

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

**DAVID C. SUMMERS**

*Interviewed by: David Reuther  
Initial Interview Date: July 26, 2012  
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**FOREIGN SERVICE POSTS**

Krakow, Poland, vice consul	1975-1976
Warsaw, Poland, third secretary, political section	1976-1977
State Department Operations Center, junior watch officer	1977-1979
State Department Office of Congressional Relations (H), staff assistant	March-May 1979
TDY Warsaw Poland during visit of Pope John Paul II	May-June 1979
Beijing, China, second secretary, political section (external affairs)	1983-1985
Bangkok, Thailand, second secretary, political section (political-military officer)	1986-1988
Stockholm, Sweden, administrative section, first secretary, data processing center chief	1989-1993
State Department Office of Caribbean Affairs (CAR), Dominican Republic desk officer	1993-1995
Budapest, Hungary, political counselor	1996-1999

**INTERVIEW**

*Q: Good morning. It is 26 July. This is a foreign affairs oral history program with David Summers. We are in Washington conducting this interview. It is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am David Reuther. Dave, let's start out, can you give us a background of where you were born and raised.*

SUMMERS: I was born in Lexington, Kentucky in 1949 into a family that had been in Kentucky for about 200 years. I was reminded of this recently when I told a friend about my grandfather who went to the St. Louis Exhibition by train in 1904. He got married in 1905 and went by train to Washington DC which was the honeymoon destination for Kentucky, like Niagara Falls. He never went anyplace else in his whole life. He died at age 96 in 1969. He never went north; he never went south, except to visit his family. He was a farmer. So I was born into a pretty sedentary family in Kentucky.

*Q: On the paternal side they had this long history in Kentucky what did your father do?*

SUMMERS: My father was an English teacher. By the time I was born he was at the University of Kentucky. When I was 10 we moved to Ohio.

*Q: What about your mother's people?*

SUMMERS: Mom was born in Bourbon County, Kentucky, a town called Millersburg. Part of the farm that my grandfather farmed was first bought for British pounds. They went there in 1775. Thanks to Google I recently found a letter from Daniel Boone written when he was staying at my ancestor's place. My ancestors got there first, but of course Boone came overland on the Cumberland Road and they floated down the Ohio River, so their trip was easier. They were settled in Carlisle, Pennsylvania when they bought land from Lord Fairfax and went to Kentucky.

*Q: So these were English settlers.*

SUMMERS: Yes, they would have been English settlers when they went.

*Q: Let's start off by talking about, you moved when you were ten, but before that time what was life like in Lexington?*

SUMMERS: Oh gosh, it was like those things you read on the internet where they admonish you to pass it on if you remember: skate keys, drinking from the hose, going to the store for ice cream because we didn't have a freezer that would hold ice cream. I have an idealized view of my childhood growing up in a little neighborhood where the children roamed freely. We came home at dark in the summertime and we had a lot of adventures that were of our own making, but didn't really go very far, just a few blocks from our house. I remember when I got a bicycle and rode my bike into another neighborhood I thought I was in strange territory. I couldn't believe I had done it by myself. All the kids disappeared on Sunday morning to attend a different church, but we were back together again on Sunday afternoon. All the parents on the block felt free to discipline all the kids, but also to indulge them.

*Q: Now your father was an English professor at the University of Kentucky?*

SUMMERS: Right.

*Q: How big was that campus at that time?*

SUMMERS: Well it seemed big to me, and I think it was the biggest school in Kentucky. I suppose it might have had 10,000 students, something like that.

*Q: Now you would have started elementary school in Kentucky, this is the period of the Korean War which you probably wouldn't remember.*

SUMMERS: Oh yes, I do remember it. I suppose this may be my first memory of a foreign country. The man across the street was in the army. His name was Fred Rankin. While he went to the Korean War, his wife Irmgard, who was a German war bride, lived across the street with their two children. Our families were good friends. When Fred came back from the war he brought us zori shoes from Korea, flip flops. They were the first anyone had ever seen. We all loved them. That was my first knowledge of Asia, that and the occasional move among the neighborhood kids to dig a hole in someone's backyard with the goal of reaching China. Then that next year, my family went to Mexico on my father's sabbatical. The deal was that after seven years at the University of Kentucky, a teacher could either take a leave for a year at half salary or half a year at full salary. We went to spend the whole year in Mexico. That was the same year that the Rankins were reassigned to Japan. I remember debating with Karin Rankin which of us would travel farther. My parents told me it would take us a week to drive to Mexico. Karin's family would take two days to fly to Japan. We agreed that planes went faster than cars, but that a week was much longer than two days. We decided that Kentucky was equidistant between Mexico and Japan. No map was consulted.

*Q: Where did you go in Mexico?*

SUMMERS: We went to Mexico City.

*Q: What did your father do?*

SUMMERS: He wrote a novel called The Weather of February. I entered the first grade at the American School, and my brother entered the fifth grade. Mexico's national day was soon upon us, and he had an assignment to draw the Mexican flag. I remember feeling relief that first graders didn't have to do that, because it was hard to draw an eagle on a rock with cactus eating a snake. Our mother taught first grade at a school called Colegio Colombia, a bilingual school not far from ours.

*Q: What was the American school like then? It wasn't just Americans was it?*

SUMMERS: I think it was about half Americans and half Mexicans. Compared to the school in Kentucky, it was impressive. It had a big fence around it, and it had 12 grades. I had been just to kindergarten, and I walked one block by myself to school. This time I rode on a bus which was pretty exciting.

Sometimes I think back to this period when I try to figure out why I became interested in foreign languages when my parents basically were not. I think it could date back to the trauma of my first day of first grade in Mexico. By mistake they put me in a class for Spanish speakers who would slowly learn English, rather than the class for English speakers who would slowly learn Spanish. I couldn't understand a thing – the teacher and students seemed to babble at me with growing impatience. I had learned to count to a hundred, and decided to count to myself. If my parents didn't fetch me by then, I would run away. I counted to about 30 when I decided they weren't coming until afternoon and that I might as well leave right then. When the teacher's back was turned I dashed out of the room. I was like the little gingerbread man. I hid in the bushes by the fence and made my way to the gate, which was guarded by a pensioner. From my hiding place, I could see the teacher's high heels next to the old man's boots. When the time seemed right, I made a break for it, clearing the gate and running howling down the street towards the school where my mother was teaching. They took chase, but were no match for me that day. I don't remember learning Spanish but I do remember the day my parents gave me a tiny stuffed dog when I acted as the interpreter at a store where they were trying to buy automobile tires. I had no idea what I said that helped them, but I suppose that the experience of overcoming the strangeness of a foreign culture became a pleasurable challenge.

*Q: Now what year was it?*

SUMMERS: That would have been 1955.

*Q: Now you gave me a note about the Weekly Reader in '56 –*

SUMMERS: That must relate to my earliest political awareness. My friend Polly Bacon was a year older than I was and her third grade class read *The Weekly Reader*. She showed me an article about President Eisenhower's dog, which was a Weimaraner. I was in awe that Polly could read the words "Eisenhower" and "Weimaraner." I became an Eisenhower fan instantly. I thought my parents should vote for Eisenhower based on the strength of Polly Bacon's reading prowess. I was deeply disappointed when I questioned them and learned that they didn't plan to vote for Eisenhower. Many years later I thought of this incident when I learned about young Chinese who denounced their parents during the Cultural Revolution.

*Q: At the end of the Eisenhower administration there were a number of foreign affairs things going on. By this time you were reading the newspaper or social studies class was introducing you to the wider world. Do you recall any of those incidents, the kinds of things you were reading at the time?*

SUMMERS: Yes. One thing I remember was the Batista revolution and Castro taking over Cuba. I remember when my father's office mate Edgar Whan burst into our living room after church one day and said, "Castro is like Jesus Christ! He looks like Christ and he is going to save the Cuban people!" Now that impressed me. That must have happened in the fall of 1959, after we moved to Ohio. Then followed a period of cognitive

dissonance for me: Castro allied Cuba with the Soviet Union and expropriated U.S. assets. The U.S. imposed an export embargo which first excluded but then included medicines. I'm sure that this came as a big disappointment to everyone who once considered Castro as the second coming of Christ. But I can remember thinking that the entire Cuban population shouldn't have to suffer because Castro went bad. I suppose I have been against the Cuban embargo since I was 11.

I vividly remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. We had returned to Mexico a second time for my father's next sabbatical. I was back at the American school and I was back at that very same gate that I had escaped from when I was six. Because Mexico City had been targeted for Soviet missiles from Cuba, school was closed, but no one was allowed to leave until a relative came to pick them up. This time I was freed from the bars of the school when a girl headed out to meet her mother declared that the people around her were all her "primos"/cousins. I was on the loose again in the streets of Mexico City. I don't remember feeling any fear about the situation. I seem to remember that people were concerned about riots of some unspecified kind as a result of the stalemate.

*Q: '63 was your freshman year in high school I think.*

SUMMERS: That is right.

*Q: What were the kinds of things you were doing? Did you have a part time job?*

SUMMERS: I had a part time job a couple of years after that. I worked in a book store at Christmas and during the summers. Otherwise, I was just around. I wasn't on any sports team. We went wilderness camping a lot. I recently recounted to my kids that I was in a cave listening on a transistor radio when Sonny Liston took the world heavyweight title from Floyd Patterson. They said "Who were they?" It was small town life. I still walked to school. I never took the school bus to school except in Mexico. It was pleasant. Everybody knew each other.

*Q: Now '63 is a seminal year in American history with the Kennedy assassination.*

SUMMERS: Right.

*Q: Where were you?*

SUMMERS: I was headed out of the cafeteria for biology class when someone said the president had been shot. The first news was exciting. No one imagined it would be a mortal wound. It would be a close call like in a TV Western where the hero who was in danger is resting comfortably with his arm in a sling after the final commercial.

*Q: How did you hear?*

SUMMERS: I was in 7<sup>th</sup> period algebra class when the bells of the Catholic church began to ring. The student teacher leading the class burst into tears and left the room. That's how we learned. It happened in a non-verbal way.

*Q: As you are going through high school from the '63-'67 period, things like Vietnam are coming along, civil rights marches. Did that come across your screen any?*

SUMMERS: Sure. Our minister at the Presbyterian church was involved in the civil rights movement. He marched. That caused some discomfort among the congregation. Lots of people felt his pastoral duties didn't include that kind of thing, but he certainly put it before everyone. There were no black students in grades 1-12 then, but at about that time a student named Brenda Talbot appeared from Alabama for about a year. She was kind of a celebrity who connected us to national affairs.

I remember I was home alone in August, 1964 when Lyndon Johnson came on TV to announce the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The gravity of his remarks terrified me that World War III was on its way. I waited anxiously for my parents to come home, and when they did, I gave them the news. They took it calmly, and sure enough, it didn't develop into the cataclysm I was expecting. It made a big impression on me that Lyndon Johnson would interrupt summer re-runs on TV to make the announcement. Then I went to Oberlin College, where everyone was conscious of the Vietnam War, but from a different perspective.

*Q: Now if your father is a college professor and you are in a college town, isn't there going to be a liberal environment?*

SUMMERS: It was a liberal environment for the college, but the people in town were pretty conservative. Good question. Athens County was the only Ohio county which did not vote for George Bush in 2004. I remember Nixon came to town in 1960 for the election. By this time I was on my parent's sheet of music and I was for Kennedy. Nixon made a whistle stop in Athens and I remember cheering when he mentioned Kennedy from his podium at the back of the train. Two ladies behind me in a tight crowd tut-tutted when I did that. I was shorter than everyone, and couldn't see a thing, so I switched my cheers to Nixon, and the two ladies lifted me up so I could see him. So I was aware of that election, and aware of opposing views about it, and happy when Kennedy won.

*Q: Now in high school you are getting into subjects in a much more intense role. What was some of your favorite classes or teachers?*

SUMMERS: Actually my favorite teachers were my English teachers just because they opened up new worlds through literature. For instance as a kid I liked Shakespeare. American history in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade was a kind of rite of passage: all the students had to stand in front of the class and recite the Gettysburg Address one by one, when they were ready. It was like joining a church. The world history teacher did crossword puzzles while he gave us time to read the text in class. The tests were all about the dates, and we used the "Sears Roebuck" method to pass them. 1492, for example, might represent the

price of a toaster, \$14.92. Then you'd think: "Columbus. toaster. 1492" and you could ace the test that way. I loved French, and I was about the only one who did. For me, learning a foreign language was like getting a secret code to another world, a *real* world, so better than literature. When the French film The Umbrellas of Cherbourg came to town, I convinced my teacher that the class should go see it on class time. My classmates were grateful to me, but when Catherine Deneuve appeared singing all her lines, they broke into peals of laughter, clapping, and throwing spit balls. The teacher was disappointed, kind of mad at me. I was heartbroken.

*Q: Vietnam is bubbling along here in high school, and you are in a college town.*

SUMMERS: Well, not so much of the college town part of it. I left for college in 1967, about the time the protests started building up. From my high school years, in addition to my Gulf of Tonkin scare, I remember learning that Ngo Dinh Diem was not a true democrat and that South Vietnam needed to be a more democratic country like us. But luckily we were there. I started out with the program and the conviction that fighting communism was important. I forgot to mention my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mr. Shrigley, who had fought in Korea himself. He told our class that we should drop the atom bomb on China right away because they were going to get stronger, and that they would drop a bomb on us the first chance they got. I can remember a silence at the dinner table when I shared this news with my parents. That was at the core of my world view: communism was bad; communism threatened everywhere, for example, in Vietnam. Because South Vietnam wasn't a true democracy, we had to help them. That was pretty much the way I looked at it until I got to college.

*Q: Now in '67 you went off to Oberlin. How did you pick your college?*

SUMMERS: In the end I picked the college which picked me. I first heard of Oberlin from Mary Pullen, our neighbor across the street. She had no children but took interest in the neighborhood kids. Her husband was a trainer on the Oberlin campus for one of the first outgoing Peace Corps groups. Mary returned that summer and told me "Oh I think Oberlin would be a good college for you." The way I remember it, my parents took no part in my college applications, apart from forking out the ten dollar application fee for each place. We didn't visit any schools beforehand. People didn't do that.

*Q: You tried two or three other...*

SUMMERS: Yeah. I was rejected by Harvard and Princeton. I was accepted at Johns Hopkins, Wesleyan, and Oberlin. I think proximity influenced my decision after that, plus Mary Pullen's recommendation.

*Q: What was Oberlin like as a residential small liberal arts college.*

SUMMERS: Kind of scruffy. I didn't really realize that I had moved to a much more liberal world than the one I had grown up in, although as you mention my town was probably more liberal than most because of the university. Oberlin had no fraternities or

sororities. It had coop dormitories where people cooked food together. It was kind of hippie, and when the Vietnam War intensified, it was solidly anti-war.

*Q: Was this just the students or the faculty too?*

SUMMERS: Mainly the students. The faculty was divided, but collegiality prevailed there, and everyone had a voice in seminars on the Vietnam War. The anti-war sentiment dominated, so it would be odd to be for the war and be at Oberlin.

*Q: What were you thinking of as a major?*

SUMMERS: I was a government major, and by this time I was interested in international relations. I took an English course every semester, for relaxation.

*Q: And how did you come to that decision?*

SUMMERS: I think it was from having lived in Mexico twice and then once in Spain when my father was on sabbatical leave. I enjoyed those times and thought “gee, that would be cool to be involved in international relations.” But I didn’t have a good idea of what that would mean, or what the State Department was about. I was probably driven by the idea of learning languages, too.

*Q: Had you ever had a language requirement or did you get rid of that with your French?*

SUMMERS: At Oberlin? I took another year of French, and one year of French literature.

*Q: What were some of your better classes you took that you enjoyed?*

SUMMERS: My advisor was George Lanyi. He accomplished what a small college is supposed to do. He took a personal interest in me and he also had a critical interest in me. I remember one time - actually I am proud of this now - I asked in class why shouldn’t Germany re-unite and become a neutral buffer for the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff. He said, “If you ever say that outside my class, I will deny that you were ever my student.” George was a Hungarian who had gone to the London School of Economics and then was stranded by WWII in England. He encouraged my interest in international relations. Also he single handedly made it possible for me to spend my junior year abroad at the LSE. At that time it wasn’t a junior year abroad program, I just enrolled in the London School of Economics, and sat for first year exams. That was fabulous.

*Q: Then it blew your mind.*

SUMMERS: Yes. Every day was a big adventure.

*Q: Living in England from '69 to '70.*



SUMMERS: 1968, the year before I got there, had been a time of student tumult, and the reputation of the LSE reputation as an activist hotbed continued. But at the same time, attending school was a formal affair, where people wore jackets and ties to class and addressed each other formally. Class division was a legitimate distinction in debate among students as in “Mr. Summers, you hold that view because you are not working class.”

*Q: LSE is not exactly....*

SUMMERS: Well it was then. It was founded by the Fabian society, so it had a socialist foundation, but it also maintained what seemed to me to be a far older prism of formal discourse.

*Q: Well you must have been an experience for them too. I am not sure how many Americans there would be there, but certainly there were a lot of British, a lot of Commonwealth, Aussies, Kiwis, Rhodies, South Africans. So you must have been quite a different species for them.*

Q: I suppose that is true, although I can't think of a specific example of my nationality being an issue there. It seemed to be about class.

*Q: But that must have been quite eye opening for you.*

SUMMERS: Oh it was amazing. It was a kind of out-of-body experience to observe from afar as events unfolded in the U.S. For some reason, I was surprised to find U.S. policy debated as hotly in Britain as it was at home. I learned of the U.S. military invasion of Cambodia from an approving tabloid headline at the top of the Holborn tube escalator: “Nixon's Army Swoops Down on Reds.” I was also conscious of missing out on a piece of my own history. The Kent State killings and the events that followed changed the campus atmosphere in America, roughened it. I noticed it immediately after I returned, but I missed how it got that way.

*Q: What did the London School of Economics people think of Kent State?*

SUMMERS: I think everyone was shocked, although I may have been more affected than they were because many people took for granted that the U.S. was a violent society – segregationists on one hand, Chicago mobsters on another. I had an appointment to renew my passport on May 5, and learned about Kent State on my way to the U.S. Embassy. Allen Turner, the father of future actress Kathleen Turner, was the consul who administered an oath before he gave me my new passport. I didn't question that he did that, because I had never had a passport renewed before, but I wonder now. Maybe it was because Kathleen and I went on the same student trip to Russia that March. Turner told me he had read in the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper that communists were behind the demonstrations. My head began to swim.

*Q: Did you get what you hoped out of the London School of Economics experience?*

SUMMERS: I didn't have a specific goal, but yes. The British educational system was different, but it worked. Once a week I met with a tutor and we discussed a topic related to a class. That required more focused preparation than I was used to from going to classes. Exams came at the end of the year, and that proved stressful for about six weeks in the spring when the weather kept getting more beautiful. The different approach to study was an education in itself.

*Q: What did the London School of Economics people do in their off time?*

SUMMERS: They drank in pubs. Well I was a member of two clubs at the London School of Economics. I was in the sailing club and the canoe club. During the spring break we went sailing in the Norfolk Broads on a boat with huge sails that had been used for commercial trade with Holland at the turn of the century. The canoe clubhouse was on the Thames at Teddington. But it was an institution in the heart of a big city, so there wasn't the same kind of school feeling that there was in an American university.

*Q: When you got back, how did your colleagues look at you? You had been out a year; you now have an accent?*

SUMMERS: No accent. I would just say I was out a year. In a way I felt that they had changed more than I had, because of the events following Kent State.

*Q: In '71 you graduated and then went on for a masters?*

SUMMERS: Yes, but first I went to Romania, 1971-1972, with a travel scholarship from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation. At the LSE I took a course in diplomatic history which involved research in the original documents of the Public Record Office. I wrote a paper on the machinations of British-Romanian diplomatic relations in the months leading up to World War II in 1939. That made me want to go to Romania, and after I learned about the Watson fellowship, I hit on the idea to study folktales from the entry on Romania in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

It was a good year. The USIS staff at the U.S. embassy in Bucharest was welcoming. I was given the same mail privilege the Fulbright fellows enjoyed. That way, I could expect a return letter from home in six weeks rather than in two months-to-never. The time I remember thinking "I'd like to be part of the foreign service!" came when the PAO James Rentschler invited me to a home screening of the movie Woodstock. Woodstock was another phenomenon that happened while I was away in England, and I was eager to catch up. Most of the Romanian guests seemed to be from the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Culture. Between reels we stopped for a different course of dinner.

*Q: What was their reaction?*

SUMMERS: It was shock. I notice the lady sitting next to me stiffen partway through the first reel, and she stayed that way. People gobbled salad with unusual attention to the lettuce rather than making conversation, or worse, discussing the movie. What struck me

as wonderful was that the embassy had pierced the firewall of Ceausescu's Romania that way. He was just beginning to feel his oats at that time, and billboards with his picture were beginning to show up around the country, beside Marx and Engels.

*Q: You already had an idea about communism. How did you end up in communist Romania?*

SUMMERS: Well, my original idea was to see Romania. It just happened to have turned communist since the period before World War II. It was probably the best time to be there, because in 1968 Ceausescu had opposed the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. He was lionized for that, and Nixon made an overture to Romania too. We were good friends with Romania in 1971 and 1972. I think something personally happened to Ceausescu after that. At the time he wasn't a megalomaniac, although people were already making jokes about him and especially his wife, Elena. Basically I think he was trying to stave off the kind of reform which Russia began in 1956. Ceausescu wasn't having any of that. He wanted to hold power closely. But in '71, part of the equation for him was to be the darling of the West, the leader of an independent communist country, when in fact Romania probably already was one of the most repressive ones. That is how I enjoyed freedom of movement which would have been impossible a few years later.

*Q: So describe this program you have created for yourself.*

SUMMERS: In the late '60s, Thomas Watson Jr., the head of IBM, established a fellowship based on a simple idea: give graduating college seniors a stipend for a year of individual study abroad. Watson had made such a trip when he graduated from Brown University in 1937. My goal was to go to Romania. A folklore project seemed like a manageable way to learn about the countryside. A stroke of sheer luck appeared with the invention of the Sony cassette tape recorder. That proved to be my entrée to the Romanian Institute of Folklore. When a team went out to the field where there wasn't electricity, they took a big Russian tape recorder and four auto batteries with them. Ligia Georgescu was the collector of basme, what we call fairy tales. She invited me and my Sony to join her.

*Q: You assisted her in collecting these folk tales?*

SUMMERS: I assisted her by pushing the button. But the cool thing was that we could go to where people lived rather than having them come to the central spot where the big tape recorder was. That made the experience more genuine. They were more comfortable and we reached those people who were unable to stop everything to go to the central house.

*Q: This has aspects of a Peace Corps experience.*

SUMMERS: Yeah, in terms of living among a people who are meeting a different culture for the first time. When I got to the village of Breb in Maramures province, I was asked how long it took to get to America by train. The villagers had heard of America and a few had left for America after World War II. Another question somebody asked was "Do you

have the Bible in America?” and then “how can you read it when you speak Romanian so poorly?” I spent Christmas and New Year’s in the village. Then I went back for Easter and the feast of St. George. When I returned I was greeted like an old friend. A lady whose son had left the village to work as a miner was upset to learn that I hadn’t been back to America to see my parents while I was away. She made up a poem for me to send them immediately. The gist of it was “Little bird, fly over the mountains and tell my parents that I still love them and not to be angry with me.”

*Q: Did you travel far and wide in Romania or only out from Bucharest.*

SUMMERS: Well the folks at the Watson Foundation prefer projects that include travel to more than one country. I traveled far and wide in Romania, but my folklore research was confined to one village. After that was over, I visited Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria and Czechoslovakia as a folklore tourist.

*Q: Whatever happened to these stories?*

SUMMERS: I wrote an article listing the stories I encountered that was published in the British Magazine Folklore in 1972.

*Q: Now when you were in Romania Kissinger was very successful to his approach to China. In fact you were telling me when you heard that Nixon was flying off to China.*

SUMMERS: I remember the day, Sunday, February 20, 1972. Nixon was flying to China, and I was driving through the countryside with Andreas Müller, a Swiss-German colleague from the Institute of Folklore. Nixon’s trip seemed unimaginable to us, and we tried to talk through what it would mean for the future. We had no idea. Next thing, we arrived in Braşov, a city established by Teutonic knights in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. We decided to have a look into the Biserica Neagră, the Black Church, a Gothic cathedral built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We meant to stay only a few minutes, but a man approached us and grabbed Andreas by the sleeve. When he learned Andreas was from Switzerland, he whispered “Wir sind immer noch deutsch/we are still German!” and whisked us to the front of the church. The next thing we knew we were singing “A Mighty Fortress is our God” in German while the organist pulled out all the stops. We emerged and returned on our way, slightly shaken. Not only could we not understand the future, it appeared that we didn’t fully understand the present, and certainly not the past.

China was Romania’s dear friend in those years. The Sino-Soviet split was going strong, and China was happy to promote dissension in the ranks of the socialist fraternity by supporting Romania. The Cultural Revolution was also going strong, so my first glimpse of life in communist China took place in the form of performances of the lavish revolutionary operas promoted by Jiang Qing, Mao’s wife. I saw The Red Detachment of Women and The Girl with White Hair at the Palace of the People in Bucharest. The shows seemed vigorous and joyous. It was a big surprise when I learned later that those were tough times for people in China.

*Q: Let's take a break for a moment.*

*We are returning to our conversation with Dave Summers. So the Watson fellowship is, I don't want to say a bit of a lark but a bit of a Peace Corps kind of experience. What did you decide to do with that or to follow on.*

SUMMERS: Well no follow on was required. I wrote the journal article I mentioned and filed a trip report with the Watson Foundation. But that year gave me an appreciation that life lived by individuals is deeply richer and more enduring than the political structure of the day. That fall I enrolled in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. My Watson year inspired me to try for the foreign service. I took the foreign service exam that fall, and graduated with a master's degree in public affairs in June of 1974. I rented a car and moved with all my belongings to Washington and joined the 113<sup>th</sup> foreign service class one week later. There was a one week gap between my college career and my work career.

*Q: So you took the exam in 1972, the fall of '72. What did you think of the exam?*

SUMMERS: I thought it was a fun exam. It was like the TV show Jeopardy. Certainly the kind of international relations program I was in helped me prepare for the exam. I had always read Newsweek in high school and The Economist in college, and my advice for people asking about the exam has always been to read faithfully a weekly news magazine cover to cover, including the parts you normally wouldn't. Like for me, sports. There were some sports questions on the foreign service exam. I remember my exam had a question on Billy Holliday, and I had learned about her from Newsweek.

*Q: Now what was your program at Princeton?*

SUMMERS: There were four tracks, and I was in the international relations track. The easy track. There was a track on development which involved more economics, and the international economics track placed still more emphasis on economics. There was also a specialization for domestic public policy.

*Q: What kind of courses did these cover. Comparative government, IR theory.*

SUMMERS: Yes. International Law was taught by Richard Falk. Uwe Reinhardt taught terrific economics courses with a public policy angle. It was something like starting college all over again, with great teachers, and astonishing access to public figures. I remember being mesmerized by a discussion led by Leonard Woodcock, head of the United Auto Workers, about the economics of collective bargaining. Daniel Ellsberg gave an impassioned talk of why he risked theft and conspiracy charges over the Pentagon Papers for what he felt was the good of the country. He made an impression on me with an anecdote about feeling superior to other Pentagon analysts who didn't have access to the same security classification he did, and treating their views with condescension. One day he went to Henry Kissinger with his concerns over the conduct of the Vietnam War and realized that Kissinger was letting him have a say with the same

condescension of the “insider.” Ellsworth’s message was that higher classification doesn’t mean better information. Always look at the whole situation.

*Q: Did any of your fellow students particularly stand out to you at the time?*

SUMMERS: That’s interesting because I would almost say no. They were my fellow students. I do remember what a sharp student Louka Katseli was. She became minister of labor in Greece. David Gompert was a serious student a year ahead of me who went directly to the State Department and Henry Kissinger’s staff, then on to AT&T, Rand, and a number of high-level government positions.

*Q: At the time you are in this program now there is a cease fire in Vietnam in '73. Is Vietnam seen the same way as earlier, or is this beginning to fade?*

SUMMERS: That is an interesting question too. The short answer is that it was beginning to fade, in that it was not the existential issue it had been a few years before, but interest in the Paris Peace negotiations in the fall of 1972 was intense. We watched the CBS evening news every night after dinner. But by this time we looked at the conflict as a policy question of how it could be best negotiated to the U.S. benefit. The passionate debate of whether pursuing the war was destroying or protecting the country was over.

*Q: Now in the Princeton program, was there a dissertation or just coursework.*

SUMMERS: coursework. The final exam which was a day-long exam where you wrote a policy paper based on a scenario they gave you.

*Q: Now you were saying you got your master’s degree in June and started the foreign service right after that, one week apart. When did you take the oral exam?*

SUMMERS: That must have been the spring of ’73. I went down from Princeton to Rosslyn and took it there.

*Q: What was it like?*

SUMMERS: It was a classic good cop-bad cop scenario. There were four people, a woman and three men. Three of the people were fairly encouraging and the fourth was like a central casting inquisitor. He asked how many people from Princeton had died in Vietnam, and didn’t I feel ashamed for neglecting my national duty. On and on. He asked me a question on the doctrine of mutually assured destruction which I stumbled on. I thought “oh no I flunked this for sure,” so I was surprised at the end when they said “you passed.” I think they said, “You passed, but just barely.” Next they took my fingerprints.

*Q: So there was a delay there for security clearances.*

SUMMERS: The clearance process took about a year. I was offered a spot in the June ’74 class.

*Q: How did you organize housing and know what you were going to do. What did they tell you about your start and when and where to show up.*

SUMMERS: At first it felt like another college experience. I went to a building in Rosslyn, Virginia and reported on a certain day. The only difference was I started dressing in the English fashion, a little bit nicer, and I had a salary. I originally found a place to stay with some college friends who had a group house. Junior officer training took most of the summer. I remember the Sunday in September I moved my belongings to my own little apartment in Arlington when I heard on the car radio that Ford had pardoned Nixon. By that time I had been assigned to a consular position in Poland, and was settling in for a 44-week course in Polish.

*Q: Let's go back to foreign service boot camp. The A-100 class. You started on June 14. You were in the 113th class. Let me ask that standard question, what were those people like. You knew how you got there.*

SUMMERS: They were an interesting bunch, and it was a heady time. We all had just landed a dream job. A bunch of my classmates were like me: they had studied foreign relations in a graduate program. My future brother-in-law, Don Camp, was in that group. He had just come from the University of Chicago. But there were just as many others who came from different backgrounds. Let's see. Kent Weidemann had just flown in from Scotland where he worked for the Hewlett Packard Corporation. A couple of classmates had worked in insurance. Probably the biggest cohort was made up of former Peace Corps volunteers – Don Camp, Kent Weidemann, Pancho Huddle, Edmund Hull, Steven Wagenseil, that I remember. A number had served in the military. I remember Steven Brattain had been in the army, and Chuck Redman, who went on to be ambassador to Sweden and Germany, came from the air force. Lisa Layne had worked at a TV station in Philadelphia.

*Q: How were the introductory classes?*

SUMMERS: They were good. I had the same reaction to the consular course as I did to Art I in college. I went in knowing nothing and came out feeling knowledgeable. The teacher posed questions about bizarre hypothetical cases – someone born overseas with one parent who returned to the U.S. as an infant but left again as a teenager – the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 always came into play. At the end of the scenario the teacher would ask “Is this person an American citizen?” Then, whether the answer was yea or nay, he would thunder “No QUESTION about it!” That became our slogan for all the other courses. I'm not sure the other lecturers understood what was going on when three people would pipe up at once “No QUESTION about it!”

*Q: Now how did you get your assignment at the end of this? Was there a bid thing?*

SUMMERS: There was a bid process. It was a little arcane. There was one week my career counselor Gib Lanpher had a plan for me to leave the A-100 class immediately for a consular position in Costa Rica. “You can speak Spanish, can't you?” he asked.

“Enough to get on and off a bus.” I answered. “That’s enough” he said. That vanished, and Hungary was dangled before me temporarily. I clutched at that one because of my ties with my Hungarian college professor, but it transmogrified into a consular job in Krakow, Poland. I was still thrilled.

*Q: But you got some Polish.*

SUMMERS: I got ten months of Polish.

*Q: Now that is awesome for a junior officer to get that much language, because normally as I say you are pumped out the door to Costa Rica or some other Visa mill because your junior officers were the visa officers, the consular officers.*

SUMMERS: Right, it was so much fun. There were three of us from that A-100 class assigned to Poland. I think it was because of the Helsinki Agreement and the expansion of the U.S. diplomatic presence in Poland. A new consulate had been opened in Krakow. Patrick Nichols and I both went there as new officers.

*Q: How many people in your language class?*

SUMMERS: Oh there were about six of us. Jim Bradshaw was the PAO, the Public Affairs Officer, to Warsaw. P.J. Nichols and I both went to Krakow. Richard Ruble landed in Warsaw in the consular section, and Pat Flood went to be consul in Poznan, along with Kent Wiedemann, who was the admin officer there.

*Q: Now you have had language training before. How was FSI language training compared to...*

SUMMERS: Oh so great. You spent every day studying with native speakers. I went on to study Chinese, Thai, and Hungarian at FSI, and each time the course itself reflected the culture we were going to. Of those, Polish was the most vivid. We had two principal teachers, Krysia Wolanczyk and Lydia Skrzypek. They were best friends but they were also rivals. We would spend weeks in the class of one and then weeks in the class of the other. They both were zany teachers. One of the first things we did in Polish class in '74 was to make a field trip to the newly-constructed Mormon Temple on the beltway. Krysia wanted to see it, and the window was closing for visits from non-believers before it was consecrated. We must have been quite a spectacle: six men in suits following a little lady from room to room repeating her elementary vocabulary chants: “To jest krzesło!” “To jest krzesło!” (this is a chair.) “To jest telefon!” “To jest telefon!” (this is a telephone!) Then in the spring there was a Polish custom for Easter Monday called Śmigus-Dyngus, a quasi-religious water fight of ancient origin. Krysia organized a posse to go to Lydia’s class and sprinkle water on them from glasses of water. About ten minutes later Lydia marches with her students into our class and drenches both us and our study materials with a pitcher of water. That was acceptable in Polish language training. It was not very disciplined. And that was the way I found Poland when I got there. Another lesson I had already learned by the time I left Polish language training was the strength of Polish



patriotism. Poland was wiped from the map of Europe from 1795 to 1918, and threatened again during World War II. I came to think of a Pole's duty to defend and preserve his country as something personal that we don't experience the same way. Our language teachers tried to make sure we understood this. One night we were invited to dinner by Georgetown professor Jan Karski, who floored us with his matter-of-fact story of his role in the Polish underground during World War II. Later, my classmate Jim Bradshaw held a dinner for one professor Drozdowski, head of the School of North American Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Jan Karski was there, too, and after Professor Drozdowski gave his view of the meaning of World War II, Professor Karski read him chapter and verse of how his narration was the approved Soviet version, and not the history of Poland. My Polish teacher Kryisia Wolanczyk arranged for me to meet her friend Zbigniew Stypulkowski when I stopped in London on my way to Poland. She described him as a "bookseller," but our lunch turned out to be in the Exhibition Road headquarters of the Polish government-in-exile, by then named "The Polish Club." Mr. Stypulkowski turned out to be one of the sixteen leaders of the Polish underground arrested by Stalin in 1945 as the pro-Moscow government was being set up in Warsaw. We stayed at the table until 4:00 p.m., as Stypulkowski outlined suggestions for what the U.S. could do to help bring about a free Poland. He told me that we should support building superhighways going North and South in Poland, which would unify the country, and strengthen the classic link between the Baltic states and Rome. We should resist East-West roads, which would help invading neighbors. I never saw Minister Stypulkowski again, but I was happy to note that when Poland opened its first superhighway, it ran from north to south. To me it was a sign that the nationalist Poles also had this in mind.

*Q: Where was the class?*

SUMMERS: We were in Rosslyn, in the same building with A-100 training, at the corner of Oak Street and Key Boulevard, but on a different floor. We played ping pong with the teachers during breaks.

*Q: The materials that you had, were these specialized FSI materials?*

SUMMERS: Yes, they had been developed by the teachers. Actually Kryisia had written a book that we used towards the end of the year. I hope I still have my copy. It was a great social document about everyday life in communist Poland, with chapters that now are ancient history – how to buy a used car at a Saturday market, for instance.

*Q: Now you got the language because you were assigned to the consulate in Krakow. What was your assignment and what did you anticipate your duties were going to be?*

SUMMERS: I was going to be a consular officer and I had a pretty good idea of what that was because I had taken that consular course. The people who were surprised were the State Department personnel planners. It transpired that the Krakow consular load was higher than expected, and that was because under the Polish partition, the Austro-Hungarian authorities were more lenient about emigration than the Russians or the

Germans. As a result, contacts between Poles in our consular district and their more numerous relatives in America were stronger than in the other districts. I think the same dynamic was still valid in Poland when I arrived: it was easier to get a passport and travel from Southern Poland than from former Germany or former Russia.

I worked for a few weeks at the consulate in Poznan the summer I arrived in Poland, and was struck by how many more communist party members applied for visas than from Warsaw or Krakow. This was a pain for us, because we had to do extra paperwork to obtain a waiver before they could travel. One day I asked a successful applicant why so many party members showed up in Poznan compared to Krakow. His answer was immediate: “because we obey the rules here. To get ahead you have to be a party member. Down there they don’t obey rules, and it can even be a handicap to join the party.”

So Krakow was the place where most Americans had a relative that they could invite to come see them, which usually meant coming to work. They would go to Passaic, New Jersey, and Chicopee, Massachusetts, where they might find employment making Milton Bradley games and Wilson tennis rackets. I came to know a single address: 57 St. Mark’s Place, Manhattan. Hardly a day passed without someone bearing an affidavit to visit a cousin at 57 St. Mark’s Place. Pretty soon hardly anyone was approved to go there. When I ended my tour, I stopped in New York and I made a pilgrimage to that address. The Polish National Catholic Church was located there. I guess someone there was trying to help parishioners get their relatives over.

I think that my visa work gave me a feel for what life was like for the average Pole which helped me with my political reporting the next year in Warsaw. I got to know the common people, farmers and housewives, who saw an opportunity, thanks to a family connection in America, to get a leg up by spending a few months in America, cleaning the Sears Tower or whatever. They almost always returned to Poland. I also got to meet the new Polish nobility, such as the modern composer Krzysztof Penderecki, who was on his way to the Yale School of Music. He blew in with his nanny and a lofty attitude about the visa he needed to secure for her. I also met outliers who didn’t belong to any category. I remember an old woman who was going to upstate New York to visit a man with a Jewish last name. The application didn’t fit the profile. I asked to speak with her, and she quickly described how her invitation appeared out of the blue. During World War II she had kept three Jews in her attic who had escaped a German firing squad in the cemetery behind her house. One of them was the man who sought her out and invited her to visit, along with her granddaughter. “Why is your granddaughter going?” I asked. She said, “Oh to help me because I am so old.” “Does she speak English?” “No, but she is pretty.” So off they went.

*Q: Now Krakow is a new post. Could you describe the work office and your living conditions.*

SUMMERS: The building was designed by USIS, apparently with the active participation of the Polish government because we had a beautiful medieval building that opened onto

the famous market square, the Rynek, from one side, and on a quiet street occupied by the Carpenter's guild on the other, facing a 13<sup>th</sup> century Dominican monastery. The Polish staff was new, and so were PJ Nichols and I. The consul who opened the post, Victor Gray, left after a few months, and was replaced by Peter Becskehazy, who was a third tour USIS officer who had not led a mission before. It was exciting for all of us, and we all shared the newness of it, like Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland putting on a show. In the consular section we hired a new person Pani Wanda, Miss Wanda, to do social security work because it turned out that there were a lot of people living in the district who earned social security benefits. We weren't expecting that. Everyone loved the consul's driver Pan Bogdan, Mr. Bogdan, even though we were pretty sure he was the eyes and ears of the security services. A couple of people hired before him resigned abruptly soon after they were hired, and then Pan Bogdan appeared and said "I'm the new driver."

The consular section was different. Almost everyone was a young woman with a good education. They were referred to by the rest of the consulate staff as the "panienki," "the little misses." They dressed nicely. They had salaries for the first time. I had a salary for the first time. We were all just in clover. They were good loyal employees. One time Pani Ewa came to the door and said, "there is someone who just insists on talking to you, and I don't think you should talk to him." "Well why not?" "He says he is a vampire." "Well if he won't leave I will talk to him." We had time for such things. An average daily issuance was 30 visas. In Santo Domingo they processed 30 visas every hour, or maybe more. The vampire comes in and bows, saying "The Lord God turned me into a vampire." To make sure I understood the word "wampir" I asked him what it was. The man said "Oh a vampire is just like you. He sits behind a desk and he makes people do things." He went on to explain how another vampire had put radio waves into his brain and how he had sworn at statue of the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz that he would be true to Poland. "How can I help?" I said. "I want you to send a message to President Ford that we want peace." I said, "I will be happy to do that." He said, "Thank you" and went away a happy man. We all felt good that we had dealt with the vampire in a positive way.

*Q: did the consulate work with local government or?*

SUMMERS: We did in limited ways. The consul was a USIS guy, and he worked to place cultural programs in the city and the university. I think the town fathers were happy to have us, along with the new French and German consulates. The Soviet consulate had been there since World War II, and had acted more like a proconsul.

*Q: So it was primarily for USIA getting the U. S. story out. It was not a big political reporting post.*

SUMMERS: Right. Although we started out with a big political event. Gerald Ford visited after I had been in Krakow for about three weeks on his way to sign the Helsinki Accords.

*Q: July 28.*

SUMMERS: That sounds right. The Helsinki Accords gave Poland the case to open the consulate and engage with us. We were there as a public affairs post that quickly became a visa post, too. We met local leaders willy-nilly. Nobody was telling us what to do. They were happy to come, and we were happy to go. I remember one evening at the consul's house with the city leaders and the editors of a distinguished weekly connected with the Catholic church, Tygodnik Powszechny, the General Weekly. It was probably more unusual for the guests to be in each other's company than it was for any of them to be in our company. I was just trying to make conversation when I began to quiz the mayor on the electoral system that earned him his position. My innocent questions led to one awkward silence after another. Sometime later I learned that the editors gave me the nickname "szakal," "jackal" for being such a provocateur.

Another incident along those lines took place at a reception held at the French consulate for an international short-film festival (at which the U.S. did not participate because Palestine and Vietnam used it as a staging ground.) The U.S., French, and West German consulates were all new. The Soviet consulate had been there since the war, and the consul was a true apparatchik. Already he was outside the new social circuit that had sprung up, but he had paid our consulate several visits, meeting us one-by-one, and asking many questions. The French put on a classy party, with champagne in the garden. I was speaking with the Soviet consul when Helena Blum walked up. She was everybody's favorite, an enormous henna-haired woman who tore around town in hush puppy shoes. She always had a sleepy look about her, but could entertain with stories of the quarrels between the cubists and the fauvists from her days in Paris. "Hello, a pleasure to meet you." She says to the Russian in Polish, "With whom do I have the pleasure?" He says, "My name is Kurowicz." "Oh, I know that name" she said, raising a sleepy toast. "There used to be lots of them back in Lwow." "I am the Soviet consul" he replied. "Oh dear Lord!" she exclaimed, spewing her champagne. "And to think I raised my glass to you! You have my land! You have my house! And they say you dug up my parents who wanted nothing more than to sleep peacefully in their graves! Ho Ho! YOU!" The KGB consul was most polite and said that is she would come to the consulate to him personally he could arrange a trip to assuage her fears. Helena replied "Yeah, but if you give me a trip, how do I know you won't give me a free one all the way to Siberia! Well, let me tell you, you won't get away with it, because my friend here the vice-consul here will take you to task!"

*Q: Something else happened that might not have been as much fun as you said. President Ford came through. Now American presidents always come in hordes or with hordes. You are a three man consulate. Are you getting any help from Warsaw? How did that whole thing unfold?*

SUMMERS: It hit us like a ton of bricks, but we were excited. Right after the announcement, they did start coming in hordes –WHCA, The White House Communications Agency, the Secret Service, the interns who were the scions of political donors, such as a young man surnamed Decker whose family made Black and Decker

power tools. We worked around the clock, and we were joined by staff from Warsaw. All the tasks assigned were unprecedented: we arranged a food service in the consulate library for the 100 people who had appeared. We arranged for a jet to land carrying two of the president's limousines, and a fleet of helicopters to ferry the visitors to Auschwitz. We had a motor pool of 40 taxis on call day and night. It didn't work very well - both drivers and passengers were left waiting all over town. I spent an afternoon with a WHCA technician and a Polish telephone company official matching up wiring. Fortunately my FSI Polish was up to the task. The conversation was almost entirely about colors "green-and-yellow," "red and black" that referred to the insulation for the various wires to be connected. To this day I don't know what "one pair four wire" and "two pair eight wire" are. They have to do with telephone connections, and for part of an afternoon posed a stumbling block for the entire visit. Another one of my jobs was to go around with a secret service guy. We looked under buildings and bridges where assassins might lurk. I also was assigned to travel the route of Mrs. Ford's separate motorcade to place Charmin tissue and Lux soap in every bar and gas station where she might decide to go to the bathroom. The proprietors involved met my request with dismay, but also with grace.

*Q: Now how long were they in town?*

SUMMERS: Oh less than a day. They arrived in the morning and they left that afternoon.

*Q. Which car did Mrs. Ford take? Was there one brought in for her?*

SUMMERS: I don't remember. I seem to remember that the two limousines flown in for the president were both for his use. The U.S. ambassador to Germany's car was also brought in, so maybe she used that. She was meant to travel in a motorcade with separate security and communications vehicles. It didn't turn out that way, because of a mix-up in the parking lot - that was my responsibility too, but I couldn't stop Polish officials from commandeering cars commensurate with their status from the carefully arranged motorcade queues. Mrs. Ford spent the morning incommunicado but she arrived for lunch at the Wawel Castle right on time. I should add that not only the Poles were status conscious when it came to the cars they rode in. We were told that State Department Counselor Helmut Sonnenfeldt elected to spend the day on the airplane rather than take part in ceremonial events that didn't recognize his status. And a major feature of the "countdown meetings" to rehearse the events of the big day was the tussle between the State Department advance people to get Henry Kissinger onto the podium for the speeches by President Ford and Polish Communist Party First Secretary Edward Gierek, and the White House advance people who struggled to keep him off. The Polish side had their own priorities. One of them was to insure that none of the camera angles for the speech in the market square included the Mariacki Cathedral which dominated the square.

In the course of the long days of preparation, there was plenty of down time for small talk. I got a window onto the world of the people who travelled with the president that way. The helicopter crew which flew to Auschwitz seemed like the laid-back flyboys depicted in movies. They said Nixon was polite and easy to work for, but that his staff

made difficult demands, including requests for dangerous landings and requirements that the ladies' hairdos be preserved as they stepped from the aircraft. Everyone agreed that Henry Kissinger was more abusive to his personal staff than anyone else, but that he also had the best sense of humor.

*Q: Now what opportunity appeared that allowed you to go up to the embassy in Warsaw?*

SUMMERS: You mean to work?

*Q: Yeah.*

SUMMERS: That was always part of the plan. It was a junior officer rotation with one year in the consular section and one year in the political section.

*Q: Oh OK.*

SUMMERS: So after one year I went to the political section in Warsaw. But before I left Krakow probably the most significant event of my tour in Poland took place, the price riots of June, 1976. By that time, the Polish command economy, which had borrowed money from the West and had invested in consumer good production like cars and color TVs, was in trouble. The only hint of this was a blitz of newspaper articles about inflation and price rises in Western countries. The Poles took the hint, and began hoarding food staples, leading to shortages. It proved a problem for me because I usually shopped for food after work, and now the stores were packed. One time I was in line and there was a little old lady ahead of me quoting newspaper headlines to no one in particular: "Unemployment in rotten America. Inflation in Argentina, not to mention Brazil – "to daje duzo do myślenia" – it gives you a lot to think about." That phrase stayed with me for the rest of my career when it came to trying to unravel a foreign enigma: very often the handwriting is on the wall.

Then on the night of June 23, Prime Minister Jaroszewicz went on TV, talked for a long time about how great people's Poland was, and at the end announced price increases mostly ranging from 50% to 100% for almost everything except alcohol and bread (but an 80% increase in the price of flour.) At first I didn't understand how important it was for the people, who spent a far higher proportion of their income on food than we did. By early morning the next day, there was already a queue formed outside the delicatessen near the consulate, and an old man standing there waving a cane and shouting "this is the road to socialism!" I thought that was amusing, and when the senior Polish employee in the consulate said "I'm not sure I can do my job today. My head is spinning trying to think how we will make ends meet," I thought that was endearing. That morning I was driven to take part in an American art opening in the mountain town of Zakopane. My driver clucked his tongue and said he feared that blood was being shed in Poland that day. I chalked it up to the well-developed Polish sense of drama. The next day I attended an outdoor music festival in the Silesian city of Opole. It was a terrific event, and the day after that, a Sunday, I strolled around admiring the architecture of that former German city. When I was prevented by police from taking a photo of a pretty wrought-iron

footbridge, my good mood vanished, and I marched to the police station. In those days, every police station had a “complaint book/ książka skarg” for citizens to write a letter to pick. “I would like to make a complaint” I told them. “Against whom?” they asked. “Against the police.” I went on to say that if anybody thought that a photo of that little bridge had military significance then Poland’s defense strategy was in trouble. The police were kind. They asked for understanding and said “this is a day of great tension in our country, and our police are understandably nervous.” I was shocked by their answer, even though it explained nothing. Apparently the ladies who feared for their families’ well-being and the driver who predicted bloodshed were onto something. In fact, the communist party headquarters in the town of Radom had been burned down, railroad tracks were torn up, several people were killed, and many more arrested. The government backed down on the price rises, but the arrests they made led to the formation of KOR, the Komitet Obrony Robotników/Workers’ Defense Committee. Over that next year, KOR evolved as the major civilian political movement which laid the groundwork for the formation of Solidarity by 1980. For me the whole thing started with a little old lady in a grocery queue who opined that all the bad news about inflation in the West “gives you a lot to think about.”

*Q: Now when was it you went up to Warsaw to the embassy?*

SUMMERS: In July, just after our bicentennial celebration. That turned out to be a big deal. Polish television broadcast a special program on July 4 with footage of First Secretary Gierek presenting our Ambassador Davies with sculptures of the Polish heroes of our revolution, Pułaski and Kościuszko. The next day was our reception at the consul’s house for 250 people. Everyone pitched in with preparations, but no one did more than the consul’s wife, Cathleen Becskehazy. She baked nine cakes that when lined together spelled out “1776-1976,” and another cake that said “Happy Birthday USA.” Early that afternoon there was a knock at the door. An old woman presented a bouquet and explained that she just wanted to thank America for the help given to her after World War II. That brought tears to our eyes, and Cathleen invited her to the reception. She came, and when she saw me she took me aside to ask whether I had any Playboy magazines she could see. She explained that she had always wanted to see one, but the library didn’t carry the publication. At six o’clock sharp, all the wojewodas, or governors, of the Krakow consular district came jogging up the steps together like a football team headed out on the field. It rained after Consul Peter Becskehazy’s speech, and everyone crowded indoors. A Polish-American guest played “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” over and over on the piano, and crammed together like that, people who would never have met otherwise fell into friendly conversation. All the red, white & blue paper plates went home as souvenirs.

*Q: Let’s talk about the embassy for a moment. Who is the ambassador? Who was your boss?*

SUMMERS: I moved from a seat-of-the pants startup consulate to a traditional embassy. It was particularly old school, I think because of Ambassador Richard Davies. I seem to remember that he had taught German language at some point. In any case, people called

him “the professor” behind his back, for his penchant for making grammatical corrections to the cables that came across his desk. I was grateful for my upbringing in a household with an English teacher. Ambassador Davies had a patrician demeanor. We all stood up when he walked into a room, even if the room was our office, and we were on the telephone and the cord didn’t quite enable a full standing position. We made sure we wore a jacket when we entered his office. He had a morning staff meeting every day, and everyone reported. It was quite orderly. My boss was Al Brainard, the political counselor. He smoked a pipe and rode horses with Mieczysław Rakowski, the editor of the influential weekly Politika, and future prime minister. There were just the two of us in the political section. My portfolio was church relations, youth, and labor. Until that year, church relations were the most important. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński gave sermons from the Warsaw cathedral that everybody, including the secret police, paid close attention to. He often spoke out for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience. Sometimes I would go to the sermons when somebody tipped me off that a zinger was coming. That year I was there, there was a special mass said on November 11 for Marshal Józef Piłsudski, the authoritarian head of Poland before WWII. November 11 was the pre-communist national day, and also the date Piłsudski died.

*Q: That was an open mass?*

SUMMERS: Sure, an open mass at St. John’s cathedral in the old town. I don’t think anyone said “you can’t have a mass for Piłsudski,” but on the other hand, it hadn’t happened before. As I left the church, I came upon a crowd hectoring a pair of young policemen. The word was that they had approached a man as he left the church and asked for his identity card, and were planning to take him in for questioning before the crowd intervened. “Has it come to this? A person can’t go to church anymore?” was the refrain, along with “even the Gestapo waited until someone entered a café before they dragged him away.” One person in the crowd said he was a lawyer, and collected names of witnesses who would be willing to testify in court. The police retreated beneath a hail of epithets like “świnie!/pigs!.” As with the price rise riots, I got a glimpse of hidden social tensions.

Labor matters turned out to be my most interesting portfolio. KOR, the Workers’ Defense Committee began issuing statements and keeping track of the people who had been incarcerated as a result of the price rise riots. I regularly walked over to the UPI (United Press International) office where the office director Bogdan Turek handed me the latest mimeographed communiqué from KOR about the progress of the legal proceedings against the people accused of burning down the Communist Party headquarters in the city of Radom, and the protests at the Ursus tractor factory outside Warsaw. One of these documents was a think piece devoted to the notion of the “Finlandization” of Poland, that is, a neutral, sovereign, democratic state that followed the Soviet lead on foreign affairs. It seemed like a pipe dream at the time, but showed that KOR was not only defending the incarcerated workers, but also was thinking about a different future.



*Q: If things are changing in Warsaw, and there is a substantial Polish community in the United States, I would think that you would have your share of CODELs and high level visitors and what not. Were the conditions in Poland equal to hosting CODELs.*

SUMMERS: We didn't have so many as I later saw in other posts, but I suppose you could say they were drawn to Poland because of the changing conditions. A staffer for the Easter arrival of House speaker Tip O'Neill and friends told me that their visit was "the meat" of a trip that began in Rome and ended in Ireland. I had a hard time imagining the scene at the other stops, because they had an uproarious time together in Krakow, mostly at the expense of their Polish hosts: at the Wawel cathedral: "why don't they wash the windows here like they do in Germany?;" at the tomb of Zygmunt the Great, lying on his side holding a Carrara marble orb, symbol of authority: "the old guy liked to bowl;" at the guest book of the faculty where Copernicus taught: "last one to sign takes the pen!" One of my assignments was to escort Silvio Conte of Massachusetts to buy a hat. He explained to me that he did this wherever he went because it was important to "meet the people."

The delegation that sticks in my mind wasn't a CODEL. It was a group of Polish-Americans who had cooked up a plan to place a memorial plaque to Tadeusz Kościuszko, hero of American Revolution, in the royal Wawel Cathedral of Krakow. They wanted to come in October, and Cardinal Karol Wojtyła had written that he would be in Rome then, but that the group was welcome. Well, the ambassador was incensed. He figured the Americans wanted to come in October because the weather was better then, and that this was an affront to the cardinal. At a staff meeting the ambassador said, "David you are going to Krakow to meet with the cardinal, and explain to him that we are happy telling the Polish Americans they can only come in December so they can meet with him. So I jumped on a plane early one Thursday and flew down to Krakow. That was audience day, but since I didn't have an appointment, a nun ushered me to the cardinal's private chambers to wait for the scheduled audiences to be over. It was a grand room with oil paintings on the walls. Presently, Cardinal Wojtyła appeared, tossed his cap and said 'How may I help you?' I began to tell him about the plans of the Polish-American delegation, when he interrupted me, "You know I think it would be great if they came in October. I went to the international Eucharistic Conference in Philadelphia last summer, and learned a lot by meeting with Americans. I think it would be great for my deputy Father Macharski to have the same experience." Then he smiled and said "Besides the weather is so much better in October. It would be so much nicer for them if they could come then." I was taken aback by this omniscience. It resolved the question nicely.

*Q: That is illustrative when you have a young officer and a young shop, lots of things to do, you suddenly find yourself with notable people and notable circumstances. You are not just a junior officer in the back of the bus. Surely it is a different experience than if you were the junior consular officer in London.*

SUMMERS: Yes, I'm sure that's true. The other thing about it was that many Poles found themselves in notable circumstances, too, because of the times. Another person I got to know was Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the editor of the Catholic monthly Znak, which

published articles on religion, philosophy, and ethics. Before I left Poland, I went to say goodbye to him. He was having a terrible day. The previous issue contained something that had displeased the censors. They expressed their displeasure in a subtle way, by informing him that the next month's delivery of newsprint would be insufficient to meet the print run. I made the mistake of saying "that's so interesting." He said, "For you it is interesting. For me it is my life." The next thing I said displeased him even more: "I can see the day when Poland will be another Sweden." Mazowiecki looked at me and said "What? Are you crazy?" I said, "No, I visited Sweden recently. Both countries have a good education system, a strong sense of justice, and a small population relative to natural resources." He said, "Haven't you learned anything in your two years here? The essence is this: Sweden entered the industrial revolution as a poor country of peasants where everyone was equal to everyone else. That is the basis for Sweden. Poland entered the modern age as an aristocracy, and communism was forced onto us. Communists became the new new aristocrats. Where every Swede thinks he is equal to every other Swede, every Pole thinks he is better than every other Pole." I thought "you're right." I left feeling sorry for Tadeusz Mazowiecki and his Sisyphean task to keep a small monthly magazine supplied with newsprint. Twelve years later he was prime minister of Poland.

*Q: One of the things we were talking about earlier was the cruise missile.*

SUMMERS: Yes, the mysterious cruise missile. Thinking back on my time in the foreign service, I am hard put to think of an example when my embassy's actions resulted in a change in foreign policy. I thought I knew of one such case early in my career. My idea goes like this: in June, 1977, President Carter announced that the U.S. would abandon the B-1 bomber program, and instead rely on deployment of theater nuclear weapons in the form of the cruise missile. This alarmed the Polish government, which quite independent of its position in the Warsaw Pact alliance, feared that this move would destabilize Europe and increase the chances for the outbreak of yet another conflict in Central Europe which could not be contained. In my version of things, the relationship of trust between Ambassador Davies and Deputy Foreign Minister Romuald Spasowski played a role, and the Embassy's representation back to Washington resulted in a decision to delay the cruise missile deployment. I have carried this impression with me since then, though at the time I was not personally involved and didn't see any of the cable traffic which would have confirmed this. I've googled the subject, and found no reference to it, including in Ambassador Davies's ADST interview. Maybe this was a historical footnote made insignificant by the deployment of cruise missiles to Europe two years later, or maybe it never happened to begin with.

*Q: Now Davies was career or non career.*

SUMMERS: Career. He spent five years in Poland. He was really devoted to Poland. Many years later, I learned that the cold war spy Col. Ryszard Kuklinski provided critical information about Soviet military planning through the Warsaw embassy during those years. He escaped to the U.S. before the declaration of martial law in Poland in December, 1981, and was sentenced in absentia to treason. Ambassador Davies took up

the cause of clearing Kuklinski's name, and didn't rest until this was done. He treated that cause as a debt of honor.

*Q: When you were in the embassy you were there with other officers who were also young, even your boss Al Brainard. What was he like to work for?*

SUMMERS: He was a little distant but quite a good and helpful boss, especially when it came to drafting cables in the preferred State Department format. He was generous in a crusty kind of a way. "This is a wordy summary" he might say. "When are you going to learn?" I mainly wrote the "airgrams" – slow mail reports of events that didn't require State Department action. If something I wrote was worthy of a cable, he would edit carefully.

*Q: It sounds like the embassy even in the midst of the communist period was connected and had available a wide variety of Polish interlocutors. The Church, the magazine editors.*

SUMMERS: that is right, the leading ones. I wasn't in a position to compare with other countries, but I don't think Romania had the same tradition of a self-confident intelligentsia.

*Q: Well why don't we break off here because otherwise you are going to be up all night.*

SUMMERS: Yes.

*Q: Hello. We are returning to our conversation with David Summers. It is August 13. David, did you want to add anything more on Poland before we move on.*

SUMMERS: Yes. I was reminded of a story when presumed presidential candidate Mitt Romney made a speech at the Ogród Saski, the Saxon Gardens, in Warsaw recently. It was at that same spot on a foggy Thanksgiving morning in 1976 that former secretary of the treasury, David Kennedy, who was an elder in the Mormon Church, presided over the rededication of Poland to the church. The way I understood it, the Mormon Church recognized the borders established by international convention, and because Poland's borders changed after World War II, the country needed to be rededicated. Kennedy had been on a mission trip to East Prussia in the 1920s, and this ceremony was somehow a follow-up to that. I can't remember how I came to be the one to take David Kennedy to the ceremony in my VW, but it may have had to do with separation of church and state in the U.S. and the fact that Thanksgiving Day was a holiday so that technically I was performing a favor of my own free will. In any case, after a short ceremony with a few Polish Mormons converted during Kennedy's missionary years, I drove Mr. Kennedy to the ambassador's house for his Thanksgiving dinner. On the way, we were nearly hit by a tram that emerged from the fog, and in the moment of danger before we were delivered, the thought flashed through my mind that at least Poland had been safely dedicated. The whole incident flashed through my mind again recently when I saw Mitt Romney deliver a speech from the spot where the Mormon dedication ceremony took place.

*Q: Poland. So here you have been at a consulate at an embassy but your next assignment is in the Operations Center which is the eye of the hurricane in one sense. Let's start out, how did you get that job?*

SUMMERS: I remember the ambassador suggested that I bid on that job. I think they must have sent a cable asking for candidates.

*Q: I have forgotten, at this time were you in a cone dedicated?*

SUMMERS: Yes, I was already in the political cone.

*Q: OK, you come back from the joys and winters of Poland to Washington DC. How was the Operations Center organized when you arrived? Who were the main people?*

SUMMERS: The director of the operations center was Roger Gamble. His deputy was Steve Steiner. Then there were several groupings of senior watch officers and junior watch officers who worked together on eight-hour shifts around the clock. The whole place was on the seventh floor of the State Department in a hermetically sealed part of the building which was great for me because I was freed from anxiety about leaving classified documents out where they could earn me a security violation. I am sure that anybody who has spoken about the watch at that time would remember that it was established as a consequence of President Kennedy's inability to get in touch with anyone after hours at the State Department during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Marie Connolly, an office management specialist who was present at the creation, told me that story. At that time, before CNN, it was unique, a classified 24-hour news station. We assembled the news from cables and teletype machines and liaisons to the Pentagon and the CIA via INR, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. We were set up with a big desk that was like a TV anchor desk with a telephone with multiple extensions. That was the top of the technology. The senior watch officer and a junior watch officer sat there handling the calls and making a log on an IBM typewriter. The second junior watch officer would write a short summary of cable traffic received during the shift, and would cut newspapers with scissors and make Xerox copies so the "principals," the secretary of state and his deputies on the seventh floor could have a faster look through the major papers of the day. They were the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the Baltimore Sun, and the Wall Street Journal. So we were a team. It was a lot of fun, as if we were sharing a beach house with people who came and went according to different schedules. We didn't have anything to do with policy but we got to watch policy being made.

*Q: Now these it is a 24-7 operation so you had eight hour shifts.*

SUMMERS: Right. Eight to four, four to midnight, midnight to eight. The midnight shift was the slow shift and the one that was hardest to get through except that when something dramatic happened, adrenaline would keep you going. The Secretary's Morning Summary was prepared on the midnight shift. This was a compilation of the

cables that came in overnight for the secretary, who was Cyrus Vance then, to read as he rode to work. He was the only person who read it. The source material was exclusively the cables which came in on that shift. Some people in the field were aware of this. I remember in particular a consul in Montreal who regularly filed his reporting cables after midnight on the weekend so that he would be in the running to be noticed by the secretary. He boosted his chances with catchy titles for his cables. One about Quebec independence was headed something like “Her lips say ‘no’ but there is ‘yes, yes’ in her eyes.” That may be what inspired us to go with our own catchy titles for the one paragraph summaries of a cable. For example, Golda Meir died during that period. The title of the summary item about her funeral was “the Bier that Made Milwaukee Famous.” When there was racial tension in Rwanda, the paragraph that reported that went up “Hutu, Tutsi Goodbye.” One time, a routine consular cable reporting the death of an American citizen made it into the Secretary’s Morning Summary. This one caught the editor’s eye because the death occurred when plastic sacs containing heroin burst after being implanted in the breasts of the deceased. That cable had no business in the summary, but the headline proved irresistible, and in it went: “Big Drug Bust.” No one ever said a word to stop these antics. They just disappeared into the ether. We never knew what the secretary’s reaction was. We imagined that they helped him wake up in the morning. So that was the midnight shift.

Then the daily shift, the one that began at 8:00 A.M., started early with the staff assistants coming to pick up the mail for their “principals.” To be sure those jobs led to success in the foreign service. John Tefft, future ambassador to Lithuania, Georgia, and Ukraine, was the staff assistant in EUR. April Glaspie became ambassador to Iraq at a crucial time. Bob Pearson became ambassador to Turkey. Jeff Bader rose to several Asia-related jobs and spent a long time at the National Security Council. The staff assistant in the Office of Management was Patrick Kennedy, and he is Undersecretary for Management to this day. We came to know the young staff assistants in a certain way. April rode a bicycle and showed up early at the door. If her jacket was wet, the outgoing shift members knew to dress for rain. John Tefft was Mr. Cheerful. Bob Pearson was Mr. Polite. Then among our lot in the Ops Center a number of people also went on to successful careers. Mike Lemmon became ambassador to Armenia. Dee Robinson was Ambassador to Ghana. Marshall McCallie was Ambassador to Namibia. Marisa Lino became ambassador to Albania. Don Camp became the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. Quite often you could go from working in the Ops Center to be a staff assistant. People on the seventh floor knew that Ops Center veterans knew the current issues and had some experience with how the system worked. Plus, their circadian rhythms were already off, so they were good candidates for the seventh floor staff jobs.

*Q: Now you were saying the night shift did the Secretary’s Morning Summary. Did each shift publish some sort of report or cable summary?*

SUMMERS: Yes. For each shift we made a log of what went on – important cables, telephone calls, actions completed and actions pending. The log was reviewed by the office director and was available to people involved with ongoing issues. The Ops Center

was also where crisis task forces were set up, for example after the U.S. Embassy in Teheran was breached on Valentine's Day, 1979.

*Q: Now the State Department has different channels for different sensitivity of its communication. EXDIS is executive distribution. NODIS is no distribution. But there are other coded channels. Did the Ops Center get a chance to handle some of these other channeled traffic?*

SUMMERS: They did. The codes themselves were secret. When we started at the Ops Center, we had a special briefing on the various code words. It was a solemn affair, like joining the masons. They emphasized that it would be a security violation to reveal a secret codeword to someone who was not cleared to know about it. This made such an impression on me that I forgot the code words. That way I wouldn't reveal them if I was tortured. More than once I would give a blank look to somebody standing in the Ops Center with a document in hand who had just asked whether I was cleared for something like "Xerksox," and that person would blanch at the thought that he had accidentally revealed a codeword. Often code words were assigned to information obtained by methods that themselves were secret, such as satellite reconnaissance. That was the case when a Russian satellite, Cosmos 954, began to disintegrate in the fall of 1977. In the week before the satellite disintegrated over Canada, super secret cables tracked its descent and outline contingency plans for populated areas in the path. It was our secret. As the crash time neared, some wag put a large waste basket in front of the watch desk with a sign marked "Cosmos 954" as if it had been placed there to catch the falling object. The sign was visible only to us, so that all the staff assistants who came to the door to pick up cable traffic were left to wonder why there was a waste basket in the middle of the room.

Everyone could handle EXDIS materials, but NODIS items were delivered directly to the senior watch officer, the SWO. Of course the NODIS cables were the most interesting for that reason. It was pretty much a rule that the higher the classification, the sooner the information contained in a cable would become public. In December, 1978, the SWO let me read a few enigmatic exchanges among the leadership, the gist of which was always "no one has caught on yet." The SWO is going, "What do you think it could be?" I am going, "I have no idea what it could be." Even in the NODIS cables they didn't name the thing that was about to happen. It turned out to be the announcement that the U.S. would break relations with Taiwan and normalize ties with China.

*Q: The 15<sup>th</sup> of December.*

SUMMERS: First we were in the dark and the next thing TV is showing footage of our ambassador's car getting pelted in Taipei. It was a bombshell. Probably the biggest in the two years I remember. It was so closely held because it was as politically sensitive for domestic politics as it was for international relations. Another dramatic event was the Jonestown massacre, in November, 1978, I think.

*Q: It was, November 18.*

SUMMERS: It was a Sunday, and I was showing up for the midnight shift. Usually when you come in at 11:30 to start work at midnight, it is like a sleepy border town. But this night there were a lot of people. They were all in motion. I came in and said, "What is going on?" Nobody answered to me because they all had something urgent to do relating to the mass suicide of an intentional religious community in Guyana led by an American, Jim Jones, whose utopian experiment went bad and ended with the congregation dying en masse from drinking Kool-Aid spiked with cyanide. It is the origin of the phrase "drinking the Kool-Aid" to mean being tricked into devotion to a flawed concept.

*Q: Let's take a break for a moment.*

*Ok we are back to our conversation about the Ops Center and Jonestown.*

SUMMERS: Yes. I was walking into the Ops Center just before midnight which was frantic with activity. Someone instructed me go downstairs to the front office of ARA, the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, and tell them that "Ryan is confirmed dead." I still didn't know what was going on, or that that Congressman Leo Ryan had traveled to Jonestown to investigate complaints from constituents about the treatment of people there. Ryan was shot and killed as his plane prepared to leave Jonestown. Quite a few people were gathered in that office when I delivered the message. Someone began to weep.

Another dramatic time at the Ops Center was Valentine's Day, 1979. In addition to the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Teheran I mentioned, in Afghanistan the U.S. ambassador was assassinated.

*Q: Spike Dubs.*

SUMMERS: Yes, Spike Dubs. Events spun out of control and the Ops Center was the place where the fragmented information was collected.

*Q: The Jonestown thing was a big thing. How did the department through its various offices come to grips with what was going on and what needed to be done?*

SUMMERS: I don't have a good answer, but it seemed to be through telephone calls to the ARA Assistant Secretary. The people in that office had helped arrange the visit of Congressman Ryan, and were the best informed as the crisis unfolded. The Ops Center assumed the role of communications center.

*Q: But I guess what I am interested in is that the Ops Center role in all this is basically to keep everybody informed and coordinated. You didn't really have any action role save that communication.*

SUMMERS: That almost always was the case -- passing information as quickly as possible and putting the people in touch with each other. The biggest hi tech method to do that was the patch telephone call. We would get several people on the same phone line

through the Ops Center, so that they could discuss an issue together and come to a decision.

*Q: Now part of covering the telephone was this time that the watch officer stayed on the phone and made notes of the conversation?*

SUMMERS: Sometimes, yes, they did. And that usually would be the job of the senior watch officer to do that.

*Q: Now a number of other things came up at the time you were there. You are actually coming on just as the Carter administration starts out, and that is where the China recognition comes out. But one of their main things was to get the Panama Canal treaty through. Did the Ops Center have any action there?*

SUMMERS: I don't remember something specific that the Ops Center did in connection with the Panama Canal treaty, but I do remember the increased cable traffic on the subject, as with the Rhodesia talks, and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Thinking back on it, I believe President Carter deserves extra credit for trying diplomacy first to resolve international conflicts, and that his successes are not well recognized today. Cyrus Vance's personal role in the Arab-Israeli agreement was big. He traveled many times to the region. When he did the State Department set up a special communication channel and a special set of cables to and from the Secretary called TOSEC and SECTO. A drop line telephone connection was also established for the Secretary's use. In those days it was hard to guarantee a telephone line out of a city like Cairo. I remember one such phone line that wasn't working quite right. Our job was to check the line. I was on the line to say "hello." The response was "hello, hello, hello" like an echo. So I put it on speaker phone, another technological advance that only we had in the op center. I wailed "I'm lost in space!" At first the reply came back "lost in space, lost in space," but then it clicked in clearly, and everyone in the room heard a distinct voice with a trace of a Southern accent say "This is Cyrus Vance," and then my voice "just checking the line, sir." That was my role in the Egyptian-Israeli peace process. But monitoring the progress on that issue was the most inspiring time I spent at the Ops Center. As we know, since then there have been many attempted negotiations that didn't fare so well.

*Q: Now you talk about upstairs- downstairs stuff, what did you have in mind there? Let's go back a little bit. Place the Ops Center in the staffing pattern in the Secretary's office, because it is SSO, Secretary staff, operations. So you must have been dealing with other members of the secretary's staff from time to time as they made requests, demands on the operations center.*

SUMMERS: That's right. Our job was to make things easier for the principals at a personal level. A simple example is that we would screen calls to them when they went out to dinner. The cell phone hadn't been invented yet, so they would call in to tell us the number where they could be reached. The upstairs/downstairs analogy is apt in that we served as discreet household help. So depending on how they treated us, and this had nothing to do with how well they performed their jobs, we developed a personal opinion



about them that we usually shared. Perhaps the less said about this the better, even at this late date. However, let the record show that Richard Holbrooke, who was assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, became a *bête noir* to the downstairs staff. He would call to ask us to pick up a pizza he had ordered delivered to the C Street entrance of the State Department. He would ask us to patch calls through to friends and then make them wait on the line for him. So many years later in 1995 I wasn't surprised that he succeeded in bullying the combative negotiating parties to a framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But I also could see how the same approach would not work with people who were quick to offend, which I think is what happened in Afghanistan. My conclusion is based on how I felt going downstairs to pick up his pizza.

The other memorable time that we became an upstairs/downstairs family was during was the romance between State Department Spokesman Hodding Carter and Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs Patricia Derian. They fell in love, and eventually married after divorcing their spouses. But for a little while we were the children in the spat, in the form of Mrs. Carter looking for her husband, knowing she could find him after working hours through the Ops Center. When Mr. Carter was with Mrs. Derian a problem arose that had nothing to do with foreign policy. I think I was took one of the last phone calls of that nature when the phone rang in the evening and Mrs. Carter asked to be put through to her husband. I stammered something about trying to find him when she interrupted "Well that is all right. I don't care where he is tonight. Just tell him that I will be in the Department tomorrow and I will slip the divorce papers on his desk."

*Q: Now Bill Rope and earlier Roger Gamble were the two bosses of the op center. Did they have personal styles about the way they worked?*

SUMMERS: You know I think some people interacted with them a great deal, but I didn't. For one thing, they worked regular hours and we worked around the clock. Roger Gamble is more of a presence in my mind, but that may be because he was the one who introduced me to the job when I first arrived. Neither was part of that circus atmosphere of everybody working together in an open pit.

*Q: Now as you are saying as a young second tour officer in a high profile office, did you have any opportunity to make other opinions on some of the more senior people, Peter Tarnoff, Frank Wisner. You would have seen them from time to time.*

SUMMERS: Yes, both of them made themselves known, but mainly in the context of public relations. Both of them came down to the Ops Center on occasion and said thank you for something. We probably interacted with Frank Wisner the most, so I got the impression that he was most involved with crisis management.

*Q: Now in your case this was a two year assignment. I have heard in other periods these were one year assignments because people burned out, but in fact you weren't there for exactly the full two years. You had a couple of other things that came up for you. You are talking about being a staff assistant over in the Congressional Relations bureau.*

SUMMERS: Right and actually it was a two year assignment at the time. Often people would leave before two years to take a staff assistant job when one came open. So I don't think everyone or even half the people stayed two years. In my case, in the spring of 1979, I first went to H, the Bureau of Legislative Affairs, to fill out a term as staff assistant for Mike Lemmon, who had earlier left the Ops Center for that job. It was a short stint, because I was soon off on a TDY assignment to Poland during the first visit of Pope John Paul II to his native land, and after that I was slated for a two-year leave of absence to become director of the Thomas J. Watson Foundation, the organization which sponsored my travel to Romania in 1971 to study folktales.

One part of my job as staff assistant was to escort members of Congress up a private elevator to the outer office of the secretary of state. There seemed to be an unwritten rule that the secretary would receive congressional visitors for a personal call within 48 hours of the request. At least that's what Texas Charlie Wilson told the beautiful blonde woman as I escorted them upwards. "Watch! He'll call me by my first name!" Wilson said. I later decided that Tom Hanks did a good job depicting Wilson in the film *Charlie Wilson's War*. On another elevator ride, Senator Jacob Javits of New York growled "get me an aspirin." I also decided that if I were to write a book about my elevator experiences that spring, I would call it "My Ups and Downs with Congress." Doug Bennet was the assistant secretary and Brian Atwood was his assistant. Both of them went on to become the director of AID, the Agency for International Development. Bennet had experience as a legislative assistant on the Hill, including working for Hubert Humphrey. I was impressed by the way both of them threw themselves into the sausage-making business of the legislative process. I would throw up my hands at what I considered unreasonable behavior, but they both seemed to love the challenge of working something out. One big issue of the day was the conflict between North Yemen, a remnant of the Ottoman Empire, and South Yemen, a former British colony under Marxist rule. The Congressional angle was that because the USSR supported South Yemen, some Congressmen wanted the U.S. to intervene on behalf of North Yemen. There were reports every morning about how the war was going, which in H were viewed through the prism of Congress. I remember hearing the phrase "drawing a line in the sand" used for the first time. There was apparently a "line in the sand" analogous to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in Korea, that some people in Congress intended to be a tripwire for U.S. participation in the conflict.

*Q: This is interesting because we often tell embassies here in Washington, don't just come to us. You need to lobby the Hill also. That fits into this.*

SUMMERS: Yes, and Congress also seems to think "you need to be personal with us. You need to have face time with us and show us that you respect us, and that you are listening to us. Also, when a constituent seeks a business opportunity abroad or finds himself in trouble, you need to help, so that we, the Congress people, can show our constituents that we are working for them." Very often it would be a below the radar issue that could be important to a district but not to everyone. That could make it difficult because maybe it was not the top priority of the State Department. Tom Lantos of

California, for example, indefatigably monitored the issue of the ethnic Hungarian minority in Transylvania. When I got to Budapest, I learned that some people there called him “the representative from Hungary.” Charlie Wilson made those calls on the Secretary not only to impress his girlfriend, but also to urge support for Nicaraguan strongman Somoza, whose star was on the wane. One enterprise with Somoza connections literally bled some peasants dry in the course of drawing blood for sale abroad, but another one supplied tropical hardwoods to a wealthy lumberman in Wilson’s district who was also his supporter.

*Q: Had certain people on the hill created a reputation or aura about themselves in the office of Congressional relations, serious but pushy, not serious but bombastic. You create the category.*

SUMMERS: Senator Frank Church of Idaho was serious but not pushy. He was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at the time, and called on Secretary Vance a couple of times. I can’t remember the issue. It might have been the SALT Treaty. I just remember that I was impressed by what I thought to be his focus on the national interest rather than partisan interest. I wasn’t in the bureau long enough to form opinions of individuals in Congress. I soon had a chance for a TDY, temporary duty assignment, to Poland for the first visit by Pope John Paul II to his homeland since his election as pope.

*Q: Cardinal Wojtyła*

SUMMERS: Wojtyła, yes

*Q: How did you get yourself associated with that?*

SUMMERS: It was enough to make a believer out of me. Warsaw sent a cable tagged for H requesting extra help because of an expected onslaught of Congressional visitors at the time of the Pope’s visit. Anybody with a Catholic constituency seemed to be planning a “CODEL,” a congressional delegation visit to Warsaw at the same time. So I saw that cable and I went to the front office and said, “I volunteer.” They signed off on it. By the time the pope’s visit materialized, most of the CODEL s had been cancelled, but I was still there to witness the event. Since I was a supernumerary at the embassy, I was allowed to go with the Pope every place he went.

*Q: Now let me get this straight. It is the American visiting Congressmen that puts the extra pressure.*

SUMMERS: Correct. Most of those CODEL s didn’t materialize. I was the control officer for a single CODEL, led by Congressman Phillip Burton from San Francisco.

*Q: Now did you travel with them?*

SUMMERS: They came just to Warsaw.

*Q: You were already there. You didn't travel with them.*

SUMMERS: Right. There was just one CODEL, but it was memorable. It turned out that Congressman Burton's wife was Polish-born, and this trip was something of a present to her. As he explained it over pre-dinner drinks, it was also a way to get back at House majority whip Tom Brademas, who had edged him out for that position by one vote. Brademas had been named to lead a 35-person presidential mission to Poland, the one that was later cancelled, and Burton wanted to show he had the clout to get there first. He got there first, but he was still in a bad mood. He was late for every event planned for him including his military air flight to take him out of the country. He asked for takeoff to be delayed until noon on the day of his departure, and although I made the request in a weekend demarche to the Polish foreign ministry, it was denied because flight plans had to be filed 48 hours ahead of time. Burton seemed to acquiesce to this setback, but on the day of his departure nothing, certainly not my loud banging on his hotel room door, would rouse him. Ambassador William Schaufele was waiting at the airport to bid him farewell, and airport staff was scurrying about doing whatever they could to insure that the plane wouldn't be shot down on the way back to Ramstein Air Base in West Germany. Burton appeared at the airport when it pleased him. With a slight chuckle, he got out of the car and said "Well Mr. Ambassador the ordeal is almost over." The ambassador replied coolly, "For me, yes. For you, never." I was in awe of the repartee. That phrase is part of my vocabulary to this day, like "drinking the Kool-Aid."

My congressional duties dispatched, I became a reporting officer for the pope's visits to Warsaw, Gniezno, Czestochowa, Krakow and Nowy Targ, a mountain town south of Krakow. At the first provincial stop, political officer David Pozorski and I found ourselves straining for a view in a sea of people outside the cathedral at Gniezno, the oldest see in Poland. Then all of a sudden, the view was great. That was because the other few hundred thousand people there had all fallen to their knees according to the liturgy, something we did, too, just a few seconds later. The entire period, from June 2 to June 10, was like one continuous dream. Before it began, Poles repeated to each other "Co to będzie?/What will be?" They just couldn't conceive of what might happen. Then it happened: day after day of affirmation for what was good and true. Every place the pope went he changed his game. In Warsaw, he appealed to the Polish sense of nationhood. Down south at the foot of the Tatra Mountains he drew a roar of approval when he personified the peaks, suggesting that on the cloudy day they were ashamed to show themselves. The crowd understood that this was a reference to the effort of the communist authorities to keep down the numbers by closing the roads leading to the mass, "for safety." The people responded with enthusiasm by making a pilgrimage to the spot on foot, scornful of the petty roadblocks thrown up by the officials. At a closed session with the academic community in Krakow he found his old drama teacher in the congregation and said "Professor Marczewski wanted me to become an actor, but Jesus Christ had other plans, and I became a priest." Then he paused like a good comedian, and added "Now I have a job where I can do both." Everyone laughed in a kind of conspiratorial way.

It was a magnificent thing, in my mind, more influential in bringing about the collapse of Soviet hegemony in Europe than Ronald Reagan's "tear down this wall" speech. Well, I think the main reason the Berlin Wall fell and communism fell is because of economics, and it was happening over a long period and overspending on the military is one of the easiest and most dangerous things a great power can do. But in the twentieth century Stalin's question "how many divisions does the pope have?" was the wrong question.

*Q: Now you were the foreign service rep at all these things, or were some of them were personal connections.*

SUMMERS: As an embassy representative, I had access to the papal venues – the Krakow consulate drove a van through the roadblock to the mountain mass in Nowy Targ, for example, so we didn't make that pilgrimage on foot. However, I experienced the events in a personal way. When the pope first landed in Warsaw, I was watching TV with friends in an apartment overlooking the Castle Square at the entrance to Old Town. The room was still as every pair of eyes drank in every detail of the moment. It seemed to be really happening, but how could that be? Even as the papal motorcade passed beneath the apartment window, it didn't seem real. Seeing it on TV, seeing it with our own eyes, couldn't shake the dreamlike quality of that day. After the pope's helicopter lifted from the field in Krakow on the last day of his visit, with the shouts of the crowd "stay with us!" sounding above the noise of the propellers, I went to the apartment of friends there. We were chatting about all that had happened when suddenly the lady of the house leapt up and in tears rushed from the room. After a while, she returned beaming, and told her story: she had suddenly felt the urge to be alone, and so she went to the church down the street to the tomb of Piotr Skarga, a 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit who famously preached to the Polish parliament warning that their fractious ways would endanger the nation. By the time she reached that quiet spot, she found that someone had been there before her, and had written a four line poem in chalk on the wall, urging Poles to band together, "like a flock of birds." The poem was signed by a university student who also listed her year in school. The fact that the poem's author stood by her words inspired my friend to hope that Poland was on the verge of change.

*Q: And of course it seems to me this illustrates the point that the object of the embassy and its personnel is to weave yourself into local society so that you know what is going on.*

SUMMERS: Well of course. That is also why telephone calls don't work so well as conferences. Part of it is seeing other people and seeing how they react and understanding the world they are in. For example, when the Polish price riots took place. I already mentioned that in 1976, after the price hikes were announced, my normally cheerful FSN could barely focus as she tried to calculate how she would make ends meet. At first I thought that was just dramatic hyperbole. But in retrospect I knew it made sense because I had just spent a year looking at visa applications. One-by-one they revealed what little money people made and how such an increase would bust household budgets. To your point, when you live in a country and develop a web of personal connections, you can

feel the importance of changes versus analyzing and knowing them in some kind of logical way.

*Q: Now you have in mid-1979 this fabulous opportunity to work for the Thomas Watson Foundation. How did you decide to do that? And why did the department let go of you. You are obviously a brilliant officer.*

SUMMERS: The offer came out of the blue, and I accepted just as quickly. My Watson fellowship year was a revelation for me, and I felt sure that it would be just as exciting to work on the management side of the operation. I soon learned that Thomas Watson, Jr., who conceived the fellowship program, was proud of the low overhead of his foundation. He also concluded that hiring relatively young former fellows to the post of director would keep the process fresh and keep down salary expenditures. I also later learned that even though I had never met the assistant director of the foundation, she remembered me because my project reminded her of the folktales her Italian mother used to tell her.

*Q: Now, in the State Department system you have a career counselor. Who was your career counselor at this time. You must have been giving him fits.*

SUMMERS: This reminds me of our unofficial motto at the Watson Foundation: “serendipity stalks the Watson Fellow.” It was coined because things kept going right for Watson fellows as they roamed the globe. My career counselor was Richard Castrodale. He had been my Senior Watch Officer in the Ops Center, so I had probably spent more time working with him than with anyone else in the Foreign Service. He was immensely supportive.

*Q: Now where are you when you are operating out of the Watson Foundation? Are you in New York City?*

SUMMERS: Providence, Rhode Island.

*Q: So of course you are still interested in international events and what not. The Tehran hostage crisis comes up and Desert Storm comes up in April 1980. You would have read about those things and wondered, Gee shouldn't I get back into the game.*

SUMMERS: Yes, I was constantly thinking about what the Ops Center must be like on a given day. On Inauguration Day, 1981, when the Iran hostages were also released, I was interviewing candidates for the Watson Fellowship at Pomona College. There was a TV set in the room, and between interviews I tried to try to catch up on the breaking news. I was struck then that while I experienced the release of the Iran hostages personally, the students were nonchalant. “The youth of today!” I thought in exasperation, but really I could attribute our different reactions to my attachment to the State Department.

*Q: Well now this is interesting. As part of your Watson Foundation duties you traveled around the country to various universities and what not for interview purposes?*

SUMMERS: Yes. I was the main interviewer. There was a selection committee of three, and together we went to 50 schools. I went to 35 of them. It was like a domestic traveling fellowship.

*Q: Was there a particular way that you selected those schools?*

SUMMERS: They were all small liberal arts schools, without a graduate program with the exception of Cal Tech, which had been so good to the Watsons. The idea was that professors at such schools could help identify students with a spirit of inquiry that might not be evident from standard measures such as grades. Thomas Watson had such a professor at Brown, who urged him to travel after his graduation. We at the foundation thought that Thomas Watson relived his own life story through his sponsorship at these small colleges.

*Q: If you went to Pomona you must have gone to Occidental.*

SUMMERS: Yes indeed. In fact, well that is not part of this story, but I recognized something from Occidental College when I read Obama's Dreams of my Father. He writes there about an Afro-American student named Roberta who challenged him to commit to his identity. Roberta was older than he was, and had won a travel fellowship to Africa. Obama changed Roberta's name in the book, but I remembered interviewing her and awarding the fellowship to her. It made me proud of the work of the foundation to think that one of our fellows influenced a future president.

*Q: Now how did the transition from Watson to the State Department go?*

SUMMERS: Smoothly. I was engaged to Beatrice Camp by that time, whom I knew from college. She had taught English in Thailand after graduation, and was eager to return to Asia. Because of the normalization of relations with China, there were many new language-designated positions opening up, and we took advantage of one of those. We came back to Washington and started studying Chinese. We did that for a year at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in Rosslyn, and for another year at the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT).

*Q: Now Chinese is a different language than Polish, differently based. It is tonal. How did you rate the teachers and their effectiveness.*

SUMMERS: Oh gosh, my rule of thumb, and it also applied to Hungarian and Thai at FSI, was just as U.S. embassies overseas adapt features of the host culture, so does studying the foreign language. The Study of Polish was highly inventive and idiosyncratic. Chinese was a march of ten thousand leagues which began with the first step. There were many teachers who coordinated with each other. Polish instruction was like a master watchmaker producing a single watch, and Chinese was like a precision watch from an assembly line. They both worked out but with different methods. I picked up one thing in Chinese language training from two teachers who frequently went to lunch together. I knew that they disagreed about the teaching curriculum, and when I

asked the more approachable teacher about that she explained that they needed to spend more time together to work on their relationship. The Polish analogy might be “Let’s go throw water on the other class.” We did that one time. It was a tradition for Easter Monday.

*Q: Of course what you are describing in the Chinese class is the vocabulary and the scenarios as they were introduced were in what they used to call module styles. You are at the restaurant, or you are proceeding on a travel adventure.*

SUMMERS: Well the Polish curriculum had that too, the way it should be. It is just that it didn’t get executed in the same way. The first lesson in Polish was about Krakow, and included the phrase “Panie Andzeju! Co za niespodzianka!/Mr. Andrew! What a surprise!” We all learned that on the first day, but by the third lesson we had diverged like cats. The rote learning in Polish did have an effect, though. There was a man named Andrzej Głowacz who worked at the consulate in Krakow. Every time a veteran of the Polish class came to Krakow and was introduced to him, the elated Pavlovian response would emerge: “Mr. Andrew! What a surprise!” This baffled Andrzej for a very long time.

*Now as you explained with the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979 we were beginning to build a diplomatic establishment in China that needed Chinese speaking bodies. Yours was one of the larger classes. Do any of the other people particularly strike you as interesting or how they came to the class.*

SUMMERS: Well some were already experts in affairs Chinese and had studied China before there was even a China career path to follow, as you well know. Probably our class had more neophytes than classes which came later, after China exchanges expanded. One thread for how people came to the class was “cherchez la femme.” We studied together with spouses who were born in Malaysia, Korea, and Vietnam. I would add my wife Bea Camp to that group, even though she was born in Alabama. She was keenly interested in China. Several of our classmates eventually headed consulates in China: Don Camp in Chengdu, Jeff Buczacki in Kaohsiung, and my wife in Shanghai.

*And of course the point being in these long term training circumstances, you just don’t go to language. You are given an assignment that requires the language. They didn’t just say oh yea, why don’t you go to Chinese language training. They said OK we are assigning you to the Embassy Beijing political slot and here is your two years of Chinese to get there. So all of those people had assignments.*

SUMMERS: Right. That was a long range career move, because when you are in language training typically you don’t get a promotion. I think it was a serious, motivated, group that I studied Chinese with. People came to that job from previous assignments all over the world: Linda Buggeln from Brazil, Martin Brennan from Rwanda, Jeff Buczacki from Zaire, Don Johnson from Central America, Don Camp from Barbados.

*Q: Wasn’t Art Kobler in that group. He had Asia Vietnam experience.*



SUMMERS: Oh that is right, He was in Vietnam, and Don Paarlberg was in Nepal.

*Q: Now it is a two year program and language is the software of the mind. It tells you how that society thinks about things. Were you also exposed to cultural things or food things along the way?*

SUMMERS: Oh sure. I have already mentioned how well-structured the Chinese language instruction was. I remember Art Kobler, who went on to be the DCM before he left Beijing four years later, led a delegation to the administrative staff the first year to demand a different teaching approach. He said something like “I studied other languages and they were a lot easier than this. I think there is something wrong with the method. It has been a year and we can barely read.” The response was “this is the only way. All Chinese learn like this – 心苦/xinku/bitterness in the heart. Go back and memorize your characters.” That episode was an introduction into the ethos of accepting bitterness and working hard. We also got a glimpse of how Chinese revere their writing system.

Another concept we learned while studying Chinese was the order of things. I remember at Thanksgiving the first year at Arlington, the students were instructed to prepare a Thanksgiving dinner. At the next class session, our teacher thanked us for the dinner and went on to say “don’t do that again with Chinese guests. #1: Turkey is a tasteless meat, #2: bringing a carving knife to the table is savage.” This made us uncomfortable three years later when Nancy Reagan thought up the idea of serving American turkey at the return banquet of her husband’s 1984 visit to China. Fortunately, it wasn’t carved at the table. Chinese language training taught us to be uncomfortable on another score during that visit: the trademark “Reagan red” which the First Lady preferred was known to us to be the color worn by a blushing bride, but inappropriate for a woman of a certain age. I never heard that there was any reaction to Mrs. Reagan’s red outfits, but Chinese class taught us to be sensitive to such things.

Such lessons were multiplied during our second year of language training in Taiwan. I feel grateful to this day that we had teachers that were so intent on teaching us ancient Chinese culture. For example, Confucius. As students, we rose before dawn on his birthday to be part of a ceremony in his honor, replete with hogs’ heads and clangy music. The next year on the mainland, we made a rail trip to Confucius’s home town of Qufu. It had suffered mightily during the Cultural Revolution and they were just starting to put it back together. In one room of the Confucius family home were stacked musical instruments. I asked the guide how the instruments were used. The guide answered “Oh we have no idea. That was a long time ago.” But in Taiwan they had preserved this heritage, and our class had listened to each of the instruments being played in the pre-dawn hours on Confucius’s birthday. Whenever a Chinese person on the mainland chanced to refer to the stolen treasures in the palace museum of Taipei, I would think that all Chinese should be glad for that particular twist of fate.

*Q: Now you were pointing out this two years of language was one year at FSI in Rosslyn and the second year in Yangmingshan in Taiwan. Who is the linguist in Taiwan?*

SUMMERS: He was Neil Kubler, a young man with a charming wife from Taiwan, Jerlin.

*Q: So the second year was adding on and more things.*

SUMMERS: The second year we moved to Taiwan, and we lived in a housing complex that was modeled after Camp Pendleton in California. We had little ranch houses with small lawns in front. After the U. S. military left Taiwan, their housing was turned over to the U.S. civilian sector. It was pleasant. Yangmingshan was a mountain north of Taipei above most of the pollution in a beautiful green setting. We studied in little buildings that were scarcely converted from when they were dwellings. We would hold class in a bedroom or a living room or even the kitchen of someone's former home. I liked it very much. We really were free from all other concerns. The first year we still had to pay the rent and commute to work. The second year we walked to work and we had the whole day to study. We would watch television at night and try to figure out what the news was about. And then go to class and study the news with a teacher and a notebook. I found it collegial in the way the Ops Center had been.

*Q: Now one of the unique aspects of the Taiwan experience was this was under the rubric of the American Institute in Taiwan, the unofficial entity. Did that create any interesting aspects?*

SUMMERS: I was oblivious to most of it. I knew from the experience in the Ops Center how deeply aggrieved Taiwan was over the way we broke relations. The Taiwanese had every reason to be resentful of how poorly we had treated them just a few years earlier. But our experience reinforces how the Chinese often take a long-term view of things. I always felt welcome in Taiwan. Getting back to your question, although we weren't affected by our anomalous status in our day-to-day lives, it did crop up when it came to bureaucratic matters. Number one, we had civilian passports. Our son who was born in Taiwan had three passports by the time he was six weeks old as a result of our move to the mainland. I can think of a couple of events that made me know I was in a different part of China. One was when Bea and I visited the Sun Yat-sen Memorial and the museum of communism located beneath it. One the photographs showed two people on the mainland hauling a television suspended from a pole they carried on their shoulders. . The caption read 'on the mainland people feel lucky even to have a black and white television set.' Already Taiwan was making color television sets hand-over-fist, and we were the only people we knew who had a black and white set, as pathetic as those benighted folks on the mainland.

At the end of our Taiwan study we were invited to a banquet by the ministry of foreign affairs. Somehow we were supposed to separate ourselves from everything official, but at this one event time off for good behavior was declared. It was good education for future Chinese banquets, which is to say a study in tedium. It was held in an enormous hall, and somewhere in the distance at a front table dignitaries were seated on a dais befitting their status. We junior staff were seated at the back with our counterparts from the Taiwanese

ministry of foreign affairs. My wife and I were seated at a table with Linda Buggeln, a vivacious cultural affairs officer who brought a little bit of Brazilian carnival everywhere she went. Conversation at our table seemed to be grinding to a halt. We had covered the topics of our ancestral homes and whether we felt comfortable using chopsticks when something possessed Linda to say she could read palms. She beckoned a young man to give him her hand, and intoned “on the surface you are a very boring person without much status, but I see a supreme intelligence and a heart that beats with passion.” Soon our table grew animated as one palm after another was outstretched for a reading by Linda: “you don’t exercise much, but you too are a brilliant creature whose ability to sense things is far beyond normal.” When it came time for the main speeches up at the front, we were rebuked to quiet down. I left that dinner with a conviction that all men are brothers. I also took away a handy social tool for the many banquets before me: when conversation grinds to halt, bring up something extremely personal, say potty training, and you will find an intelligent, passionate soul bursting to share ideas.

Two events connected with our move from Taiwan to the mainland encouraged me that the conflict between Taiwan and the mainland would someday be resolved. The first took place in a barber shop in Taipei. Once the barber learned that I would wear my new haircut all the way to Beijing, he whispered in my ear “tell our countrymen there that we don’t want war. We come from the same womb and we should live peacefully together.” The light at the end of the tunnel brightened again at the passport inspection of Beijing airport. We had with us our six-week old son William, who was sleeping peacefully on his stomach in a folding basket. Our Dr. Spock guide to child rearing instructed us that the child should sleep this way to insure his windpipe stayed clear. From the day he was born, we endured citizens’ arrests from Taiwanese passers-by who began with the accusatory “why is he sleeping on his stomach?!” Chinese wisdom, which some years later was adopted by Dr. Spock, was that a baby was safest sleeping on its back. We landed in Beijing both excited and anxious about the new life ahead of us. We approached the immigration desk and handed over our passports. Before the official could process them, he noticed William sleeping in the crib and burst out “why is he sleeping on his stomach?!” I turned to Bea and said under my breath “China will someday be reunited.” They are on their way, if you take the long-term view. Nowadays the number of direct flights between Taiwan and the mainland is edging towards 100 a day.

*Q: Now as normal state department practice when you go from one tour to another, there is home leave and on to post. So how did home leave go from Taiwan because you had come back to the States.*

SUMMERS: We didn’t have home leave, but because there was no such thing as a direct flight then, we took a circuitous route. First we flew the Philippines for R&R, then to Hong Kong, and from Hong Kong to Beijing.

*Q: Now let’s talk about Beijing. Your assignment is the political section. The political section is probably divided into external and internal reporting. Which one of those sections were you in?*

SUMMERS: I was in external. Dick Hart was the political counselor, a gruff, but warmhearted fellow who reminded me of Walter Matthau from the day I met him. He took responsibility for U.S.-China bilateral relations. The head of the POL/external section was Don Johnson. He had been in the Soviet Union, and made Sino-Soviet ties along with Sino-Japanese relations his specialty. Don Camp took the next tier in importance – China’s complicated relations with its Asian neighbors, especially Vietnam, India, Pakistan, and Cambodia. And I had what was left over – the rest of the world. I reported on China’s relations with Africa. I can report that they were very much the same today as they were then, even though other factors have changed. At that time, the non-aligned movement was going strong and the Sino-Soviet rivalry had dimmed only slightly. China was busy seeking support from states in the non-aligned movement which they did by expressing people-to-people solidarity and never questioning the internal affairs of another state. Today China has more substantial interests in trade and raw materials than they did then, and their turnkey foreign aid donations are getting bigger – television networks and stadiums instead of stretches of asphalt road – but the format is the same. Through a Tanzanian colleague at that time, I also got a window on African diplomacy with North Korea. The Tanzanian embassy in Beijing was also accredited to Pyongyang, and one winter day my friend accompanied his new ambassador to present his credentials there. They were wakened in their hotel room early the next morning and told to meditate on the Great Leader’s accomplishments. Lunchtime passed with no food, and then in the early afternoon they were driven at high speed up a snowy mountain road. The car slid off the road and the two Tanzanian diplomats were taken to the hospital without having met the Great Leader and without lunch either. Kim Il Sung then visited the hospital and presented a medal to each man. For bravery, presumably. The most important aspect of China’s relations with Europe in those years, apart from negotiations for the return of Hong Kong, was the rise of Euro-communists and their fondness for China. With a trip to China they could thumb their noses at Russian communism and show their independent streak to the electorate back home. The Iran-Iraq War turned out to be the most important issue for Chinese relations with the Middle East. Both the U.S. and China proclaimed neutrality in that conflict, so it shouldn’t have been an issue at all. But the United States knew from satellite photography that the Chinese were loading weapons onto docks in North Korea which were bound for Iran. My job was to make a demarche about that without revealing that I knew any such thing, because of the methods we used to get the information. Every few months I would go to the foreign ministry to complain in Delphic terms that China was violating its pledge of neutrality, and every few months my Chinese counterpart would testily rebut the vague charge with a vague charge of his own. This went on winter and summer. In the winter I had to remember to put on my long underwear because the foreign ministry was so cold, and I had to stay long enough for tea. In the summer I would take off my jacket before I went over there because it was so hot. My tour was drawing to an end when I was charged to go in once again with this demarche. The kabuki conversation was well underway when something inside me snapped. I said “why do you keep saying you have neutrality when we *know* you are sending weapons to Iran.” The guy responded as if he had been goosed. “How dare you say that when we know *you* are sending weapons to Iraq!” I thought that was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard. Why would we do that? We were Israel’s

ally. Well a few years later a news story broke that we had been providing arms to Iraq during that period, and my interlocutor knew it but I didn't. I knew I owed him an apology, and wondered whether he ever found out the truth about his country's supporting role in that conflict.

*Q: What was your contact list like typically?*

SUMMERS: There were a couple of regular lunch meetings with diplomats from friendly embassies where we would exchange information about our own activities and hash over the crumbs of information put out by the foreign ministry on other international issues. My French counterpart was a true sinologist with an encyclopedic knowledge of the changes in the politburo. My only consolation was that he couldn't pronounce the Chinese name of the People's Daily, Renmin Ribao, which was easy for a native speaker of English to say. Sometimes, when I was preparing an omnibus report on China's relations with one of my regions, I would just telephone one embassy after another and ask for an appointment. I would be greeted with suspicion on occasion, and more often than not I wouldn't learn more than I could read about in the Xinhua (China News Agency) reports. I remember that one exception to this rule came from my call on my Portuguese counterpart. It turned out that Portugal's relations with China were quite nuanced, dating back to the Ming dynasty.

Those of us in the external section joined the internal section in making reporting trips to provincial Chinese cities. The list of cities foreign diplomats were allowed to visit in 1983 was expanded to about 21, I think, and we wanted to go to them to learn what we could and show the flag. We were met by handlers from the Waiban, the Foreign Affairs Bureau, at each stop, and they arranged for interviews with local leaders of various kinds who usually came to where we were staying for a discussion instead of our visiting them. Despite all that formality, it was always eye-opening to make such a trip.

The first was to Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, in the fall of 1983. Until that time, Chinese and foreigners were forbidden to travel in the same compartment together. The policy switched overnight, but it took Chinese travelers some time to get used to the idea. A reluctant Chinese traveler boarding the train did an about-face when he saw me already sitting in the compartment, and he had to be pushed back in by a porter. We traveled through the night in our "soft sleeper" in guarded peaceful coexistence. The next morning at 6:30 a.m., the speaker in our compartment burst into life. Broadcast programs on trains seemed to abhor an aural vacuum. One minute they would coo things like "Dear comrade, your travel adventure is about to begin, eager to struggle for the nation, to struggle for socialism," next stern warnings "don't spit in the compartments, no firecrackers allowed on the trains, no stoves", next social notes about the passing towns, all interspersed with martial music and Chinese opera. On that particular morning, it was something different. An authoritative voice warned about the evils of "spiritual pollution." I had never heard that phrase before, so I asked my travel companion what it meant. It turned out that he had never heard it before either. I asked him whether it was good or bad. "Oh, it is bad" he replied, with a stricken look that told me he was turning over in his mind whether riding in a train compartment with a foreigner could be counted

against him under the new rubric. I next asked him whether he was for or against “spiritual pollution.” “Oh I am against it!” he answered. The spiritual pollution campaign turned out to be an effort by communist party conservatives to slow the pace of Deng Xiaoping’s reform movement. It didn’t take off, and died a quiet death within a few months. But China was still a place where something like that was a cause for concern for the average Chinese citizen after the Cultural Revolution. It didn’t pay to stick your neck out in China in those days, as the intellectuals who offered suggestions for reforms during the “Hundred Flowers Movement” of 1956 learned the hard way. Although things were changing fast, and we could see the evidence, the people we met weren’t that sure.

My next trip was to Changsha, the capital of Hunan province. A lugubrious pair, Mr. Peng and Little Wan from the “Waiban,” the Foreign Affairs Bureau, met me at the station. I think their assignment was both to facilitate my visit and to make sure that I encountered nothing that might be deemed controversial, without a good idea themselves of what that might be. I believe they were also directed to monitor every word I spoke. Mr. Peng stayed in the hotel room next to mine, because, he explained, it was too far to commute home every night. At first they told me that they could arrange for only three people to come to the hotel to discuss the topics we had expressed interest in, but when I suggested I would like to visit sacred Mt. Heng to fill up the time, they were galvanized into action, and my interview card was filled. Despite their control of how and with whom conversations were held, it proved impossible to limit the information flow to the level of what appeared in People’s Daily. I learned that lawyers had returned to work, after suffering more than most professionals during the Cultural Revolution. They seemed to have a genuine interest in helping individuals with their daily problems, but they scrupulously avoided passing judgment on the nation-wide law and order campaign that was underway then. Despite that, I learned that someone from Hunan was executed for stealing six watches in order to meet a production quota, and heard that the whole campaign probably started because the president’s daughter (or was it his granddaughter?) was raped in Hunan, or was it that Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping’s entourage was jumped by hoodlums at the beach resort of Beidaihe? They couldn’t be sure. I learned that 102 private enterprises were shut down for diverting raw materials from state enterprises, and that the university was criticized for being too “leftist” – in other words, anti-intellectual. On a visit to an agricultural commune of 48,000 people, I learned that the one-child policy mandated sterilization if two children were born to a family, so 70% of the women opted for that and had two children. When I asked the commune leaders whether they sent a delegate to the family planning conference held in Changsha at the same time, they laughed. “Oh no! Not us! That’s for groups which have been good. We’ve been bad! We got invited to the agriculture production conference because our results were second in the prefecture.” One evening, as I was walking by the river, a young man who struck up a conversation with me said “We in Hunan don’t like Deng. We think he let us workers down. Just look at who’s on top now! It’s the children of the Five Bad Elements” The Five Bad Elements were “landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionaries, bad influencers, and rightists” – hard to put your finger on. I returned from Changsha with a sense that the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution were past, but that some groups that lost out in the process hadn’t given up their opposition. Meanwhile, back on the farm, life went on without too much regard for the rest.

On a similar trip to Xinjiang province, I asked to meet with members of the Muslim Uyghur minority. When they first showed up clad in layers to keep out the cold (I was wearing them too), they looked frightened, as if they were headed for a police lineup. Sometime into the interview it dawned on them that I was a voice to the outside, and the Waiban rep became the one who looked frightened. They spoke of religious and work discrimination, and riots that had taken place a few years earlier because of the bad conditions. Ever since then, when I read about tensions in that region, I tend to believe that the complaints by the minority are legitimate.

When our China assignment drew to a close, I said to Bea something like “boy I am really glad we came here. It was like one of the required courses in college – not always that much fun, but ever valuable as a point of reference.” I thought China would assume the leadership of the non-aligned movement, and that third-world countries would learn lessons from China on how to provide basic services and education in the context of a scarcity economy. I didn’t foresee China’s leap into second place among the world economies. One of the reasons was the lack of infrastructure, but China has remedied that at warp speed.

*Q: Now often you talk about interacting with other embassy personnel . Often in countries where everybody is just beginning to start a relationship with the Chinese, they English speaking embassies get together or the junior officers get together. Was that a phenomenon that you saw in Beijing?*

SUMMERS: Oh for sure. There were the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and British embassies. The others had bars and there was a rotating happy hour on Fridays. The British sponsored a group called the Beijing Society, an English-language group which sponsored programs related to Chinese culture. A wide variety of people took part, including some expats who had stuck with China through thick to earn the title of “friends of China” even as they were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. One of them was Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who worked in China from 1927. He contributed the word “gung ho” to the English language, when he founded the industrial cooperative (“gong he” in Chinese) movement. Observers at the time equated the workers’ enthusiasm with being “gung ho.” Another friend of China was Han Suyin, author of many books, including Love is a Many-Splendored Thing which was made into a Hollywood movie. People were indulgent of Rewi, who was modest but confident, and who always put his cause first. They didn’t like Han Suyin very much, maybe because her habits were the converse of Rewi’s. We became friends with Ruth Weiss, another friend of China who was also a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress, an advisory body under the Chinese constitution. Ruth was born in Austria, came to China as a journalist, and took the side of the Communist Party about the time of World War II. After the war her Chinese husband left her to become a math teacher at the University of Pennsylvania, and her two sons eventually emigrated to the U.S., too. Ruth stayed faithful to China, where she had a job translating from German. I remained in awe of the way Ruth never complained about the things that went wrong in China during her lifetime, or about the rapid changes happening around us, which Ruth considered to be

straying from the socialist ideal. Your question was “did the foreigners get together?” and the answer is “yes.” The reason my thoughts wandered to Ruth Weiss is that I took her to the British Embassy’s Christmas pantomime in 1983, for one of the most excruciating experiences of my time in Beijing. So, a Christmas pantomime is a slapstick show for children on one level, based upon a favorite children’s story, and it is a bawdy satire on another, for their parents. That year, the show was based on *Alice in Wonderland* and the satire of communist Chinese institutions was both savage and hilarious. I remember almost all of that show, in particular the Jabberwocky transformed into the “CAACerwocky,” named after the Chinese national airline. The problem was that I was sitting next to Ruth, a true believer of the first water, and a true-blue soul to boot. At first she didn’t understand what was going on, but once she did, I felt it my duty to bite my lip rather than join the laughter at expense of the things she held dear. Some people nicknamed this cadre of “friends of China” “the dinosaurs.” They actually reminded me of missionaries I had met in Rwanda, whose faith was so strong that they could withstand whatever adversity was hurled at them.

*Q: What was it like living in Beijing under these newly opening conditions I mean could you tell in the street and in the shops the changes that the econ section was reporting?*

SUMMERS: Yes. Over two years there was a big change. One was the free market on Dongdan Street that sold items never seen before, such as a blouse with sequins, made in Guangdong. Private restaurants were opened. China Daily ran a story about a restaurant in Tianjin that was open all day, rather than two hours at lunchtime and two hours in the evening, as was the practice then. At the same time the perimeter around Beijing where foreigners were allowed to drive to was expanded to include Tianjin. We were so excited to see a restaurant that opened in the afternoon that we made the four-hour trip to Tianjin to eat noodles in mid-afternoon. Today that trip takes half an hour by fast train, and of course you can get noodles before, during, and immediately after your train trip. The owner of the restaurant was thrilled that his novel idea had attracted visitors from so far away. The economic changes were realized gradually after the markets were opened, but there other changes that just suddenly appeared. One night after my car was delivered, a policeman stopped me near the Museum of Fine Arts and told me to turn off my headlights. It was the law, he said, because headlights could blind bicyclists and cause an accident. A month later, a policeman at the same spot stopped me and told me to turn my headlights back on. We heard the story after that that the leaders noticed from their travels that in other countries the headlights went on at night, so they drove around town one night with the headlights on and decided that cyclists were safer that way.

*Q: One of the things that struck me when you were talking about your portfolio, you characterized yourself as the most junior officer in the political section. Yet you could call on ranking people in other embassies. The ambassador of another embassy or whatnot. So you had pretty full initiative to follow up all these leads for your reporting responsibilities.*

SUMMERS: Usually there would be somebody besides the ambassador and I would talk to that person, but most of the embassies were new and small. Most of the time diplomats



from other embassies were happy to talk to me and to ask questions about U. S.-China relations. I suppose they could then write a cable on U. S.-China relations while I got to write one on relations with their country. There was quite an atmosphere of collegiality in the foreign diplomatic corps at that time. Certain countries like Pakistan had been there for a long time, and may have resented the arrival of all these newcomers. But most of the time everybody was starting out together at about the same time.

*Q: Even the American embassy was starting out as even though it had been there, the interest section since '73 and the embassy since '79. What was it like to work for Ambassador Hummel and Chas Freeman?*

SUMMERS: I respected them both. Ambassador Hummel was an eminence grise, and I hardly worked with him at all. He worked with his section chiefs and assignments went up and down the line. He was unfailingly polite, and he could always rely on his outgoing wife Betty Lou to fill him in on who was who in the embassy. Whenever there was a big question about U.S.-China relations, he would handle it. I don't suppose there was ever another foreign ambassador accredited to Beijing who had fought alongside the Chinese in the anti-Japanese war. Chas Freeman on the other hand was everywhere, all the time. He frequently would have a comment, usually a correction, on something I wrote. One day I came home and said "Geez, Chas Freeman just corrected three typos in my cable." Bea said "He just changed the zip code in Connecticut of a letter that I wrote for his signature." He was amazing. We had been prepared for this the entire time we studied Chinese. Whenever we stumbled, one or another teacher would say "Fuliman Xiansheng" ("Mr. Freeman") understood this intuitively" or "Fuliman Xiansheng never complained." I was surprised when I met Chas for the first time that he didn't look just like Gregory Peck. He looked normal, but in every other way he reminded me of Atticus Finch. He was a delight to work for. Sometimes he would be critical but always in a constructive way. Mainly he noticed. He paid attention to who we were. Early on, he invited me to lunch at his apartment with the heads of the Africa bureau in the foreign ministry, introducing me to people I would not otherwise meet. We rode to his house together, and on the way he looked at a cable with talking points of issues of interest to Washington, ranging from Namibia, Angola and the Horn of Africa to the Chad crisis and the Polisario activities in Mauritania. He complained that he didn't know anything about Africa and said he hoped I could back him up. Then came the lunch, and Chas launched into a barrage of hail-fellow, highly idiomatic Chinese, and sandwiched in between all the bonhomie, every one of the talking points. He asked pointed questions about what China was doing in Africa, and they were quite comfortable in responding. One of them asked him where he planned to go next. He answered "I want an assignment where there is a swimming pool and a war. In the foreign service you need a war to get ahead." You could just see their eyes bug out. They weren't used to revealing anything that would involve how they really felt and what they really wanted. So Chas Freeman reinforced what I learned from Linda Buggeln about being yourself with the Chinese. Chas went on to Bangkok which had the swimming pool but not the war. But then he went to Saudi Arabia in time for the first Iraq war. Someone else's oral history will tell the story of what happened there. Chas never became ambassador to China, which was my wish for all of us.

*Q: There is a story there. Jesse Helms hated him and moved heaven and earth to block him. That is why his ambassadorship was in the NEA bureau and not the AP bureau which was his home. Jesse decreed that he should never be an ambassador in Asia.*

SUMMERS: Wow, I didn't know that.

*Q: Now one of the duties, that pops up in the Beijing context is congress and CODELS and visitors. How much of that impinged on your time.*

SUMMERS: Hmmm. More work than in Poland, but less than a few years later in Thailand. There was a CODEL led by Melvin Price of Illinois which chose to fly to Beijing on a military airplane via one of the Gulf states so he could buy gold for his wife, but it couldn't be a capital city, because Price's Jewish constituency would be upset if he met with Arab government officials. Then Senator Orrin Hatch brought along Anna Chennault, the Chinese-born widow of Flying Tiger General Claire Chennault. I was notetaker for a meeting with the foreign minister in which Anna batted her false eyelashes and said disparaging things in Chinese about Hatch to the foreign minister.

Maybe the CODELS aren't vivid in my memory because of the lasting impression made by the visit of Ronald Reagan in April of 1984. It began in November, 1983, with a military plane bringing presidential assistant Michael Deaver to scout places that a follow-on advance team might like to scout as possible places for President Reagan to visit. It involved chartered planes and boats to take Mr. Deaver to visit the Three Gorges region of the Yangtze, which, *mirabile dictu*, he then decided would not be appropriate for the president's visit. Someone in the party said that Vice President Bush suggest he go there before the waters of the Three Gorges Dam swallowed it up. Next came the real advance team for the visit. We had countdown meetings for two weeks where all the people who were working on the visit reported their preparations for the visit, down to every step the president would take, and when he would turn to the right or the left. Diaoyutai, the State Guest House, was the center for all this. Up until that time Diaoyutai had been shrouded in mystery, next to the compound where the leaders made their homes. Pretty soon we were installing Coke machines in each of the villas, and then Pepsi machines when the execs in Hong Kong took umbrage at what they thought was a steal on their march.

My assignment was to be the control officer at the Great Hall of the People, which included President Reagan's arrival meeting with President Li, a welcoming banquet, and a meeting with Deng Xiaoping. My first challenge in preparing for my part of the visit was to identify a small room where Reagan could meet for a final briefing with his staff just before his meetings. The Great Hall of the People didn't have small rooms.

*Q: Now the staff that is doing this prep work is his staff.*

SUMMERS: His staff from the White House. The secret service was along in all the places. They didn't care how small the rooms were, but they wanted them locked before

the president used them, so that everything they prepared would be inviolate. For example, they planned to rush the drinking water ahead from the plane so they could be sure of its purity. The Chinese took offense at this, and insisted that they provide the water. After dancing around the issue for a while, they came right out and said “how do we know you are not going to poison your president and then blame us. We are the hosts. We are responsible for his well-being.” There was another round, and the Secret Service thought they had agreement to do it their way, but they were wrong. When the day arrived, the Secret Service comes racing to the Great Hall of the People with their water. They rush up to the room and find it locked. “Get that room open!” My job as translator was to say in Chinese “We must have that room opened.” My Chinese counterpart responds “I’m sorry. The door is locked. No one has a key.” The key appears seconds before the President is to enter the room, too late to put American water in there. The last thing I heard before the door closed was the urgent voice of the Secret Service agent saying “Mr. President, don’t drink the water!”

Well before the President arrived at the Great Hall of the People that day, Secretary of State George Schultz came ambling up the steps. He stopped to shake the hands of some embassy employees who had a place to stand and watch the proceedings. One person said “Mr. Secretary, I want a transfer!” which he received with a smile. Someone else asked him “What is your role going to be during this visit?” The Secretary answered “my role is to stay out of every photograph.” That was a contrast from the previous presidential visit I was associated with, where Mr. Kissinger strove to be in every photograph.

It is still the first hour of the first day of the president’s visit. The president emerges from his briefing room to a hall where President Li Xiannian is waiting for him, along with a wall of press reporters arranged on bleachers. President Reagan and President Li sit in chairs that look like the one at the Lincoln Memorial, and the meeting begins. Reagan notes that both he and President Li are grandparents, and that he hopes that as a result of this visit...” - the cameras are whirling - “we can make the world a safer place for our grandchildren.” Next comes translation into Chinese. When that is over, President Li looks down silently, and with great deliberation spits into the spittoon beside him. In a Chinese context this gesture means “I am chewing the cud. I am thinking about your wise words.” Of course our first interpretation, and that of the reporters, was “I spit on your words.” So Reagan imperceptibly turns towards the reporters and shrugs his shoulders with his palms opened. It is perfect body language for “WTF?” and the reporters smile. I got a glimpse of why they called him the great communicator. He perfectly defused a moment of uncertainty with his gesture.

The last meeting at the Great Hall of the People was with Deng Xiaoping. At this point the embassy had a big role in preparing the president’s comments. Thanks to the Chinese predictability and collegial way of coming to decisions, the embassy notes on what might be raised at the meeting were highly accurate. One of points was that Deng would complain about U.S. policy treatment of Taiwan as “an unsinkable aircraft carrier.” That was a phrase used by Eisenhower during the Quemoy crisis, but it was never used again. The Chinese kept it as a shibboleth to complain about our ties with Taiwan. The meeting between Reagan and Deng started off swimmingly. Both the U.S. and China were

concerned about Soviet expansion into the South Pacific. After a few exchanges which reflected complete agreement, Deng changed the subject to Taiwan, the unsinkable aircraft carrier. Well, Reagan didn't quite hear that, but he gave it his best shot, based on what went before. In a strong voice he said "Yes, we're building one aircraft carrier and are planning on two more." The two interpreters locked eyes, each expressing terror. The American interpreter saved the day by saying in Chinese "speaking of aircraft carriers, we have an aircraft building program, and we have one and are going to build two more." That gave Deng an opportunity to raise the Taiwan issue in another way, and both could pick up on their talking points.

Right after that meeting Reagan visited the Great Wall. Before that he had to slip into a knee brace he used for strenuous walking. There was no little room nearby, so the Secret Service set up a private space using "pipe and drape" to make the change. I happened to be standing there when they disappeared behind the curtain. The next thing I heard was Reagan's voice saying "saddle me up boys." He had that winning way.

In addition to the drinking water crisis, the Secret Service had another scare at the welcome banquet given at the Great Hall of the People by the Chinese. Deng Xiaoping presented Reagan with a pair of Baoding balls. It was a thoughtful gift. These are now sold in the U.S. as "healthy balls" for meditation and to maintain flexibility, but at the time they were practically unknown. I was seated at the table with the Secret Service people, and that turned out to be a good thing, because after Reagan handed them over, they didn't know what to do next. The shiny balls, really one ball encased by a second, gave off a tinkling sound, and seemed to contain some kind of gyroscope mechanism. I was able to allay their concerns that they were some sort of petard that should be whisked from the room.

That brings me to the return banquet. This was the first time that the return banquet wasn't held at the Great Hall of the People for a state visit like this. It was held at the newly-opened Sheraton Great Wall Hotel. The menu was developed ahead of time with great care. Mrs. Reagan chose turkey for the main course. The press made a story of how those were flown in from the U.S., and none of us veterans of Chinese language training had the courage to suggest this wasn't a good idea. Mrs. Reagan's chief of staff Jim Rosebush had developed a new salad especially for the event he called "panda salad." There was a practice meal at the ministry of Foreign Affairs with the chief of protocol. He spoke flawless, intimidating English which he learned from the BBC before there were direct contacts with the West. He took one look at the panda salad and said to an expectant Jim Rosebush "We Chinese, when we eat bean sprouts raw, vomit." Rosebush was disappointed, but thinking on his feet he swapped out the bean sprouts for hearts of palm. Well, on the night of the big banquet I was seated at a table with the Chinese Olympic ping pong champion. He seemed to be tucking his dinner away nicely. I asked whether he liked Western food. With a wave of his hand he answered "I've been abroad a lot, so I'm used to it." Over at my wife's table things weren't going so well. Two young women were picking at their panda salad and they looked pale. Bea asked "is anything wrong?" One of them poked at a heart of palm and said "It's just that my friend and I have never eaten panda meat before."

*Q: One of the things of interest in these kinds of meetings the White House advance team and sometimes their very strict requirements or demands. Were you at a level where you, I mean you are talking about the Secret Service guys and water.*

SUMMERS: They lost the drinking water round, but they won the one with the Filipino taster who took a bite of everything President Reagan ate before he did. We told the Chinese there were no hard feelings. The people planning the camera shots suggested that the Chinese remove the bamboo scaffolding that covered the main gate to the Forbidden City at Tiananmen Square, which was under restoration. That action would have revealed a half-repainted façade, and would have taken too much time to do, so that idea was dropped. I mentioned the Coke and Pepsi machines at each villa in Diaoyutai. That required new fuse boxes, but I think our side paid for that. I suppose things went relatively smoothly.

*Q: Did you have, was Secretary Shultz at Diaoyutai with the President and whatnot and therefore outside your scope?*

SUMMERS: Yep, I saw him only on the steps of the Great Hall of the People before the whole thing began.

*Q: Because State also as you know from the Ops Center sends a team to advance him and be with him and whatnot in addition to the White House guys.*

SUMMERS: Oh gosh you just brought up a memory that I haven't thought of for a long time. The State advance person was named Margery Lemb. She arrived before the White House advance, and at first came on strong with a list of requirements for the Secretary. Then the White House advance arrived, and Margery was bowled over along with everyone else. Her name came up again in 2002 when she was arrested for shooting with intent to kill the estranged husband of her best friend as he lay sleeping. I don't think this had anything to do with her experience in Beijing.

*Q: One of the things that happened in that year of '84 was the consulate in Shenyang opened. Which raises the question you had the internal travel I assume the political section and econ section people were encouraged to make sure they hit the consulates and work with them.*

SUMMERS: Well at the time there was only Guangzhou. The Guangzhou consulate was close to the consulate in Hong Kong, so it was the odd occasion when a Guangzhou person would come up. Shenyang opened as part of a bilateral agreement and China got Houston I think. We felt we were treated shabbily in that exchange. First of all I think we would have rather been someplace other than Shenyang. It was cold up there. The air was polluted in a way it wasn't in Beijing at the time, and the local authorities didn't make things easy. There was one story about the movie theater we were keen to have included in the new consulate so we could show American films. The Chinese demurred, but then they relented. Construction was well on the way before someone noticed that the Chinese

construction crew had placed a pillar directly in the line of sight between the projection room and the screen. We felt sorry for the people who went to Shenyang. They were true pioneers.

*Q: Well why don't we break off here. I think that takes care of Beijing. Oh Herb Horowitz comes as DCM in '85. Did that create a different atmosphere or you were on your way out the door?*

SUMMERS: I remember him as a pleasant man, who transitioned easily into his job. We lost that laser beam attention that we grew used to with Chas Freeman, but then I never encountered that anywhere again.

*Q: God afternoon. It is 15 August 2012, and we are returning to our conversation with Dave Summers. Dave you have had a brilliant foreign service career in Beijing. When and how did you decide what your next assignment was going to be?*

SUMMERS: Cherchez la femme. By that time my wife whom I married right before we began to study Chinese had herself entered the foreign service and had completed a USIS junior officer tour of 18 months as I completed my two-year tour. We had good luck as a tandem couple, which I attribute to our assignments in different agencies. If we could convince one of our career counselors that we were good for a position, it was a step towards convincing the second one. Bangkok was my wife's dream assignment. She had spent part of her childhood there, and taught English in Chiang Mai for three years after college. She went to USIS Bangkok and I went to the political-military job in the political section of the embassy in Bangkok. We worked there from 1986 to 1988 after studying Thai for a year.

*Q: Now did she have a language requirement too so you both went to language?*

SUMMERS: We both went to language, though of course she was in an advanced class.

*Q: It is tonal, what else, perfectly phonetic. You have already gone through a number of FSI language experiences. How would you rate the Thai?*

SUMMERS: Well as we said last time, the language training is the culture. The Thai language training was "sabai," it was pleasant. Whereas the Chinese would say "you have to study harder." "This is the only way to learn it." And "Chas Freeman learned it; why can't you?" the Thai teachers would say "Gosh you all seem to have hit a stumbling block here and you are getting a little behind. So on Friday we will have a picnic, and we will cook Thai food." Actually, when all was said and done I didn't learn so much Thai as I did Chinese as a result. But it was a wonderful period.

*Q: Now you would have started Thai language in July, summer of '85. Is this in Rosslyn or the FSI campus?*

SUMMERS: It was in Rosslyn.

*Q: Still in Rosslyn. Who were some of the other students? Was it a big class, small class?*

SUMMERS: It was a medium sized class. There was a young fellow whom I met the first day who introduced himself as John Adams. I said, "Oh John Q. Adams I suppose." He said, "Yes." I think he is still in the foreign service, a member of the Massachusetts Adams family. He was coming in as a junior officer, and had taught English in Chiang Mai the way Bea had. Sheldon Krebs and Tom Ferguson were both headed to the political section and both had worked in Thailand before. It was a good sign that so many people wanted to return to Thailand. Margaret McMillion went on to be ambassador to Rwanda and Debbie Malac has just been confirmed as ambassador to Liberia. They were both in that class. Those are the ones I remember vividly. Plus my wife, Beatrice Camp.

*Q: Were there other spouses too?*

SUMMERS: Yes. John Adams's wife Natalie studied with us. Col. Vern Ellis was going out to be the air attaché. He studied with his wife Scotty.

*Q: How many months of instruction?*

SUMMERS: It was one of the 44 week courses.

*Q: So then you would have hit Bangkok in July of '86.*

SUMMERS: Yes, I arrived in August just in time for a job-related event, Operation Cobra Gold, a joint military exercise with the Thai armed forces.

*Q: So Cobra Gold was this training exercise. Had it been going on for some time?*

SUMMERS: It began in 1982, after a hiatus triggered by the U.S. pullout from Vietnam. Cobra Gold was a big exercise for U.S. troops in Asia. They came mainly from Korea to take part, but also from the U.S. That year it began with an amphibious landing on a beach south of Pattaya. We rose at 4:00 A.M. to be there in time to watch the troops land, which worked out fine for me, because I still had jet lag. I got a little lesson about military classification and secrecy that day though, because we were not supposed to talk about where we were going and what we were going to do when we left Bangkok. We arrived under darkness at a viewing stand set up on the beach. It reminded me of a jousting scene in a movie about the Middle Ages. The amphibious landing craft poured out soldiers right at our feet, and they went running behind us into the darkness. Before they got too far up the beach, they met young women selling t-shirts that said "Cobra Gold '86" on them, and street carts selling things to eat. Dawn had not yet broken, and I had spent my first day as a political-military officer.

*Q: Now at this point are you the political military affairs officer?*

SUMMERS: Yes. There wasn't another one.

*Q: There was not another one and you are now in the political section.*

SUMMERS: Right.

*Q: I want to draw that because when I was there in the 70's we had more going on. We had an entire pol-mil section, separate to itself of four or five people. So what we are looking at here is how the State Department is adjusting to the post-Vietnam time and it is probably a much more bilateral arrangement with the Thai.*

SUMMERS: That is interesting you should say that, because I didn't exactly know that. But I felt it. There were several things about my job that seemed anachronous, such as providing clearances for military sales or military movements that had already been approved on a bilateral basis with the Thai. There must have been a time when oversight of such things was more important to the embassy.

Another aspect of my job that didn't make total sense to me was my role in representing U.S. defense industries from the predations from low-cost competitors from other countries. This became more of an issue as the generous military assistance of the early Reagan years began to shrink. Once I was sent to demarche the Thai foreign ministry about their purchase of Claymore-style mines from Yugoslavia. You could buy several Yugoslav mines for the price of a single Claymore. They were used along the Thai-Cambodian border, and their special quality was to maim rather than kill the unfortunate person who stepped on one, requiring the enemy to invest more resources to care for its troops. I was instructed to urge the Thai to single source their mine purchases from the U.S. in order to guarantee quality control. Fortunately, I didn't have to pursue the logic of what bad quality would consist of – accidentally killing someone instead of just maiming.

Another aspect of my job was to follow the politics of the military in Thailand. Since a coup in 1932 ended the full powers of the monarchy, the military had played an important role in the governing of Thailand. The "Young Turks" of Class 7 of the Chulachomkiao Military Academy had played a role in unsuccessful coups in 1981 and 1985. Their patron, Prem Tinsulanonda, had been prime minister since 1980, and had evolved into a trusted advisor to the royal family. Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn had just been made a general in the Royal Thai Army. The permutations of what the actions of these players portended for the future were endless. Our JUSMAG (Joint United States Military Advisory Group) staff was well plugged in with Class 7, and reported frequently on the competitions within the class. Every year in August, a "military re-shuffle list" was announced, and that was studied intently. My break in the Class 7 reporting biz came unexpectedly. One day I took a call in my office from the political section OMS (office management specialist) who said in a funny voice "it's for you-u." I said, "Who is it?" "He says his name is David Summers." So I picked up the phone and said, "this is David Summers." The other person says, "This is David Summers." I said, "This is David C. Summers." The other voice says "This is David C. Summers." I said, "Well this is David Clarke Summers," and he said "This is David Clarence Summers." That is how I met a Watson Fellow and budding neurophysiologist David C. Somers who was touring



Southeast Asia to study “vegetarianism as a way of life,” and who became our houseguest for a week. In the course of his visit I hit on the idea of taking David to a vegetarian restaurant near Chatuchak market which was run by supporters of the mayor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang. Chamlong was another member of class 7 of the military academy. Unlike his classmates, he responded to the lack of political reform by adopting an ascetic practice of Buddhism, including vegetarianism. His nickname at that time was “Mr. Clean.” I translated a conversation between David and the staff of the restaurant. They were interested in his conversion to vegetarianism from a physiological perspective. A few days after David Somers made his way on to Indonesia, a call came in from Mayor Chamlong’s office asking for “David Somers.” I responded that I was “David Summers” and had been along at the visit to the vegetarian restaurant. That was enough to get me an invitation to the mayor’s office, where I was received as one of the inner circle. We had a good conversation about the mayor’s “Power of Dharma” party, and their plans to break out of Bangkok and go national in the 1988 elections. It was a scoop in the world of pol-mil reporting.

*Q: It does illustrate that even your personal interests and things that are personal to you can suddenly turn into an avenue to the society of people you are dealing with overseas.*

SUMMERS: For sure. In this case someone who shared my name.

*Q: Just get a quick sentence in there. When you did the Claymore mine demarche did you do it yourself or was it you and someone else from the embassy?*

SUMMERS: I made the demarche by myself.

*Q: You are right. The military in Thailand has played a fairly extensive role in civilian affairs. Did you ever run into the crown prince who was in the Thai military.*

SUMMERS: No I didn’t. But I heard plenty about him from other people in the military. Some people looked at the crown prince’s military role with alarm, fearing that it was a move to strengthen the role of the monarchy. But here we descend into the dark morass of gossip because of the laws of lèse-majesté, forbidding speech against the royal family. Since nothing could be spoken in public, the gates were opened to say the most scurrilous things in private, knowing that they could always be denied. I don’t think the laws serve the royal family well, and they didn’t way back then, either. The Wikileaks revelations contain plenty of such rumors that were never meant to see the light of day, so it probably isn’t useful to repeat them here. Suffice to say, he hadn’t made many friends in the military when I arrived in Thailand. Some people credit his interest in airplanes to the Thai decision to buy 12 F-16s during those years, so if you agree with that decision you could applaud him for that.

From a purely military point of view, an important step forward in our bilateral military relationship was the signing of the War Reserve Stockpile Agreement in 1987. This enabled the U.S. to preposition ammunition and weapons in Thailand in case they were needed in a conflict. Thailand would be able to use them in case of a nation threatening

situation with presidential approval. So Thailand would have to say, “Oh we are endangered. May we use them?” That wouldn’t seem like the greatest deal to me if I were a Thai person. I guess the point was that it tightened our commitments to one another. The implementation of the treaty went smoothly. I was a page turner at the signing of that agreement, along with a young man named Bo Bunnag who was brand new in the Thai foreign ministry. I met him again in Shanghai in 2010 when he accompanied Princess Sirindhorn on her visit to the USA Pavilion of the Shanghai World Expo.

*Q: The agreement was signed on January 9, between Ambassador Brown and Minister of Defense Kantarat. The War Reserve Stockpile Agreement allows pre-positioning of materials. Was this positioning on land or on sea?*

SUMMERS: On land. In a field of bunkers. I accompanied the U.S. munitions experts from Hawaii to check out potential sites for the stockpile. The sites all looked pretty much the same to me, but I soon learned the finer points of arms emplacement. The Thai Navy already knew about that, too, and they were nervous that we would ask to use new bunkers they had built for themselves. The briefing at that site was worthy of Brer Rabbit: “Here is our stockpile. Unfortunately, munitions corrode in the salt air, and this is a bad place to put them. Also, forest fires are a danger. Security is not so good. We have to store our munitions too close together. Also snakes.”

*Q: As you were saying the major security issue of that time had been the Vietnam invasion of Cambodia to end the Khmer Rouge rule in Cambodia, and the Khmer Rouge push to the borders of Thailand and Cambodia and there was a non- Khmer resistance with the Chinese supporting the Khmer Rouge. Did any of those reporting issues fall in your portfolio?*

SUMMERS: No. They belonged to external reporting arm of the political section, and to the office of refugees, which got bigger, I guess, as pol-mil got smaller. You needed special permission to drive to the border to visit the camps which were located on the Thai side of the border so the reporting on those issues, which was considerable, didn’t really affect me.

*Q: Did you ever get a chance to get to the border?*

SUMMERS: No. During one Cobra Gold exercise we flew in helicopters and landed near the border, just to prove we could do it. But that was like changing planes at Hartsfield and saying you have been to Atlanta. I did have a dangerous and wonderful trip to the Burmese border, though, as the guest of the U.S. special forces. In the name of civilian control of the military, I had opposed joint training between the special forces and the Thai Border Patrol Police who raid opium operations. Congress passed laws prohibiting the training of police and using military troops in the drug interdiction effort except for flight time. The CINCPAC lawyers found ways around my objections. They called the operation a “combined exercise,” not “training” for instance, and just to show there were no hard feelings, they invited me on one of their “low level” flights to the north. Low level, under-the-radar flight training is hard to come by because many countries have

restrictions about flying a C-130 Hercules at 300 miles an hour at an altitude of 300 feet. After takeoff, I joined the crew in the cockpit. The windows reached from floor to ceiling, and two navigators did a kind of boxer's dance as they directed our course over the jungle with topographic maps. I think I was meant to be frightened when the cockpit alarms went off during the steep "assault landing" onto a dirt runway in the jungle, but I didn't know enough to be frightened. I decided it was an excellent combined exercise.

*Q: Actually in the course of your tour in Thailand did you do much in country traveling, either personal or business?*

SUMMERS: We didn't do a whole lot. We had small children by this time, an infant and a three year old. So we went to places where they could splash in the sea, mainly Pattaya, but also Phuket, Songkhla, and Ko Samui. We once went out to Chiang Mai where my wife had taught English and had a look at that. Our household staff was against the idea, because they thought it was too cold there and the children might catch pneumonia. We also traveled to the river Kwai. Those were all personal family vacations. During the Thai election campaign of 1988, everyone in the political section made reporting visits. I went to Kanchanaburi, and came away with the impression that Thai electoral allegiance is highly personal. I met a candidate there who was the son of Mae Sri, who could be compared to Betty Crocker with her line of prepared foods featuring her picture. He had a face quite like hers, and he won handily.

*Q: Now in the course of pursuing your portfolio, who would be some of your typical contacts on the U.S. side and on the Thai side?*

SUMMERS: The people at JUSMAG were my daily U.S. contacts. General Joseph Nagel was the chief. He seemed to me like a commanding officer as depicted by Hollywood: strict, by the book, concerned for his soldiers. My father died during that period, and General Nagel telephoned me in Ohio to convey his condolences. I could not have been more surprised, or more appreciative. My immediate boss in the political section was Robert Porter. He had wide experience in Southeast Asia, and widened our perspectives about our work. The political counselor was Phil Mayhew, who had even longer experience in the region. It was an even-keeled operation.

*Q: How about contact with the Thai. Were you frequently going over to MFA or the Thai military?*

SUMMERS: Not so often. I made regular trips there during the finalization of the War Reserve Stockpile Agreement. The notorious Bangkok traffic made that an ordeal. After many requests, I scheduled an appointment with the armed services committee of the Thai parliament. I learned what I should have expected, that their role hardly resembled the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, but this lesson came at a price: a television ambush. My host General Charan – he had been aide-de-camp to the notorious dictator and student-demonstrator-basher Thanom in the 1970s - ushered me into the klieg lights and before three cameras asked me about the prospects for military aid to Thailand. That was the year that we cut our defense aid by half. The Reagan

administration discovered it was spending too happily, so around the world military assistance budgets which had been going up for a few years and then had evened out, were about to plummet. That was a big secret because the cuts would even affect things that were already in the pipeline. My goal during the interview was to conceal this information. I chose to do this by praising the U.S.-Thai military relationship in every way possible, from King Mongkut's offer of elephants to Abraham Lincoln on down. When I got home that night I said to my wife "let's watch the news. I think I might be on TV." There I was, with the voiceover announcing that I had promised military assistance to Thailand would go up the next year. I was stricken. I arrived in the office early the next morning to explain what had happened. The political counselor Phil Mayhew puffed on his pipe and said "Forget it. They do that all the time. It will be forgotten by tomorrow." And it was.

The staff of the English language newspapers, The Nation and The Bangkok Post, were always approachable. One was a journalist just starting out, Kavi Chongkittavorn, who is now an editor at Bangkok's The Nation. Another, then writing for the Bangkok Post, was Surin Pitsuwan. He was a Muslim from southern Thailand who had been a Congressional fellow in the U.S., and a favorite participant for various conferences held by USIS (United States Information Service). He went on to become Thai foreign minister and was mentioned as a candidate for U.N. secretary general.

*Q: Even at this time though with the drawdown from Vietnam there are all kinds of interactions, pol-mil interactions. Wasn't there a military hospital or research facility?*

SUMMERS: Yes: AFRIMS. The Armed Forces Research Institute of Medical Science. They employed about fifty people in a multi-year study on malaria. I visited the facility, but they worked independently.

*Q: It was flowing along itself and there weren't things popping up. One of the things that going on at this time, it might have been outside of your purview again but the whole POW MIA and there are still Americans held in Indo China. Would you have gotten involved in that?*

SUMMERS: There were a few military people attached to the embassy in the office known as JPAC (Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command), and they conscientiously kept us in the loop about their activities. I have to say that to me it was disheartening. They followed endless leads, but as long as I was there they led nowhere. The lure of reward was strong in the countryside, and villagers sometimes would produce bones that were not from humans. The sighting of a Caucasian somewhere in the countryside would be reported in various forms, but always turned out to be based on second-hand information. I didn't work with them, but I followed their work.

*Q: We have covered a lot of stuff here. Let's talk about some of the way the embassy was run and the embassy dynamics. I think Ambassador Bill Brown was there when you first arrived. What was he like as a boss.*

SUMMERS: There are a couple of things my wife and I never forgot about him. He was energetic. He had a big job because the Bangkok embassy was one of the largest in the world. He strove for a personal connection with everyone but that was impossible because there were so many people. I am not sure he ever knew my name, but whenever he saw me he would exclaim “How are you my friend!” with such warmth that it didn’t matter. Embassy Bangkok was a frequent host to CODELs (congressional delegations.) Ambassador Brown knew how important they were, but he couldn’t let them eat up his schedule. So he developed the custom of greeting every delegation when their plane landed, and during the ride into the city briefing them with a microphone, giving enthusiastic and candid answers to whatever questions came up. Then he would go back to his day job. That contrasted with other countries where ambassadors fretted over receptions and briefings for CODELs, and something always went wrong. Well, Ambassador Brown gave them all his undivided attention for the hour trip in from the airport and that was it. It was an excellent management technique.

*Q: Actually he was a marine.*

SUMMERS: I think so too.

*Q: And didn’t he go out parachuting with the Thai army one time?*

SUMMERS: Yes. That was before I got there. I heard him talk about that.

*Q: Who was the DCM?*

SUMMERS: Joe Winder. He probably had the toughest job in the embassy, coordinating the daily operations of U.S. government entities spread all over town. There was something about Ambassador Brown that was like Teddy Roosevelt – hearty and enthusiastic. I can imagine that it was left to Joe Winder to handle the details and contradictions which ensued, but I never knew for sure. Strangely, after all these years, I remember one time Joe called me on the carpet for sending to the front office one of the routine requests to the foreign ministry for country clearance for a visitor from Washington. Wang Word Processing had just been invented, and our productivity in churning out diplomatic notes was set to leap ahead thanks to the feature of “global replace” which allowed us to change all the names in a document with one stroke. Then all that was left was to change the dates of the visit and possibly the reason for the visit and we would be done. One day we hit “replace” rather than “global replace” so that the diplomatic note requested clearance for Mr. Jones at the beginning, and Mr. Smith at the end. Joe called this error “sloppy” and “unacceptable.” Of course he was right, and I was chastened. I can’t tell you why I remember that incident while many such others at the hands of Chas Freeman have faded from memory.

*Q: Phil Mayhew is an old Thai hand. This is probably his second or third tour. A pretty relaxed guy or what?*

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SUMMERS: Yes. The term “unflappable” didn’t do him justice. He took everything in stride. Part of his talent was putting new crises in the context of other things that had happened before.

*Q: Now the time you were there coincides with the Kings fifth cycle birthday. Did that become a big thing for the embassy?*

SUMMERS: It was a big thing for the whole country. The embassy didn’t have a role in the ceremony, of course. Many countries presented a gift to Thailand in honor of the event. Japan built a cultural center and concert hall. The U.S. hosted a performance in that center by the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The gesture was appreciated, because His Majesty the King was a jazz aficionado. I heard that the king joined in with his clarinet during a private session with the band. Our family was on the riverbank as the golden royal barges glided by as part of the celebrations. It reminded me of when Pope John Paul II first arrived in Poland. Instead of the approving roar of a crowd at a sporting event, there was a hush, like what comes over the land during a solar eclipse. Early in the next year, a few weeks after the birthday events, the Thai authorities published data on the jump in AIDS cases. From a statistician’s point of view, it seemed clear that the data had been suppressed during the previous year so as not to spoil things for His Majesty. The Thai approach to the AIDS crisis switched to become both practical and inventive after that.

*Q: In any embassy there is Americans and their local employees often work very closely. Did you have an opportunity to work with the Foreign Service Nationals that worked with the political section?*

SUMMERS: Yes. We had a three person section. Two people had been there for years and years. Amonrat had the title of “khunying,” meaning that she was related to the royal family. Khun (Mister) Vongbhand Na Lamphoun was an earthy fellow with all kinds of unlikely contacts, in the Ministry of Interior, for example. I imagined that he was Bangkok’s version of a Chicago ward politician. Those two were the senior FSNs, and they seemed to work well together, even though they reminded me of Katharine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*. The third FSN was Khun Abhijat Buddhawongsa. He was a bright young graduate of Chulalongkorn University, with whom we seemed to have more in common. He didn’t have the personal connections of the other two. He spent his entire career with the U.S. government, at the embassy and then at the consulate in Chiang Mai, eventually earning an FSN of the year award. I had the feeling that all three FSNs could have had successful careers of another kind, but that they considered the U.S. a good force and a good partner.

*Q: Now you were saying Margaret McMillion was in language class. Her assignment was principal officer in Udorn. Did you get a chance to go up to Udorn and see her?*

SUMMERS: I went as part of a military trip one time. I guess there were some exercises in her district so I flew up with the military team and met her. She also came to Bangkok regularly to consult with the Embassy on issues important to her district.

*Udorn: What kind of group were you escorting?*

SUMMERS: I don't remember. I remember sitting with the visitors on big hassocks in a reception room. It struck me as a good compromise between chairs and the Thai custom of sitting on the floor.

*Q: Your tour there ends in 1988. Ambassador Brown leaves in August. He must have taken you with him.*

SUMMERS: He went to Israel. We went to Sweden. This was a dream come true for me. I had wanted to go to Sweden since my freshman year in college, when I heard Swedish spoken in an Ingmar Bergman movie and decided that I could maybe learn that language. This was one of those times when being a tandem couple worked well for Bea and me. She had her USIS assignment working with press matters, so we cast about for an assignment for me until I was invited to manage the data processing center in the Admin section. That job was created as a result of the 1985 Inman Report on Overseas Security, when it was determined that unclassified computer systems contained sensitive information that belonged under U.S. supervision.

*Q: But here you are again at FSI for professional training. Now is FSI...*

SUMMERS: Still in Rosslyn.

*Q: Still in Rosslyn. Does this movie ever end?*

SUMMERS: This time the language was computer language. As my wife pointed out, a computer won't talk back to you unless you use perfect grammar, and this was never my strong point. We had a great instructor, Mark Wheatley, and he managed to teach even me how to run a Wang minicomputer VS 100. I always remember a quote from Mark about why he turned to computers after a civil service job – in the Peace Corps, I think: "I grew weary of ambiguity." That became another phrase that returned to mind over the rest of my career.

*Q: Now this training, did it include writing programs or just understanding what the computer could do for you?*

SUMMERS: We did have a module on Cobol programming, but we never used it to write programs. The State Department wisely decided that uniformity could be preserved by developing all the software centrally. It's like a distant mirror, now. It took us more than a year to get a software patch that would produce an umlaut over the letter "o" for Swedish word processing. When I got to the office there were two young blonde women who had been doing the job by themselves until I was parachuted in to become their boss. My only defining skill was that I was an American citizen. We quickly worked out a deal where I did all the work that required being there after hours. I went in early in the morning and did the backups with big reel-to-reel tapes. I thought of it as a barnyard task,

like milking a cow. The computer was about the size of a cow, too. We always did the software upgrades on U.S. holidays so we wouldn't have to pay overtime for the Wang technician, and I was there for those. In return, my colleagues eagerly stepped up to troubleshoot problems requiring ingenuity when they occurred. Once I ran into a colleague from Bangkok in the halls of the State Department who told me he had heard an outlandish rumor that I was working with computers. I confirmed this and explained the situation. He looked at me and said, "Well I guess you could call that the blind leading the blonde." That became my mantra during my four years there.

*Q: Now Wang was the big thing with State at that time. State had the primary contract or the only contract?*

SUMMERS: At the time Wang was the only company that provided data terminals for handling classified materials. It had to do with the casing of the machines. So we were wed to Wang, as Wang began slipping behind in an intense race of technological advancement. Wang originally invented word processing as an office tool. Then it tried to move into computers but could not keep pace. By the time I got there in the early 90s, Word Perfect had superseded Wang Word Processing. Pretty soon Word for Windows superseded that. But the State Department took several years to make those changes because we were bound by contracts and the need for secure word processing in an office environment.

*Q: Now in addition to the computer stuff you had some free time and stuff and you traveled.*

SUMMERS: Yes. What would you like to know about that?

*Q: Well I have pictures from St. Petersburg. Do you want to explain these?*

SUMMERS: We were among the first wave of visitors to St. Petersburg in a long time. For the first couple of years we lived in Sweden, I rode my bicycle past a signpost marked "Leningrad" every day on my way to work. It pointed to the wharf where the ship *Ilyich* made a ferry run every few days. One day that sign was gone and the sign "St. Petersburg" was there instead. We rode to St. Petersburg on Columbus Day weekend of 1992. It snowed, which seemed appropriate during those dark days for Russia. The Russian currency had tanked and all the prices seemed trivial. We saw the major sights, but our main goal was to find warmth. We lingered in the café where Pushkin ate his last meal before the duel that killed him, then hired an entire *bateau mouche* with a \$20 bill for a tour, with heating, of the canals. Many of the Swedish tourists went to the Gostiny Dvor Department Store and bought accordions. These they played in the passageways on the return voyage. This gave our journey a Brechtian feel, as if something worse was about to befall Russia. I don't think it has yet.

My more existential brush with Russia came on June 6, 1991, in Stockholm. It was Swedish National Day, which then was not a public holiday. As a way to make amends for that, and also to revel in what was invariably a sparkling summer gem of a day, I



rented as usual a motorboat for our office picnic excursion to the Fjäderholmarna islands just outside Stockholm harbor. It was such a beautiful day that we lingered beyond the two-hour window I thought was safe for all three of us to be away from the office without attracting attention. I suggested that I drop the blondes off on the shore so they could hurry back to the office while I returned the boat to the rental place. We were on the way to executing that maneuver when from two directions we were approached by speeding zodiac boats crewed by men in black bearing machine guns. They also had a megaphone, which they used to command us to retreat. What we didn't know was that Mikhail Gorbachev was holding talks inside the villa where we planned our landing, and we had penetrated the security perimeter. Following this hubbub, I was granted permission to discharge my passengers some distance away, but in the confusion I struck a rock with the propeller, incapacitating the boat. This meant that I had to row back into harbor, a daunting task. I arrived back at my desk shortly before closing time, and as fate would have it, I met my boss, Administrative Counselor Andrea Nelson, in the hall. I feigned nonchalance, sweating, perhaps, from a tricky terminal installation somewhere in the building. "Tired of rowing?" she deadpanned. It was Gorbachev's last foreign visit before being deposed in a coup that August. I survived to take to sea on another Swedish national day.

*Q: You were also there at the beginning of the Iraq war.*

SUMMERS: Yes.

*Q: '89, what do you recall from that?*

SUMMERS: What a good questioner! You are making silk from straw. In the Iraq war I was in the rural hospital in the northern town of Mora on March 3, 1991, the day that Saddam Hussein accepted the terms for a ceasefire. The day before, I had slipped on the ice and broken my arm at a cross country ski race in which my wife participated. Now I faced an operation, and a country doctor's interrogation about the U.S. military activity in the Gulf War. I was halfway through a long discussion of the factors leading up to the U.S. action when we interrupted me. "We are a neutral country," he said. "We haven't been to war in a long time. But sometimes we are glad for countries like you to do what is necessary."

*Q: It was a very personal thing.*

SUMMERS: Yes, it didn't have to do with the embassy. After four years of personal encounters of all kinds, I left Sweden with respect for Swedish democracy and the way Swedes do things. People commonly treated one another fairly, or more than fairly. When our six-year old son Will joined a neighborhood hockey team, he had never put on a pair of skates before. After a few sessions a couple of the fathers came up to me and said "we notice your son isn't very good at hockey." I nodded and waited to learn my son had been cut from the team. "We wonder if it would be all right if you would come early to the practices so that we can teach him."

*Q: One of the things you mentioned earlier talking about social things was refugee issues in Sweden. Kurds, Greeks, Poles.*

SUMMERS: I think that when we lived in Stockholm, more than 10% of the population was foreign born. Their arrival dated back to refugees from the Greek Civil War of the 1940s. We also met refugees from Chile, Guatemala, Poland and Iraqi Kurds. The Swedish government had many programs to help them assimilate, but they didn't all work out as planned. One weekend we attended a program called "Swedish for immigrants." We learned useful information like vocabulary for securing repair of a video tape player. A planned activity for a little Swedish dance together hit a snag. The Kurdish women would have to touch hands with a man and they wouldn't do that. In another exercise we were asked what we thought of Sweden before we arrived and after we had lived here a while. A Kurdish woman said she thought Sweden was a nice country where there would be opportunity for everyone, but she learned after her arrival that Sweden is a place where men exploit women and a woman's virtue is not respected. In another exercise, the moderator asked "Is there anyone here who sometimes feels like walking down the street and singing?" Some people held up their hands, and the Swede said "Don't. In Sweden if you sing in public people will think you are drunk. Especially as an immigrant you might face arrest." Taken as a whole, I got the impression that the course to help immigrants integrate made them feel more isolated than before. But we learned useful lessons at that course. One dark night I as was biking home through the central streets of Stockholm, I came upon a young woman stopped on the bike path at one of the mini-traffic lights they have in Sweden for bicycles. She was singing. I didn't want to frighten her, so I shouted "hej!" as I approached. This caused her to snap to attention and whirl behind her with a pleading look in her eyes: "I am an *actress!* That's why I was singing" she said. I suppose that this is the flip side of the homogeneous society I so respect.

*Q: Now this was a four year assignment. Was that because of Bea's assignment?*

SUMMERS: We both had three-year assignments. We extended because we liked it so much.

*Q: Now in '93 you move on to your next assignment which interestingly enough doesn't require any language training. Let's go through the assignment process for 1993.*

SUMMERS: By this time it was time to pay the piper. I had always found assignments I was eager to do, and went skipping through my foreign service life with a smile. I didn't have an angle for my next assignment. We planned to go back to Washington, and towards the end of the bidding cycle, my career counselor telephoned to say "There is an opening for Dominican Republic desk officer and you should apply for it." I said, "Gee I don't know anything about the DR." He said, "That doesn't matter. You need to be a desk officer, and this is what is left." I spent two years in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, and I came to agree with my career counselor that it is useful to sit at a country desk to understand how the State Department from that perspective. In the Operations Center I watched how they worked at the top. But the process of bilateral relations was better

learned on the desk. Going up and down the chain of command was something I learned as well. My front office boss Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Donna Hrinak. She was a dynamic officer and went on to be ambassador to three Latin American countries. She had the skill of a juggler. Had I risen higher in the foreign service, I would have tried to imitate Chas Freeman and Donna Hrinak. During that period, the DR had a flawed election, in which the incumbent Joaquín Balaguer was declared the victor over José Peña Gómez. Balaguer was in his 90s, blind, and had been president off and on for more than 20 years. He had devoted himself to his country in a paternalistic way that was going out of style. IFES, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, was in the thick of it, and did a remarkable job of maintaining impartiality. Their work also lent weight to the argument that Balaguer's forces had rigged the election by tampering with computers. The way I remember it, Donna arrived in Santo Domingo just as supporters of Peña Gómez were mounting mass demonstrations. She met privately with the rivals, and was taken aback when Balaguer made an offer which Peña Gómez accepted: that he would govern for two more years and then step down in favor of Peña Gómez. Donna reminded them that this was unconstitutional, and in the end Balaguer kept his victory with the promise to step down after two years and hold new elections. This he did, but Peña Gómez lost after Balaguer's party made an alliance with a third party, its arch rival the Dominican Liberation Party.

The economy of the Dominican Republic had relied on cigars, tourism, and sugar for many years. More recently, textile manufacturing had become part of the picture. The Dominican Republic was nearer the U.S. market than similar facilities in Asia, and it soon developed a niche for producing high-end clothing where fast delivery was crucial. Labor was cheap and youthful, but labor unions were forming, and education was spreading. Expectations were rising. People who used to earn a dollar a day cutting cane in the fields could earn a dollar an hour making Liz Claiborne clothes. That was a factor why the election of 1994 was contested in a way that it hadn't been before in the Dominican Republic. IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) and other NGOs (non-governmental organizations) had a role to play, and the State Department also got into gear in the aftermath of the elections, providing "sitreps", situation reports, to the White House twice a day.

The Dominican Republic at that time was the only country in Latin America that did not recognize Cuba. I could see a reason for this from their point of view: normalization of relations between Cuba and the U.S. would translate into a new rival for the DR in the sugar, tourism, textile, and cigar industries. Maybe those economic considerations help explain why the DR was our last American ally for the UN resolution on the Cuban embargo.

Even as some NGOs protested conditions for Dominican workers, and such cases figured into our annual human rights report, there seemed to be some kind of fix that kept commerce moving. I attended a couple of USTR (United States Trade Representative) sessions on textile imports that seemed to be successfully concluded in record time. I have no doubt that employers in the new textile factories in the DR made difficult demands on the workers, but when I visited one of the factories during an orientation trip

to the DR, I could not fail to compare the conditions of fieldworkers slashing down forests of sugar cane along the route to the factory with the young people playing ping-pong and flirting during their breaks from stitching men's woolen suits.

*Q: Let's take a break for a second.*

*Q: Now DR shares an island with Haiti. Did you have any issues come out of that relationship?*

SUMMERS: Haiti was a big issue during those years. Beginning with coup of 1991 and the subsequent flood of Haitian refugees to Florida, Haiti stayed on the front burner. While the contested DR election of 1994 merited daily "sitreps" (situation reports) for several weeks in 1994, there were Haiti sitreps throughout most of that year. They chronicled feverish UN activity, an embargo, threat of U.S. military action, and finally the return of ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. While there was one Dominican DR officer there were four or five people dealing with Haiti. But we didn't have much working contact with each other, much like the countries themselves. The big issues of DR were the election, and human rights complaints on specific issues, such as the treatment of textile workers, but other than that, things went pretty smoothly. There were a million Dominicans in the U.S. at the time. There were a lot of consular cases, but that part went fairly smoothly, too. The issues involving Haiti were vastly more complicated. Drug interdiction and drug issues were important at the time, and there was a lot interdiction in the waters around the Dominican Republic. As CAR (Office of Caribbean Affairs) duty officers, we participated in conference telephone calls for authorization to board a ship suspected of carrying drugs.

*Let's talk about the administrative situation. How big was the office of ARA/CAR?*

SUMMERS: There were five desk officers, excluding Haiti affairs.

*Q: Who was the office director?*

SUMMERS: When I arrived the director was Lee Peters and when I left it was Bob Millspaugh. Both were old hands in Latin American affairs.

*Q: That's right. What would you say was your visibility in the front office? Were you guys enough of a problem?*

SUMMERS: Haiti was the issue which commanded White House attention and therefore front office attention. I am going to give credit to DAS Donna Hrinak for keeping the rest of us on the map. She met with us weekly, and in addition to receiving our input, let us know what else was happening in the bureau.

*Q: Now you have been your career has developed such that you have been mainly in embassies. What would you say you learned from being a desk officer?*

SUMMERS: One thing was how the political players in Washington affect foreign policy. In the case of that Dominican election, I think it was an important priority of the White House to establish democratic practice across the board. The Dominican Republic was one of the last countries in the hemisphere under the old patriarchal system, and for that reason it became important to press for a free and fair election there. Looking next door to the Office of Cuban Affairs, I got a good picture of congressional clout, not only in terms of policy, but even personnel. Once the Cuban Lobby decided it didn't see eye to eye with an official, Morton Halperin at the National Security Council for example, his days were numbered. When anyone would ask about my job on a desk in those days, I'd describe it as "horse holder." Most of the time, you are the one holding the horse. You know both of the jockeys well – your ambassador in the foreign capital and the ambassador to Washington, and you know the horse – the issues of the bilateral relationship. It's your job to have everything ready when an issue comes to the fore, when it's time for a race. My colleague who was a desk officer at the same time said he felt like an air traffic controller. At any given moment, some issues were on their way in and others, often in the form of paperwork for use by the higher-ups, were on their way out. If all of this went smoothly, and no one experienced a delay, or worse, a crash, his mission would be accomplished.

*Q: Because yeah the desk job does give an interesting view on how the sausage was made, how policy is made. But according to my notes here you are looking towards another overseas assignment. Following the David Summers school of current happiness it starts off with another language. How did you end up with this assignment in the summer of 1995?*

SUMMERS: I always wanted to go to Hungary. When I saw it on the open assignments list I asked my wife if she could find one too and she did, so that helped my cause even though I wasn't the first choice for the job. I got that job late in the assignment cycle thanks to a series of unrelated developments. I think I eventually got the job because I was so focused on it, rather like those members of Congress whose foreign policy focus is confined to a single issue.

*Q: Now this assignment comes with language training. You have done Thai, Chinese, tonal Asian languages, you have done Polish. How does Hungarian stack up?*

SUMMERS: I consider Hungarian the hardest language I studied. There is more to be mastered in Chinese, it is true, but the road to an adequate working knowledge of Chinese is not so long as it is for Hungarian.

*Q: How were your teachers? Who were your colleagues?*

SUMMERS: That year there was a spat over funding between the Foreign Service Institute, and USIA, the United States Information Agency. USIA took its three students, including my wife, to a different language school, leaving me alone in class with a pair of teachers who were married, Attila and Ilona Lantos. That sounds like a good way to learn a language, but I don't think it was ideal. The teachers got tired of me, and I never got a

break in the classroom. I couldn't sit in the class and listen to someone else. I felt like the poor little rich kid in a Depression-era movie. But I had dedicated teachers as always at FSI. They worked hard to teach me Hungarian.

*Q: What did you test out at?*

SUMMERS: I got a 3/3.

*Q: When you get to Hungary in the late summer of '96, August I think, how had the Washington desk briefed you for this job? Before you went in what were some of your expectations of what some of the issues were going to be?*

SUMMERS: The biggest issue was Hungary's accession to NATO. Hungary was one of the early candidates for NATO membership, along with the Czech Republic and Poland. It was the main focus for the embassy. There was no JUSMAG, so the political section had a bigger job to do. Negotiation of a status of forces agreement (SOFA), and a defense omnibus agreement turned out to be a hard slog. The long list of issues to be agreed upon inevitably spawned a follow-on list. Some of the main categories were taxation, legal recourse, licensing and permits, passports and visas, imports, cross-sharing, firearms, flight clearance, and benefits and exemptions for U.S. contractors. The negotiations came just at the time the government of Hungary announced force reductions for budgetary reasons, so that was an additional tension. The issues weren't deal breakers, but they posed practical obstacles to reach the point where Hungary would join NATO. It was an effort of the entire embassy. USIS played a big role in the run-up to the Hungarian referendum on NATO membership. They commissioned polls and organized public information programs around the country.

*Q: When you got there, as you said well, the embassy is not new, the embassy has been there for some time. What kind of a building was it? We are always curious about facilities.*

SUMMERS: It was an old building on Szabadság tér (Freedom Square), a short walk from the Hungarian parliament. Out in the square was a statue of the American general Harry Bandholtz, riding crop in hand. In the aftermath of World War I, Bandholtz blocked Romanian troops from looting the National Museum of Hungary. The statue was erected by grateful Hungarians. It disappeared during the Soviet period and reappeared after 1989. Our embassy was an old Beaux Arts building right next door to the Hungarian National Bank. My office had windows on a courtyard that we shared with an apartment block associated with the bank. I was told that Cardinal Mindszenty took his exercise there during the fifteen years he lived in asylum in the embassy following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. During my years that drama was replaced by a teenage boy who blew forbidden cigarette smoke out his bedroom window while his mother busied herself in the kitchen, all visible as I sat at my desk. Needless to say, the old building posed challenges for the State Department's stricter security regulations. It was also inadequate to serve the whole embassy population. Some offices, including USIS and AID, were housed in rented space nearby.

*Q: How many people were working in the political section?*

SUMMERS: About six. We had a couple of officers working on internal affairs and a couple working external, plus an intern most of the time, and from time to time, a junior officer on a rotational tour.

*Q: What was the front office like?*

SUMMERS: The ambassador was Donald Blinken. He was a New York investment banker and contributor to the Democratic Party. His wife was born Hungarian, and for sure that propelled his interest in going to Hungary. She was quite involved. Her name was Vera and she formed a women's group called Primavera. The members were movers and shakers who were interested in the new Hungary. I'd say if you opened up the newspaper you were more likely to read about her than about him. He was fine to work for and eager to promote the democratic ideals and the rule of law that were all part of that post '89 peace dividend activity.

*Q: Who was your DCM?*

SUMMERS: Jim Gadsden. He was a career officer who had been a junior officer in Hungary so he knew a lot about the country. He also was a gifted administrator. He punctiliously kept to a schedule of a weekly meeting with section chiefs. Almost every issue I wanted to raise would wait a week, and I knew that I could count on his undivided attention, so I didn't interrupt him unnecessarily. Likewise, he waited until our weekly meeting to offer counsel to me on questions that had come to his attention. I remember his farewell remarks in the embassy lunchroom. It was a workaday valedictory, but it hit me then how much I would miss him. Gadsden and Blinken made a good team, one with experience and one who just sailed in at the top of his game.

*Q: As previously can you give us a description of some of your Hungarian contacts proceeding to various issues you would be seeing a lot.*

SUMMERS: As a function of Hungary's new parliamentary system, we had unusual access to Hungarian political parties and members of parliament, because they wanted to get to know us. Soon after I arrived, a young political officer, Kurt Volker, hosted an evening with the leadership of FIDESZ, the Alliance of Young Democrats. Within two years they were leading the government. The ambassador was regularly invited to dinner with Jozsef Torgyan, head of the historically important Independent Smallholder's Party. Our senior FSN, Tamas Zemplen, had developed close contacts with the parliamentary parties just as they were forming in 1989, and through him we had access to the leaders of the Alliance of Free Democrats. The USIS (United States Information Service)-administered International Visitor Program (IVP) made a spectacular impact in those years, opening the horizons for the new generation of leaders whose educational formation was mostly under the Soviet system. I remember my astonishment when a young parliamentarian from a rural Eastern district, returned from the United States to tell

me that before he left he really didn't know what he was doing in parliament, but his IVP experience gave him a sense of purpose. Hungary was eager to integrate with western institutions during this period, so our contacts, facilitated through visitors from the U.S., were probably wider than usual. Sometimes there was a culture clash, as when the delegation of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA) met with Hungarian constitutional lawyers whose mission was to re-cast the Hungarian legal system without imposing new injustices. The U.S. Helsinki Commission took an active interest in the welfare of the Roma minority in Hungary, and boosted the efforts of Roma organizations in Hungary. Because of the interest of special ambassador Stuart Eizenstadt in the issue of restitution for Hungarian Holocaust survivors, we had regular contact with the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, MAZSIHISZ.

*Q: Now with the NATO issue being so large I assume you worked closely with the military attaché.*

SUMMERS: Yes. There was already an air force and an army attaché. The Defense Security Assistance Agency (DSAA) also assigned an officer permanently to the embassy. In addition, experts in the operational aspects of NATO membership came from EUCOM, the United States European Command, sometimes for long periods. Among the organizations which sent personnel to help were the Army Audit Agency (AAA), and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). A separate project was establishment of the Airspace Sovereignty Operations Center (ASOC) in Veszprem, which integrated Hungary's airspace with NATO's. We shared with the Hungarian government the goal of NATO accession, but the trail to that had to be blazed through a dense forest.

*Q: Now were we talking about stationing troops in Hungary?*

SUMMERS: No, we were not, but the framework had to be established nonetheless. In practical terms, we were talking about upgrading airfields so that NATO could access when there was a need. It proved difficult to find a suitable candidate. Taszár in southeastern Hungary, was finally chosen.

*Q: Now at this time in Serbia did the Serbian Kosovo thing get started?*

SUMMERS: Yes. The Taszár airbase was used to launch strikes in Serbia in May, 1999, and the Budapest airport was used to bed down tanker aircraft. Two months earlier, we held a dinner to celebrate Hungary's accession to NATO. Representative Tom Lantos was there for that, and within a month we were at war. It wasn't a popular war in Hungary. Those political parties we had been getting to know expressed concern about the welfare of ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina, the northern province that had been part of Hungary before World War I. Some worried that Serbia would take action against the Hungarian minority, and there were reports of conscription of ethnic Hungarians to fight in Kosovo. Thanks to the way the war was fought, as an air war, there was not a crisis in Vojvodina.



*Q: I would assume that six years after the fall of the Russian suzerainty there is all kinds of ways that countries interact and change. I was noticing the FBI helped establish a law enforcement academy.*

SUMMERS: Right. The International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA), opened in 1995, was the most visible institution formed to strengthen the rule of law in the region. The FBI conducted training for law enforcement officials from around the region that proved immediately useful. Cross-border crime was flourishing in those years, often involving Ukraine. When I first got to Hungary I had never known anyone who had been the victim of car theft. By the time I had been there a year I knew ten people whose car had been stolen. Off they went to the Ukraine, so it was said. ILEA worked up training sessions that combined law enforcement elements that typically didn't work together – police, investigators, and public prosecutors, and they did this with representatives from different countries who also had never worked together.

There was another piece of law enforcement which centered on thwarting the theft of nuclear materials from the former Soviet Union and the Ukraine. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana watched over this issue, and made an annual visit to the countries involved. What a visionary and what a hard working guy! ILEA was our institutional way of establishing the links to deal with everyday crime as well as the specter of nuclear disaster.

*Q: And then kind of a new relationship in the United States with so much Congressional interest and visits.*

SUMMERS: There was interest, and there were visits. Soon after the Kosovo War escalated into NATO bombings in late March, 1999, a stream of congressional delegations (CODELs) sprang up. It was practically a shuttle service that would bring CODELs over on a Friday night. On Saturday the CODEL would fly to the NATO air base in Tuzla, Bosnia, pose with constituent soldiers for photographs, return to Budapest in time for dinner on Saturday night, and Sunday return to Washington. I was often the “control officer,” or the designated greeter, for the visit. I practiced the method I learned from Ambassador Brown in Thailand, which was to meet the CODEL at the airport and give a briefing during the ride into town. After one visitor asked whether U.S. dollars were welcome in Budapest shops, I added a history lesson based on the figures which appeared on Hungarian bank notes.

*Q: How was Hungary a place to live with family and all that.*

SUMMERS: It was a wonderful place to live. Budapest is one of the most beautiful capitals of Europe and it was getting better every year despite the fact that your car might be stolen. There was a new American school that was growing fast. There was a lot of business in those years. Hungary had that advantage the Dominican Republic had of being close to a big market. So things that could be built in Hungary could be shipped to the Western European market quickly. For instance GM and Ford both opened factories there for automobiles and components. General Electric was there and IBM was there. It

was an optimistic time. Our kids, by this time are in grade school and middle school and there were sports teams for them, and a scout troop, sailing camp and Outward Bound in the summer. It was a good place.

*Q: It sounds like there would be an American Chamber of Commerce.*

SUMMERS: There was, with weekly meetings and it was growing quickly.

*Q: Was that more with the econ guys or did you also participate?*

SUMMERS: Funny you should mention that. An outgoing USIS officer recommended I join because there was so much to learn there, but I never did. I left it to the economic officers of the embassy.

*Q: You got a new DCM about a year into your tour, Lynn Lambert.*

SUMMERS: Yes. She stayed only a few months. More to the point we got a new ambassador. His name was Peter Tufo. He had a similar profile to that of Ambassador Blinken – a Democratic Party supporter from New York City. The work atmosphere changed a great deal. I could talk for an hour about Peter Tufo. I wonder how to this day I still remember trivial episodes in detail, and think it must be something akin to the powers of recall of the character Henry Fleming in the Red Badge of Courage. The amazing thing about that period was that embassy morale didn't suffer. I heard one colleague say that no single person had ever united an embassy more, basically in order to save ourselves and Peter Tufo from himself in the conduct of foreign policy. He was keen to be a public personality, but his shotgun approach didn't always draw good publicity. Probably you could still find a record of some notorious episodes on a satiric website initially dedicated to him called pesticide.hu. One episode that never saw the light of day began in April, 1999 after he read a Wall Street Journal op-ed piece in which General William Odom advocated a solution to the Kosovo war in the form of a ground invasion from the flat terrain of Hungary through Northern Serbia. Apparently it worked for Hitler. Without instructions from Washington, Ambassador Tufo paid a one-on-one call to the Hungarian Foreign Minister to discuss the idea. I rode along to the foreign ministry, but the ambassador told me I wouldn't be needed for the meeting, and I was left to waiting in an ante room. I guess that's where the Red Badge of Courage stays in my thoughts: I should have been there to carry the flag. Nothing tragic came of it, thanks to the scrambling which followed with all embassy hands on deck.

*Q: Sounds like he wasn't particularly interested in the advice and the experience of the people in the embassy. Was it clear that he was discounting everybody?*

SUMMERS: He didn't really discount people because he didn't have well-formed ideas of his own to counter with. If you were involved with something that held his interest, then you had his full attention. For a while there was a project dubbed the "Ambassador's Initiative for Eastern Hungary." The premise was that economic conditions in the less-developed Eastern half of the Hungary could be improved under the ambassador's

leadership encouraging foreign investment there. Quite a few embassy officers, including from the Economic and Commercial Sections, were involved in arranging visits for the ambassador to the area, but the content was thin. Then there was “the Ambassador’s Initiative against International Organized Crime,” formerly the “Bilateral Agreement to Cooperate against Organized International Crime,” associated with a visit by FBI director Louis Freeh. That one got off to a rocky start when the ambassador said – who knows why – that Hungarian government corruption was a “scourge.” Another project the ambassador became involved with was an “American salute” to Hungary for the millennium of Hungary’s establishment as a state. Private funds were raised for a concert in the Matyas church in the castle district, a banquet at the military museum, then another dinner. Planning was well underway when the ambassador added a new detail: between the first meal and the second he would be married by the mayor of Budapest to a young television actress he had met back in New York. Some senior Hungarian officials felt slighted when they learned that the salute to Hungary had morphed into a wedding banquet. It was like a reworking of a tale from Boccaccio.

*Q: The staff would recognize they were being distracted and used in ways.*

SUMMERS: Oh yes. Everyone had a personal collection of anecdotes.

*Q: did the Hungarians react to any of this, because I have interviewed a guy who said the local government came to the embassy and said this political appointee is just beyond the pale. You can remove him or we will PNG him because we are tired.*

SUMMERS: That must have been after my time.

*Q: It was a totally different circumstance.*

SUMMERS: Oh a different ambassador.

*Q: A different ambassador.*

SUMMERS: I don’t think the situation ever reached that level. In a way that was the problem. Everyone worked hard to make things turn out okay. We all were enablers, and there was never an intervention, at least not a collective one. Well, there was one intervention. On a visit to the Ford factory, the ambassador suggested it would be nice if he were given a car. The admin counselor organized a posse to remonstrate, but the ambassador denied he had ever suggested such a thing. On a positive note, the experience gave me deeper respect for most of the presidential envoys, both political and career, I worked with over the years.

*Q: There is an interesting point here that you raised. The national day the Fourth of July was always an opportunity for the embassy and certainly the political section to collect up its contacts and have a nice social occasion and what not. Was that your experience in Hungary too in the three years that you were there?*

SUMMERS: Yes, that was always the case. The weather in July was delightful, and so were the receptions. It might have rained, but it didn't. Ambassador Tufo moved the venue from his residence, which had a beautiful garden, to the Marine house, which had a fabulous garden with a postcard view across the Danube to the Parliament building and Pest. Guests loved that invitation because it enabled them to see inside a place which played an important role in the 1848 revolution. The new venue inspired more people to ask "Why isn't this place a museum for Hungarians?" Perhaps the law of unintended consequences kicked in, because the call for return of the property to the Hungarian government grew more intense in the years that followed. I understand that a swap was eventually worked out which enabled the embassy to expand to the national bank building next door.

*Q: Is there anything we need to cover about Hungarian attitudes toward the Kosovo Serbia situation?*

SUMMERS: It bears repeating that the Hungarians were reluctant. First, they worried about the effect of military action on their ethnic kin in the Yugoslav province of Vojvodina. Second, as a nation, they were more averse than average to collective military action. Hungary was on the wrong side of World War I and II, and life under the Warsaw Pact was no picnic, either. We had observed this in the polling before the referendum on Hungarian membership in NATO in 1997. Many people were unenthusiastic about joining another military alliance, and it appeared from the polling numbers that they would stay away from the voting altogether, invalidating the result. About half the registered voters did stay away, but those who voted approved NATO membership by 85 percent, yielding a valid referendum result. They did their duty at the polls as they did as a NATO ally in the Kosovo war.

That's it in a nutshell, but the entire process was more nuanced. I remember visitors from the department in the fall of 1998 who spoke with Hungarians as if military action in Kosovo were a foregone conclusion, based on the looming humanitarian crisis posed by displaced persons there. They were looking at the situation through the lens of the recent Bosnian crisis, while their Hungarian counterparts looked at Kosovo and saw instead a humanitarian crisis that hadn't happened yet – in Vojvodina, where the Hungarian minority would play the role played by the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Since Tito's time, the fortunes of the two autonomous regions had waxed and waned in tandem, and there were plenty of stories about how Vojvodina Hungarians were coming under pressure from all sides. I remember one day when my Hungarian teacher came to class quite shaken. She had met a woman with two children at the bus stop. The mother was from Vojvodina, and described the ill-treatment her family received in Croatia when they tried to take a vacation there with FRY (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) passports. She described her family's plan to reach Canada, "as far away as possible" from the conflict that she said would plague the region for the next 100 years. Not everyone was so reluctant. When the crisis came to a head in early 1999, right-wing political groups in Hungary voiced hope that a war with Serbia might pose a chance reclaim part of Vojvodina back into Hungary, or at least an autonomous state for Hungarians. They also suggested that the FRY deserved to be punished because it was "still communist."

It's strange how after history is written it seems inevitable. Differing opinions about the Kosovo war also swirled in the U.S. I was pleased when that was demonstrated by a CODEL led by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. Hungarian foreign minister Janos Martonyi held a luncheon at which the party vigorously debated military intervention. Senator George Voinovich of Ohio, himself of Slovenian origin, said military action "disregards Serbian history." Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey emphasized the humanitarian nature of the action and the need to avoid another Holocaust.

*Q: Actually Hungary was your last assignment in the foreign service. You retired right after that.*

SUMMERS: That is right.

*Q: What have you been doing to keep yourself busy.*

SUMMERS: For a few years I worked WAE to keep myself busy. I finally got to go to Romania for an assignment after having bid on it half a dozen times. I got to speak Romanian at work.

*Q: Quickly tell us what a WAE is.*

SUMMERS: WAE stands for "While Actually Employed." It gives foreign service officers who have recently retired a chance to return to work part-time, and be paid for the hours they are "actually employed" without other benefits. You could think of it as bureaucratic outsourcing, and it is especially useful in consular work where there is seasonal demand for visa issuance. In my case, I worked in offices where I had some kind of previous experience. I was Hungary desk officer for a while, and then I was Romania desk officer. I worked at the political section of the embassies in Budapest and Bucharest. I went to Lithuania as part of a surge, one could call it, a bureaucratic surge to prepare for the November 2002 trip by George Bush that marked the expansion of NATO to Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. I also spent a short time in Oslo during a busy period when Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and an Afghan donors' conference was held. I also did a stint as the desk officer for the Baltic countries. These were short assignments, never more than five months long.

*Q: Well that is excellent. I appreciate the time you offered us on this.*

SUMMERS: Well thank you, it has been a lot of fun going down memory lane.

*Q: Well I think you will find the fun part when we give you the transcript.*

*End of interview*