy changed and, even more quickly, almost the branch posts were closed. But we were talking about the MDUs we operated while I was in Songkhla.

When I arrived in Songkhla the post had one Landrover used to visit teacher training colleges and provincial government officials. As the US became more involved in Laos and Vietnam, and infiltrators from Vietnam were found to be telling villagers in northeast Thailand about the benefits of communism, the US and Thai governments agreed that something had to be done. Cooperative programs were initiated to counter the threat. USAID began constructing highways in the northeast. I think there were some telecommunications upgrades. But more had to be done to reach into the countryside, into the villages, with information that would bond the people with the government. The three USIS posts in the northeast, Korat, Ubol, and Udorn, were well-positioned to work with local governments to do this. The mobile development unit (MDU) program was developed. USIS posts in Songkhla and Chiangmai would be included. There were communists in southern Thailand, but they were not seen as an immediate threat. The Thai Border Patrol Police estimated there were about 2,000 so-called communist terrorists (CTs) from the Malay insurrection of the 1950s against British rule living in the jungle on the Thai side of the border. Malaya was now Malaysia, a free country, but the remaining CTs were not willing to give up. They were not actively involved in anti-Thai government activities. The concern was that they would create unrest in the Muslim villages of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and Satul. In the south we would be countering a rump band of communist terrorists, whereas in the northeast they would try to halt a recent infiltration.

Q: So it ends up the State Department has the embassy and one consulate in Chiang Mai, but USIA is in multiple locations, these mobile development units?

KNOPES: Yeah, there were five at the time -- Korat, Udon, Udon, Chiang Mai, and Songkhla. USIS Bangkok bought specially-fitted Jeeps for each post. I think we had two, plus a regular Jeep. Thai villages were accessible only by dirt roads, paths in many cases, which were impassable in the monsoon season. The few vehicles I saw on the way to villages were so crowded that passengers were even sitting on the hood and fenders. Newspapers were not available. TV did not yet reach the rural areas. Their one link was usually news on a radio the village chief owned. Most villagers were not aware that they were Thai, so MDUs would take information to them about Thailand, as well as the United States. MDU vehicles had a special generator that ran off the Jeep engine, used at night to power the projectors and lights. There was a container on top for the movie screen, places to anchor the movie projectors, shelves for movies canisters, and places to store magazines and other publications. We carried portraits of the king and queen, booklets on what the government was doing in the region, building roads and schools, for example, information to let them know the government in Bangkok was looking after their interests. We would only be successful if the local government was involved, so I called on provincial governors to ask for their help and participation. In general, we got good support. Someone from the province or the county government, usually representing the health, agriculture or education office, would join us. We had two teams working much of the time. I hired a young Muslim to head the team that went to Muslim villages. The other team went out to Thai villages. I went on several of the trips, often sleeping in temples, wats in Thai, or in the village chief's house. Trying to sleep on the hard, teak wood floor or a wat was not easy. But it was fun, trying to communicate with the villagers. I didn't get Thai language training before the assignment. I just studied with a teacher in Songkhla whenever I had a chance. After a while, using Thai every day on these MDUs, I thought my Thai was pretty good. Back in Washington I got an S1-R1 from FSI, even though I had no problem communicating with Thai villagers. I think the testers at FSI didn't like my southern accent.

I mentioned that the villages were remote, accessible only by dirt roads. Driving to one of the villages we came to a bamboo bridge over a dry creek bed. The village chief said it was safe, that Jeeps often drove over it. I started across, but before I got to the mid-point I heard a crackling sound as the bridge collapsed under our Jeep. It came to rest with the rear bumper resting on the creek bed and the radiator pointed in the air. There was no damage to the Jeep, but I was very embarrassed. The chief said "Mai pen rai," a Thai term meaning it doesn't matter. The villagers brought ropes to lower the Jeep onto the creek bed. We found a flat place to cross and made the scheduled showing of movies that evening.

Q: Now, the Peace Corps comes to Thailand in January '62.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: So it's just starting out itself. Did you run into them or?

KNOPES: Oh yeah. They were great kids. Most were teaching English in middle school and teacher training colleges, but there were some who lived in the villages promoting sanitation, installing septic tanks, installing pumps for clean water. I got to know them very well and they were very nice, dedicated. We often had PCVs (Peace Corps Volunteers) over for dinner. When I traveled I looked them up, took them to dinner. I learned a lot from them and they were very helpful in recommending bright students for the American Field Service year-in-the-US program. They were great and I think they really did a great job.

Q: And they were quite spread out.

KNOPES: All over the place. They were in almost every province. A couple of them I knew stayed on in Thailand. There was a Japanese-American PCV who went up to Bangkok and started a pizza concession. I heard he did quite well. And there was a teacher, I think she was over in Trang, Doris Gold. Was Patrick Corcoran there with you?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KNOPES: Yeah! Well, when I last visited Bangkok Patrick said she had married a Thai and was living in Bangkok. We tried to contact her and get together but our time was too short.

Q: Now, the assignment to Songkhla, they had a post you had to fill. So you came down from the embassy to do that.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: So you were in Songkhla from '63 to --

KNOPES: '65.

Q: Two-year assignment.

KNOPES: Two-year assignment. Right.

Q: Now, what kind of reports were you sending up to the embassy, keeping them informed of what you were doing and stuff?

KNOPES: I sent memos to USIS Bangkok asking for supplies and filling them in on programs. For reports on the area I wrote airgrams, I don't know if you --

Q: Nice green --

KNOPES: Yeah, those green things you had to type up. I was told a report I wrote on Muslims in South Thailand was sent directly to Washington. I was suddenly the authority on Muslims in Thailand. No one else had looked at them before. I got a lot of information from the young Muslim guy I hired. And I had visited many of the Muslim villages. So I got a feeling for how they lived and what they thought. No classified communications came to Songkhla. If I wrote a report on something sensitive, like the report on Muslims, I had to wait for a visitor to carry it up to Bangkok for me.

Q: Now my chronology is off here. Who's Howard Biggerstaff?

KNOPES: Howard had been a branch PAO in Japan before he was assigned to Songkhla. I don't think he realized that Songkhla as a branch post was not comparable to Osaka or Sapporo. Unfortunately, he got hepatitis shortly after arrival and was medevaced to Bangkok, leaving the BPAO Songkhla slot vacant.

Q: And that's the vacancy that you --

KNOPES: That's the one that I filled. Otherwise I might have gone to Chiangmai. There were two open BPAO slots. Jerry Kyle, who came just after me as JOT, went to Chiang Mai. That would have been fine with me, too, working in the consulate. But it was great being in Songkhla, where I was completely on my own. President Kennedy was assassinated when I was in Songkhla. I heard it on the VOA. The embassy decided that it probably wasn't appropriate to have a memorial service, just have a mourning book at the embassy. Before that message reached Songkhla I had already held a memorial service. It took that long for communications to reach us. We were at the end of the line. If I wanted to call Bangkok I had to go to the telephone exchange in the rail junction city of Hat Yai, a half hour away. The long distance telephone connection just didn't work from Songkhla.

Q: Goodness. Hat Yai is about halfway up the peninsula.

KNOPES: Well, not quite that far, but it's about 20 miles. A driver went there once or twice a week to pick up shipments for USIS that came by rail. The airport was in Songkhla, though, so we got an unclassified pouch twice a week on the Thai Airways flight.

Q: But this would be new movies and --

KNOPES: That would be unclassified cables, messages, magazines and newspapers. Movies, which were on 16mm reels, were bulky and came by rail.

Q: Now, one list of the USIA branch officers is Al Cohen in Korat, Gordon Murchie in Udon, Rob Nevitt in Ubon.

KNOPES: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Would you guys have been called up to Bangkok from time to time?

KNOPES: Oh yes, regularly. We all went to Bangkok quarterly for a BPAO meeting. We found out what new programs were being worked on, met with embassy officers, including the ambassador, and registered out needs and complaints.

Q: And who was your boss then?

KNOPES: Howard Biggerstaff. He stayed in Bangkok and took over the field program office.

Q: Oh, after getting sick.

KNOPES: Uh-huh. He was the field program officer, supervising and supplying all the branch posts. If we had a complaint we called Howard. He was a real dynamo, had excellent program ideas, and got things done. He was instrumental in developing the MDU program, even down to designing the Jeeps. I think that all came from Howard.

Q: That would also mean that USIA has its own budget.

KNOPES: Oh yeah, absolutely. USIA was an independent agency with its own budget until it was incorporated into State in 19 -- what, 1996, '97. That was the good part about it. That's why taking over the cultural and information program at AIT Taipei in 1993 was an interesting thing for me. The office was part of AIT and I didn't have my own budget.

Q: Uh-huh. So who is the PAO in Bangkok at the time?

KNOPES: When I got there it was Howard Garnish, an old newspaper man who had -- I think he started with OSS (Office of Strategic Services). No, it was OWI (Office of War Information). He was an old-school press guy, very nice, treated us well. He was there for about a year -- when I was a JOT. After I went to Songkhla, he was replaced by Jack O'Brien, another very nice guy. He was a good manager and hard worker, so, I started out with two great bosses, great PAOs.

Q: And when you were in Bangkok, the ambassador was Ken Young.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Did you have any interaction at that level?

KNOPES: Not when I was a JOT. And I think he was gone when I went to Songkhla. When we had our branch PAO meetings we always had a meeting with the ambassador, briefing him on what was up in our areas. I remember meeting with Graham Martin several times but not with Ken Young.

Q: Yeah, because Martin comes in in September '63.

KNOPES: Yeah, that's right. I was there for a while with Young. But I don't remember going to any meetings with him. I do remember meetings with Martin.

Q: Let me ask this. Did the embassy seem to understand what you were bringing to the table, the benefit --

KNOPES: Yes, I think so. I was down in Songkhla, with minimal contact with the embassy. But the political and economic officers people came down. They were interested in USIS programming and were willing to help when they could. I think we had a good relationship. And I think the PAO had a good relationship with the ambassador and all of the embassy sections.

Q: Now, you're in Thailand when Vietnam begins to focus U.S. attention. And in fact, the first military commitments are made in '65 before you leave. How was USIA explaining this in the Thai environment?

KNOPES: Well, in Songkhla we didn't have to. We were concentrating on introducing the villagers to the fact that they were actually Thai. There was also the anti-communist message. But I don't think it was that significant for villagers in the south.

Q: So your USIA material isn't talking about Vietnam per se, or the fact that China conducts this first nuclear test, or?

KNOPES: No, I -- no.

Q: Any of that stuff?

KNOPES: I would say no, not at all. I don't think that we were working on it. They were probably doing something like that in Bangkok.

Q: Let me ask you a couple more questions on Songkhla.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: What were your office situations and what was your living situation?

KNOPES: I moved the office when I got to Songkhla. When I arrived it was in downtown Songkhla. There was not much to the town. The story was that the USIS office was next door to the local bordello. The BPAO's office was on the porch and every morning the girls would wave and shout to him, an embarrassing situation to the young bachelor who was there at the time. This was not Howard Biggerstaff. It was one of his predecessors. The primary reason for the move was that we needed a better location. Howard had found a large house near the secondary school, and my first job was to renovate and paint the house, making it suitable for a USIS office. It was a big two-story building that I think once had been a trading company. It was basically two large rooms. We set up the library and English teaching in the ground floor space, with our offices upstairs. Karen, my wife, had taught English in a school in Bangkok and continued the program in Songkhla. Films were stored in a shed out back. Upstairs, there was a small room off to one side where I put my office. In the large room we put desks for my two staffers and our files. Though windows of most Thai houses had only screens and shutters, my office had glass windows, and faced west. It got pretty hot in the afternoon. In my one concession to Thai heat, I got an air conditioner from USIS Bangkok. We got another for our house so our two-year-old could take an afternoon nap. We lived down a lane just across from the airport. It was a two-story house with the kitchen and servant quarters out in back. The downstairs was an open area, with a small dining room off to one side. Upstairs were three bedrooms. One was very small. That I used as a study. Other than the air conditioner for our son, we pretty much lived like Thais. We frequently found cobras in our yard, a real concern with an active two-year-old. I killed a couple and the cook did in a few more. WE also found scorpions in our dining room and once, a bat on the pillow of our bed.

Q: And you were basically the only official Americans.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: In Songkhla.

KNOPES: I was the representative of the embassy. There were a couple of guys from another agency. One lived in the Samila Hotel, I remember. He came and went. We didn't know and didn't ask where he was going or what he was doing. He was just there. Two AID families lived in town. One was with rural sanitation, the other malaria eradication. Visitors came down from the embassy. That always broke the monotony. The airport was in Songkhla, which was the seat of government. Hat Yai was the trading center. So you know where the action was. I welcomed visitors from Bangkok, briefing them and finding out what was happening in the embassy.

Q: Your deal was Songkhla for two years and then Chinese.

KNOPES: And then Chinese, yeah. I finally got orders to go to Washington for Chinese language. That was a bit of a problem. The program at FSI was a year or less. It was not easy to get a lease in Washington for an apartment for less than a year. But we did get settled. And, to back up just a little bit. In September of '64 our second son was born in Bangkok. We thought about having the delivery at the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital in Hat Yai. But there was a blood-related issue that raised some concerns. We decided to go instead to the Seventh Day Hospital in Bangkok. USIS Bangkok arranged for the air force to send a special plane down for us -- with a nurse! It was very reassuring. USIS took good care of us. They took good care of the branch PAOs. We all went to Bangkok. Karen and Chris stayed with USIS friends. I stayed until the baby was born on September 20, then returned to Songkhla with Chris. Karen flew down on Thai Airways a week later with newborn Peter. When we headed back to Chinese language training, we managed two kids in tourist class.

Q: So when did you leave the assignment in Songkhla then?

KNOPES: June or July.

Q: Of '65?

KNOPES: Of '65, uh-huh.

Q: And so you came back to Washington?

KNOPES: Yeah, to FSI.

Q: For FSI Washington and Chinese.

KNOPES: Yeah. The class started in September.

Q: Do you recall who were your fellow students?

KNOPES: There were only two students, Ivan Klecka and me. Did you ever meet Ivan?

Q: Yes.

KNOPES: He unfortunately died young. Ivan came out of Laos and I came out of Thailand. We were both keen to begin Chinese language. There were two teachers and two students. Ouyang. Did you have Ouyang Chao?

Q: Mm-hmm.

KNOPES: She was still there. And Li Tsung-mi?

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: That was it, we were the class.

Q: Because they must have been running a special class for you because --

KNOPES: I don't know. I think they were shunting everybody else off to Vietnamese. I was surprised there weren't any State officers studying Chinese.

Q: But Ivan was also USIA officer?

KNOPES: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Oh, OK, so -- because I've got a list of FSOs (Foreign Service Officer) that took Chinese at that time. And that doesn't include your name.

KNOPES: Is that right?

Q: So obviously USIA was using FSI but running its own course.

KNOPES: Well, I don't know. That's strange.

Q: Yeah, because you just named the two main --

KNOPES: We had the top, we had the two teachers. When we got to Taichung there were several State officers who had been there for a while. They were finishing the course.

Q: OK, so you started --

KNOPES: About September of --

Q: In '65 in Washington.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: And then you in '66 a year later you --

KNOPES: Went to Taichung.

Q: Do you recall -- and you would have graduated --

KNOPES: 1967.

Q: '67, yeah.

Q: We're returning to our conversation with Bob Knopes. So your dream comes true. You're in Washington studying Chinese. What's that FSI introduction like, say compared to your academic --

KNOPES: Oh, it was so concentrated. When I was studying Chinese at Wisconsin Miss Chou was an easy teacher. She let me get away with too much. So Chinese always came at the bottom of my study list. She was very nice and gave me a good foundation to the language. But we went past what I learned at Wisconsin in less than a month.

Q: And how did FSI approach the training?

KNOPES: We began by concentrating on the spoken word. We started out with tones, added some vocabulary, then began to make sentences. We were halfway through the course before we got to learning characters. In Washington we gained some control of Chinese as a spoken language. In Taichung we would concentrate on characters and reading

Q: Now, is this so many hours in class and so many on tape, or?

KNOPES: We must have had about six hours in the classroom each day. I think one of those might have been listening to tapes. We took tapes home to listen to them at night. We'd found an apartment not far from FSI, two-bedrooms, and we had two small kids. Then it turned out there was another one on the way. Listening to Chinese tapes with two little guys running around was not easy. At the same time my wife was trying to cope with temporary living while hugely pregnant. Ivan was a bachelor living in the apartment complex above FSI, with plenty of time and no interruptions. I was worried that he would just leave me behind. But the study of Chinese presents its own limits on time and dedication. I held on and Ivan and I went out to Taichung on equal footing.

Q: Now, where was your apartment?

KNOPES: Oh, we were on Beauregard Street --

Q: In Northern Virginia.

KNOPES: Yeah, Northern Virginia,.

Q: The year ends in the summer of '66.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm. You're assigned then to the second year of Chinese.

Q: Mm-hmm. How does one travel to Taiwan in those days with two young kids?

KNOPES: Three by then. Now we had another six-month-old. Andrew was born in March. I don't recall much about that trip. We spent time with our parents, then left from Chicago O'Hare. On this trip we flew in a jet plane, but still had to refuel in Anchorage, Alaska. I think we stayed there overnight, then to Tokyo and on down to Taipei.

Q: What was it like arriving in Taipei in '66?

KNOPES: Well, I didn't get much of a feel for the town as we were stuck in our hotel for the entire day. There was a typhoon off the coast that almost delayed our arrival. We were supposed to catch a plane to Taichung the next morning. In the hotel room we watched the weather report on the TV. We didn't know anything about typhoons at that point. The wind outside was whipping the trees and the rain was horizontal. We thought, "This is serious."

But our USIS contact said, "We think it'll be all right. We'll send a car in the morning to take you to the airport."

It was still overcast and windy the next morning when left for Chiang Kai-shek airport. Was it Chiang Kai-shek? This airport was in town.

Q: Right, this is the one in town.

KNOPES: Yeah, I think it was called Chiang Kai-shek. Anyway, we went to the airport, only 10, 15 minutes away. We boarded and took off. In minutes we were above the clouds and saw the sun. When we landed in Taichung it was a beautiful day. That was our first typhoon experience. We learned that if it's not hitting where you are, it's not going to be too serious. This one was just skirting the northern fringe of Taiwan. We were met at the airport by the "xiaojiang," the school principal, Jerry Koch. He had been a missionary, spent time in China, and spoke Chinese. In Taichung instruction was tutorial, just a teacher and a student. Except for an occasional lecture on some aspect of China, there were no group classes that I recall. We began the course by reading lessons prepared at the school, "20 Lectures on Chinese Culture" and "Newspaper Chinese," then launched into reading articles and editorials from the daily newspapers.

Q: Where were the lessons given and what were your housing arrangements?

KNOPES: When we arrived there was no house available for us. We spent a couple of weeks in the Railway Hotel not far from the school. It was a basic hotel, not a good situation for Karen and three young boys. We learned that the CIA had a couple of leased houses that were empty. No students were coming to use them, but the Agency didn't want to release them to us. USIS Taipei worked a deal enabling us to camp out in one of those houses until something else came open. We didn't have to wait long. Don Anderson, who I later worked both in Shanghai and in Hong Kong, was leaving to be interpreter in Warsaw for United States-PRC talks. We moved into his western style

house, which had plenty of room for us. The only drawback was the hard tile floors and marble railings. We were concerned that a wandering two-year-old might fall and break his head, but that didn't happen. The school was a western-style building with many, many rooms. The administrative offices and a small conference room were on the ground floor. Upstairs were the classrooms. Each teacher had his or her own room. It was a good group of instructors, all from Beijing, all with a heavy Beijing accent. One was a retired general, another a noted calligrapher who gave each of us a scroll of calligraphy when we graduated.

Q: Mm.

KNOPES: It was an interesting group. One of my first classes was with a gentleman named Chang Da Mu. The bell rang but there was no teacher. Then there was a rattling of the paper covering the bookcase, and Teacher Chang appeared. There were no books in that bookcase. That was where he took his afternoon nap. The atmosphere in the school was relaxed, but personally, the pace was intense -- reading, breaking down newspaper editorials, learning new characters, forgetting those I had learned the day before.

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

KNOPES: To give the students a break from the routine we had a week or two off every few months. On our first break, Da Chen, the senior teacher, suggested that Karen and I and our son join her and her husband, who was a colonel in the Chinese Air Force, on a drive around Taiwan. We decided to drive from Taichung, east over the mountains, through Taroko Gorge to the port of Hualien. From Hualien we went down the east coast to the tip of the island, then through the towns of Kaohsiung and Tainan, back to Taichung. Spending more than a week with the chief teacher was great experience. The scenery was wonderful but the roads were terrible. Da Chen's husband and I spent much time pushing the car out of mud holes.

Q: In addition to this trip, were there any other field trips?

KNOPES: Yeah, we went to Hong Kong on one. I think everyone went along on that one, the whole group. We had briefings at the consulate. We were given an allowance for books and I spent a lot of time in bookstores which were well-stocked with books on China.

Q: I mean Taichung is quite a distance from the embassy in Taipei. So did you have an opportunity from time to time to interact with the embassy?

KNOPES: Yes, I was in frequent contact with the USIS office up there. I knew if I went to Hong Kong, Singapore, or Saigon I wouldn't be speaking much Mandarin. I wanted to be assigned to Taipei so I lobbied the PAO every time I went up.

Q: It was Ken Boyle at the time?

KNOPES: Ken Boyle was PAO and Ned Conlon was his deputy. Every time I went to Taipei I let them know I was available. It worked out. When the field program officer retired, I was first in line. It turned out that my job would be assistant cultural affairs officer, not field programming. I was not disappointed. Taiwan didn't need a field program officer. Our audience was not in the rural areas but in the cities. There were USIS branch posts in Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung. Kaohsiung and Tainan are only about 20 miles apart, so were overseen by a single BPAO (branch public affairs officer). With US assistance Taiwan had become a very successful agricultural economy. Now it was on the verge of change to an urban-industrial economy. As ACAO, I would handle the American Visitors Program, bringing speakers on a wide range of subjects to Taiwan.

Q: Actually, I think looking at this list, Ivan Klecka ended up in Taichung.

KNOPES: No, he went to Hong Kong.

Q: Hong Kong.

KNOPES: Yeah. He was the USIS Information Officer in the consulate. I went over to visit him a couple of times. He didn't use much Mandarin there.

Q: So let's see. We're at the summer of '67 and you get assigned into USIS Taipei.

KNOPES: Taipei, mm-hmm.

Q: So what does the assistant cultural officer do in this environment?

KNOPES: We had a big speaker program. USIA in Washington recruited speakers for posts around the world. We could request topics or specific speakers. We could also ask for speakers who were traveling to other posts, and who fit our needs, to stop in Taipei. A speaker usually came for 3 or 4 days. I think I programmed at least three every month. I remember speakers on the environment, the space program, the United Nations, education, and economics. American politics and government were touchy subjects because the Republic of China was a one-party system and the island was under martial law. I helped programmed the astronauts who made the second landing on the moon and later arranged a display of one of the moon rocks. I prepared and gave lectures on American culture and customs at USIS branch posts and in schools. Most of the speakers were programmed in Kaohsiung, Tainan, and Taichung, as well as in Taipei. It was a labor intensive job. But I had a good staff. I believe that every successful USIS program overseas came about because of the work of dedicated FSNs.

I also worked on a donated book program. American publishers got tax credits for sending remaindered books overseas. When I got to Taipei there was a room, about as big

as this room, piled floor to ceiling with donated books. My predecessor had been too busy with the educational exchange program to do anything about books. Ken Boyle said, "Well, you're here, you're new, how about taking over the book program?"

And I thought, "Great, I love to look through books."

The book room was in the back of the building. Few people knew where it was and there was no telephone. I spent many happy hours there, sorting books and making lists of where to donate them. I soon knew the librarians and many professors in every major university, as well as some senior government officials and their staffs. I could make individual presentations and I could pick out special books for the PAO to present to his contacts. It was a good opening for me. I finally cleared out that roomful of books, though more kept coming all the time.

Q: Let's get a handle on how USIS is organized at a major embassy such as Taipei. The senior officer would be the PAO --

KNOPES: That was Ken Boyle when I got there.

Q: And then he would have a deputy.

KNOPES: Ned Conlon, right. Then there was a Cultural and an Information Officer. Larger posts, not Taipei, had an administrative officer, too. The Cultural Officer in Taipei was Merv Haworth, a graduate of the FSI Chinese program in Taichung. He had served in Taipei as ACAO after Taichung. He had just come back from Washington where he had worked on the Fulbright and other Exchange Programs. Exchanges were an important part of the USIS Taipei operation. Merv and another ACAO handled all of the exchanges, leaving me free to do American Visitors and anything else that came along. There were three Americans in the Information Section. Tom Graves was the information officer. Wally Gibson was the assistant IO and Wally Bishop was motion picture and radio officer. The information office sent out the daily wireless file to newspapers, radio stations, and government offices. And then there was a book translation program, World Today books, done mostly in Hong Kong. The information office put out Student Review, a monthly bilingual magazine with English and the Chinese translation side by side. It was a learning tool for English, very popular with students.

Q: Let's talk about the wireless file for a minute.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: You were saying that comes out of Washington.

KNOPES: Yeah, every day.

Q: It's a compilation of what?

KNOPES: Of current news. Much of it culled from the daily American newspapers. The press office in Washington also had a staff of writers who covered the White House, Congress, anything in Washington that would be interest to posts around the world. One or two USIA journalists would cover events especially for Asia posts.

Q: Would it be primarily U.S. news and --

KNOPES: Yeah, primarily U.S. news.

Q: -- or cover Europe and --

KNOPES: Yes, they covered Europe, but there was a separate news desk for each area. There was an East Asia desk that gathered and sent out news of interest in Asia. You asked before about Vietnam. There was a lot of coverage on President Johnson and our Vietnam policy. USIS Taipei carried all of that. Of course, the government in Taiwan was strongly anti-communist and fully supported our efforts in Vietnam.

Q: Now, the local environment is one of censorship or sensitivity to the news.

KNOPES: Yeah, right.

Q: Did the wireless file run into --

KNOPES: No. I don't think there was ever a problem with the wireless file. That was current news. And not distributed to the public. USIS sent it to media and government offices and selected officials and academics. We tried to push a bit in introducing discussion of American political processes. I got the head of the political science department at Taida (National Taiwan University) to translate a book on American politics. It was distributed without a problem.

You asked about censorship. We programmed American speakers on American politics in our USIS centers but rarely in universities. To test the limits, Leo Moser, who was in the Political Section of the embassy, agreed to give a lecture on the America democratic system at Taida. Leo had a PhD in political science and had taught before coming into the Foreign Service. We had been classmates at the language school. I reserved a lecture room and put up posters on the campus. At the appointed time we waited and waited, but no one showed up. I am sure students were interested but it was too risky. When talking one-on-one away from campus, students were always full of questions. On campus they knew they were being observed. Being curious about democracy might indicate a sympathy for Taiwan independence. The goal of students was to finish university and go to the United States for an advanced degree. Learning about democracy would come later.

Censors read everything printed in Taiwan, with special attention to things political, and anything concerning the PRC. Small local magazines often pushed the limits on political commentary and were closed down. But they usually reopened a month later under a new name, and maybe a new editor. Any mention of the PRC was forbidden. Textbooks and encyclopedia printed elsewhere but sold in Taiwan were missing pages where items on the China mainland had been.

Q: In fact, the Taiwanese political movement was starting up at that time.

KNOPES: Oh, it was, yes.

Q: And you have the Diaoyu of 1970/'71.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Over the Senkakus.

KNOPES: Sure.

Q: Those were one of the first major student demonstrations in Taipei.

KNOPES: That's right. But that was a protest against Japan. It was nationalistic, sanctioned by the government. Those were good demonstrations and under control (*laughs*). Demonstrations about domestic questions were another matter.

Q: Well, at this time, for example, Peng Ming-min —.

KNOPES: He went off to the United States.

Q: Yeah, he went off. How did that happen?

KNOPES: Well, there was a lot of talk about it after he was gone. It was upsetting to the government. They feared he would promote Taiwan independence from abroad. I just read something the other day about who helped him get out of Taiwan. I don't think anybody in the embassy actively helped him. Though one of the political officers I was in language school with had contacts with many Taiwanese, not promoting anything but keeping tabs on the attitudes of the Taiwanese community. He spoke Taiwanese and had many student contacts. Not long after he was transferred from Taipei most of his contacts were picked up, except for one guy (*laughs*).

Q: Picked up by the authorities.

KNOPES: Yeah, right. Not sent away or anything, but questioned. Warned, actually. But the Peng Ming-min departure was an event that created a bit of a stir when I was there. We talked about it, but didn't know much about it at the time.

Q: But it must have made quite a stir in the embassy, I mean everybody's talking about it.

KNOPES: Sure. And certainly the story was big in official circles in Taipei. They were very upset by the whole thing because they figured something bad was going to come from it. But Peng went into academia in the US, did not involve himself in politics, and the story died away. Then there's one event that I've never understood. And I don't know if you've heard of this before, but a bomb exploded in the USIS library in Tainan.

Q: Mm.

KNOPES: I mention it, but I don't have anything more on it. Neal Donnelly, who was the branch PAO there at the time, has probably talked about it in his oral history. I don't think it was ever ascertained who did it or why they did it.

Q: Well, Nancy Tucker covers it in her book.

KNOPES: Did she?

Q: And she suggests it's the local authorities sending the message.

KNOPES: That was the only thing you could think of. It was not a dissident. It had to be somebody else. We never got the message as far as I could figure out. A couple of students were injured, so it seemed a senseless act.

Q: Let's see. Ken Boyle leaves in the middle of your tour, and Bob Clark comes --

KNOPES: Bob Clark comes.

Q: And change in bosses, change in atmosphere?

KNOPES: Oh, much, much. Ken was preparing to retire when I got there. He had a long career, a distinguished career. He had worked in France during and after WWII. He had been a PAO in Hong Kong. Now he was planning to go back to university to study linguistics. His mind was on his future, not USIS Taipei. He was very good at languages, fluent in French and Chinese. He had a new wife and a new baby. Ken continued to manage USIS Taipei but it was not a dynamic operation. Then Bob Clark arrived, with Bob Nichols as his deputy, and things opened up.

Q: What did they do different, programming?

KNOPES: Bob Clark developed a good relationship with everybody. He and Bob Nichols were outgoing personalities, experienced, they knew China. They welcomed new ideas. I advocated trying new things in programming, doing more with Student Review magazine, reaching out to students. Bob Clark listened, removed me from the cultural section, made me editor of the magazine, and set me up as the program officer. In one of the first issues after I took over Student Review carried an article on anti-Vietnam war protests in American universities. We wanted to be more realistic about what was happening in America. We were not advocating Chinese student protests. These same articles were being used by USIS posts around the world. The ambassador was conservative, cautious about anything that might upset the US-ROC relationship. When we were trying a new approach, the PAO always explained to him what we planned and got approval. Musical groups were part of our cultural programming, guitarists, choral groups and small orchestras. When we were offered Junior Wells and his Rhythm and Blues Band, I said to Bob Clark, "This sounds interesting. This is something we ought do."

He agreed, and convinced the ambassador that Junior would introduce another side of America. Junior Wells brought rhythm and blues to Taipei under the auspices of USIS. Everyone loved it. People got up and danced in the aisles. One of Chiang Kai-shek's old generals came to the concert with his grandchildren. We put them in the front row and offered them ear plugs. He said, "Don't worry, I'm an old artillery man."

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: Whether that meant he was already deaf or that he wanted to hear every thump of the music wasn't clear. It would have helped if he had been a bit deaf. Junior's band featured two guitars, a pounding drum, and Junior's exuberant singing, all amplified by a giant sound system. Everybody had a great time. We got no negative comments at all. The band went on to play in Taichung and Kaohsiung, with the same reaction. We opened things up a bit with out-of-the-ordinary things like that.

Q: The Kuomintang Party that's running Taiwan at this time in fact has a propaganda unit that's supposed to watch these things.

KNOPES: Sure, yeah.

Q: And the embassy was aware of who that officer was and --

KNOPES: Well, sure, right.

Q: And how to interact and --

KNOPES: We laid the groundwork for it. We promoted Junior and his band as a popular form of American music. They stirred up dancing feet, but they had no interest in politics.

I don't think they even cared where they were. On the bus they sat and listened to music on their earphones, oblivious to the passing scenery.

Q: What else did Clark open up for you?

KNOPES: I lobbied to do more with students, so I was made editor of Student Review magazine. It was popular because it promoted English learning. I added more local articles, lightened up the format, and put in more about what was happening on American university campuses. We never had a problem or even a comment from the authorities.

Q: Now, when we talk about the work of the embassy we're talking about the economic officers getting out, and the political officers getting out. What would have been your local contacts like?

KNOPES: Mine were mostly in the universities and libraries.

Q: Universities.

KNOPES: Yeah. We kept close contact with university presidents, keeping them informed of what was available, asking what we could do for them. I worked with the heads of the departments, mainly social sciences, history, languages, and literature. Not so much science or technical things, except for some programming on the environment, ecology and space. Space flight, moon landings, and space technology had broad interest. I made all the arrangements to bring a moon rock for display in Taiwan. That was a major success. The local history museum, which was right across the street from USIS, set up two rooms for the exhibit. On opening day the line to get in extended several blocks. I personally carried the rock on the plane to Kaohsiung for a showing. Crowds in the south were just as numerous and enthusiastic. About the same time we programmed the astronauts from the second moon mission. The entire embassy was involved in organizing events for the astronauts. USIS set up four big screens in the sports stadium to show a film of the actual flight, with commentary by the astronauts, to several thousand secondary school students. The astronauts did similar, though smaller, programs in other major cities, again to capacity crowds.

Q: Now, David Dean was the political counselor at the time you were there.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: And probably was running a pretty good section. Did USIA or yourself chat them up as to, you know, what some good ideas might be, or?

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: The interaction between Political and USIA --

KNOPES: The political section -- Leo Moser, Jerry Fowler, Charlie Sylvester, and Ted Price -- and I had been classmates in Taichung. We came up to together, partied together, worked together, and exchanged ideas on what was happening in Taiwan. I had a great relationship with the Political Section. David was supportive and helpful. I didn't get to know him very well until we both went to Hong Kong where he was the deputy principle officer in the consulate.

Q: Now, you're first getting to Taipei in '66. You're leaving in '71.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: What would you say are some of the changes you saw in the, in the mission and in Taipei in the local political --

KNOPES: Society was changing, the economy was expanding, and the political climate was opening a bit. Taipei was changing, growing outward, becoming urban. But it was not a modern city. The skyline was flat, only two new buildings were over four stories. When we arrived in Taiwan in 1966, we had to watch for oxcarts on the streets of Taipei. A couple of years later they were gone, new highways were constructed and there were more cars and motorcycles on the streets. Kaohsiung was a flourishing industrial city. American aid had helped create a thriving agricultural economy. Now it was moving to industry and technology. There was concern about a brain drain -- students going to the US and staying -- but this began to change as jobs in education and industry began to open up. Taiwan was still under martial law but it was not rigidly enforced. The ROC was concerned about international pressure for the PRC to take its place in the UN.

Q: And some have offered that this is because Chiang Ching-kuo was coming up.

KNOPES: That was clear, even at that time. The embassy, the political section, had regular contact with him. I think everyone saw that Ching-kuo was more open-minded and forward-thinking than his father.

Q: There was an assassination attempt in New York.

KNOPES: Yeah, that's right. It was big news in Taiwan when it happened, but it passed quickly. I can't remember much about it. It was a major story in the papers but I got the impression that Ching-kuo didn't want it to be an issue. There was some concern because it happened in the US. But the story didn't last.

Q: Now, so this whole time you're on the Cultural Affairs Section.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Oh, and you got rid of that room full of books.

KNOPES: I did, yes. There were always more coming in, but I could handle them after I got the backlog out of there.

Q: But that's, that's a good presentation.

KNOPES: Oh, fantastic. After I presented hundreds of books to a library, USIS was their friend forever. As I said, it was a great entrée for --

Q: And a personal gift too, you said to the Supreme Court Justices and --

KNOPES: Sure, right. A book presentation was a good entree to senior officials. It was a way to get to know a lot of people. .

Q: I remember when I was there later, presentation gifts were big and I have this whole collection of ties from the various municipalities in the --

KNOPES: Right. Oh, I wanted to mention my experience when I went from language school up to Taipei. As I said, all the teachers had this great Beijing accent, the standard accepted by all Chinese. When I spoke, my Chinese was very clear, understandable to everyone. The problem came when they replied and I couldn't understand what they said (*laughs*). They were from Zhejiang, Guangzhou, or Shanghai, each with a heavy local accent. Boy, that was a distressing situation (*laughs*). It took a couple of months to get my confidence back. I was really disappointed for a while.

Q: Some of the Taichung students said studying a language was fabulous. Then you walked out the door to the street and everybody spoke Taiwanese.

KNOPES: Taiwanese, right.

Q: Just to sort of illustrate how things are moving, this whole ping-pong thing comes up.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: In April of '71. That must have come to people's attentions.

KNOPES: Maybe. But as I said, reporting on anything to do with the PRC was strictly controlled. And that story concerned both the PRC and the USA. I don't think there was much in the Taiwan press about it, even though it was a portent of major changes to come.

Q: Now, in '71 you're working on your next assignment or trying to figure out what you're going to do next.

KNOPES: Yeah. That's right, '71. We were getting ready to go back to an assignment in Washington. Except for the short stay in Virginia for Chinese at FSI, we had been overseas since 1962, so we're coming on more than 10 years. My wife's father had died. Her mother was alone in Mount Kisco, NY. We were making moving plans when I got a call from the area office in USIA asking if I would like to go to Hong Kong to be editor of the Chinese-language regional magazine World Today. The plan was to revamp World Today, sell advertising, and make it self-sufficient. "We think you are the one for the job. Will you do it?" I thought it was a great opportunity but I had to convince my wife. That was one of the toughest jobs I ever had. I never did convince her. But she finally agreed and we went to Hong Kong. It was a job that just popped up. I was a Chinese language officer, had some experience editing Student Review Magazine, and I was available.

Q: But in those days USIA had a rule, you could only be out of the country so many years?

KNOPES: That was an informal policy, I think. They didn't want you to lose touch with the US, which we were probably beginning to do. Our boys had grown up in Asia. They knew little about their homeland.

Q: Want to take a break?

KNOPES: Yeah, I think so.

Q: We're returning to our conversation with Bob Knopes. We're talking about the end of your assignment to Taipei and this new assignment to Hong Kong. And I would suspect in one sense this illustrates American soft power, because you're, you're going from organization speakers and influencing audiences that way to now influencing audiences through a written publication. Did USIA have a number of these written publications --

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: -- languages around the world?

KNOPES: Yeah. I recall, Al Majal, which was in Arabic. It was the same size and format as World Today and we used that as our model. Another magazine went to Russia. I think it was called Amerika. There was Problems of Communism, in English, with articles indicated in its title. I know there were others but I don't recall the names. Al Majal" and most of the others were done in Washington. World Today was done in Hong Kong and distributed in Asia, sold on news stands. World Today was started in the 1950s to support the Republic of China on Taiwan and to counter material about the People's Republic, which had just taken over the Chinese mainland. At that time we were still thinking, hoping, the Nationalists might return some day. It also carried articles about the United States, its policies, and its commitment to freedom in Asia. It's biggest market was

Taiwan and Hong Kong, but it had a readership in the Chinese communities in Saigon, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore. Since World Today was sold on news stands, one of the first editors decided to put a Hong Kong movie actress on the cover of every issue, hoping that would catch the eye of a reader and lead to more sales. It didn't seem to fit the editorial policy of the magazine, but it was still going when I got there in 1971. The magazine was then being edited by the local staff with nominal supervision by the information officer. It had become a little bit slapdash, a jumble of translated articles. The area office wanted a more substantial, a more focused publication. We were heavily involved in Vietnam and more information on United States policy there might be helpful. There was also the goal of making it self-sufficient.

Through its life, World Today was funded from the USIA budget. Though money came in from sales, US law required that those funds go directly to the US Treasury. They couldn't be used to cover the cost of printing or shipping. Apparently, USIA lawyers had come up with a new interpretation of the law, allowing us to use advertising income to pay some of the costs of publication.

Q: As opposed to subscriptions?

KNOPES: No, we couldn't handle subscriptions. That would require more staff and a huge amount of paperwork. Mailing individual copies was not possible. We mailed in bulk to distributors in the countries I mentioned before. Circulation was all news stand sales. I had edited Student Review but didn't know much about the magazine business. I started by talking with every magazine publisher in Hong Kong, like Readers Digest and Far Eastern Economic Review. "How do you sell advertising?" "How do you market in various countries?" They were all helpful but not encouraging. It will be tough for a magazine put out by the US government to attract advertisers, they said. And they were right. It wasn't practical. But it was my job and I forged ahead. They said we would need information on readership for potential advertisers, so I found a small company that would do some surveys for us and an ad agency that started looking for advertisers.

After I got the assignment, I took a trip from Taipei to Hong Kong to talk to the PAO and look over the situation. While I was there Nixon announced that he planned to visit the PRC. Nobody saw that coming. I was standing in the corridor of the USIS office listening when David Dean came dashing down, asking "What'd he say? What'd he say?" That announcement pretty much determined how I was going to do World Today, for the first year, at least. I took over the magazine in July of 1971. Nixon was going to Beijing in the spring of '72. I forget when it was, May or something?

Q: February.

KNOPES: Oh, February? OK. I hadn't planned any big changes in the magazine for a few months, anyway. Now we would concentrate on preparing a special edition on

Nixon's trip to China. While we were doing that I gathered information on advertising, polling, and distribution.

In the run-up to the visit we made arrangements to get news reports and color photos from AP (Associated Press) and UPI (United Press International). We got materials put out by the State Department and the USIA press office covered the trip extensively. We had a lot more material than we could use. We had camera-ready copy ready for the printer before Nixon was back in the States. Copies of the special edition were on their way to distributors in Southeast Asia within a week. We must have printed almost 100,000 copies. The issue was sold out in a short time. No copies went to Taiwan, of course. The authorities there did not see this event as newsworthy for the island. Around Southeast Asia it was a best seller. This gave us a good start in launching the revised magazine, a monthly, more than double the size of the bi-weekly, with more articles on business, economics, international relations, and US society.

Our ad agency was able to sell some advertising for our first revised issue. I think we had Cross pens and the Hong Kong regional airline Cathay Pacific. Ads for cigarettes would have been a sure thing but we did not accept those. Later, we added some hotels and another airline or two. It was a slow start and never picked up much speed. I was successful in introducing advertising, bringing in some additional revenue. But we were meeting serious headwinds. On a trip to Southeast Asia I found publications carrying more about the PRC. One was even using the simplified Chinese characters developed in the PRC. Once the American president visited China most restrictions on publishing on what was happening there were lifted. In Saigon I got a mixed message. The distributor was enthusiastic, telling me, "We're looking forward to this new publication. We'll definitely increase our distribution." I looked at the barbed wire in the streets, the inflation, and other negatives and thought, "That probably isn't going to happen."

Circulation wasn't going to increase in the Chinese communities of Bangkok or Manila, either. The younger generation was totally assimilated as Thai or Filipino. They were not learning Chinese and would not be buying Chinese language publications. No matter how good we made World Today it would be hard to compete with local publications. We enlivened World Today and gave it more focus, but it was a general magazine put out by a US government agency. A couple of years after I left, USIA cut funding for magazines altogether.

Q: Just on the bureaucratic side of things, what's the tree that you're in? Who do you report to?

KNOPES: Nobody really. That was the good thing. My first PAO in Hong Kong was a former newspaper man. He was very helpful, suggesting things to try but letting me decide how to proceed. The next PAO was a poor manager. I was well into the job by then and could fend off his wildest suggestions. He was more troublesome to the rest of the staff. The people who were concerned with what I was doing were in Washington,

and they were only concerned with the finished product. I was pretty much on my own. I ran each issue by the PAO, but I don't recall any editorial problems arising.

Q: Being published in Hong Kong, is -- do you own the publishing facilities?

KNOPES: No.

Q: Or do you rent --

KNOPES: World Today was always printed by a local printing company, South China Printing, I think it was called. Their facility was in Aberdeen, on the other side of the island. We were in constant touch with them. When an issue was ready they came by the consulate to pick up the camera ready copy. Once we approved the final layout, the issue was printed and shipped to distributors. After I left Hong Kong, USIS switched the printing of the magazine to USIA's Regional Service Center in Manila, a major publishing operation that printed books, magazines, posters, everything that USIS posts needed. The magazine was then shipped to USIS posts by diplomatic pouch, a significant savings.

Q: And what was the circulation when you started off?

KNOPES: I think it was 70,000 to 75,000 copies an issue. Taiwan and Hong Kong took most of that, 70% to 75%.

Q: After that first issue, you got back into Taiwan, did you?

KNOPES: After the Nixon issue, yeah. There was just the one special issue. Then we made the switch to a monthly magazine, doubling the pages and changing the format. After Nixon went to China I thought it was time to get away from the pro-ROC bias, or at least make it neutral. In one issue I used a report on agriculture in the PRC that was written by the consulate economic section. It was just one page, a straightforward report, but it indicated that agricultural output was improving. After the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, there was no where to go but up. Our area director at that time was a protégé of Vice President Spiro Agnew, extremely conservative and pro-ROC. He was outraged that I would do such a thing. He threatened to remove me as editor, but settled on forbidding me from using anything positive about the PRC in the future. He left shortly afterward and I got back to carrying more coverage of the PRC. After Spiro Agnew resigned the vice presidency, he was frequently in Taiwan on some form of business. He and his colleague were very close to Taiwan. I could see why they didn't want the magazine saying anything good about the PRC. It might have hampered future relationships with Taiwan.

Q: Now, Washington was watching you, or reading from time to time?

KNOPES: Oh, yeah.

KNOPES: The China desk officer in USIA at that time was native Chinese, so he read each issue. We also appended an English summary of each article in issues we sent back to Washington.

Q: The magazine wasn't a -- was tied to a larger USIA program of doing these language magazines.

KNOPES: Well, not exactly, no. It was a local operation. I only used the other magazines as comparison. World Today started in Hong Kong and ended in Hong Kong. It's operating costs were part of the USIS Hong Kong budget. We got a lot of support from USIA press and magazine offices, but we in Hong Kong decided the editorial policy, except for that one instance.

Q: As the editor then of this publication, you're going around to the parties in Hong Kong saying I'm the editor? I mean you're joining the journalist crowd?

KNOPES: Yeah, to some extent. I would say, "I'm doing this magazine and we want to sell advertising. Can you give us any hints or suggestions or advice?" They were very helpful. I was a member of the Foreign Correspondents Clubs, a good place to make contacts. That's an interesting point, how did World Today fit into USIA? I believe it was one of the first regional magazines established. From what I heard, the genesis was USIS Hong Kong, not USIA, though I'm sure USIA approved. Its purpose was to project US presence in Asia and Southeast Asia. My job was to sell advertising, not easy for a general magazine relying totally on news stand sales. We had no idea who was buying the magazine. I put in more features that would appeal to a younger audience, while continuing to carry statements of the secretary of state about Asia policy. We added a section on business and economics. We tried to cover a lot of ground, maybe too much.

Q: During the time that you're in Hong Kong working this project, other things in the area are happening. The Americans pull out of Vietnam, '72.

KNOPES: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: Or '73 rather.

KNOPES: Yeah. We always carried articles on Vietnam. When I traveled to Vietnam, I found a stringer correspondent there to write local stories for us. The US was withdrawing, but we were still talking about the future of South Vietnam.

Q: Middle East pops up. Does any of that get covered?

KNOPES: Not much. We might have carried a statement of US policy on the Middle East but it was not our area of interest.

Q: Right. Because the Vietnam Peace Accords were signed in January.

KNOPES: Yeah, uh-huh.

Q: '73.

KNOPES: I think we were fairly optimistic, or at least hopeful, that things might work out. The collapse didn't come for another two years. But the Middle East, no, I don't think we covered much of that. It was a publication about Asia, the U.S. and Asia relationship.

Q: Now, you were there as the editor. Were there any other USIA officers assigned to this project?

KNOPES: No, I was it. An American officer put together Current Scene. You remember the magazine Current Scene?

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: But that was another office -- again a part of USIS Hong Kong but almost independent. Current Scene was really about what was happening in the PRC, analytical articles in English. The editor acquired articles from academics and unclassified items produced by the consulate. I think it was about 16 pages, published as a quarto, whereas World Today was a regular magazine. The USIS information officer handled press relations for the consulate. But Current Scene and World Today were separate entities within USIS. I had a staff of five or six. The senior editor had been running World Today for many years, although the information officer was nominally in charge.

Q: Now, was he a USIA officer?

KNOPES: No, no, Chinese. We had two other editors and two layout artists. I selected the articles and worked with the senior editor on a plan for each issue. The others did the translations and the layout.

Q: Well, as you were saying earlier, being in the publishing business can be tricky from time to time. Do you ever run into any other complaints on your coverage?

KNOPES: No, no. We didn't. Everyone seemed to be quite happy with it. I took a couple of trips to visit our distributors. They were always upbeat and offered suggestions on content. When we changed to a monthly, with a completely new format, they were enthusiastic about it. They said they thought we were going in the right direction. I was

not optimistic about the long term. The political climate was changing. China was opening and the ROC on Taiwan was slipping from the scene. The best thing about those trips to Saigon and Bangkok and talking to all those distributors was that I got a fantastic Chinese meal at every stop.

Q: (laughs) What office in Washington would you have been in contact with on these issues?

KNOPES: The Area Office for guidance and help and the Publications Office for support on materials for the magazine. There was one guy who looked over all trade magazines and company annual reports. Some of these had good articles about the future developments in medicine, management, or science that could be useful to us. He sent copies out to us. If we thought we could use them he would get the rights. We always had a pool of good material to choose from. There was a writer and a photographer at RSC Manila who did regional stories that were useful. On my trips around Southeast Asia I hired stringers in each of the countries. They supplied us stories from Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan. We were trying to turn World Today into a regional magazine rather than clipping and editing from U.S. articles. Of course, we used State Department policy statements. We always carried an article on US policies. The goal was to make the magazine regional. We hoped this would attract more readers and bring in advertising, too.

Q: Now, this also coincided with the time that Nixon goes to China and we have an unofficial establishment in China. Does this open the door to sending World Today --

KNOPES: No, no.

Q: -- into China?

KNOPES: That didn't happen until about 1979, after our embassy opened in Beijing. World Today was included when USIA killed off the magazines some time in the mid-1970s. After we opened our embassy in Beijing a magazine called Jiao Liu, similar to World Today, was created. Jiao Liu was distributed free in China. John Thomson was the first PAO in Beijing. He must have had something to do with starting the magazine. The problem was who to send it to. John and his staff grabbed listings from every available telephone book, college faculty directory, government office, any list of names and addresses they could find, and created a mailing list. One of my first jobs when I got to Beijing in 1982 was to refine that distribution list. It was an impressive list but we didn't know if copies were actually reaching the people, or who might read it when it arrived. But no, World Today died somewhere along the line in the late '70s. Jiao Liu wasn't a direct replacement but it was put together in Hong Kong by a similar staff. I believe the staff were all new hires.

Q: Now, when you start in Hong Kong David Osborne was the CG (consul general).

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: And later Chuck Cross.

KNOPES: Only for about a month, during my last month there.

Q: Oh, that Chuck came.

KNOPES: Yeah, it was David Osborne and David Dean all the time I was there.

Q: What was Osborne like to --

KNOPES: Oh, he was a very nice guy and an effective CG. As World Today editor, I didn't have much contact with the CG. I played squash with David Dean because we knew each other from Taipei.

Q: Actually, Hong Kong is one of the larger diplomat establishments.

KNOPES: Absolutely, right. Right, it was then, too.

Q: So it'd be easy to get lost.

KNOPES: Well, you could.

Q: Or stay in obscurity.

KNOPES: After Hong Kong David Osborne became ambassador to Burma. When I traveled to Burma as USIA desk officer in 1977, I called on him. He remembered me and was very cordial.

Q: This is also the Nixon administration, Kissinger becomes secretary of state. Did you notice any particular atmospheric change because of that? At your level anyway?

KNOPES: No, I don't think so. When was that? '72?

Q: Kissinger becomes secretary of state in '73.

KNOPES: In '73, yeah. I don't remember anything at that time or any changes back in Washington. I was pretty much in that little office. We were really struggling with the advertising and I was making trips around the area. I was completely focused on the magazine.

Q: Well, '74 you make a change by coming back to Washington.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Q: First to go to GW (George Washington University). What is that opportunity and how did it come up?

KNOPES: Well, it's kind of a sabbatical, a mid-career chance to do some studying and reflection. I could have applied to any university, but we had three boys in elementary and middle school. We wanted to get settled in the Washington area. We had bought a house while we on home leave from Hong Kong. Karen was concerned about her mother, who was alone in Mount Kisco, with some medical problems. We found a house for her nearby and she moved down. For all those reasons I applied to GW. USIA agreed and I became a student again. It was a good year.

Q: What was the coursework that you considered.

KNOPES: I took American history courses - the colonial period and the revolutionary war, social history of the US, Virginia history, and history of the space program. I also took some cross-disciplinary courses on the environment, ecology, the future of America. Those were run by Pete Mondale, Vice President Walter Mondale's brother. I took nothing concerned with Asia. I was out in Asia. I wanted to try other things.

Q: Now, did this end up with a significant or a degree or --

KNOPES: No, nothing. No, I didn't -- wasn't interested in it.

Q: Just restoring the batteries.

KNOPES: Exactly. It was fun being in there with those kids. It was an interesting year. There were four or five USIA mid-career officers taking courses there. Then I went back to USIA.

Q: Well now, this is '74 to '75.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: Saigon falls April '75. If you're in classes with younger kids, was there much cross talk?

KNOPES: No. I didn't live on campus. I saw them in class, but I went back home. I was coaching Little League baseball, getting settled in our house. I enjoyed talking to fellow students about the courses, but I didn't get involved with the day-to-day activities of a university campus.

Q: Now, the sabbatical opportunity was prefaced on coming back for a Washington assignment.

KNOPES: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Q: How did the particular assignment come up to you?

KNOPES: Well, you don't have it in your notes. After GW I worked in the science office of what was called ICS. The job was similar to what I did in Taipei, but in the opposite direction. I recruited specialists in the fields of energy and environment to go overseas as speakers. It turned out to be not as interesting as I had been led to believe. I wasn't that comfortable calling people I didn't know, asking them if they'd go overseas to lecture. I did all right but it was not my ideal job. I mentioned to Ivan Klecka -- my FSI Chinese colleague, who was then policy officer for East Asia — that I was looking for a change.

He said the desk officer position for Thailand, Burma and Malaysia was coming open. "Would you be interested in that?" I certainly was.

So I got out of the cultural side of things, back where I felt at home, where there was a little more activity. The ICS people were unhappy at my sudden departure, but they found a replacement. I worked on the desk from 1976 to 1978, when we went to Rome.

Q: Yes. OK. So that was the years of this over here. And this is, this new office -- well, let's go back to the old office, the ICS.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: So that set up the speakers. Who's, who's your boss and who's his boss?

KNOPES: It was a real bureaucracy, several layers of office and managers. The chief of my office, science and technology, supervised 5 officers. He, and chiefs of other speaker offices, reported to a division head who reported to the head of ICS. There were four or five offices like ours, recruiting speakers in art, literature, American Studies. The head of ICS was the equivalent of the area directors. ICS was a real hierarchy. I suppose that is what I didn't like about it and why I don't remember much.

Q: Well then in '76 you moved to this Southeast Asia desk.

KNOPES: Just after I took the job I went on an orientation trip to my posts -- Thailand, Burma, and Malaysia. The desk officer for Singapore and Indonesia had just left and his replacement wasn't due for a few weeks, so I was asked to visit those countries, too. It was a long and grueling trip around the world. I learned a lot about how posts were set up and how they were managed. I had been BPAO in Songkhla and magazine editor in Hong Kong office, working pretty much on my own. On this trip I saw the interactions among

office, personnel, and Washington. During my stop in Bangkok, I went south to Songkhla to visit a refugee camp that had been set up on Samila beach for Vietnamese boat people. Several former USIS Saigon FSNs were there. I went to show them they had not been forgotten and to see if I could help them in any way. It was a distressing visit for me. The refugees were crowded into a barbed wire compound. Nearby, lined up on the beach, were the boats that had carried them across the Gulf of Thailand. I had nothing to offer them except to tell them we were working in Washington to speed the visa process. I heard later that they all made it to the US.

From Thailand I went to Burma, my first visit to that fascinating country. It seemed that time was standing still. USIS operated under tight restrictions in Burma, with no activity outside of Rangoon. The library was the center of activity. Programs and the small library were very well attended. I think USIS did a magazine in Burmese. With not much to see in Rangoon the PAO took me on a tour of the country. We stayed in a former consulate building in Mandalay and toured the ancient capital.

Q: Pagan?

KNOPES: Pagan, yes. After Burma I visited all the posts in Indonesia - Jakarta, Medan, and Surabaya. I carried back a few observations and requests from PAOs in the countries I visited. It was basically an orientation trip for me. I don't recall any major developments coming from it.

Q: Now, let's talk about how East Asia, USIA and East Asia is organized. You're the desk -- you're the senior desk officer?

KNOPES: All desk officers are created equal. I mean we all handled our own countries. One desk handled Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. I had Thailand and Burma. Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia was another desk. There was a desk officer for Australia/New Zealand, one for the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and one for Japan and Korea. I don't remember who had the Philippines.

Q: Reporting to?

KNOPES: To the area director and his deputy. It was very informal. The area director convened a staff meeting every morning. Not at all bureaucratic. Every door was open and we could drop in to talk any time. Each area had an administrative officer who handled the budget and supported our travels and interactions with the posts.

Q: Who was your area director there at the time, do you recall?

KNOPES: When I got there it was Bill Payeff, with Cliff Forster as his deputy. When they left on other assignments Mort Smith came as area director and Bob Nichols, who had been DPAO in Taipei with me, was his deputy.

Q: And the second half of this coincided with the Carter administration coming in. Did --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Did a new administration --

KNOPES: Well --

Q: -- and a new director Reinhardt.

KNOPES: Well, John had an area director when I was in Thailand and Taiwan. Everyone in the area office knew him. John was an Asia hand. He was personable, a good manager, but I think he had a difficult time under the Carter administration. We established diplomatic relations with the PRC and broke them with the ROC. We were still recovering from the collapse of Vietnam. For my countries, Thailand and Burma, I saw little change. In 1977, I got an assignment to Italy, to Rome. I left the area office in late '77 to begin a course in Italian. Italian language took me into the summer.

Q: What was Payeff like to work for?

KNOPES: He was one of the funniest guys I've ever come across, a standup comedian. Did you ever meet him? He was bright but irreverent, not completely serious about anything. He made jokes to make a point, in any gathering. I think his personality helped him up the ladder of success. He was very good with people. He always knew what was going on, but as area director he was not actively engaged all the time. Cliff Forster kept everything on an even keel. Cliff was very serious.

Q: Now, Larry Daks, yourself, as desk officers, what is it that you cover? What is it that you're looking for or at?

KNOPES: We were liaison between USIA and the posts in the field. We followed all communications traffic and made sure that responsible elements in the agency answered requests. For example, if a post requested a speaker on a special topic or an article on a specific issue, I would make sure the request had been received and was being looked into. We did follow-up, making sure that things were carried through and didn't get lost along the way. If there was a policy question we'd check with our counterparts at State. Morning staff meetings with the area director outlined the overall picture and gave us warning of what we might expect that day. Basically we were there to assist the PAOs and the posts.

Q: So that means you would also be in daily contact with your state counterpart.

KNOPES: Yeah, maybe not daily, but several times a week. If there was an issue we'd call and check it out. We knew our counterparts over there. We had served with many of them

Q: From -- I'm thinking of the speaker part of USIA portfolio. Some speakers were good and really sought after and others were duds and don't let this guy --

KNOPES: Yeah, the problem is you couldn't tell until they get out there. If a speaker was especially demanding or needed special handling, we warned the next post. The first lesson I was taught was: don't send a cable. It might turn up where the problem speaker could see it. That would make things worse. We'd telephone, call the next post, make sure our comments weren't written down. But having a problem with a speaker was the exception. When I was in ICS it was my job to make sure that speakers I recruited knew their stuff and would be able to handle any situation. I'd say 99% of them were really great -- and enthusiastic. They did it because they liked to meet people, they liked to learn new things, and they knew their fields. They were great to work with. An occasional academic with a big name and reputation would think he deserved special treatment. They were a pain, but rare.

Q: On the Southeast Asia Desk, what might a typical day have involved?

KNOPES: On the desk?

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: We started the morning with piles of paper. I think it might be worse now. When I arrived at work in the morning, it was 8 PM in Asia. Everything they had done during their workday was waiting for me, not just cables from my posts, but from all of Asia. I did the action items, then read up on the rest of the area. If there was time I read the daily papers. There were phone calls, answering questions from other elements, following up on previous action items. And there would be meetings -- on speakers, publications, movies, planning, and on and on. Maybe a meeting at State. It was varied enough so it was never boring.

Q: Now, USIA is still at 1776 Pennsylvania?

KNOPES: It was, but area offices were in a new building next door. 1776 is gone now, torn down and replaced by the World Bank building, I think. The Publications Office, administration and maybe the director's office were still in 1776 at that time.

Q: One of the things that an FSO (Foreign Service Officer) wants to be cognizant of is the atmospherics of Congress.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: And what it thinks about programs, whatnot. We haven't talked about you running into congressmen or having to do CODELs (congressional delegation) or anything. At this point back in Washington, was Congress part of your attention?

KNOPES: No, not really. Not as a desk officer. I did CODELs overseas, but as a desk officer I did not work with congress. There was a separate office for that.

Q: Now, one emphasis in the Carter administration is human rights.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: Did that begin to come down to your area, the new emphasis?

KNOPES: Yeah, I'm sure it did. Beginning about that time every USIS post wrote a country plan. The PAO listed plans for the coming year in priority order, all very specific points. I don't know when this started but it was designed to gauge the success of PAOs, and for PAOs to gauge how their staff was doing. It was a useful document. I know that human rights was near the top at that time. And that meant that USIA would be providing speakers, articles, and other material for the posts.

Q: Now, these plans on the part of the post, they would come into you as the desk officer.

KNOPES: Yeah. I'd go over them and discuss them with the area director. He had to approve them. I don't think they went any higher than that. I don't think they went to the director of the agency. Part of my job was to be sure that a plan was reasonable and practical. A PAO could put a lot of wonderful things in a plan, but we had to be sure they could be carried through without a lot more funding. I thought it was a useful document, even when I was writing it later on.

Q: Well, it's interesting too. I mean you start out at the field and the next to last job was the magazine in which you were very independent.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: This job put you right in the middle of the bureaucracy.

KNOPES: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Where you're directing the hose or however you analogy you want to use. Quite a different atmospheric --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- and, and, and talents being now pulled forward in this job.

KNOPES: Yeah, I --

Q: Did you like it?

KNOPES: Yeah, I liked the job. There were some tensions, but it was a good job for Washington. It was more like being overseas. Every day brought a different challenge. I was dealing with different people, different activities, and a range of issues. It's a job that is constantly expanding and growing, and always interesting. I think the area offices had the least bureaucracy of any office in USIA.

Q: Now, we were saying in '78, by virtue of your German language training you're going to be sent to Italy?

KNOPES: That's right. I would have gone back to Asia, but neither my wife nor my boys were interested in that part of the world. So I put in bids in a job in Germany and a couple in Latin America. Then I got a call from the European area director. I knew her from the time she was PAO in Kuala Lumpur and I was traveling out of Hong Kong. She said, "I want to talk to you about these jobs. Why didn't you apply for this field program job in Rome?"

"Well," I said, "I guess I didn't see it."

"Do you want it?" she asked

"Of course," I said.

And that was it. That's how my career had gone. Unexpected offers at the right time.

Q: But you said something interesting here. You said, "I applied for," so the personnel system is being changed over the years where you're told where you're going next and --

KNOPES: Well, that was --

Q: -- now you have some sort of choice?

KNOPES: Yeah. We always applied for jobs, submitting a list of places we would like to go. If you were qualified for a job, you had a pretty good chance. About this time USIA personnel thought that area directors were exerting too much influence on the selection process. They were cherry picking the best officers for their areas. It was announced that from that time on personnel matters would be decided only by the Personnel Office. This area director didn't pay a lot of attention to directives that didn't suit her. I don't know about her relationship with the Personnel Office, but I went to Rome.

Q: And so you studied Italian.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Trained at FSI?

KNOPES: Started at Berlitz. I had left EA, FSI didn't have an open Italian class at that time, so they sent me over to Berlitz for a month or so. Karen and I both started there. We transferred to FSI, in February or March, 1978.

Q: The class at FSI, large, small?

KNOPES: We started with about eight students around the table. Then some graduated or left early, leaving just me and another guy. It was almost a tutorial, just the two of us, and we plodded along together. We were there about five months but I didn't get to S3-R3. The grammar defeated me.

Q: While you were in language training in March of '78, Carter reorganizes USIA into ICA.

KNOPES: Yeah, right. We just shook our heads. What is this? The rationale apparently was that the U.S. Information Agency was about more than information. They wanted a title that was more inclusive. So it was renamed the United States International Communication Agency - ICA. We went from information to communication, which I guess you can say covers just about everything. The first reaction was: people will confuse us with the CIA. The second was: what should we do with all the letterheads that say USIA and USIS? All the signs had to be changed. It a mistake and it was a waste. When Reagan became president four years later, Charles Wick came in as USIA director and changed everything back again. Once again we trashed the letterheads and changed the signs. We wasted forests of paper and confused a lot of people overseas.

Q: Well, I understand the Middle East guys at the time were quite upset at the change because they didn't want to be called agents.

KNOPES: Oh, really? But we were agents anyway.

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: Yeah, it was an agency anyway. And it was always USIS overseas. I mean we were not agents overseas.

Q: Yeah. That was the name overseas --

KNOPES: Oh, US --

Q: -- it's USIS. In-country it's USIA.

KNOPES: ICA replaced USIA.

Q: And now the new name both inside and outside --

KNOPES: Is -- yes, that's right, that's right.

Q: -- is agency.

KNOPES: I forgot about that.

Q: And the Middle East guys --

KNOPES: Oh, I see.

Q: -- said -- complained that it sounded like it made them CIAs.

KNOPES: Well, that's, that's interesting, because I didn't think it had changed.

Q: Because the word in Arabic for agency has this other aspect to it.

KNOPES: Oh, I see. I don't recall that, in Rome we must have changed it to USICA, but I think we were still USIS Rome. But I'm not sure. It was a confusing time all around --

Q: Let's talk about Italy. While you were in language training, or while you were recruited for this, what did you understand the job was going to be?

KNOPES: I didn't really know. I applied for another field program job. I thought I'd be working with the branch posts. But just like Taipei, the field program function disappeared, this time for a different reason. In fact, it had never existed. I was replacing a female officer whose husband was the cultural officer. She was in the Cultural Office too. They couldn't have her reporting to her husband, so they gave her the title of field program officer. But the work she did was still in the cultural office. I didn't learn this until I got out there. I would be an ACAO handling the American Visitor Program, the speaker program, a job I had done twice before --once in Taipei and again in ICS, sending speakers out. Rome was fantastic place to live, to travel, to eat, to do things. Italians are wonderful people, but they're hell to work with. The embassy started work at 8:00 in the morning and expected the work day to end at 4 or 5 PM. Often I couldn't get an appointment at the Ministry of Education until 7:00 in the evening. Karen and the boys enjoyed it, though. We had a good time there, traveling, seeing the country and learning the history. The Overseas School of Rome was excellent. Work was another matter. I had

a terrible supervisor, a guy who couldn't keep his hand out of what his staff was doing. In previous posts I had worked with a minimum of supervision. Here I was with a guy who meddled in everything. He didn't trust me, he didn't trust the rest of his staff, he didn't trust anyone who worked for him. His vision was upward -- to please the PAO and to please the ambassador. I suffered under this guy. It was not a pleasant experience, except for being there with the family, with everyone having a good time. Suddenly the situation changed. My nemesis decided to retire, replaced by an academic friend of the ambassador. The new CAO was a professor of political science from Yale. His specialty was Italian politics. When he arrived he said, "I'm going to do some lecturing, I have papers to write, I will work on the Fulbright program and deal with the ambassador. I'll leave it to you to manage the office." We worked together. He trusted my decisions. It was a changed environment.

I was still handling the America Visitor Program. At first I programmed individual speakers. After six months or so, one of the branch PAOs and I decided it would be more effective to organize a major conference, asking USIA for several experts in a single field. Our first conference was on international security, with speakers from Great Britain, Italy, and the US. We later did one on economics in Milan, one on American politics in Rome, and another on American Studies in Naples. For each of these we brought in five or six specialists. With the help of USIA Washington and the contacts of our academic CAO we got some great speakers. These conferences got good press play and made a real impact on Italian specialists. My tour in Italy started out badly, but things worked out for me in the end. Still, I was ready to go back to Asia.

Q: One of the programs I think you said you covered was the International Visitors program.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: The IVs.

KNOPES: Yeah. International Visitors, those were specialists in various fields we sent to the States. I worked incidentally with that program in all my posts. I didn't do the paperwork but I nominated several candidates for grants.

Q: In fact, let's describe the International Visitors program a little. That's where the mission nominates some Italian or Chinese, some local that they know who could benefit from focused exposure to the United States.

KNOPES: Right, contact with people in the same field in the United States. It was run through USIA. Anyone in the embassy could nominate candidates for the program. Once a year a panel was convened, with a representative from each section of the embassy. The panel went over the nominations and selected the best candidates. A tailored program was set up for each traveler. For example, a specialist in law or a judge would meet with legal

experts, lawyers, and judges in several regions of the US. Programs were designed to expand their horizons and give them an introduction to what was happening in their field in the US. There was a tourism element too. As they moved around the country they could visit places like the Grand Canyon or Mt. Vernon.

Q: Kind of answers the question, well how do you do it?

KNOPES: Yeah, right.

Q: So you take a journalist, put 'em in front of The New York Times editorial board.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Go off to Missouri, small newspaper --

KNOPES: To a small one and a large one, so they can see how different papers operate. That was basically it. As I said, I didn't work on that program. I was concerned with Americans specialists visiting Italy. These we tried to combine into a major conference. A lot of top level Italians attended the conferences, people we wouldn't have been able to attract to a single lecture. That was the goal, to raise the level so people would want to participate. We got a lot of press coverage out of it, too.

Q: What was Italy like in the '78 --

KNOPES: Oh, it was great.

Q: -- 1980s --

KNOPES: It was great. We lived on the outskirts of Rome. My mother-in-law was with us, suffering from a crippling arthritis. Unfortunately, her condition worsened. Karen brought her back to the US for treatment but she passed away. We had this nice apartment and the boys went to the Overseas School of Rome, a fantastic school. The bus system was great. We could send the kids anywhere on the bus, even though our youngest was about 12 at the time. He and his friends took the city bus into downtown Rome to the movies or to sightsee. It was safe and not expensive. And, as I said, the food was great and the scenery splendiferous.

Q: Little bit of history there?

KNOPES: Yeah, a lot! It was always fascinating to just walk the streets and alleys of Rome, visit the churches and the ruins. The Abruzzi Mountains were only an hour away. We drove out there to ski in the wintertime, or up to Abetone in the Apennines north of Florence, where the skiing was very good. We had a good time. Any city in Italy was only a few hours away by car.

Q: Now again, do other things impact on the attention of the embassy, like this was a time that the embassy in Tehran was seized?

KNOPES: Oh yeah. Just before I got there Aldo Moro, a former Italian prime minister, was kidnapped, then murdered, his body was found in the trunk of a car not far from the PAO's residence. I think this was the work of the Brigati Rossi, the Red Brigades. There were similar groups in other European countries.

Q: Reagan administration.

KNOPES: Politically it was an active time in Europe. There was great concern over the hostages in Iran and Iran in general. The Reagan administration began discussions on putting missiles in Europe to counter a Soviet threat. I think there was more multi-national activity after Reagan became president. President Carter visited Italy during my tour, though I don't think that anything significant came out of it.

Q: What is particularly challenging about getting Italian cooperation?

KNOPES: Part of it was the stagnation of the Italian government. The Christian Democrats had been in power for more than 30 years. There was a revolving door for prime ministers, a recycling of the same people. On one of my first trips out of Rome, after a new government had been installed, I asked a Neapolitan if he expected any change in policy? The southerner said, "We don't pay any attention to things that happen in Rome. That's nonsense up there! We've got enough troubles down here." I think that was pretty much the Italian attitude toward politics.

Q: Now, the ambassador when you arrived was Richard Gardner.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Q: Who's a non-career, as a lot of ambassadors in Europe were. Was he particularly engaged in --

KNOPES: He did a good job as ambassador. He was interested in what USIS was doing, especially cultural activities, and was helpful. I think he and the PAO had a good relationship. His wife was Italian. He had a long-term interest in and good relationship with Italy. But Richard Gardner was also a self-promoter, always asking the press officer for photo coverage of his activities.

Q: And Rome is a fairly large embassy too.

KNOPES: Yeah, it was very big. The largest I had seen.

Q: How big was it, do you suppose?

KNOPES: I don't know what I would compare it to.

Q: Oh!

KNOPES: The embassy was located in a large, fenced villa that was once the residence of an Italian princess. There were many, many large and ornate rooms. There were several hundred people, including the local staff. It was a large compound with several additional buildings. USIS was located in a two-story building near the rear gate. There were nine USIS officers in Rome and 6 or 7 in the branch posts in Palermo, Naples, Florence, Trieste, Genoa, and Milan. Trieste was closed shortly after I left post. There will always be a consulate in Florence because CODELs want to visit. It doesn't have any other function.

Q: Do you think we've done Rome?

KNOPES: I think so. Yeah, I don't have anything more to say about it.

Q: Because the next assignment you have is back to your --

KNOPES: Yeah, back to where I wanted to be.

Q: You are assigned to Beijing. How did that opportunity come up?

KNOPES: Well, I started lobbying for it when I was in Rome.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: The PAO there, Jock Shirley, was promoted to career minister and went back to the agency to take the new position of counselor of agency. As he prepared to leave I said, "Jock, I want to go to Beijing. Do what you can for me when you get back in the agency."

I left Rome without an onward assignment. Back in Washington I talked with Cliff Forster, who was EA area director, about Beijing. He said he would like to send me but there was no position open. Because of the shortage of housing and office space in Beijing, it was very difficult for any agency to add a new position.

Q: Mm!

KNOPES: Then a slot opened up. A medical problem forced an officer to cancel his assignment to Beijing. I got the job, which was slated for summer of 1982. I would spend

the next few months reviving my Chinese language at a private language institute on Dupont Circle.

Q: Mm-hmm.

KNOPES: I worked every day with a young man from China who was in graduate school at GW.

Q: Berlitz or --

KNOPES: No, it was another name. I can't remember the name, but they taught all languages there.

Q: So when did you leave Rome?

KNOPES: It would be the summer of '81. I spent only 3 years in Rome. After two years of conflict with the first CAO I told the PAO I wanted out. I agreed to stay another year so a replacement could be found.

Q: Let's see, you arrived in '78.

KNOPES: We decided that Karen and the boys would go back to Virginia, get our oldest boy settled at William & Mary (he graduated from the Overseas School of Rome in 1980). The second boy was already living in with friends in Virginia. He played saxophone and was a good musician. Surprisingly, there was no place for a saxophone player in Rome. There were no concert bands or dance bands. He really wanted to play in the high school band, so we sent him back to stay with friends and attend West Springfield high school in Springfield, Virginia. The youngest was would be a freshman in high school, so we thought it best for him to start at West Springfield, not switch in his sophomore year. Karen went back with the three boys. I left our big apartment and took a small flat by the Pantheon in downtown Rome. Fantastic living! I walked to the embassy every day, soaking up the atmosphere and the history of Rome. It was a great life, except that I missed my family. Then, suddenly, everything changed. My nemesis, the CAO, announced his retirement. In fact, he was nudged out to make room for the ambassador's candidate. Although we didn't get along, I felt sorry for him. I got relief, but my family was already gone. That's how I came to spend a year in Rome alone.

Q: So you came back in '81.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Did a little Chinese.

KNOPES: Yeah. I got about six months of refresher Chinese, a lot of reading, mostly Renmin Ribao. I tested out again at S3-R3. Karen and I left for Beijing in July or August of '82.

Q: And up to this time China had been -- the Reagan administration had finally come to some decision on how it wanted to handle China versus Taiwan. And in fact, Hague is asked to leave in July of '82 because of this maneuvering. And Shultz comes in. So you're assigned to Beijing --

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: And your job is PAO?

KNOPES: No, not at that time. Once again I went out as the field program officer. I seemed to start out with that title in all my assignments, but never worked in that job.

Q: No.

KNOPES: There was no deputy PAO in Beijing at that time. Given the shortage of housing and office space, creating a new position was not possible. The area director said that when the situation changed, I would be named Deputy PAO. In the meantime I should look around and do whatever was being left undone. One of those tasks would be to systematize the distribution list for Jiao Liu, the Chinese language magazine. Another job would be to set up a Distribution Record System (DRS), a centralized list of all the embassy's contacts. DRS was being set up worldwide, not just in China. It was a pretty good idea. Previously, when an officer left post, he carried away his contact lists in his head. His replacement had to start over again. A centralized system would give the new officer a head start. I would also oversee the branch post in Shanghai, open a second in Guangzhou, and plan for a third in Shenyang.

Q: You arrive in '82.

KNOPES: I arrived the summer of '82, that's right. In October of '82, I went on a trip through the northeast, to Harbin and Dalian, Jilin, and Shenyang. In Shenyang I looked over the site for our consulate. In the other cities I visited universities and officials to determine what activities USIS, or P&C (Press & Cultural) as we were called in the PRC, could best introduce. I checked on reception of Jiao Liu, added some names to the DRS list, and generally surveyed the northeast for program opportunities. I learned a lot about China in that one trip. In Harbin I made my first contact with the foreigner handlers, who were the guys that --

Q: Oh, diplomatic security?

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: PSB?

KNOPES: The security, PSB. They were called the waiban, the foreign office. I told them who I wanted to see in the government but they weren't very interested in helping. They didn't know much about me or the American embassy. For some reason, in our conversation I mentioned that I was from Wisconsin. Suddenly, they became very cooperative because the governor had just returned from Wisconsin. He had set up a sister state relationship with Wisconsin.

Q: Oh!

KNOPES: Riding in from the airport, I looked around and thought, "this looks like Wisconsin." It was flat, with big fields and heavy equipment to work them. Not at all like the south, where tiny plots were worked by hand. I didn't meet the governor, but the lieutenant governor had a dinner for me. I told him what I could about Wisconsin and I learned a lot about northeast China.

Q: Love it. Was that off of an IV, or how did he get to Wisconsin?

KNOPES: That's a good question. I don't think it was an IV. It was too early in the relationship. I think it was arranged between Wisconsin and Heilongjiang.

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: I don't think P&C was geared up for IVs yet. There were more and more sister city connections being made, and I think other provincial governors were visiting the States to promote trade. These were arranged independently, often by Americans, who also wanted trade and cultural exchanges. I met officials in other provincial capitals on that trip but those meetings weren't very useful. The biggest change I saw was the opening up of universities. They were coming out of hibernation after the Cultural Revolution, expanding, looking for ideas and programs. Almost all had foreign experts from the US teaching English. A lot of books, even foreign books, had survived the Cultural Revolution. University libraries could now order books and magazines from overseas. Several libraries I visited had already built a broad collections of publications. Space was the major problem for most libraries. Several university librarians told me that stacks of boxes I asked about were ancient books and manuscripts. There was no room to unpack and display them. Another frequently cited problem was building a centralized collection. Every department wanted its own library. When it got hold of a book, it wouldn't share it with anyone else. The student population was growing. Incoming classes were chosen on merit, not political steadfastness. The bad news was student housing. It was just terrible -- crowded, dusty, and cold in winter. The housing of foreign experts. was pretty grim, too. But they were enthusiastic. They accepted their substandard accommodations. Their biggest complaint was the restrictions placed on them. The

waiban, university security people, wouldn't let them talk to their students after class, or even mix with the faculty outside of classrooms. They were kept separate, almost in isolation. Many were leaving because of that.

Q: And what was the source of them? I mean were these just people volunteering, coming out or --

KNOPES: Yeah, they'd volunteer. I think the Chinese embassy and consulates put ads in papers and flyers in universities. Most of the foreign experts taught English. There were none in political science or government. Probably not much on the history side either. It depended on the university. I talked to one American specialist who said, "I give talks on American institutions once a week. I started out with 10 people and now hundreds are coming." That was the exception to the rule, however. Other than universities I visited a music school, a movie studio and the home of Chang Tso-lin, the subject of my Master's thesis.

Other than foreign experts, I didn't see another foreigner on my trip. Not even in my hotels. For breakfast in Jilin, I headed for a large dining room filled with uniformed Chinese, government officials, I think. A waiter stopped me at the door. "Bu xing," he said. Not allowed. I protested a bit but finally turned and went to the foreigners' dining room, where I was served runny eggs, burnt toast, and weak coffee by a young waitress.

Q: Did you get a chance to hit the other consulates, Shanghai, Guangzhou?

KNOPES: Yeah, I did. In Shanghai Don Anderson was the CG and Dave Hess was the BPAO. I visited Shanghai quite a few times. Dave was a great contact person, but he was a little loose on administrative and reporting duties. He didn't like to put anything on paper. In early 1983 we added a branch PAO in Guangzhou. I went down to see if he was getting settled. The 3 of them, Carl Chan, the BPAO, his wife and baby were doing all right. They had two bedrooms in the Dong Fang Hotel above the consulate and were heating the baby's bottle on a hot plate in the bathtub. I said, "We can do more for you, but let me know what you need." He never did.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: He was good, very conscientious. I don't know where he is now. But you know, all the JOTs I worked with are now retiring (*laughs*). I am beginning to feel old.

Q: Yes.

KNOPES: It's kind of distressing.

Q: One of the officers I mentored became an ambassador (laughs).

KNOPES: Right.

Q: Conditions in Beijing were pretty basic at this time, certainly on the living side of things, a lot of people went off -- and the desk back in Washington was wanting to be helpful, but the help was basically to block all the other agencies from sending out thousands of people, because everybody wanted to go to Beijing.

KNOPES: It's all they could do, that's right. Our progression through the housing in Beijing was interesting. We started the Fuxing Hotel. Did you ever see the Fuxing?

Q: Mm-mm.

KNOPES: Way out in the west, past the Diaoyutai guest house.

Q: Mm!

KNOPES: It was a new hotel, but you wouldn't know it. The plumbing didn't work and the cockroaches were already in residence. It was a terrible hotel. We were there only about 10 days when a room opened up at the Beijing Hotel. So we moved up, uptown and upscale. We were in the Beijing less than a month when we moved to the Jianguo Hotel, a new hotel over by the embassy. It was a California-style motel built on Changan Lu, not far from the Friendship store. We had a two-level apartment, with the bedroom upstairs, a little kitchen and a sitting room downstairs

Q: I think that's the Toronto.

KNOPES: No. It wasn't, it wasn't Toronto. This was the Jianguo. The staff was well-trained and provided good service. It had a good restaurant, several good restaurants. We moved there in November and stayed until I took over as PAO in February, 1983. I wasn't expecting to become PAO in Beijing. The plan was for me to be DPAO in the fall when a new PAO was to arrive. But the incumbent PAO had not been effective. He was thinking of retiring, planning to be a writer. But he knew China and was a good writer. When needed, he could sit down and write a persuasive memo for the ambassador in a half-hour. But he was not running the office. Complaints about his lack of attention had reached Washington.

The area director came to visit in February. After a private meeting, the PAO called the staff meeting to announce that he had decided to retire. He would be leaving in two weeks. The area director said that I would be acting PAO for the rest of the year. So we moved from the very comfortable Jianguo Hotel to the PAO's apartment, a very big, very nice apartment. It had three bedrooms, a spacious living room, and a big kitchen. But it didn't have daily maid service like the Jianguo, something Karen had appreciated. I took over as PAO but my job did not change much. What I was doing had to be done anyway. The American staff was excellent. Most had been there for a year already and they were

doing a fine job. I continued working on the distribution list, supervising the branch posts, and developing contacts. To get a DRS going I met with embassy officers to explain the system and get their input. I began to work on a budget for P&C. The post had grown rapidly, funding was available to expand programs, and things were going well. But we didn't have a clear idea of where the money was going, accountability. I worked with the administrative assistant and, with help from the admin section of the embassy, produced a reasonable plan for the coming year.

Soon after I took over, Chinese authorities short-circuited one of our projects. A major exhibit of portraits from the National Portrait Gallery was packed and ready to leave Washington for Beijing. Leon Slawewski, the CAO, had worked with various ministries on this show for almost two years. Everything was settled, all clearances were in hand. Then came a call from, I think the Ministry of Education, saying, "We've looked over the list of paintings in the exhibit and we object to two of them. These must be removed." One was of Douglas MacArthur. There might have some rationale for that one. The other was Golda Meir, who was in the exhibit because she had been born in Milwaukee. Someone apparently wanted her out because of Israel's attitude toward the PRC. We pointed out that all portraits in the exhibit had been approved, that the exhibit was packed and ready to ship, and that it could not be changed at this late date. The matter was non-negotiable, came the reply.

I explained the situation to Ambassador Hummel, who agreed that we could not consider changing the exhibit. If the Chinese insisted, we must cancel.

We informed State, USIA and the Portrait Gallery by cable. My first action as PAO was to cancel the biggest event planned since the embassy opened.

Q: Where was the exhibit going to be?

KNOPES: I don't remember. It was a major venue, in Beijing. There weren't many attractive, even suitable, exhibit halls in Beijing at the time. I don't recall where it was going to be. Leon Slawewski, the CAO, had made most of the arrangements. The interesting thing is that five or six years later, when I was PAO in Hong Kong, we brought that same exhibit to Hong Kong, with resounding success. I hoped the Chinese authorities in Beijing read all the glowing reviews about it. In the long run, I did get to hang that exhibit, but not where it was originally intended.

Q: Actually, you're making an interesting point here. This is really, this is just three years after normalization. So --

KNOPES: Mm-hmm, right.

Q: -- the Chinese bureaucracy is feeling it's way probably.

KNOPES: Sure, yeah.

Q: Within its own structure. We're feeling our way. And these kinds of things come up in this kind of --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- early stages.

KNOPES: Yeah, somebody higher up must have taken a look at the list of paintings and exercised his power. Since it was non-negotiable, he must have been very high up.

Q: Now, you were saying that the post creates an annual program, this is what we'd like to do, kind of speakers. How was that process doing in Beijing?

KNOPES: Well, I can't say that I wrote one in Beijing. Country Plans were written in the fall, as I recall. So my predecessor would have written the one for 1983. I assume I wrote one 1984. I also assume that expanding and targeting distribution of Jiaoliu magazine was a major goal. Another would have been getting a DRS up to speed. Just getting the post organized was an important function, if not a goal. From 1979, when John Thomson went out as the first PAO, the post had expanded from 1 to 8 officers in Beijing and two in branch posts. It had just grown, with everyone scrambling to get programs started, to build up useful contacts, and learn how to get things done in China. We were building up a list of official contacts, but it was hard to get beyond the official side. Chinese were reluctant to talk to you in private. Talking to a foreigner could get them into trouble..

Here's an incident about *guanxi* (relationships) and contacts in China. One day I got a call from someone who introduced himself as Mr. Jin and asked if I had studied Chinese in Washington.

I said, "Yes, I did. Mr. Jin was my teacher."

He said, "This is his uncle. I have something I would like to discuss with you?"

And I said, "Fine, where can we meet?"

We arranged to meet on a street near the International Club, not far from the embassy. Mr. Jin was a scientist, maybe a teacher, at the Beijing Union Medical College. He, his wife, their daughter and son-in-law lived in a house on the campus. The son-in-law had been accepted by a college in Texas, but had been refused a visa. Mr. Jin asked if I could do anything to help.

I said I would ask the consulate about the case but could not intervene on his behalf.

P&C was in the same building as the consulate. I explained the situation and asked if someone would take a second look. The consulate was inundated with applications from Chinese students who had been admitted to small colleges in the US. The suspicion was that few would return. Mr. Jin's son-in-law was leaving his wife in China, evidence of his good intentions. A consulate officer took a second look and issued a visa. As a result, the Jin family invited Karen and me to dinner at their home. This was one of two invitations to private homes we were offered in Beijing. The other was an official of the Bank of China I had met in Hong Kong. The Jins lived in a western-style, two story house on the PUMC (Peking Union Medical College) campus. They had lived there in comfort for 20 years, with plenty of space, until the Cultural Revolution. Now they had only the upstairs, two unrelated families shared the ground floor. Mother and daughter cooked a delicious dinner on two burners in a curtained off kitchen area. After dinner conversation turned to the Cultural Revolution. The daughter, in middle school at the time, said she had been completely swept up by it. One day after a meeting she came home, broke all her father's classical records and burned some of his books. Her father said, "Yes, that's true. But we have put it behind us." This was the first time any one in China even mentioned the Cultural Revolution. We didn't see the Jins again. We would have liked to repay their hospitality but didn't want to jeopardize them by trying to maintain contact.

Q: Now, would this be an environment in which you would propose bringing in the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra or the Detroit Ballet or those kinds of things, or we weren't there yet?

KNOPES: We didn't bring in any major shows. The Portrait Gallery exhibit was to be the first. We saw the Royal Ballet in Beijing. They came, they had the --

Q: The Brits.

KNOPES: Yeah, the Brits. It was the Royal Ballet, the real thing. The venue was old, the seats were squeaky, and the floor was warped. It must have difficult dancing on that stage. How they handled it, I don't know. Arthur Miller came out to direct "The Death of a Salesman" in Chinese, but that wasn't under our auspices.

Q: Hm!

KNOPES: It was a solid hit, with excellent Chinese actors. Even if you didn't know Chinese, they carried the message and drama of the play. I took Arthur Miller and the cast to lunch to show them the embassy was interested and supportive of what they were doing, but we were not involved. Did you see "The Last Emperor?"

Q: Yes.

KNOPES: The jailer in the opening scenes was Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman." A fine actor. I think he was later Minister of Culture.

Q: Oh!

KNOPES: It opened up in the fall of 1983.

Q: Because what's his name brought "Caine Mutiny."

KNOPES: Oh, Herman Wouk?

Q: No, the actor. Charlton Heston.

KNOPES: Oh, did he really?

Q: Brought "Caine Mutiny" out and had it produced in Beijing.

KNOPES: Well, there was a lot going on. I know Pat Corcoran talked about escorting Gregory Peck in China. I think the first P&C project in China was an exchange of films. One was "Coal Miner's Daughter," another was "Breaking Away." There were five or six of them, shown in several cities in China. Yehudi Menuhin gave a master class and performed at the Beijing Conservatory. A lot of people wanted to visit China once it opened up. If you had a skill or reputation they were happy to have you. China got international exposure out of those visits, too.

Q: Were there any _____?

KNOPES: Not when I was there, no. The only real bump was cancellation of the exhibit. That happened early on. Art Hummel was the ambassador and Chas Freeman was the DCM (deputy chief of mission). That's a great team. And easy to work with. You asked about P&C relationship with the embassy. It was easy to get to know everyone because we were so cramped for space. P&C shared a building with Administration, the Consular section, the nurse's office and the commissary. This was Erh Ban (Second Building.) The chancery and all other offices were a quarter mile away in what was called YiBan (First building). On a visit to YiBan I would meet most of the political and economic officers. Everyone was squeezed into a tiny, tiny space. The office of P&C's information officer's was a converted bathroom. You could still see where the stool and the bath tub had been.

Q: Because Jerry Ogden was there about that time. No, he was down --

KNOPES: He was in Guangzhou. I think Dick Williams was there when I arrived in China. Jerry came later. You asked about my departure from Beijing. The designated PAO, Lynn Noah, was due to arrive in December of 1983. I would be his deputy. Though I didn't know him well I had followed him as BPAO in Songkhla, then to Chinese language training. When we moved to Taipei from Taichung we took his house. I was looking forward to working with Lynn, but in September I got a midnight phone call

from our desk officer in Washington. “Harry Britton is retiring and will leave Taipei in December. Would you like to go there as head of the Cultural and Information Section (CIS) of AIT (American Institute in Taiwan)?”

I was dumbstruck and could only say, “I’ll have to think about it.” Beijing was beginning to open up. It was an exciting place to work. But Karen didn’t like it much. Dependents were restricted in what they could do. She had taught English in every previous post, but there was no place where she could teach in Beijing. To keep busy she worked as receptionist at the embassy. We both liked Taipei. I would like to have worked with Lynn Noah but I would have my own post in Taipei. I said yes, I would make the move. Lynn arrived in October. I left for Taipei in mid-December of 1983.

Q: Here we are, it is the 17th of July, 2014. We’re returning to our conversation with Robert Knopes. As we finished up, you were coming to an assignment at AIT in Taiwan from the mainland. You were replacing Harry Britton I think.

KNOPES: Yeah, right.

Q: First, can we set the stage by saying how was the AIT-USIS set up, organized, and how might it have been different from Beijing?

KNOPES: Beijing was a growing operation, whereas USIS Taipei, now called the Cultural and Information Section of AIT (CIS), was a well-established program. Our offices and library were in the same building I had worked in as ACAO in the late-1960s. We would be doing fundamentally the same USIS programs. Beijing was just getting a Fulbright Program established, there was no library and the prospect of getting one set up in the near term were not good. In Taipei both were firmly established. There were multiple newspapers in Taiwan and we had close contact with all of them. In Beijing our contacts were mostly with Xinhua, the New China News Agency, though we did know a few people at Renmin Ribao (The People’s Daily.) It was a developing situation in Beijing and an established set of programs that I was returning to in Taipei. CIS would be a smaller operation than the USIS one I had worked at 15 years before. There were no more publications. Student Review, World Today, translated books, donated books were no longer produced. The important aspect for me was that CIS was part of AIT. I would not have my own budget or the independence of programming I had in Beijing. If I wanted to initiate a new program I had to get the approval of the AIT director and negotiate funding with the admin officer.

My predecessor, Harry Britton, had been deputy PAO in USIS Taipei in the early 1970s. When he returned as chief of the CIS office he expected to continue as before, resulting in a series of conflicts between him and the admin office. These battles may have been a factor in his decision to retire early. Harry’s discontent made it easier for me to establish myself as a team player at AIT. I knew what I was going into. I planned to be diplomatic, to work with admin and the director.

Of course, we still had backup from USIA. There could be little programming without USIA support. Exchange programs, books for our library, speakers, everything came through USIA. At that time, AIT was well funded. I had no trouble getting money for conferences and other local programming. Everything CIS did was in the interest of AIT and of the United States. We gave a great deal of support to the US Trade Center -- doing their press releases and helping set up local programs.

Q: Following up on the organizational side of things, how many officers did you have and what were their specific assignments?

KNOPES: I had three - information officer, Dave Hess, and cultural affairs officer, Charles Silver, and a BPAO in Kaohsiung. The branch post in Taichung had been closed some years before.

Q: Was Joe Moyle there when you arrived, or he came later?

KNOPES: Joe Moyle was still there, in the political section. Harry Britton had pulled Joe over to CIS as information officer for a while. John Lundin was information officer when I arrived, but on his way to another assignment. Shortly after I arrived, Dave Hess finished a year of Chinese and took over as IO.

Q: But Silver was in --

KNOPES: Silver was already established as CAO. He had just finished language school. I don't even know who Silver replaced. Were you there at the time?

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: Who was before Silver?

Q: I'm not sure.

KNOPES: Silver must have been on the job because I didn't meet any other cultural affairs officer.

Q: One of the things you'd mentioned was you'd been assigned to Taipei before. Let me ask, what comparisons would you have from that first -- the atmosphere of the first assignment you had to the atmosphere in Taipei right after you arrived there?

KNOPES: Yeah, this was -- so I got there in '80 --

Q: Three.

KNOPES: '83, yeah. It was much more open. I think martial law was -- had been --

Q: No, that'd come later.

KNOPES: That was a little bit later. People had always been willing to talk with us. That was not a problem. Martial law was still in effect but now considerably relaxed. People, especially students, were less concerned about being watched. Chiang Ching-kuo was president, and I think he had decided that greater liberalization was the way to go. The clearest sign of the loosening was the formation of the Democratic Progressive Party. A few years later a DPP candidate won election as president. That didn't turn out well but it was the start of a two-party system. I had lunch with some of the founders of the DPP (Democratic Progressive party). They had big plans. The government was not harassing them. They spoke openly about politics, which was not the case when I had been there in the late '60s. That was the biggest change. It was an opening that was allowed, and even encouraged. I renewed contacts and acquaintances from my first tour. As non-official representatives of America we could not visit government offices. The officials I contacted were not standoffish. They were always happy to -- well, shouldn't say happy -- they were always willing to get together. I had lunches with John Chang, the head of North American Affairs in the Foreign Ministry and with Ma Ying-jeou who is now president of the ROC. During my first tour, the Taiwan Independence Movement was a bogey-man for the KMT, but even then I didn't see a groundswell of Taiwanese backing for that position. What they wanted was greater participation in government. The DPP provided that.

Q: Right. And as you said, you know, you're, you're there shortly after 1979 when we switched diplomatic --

KNOPES: Yeah, yeah.

Q: And in fact, wasn't Fred Chien the ambassador in Washington at that time?

KNOPES: At that time.

Q: He was quite miffed at the whole --

KNOPES: Oh, absolutely, I'm sure he was. But things were finding their level at that point. Government officials were figuring that they were going to have to deal with us. It was the Taiwan Relations Act, an act of Congress, that established AIT and stabilized the relationship. Taiwan officials were coming to terms with their new position in the world.

Q: Now, in this new environment, did that impact on who you selected as speakers to come in the programs or whatnot?

KNOPES: Not much. We could offer more speakers on American politics and governance, that sort of thing before. Universities were open to a wider range of speakers.

Q: Now, the Fulbright Program is run by a board that has local embassy, AIT in this case, people. Did that transition well?

KNOPES: There were no major changes. The Fulbright Program always worked well. It was a prestigious program. It always attracted good people. The change was the expansion of universities in Taiwan. On my first tour we dealt primarily with National Taiwan University and Taiwan Normal University. Now there was a large technical university south of Taipei and a growing university in Kaohsiung. Professors who went to any of these universities were well received and well utilized. The Fulbright program was supervised by a bi-national board of directors. I was the chairman. One of the members was the president of National Taiwan University. I don't remember any of the others. The program was administered by an office that had its quarters in part of the CIS building. The CAO worked closely with them in selecting, assigning, and looking after Fulbright scholars in Taiwan.

Q: One of things you said was they seem better funded. I would think that that was also a part of the comparison between the first time you were there and this assignment in the early 1980s. The economy in Taiwan had improved.

KNOPES: Oh, tremendously. In the '60s Taiwan was a successful agricultural economy, just beginning its transition to a manufacturing society. In the 1980s Taiwan was moving into technology. In the 1960s, ox carts were a common means of transport, even in Taipei. In the fall, harvested rice was spread out and dried in the street near our house in Taichung. In 1984, I returned to rural villages I had known in the 1960s. Then the villagers had large families, worked the fields with an ox, and had little contact with urban areas. In 1984, the older generation was still there, but the young people had gone to the cities. Rice paddies were still thriving, but were planted and harvested with machines. The kids came back in the spring and fall to plant and harvest the crop.

Q: Now, you're saying in Beijing there were no papers other than the party Renmin Ribao.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: The paper situation in Taipei was --

KNOPES: Oh, it was wild compared to Beijing.

Q: -- much different --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- yet party influenced. I mean --

KNOPES: Well, sure.

Q: Some were actually KMT spinoffs.

KNOPES: The Central Daily News was KMT-oriented and subsidized. It had a large circulation. The publisher of the United Daily News, a more independent paper, was Wang Tiwu, a good friend of USIS. I don't remember the others. We had easy access to all of them, and to the TV station. IO Dave Hess was great with people. He knew reporters on every paper and had easy access to all the media.

Q: There was a thriving periodical market as I recall.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: In Taipei at that time. And that was the one where the Taiwanese --

KNOPES: Yeah, right.

Q: -- were getting in censored form time to time.

KNOPES: Yeah, they would. We knew some of the editors of those periodicals -- Anthony Chang was one of them. He was advisor to the DPP and his magazine was a factor in its growth. He was a responsible journalist. I don't think he had any problem. Other magazines would push the limits on political commentary, be closed down, then appear the next month with a new name. It would be the same people. They could continue until they stepped over the line again. The government could close them permanently if it really wanted to. They didn't do that. Closing a magazine delivered a message: Don't go too far.

Q: One of the interesting things that happened at that time was Ninoy Aquino.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: Returned to the Philippines in a flight from Taipei.

KNOPES: Mm, mm-hmm.

Q: And then was murdered at the airport.

KNOPES: At the -- yeah.

Q: Did your contacts vibrate from that? Were they concerned about that? Did they talk about that?

KNOPEs: I don't recall. I recall the incident, but I don't remember talking to anybody specifically about it. On the political side it might have been more significant.

Q: At the same time, Henry Liu was murdered in San Francisco in October of '84. And there was newspaper coverage in Taiwan.

KNOPEs: A lot, yeah. Newspaper coverage over the long term indicated that the ROC government was in some way involved. It made an impact. It was well covered by the Taiwan newspapers, with a lot of conjecture -- how and why did this happen? Why this major move to silence somebody who was not well known? It was an indication that censorship of news was no longer a concern for the press.

Q: I don't want to ask day in the life of, but you're -- you and your officers obviously had an opportunity in this environment to really get out and know the publishers and academics and whatnot.

KNOPEs: Mm-hmm.

Q: Did you kind of divide up your contacts? Do you do all the university professors? Somebody does -- or --

KNOPEs: Dave Hess was the information officer. He was a great with people. He held open house for journalists almost every night. Journalists would just drop by, ready to talk. His friendliness inspired openness in others. He picked up a lot of information. He had done the same thing in Shanghai, developed all kinds of contacts in a place where that was not easy. Dave's problem was that he usually didn't tell anyone in the consulate, the embassy, or now in AIT, what he was getting. One of my tasks in Taipei was to get Dave to funnel information back to me and others in AIT. I left daily press contacts up to him while I did more formal representation with senior editors and owners of major papers. I was not an information officer. I tended to work more with the cultural and educational side. I was chairman of the board of directors of the Taipei Language Institute. The Institute had begun to teach English to people AID was sending to the United States in the 1950s and early '60s. It was still the best English teaching program in Taiwan. It wasn't *busyiban*, a for-profit, learn-English-quick operation that was common in Taipei. The teachers were all native speakers, mostly Americans who liked living in Taipei. They made their living by teaching at the Taipei Language Institute. My wife taught there. In other programming, CIS, actually CAO Charles Silver, set up a couple of major conferences, just as I had done in Rome. Rather than bring out individual speakers, we requested a panel of speakers and worked National Taiwan University, the Bank of Taiwan and the Ministry of Finance for a major economic conference. Harry

Thayer, the Director of AIT, attended the opening ceremony and some of the sessions. The two-day conference was well-received and well-reported. We tried to do things that would have a greater impact than individual speakers. It was the academic side that I was interested in.

Q: One of the things that was interesting in that environment was the local authorities were interested in demonstrating to their public that they had a close connection with the Americans.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: And so I would presume that as a counselor level person in AIT you had, you know, lots of invitations and meetings at a high level.

KNOPES: Yeah, I'm sure I did. We didn't deal with Ministry of Foreign Affairs a lot, but did have contacts with them. Karen and I were out often in the evening for dinners and other functions. I'm sure a lot of them were with senior officials. I don't recall anybody in particular.

Q: Well, I'm thinking too that at that time Harry was there, the director, was making the point from time to time about being concerned at us being at an event where you'd have an American flag and an ROC flag.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: And there had been instances where the local authorities had tried to put a much more formal spin on the relationship.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: And that tension was in those first early days as, as we tried to not -- we tried to maintain our unofficiality.

KNOPES: Right, and they tried to get it back.

Q: They tried to maintain their officiality.

KNOPES: I recall the issue but I think it pertained more at the director's level. We didn't display flags at any of our functions. I don't recall anybody making an issue of it. In the major conferences that I just mentioned, we had control. With individual speakers it was not a factor. I think that was more at the director's level.

Q: Now, you're in Taipei from '83 to '86.

KNOPEs: Yeah, right, well, December '83 to about July of '86.

Q: And your next assignment is USIS Hong Kong.

KNOPEs: Yeah.

Q: How did that assignment come to you?

KNOPEs: That was part of the deal when they called me in Beijing and said, "Would you like to go to Taipei?" The Taipei tour would be only until the summer of 1986, two and a half years. It couldn't be extended because Harry Britton's successor was already named, Mike Yaki, who was PAO in Hong Kong at the time.

I was concerned that, after those two and a half years, I would be thrown into a bidding process that might send me some place I don't want to be. I wanted an assignment after Taipei.

They said, "We don't have a replacement for Yaki in Hong Kong yet. How would you like Hong Kong?"

That sounded great to me. Beijing to Taipei to Hong Kong, a pretty good circuit as far as I was concerned. I had served in Hong Kong before, it would be an interesting post. That's how my Hong Kong assignment came about. It was negotiated before I left Beijing.

Q: Now, you've come out of Beijing, you've gone through Taipei, you're going into Hong Kong. How would you compare the public affairs, USIA environment of those three posts?

KNOPEs: Well, returning to Hong Kong it was going back to a USIS post. I was back in the fold, with my own budget. Many of the staff I had worked with before were still there. USIS offices were in the consulate. Our library was over near Wanchai. There were four Americans - PAO, IO, CAO, and a publications officer who produced Jiaoliu magazine for Beijing. Part of the USIS Hong Kong operation was support for the Press and Cultural Office in Beijing. World Today had died, but has been resurrected as Jiaoliu magazine about 1980. Including the Jiaoliu editorial staff, we had 30 to 35 FSNs in the Hong Kong operation. When I arrived in Hong Kong, both the CAO and IO were ready to leave. All the American staff but the publications officer would be new. Dan Sreebny arrived from language school to take over the IO position but the designated CAO had to curtail his assignment because of illness in his family. Let's take a step back. As I mentioned, CIS/AIT had a branch post in Kaohsiung when I arrived in Taipei. After AIT opened a quasi-consulate in Kaohsiung, BPAO was not fully occupied. With the agreement of USIA in Washington and the AIT director, I closed the Kaohsiung post. Anything we wanted to do in Kaohsiung we could handle from Taipei. When the officer

slated for the Kaohsiung post finished Chinese language training it was natural for her to be assigned as CAO Hong Kong, to fill the gap caused by the curtailment of the designated CAO.

Q: And of course the education and public affairs environment in Hong Kong was so much more sophisticated than Beijing.

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: So your part of Hong Kong was, more focused on supporting Beijing embassy than some of the earlier programs that had been Hong Kong alone?

KNOPES: The USIS operation went on much the same as it always had. Support for Beijing was production of Jiaoliu magazine and shipping supplies up through our warehouse unit. What we were doing for Beijing didn't detract from what we were doing in Hong Kong. We still ran a Fulbright Program, maintained contacts with the media - HKTV and RTHK, and all the newspapers. We had regular contacts with the two major PRC-leaning newspapers, Wen Wei Pao and Ta Kung Pao. Ta Kung Pao was the largest and most influential. When the owner died the funeral was a major event. Don Anderson, the consul general, and I attended to pay our respects and show a continuing relationship with the paper. Of course, we had regular contact with the two English newspapers, The Hong Kong Standard and the South China Morning Post. There was a Xinhua (New China News Agency) office in Hong Kong, but we were never able to establish a close relationship with them. The Asian Wall Street Journal was there, too. I took senior editors from the English papers on a cruise on the aircraft carrier Enterprise to show how the Seventh Fleet operated. We met the ship in Subic Bay and sailed back to Hong Kong - two nights and one day. The journalists wrote feature articles about the 7th Fleet and the skill of the American navy. We did the same for Chinese newspapers too, flying them by helicopter out to the battleship New Jersey as it came into port. That sort of event always resulted in positive stories. Either Dan Sreebny or I accompanied them. It was one of the perks of the job.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: One of our goals was to show that the United States was still maintaining a military presence in the Pacific, that we were there to stay. These trips were one way to do that.

Q: Now, as you said, the Sino British negotiations were going on about reversion.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Q: Hong Kong reverting back to Beijing. How closely did you follow it, or --

KNOPES: Not very much. I'm sure the consulate was following it, but I didn't. Hong Kong was a British colony. The matter was for Great Britain and China to resolve. It did not impact our programming at all.

Q: Now, Hong Kong's a pretty open environment. I would suspect that a lot of foreign journalists come through and the consulate and your operation would talk to them.

KNOPES: Oh yeah, a lot, a lot --

Q: Help them out.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm. One of the great places in Hong Kong was the Foreign Correspondents' Club. I was a member and so was every journalist in Hong Kong. You met everyone there, including editors and journalists who were passing through.

When we talked about Beijing I mentioned that one of the first problems I had when I became PAO was the cancellation of an art exhibit from the National Portrait Gallery. I talked about that before. One of the first things I did in Hong Kong as PAO was bring that exhibit to Hong Kong.

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: We held the exhibit in the art gallery at the city hall, which is more than a city hall. It's the public library, office building, and a very good gallery for visiting exhibits. The director of the Portrait Gallery came out for the opening. He and Don Anderson, the consul general, did the opening ceremony. Turnout of Hong Kong officials, artists, and media was wonderful. The exhibit got excellent media coverage. I'm sure news of the exhibit's success reached Beijing, letting them know they had missed out on a good thing.

Q: Now, was this the time when Patten was the governor, or?

KNOPES: No, Patten didn't come until 1992. The governor when I was there was David Wilson. I met him only once, when I took Charles Wick, director of USIA, on a courtesy call. I knew most of the heads of Hong Kong departments. I had lunch regularly with the chief of the information office, exchanging information on plans and upcoming activities. Day to day operation of information activities I left in the hands of the very capable IO, Dan Sreebny. We had no problem with the press when Dan was taking care of things. The cultural office was another matter. As I noted before, the officer slated to be BPAO in Kaohsiung became the replacement for the officer who could not come. She was a very nice person, well-meaning, but very deliberate in getting things done. Not the ideal CAO in an active post like Hong Kong. I spent more time on the cultural operation and supervising the cultural activities than I might have under other circumstances. During our time in Hong budgets of government operations were being cut, across the board.

USIA was forced to cut a number of branch posts around the world, generally reducing the number of people overseas. In my second year I got a call from the area director. He said. “We’re going to have to eliminate the cultural officer position in Hong Kong.” He was surprised when I didn’t put up a strong argument for the position. But I knew it wouldn’t be a great loss. I was already spending a lot of time on cultural activities. I acquiesced and took over the cultural operation. It was not a big problem. The FSNs were excellent, well-connected with cultural contacts. They handled day-to-day activities as well as anybody could. We worked it out.

Q: And at this point, let me ask. What would be cultural? What would the cultural officer or the cultural program entail?

KNOPES: There was a library, located in an office building not far away. The library staff was professional, very capable. It required little oversight. We worked closely with an active American Studies organization organized and run by a professor at Hong Kong University. They used the library for meetings and programs. The Fulbright Program was important in Hong Kong. I became good friends with the president of the University of Hong Kong and the school accepted its first Fulbrighter while I was there. Up to that time the school was completely Europe-centered. Chinese University, the Technical University and Baptist University all made good use of the Fulbright program. All of those schools, plus RTHK (Radio Television Hong Kong) were across the harbor, in Kowloon. There were two tunnels but they were always jammed. Sometimes it took an hour just to get through the tunnel. It was faster take the ferry or the metro across, then take a taxi to wherever you were going. Often I would do that, then have the driver pick me up for the ride back to the consulate. We also had one or two American speakers a month.

Q: On the other hand, here’s Hong Kong, very sophisticated environment. There would be people back in the States saying, “Why do we need a cultural or information program at all?”

KNOPES: No, I don’t think that ever came up. USIS Hong Kong had been an integral part of the consulate since the 1950s. USIS programs in Hong Kong provided information and understanding of US policies to a broad range of residents, including those aligned with the PRC. Now USIS Hong Kong was supporting P&C Beijing with a magazine, books and supplies.

Q: We’re returning to our conversation. We were talking about Jiaoliu, which is the Chinese language magazine to be distributed on the Mainland. But in fact, was put together in Hong Kong. And back in Washington there’s an office that provides materials for it?

KNOPES: No longer an office dedicated to magazines, but there was still a press operation that provided articles and assistance.

Q: Now, the content of Jiaoliu. Think pieces? Long pieces? Fluffy pieces?

KNOPES: It's a long time ago. I didn't work directly on the magazine. I worked with McKinney Russell, the Beijing PAO, on selecting suitable articles. I can't recall anything specific. There were statements by the secretary of state and articles on U.S. Asia policy. There were articles on life in America -- business, agriculture, and science. It was a general magazine.

Q: Of course magazines are put together months in advance, or at least scoped out. I suspect therefore you had a pretty close connection to the PAO in Beijing.

KNOPES: I attended branch PAO conferences in Beijing to hear about their programming and get suggestions on what Hong Kong might do in support, maybe get ideas for Jiaoliu. McKinney Russell came to Hong Kong at least quarterly to meet with me and the publications office on future issues of Jiaoliu. Then it was up to the publications officer to get the articles and lay out future issues.

Q: Now, Hong Kong, as you said, is a fairly large post, which means that there's all kinds of other federal agencies in there, immigration, whatnot. Did you have much interaction --

KNOPES: We did a lot with the Foreign Commercial Service and the agriculture office. I think we put out some press releases regarding the FBI and answered questions on our refugee policy for the press. A new tool we had was EANET, a satellite link with Washington for interviews with well-known academics and senior officials who would not otherwise have been available. This was one of USIA Director Wick's contributions to programming. We used them regularly, often cooperating with the political and economic sections on topics like US foreign policy, trade policies, and US/PRC relations. Many were held in the 4th floor conference room in the consulate.

Q: -- or at least explanation to the Hong Kong press?

KNOPES: I knew everybody in the consulate because the consul general had a regular staff meeting. I don't know if it was every day or a couple times a week. We handled everything for the consulate, all the press releases, press inquiries, and organizing special events, such as a speech by the CG or a visiting American official. We also provided press support for the American Chamber of Commerce, since this fit with our goal of trade promotion.

Q: Even though it's a fairly large consulate, the State Department component is quite modest I would assume.

KNOPES: That's right.

Q: In July of '88, Secretary Shultz goes through Asia and makes a stop in Hong Kong.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Did your officers get sucked up into that?

KNOPES: Oh yeah, everybody was pulled in. He came more than once. Maybe three times when I was there. I remember the planning meetings. Everybody was part of those. We handled all the press arrangements for both the local and accompanying press. One of those trips had covered most Asian countries and the press contingent was huge. We arranged a press briefing by Stapleton Roy -- he must have been the Assistant Secretary of State for Asia. Those visits were big events. But not filled with important activities in Hong Kong I'd have to say. The secretary usually had a tennis game, had some shirts made and called on the governor. It was more of a rest stop.

Q: But it certainly keeps everybody busy.

KNOPES: Yep.

Q: And puts great pressure on the staff.

KNOPES: He came through Beijing when I was there too. That was even more hectic because it was harder to organize. The Chinese didn't have the staff, the facilities, or the experience to deal with the American press.

Q: You said a couple of times -- yeah, I'm noticing, Shultz stopped in Hong Kong in June of '86.

KNOPES: Uh-huh.

Q: You might have just arrived.

KNOPES: No, I don't think -- July? It might have been. I might have got there in July, but not in on the planning. I do remember a dinner at Burt Levin's residence. Burt was CG, preparing to leave for his next assignment as ambassador to Burma.

Q: And then again in March of '87.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I remember that visit.

Q: So March of '87 --

KNOPES: Oh, I was definitely there --

Q: -- March of '88 --

KNOPES: Oh, March of '88, yeah, those two I remember. Those were the two I was thinking of. Well, as you said -- it did keep the Hong Kong staff busy. As a matter of fact, I think one of the admin officers suggested that perhaps in the future it would save us all trouble if we sent his shirt maker down to Singapore.

Q: Along those lines, I suppose Hong Kong would certainly be a favorite spot for congressional delegations.

KNOPES: Well, I don't recall many during my second tour there. At least, I don't remember escorting any of them around. I took a couple of senators around when I was there as a junior officer. There were a lot of visitors though. This reminds me, regarding your question about our relationship with the PRC. When John Burns, The New York Times correspondent in Beijing, was expelled from China -- in 1988? -- CG Don Anderson and I made it a point to go to the airport to welcome him to Hong Kong. We wanted to make clear to the Chinese that the consulate in Hong Kong and the U.S. government supported The New York Times and a free press.

Q: At that time was that also the height of the Vietnamese refugee thing or that --

KNOPES: Yeah, it was. Let me see. It seems to me there was still a camp for Vietnamese refugees on one of the outlying islands. I believe USIS put out several press releases on US refugee policy, maybe even did an EANET, a video connection with an American expert. There might have been an article in Jiaoliu as well. USIS worked closely with all elements of the consulate in getting out information on their programs. We were well-integrated with everything that went on there.

Q: Returning to government administration issues, you were saying in '88 serious budgetary things came up.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: You at least got a call, here's what we're thinking. More than likely, perhaps in this time for other places, Washington just says, "Cut 10%," or some percentage.

KNOPES: I lost the cultural affairs officer. It is likely that our budget was cut a bit, too. But I think our contribution to budget reduction was the CAO position. Personnel costs are the major part of any operation. At that point there wasn't much left to cut except personnel. We couldn't continue to snip away little pieces of programming. Something major had to be cut. I heard that some complained that USIA was taking most of its cuts overseas, saving jobs and activities in Washington. I don't know if that was true or not.

All through my career, every few years we had to make a 10% cut here, later 10% there. We had gotten to the point where we had to start making big cuts.

Q: Well, when you started out in USIA there were all kinds of programs, you're talking about the magazines.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: And all these things. Now, here we are in the 1980s, they've either been superseded or dropped off or the environment for their need has changed.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm, yeah. Well, that was the --

Q: And so USIA is kind of naturally shrinking.

KNOPES: Shrinking, yeah.

Q: Down to personnel issues.

KNOPES: USIA was beginning to close libraries at USIS posts. Part of it was budget, but a good part was because of access to the internet and growing reference databases. Posts with good international communication connections didn't need a big reference collection anymore. We were moving that way in Hong Kong. Of course, it wouldn't work in Taipei or Beijing because telecommunication connections weren't there yet. In Hong Kong we set up a computer in the library and helped people do research using databases in the United States.

Q: Now, coming up to 1988, 1989, November '88 the Americans have a presidential election.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: How did USIS Hong Kong play in that?

KNOPES: Yes, we set up an election headquarters in the ballroom of one of the big hotels in Central, maybe the Hilton, with TVs and tote boards to show the returns. It was well attended by the press. Businessmen and officials dropped in during the day. The 12-hour time difference with Washington made ideal timing for us. Returns were coming in all during the day. Of course, RTHK and radio news reports kept people informed, too. Our center provided more color and detail, and provided extra materials for the press. Dan Sreebny and the information staff did an excellent job on it.

Q: Well, 1988-'89 then would be the transition to a new administration that comes in in January '88. Did you particularly notice any changes in --

KNOPES: No, no. This would be --

Q: -- for your operations?

KNOPES: -- the first George Bush. No, I don't recall any major changes. I suppose we provided a lot of information to the media on the new administration. But no, I don't think it had an impact on our operation.

Q: But when did you leave Hong Kong?

KNOPES: Well, that's a story. I left Hong Kong for Washington in July of '89. I knew I was going back to the Voice of America to head the East Asia Pacific Division. In May I took a trip all through Southeast Asia, visiting countries where VOA did a language broadcast -- Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia. I visited the short-wave relay station in the Philippines. I may have gone to Burma, too. My last visit was to Beijing. On June 3, as I got ready to leave for the airport, I called Larry Daks, the deputy PAO in Beijing. I said, "Larry, I'm ready to go to the airport. How do things look on Tiananmen square? Should I put off the trip?"

Larry said, "Well, we don't know what's going to happen. We'll find something for you to do. Come on up."

Q: (laughs)

KNOPES: I arrived in Beijing the afternoon of June 3, checked into my hotel. It wasn't the Jianguo Hotel, it was one that was a little farther out on Chang An Lu.

Q: The Sheraton?

KNOPES: No, no, it was smaller, only two or three-stories -- I can't remember the name of it. I stopped by the embassy, then walked over to Tiananmen Square to talk to the students. One of them said, "There's a lot of activity around here. You better be careful. We fear something might happen tonight." I took pictures of the goddess of liberty and the tents, then walked back to my hotel. Near my hotel a line of military trucks loaded with soldiers had been stopped by people coming out of the *hutong*, the neighborhoods. The soldiers were not armed. The people were orderly. After a lengthy conversation the trucks turned around and headed out of town. I thought, "That's a very good sign. Maybe this situation will be worked out peacefully. Maybe the students will disperse on their own." I had dinner and went to bed about 10:30. About midnight I heard clanking noises, looked out the window and saw tanks going by. Big tanks with big guns, swinging back and forth, at times pointing right at my window. After the tanks came a line of armored personnel carriers, then truckloads of armed soldiers. Looking toward Tiananmen, about a mile away, I could see flames and hear small arms fire. In the morning I went down to

Changan Lu. People had gathered, talking. Around them were remains of buses and feeble barricades that had been crushed by the tanks.

Q: Because the buses had been turned over in the intersections.

KNOPES: Yeah, right.

Q: Long before the --

KNOPES: The people in the street were listening to radios, but they heard nothing but martial music. I tried to strike up a conversation, but they were not about to speak to a foreigner, even in Chinese. I walked over to the embassy, which was, as you know, in chaos, trying to figure out what was going on, what might happen next. USIS was trying to get in touch with Fulbrighters and other Americans who were there under our auspices. Concerned calls were coming in from Americans in Shanghai, Chengdu and other cities where there had been student demonstrations. I answered calls, tried to reassure the callers, for much of the day. I didn't find out much about Voice of America broadcasts, except that jamming had been increased. The CNN Beijing operation was closed down the day after the crackdown. From then on VOA and BBC were the primary sources of information out of China. That is, until the VOA correspondent, too, was expelled. I had a reservation on Cathay Pacific back to Hong Kong on June 6. On the way to the airport we passed several military encampments. The airport was chaos. Foreigners and many Chinese trying to get out. Back in Hong Kong the next day, I watched tens of thousands march in the streets, protesting the killings in Beijing. They still have a commemorative protest march every year in Hong Kong.

Q: One of the consequences of Tiananmen Square is, as you were saying, the embassy contacted all American citizens and urged them to leave, and in fact brought in charter planes I think --

KNOPES: I think they might have, mm-hmm.

Q: -- over a thousand people. I'm not quite sure where all those people went. Did any of them, any of the main journalists come down to Hong Kong?

KNOPES: Not that I know of. But I was already on the way out. I left for Washington a few days later. Journalists, if they couldn't stay in Beijing, probably went to Japan, which was closer and not as directly involved as Hong Kong.

Q: Well now we have you at Voice of America. And I don't think we've talked to anybody about what Voice of America is.

KNOPES: Ah.

Q: And I think there's a number of issues. Just how is it organized itself and then what's the relationship between it and guidance from the State Department and such. If you'd like to approach that.

KNOPEs: Voice of America started in 1941 or 1942, at the beginning of World War II, to provide news and information to the occupied countries of Europe. I think the expansion to Asia and other countries came later. It was authorized and funded by Congress as an independent news operation. In 1953, when USIA became an independent agency, the Voice of America became a part of this new agency, though it retained a great deal of independence. In 1976, President Ford signed into law the VOA Charter. The Charter has been instrumental in protecting VOA from outside influence and interference on its news gathering and broadcasting, including from the Department of State. There was a fierce independence throughout the organization that I respected, though I had been on the complaining end about some coverage when I was overseas. I went to VOA as chief of the East Asia/Pacific Division, managing the services that broadcast in Burmese, Indonesian, Lao, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, and Thai. Well, Thai was something separate. The Thai service, only 3 staffers, prepared daily programs that were not broadcast, but sent to Thai medium stations for airing as they saw fit. I started Tibetan and Cantonese services while I was there. Starting Tibetan brought a lot of criticism from the PRC and a lot of jamming when we started broadcasting. Of course, English programming went on around the clock, reaching all parts of the globe.

Q: Who was the head of, of USIA and VOA at that time that you were there?

KNOPEs: Dick Carlson was the director of VOA and I think Bruce Gelb was the head of USIA. They did not get along. Dick Carlson was appointed by George Bush, the first George Bush. He had owned some newspapers in California. Bruce Gelb was also a political appointee, but not as well suited to the job. His background was in the cosmetics industry or something of the sort. They were both fundraisers for Bush and the Republican party. They had a disagreement about funding for VOA. Congress appropriated money for the Voice, but it was funneled through USIA. Funds for VOA often didn't come as quickly or as completely as expected. The outcome was that Dick Carlson left VOA, went off to the Seychelles as ambassador. I think Gelb went to Belgium as ambassador. In the long run their public feud didn't help either organization.

Q: As the chief of the East Asia Division of VOA then, what were your responsibilities and duties?

KNOPEs: I took over right after Tiananmen. The China branch, which had been broadcasting about 10 hours a day to China, increased programming to 12 or 14 hours a day after Tiananmen. Congress appropriated funding for this expansion. Additional new staff was hired to cover the expanded programming. In the aftermath of Tiananmen, the Bush administration extended the visas of all Chinese students who were in the United

States. Some were finishing classes and needed a job, many did not plan to go back to China anyway and were looking for work. There was this tremendous pool of talent available when VOA went recruiting for Chinese broadcasters. This worked out well in another way. VOA Chinese broadcasters were all talented and professional. But almost all had come from Taiwan years before. They were anti-communist and pro-KMT. Some had been there a long time. VOA needed more broadcasters who knew the PRC and had current vocabulary. The language had changed both in Taiwan and in the PRC, but not at VOA. Bringing in these young, talented people helped the service tremendously, but it led to a certain amount of conflict between the two groups.

Q: So under the East Asia Division then there would be language specific --

KNOPES: Yeah, language services. But the China branch was the biggest.

Q: Right. Who ran the China branch?

KNOPES: Dave Hess, who had come --

Q: Dave Hess! OK.

KNOPES: Who had come from Taipei. Dave worked for me when I was in Beijing and he was in Shanghai. He went to Taiwan for language school and AIT. I expected to be in Beijing a couple more years at least. When I unexpectedly went to AIT Taipei, there was Dave Hess as information officer. When I went to Hong Kong I didn't expect to work with Dave again. Then VOA came up and we were together again. We couldn't have done much better than Dave for running the China branch during and after Tiananmen. He had experience in radio, having been a broadcaster for Armed Forces Radio. He spoke Chinese, loved China, and was good with people. He did a fine job of getting news of the outside world to a China that was locked down for some time after the massacre. VOA reporting was very irritating to the PRC authorities, much of it the reporting of our correspondent in Beijing, Al Pessin. I knew Al from my time in Beijing. A couple days after the crackdown on Tiananmen he was expelled from China.

The Voice of America was an adjunct member of an organization called the Asian Broadcasters Union (ABU). Any organization that broadcast to Asia was eligible. In addition to VOA, Netherlands Broadcasting, Canadian Broadcasting Company, and Deutsche Welle, were adjunct members. The ABU held an annual meeting in Asia, with the 1989 meeting scheduled to be held in Beijing in November under the sponsorship of Radio Beijing. The leadership of the ABU was concerned about going to China so soon after Tiananmen, but feared cancellation would have create long-term problems. It would have been a major loss of face for Radio Beijing. We in VOA wondered if we should attend, if our attendance would send the right message? I argued for it as a chance to see first hand what was happening and to find out how other broadcasters were handling the situation. We might even get support from Radio Beijing for replacing Al Pessin. It was

decided that Sid Davis, VOA's head of programming, and I would attend. The meeting was held in a new hotel in Beijing, I think it was called the Prince Hotel -- do you remember that at all?

Q: Yeah, I was --

KNOPES: It was one of the new hotels. Tiananmen had had an effect. Except for the ABU, there were only a handful of other guests. There didn't appear to be any surveillance or restrictions on our group. One afternoon I walked to Tiananmen and found it well-guarded. There were PLA and plain clothes guards all over the place but I was permitted to walk around. There were no Chinese, just a few tourists. Beijing was still very quiet. Sid Davis and I attended all the ABU sessions, talked with other broadcasters. We even had a talk with the Radio Beijing people, but with little substance. We requested and got an appointment at the Foreign Ministry. After tea was served, the official, I don't remember anything about him, launched into a tirade about how Al Pessin had broadcast false and misleading news about what happened at Tiananmen. Al had been expelled because he misrepresented the facts. Sid was nonplussed at this overheated diatribe. I took it as theater and rejoined with a description of VOA's news organization, journalistic responsibilities, and congressional charter. Al Pessin reported what happened, I told him, as did all western journalists. I said it was time to allow VOA to restaff its Beijing office. Of course, nothing came of that meeting, It wasn't an exchange of views, just an exchange of opinions. A few months later a VOA correspondent was accredited and re-opened our office. Maybe our mild confrontation had a positive effect in the long run. Before I left VOA, we were able to add a Chinese speaker to the Beijing office. The correspondents were not Chinese speakers. A short time later I was able to send a senior staffer from the China Branch to Hong Kong.

Q: Did the Chinese jam the broadcast?

KNOPES: Oh, that was constant. When I traveled to China, I always took a shortwave radio to check our frequencies. There was always jamming, but we broadcast on several frequencies simultaneously. A listener could usually find one that was not jammed. VOA had monitoring offices around the world analyzing frequencies and interference with our signal. There was always jamming in China. Jamming cost money so I think they concentrated their efforts on Chinese broadcasts. They weren't as successful in jamming English broadcasts. They probably weren't as concerned about the English-speaking audience. At the same time, VOA was moving away from short-wave broadcasting, putting more and more on satellite. Shortwave signals went from Washington to a relay station in California. From there it was sent to transmitters in the Philippines, then broadcast around Asia. That's probably a little easier to jam. Sending the signal up to a satellite, then down to the ground gives a stronger signal. probably more difficult to jam.

Q: Now, just at the time that you're heading the East Asia Division, all sorts of things are happening. What I wanted to ask -- all kinds of things happened in '89/'90. You have a

coup in the Philippines. The Americans fly jets over Manila. How does VOA, what role does the East Asia Division have --

KNOPES: As I said, VOA was a news organization. We had correspondents in Bangkok, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Beijing, who traveled to cover breaking news like a coup in Manila. The central news room in VOA worked 24-hours a day, gathering correspondents' reports, plus items from wire services, and daily newspapers to prepare articles that were sent to all language services. The services also wrote stories on their own countries based on information they gathered from local media. To ensure accuracy, nothing could be put on the air unless it had three independent, reliable sources.

Q: So they had correspondents actually stationed all over Asia.

KNOPES: All over Asia, yeah.

Q: That could be sent to --

KNOPES: Correspondents were constantly on the move. VOA had stringers, too, local journalists who would report breaking news and send in feature articles. There was an editorial office, separate from the news operation. Services were required to carry at least one VOA editorial each day. Those editorials were a constant issue between VOA, USIA and the State Department. Editorials were supposed to reflect U.S. policy, but they often reflected a more conservative and rigid point of view. At one point, the State Department wanted to have a chance to look them over, maybe edit them. That didn't happen. They were always a sore point, even within VOA. I think every division would have welcomed a chance to reject some of them, but they were required. No one liked them but we couldn't get rid of them.

Q: So the editorial shop wasn't under you, it was a separate --

KNOPES: It was separate, with some outside support that made it secure. I really don't know how it came about, who started it, who supported it.

Q: So Desaix Anderson who was the DAS --

KNOPES: He was the -- was he?

Q: Or Kent Wiedemann didn't call you?

KNOPES: No. No, they really didn't. We got some complaints through the EA office of USIA, but State did not call me directly. I kept in touch with State desk officers about some issues. But we made our own decisions on what to carry in the services. We set up interviews with senior officials at State to discuss American policy towards Asia. Assistant Secretary Dick Solomon was one. We were a news organization and we

interviewed the policymakers and newsmakers. Sometimes news makers we interviewed overseas made comments counter to our policies or against some US position. That caused some problem but that was one voice among many we carried. We always tried to be balanced. There was always that tension. There is another point I should make about the evolution of VOA. When I came into USIA in the early '60s, all VOA division chiefs and almost all the language service chiefs were Foreign Service Officers who had served overseas, usually in the countries they were supervising. There was an awareness of what was going on in those countries and perhaps more awareness of U.S. policy toward those countries. By the 1980s, assignment of Foreign Service Officers to VOA had been phased out. Not because of an issue with their abilities or their point of view, but because broadcasters, who were very good, very professional, complained about the low ceiling. Why could they not aspire to be service chief? That was a reasonable position. VOA began promoting broadcasters to head language services, leaving fewer jobs for Foreign Service Officers. Most of them did outstanding jobs as supervisors. But some lost touch with their home country, especially a country they couldn't visit. Some stayed well beyond their productive years.

Q: Well, Dave Hess was head of the China Section. Were other sections headed by FSOs?

KNOPES: No. No. Personnel matters in the China branch were sensitive, mostly because of the --

Q: Tiananmen.

KNOPES: No, from the broadcasters from two sides of the Taiwan strait. You couldn't choose someone who had come from Taiwan, or one who had come from the PRC, to head the Branch. The factions were too entrenched. That was one of the reasons for keeping FSOs in those jobs. I was one of two FSOs as division chief at that time. All the other division chiefs had come up through the language services. When I left, I was replaced by an FSO. But when he retired, my deputy, who had been a Chinese broadcaster from Taiwan, moved up to be division chief. After Dave Hess retired, I brought in a couple of FSOs to run the China branch. One was Bill Palmer, whom I had known in Shanghai. He stayed a couple years. To replace him I got Dan Sreebny, who had been the information officer in Hong Kong with me. Dan was, as I said, a very good information officer, a very good Foreign Service Officer. He was so good that they took him out of the China Branch and made him the head of the Near East division. He knew Arabic as well as Chinese. That was about the time I was leaving. Of course, USIA was folded back into the State Department a couple of years after I retired.

Q: While you were head of the East Asia Division, did you get to do any traveling?

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: You'd done the orientation before you --

KNOPES: I visited all countries with VOA language services while I was still in Hong Kong. As division chief I made quite a few trips to the area. I attended at least two Asian Broadcasting Union meetings -- the one in Beijing and another in Seoul, Korea. My deputy went to a couple, also. We tried to go every year. It was a chance to meet other broadcasters and to keep up contacts with Radio Beijing. One of my trips was to try to increase audio feeds to medium-wave stations. On that trip I visited the new relay facility VOA was building in northeast Thailand. When it opened a year or so later the signal to all of Asia was much stronger, especially into China.

Q: Well, it must have been interesting too, because if you're a journalist doing journalistic reporting, and you're head of the China service, while you're talking about everything in the Middle East, everything in Latin America, I mean you're not just doing news out of, out of China, so you're quite a cockpit of, of, of the news.

KNOPES: Well, yeah. I wasn't a journalist. As I said, there were VOA correspondents in major cities in all parts of the world who filed daily. Their reporting went to VOA's central news room, was edited and sent to all language services. Our reporting covered the world, not just individual countries. I was able to send service chiefs out to their countries occasionally to familiarize themselves with what was going on and file stories. I went to a PAO conference in Singapore to hear the concerns and plans of PAOs. I filled them in on our plans to place programs on local radio stations. In Asian cities, people were moving away from shortwave radios. Local media was expanding and getting better. The more we could put on I medium wave stations, the bigger audience we would have. We hoped to get on the national stations which reached all over the country. But we also worked with small- and medium-size private stations who were expanding and needed material to fill new time slots. I should say at this point that VOA was looking to the future, starting transmission via satellite, but not abandoning shortwave. Shortwave listening was declining gradually, mostly in urban areas. Even there we had listeners who were interested in the US, did not trust their own media, or wanted more international news.

Q: Let's see. Harry Catto becomes director of USIA.

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: During this period. Does that impact on your operation?

KNOPES: Not really. Catto was not at USIA very long. He had visited Beijing when I was there, as assistant secretary of defense. I think his tenure was short because he was a Bush appointee. When Clinton won the election he brought in Joe Duffy. At VOA, when Dick Carlson left to be ambassador to the Seychelles another Texan replaced him. I can't

remember his name. Again, when Bush lost, he was out. The last VOA director I worked with -- I can't remember his name --

Q: Chase Untermeyer?

KNOPEs: No, he was the Texan. It was the one after him. Have you got it down here?

Q: OK, here's Duffy. Sid Davis?

KNOPEs: I remember. It was Geoff Cowan. Anyway, he was the last -- where were we going with that?

Q: I was asking if the change in leadership in USIA was impacting on --

KNOPEs: Geoff Cowan, the last director of VOA I worked with was a dynamo. As I said, his father had been a director of VOA, and this was something he really wanted to do. He had a lot of ideas for VOA, but I was on my way to retirement and didn't work very long with him. Joe Duffy, the last director of USIA, was an academic. I don't think he was very much interested in what USIA was doing. He liked to go to conferences, he liked to think big thoughts. He was a political appointee. His wife was a political appointee, too. I think he was the beginning of the end for USIA. I always thought if we'd had a stronger presence in USIA, somebody would have stood up to Jesse Helms and Madeline Albright, made a case for public diplomacy. Things might have turned out differently. I'm not sure they could have, but I would have liked to have seen someone arguing for the agency.

During my last two years I was actively involved in a fight to derail formation of Radio Free Asia (RFA). I argued, and still do, that VOA was doing everything that needed to be done in providing accurate and timely information to Asia. Starting a new broadcast operation was redundant and wasteful. Who is it that we are trying to "free" in Asia, anyway? I extended for a fifth year at VOA because I didn't want to give up the fight against this boondoggle.

Q: Jesse.

KNOPEs: Huh?

Q: Wasn't it Jesse?

KNOPEs: It might have been. There were a lot of others in Congress and conservative think tanks who looked at China and said, "This is a communist nation that is closed to information. VOA is not tough enough toward this communist menace. We should be doing what Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty did for the Hungarians," you know, --

Q: (laughs) Got 'em all killed.

KNOPES: Now, RFE and RL were effective in getting information behind the Iron Curtain. They probably take more credit than they deserve regarding the collapse of the communist empire. Proponents of RFA said we need to give Asian countries unbiased news. I knew that VOA was already doing that, especially to China. A lot of very talented people from VOA went to work there. Dan Sutherland, who was with The Washington Post, is deputy director. It turned out to be a professional organization. I think they try to do a good job. I still don't see why we spend money creating new entities.

Q: Really?

KNOPES: Anyway, I, Dan Sreebny, and others in VOA did our best to show the people who were pushing for Radio Free Asia that we were doing what they were talking about. We could do even more if the money planned to create something new were devoted to programming that was already on the air. We launched programming within the East Asia Pacific Division that we thought would show that we were capable of doing the same things that they were talking about. We outlined all this in meetings with the task force created to look into the feasibility of creating RFA. We hoped the Clinton administration would be more sympathetic and helpful but got nothing. Radio Free Asia was created. It was chartered for only a few years, but everyone in Washington knows that something created by the U.S. Congress, even something called short-term, is going to be around forever. There are now five international broadcasters funded by the US government -- Radio Marti to Cuba, VOA, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia. Radio Free Asia is located on N Street in DC, with new studios and a large staff. It uses VOA transmitters and satellites and shares frequencies. The Bureau of International Broadcasting was created as an umbrella organization to run these various independent broadcasters. Spreading funding among them left them all short. I don't know about the others, but VOA is doing a lot of television now, and things with tweets and toots and whatever else you call that social media. They're into modern technology. VOA also has millions of people signed up for daily emails. A lot of material goes directly to individuals. Now the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the BBG, has replaced BIB. It has not done a good job. Secretary of State Clinton called it dysfunctional and wasteful. I don't know what the future holds for international broadcasting.

Q: Now, on a daily basis, as chief of East Asian Division, what might you do? What's a typical day at your level?

KNOPES: We started with a morning staff meeting. All the services and division chiefs gathered for a look at what was planned for that day in the newsroom. I would report on anything special coming up in our area, what we were covering, that sort of thing. A good part of a division chief's job was personnel -- meetings and consultations on personnel policies, hiring, a problem with an individual. I launched two new language services -- Tibetan and Cantonese -- during my tenure. Planning, finding space, recruiting staff,

especially in Tibetan, took a lot of time. Most Tibetans in the US were active supporters of the Dalai Lama. We didn't want to leave ourselves open to a Chinese claim that VOA and the US government had built a platform for the Dalai Lama by hiring an activist. In a bureaucracy you're always busy, things are always going on. Starting the new services I specifically remember. In my last two years at VOA I spent almost all my time fighting Radio Free Asia. Of course, I didn't win.

Q: In talking about Radio Free Asia, what kind of meetings would you have and who would you be meeting with?

KNOPES: From the director on down, everyone was opposed to the creation of another broadcaster. We knew that we were doing a good job of providing information to Asia. With the funding required to start RFA we could do a lot more. We tried to put together some additional programs to show proponents of RFA we could do anything that they were planning to do. After the fact it was pretty clear that nothing we had to say would convince the majority of the study group. Their minds were made up. We did a lot, made a major effort, but I don't think anything could have stopped the RFA steamroller.

Q: It strikes me, one of the things you're looking at when you're taking about the Radio Free Asia idea is still the blow back from Tiananmen Square.

KNOPES: Yes, that was definitely a big part. Especially for those in Congress.

Q: Everybody hated Beijing.

KNOPES: Sure.

Q: Scowcroft made secret visits. When that was revealed --

KNOPES: Right, right, exactly.

Q: -- that was very unattractive. In fact, when the new Clinton administration comes in, he announces that, you know, human rights is going to be the real policy toward China and he finds out that that doesn't really get him very far.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: And he has to drop that. But in order to drop that, Congress forces these National Council on China things, and there's one for military and one for something else.

KNOPES: Yeah, right. That was --

Q: And so instead of being able to complain about human rights --

KNOPES: Yeah.

Q: -- they then institutionalize those complaints.

KNOPES: That's right.

Q: So here you are, '93, '94, four, five years later, you're still handling the emotional impact.

KNOPES: Yeah, absolutely. That was a good part of it, sure. Once Congress picks up an issue, emotion and misinformation drives it forward.

Q: Now, you're retired in 1994.

KNOPES: Right.

Q: What --

KNOPES: Twenty years ago!

Q: Right, yes! Twenty years ago.

KNOPES: Come November.

Q: Was that -- you hit age, rank?

KNOPES: Yeah, well?

Q: Balding?

KNOPES: I hit all those things, yeah. The boys were out of college. I didn't want to go overseas again. I was coming up on the mandatory retirement age. I could have gotten an overseas assignment, but there wasn't any place I wanted to go. PAO Beijing came open at the time. I considered applying for that but my wife did not want to go overseas. We were getting comfortable. I was tired of the bureaucracy. Everything fell into place.

Q: What have you been doing since retirement?

KNOPES: Well, I wrote a couple books. The first one was [Any A Damn Fool Can Be A Farmer](#), about growing up on a farm in Wisconsin. It was published by Badger Books in Madison and sold pretty well in the midwest. Then I wrote about our career in the foreign service. That was for the boys and our grandkids. I didn't try to get that published. There are too many "Life in the Foreign Service" books around already. It is for our children, who grew up overseas but were never sure what Dad was doing, and for our

grandchildren. They are not interested now, but some time later on they're going to ask their parents "What were you doing in Thailand or Taiwan or those places?" I've always been interested in photography. I've been selling photos through a small photo agency for 40 years now.

Q: Hm!

KNOPES: I've sold quite a few pictures over the years. Karen and I usually take a major trip a year. These give me a chance to photograph a variety of subjects. We've been to Africa and Vietnam, we've cruised the Baltic and explored Spain. We just got back from a cruise on the Danube. I've skied in Argentina, France and Italy, and every year out west. I take a lot of pictures, send them off to the agent, and some of them sell. I used to say sales kept me in film. Now everything is digital. There is no film, so I guess the sales keep me in beer (*laughs*). It's fun and I always learn something about the places we travel to. Plus I'm still learning Photoshop and Lightroom for editing photos.

Q: Are you still keeping up with some of the USIA colleagues?

KNOPES: Yeah, yeah, I play golf with Lloyd Neighbors, who replaced me in Hong Kong, and with Bill Palmer, who ran the China Branch. Neal Donnelly and Jerry Stryker, I don't know if you know that name or not.

Q: Yeah.

KNOPES: I played golf with Jerry and Neal for about 15 years. We served in Taiwan together in the 1960s. Neal now has health problems and Jerry moved to California. He is still playing golf at age 92.

Q: Let me ask you a wrap up question because much has changed in the way the United States organizes this function of public affairs and whatnot.

KNOPES: Mm-hmm.

Q: Give me your take on the change.

KNOPES: Yeah, you mean State Department and wherever we are now?

Q: Yeah. And taking it back over.

KNOPES: I don't think it's worked out very well. I was sorry to see USIA go. At that time some thought public diplomacy was not needed. Some of the same people thought we needed another broadcaster to Asia. I didn't like the way it went. Jesse Helms pushing his agenda and no one pushing back. USIA did not exactly disappear. It took on a new form in the State Department. The problem -- it seems to me, and to people I've talked to

who are still working, is that the assistant secretary for public diplomacy has little, if anything, to do with the day-to-day operation in the field. It seems that the assistant secretary is a Washington position just for show. The first Assistant Secretary's background was in sales with some big company. Someone with an international affairs or a communications background might have set up a public diplomacy cone more rationally. In a presentation at the USIA Alumni Association, that first PD assistant secretary used PowerPoint to show us how she was going to spread the word about American democracy around the world. It was clear she didn't know much about the subject or what had gone on before. The people who do the work, the PAOs, the public diplomacy specialists in the field, do a good job and need support in Washington. I don't think they get enough under the present configuration. I wouldn't want to be part of it. I guess that's what it comes down to.

Q: Well, it's interesting, because like everything else, USIA has made such an enormous contribution, but continues to change with the times. In the olden days when you and I started, they would have film crews --

KNOPES: Oh yeah.

Q: -- go out to the rural villages in Thailand --

KNOPES: Sure, yeah.

Q: -- and Cambodia.

KNOPES: We did that. We talked about that. The mobile development units, that was the big thing. They were great fun. I enjoyed that.

Q: It's good for your language.

KNOPES: Yeah, it was much better than being part of the bureaucracy. I enjoyed running my own operation. Talking to people every day is good for your language. Even if FSI has a problem with one's accent or vocabulary. It also increases one's understanding of how other people see life, people who are not concerned with status, policies, or hierarchy. Of course, after Songkhla, most of my conversations were with people who had all those concerns.

Q: Well Bob, I appreciate you giving us this time.

KNOPES: Well, it was fun, more fun than I expected. I probably should have done it sooner, before my memory started to erode.

End of interview