

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

**WILLIAM BELTON**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Mr. Belton could you tell me a bit about your background; when and where you were born and something about your education.*

BELTON: I was born in Portland, Oregon, on the 22nd of May, 1914. I was raised in Portland and lived there until I graduated from high school when, I went off to Stanford University.

*Q: What was your family doing?*

BELTON: My dad was a salesman for a confectioner supply company. My mother was what was known as a housewife. I was raised in a typical middle class, middle income family; although during the depression days, when I was just graduated from high school and went to college, I am not sure just what middle income was. Some years later I found that my education one year had cost more than my dad had earned.

*Q: What attracted you to Stanford and what were you taking there?*

BELTON: I went to Stanford primarily because my father had been raised in California. He had been a college dropout and was determined that his son was going to get the best education possible, having learned that he hadn't done as well as he should have himself. So he had in mind my going to Stanford all along. That was really what sent me, because I didn't have a broad enough vision at that stage of life to realize that was what I ought to be wanting to do.

*Q: What was your major at Stanford?*

BELTON: Well, I went to Stanford because my father wanted me to go. I had no clear idea of what I was aiming for. I went without an objective other than just to get a broad, general, liberal education. Because I didn't have any clear cut goals, I didn't do well in my first year. At the end of that year I was asked to see if I couldn't go somewhere else. I transferred to the University of Oregon. That first year's experience shook me up quite a lot. The result was that during my sophomore year I made the honor roll at the University of Oregon and returned to Stanford in my third year. By that time it was necessary to begin to concentrate on something, so I decided on political science. At that time I had ideas about the Foreign Service, although they weren't well formed or very clear.

*Q: Did you run into any foreign service people?*

BELTON: No, I never did; it was just the lure of the open road that got me interested in the Foreign Service. In those days, at Stanford, there was a professor by the name of Graham Stuart who specialized in foreign service...

*Q: Oh yes. His book is the text; I used it at Boston University in about 1955; his book "American Diplomatic and Consular Practice."*

BELTON: I took his courses; I still didn't have a very clear notion of what I wanted, so I took a wide range of general courses and ended up with a degree in 1935 in Political Science.

*Q: Then what did you do?*

BELTON: Toward the end of my college career I came to the conclusion I didn't know enough to earn my living. I had always had a great interest in the outdoors, so I decided I would try forestry. I went up to what is now Oregon State University (in those days it was Oregon Agricultural College), which had an excellent forestry course, and made arrangements to go into forestry the following autumn. OAC arranged a summer job for me in the Forest Service, but Congress did not appropriate the funds they expected so the job collapsed just two weeks before I graduated from Stanford. I worried that if this job collapsed so suddenly, another might also collapse at the end of the couple of years I was going to spend getting a forestry degree. This cast a shadow over my interest in forestry, so I began to reconsider my options.

I worked that summer at Stanford University on a construction job and during that time decided I would go abroad and see something of Latin America. I had always wanted to do it, it had been kind of an ambition of mine without any clear concept of why or what; I just wanted to see what was there. I suspect I was motivated by the fact that my paternal grandfather had gone to Mazatlan for a while after the Civil War and that my Dad, when he was young, had worked briefly on a ship running between California and Panama. Their experiences had always seemed terrifically adventurous to me, even though I don't recall hearing anything very special about them. So I planned to leave for Mexico as soon as I could. My folks didn't want me to go alone and I didn't particularly want to either, so I went back to Portland and found a friend, Bob Stevens, who was willing to go with me. The trouble was that he didn't have any money. I didn't have much myself, but he didn't have any, so he had to raise some. The only way he could find was to sell blood to a hospital blood bank. He couldn't do this more than once a month so it took a little while for him to get his money together. Thus we didn't leave until December, 1935.

For \$25.00 I bought a 1923 Overland touring car in which we started out from Portland, going through Tucson and then heading down the west coast of Mexico. That was the first time I had ever been abroad except for trips to Vancouver Island, British Columbia. My first contact with the Foreign Service was at the Consulate in Mazatlan, where a Vice Consul (whose name, if I recall correctly, was Roswell Beverstock) was cordial. He helped me look for some trace of my grandfather's name in the Consulate's old files and invited us to his home on New Year's Eve. The Overland had done its duty by the time we reached Tepic, so we continued from there by train, second class. After we reached Mexico City I decided I wanted to continue south and needed a passport, so applied at the Embassy. Everything was done by mail in those days, so there was a long delay, during which Bob returned to the United States. I then continued on by train and boat, down through Central America and into South America, arriving in Quito, Ecuador, in mid-April of 1936. By a series of coincidences I soon met a young American living there, Juan Gorrell, who later also became a Foreign Service Officer. He persuaded me to stay in Quito by telling me of job possibilities there, and through him I learned of a possible opening as a temporary clerk in the legation.

*Q: In Quito--that time was before Roosevelt had raised all the legations in Latin America to...*

BELTON: That's right.

*Q: He did that a couple of years later, didn't he?*

BELTON: I have forgotten exactly when it was. I was just thinking, in preparation for talking today, that the title of the head man at a Legation was a wonderful title. It is too bad it doesn't still exist--I guess maybe it exists but you never hear it. Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. That was a wonderful title.

*Q: Who was that at the time, do you remember?*

BELTON: The man in Ecuador at that time was Antonio Gonzalez, a political appointee of the worst order. His wife had been active in politics in New York City. Her husband had been appointed as a result and he was a terrible representative. One of the unfortunate things was that in spite of his name he didn't speak any Spanish, and never learned to speak any Spanish while living in Ecuador. I went around to him when I originally applied for the job in the legation that I eventually got, but by the time I started work he had gone home on leave so I worked under Eddie Sparks, who was the chargé d'affaires. This was in the days when embassies, or legations in this case, were really major institutions. The staff at that time, consisted of Eddie Sparks as the only officer, two American clerks, and three or four local employees who were janitors or messengers. That was the full staff of our outfit in Quito.

It might be appropriate to mention here something illustrative of Department personnel policies of those times. One of the American clerks was Harry Reed, who had been born in Ecuador of American parents and was married to an Ecuadorian lady of a distinguished and socially prominent family. By virtue of several years of service, he was eligible to become a Foreign Service Officer by passing the oral examinations, without previously taking the written exam. He had been anxious to go to Washington for this purpose, at his own expense, but the Department would not give him leave to do so until a replacement was available. Sending out a replacement was out of the question in those days, so he heartily welcomed my appearance on the horizon as a solution to his problem. It took some time for my application to be approved. but I eventually started work in October, 1936. I was hopeful that if Harry passed the examinations I would be taken on permanently as his replacement. The prospects for this seemed good, for Harry was a well-educated Dartmouth graduate, mature and sophisticated. However, after he reached Washington, but before the date set for his examination, the Department passed a regulation, effectively immediately, prohibiting persons married to foreign citizens from taking the exams. That ended Harry's hopes for the time being. The new regulation was not highly thought of in Quito, for Eddie Sparks, the Chargé, was married to a Belgian lady. Her personal charm and her ability as a hostess were legendary. Eddie took the regulation almost as a personal insult, while all of Harry Reed's wide circle of friends and relations were indignant at the way he had been treated. The regulation was eventually rescinded and Harry became a Foreign Service Officer, as did Bill Snidow, the other American clerk at the time.

*Q: What were you doing? What was the legation doing at that time?*

BELTON: It was conducting normal relations with the Ecuadorian government; but we didn't have any active programs in those days. No AID programs, no anything else. It was just a question of protecting American interests, and keeping Washington informed of political developments in Ecuador. I recall an incident relating to a fishing vessel, that had been taken for some reason or other; I don't think they had yet declared the two hundred mile limit in that part of the world. That became a big issue subsequently. Since the other American clerk, Bill Snidow, was a stenographer, he was closer to the substantive work of the Embassy than I was. My duties were more administrative. I do

recall a brief revolutionary attempt by a military garrison to overthrow the President, Federico Paez, who was classified as a "dictator", but was certainly a very benign one. When the attempt was quelled, Eddie went to call on Paez and took me with him, for reasons I don't now recall. I do remember once before then accompanying Eddie, his wife Andrée, and others, including another lady, while we walked along a narrow sidewalk in the center of Quito one evening. A lone man coming in the opposite direction stepped into the street to let our group stay on the sidewalk. As we passed salutations were exchanged. After we were out of earshot, Eddie informed me that was the "dictator".

*Q: Did we have a post in Guayaquil at that time?*

BELTON: Yes, we had a Consulate General in Guayaquil. I never saw that office, nor the Consul General, but I recall that he was of European birth and that his English was sometimes interesting. He reported to the Legation on one occasion that his pocket had been picketed.

*Q: What type of thing were you doing as a clerk?*

BELTON: My work involved typing dispatches, coding and decoding cables, ordering rubber bands and paper clips from the Department of State; all the simple housekeeping tasks, keeping the accounts; a wide range of things. It was a general clerk job and involved almost everything you could think of.

*Q: I assume then that relations between Ecuador and the United States were on an even keel and there wasn't much going on.*

BELTON: There wasn't anything extraordinary going on. Ecuador, in those days, was a very quiet, simple sort of a country. They had political situations of their own, but we didn't worry too much about it.

*Q: It was the prime source of Panama hats, wasn't it?*

BELTON: Yes.

*Q: Which at that time were very popular in the United States.*

BELTON: Yes, they came from a place called Jipijapa.

*Q: How long did you stay there?*

BELTON: I stayed in Ecuador for exactly a year, but I was only employed for four months. Harry was undecided about his future for a while, but then decided to return to his Legation job, so I went on my way, heading for the United States via Bogotá. Our Minister to Colombia was William Dawson, who had previously been Minister to Ecuador, so Eddie Sparks gave me a letter to him. I went around and presented it when I

arrived in Bogotá. Dawson asked me what I had been doing, and I told him; he called together three or four other young fellows who worked in the legation and suggested that they take me out to lunch, which they did. When during luncheon they learned I had been a temporary clerk in Quito, they looked at each other and said, "By golly, one of our clerks is going on leave and we don't have a replacement. Would you be interested in a job on a temporary basis here?" I said, "Yes, I would." We went back to the Legation and--this is an interesting illustration, I think, of the difference in attitudes about things in those days and these days. One of the young officers at lunch was Bob Woodward.

*Q: Oh yes, I interviewed him. Later Ambassador to Spain and several other countries.*

BELTON: Bob went up and spoke to William Dawson and said, "We have this young fellow down here who might be a suitable clerk on a temporary basis." Dawson said for me to come so he could talk to me. The job was as his secretary, but he didn't dictate, he always typed out his drafts, so my lack of stenography didn't matter. They gave me a typing test to see if I could satisfactorily type his dispatches and I passed that all right. Dawson then said, "I'll send a dispatch to the Department and ask for permission to hire you." I said, "I appreciate your offer very much but I am sorry I don't have enough money to wait around for an uncertain job, because it will be at least three weeks for this to go out by mail and come back. If you could send a telegram I would be interested." "Oh," he said, "I am awfully sorry but I wouldn't be justified in sending a telegram on a matter like this." So I said, "Thank you very much, I'd like the job, but can't afford to wait several weeks and then maybe find it hasn't been authorized." I went down the stairs to find Bob Woodward waiting at the bottom to see what had happened. I told him. He said, "Well, wait a minute." He went up the stairs--it was a circular staircase---I can still see it---, talked to Dawson for a few minutes, came back down and said, "It's all right, he'll send a telegram."

*Q: A telegram was a big deal in those days.*

BELTON: A telegram came back in a few days authorizing my temporary employment as a translator (for budgetary reasons) for one month effective June 1 and as a clerk beginning July 1. This was late April. I was delighted to wait as long as I knew I had a job assured. So I started work on the 1st of June, 1937, and stayed from then on in the Foreign Service for my full career.

*Q: Did this turn into a permanent assignment while you were there?*

BELTON: Yes, it did become permanent. One of the other clerks left a couple of months later, so I was appointed to his slot. By that time I knew that I wanted to continue in the Foreign Service. I wanted to do it right, so I signed up to take the written examination, which, as a permanent clerk, I was entitled to do at the post. It was given to me in September of that year; Bob Woodward administered it. As I was the only person taking the examination, they put me in a room that was in effect a glass cage, with windows all around; Bob came in and searched all the desks, the drawers and everything, to be sure I

didn't have any cribs in there. Every half hour or so he would come and patrol outside the windows to see that everything was all right. In those days the written examination was a three day operation.

*Q: When I took it in 1953 it was three and a half days, because of a half day for the language. Then it changed about 1956, I think.*

BELTON: I waited around with considerable anxiety and finally got the results of the examination. In those days you had to have a passing grade of 70 to be eligible for the oral. I got 71 and was quite discouraged by that. You had to come out with an average grade of 80, which meant I had to get a 90 in the oral. I didn't have any anticipation of being able to do that. I thought it wasn't really worth my while even worrying about the oral and incurring the expense of going to Washington to take it. Others told me I shouldn't be so pessimistic. My home was in Oregon and Washington seemed a long way; I had never even been to the eastern United States. But when the time came I got myself organized and went to Washington to sit for the orals. I subsequently realized that the oral examination was an informal sort of thing as far as the grading was concerned. They decided whether they wanted you or didn't want you and gave you whatever grade you needed in order to pass you.

*Q: What sort of things were they asking you? Do you remember?*

BELTON: Yes, I do remember. It was a very potent examining board. I saw an article recently in the Foreign Service Journal about the examination procedure, saying they ought to have higher level people on the examining board. It made me recall my own examining board which had three assistant secretaries of state, George Messersmith, Francis B. Sayre, and Adolf Berle, the chief of personnel, Howland Shaw, and a representative from the Civil Service Commission. This was at a time when Assistant Secretaries were the highest ranking people in the Department after the Secretary and Under Secretary, and the Chief of Personnel ran the Foreign Service.

*Q: Good God, these were all names to conjure with.*

BELTON: Exactly. Those guys sat there and you were facing the bunch of them. Adolf Berle, it turned out, had been on an economic mission to Colombia some years before which had made complex recommendations with regard to the Colombian banking system. So he started asking me what I knew about the Colombian banking system. Well I didn't know much, naturally, but one of the jobs I had had as a clerk was to read the Colombian equivalent of the Federal Register and spot anything that might be of interest to us. I picked up a miscellany of information that normally I wouldn't expect to have and was able to answer some of his questions. But I will never forget the very distinct, almost physical, feeling I had that I was out on a limb in a tree with this fellow after me. Every time he would ask a question it would push me out a little farther on the limb, whereupon he would ask me another question more detailed than the one before. He never stopped until I fell off. Then I would climb up again and it would repeat until I said "I'm sorry, I



don't know." This was terribly discouraging because there was never any time I could say, "Well, I came through that one."

There were other questions about my personal background and that sort of thing, but I remember Adolf Berle's questions clearer than any others. George Messersmith asked me something about diplomatic history. It was on a subject with which I was familiar, but I couldn't fix on the answer. There was a bookcase behind him and I could see the book that had the answer right over his shoulder. I was so rattled by then I didn't have enough of whatever it took to tell him that's where it was. It always a source of regret that I hadn't. I don't remember any of the detailed questions.

*Q: This was when?*

BELTON: In 1938, April of '38.

*Q: So they said, "All right, you are going to be a foreign service officer?"*

BELTON: I went out to my home in Oregon and waited in a very low mood, because I was sure I had flunked the thing, until I got a telegram from Eddie Sparks, who was by then in Washington, telling me he found out I passed. That put a whole new look on life. The next weekend friends arranged a blind date for me that turned out to be with this lady alongside me here now. Then I went back to Bogotá to wait out the time for my appointment to come. I took the examination in April, I guess I got back to Bogotá in early May of '38, and my appointment came through in July. Another example of the way the foreign service ran in the old days: most of our telegraphic traffic then was coded, the work being done by hand. The common code was the Gray code, which really wasn't a serious code in the sense that it would keep anything from our enemies they might want to know. It was more for economy's sake.

*Q: Just one letter, or something, represented a word?*

BELTON: A word or a phrase. You had a book you looked all these things up in. One book for coding and another for decoding, sort of like a two-volume bilingual dictionary with one language in each volume. Well, I was the code clerk in those days, among lots of other duties in the Legation. When telegrams came at night, as most of them seemed to do, I had arranged for them to be delivered to the apartment where I lived. I knew the time was coming when my appointment would be coming through, so I learned my name in gray code. When a telegram came at night, unless it was marked urgent, I didn't have to do anything about until morning, but at this period I looked at each one to see if I could discern my name. Finally I found it, so I went over to the Legation late that night to decode the message and to learn that I was ordered to Havana as Vice Consul . That was my first post as a Foreign Service Officer.

*Q: So you went to Havana in 1938?*

BELTON: Yes, in 1938.

*Q: What were you doing in Havana?*

BELTON: In those days our first assignment was always as a student vice-consul, so I went to the Consulate General in Havana. As a student vice-consul I was rotated around and given a taste of each of the functions of the office. The principal thing in those days was visa work, because Havana was flooded with European refugees. This was just before the outbreak of the war.

*Q: Were there a lot of Jews there?*

BELTON: The city was just full of German Jews who had been unable to get US visas while they were still in Europe, so had come to Havana to wait until their numbers came up on the quota system for the United States. So we had a really big and extremely active, busy visa mill going there. That was my principal duty.

*Q: The foreign service has been castigated from time to time about how it treated refugees, particularly the Jewish refugees from Europe in the late 1930's; charged with not being very sympathetic or responsible. Of course we did have a law. Could you give us a feel about how it was for a young man dealing with this problem? Cuba was certainly not under the gun at all--what was the attitude of the more senior officers and what were the instructions from Washington?*

BELTON: I really never thought of this in that sense, because I never felt there was anything but sympathy for this tremendous problem and the people involved in it. There was a difference between our attitude toward these people, how we handled them, and what the laws enabled us to do for them. Thousands of people were eventually going to get into the United States, one way or another.

*Q: You knew that?*

BELTON: We knew that. It was a tragedy that we had to keep them sitting there on the benches in the parks of Havana for years on end sometimes, before they could come. When they walked into the office, we did the very best we could under extremely difficult circumstances. Understandably, the visa applicants themselves weren't always models of patience. I remember on one occasion we received a complaint from the United States about how somebody was treated at the reception desk. The Consul General, Coert duBois, was a very imaginative and gung-ho officer; when he got this complaint he had a photographer come and take a picture of the receptionist at work. It was a very dramatic picture. There was this young woman at her desk surrounded by at least twenty people, all with their arms out, shouting at her, trying to get her attention, trying to get in. The poor woman was trying to cope with this great crowd of people. Well, you could say we needed more people to take care of this, but from the point of view of the receptionist, she was doing the very best she could. She was well disposed toward these people, but sometimes somebody would get rambunctious and she would have to put them down. I

honestly don't feel that there was anything untoward about the way we handled the people in general under the circumstances that existed at the time, which were extremely difficult for everybody, on our side and theirs as well.

*Q: Were we making representations to the Cuban authorities not to expel these people?*

BELTON: This was up at another level than I worked at, but I have no recollection of there ever being a particular problem in that regard. The people were swarming into Cuba, not only from Germany but from many other countries. We had people from thirty or forty nations, it seemed, all lined up there waiting for their visas. As far as I can recall, Cuba was a very hospitable place for them. It was comfortable, warm; of course they had to have some means and I am sure a lot of them were in difficult economic circumstances, but I don't think the Cubans were giving them any particular problem. Most of them were real lucky to be there rather than some of the other places they might have been at that stage.

*Q: Did you as a student vice-consul--you had already been a clerk which had obviously prepared you better than the normal student vice-consul--do anything to prepare yourself for the foreign service other than just doing your job?*

BELTON: At that stage of one's career it was hard to know what one's future was going to be. Every assignment, of whatever kind, was something that you dedicated yourself pretty fully to. I remember I had some time in the commercial section--the consulate general not only had the visa section, which was the big thing, but it had a commercial section. And in those days we had invoices and shipping; there was a lot of shipping and a lot of documentation that we don't have to worry about anymore in regard to ships. So there was time spent there as well. Those were the three sections that I...oh, there was another section: protection; a big tourist center, such as Havana was in those days, had a lot of protection activity. There were always Americans getting into trouble, getting into jail.

*Q: This was a big gambling and prostitution area, wasn't it?*

BELTON: Yes, it had everything a big tourist resort had in those days. I have never thought of it in these terms, but I suspect it might have been considered the Las Vegas of that time. Las Vegas at that time didn't exist, practically speaking. There were lots and lots of Americans there and the protection business was quite active. Then Coert duBois had the idea that he wanted to do something that would be good propaganda for the Foreign Service, so he arranged that every time a big tourist ship came into port--and this was sometimes two or three a day, sometimes one every three or four days--one of the vice-consuls would go down to meet the ship. He would go aboard, introduce himself to the purser, and say, "I'm here to see if there is anybody who needs our help." He would ask whether there were any problems, or if any prominent Americans were on board that we should greet in the name of the Ambassador or the Consul General. We did a lot of meeting and greeting that way.

Offhand, I don't remember anyone I met in this fashion except on one particular occasion when a purser said, "Well there is a fellow here that perhaps you ought to meet. He's been doing quite a bit traveling, seems to be important and has impressive documentation." There was something strange about the way he approached this. Anyway the man finally appeared and turned out to be a friend and classmate of mine from Stanford. He had made a trip rather like my own through Central America, but he had loaded himself up with every kind of document that he could get. One was a signed letter of introduction from Herbert Hoover, who was living on the Stanford campus in those days; he had fixed all this documentation with big seals and ribbons so it looked very, very official, and using it, he had talked his way into a number of events and situations along the road and had persuaded the tourist ship captain to give him a work-away passage from Jamaica to Havana.

*Q: Work-away being the way we sent Americans back home who ran out of money.*

BELTON: Exactly. He was the only "prominent" American on board.

*Q: How about getting people out of jails; was this a problem or were the Cubans pretty tolerant?*

BELTON: It would depend entirely upon what the fellow was in for. I recall one time going around--it was one of my earliest experiences and was of lasting value to me. I presented myself as the American Vice-Consul--spreading my chest a bit--and talked to this Cuban official, I can't remember his position, about an American who was in jail. I hadn't gone very far before he let me know that he was in charge around there and this guy was going to stay in jail as long as he wanted him to stay in jail. I don't remember what the fellow was in for. I think, in general, we got along pretty well and we had reasonably good relations, but not necessarily on the basis of student vice-consuls who didn't yet know how to approach Cuban officials.

*Q: When you finished this assignment did you go back to Washington for training?*

BELTON: Yes, then I went back to the Foreign Service School. All of us who had passed the 1937-38 exams were sent to the school after our initial student assignment. Only one person, so far as I know, didn't go. That was Phil Bonsal, who was several years senior to most of the rest of us and had already had extensive experience with a telephone company abroad. He served briefly in the Consulate General in Havana, but when I came along to replace him, he moved over to the Embassy and continued there without attending the school.

*Q: Where was that located?*

BELTON: That was located in the basement of what is now the Old Executive Office Building. It was then the State Department. You walked in the southwest entrance from

17th street. A door immediately on your right as you walked in led through a small entrance hall to a large room that held our school-type desks and chairs

*Q: How long and what type of training did you get?*

BELTON: We went there in September and left in late January. The course consisted of a series of lectures and work assignments of various kinds. Here is an example of how things have changed a bit: In those days, every Foreign Service Officer ran his own accounts, so we were taught how to write a draft on the government to ourselves to pay our own salaries and how to submit all the documentation that was involved each month for this and for any incidentals, which there very rarely were in those days. That was part of the procedure; we had to learn how to do this sort of elemental stuff. Then, in addition, we had lectures from all sorts of people from all branches of the government, including, primarily, the State Department. The officer in charge of each geographic bureau came down and talked.

*Q: How many were there of you, about?*

BELTON: I think our original class was...the figure 21 comes to mind. We all sat in a kind of classroom, with a lecturer up in front. It was very much like a college classroom. College classrooms have seats with a broad arm on one side, but this was more like grammar school, actually, where we had our own small desk.

The lectures involved lots of discussion, with opportunities to ask questions and so forth. Each of the assistant secretaries that I commented on as being members of the examining board spoke to us, as well as lots of others. We discussed the whole range of American foreign relations, not only from the point of view of policy, but also from the procedural angle, how you did it, including routine administrative things, such as how you did your accounting. In those days there were very few, if any, administrative specialists. We were all expected to have a basic understanding of administrative practice.

Then there was another feature of it that was sort of novel from the present day point of view. A lady of fairly advanced years, Cornelia Bassell, was the secretary in charge of the foreign service class. She functioned as a sort of Mother Superior, seeing to it that we got to class on time, that we minded our manners, that we did things correctly--turned down the correct corner of the card when we made calls--that we made our calls and that we were decorous at all times. She asked Judy and me, on one occasion, to be her guests at a lecture at the Women's Democratic Club. We were sitting in folding chairs that were hard and uncomfortable. I needed to stretch a bit but the talk was going on, so I put my arm over the back of Judy's chair. It wasn't a gesture of affection or anything, it was just to get my arm stretched. The next morning she called me aside to inform me that in a public place a gentleman wouldn't do that sort of thing.

Some of the social instruction left us with questions in our minds. We were told to make social calls on all the proper officials by dropping cards at their residences. One of the people to be called on was the head of the Foreign Service school, Klahr Huddle, a

senior foreign service officer. So over a period of time we made our calls, but a call required a return call and of course if you were home you had to invite them in. Huddle would have had to call on all 21 people--or did have to call, as they were teaching us to do this thing right and he had to do his end of it. He solved that problem very neatly; one day a member of the class had a party and invited everybody including Huddle, but Huddle didn't come to the party. All the rest of us were there. When we all got home we found that Huddle had dropped cards on all of us that day.

Adolf Berle, Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, was notable for showing a more friendly, personal interest in us. He spent a couple of full days, as I recall, with us in the classroom, conducting a wide ranging seminar on the world economic situation. Then he and his wife invited the entire class, with wives or girl friends, to their home to a dinner dance. We were all also invited to George Messersmith's to tea. As a new officer with Latin American experience, I recall being invited for lunch one day by Larry Duggan, who was in charge of Latin American affairs. Ellis Briggs and someone else were also there. I was clearly being looked over by them. I suppose other members of the class had similar opportunities to meet departmental officers during this time, but most of our social activity was among ourselves.

*Q: What about writing of dispatches, training for being a political officer? Did you get much of that?*

BELTON: There was relatively very little of that;, they told you how to head your dispatch and say "Your Most Obedient Servant" at the end.

*Q: And "I have the honor to report."*

BELTON: Yes, that sort of thing, but there wasn't much else. I recall a few years ago telling Steve Low, who was then the head of the Foreign Service Institute, that I had felt very strongly a lack of any instruction in diplomatic practice as such--elementals of how things should be done in order to best make your point with a foreign government, how to maneuver in the diplomatic field. Somehow, I think, the concept existed that we all had this innately in us if we had passed that exam, but the fact is that we obviously didn't.

*Q: I came in 1955 and left in 1985 and I received no training at all in how to write; I got it on the job, which is wrong. There are shortcuts...*

BELTON: I got training in my first job after the Foreign Service school, because I would draft a dispatch and send it in to the minister. He would send it back and tell me all the things that were wrong with it. So I got a lot of on the job training.

*Q: That's the way we all worked.*

BELTON: There wasn't anything formal about it. There are certain basic principles that you learn as you go along that never, even now, are taught.

*Q: Did you ever call on the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull?*

BELTON: Yes, the whole class was invited to call on Cordell Hull and we did. Well, we dropped cards on Cordell Hull, but we also were invited up to his office and had a session with him. It was normal in those days to call on the President, too. We dropped cards on the President, but things changed a lot because war in Europe was declared in August and we went to school in September. I know we never went to the White House and I think it was because of the fact that the war had changed the practice and they were not any longer spending time with routine invitations of that sort.

*Q: When the time came to go, was there any logic as to who went where? Were people asking to go to certain parts of the world? As you say, the war was on though we weren't in it at that time.*

BELTON: Yes, the war was on and it was influencing things. People were given an opportunity of some sort. I don't recall how formal it was, there probably was some formal procedure, but I don't recall what it was with regard to announcing your interest in an assignment. I recall that I learned that we were opening a consulate in Iceland, or was it Greenland?

*Q: It could have been either.*

BELTON: It was Iceland. I thought that would be a lot of fun, but I don't think I ever submitted any formal document or letter or anything of that kind, but I let it be known somehow or other that I would like to go to Iceland. But when the assignments were announced, and I guess my Latin American experience and interest had something to do with it, I was assigned to the Dominican Republic.

*Q: Ciudad Trujillo.*

BELTON: Yes, Ciudad Trujillo, as it was then called. Somebody walked into the classroom where we all sat and read off our names and the assignment where we were going-- it was a very dramatic moment. For me he called out "Santo Domingo". Well I knew where Santo Domingo was and went to the telephone immediately and called Judy and said, "We're going to Santo Domingo." She wasn't sure where Santo Domingo was so got hold of an atlas and looked it up. The only one she found was in Costa Rica so she told someone we were going to Costa Rica. That was soon straightened out, and in February we were on our way to the Dominican Republic.

*Q: I have you serving in Ciudad Trujillo from 1940 to 1942.*

BELTON: That's right.

*Q: What was the situation there? I assume that Trujillo was well in power at that time.*

BELTON: He was very solidly in power. Trujillo had no moral principles of any kind. He was motivated only by his own personal welfare. He considered the Dominican Republic to be his own ranch, so anything that happened to the Dominican Republic was related to him and his own welfare. He played footsie a little bit with the Germans and the Japanese and was perfectly willing to do so. But when Pearl Harbor occurred, he quickly knew where his bread was buttered. He sent us word that he wanted to know the very minute the United States officially declared war because he wanted the Dominican Republic to be the first country after the United States to declare war on Germany, Italy and Japan. That in effect is what happened, because the Dominican legislature was totally at his command; he had them sitting there waiting for the telephone to ring so that they could declare war.

*Q: What were you doing there and what was the situation as far as you saw it in the country?*

BELTON: Well the Dominican Republic was kind of a backwater in many respects. It didn't loom very large in the overall picture, but nevertheless we were interested in whatever went on there because the Germans were presumably looking for submarine bases in that part of the world. The Caribbean was important to our overall national security, so our activities were essentially just seeing to it that things did not get out of hand and communicating our approach on things to Trujillo and his government so we could keep it on an even keel. There was always that dichotomy of how do you handle a guy like Trujillo...(noise on tape). You had the problem of how you behave with a guy you have no respect for but who controls a certain amount of geography that is important to you and that could affect your interests adversely if things don't go right.

*Q: At later points he had several Congressmen in his hip pocket. He was very kind to them. He had political clout in the United States. Did you feel that at that time--that I have to watch this guy because if worse comes to worse he'll go to his tame Congressman? I don't know if he had one at that time, but he did later on.*

BELTON: I think he probably did; I don't recall in detail but I do remember that there were people that were favorable toward him. Among four hundred and thirty-five Congressmen there will always be some who'll ignore or be ignorant of the realities of an individual like Trujillo. But I don't have any recollection of his having a cult of the kind that gave us significant problems. Obviously from the point of view, maybe, of the Department of State and the Democratic Party that was in power at that time they had to give a little attention to this but it wasn't a significant factor.

*Q: Who was your ambassador, or was it minister?*

BELTON: He was Minister at that time; Robert Scotten was Minister during the time I was there.

*Q: What was his background?*



BELTON: He was a career Foreign Service Officer.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

BELTON: I was sent there as Third secretary and Vice-Consul. Both those titles reflected what I did. I was the low ranking man in the political section, but when they needed help in the consular section I went over and worked there. Again, though nothing like Havana, we had a fairly substantial visa load. Trujillo, not out of any particular sympathy for the Jewish problem or people but because he thought it would reflect well upon himself, was admitting a number of German Jews into the Dominican Republic. They had formed a settlement up on the north coast at a place called Sosua. There was a good deal of interest on the part of well placed American Jews to see that this place prospered and that these people got a fair shake. So that was one of our interests; we didn't have any specific responsibilities but we had a general brief to watch over that situation. There was a lot of circulation there, people would come there as a temporary place to stay; not very many of them really had any sincere intention of making that their life home, for they were waiting for visas to go to the US or elsewhere. There were a lot of other Jewish people in the country. Prior to the declaration of war there was an active Nazi German movement in the Dominican Republic which we kept our eye on too, which was part of the job.

*Q: I would say that that would be more of your job than the political situation which was what Trujillo wants, Trujillo gets.*

BELTON: That was an important aspect of it. We had what we called the "proclaimed list." Certain people were on it, certain firms who dealt with Germany or which were actually in the hands of Germans.

*Q: From my interviews it seems that this was essentially a blacklist of Axis dominated firms and was in many ways the principal job of the Department of State in Latin America, wasn't it?*

BELTON: Well I think we had other things as well, but it certainly was an important aspect of our work and I think you are right about a place such as the Dominican Republic, it probably was our major war-related activity.

*Q: Did the German community as such cause any trouble or were you just keeping an eye on it?*

BELTON: They made noise and were considered to be ready to take over when the Germans won the war. No, I think we were more suspicious of them than...I don't know what they were doing; we never found out. I am sure they had some contacts with Germany that were harmful to our interests, but how effective they were and how serious

they might have been as a problem if things had turned out differently is something that only can be speculated.

*Q: To plow this ground once more--the attitude you got from the Ambassador and all in the legation was that Trujillo was not a very nice man.*

BELTON: Yes, there wasn't any question about that. We had personal experience of this when at a party one of his henchmen, many of whom served as government officials and acted as procurers for him on the side, invited my wife and the wife of an American banana export company manager to go with him to meet Trujillo. They left no doubt of their lack of interest in the invitation, but the other lady was quite concerned that her refusal might create difficulties for her husband's business.

The way you handled him on an official level was something else again. Trujillo had an enormous, fancy yacht he would make available to the Minister for weekend fishing trips. The Minister accepted and invited some of us to go along; we had two or three wonderful trips in that connection. I particularly remember because while I wasn't very interested in fishing, my later enthusiasm for ornithology was initially stimulated there. We went down near an island which years later I went to and banded birds on; that was the first experience I had down in that direction. The question is whether the Minister should have accepted. I don't remember it even being raised in those days. I know that under present day attitudes, the way you look at things now, the question would arise whether the Minister should have ever accepted that kind of an offer from Trujillo.

*Q: Do you distance yourself, or not? This is a difficult call because it hurts your political effectiveness...*

BELTON: If the minister had wanted to refuse the offer he would have had to have a very convincing reason to do so without offending Trujillo.

*Q: And does that make sense? Does it hurt your job? You were there until about 1942. What was the situation of foreign service officers at that time? By then we had entered the war.*

BELTON: Some officers were volunteering for the military service, but there was a general understanding that the Foreign Service was a pretty important career in the war itself; that whatever you did in the Foreign Service was contributing to the war effort. Eventually, so far as I know, all Foreign Service Officers were granted an exemption. That wasn't automatic, it took a while. I remember my own exemption--the issue didn't even come up until I was at my next post. I recall, I don't remember much of the details, I didn't know whether I was going to get it and I began to make inquiries about what service I wanted to go into if I was to go into military service, and at what level. Eventually it did come through, so I never gave what you might call serious consideration to military service. In view of the events of the last few months one looks back and wonders about it.

*Q: You left the Dominican Republic in 1942. Where did you go then?*

BELTON: We went home on leave. Previous to 1939 the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture had had their own foreign services. In 1939 there was legislation that consolidated those two departments' services into the regular Foreign Service operating under the State Department. Those departments then had to find within the Foreign Service people who would meet their requirements for reporting and doing all the things that agricultural attachés and commercial attachés were doing. At the Foreign Service school the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture each had people who came over and lectured to the class about the wonders of working on their behalf in the Foreign Service. As I think I mentioned earlier, I had always had an interest in the outdoors, forestry, and that sort of thing. It so happened that Judy's father was a professor of agriculture, which gave agricultural specialization a particular appeal to me.

When we went to the US in 1942 for home leave we went through the department for consultation and in the corridor I passed the same man who had given the lectures in the Foreign Service school, a fellow by the name of Louis Michael, who was the Department of Agriculture's representative to the Department of State and whose job it was to recruit agricultural officers in the Foreign Service. He spotted me, and as I had expressed some vague interest at the time of the Foreign Service school, asked me if I was still interested. I said, "Well, I might be; I was interested in knowing about it." He gave me more of a pitch and I, somewhat innocently as I look back on it, decided it would be interesting to go into the agricultural branch of the Foreign Service. From the point of view of the war, agricultural production was very significant item at that time. He said, "All right, we are going to assign you to the Department of Agriculture for a period of training." So that is what they did. We went home on our leave and then I came back to Washington and went to the Department of Agriculture for a training period.

That was not nearly as productive as it should have been because their idea of training was to sit you down in the middle of a bunch of people in the Division of Foreign Agriculture and let you swim for yourself. I swam for four or five months and I did learn quite a bit about what they did, which essentially turned out to be reporting on the crop situations in foreign countries. There was relatively little negotiating of any kind, at least at that level. Then I was told, I don't remember when, but at some stage of the game I was told that I was to go to Winnipeg as Vice-Consul. My job was to do agricultural reporting for the prairie provinces--Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. So I went up there and spent a little less than two years there. Again it was a post where there were not a lot of people and when there was a vacancy in the consular section I issues visas or did other consular work. But essentially I was there to report on the wheat situation, the oat situation, the rye situation, the flax situation, and so forth. Each week I had to send off a report. We had an agricultural attaché in Ottawa to whom I was also responsible and with whom I worked on a close basis. At the end of this period I was assigned to Ottawa as assistant agricultural attaché.

*Q: You were there from about 1944 to 1946? Who was the ambassador at that time?*

BELTON: Ray Acheson.

*Q: How did you find the embassy in Ottawa? You had been in Quito, Bogotá, etc.*

BELTON: It was a much different place. It was a going concern as opposed to the other places. Relations between Canada and the United States were on a vastly differently level than they were between the United States and the Dominican Republic. We had a fairly substantial staff, we had high powered people at various levels and it was very much of a going concern. I already saw that I didn't want to spend all my life being an agriculturalist and so I went around to see the deputy chief of mission, whose name was Lewis Clark, and told him that while I was in the agricultural section of the embassy I would very much like to keep up with what was going on in other sections. He understood that and let me peruse through the files and see the outgoing dispatches and telegrams and so forth; it enabled me to keep up with the overall tenor of the activities of the embassy. I am sure I wasn't in on everything, but I could see the larger picture. My boss, the agricultural attaché, Clifford Taylor, was a very fine agricultural officer, but he was totally dedicated to agriculture and his vision was rather channeled. Cliff and I would go to luncheon together. I can remember standing in line at the cafeteria in the Chateau Laurier with Cliff, who instead of taking a break from the office, would start speculating on hog production in Canada for the next year. There wasn't anything to talk about with Cliff Taylor except agriculture and agricultural reporting. That contributed to my increasing restiveness and my realization that I didn't want to spend the rest of my life reporting on the wheat crop, the pig crop, the cattle and beef situation, and so forth. I arranged to come down to Washington and talk to the then deputy chief of personnel and tell him my woes and how I would like to escape if I could in some gracious way. He was Harold Tewell, who had been the number two man in the Consulate General in Havana at the time I was there, and who was a very likeable and sympathetic sort of a guy. Again this is a feature of life as things were in those days--you kind of negotiated your next post on the basis of what your personal needs were, what your interests were, and what the department's interests were. It wasn't a formal business the way it is now. I told Harold Tewell my problems and went back to Ottawa and before long received a letter from him telling me that they were contemplating sending me to Porto Alegre, Brazil where the consulate had had an agricultural reporting officer that they were withdrawing--by now the war was over. They were also reassigning the principal officer and wanted me to go down and take the job as principal officer with the understanding that I would also do the agricultural reporting. That was a very good solution from my point of view, in the sense that I was able still to continue with some of my reporting activities and feel that I wasn't abandoning agriculture flat, while at the same time I got valuable experience as a principal officer.

*Q: Where is Porto Alegre located?*

BELTON: Porto Alegre is the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul; it is the southernmost principal city of Brazil.

*Q: What was the political situation in Brazil at that time?*

BELTON: That was between the regimes of Getúlio Vargas, who had been sort of the dictator of Brazil. The president at the time we were there was Dutra.

*Q: You were there from 1946 to 1948?*

BELTON: Yes.

*Q: What was the consulate doing? How did you deal with the Brazilian authorities and what were your major concerns?*

BELTON: Our major concerns were representation of American interests, in the sense of watching out for any Americans who got into trouble, promotion of American business interests, political reporting on the local situation, primarily to the Embassy, and from my personal point of view, a very active series of reports on the agricultural situation. It kept me busy full time.

*Q: How did you find the Brazilian authorities at your level?*

BELTON: Cordial and easy to deal with. They having just participated with us in winning the war, it was an advantageous situation at that time.

*Q: They were very proud of the Brazilian troops that had been in the Italian campaign.*

BELTON: The Brazilian troops had done a very good job in Italy in particular. Rio Grande do Sul is heavily populated by people of German and Italian origin so there had been a strong Nazi movement and sympathy there for the Axis powers. It took Brazil quite a while to get into the war, but when they did they took active measures against these people, even to the extent of prohibiting the use of the German language, I guess Italian too, but I particularly remember German, in everyday usage. There were lots and lots of people in those days who, because they lived in closed communities, didn't speak any other language than German. They were automatically violating the law by just saying good morning to their wives and children, because they didn't have any other way of communicating. This was dramatized for us a bit when we first got there and before we had acquired any real competence with Portuguese when Judy went to a shop and tried to communicate in Portuguese and was told by the shopkeeper, "It's all right, you can speak German now, it's all right." Her only alternative was English but they didn't speak any English. When she continued with her poor Portuguese, they became irritated because they thought she was still afraid and trying to hide the fact that she knew German.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the German community? With the Italian community? Or did they sort of avoid you?*

BELTON: I didn't have any particular contact with the German community as such. Let me introduce what I say now by telling you that we went back to Rio Grande do Sul in 1970 and lived there for nine years, so my memory of what was the case in 1946 to 1948 is somewhat blurred and confused by the fact that we lived there after my retirement, from 1970 to 1979. It is sometimes hard for me to remember what happened when. But I wanted to say in response to your question that the social communities of Rio Grande do Sul, whether German or Italian, were Brazilian at the same time, and there wasn't, at least as far as I was aware, any distinct line between what was the German community and what was the Brazilian community. I am sure that there were some lines that we might not have known about, but by the time we got there in 1946 those lines, if they existed during the war, had begun to dissolve. I don't remember, at any rate, ever having distinguished any line of that kind. There would be more of a distinction between the German and the Italian communities than there would be between any German and Brazilian community, because the German community was Brazilian and the Brazilian community was German, or Italian, just as Garrison Keillor's Lake Wobegon, although very Norwegian, is undisputably American also.

*Q: Did that cause any awkwardness for you in that immediate post-war period?*

BELTON: No. I don't recall anything that you would classify that way at all.

*Q: Well then they threw you back into the briar patch after that, didn't they--back to Ciudad Trujillo, 1948-1952?*

BELTON: 1949-52. My transfer from Porto Alegre provides another illustration of how they solved administrative problems of the department and the service in those days. After we had been in Porto Alegre for a couple of years I got word that my mother was seriously ill with cancer and didn't have long to live. I was very anxious to see her. In those days my economic situation didn't provide me the wherewithal to make a trip to the United States on my own. As I recall I was entitled to home leave by then, but there was no money to pay for it. The department couldn't find any basis to get me home except by transferring me, via Washington for consultation. So they did that with the understanding that when I got to Washington I could take some time to go out to Oregon see my mother. We worked it out so the whole family went out to Portland. To transfer me they just picked the first available job, which was in Panama. So I left Porto Alegre on transfer to the Embassy in Panama.

*Q: Oh, you went to Panama?*

BELTON: No, I didn't. When I reached Washington I was told that a fellow who was head of the political section in the Embassy in Mexico had suddenly died and they were transferring the DCM from the Dominican Republic to fill that job. Instead of going to

Panama, would I like to go to the Dominican Republic as DCM? I wasn't excited about going back to the Dominican Republic, because I had never had a great deal of enthusiasm for the place, but the position was much better than the one I could foresee in Panama. I had gone north by plane, while Judy was on the high seas with our children, traveling by a slow freighter. I sent her a message via how messages were sent in those days to ships at sea, asking if she was willing to go back to the Dominican Republic. She was, so I said, "Yes". So I went on home and then instead of going to Panama we went to Santo Domingo again.

*Q: You were there from 1948 to 1952?*

BELTON: February, 1949 to June, 1952.

*Q: Who was the ambassador when you first went out?*

BELTON: Ralph Ackerman.

*Q: What was his interest and style of operation.*

BELTON: Ralph Ackerman --this was his first and only assignment as an ambassador-- had been a Department of Commerce officer. He had reached the acme of his ambitions, probably some beyond where he had expected to be. He wasn't particularly perceptive as a political observer; he didn't see Trujillo for what I thought Trujillo was. I didn't agree with him on his attitude toward Trujillo. By that time Trujillo's colors were far more evident than they had been when I had been there before. Ackerman thought that things were okay in the Dominican Republic; it was a country that was on our side of the cold war and why should we examine any further than that. That pretty well reflected in all of the things he did.

While I didn't believe in overt provocation of Trujillo, since under the circumstances then existing it would not only have been unproductive, but probably counter-productive in our over-all relations, I felt we should make it clear now and then that we didn't sympathize with his way of running things. I guess I personally was able to convey that impression, for the government-run newspaper ran an editorial shortly before I left commenting on my lack of understanding. I looked on this as a badge of merit and was further pleased when, about 10 years later, after Trujillo was well gone and opposition forces were in power, I was awarded an official Dominican decoration, which, incidentally, never reached me.

*Q: Were you finding the cold war was intruding as it did in so many other places? If you are with us you are really our friends no matter what you do.*

BELTON: There was a lot of that attitude and atmosphere, yes. Certainly I think that was an accurate reflection of Ackerman's approach to it and attitude about it. On the other hand it was hard to feel any true communist influence in the Dominican Republic;

there wasn't any room. Communists were worse off than democrats in the Dominican Republic so there wasn't any sense that there was anything to worry about there. We always wanted the Dominicans to come along with us on various undertakings in the United Nations; we were always looking for their support there; I think that was the primary thing. We wanted them to be friendly to business interests and so forth. It was generally a question of keeping them on our side and being sure that they didn't stray, because anyone who knew anything about Trujillo knew he was a total opportunist and would do what was best for Trujillo, whether it was good for anybody else or not.

*Q: Was he playing the communist card?*

BELTON: I don't recall that he ever did that. There wasn't much of a communist card for him to play. His country was geographically too close to the United States for that.

*Q: Did he create a communist party in order to...*

BELTON: No, no.

*Q: This was not unusual.*

BELTON: No, I don't think that he ever created any communist party at all. Let's see, Castro was in by then, wasn't he? No, he came later.

*Q: Castro didn't come until about 1958 or 1959. Did you find any political pressures to be nice to the Dominicans? Did you feel any interest from Washington about the Dominican Republic or was there profound silence back in Washington as to what was happening there?*

BELTON: Frankly my memories of that time are not very vivid; personal memories are, but memories of our political actions and attitudes to the Dominican Republic are not very vivid. I think the reason they aren't is because there was not very much vivid about our relations at that time. Subsequently, after Trujillo was overthrown and Castro was in Cuba, then we became very active.

*Q: This was in the mid-1960's.*

BELTON: But that was a totally different picture. In my day we were riding along and letting this guy take care of his ranch as long as he didn't get in our hair. We would now and then go around and talk to him and say we wanted to do this, that, or the other thing. He was a rambunctious kind of a guy and would act up occasionally. I remember once in a while having had occasion--I was in charge a couple of times--to write some rather sharp notes on little things that they had done, or to go to the Foreign Minister to protest. It was interesting because the Foreign Minister was a fellow who was very frank and open. I remember one occasion when I wrote a rather sharp note about the way they had treated an American. I handed him this note, he read it, then looked up me with a smile



and said, "Pica, pero me gusta." In other words, "it stings, but I like it". So we did have an opportunity to talk frankly sometimes with these people. The Foreign Minister was totally under Trujillo's control, but personally sympathetic to our attitudes and not afraid to let us know his underlying feelings when he could do so discreetly.

*Q: You were there for a period of about four years?*

BELTON: Yes, on this second tour, from January or February of 1949 until the middle of 1952. I left there about the first of July.

*Q: Today is August 6th, 1993; this is the second interview with William Belton. In our last interview we finished your time from '48 to '52 in Ciudad Trujillo and now we come to '52 to '54 at the Mexican desk. This is sort of in the Jurassic period--we are talking about the '50s. What did the Mexican desk officer do at that time and where did he fit into the scheme of things?*

BELTON: The Mexican desk officer was responsible to the director of the Office of Middle American Affairs, who at that time was Dick Rubottom. His deputy was Jack Neal. I was directly responsible to them and they in turn were responsible to the Assistant Secretary and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs.

*Q: But you pretty much had Mexico, is that right?*

BELTON: Oh yes, definitely Mexico.

*Q: Today these things are split up.*

BELTON: I had a deputy whose name was Ruth Hughes. A fellow by the name of T. R. Martin--he didn't have any other names; his parents had argued as to whether he should or should not be called Theodore Roosevelt Martin and he ended up with T. R. -- was in charge of boundary and water affairs; the US-Mexican Boundary and Water Commission sits in El Paso, Texas, at least the US section of it. He was directly working with and for them but liaising with us. My authority regarding his work was not very clear, but nevertheless we all worked in harmony together.

*Q: In the 1952, 1954 period Eisenhower had just come in or was about to come in. What were the issues that particularly concerned you?*

BELTON: The two headline issues in those days were the wetback situation, illegal immigration of temporary workers --who were not always temporary, and prevention of the spread to the United States of hoof-and-mouth disease that had broken out in Mexico. American cattle interests were dead set against letting it get as far as the United States. Those were two very large problems that kept us quite busy all the time.

*Q: Dealing with the illegal immigrants, what could you do?*

BELTON: I am a little hazy on all the details now, but according to our laws and regulations and the agreements that had been worked out between Mexico and the United States, migrant workers were supposed to go to a Mexican center where they would be processed and brought to the United States. The Mexican Government was not working very hard at seeing to it that that's what the workers did.

*Q: We are talking now about part-time laborers?*

BELTON: Part-time laborers who came over for seasonal work in agriculture. For many of them it was too much of a nuisance to go through this process, and some of them would be prevented from coming as a result of whatever bureaucratic procedures there were, so thousands and thousands just waded across the river. That was the major problem we were having. We were constantly talking with the Mexican authorities to try to get them to meet what we felt were their responsibilities on this. We told them if they didn't we were going to pass additional legislation which would force it. I don't remember at this stage what the details of that legislation were. The Mexicans did not meet our demands so we had the legislation introduced into Congress and got it passed. It is of interest, incidentally, that the Congressman of those days who was particularly interested in this and with whom we worked was Lloyd Bentsen.

*Q: Now Secretary of the Treasury, who had been the Senator from Texas for many years.*

BELTON: Another item of interest, the very day this legislation was up for passage in the House, I and a couple of others from the State Department went up to the gallery of the House to see the proceedings. That turned out to be the hour that the Puerto Rican nationalists shot up the House of Representatives. I don't remember what date that was but it was a dramatic event.

*Q: What was your feeling toward the Mexican authorities that you were dealing with?*

BELTON: With the ones we were dealing here in Washington we didn't have any problems at all. It is hard for us to know exactly what they might have been telling their people in Mexico, but we got along fine. However, this legislation created an enormous lot of publicity in Mexico adverse to the United States. The day the legislation passed newspaper headlines came out saying that this was the worst crisis in Mexican relations since the time the oil fields were nationalized many years before. We recognized this was going to cause some dissension, but we felt this was a point on which we had to stand firm. I personally took courage on this issue because one of the Mexicans with whom we were dealing up here told me on the side one day, when we were in a taxi returning from a meeting, that he thought we were right.

*Q: There has always been this thing going on in relations between Mexico and the United States, it still continues; the Mexicans say, "that's your problem," as far as people*

*coming in, but as soon as we try to deal with it they dump on us and say we are being anti-Mexican. I understand, there are political pressures within their country.*

BELTON: This gave rise to a great deal of dissension and, incidentally, it made our Ambassador very unhappy.

*Q: Your ambassador at that time was who?*

BELTON: Francis White. He was unhappy, unhappy enough that he got me fired from the Mexican desk, which in the long run I was very happy about but...

*Q: Had he gone "local," you might say?*

BELTON: No, no, but he was looking at it from the point of view of our overall relations with Mexico and we up here were much more able to recognize the domestic problems all of this was creating and the pressures on the State Department to get the situation corrected. So there was a natural and understandable dichotomy of attitudes that reflected itself in differences between the fellow out in the field and those of us in Washington.

*Q: Yes, its the classic case. But why would he pick on you?*

BELTON: I was the guy in charge of Mexican affairs. I was the messenger. I was taking the heat. He used to go to the Mexican Foreign Office -- while we were in the midst of these negotiations it seemed to me he was there every day -- so then he would come home -- there was a time difference between Mexico and Washington -- and every night about nine o'clock when I was getting tired enough to go to bed, he would get on the phone and bend my ear for an hour or an hour and a half telling me all that had happened there. And I, of course, told him what was happening on our side, but he didn't always understand why things were going that way, so that was part of it. I was the fellow with whom he had the most direct contact and I was the one who was responsible for transmitting to him the Washington point of view.

*Q: How do you know that he worked to get rid of you?*

BELTON: It was made perfectly clear; I was told that he wanted me moved. So that was that.

*Q: Before we leave the desk, how were you finding the problems of Mexicans in the United States; was the Mexican Embassy complaining that Mexicans who visited the United States were not being treated well--the ones that got in trouble?*

BELTON: No, I don't think there was too much of that. There weren't the dimensions that there are today in that sort of thing. The largest proportion of these people, in fact the vast majority, were coming over for temporary work. A large element in the United States was happy to encourage this because people coming illegally had no recourse to

any legal protection and therefore were paid way below the minimum wage. They had no benefits of any kind, I don't know how many benefits there were in those days, but many were given the most horrible living conditions. They were real slave labor, you might say; serfs, as it were, treated terribly. If they began to raise the devil the employer would report them to the immigration service and they would be shipped back home again.

*Q: How did that group, basically the growers lobby, impact on you?*

BELTON: There were two points of view, those who wanted the thing legal and those who liked things as they were. We knew that there were a lot of people encouraging illegal entry. We assumed probably they were having some influence on the Mexicans who were not complying with the rules on the other side of the border. Most of the pressure from our point of view, that I noticed at any rate, came from people who wanted the situation legalized and straightened out -- the flow restricted and channelized.

*Q: What about Americans who got in trouble in Mexico?*

BELTON: Right at the moment I have no memory of any particular case. Part of the consular section of the embassy was devoted to that. Because there were so many thousands of Americans in Mexico, it was obvious there was always going to be somebody in trouble. But I don't have any memory of its having impinged on relations between the two countries in any major way. When some acute problem would come up, or when somebody well known got into trouble it might reflect on our work but it was not a major feature, in any sense, of my problems.

*Q: On the water side--this was a time of great agitation on both sides about who was using the water, desalinization, everything else--was this pretty much in hands of experts?*

BELTON: Yes, this was a problem of the International Boundary and Water Commission. Our section of the Commission handled this problem pretty much on its own, with T.R. Martin working the Washington end and keeping me informed when necessary. During the time I was in Mexican affairs one of the big projects was construction of Falcon Dam, one of the big dams that provides irrigation water, flood control, and so forth for the lower Rio Grande valley. We were also engaged in another interesting negotiation for exchange of pieces of land cut off by meanders of the river. The river is the border. Little peninsulas on the Mexican side would be cut off by floods and end up on the US side, and vice versa. A long standing negotiation to correct that situation by exchanging land on one side for land on the other was going on actively at the time that I was there, from 1952 to 1954, but the negotiation was not completed until the presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

*Q: We are talking about 1963 to...*

BELTON: The reason I remember is because medallions were struck to celebrate this event, with Lyndon Johnson's profile prominently displayed. I was sent one of these medallions because I had been working on the problem about twelve years before.

*Q: The two major problems that you were dealing with were the problems of wetbacks and the water.*

BELTON: No, hoof-and-mouth disease was the other, along with wetbacks.

*Q: Now how did hoof-and-mouth disease concern you? I would have thought this would be in the hands of veterinarians or something.*

BELTON: Well it was, except that the way to control hoof-and-mouth disease was, according to US policy at the time, to kill cattle. To go down to Mexico and tell some Mexican peon with twelve head of cattle out on a few hectares of land that he has inherited from his ancestors that he has to kill all his cattle even though they may not seem to be sick to him, and maybe aren't sick at all, is a pretty delicate matter. And when you tell Mexicans all along the border and well into Mexico that that is what you have to do, it becomes a national problem. That is really what it was. We ended up buying these cattle for -- well I don't remember the figure now. I am tempted to say two billion dollars but I think I am dealing in modern terms.

*Q: Well anyway, big bucks.*

BELTON: Yes, big bucks in those days. So that was the nature of that problem. I recall this as a big issue and big thing that we were constantly worrying about but nothing that caused any major blips.

*Q: It was a problem and you worked on it.*

BELTON: It was a problem we worked on and was eventually solved. As you say, it was handled primarily by experts, cattle experts and disease experts.

*Q: This is a thing that so often happens both with American-Mexican and American-Canadian relations. There are so many of these things, with our boundaries and all, that end up in the hands of experts because these things are so very complicated. They are not the normal relations.*

BELTON: They are really part of the domestic, everyday activity of these agencies. The sources of the problems and the solutions to the problems are often across the border from where they are working, but they have to be treated in the same sense that you treat the problems on this side. It takes a lot of close cooperation between the two sides. It inevitably gets down to the expert level.

*Q: After you were requested to leave as Mexican desk officer by the ambassador, what did you do?*

BELTON: I wasn't requested by the ambassador to leave. I was told by the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs that I was being transferred to be officer-in-charge of West Coast Affairs, which included Peru, Bolivia, and Chile.

*Q: You were there from '54 to '56. What were our major issues with those three countries?*

BELTON: I was in that job until the end of 1955. Then I was appointed Deputy Director of the Office of South American Affairs, where I served until my departure for Chile in the middle of 1956. One of the big problems during those years was the twelve mile limit, or the two hundred mile limit, according to which way you looked at it. Peru and Chile had officially declared that their territorial waters went out to two hundred miles while we still adhered strictly to the twelve mile limit. We had a great many fishing boats from the west coast, particularly from southern California, that exploited the tuna fisheries in between twelve and two hundred miles. Every now and then the Chileans or Peruvians would go out and haul some of those fellows in and fine them heavily. That of course caused lots of trouble.

*Q: I know, particularly with Ecuador, that the tuna war went on until the 1970's and 1980's. In those days with Peru and Chile were we able to come to any understanding?*

BELTON: We never reached any solution, to the best of my knowledge. Because I went from Washington to be DCM in Santiago, there is a little bit of confusion in my mind, with regard to Chilean affairs as to where I was at the time of a specific incident in our relations. In addition to being officer-in-charge for those three countries, I also served as Chilean desk officer. So I had a two-fold job, I had my own desk and I had supervisory responsibility for the other two desks.

*Q: What type of governments did these countries have? I assume Bolivia was going through its normal coup routine, but what about Chile and Peru?*

BELTON: Chile was under Carlos Ibañez; in the late 20s he had taken over as a dictator but was thrown out a few years later. He was legally elected in 1952 and this time governed democratically. The Congress was functional so it was a working democracy. That was the essence of the Chilean situation. As you say, Bolivia has always been revolving merry-go-round, although during the period I was working with it, it was quite stable. Paz Estenssoro was president and he stayed in for quite a while and managed to govern reasonably well. The problems with Bolivia were essentially economic during that period; we tried to assist them in one way or another to find some basis on which they could become economically viable. Nothing was found. I do remember talking one time to one of the lobbyists from W. R. Grace & Co., who were constant presences in our field at that time, telling him that things looked so stable in Bolivia I thought it was a pity they didn't take some risks and do some investment there. He said, "Yes, but we want to

watch it a little further". Of course he'd had a lot more experience in that field than I had and he was undoubtedly right.

I am trying to remember the situation in Peru. Peru had a dictatorial government at that time, too, and I can't even remember the name of the President.

*Q: Well did we have, outside of this running tuna war problem, problems with...these were places where we were taking out large amounts of crude minerals, weren't we?*

BELTON: Copper; copper was the big issue there because the price of copper on the world market made all the difference whether Chile was economically viable or not. Everything we did up here that might affect the price of copper by one cent a pound one way or other was of major interest to the Chileans. That was something the State Department had no control over whatsoever, so the best we could do was watch and try to pat the Chileans on the back when things were difficult.

*Q: This was the solid Cold War period. Did the east-west confrontation intrude at all on Latin American affairs?*

BELTON: Oh yes, it was always a major issue and I guess we were more concerned in Bolivia because of the instability; but this was prior to the insurgency period so there wasn't any thing of great significance. Chile and Peru seemed so far from the Cold War itself that while there were always things at issue, we never had anything of great moment. We were, of course, always looking to get their votes in the United Nations. There were often times when we would go around to tell them about how important it was that they support us on some Cold War issue or other, and where we needed them to vote with us rather than with the so-called third world countries. We had pretty good luck in getting their support, though it wasn't 100%.

*Q: You had no particular problems with the ambassadors down in those areas?*

BELTON: No, we had good ambassadors. During the time I was on the Chilean desk Willard Beaulac was the ambassador. He was a first class professional. He was reputed to be a hard guy to get along with, but in contrast to my previous experience, I got along very well with him. He tended to talk tough and look you in the eye while saying something provocative. I managed to look him in the eye too and see that there was a twinkle back in there, so I lost any fear, if that's the word, of him. I talked back to him and we got along fine; the end result was that he invited me to be his DCM. It turned out that he was transferred to Argentina just about that time, so I never served at the post with him.

*Q: That often happens; but you did go down to Santiago from 1956 to 1958.*

BELTON: Cecil Lyon was the ambassador, who arrived just before I did.

*Q: He was a professional too. How did you find Cecil Lyon as an ambassador? How did he run his embassy?*

BELTON: He was a delightful guy, and very good. He kept his finger on everything. The characteristic that I most remember about Cecil was that he just used to bubble over with ideas about things we might do, either in the embassy or vis-à-vis the Chileans. He was a fountain of ideas, but a large percentage of them didn't add up. He would realize they hadn't added up and then would be discouraged and say, "Oh, I have all these screwy ideas." I would constantly say to him, "Cecil, you have ten times more ideas than anyone I know of; if only ten percent of them work out you are still a long way ahead of everybody else, so stop fussing about it and keep on bubbling." That to me is the best characterization of him. To ask what kind of an idea, I can't tell you, but he would come up with all sorts of notions of one kind or another; some of them were big ideas and some of them were on tiny details. Vis-a-vis the Chileans, he was very popular. He had served in Santiago years before as a very junior officer and still had many friends from that time, some of them by then in high places, which was helpful.

*Q: How were relations in this 1956 to 1958 period with the Chileans?*

BELTON: Very good, we had good relations with the Chileans at that time. As I said, Chile at that time was a practicing democracy. Their congress had some thirty parties represented in it, which was the ultimate in democracy--far too much. Over the couple of years I was there, they managed to consolidate and the important parties got down to six or eight. I took particular interest in the Congress and made friends with a lot of congressmen. I eventually devised a program for inviting Chilean congressmen to come up here on official visits to the United States. We put together one group of eight who represented all the parties -- not all the parties, but each one represented a different party. There were both senators and members of the House of Representatives in the group. They came up and had a very useful visit. One of the most important features of it, from my point of view, was that they got to know each other; because they were each from a different party they had been sort of standoffish with each other but they learned during the trip to know and respect each other. I always felt this was a significant contribution to Chilean democracy. That was one of the high points, from my point of view, of the things we did while I was down there.

We had an incident, on one occasion while I was temporarily in charge of the Embassy, that I think some people in the State Department tended to blame me for but which I was totally innocent of. I should say they blamed me for not preventing what happened. The Department of Commerce passed a regulation that had an effect on copper imports, again I am hazy on exactly what the details were, and announced it one afternoon. The State Department didn't even tell us about it promptly; we received a cable the next morning about it. It had the effect of impeding the flow of Chilean copper to the United States, either by raising the price slightly or putting a tariff on it, I don't remember exactly what the detail was. The Chileans got word of this before the Embassy did, and were so outraged by it that President Ibañez, who had been invited to come to the



United States as an official visitor, announced that morning that he was canceling his visit because of this outrage the United States committed toward Chile. They were on the telephone to me from Washington asking me why I hadn't prevented Ibañez from canceling his trip. The Embassy didn't even know we had done anything to make him want to cancel until after it was all over. I explained all of this; I think I put it over but I never was sure that everybody was convinced there wasn't something I could have done. That was one little flap we had in our relationship, but it blew over and didn't have any long-range significance except as an example of how casual we can be up here regarding things that make a large difference elsewhere.

*Q: How did we view the Chilean military at that time?*

BELTON: The Chilean military at that time were a very well respected outfit. They had, in times past, showed their muscle--that's how Ibañez got in the first time. But at that time they were very much confined to barracks and were not interfering with the way the government ran, at all. I shouldn't say at all, they probably had the same influence that our military, but it wasn't excessive. Now the way things turned out years later was much different than it was then.

*Q: Well that was quite a change; the military, at least for some period, had been a much more passive. You said you wanted to mention something?*

BELTON: I wanted to mention something that happened while I was temporarily in charge of South American Affairs. It was fun to do and fun to see the long-range results. The Peruvians for many years, since the Second World War, had owed us three million dollars from a lend-lease deal of some kind. We had been constantly after them to pay this debt and get it over with, while they had constantly found all sorts of reasons to not do so. Our Assistant Secretary, whose was Henry Holland at that time, made a big swing around Latin America. In those days that was a big deal; he was relatively much higher ranking in the department than his present-day counterpart, and he was the man for Latin America. He was accompanied by a commission and all that. He started down the east coast and gradually came up the west coast. Without mentioning it to him--in fact I guess the idea arose after he left--we decided to call in the Peruvian Ambassador and tell him that Mr. Holland was on his way to Peru and we knew that the Peruvians were going to have a big agenda of things they wanted to talk to him about. Some would involve loans and items of that sort, so we thought it was very important for him to know that it would be very helpful to the climate of these talks if somehow or other Peru managed to pay that three million dollars before Holland's arrival there. Well, lo and behold, it worked; to our amazement they paid up. Within a month or so afterward, the Peruvians went out on the high seas and found a big ship that had something to do with tuna, I don't remember actually that it was fishing for tuna but it was a Greek ship that belonged to Onassis, Aristotle Onassis. They seized it for doing something they claimed shouldn't be done within the two hundred mile limit, hauled it in to port, and fined it three million dollars. Well, it was so obvious that this fine was their way of getting back the three million that they had just paid to us that it was something I never forgot.

*Q: At least Onassis was a Greek citizen.*

BELTON: Onassis had nothing to do with it, he was just the fall guy, somebody they knew could handle the three million dollars!

*Q: Back to the time when you were in Santiago. Were there any other crises, coups, problems of that nature?*

BELTON: The two hundred mile limit was a constant problem. It was getting more difficult for us in many respects. Because of the cold war we were anxious to have the freest passage possible everywhere in the world. The two hundred mile limit, if applied literally, meant that in the East Indies, for instance, you couldn't navigate at all without being in someone's territorial waters. We were trying to get the Chileans to come around on this. I remember going to talk to the deputy foreign minister regarding their position at a meeting on the whole issue of the high seas in the United Nations. I had much better luck than I anticipated, to the extent that instructions were sent to their delegate at the meeting for him to accede to our positions, at least in some aspects - the details I no longer remember. However, the delegate was a much harder nut to crack and threatened to resign his post if the Foreign Ministry insisted, so they backed down and the problem remained unresolved.

Another approach I took was with the owner of the leading newspaper in Santiago, *El Mercurio*, Augustin (Doonie) Edwards. The Edwards family was big in all sorts of activities. One of the things they had was a shore-based whaling industry. They were among the original promoters of the two hundred mile limit. They wanted it so they could have the offshore whaling all for themselves. They didn't want any other countries coming in and catching whales in this immediate area of the Humboldt current, which was a good whaling area. I was very friendly with Doonie--I didn't become friends because of this--and used our friendship to talk to him a great deal about this issue. As a result, I think, *El Mercurio* came out with some fairly reasonable editorials on the subject. It never, however, at least during my time there, resulted in any change in their basic stance. Now we are the ones who have expanded our view of what territorial waters should be.

*Q: You left there in 1958? You went to the National War College?*

BELTON: Yes. I was in the National War College for the 1958/59 year, then I went to a French language course in the summer of 1959. My tenure in the language course was interrupted by an appointment to the selection boards. I had been trying to learn French on the understanding that I would like to get out of Latin America and go to a French speaking post of some kind. I had thought maybe one of the French-African posts would be an interesting place and provide me with new and valuable experience. I had particularly asked that I not be sent abroad before the end of the year because our daughter was entering a new college and we were anxious to be sure she was well adjusted before we

left. As a result I was assigned to the selection boards and my name was up for assignment during that period. I kept hoping for this French speaking post until one day I was asked to talk to our Ambassador to Australia about going out there as his DCM. So that is where I went.

*Q: This was in 1959. Who was ambassador to Australia at that time?*

BELTON: It was William Sebald. I went to Australia in January of 1960.

*Q: What was William Sebald's background?*

BELTON: He spoke Japanese and had married a Japanese lady. I am not sure what he did before the war, but he was in the US forces during the war, utilizing his Japanese. I believe he was in on the decoding of Japanese messages and that sort of thing. He worked with MacArthur during the time we were making arrangements for Japan after the victory. Then he came into the Foreign Service, at exactly what date I don't know. He was in the Department of State and I believe he was either assistant secretary or deputy assistant secretary for Far Eastern Affairs for awhile and then he went out as Ambassador to Australia.

*Q: You were in Australia from 1960 to 1963. What were our major interests with Australia at that time?*

BELTON: Our major interests were collaboration and cooperation, because our space program was starting, and because Australia was a reliable ally in the Cold War. The Russian satellite had gone up in the late fifties and we were then in the process of developing our own space activities. We needed space stations in Australia, places to monitor our space activities. At the same time the military wanted to establish a large-scale base for communications with submarines, up in the Northwest Cape area of Australia. That involved large-scale negotiations, treaties with the Australians, not only for base rights but also a status of forces agreement. These were the major aspects of our relations during my time in Australia. At one time I remember counting that we had thirteen treaties or agreements of one kind or another under negotiation at the same time. Most all related to these things I have mentioned.

*Q: How receptive were the Australians to these various proposals?*

BELTON: Very. It was an enormous contrast; all my previous experience had been with Latin Americans, where you had to start from absolute scratch and tell them why this was important, and then why they should go out of their way to be helpful to you. Then argue all the other aspects and facets that they could bring up to make it difficult. When you went to the Australians, in those days at any rate, they would say, in effect: "Well yes, that seems pretty important, how can we work this out together?" So far as I remember, there was only one occasion when that didn't work; we went to the Australians for USIA, which wanted to establish a radio station to broadcast Voice of America stuff to southeast

Asia. The Aussies did not want to be a base for US propaganda. They gave us a flat no on that; it just didn't fly at all. Except for that, everything else that we ever asked...obviously they always stood up for their own sovereignty and rights and so forth without any difficulty but it was always a good, collaborative and very fruitful relationship. I loved it.

*Q: Was there a contrast between the, I am not sure what they call them there, labor and conservative governments? Was the labor government kind of left-wing in the British sense?*

BELTON: Somewhat. They weren't seriously left-wing. There were extremists in the Labor Party, but they didn't weigh very heavily. I think it is accurate to say that the Australian Labor Party in those days was not as extreme, that is not a good word, as the British Labor Party.

*Q: Or the New Zealand Labor Party.*

BELTON: No, or the New Zealand Labor Party. During the time I was there they were not in power.

*Q: Vietnam, Laos, the whole Indochina thing was beginning to boil up at that point. This being in the backyard of Australia, did they pay much attention to it?*

BELTON: Yes, they were paying a lot of attention to it. Interestingly enough -- this was the very beginning of these days -- we in the embassy had arguments with our military authorities in Hawaii, headquarters for the Pacific Command, about their reluctance to bring the Australians in on their operations. We thought they should be taking better advantage of what the Australians had to offer, while they at that stage of the game thought they could handle it all themselves. They didn't know that much about the Australians and didn't want to be bothered with the problems of working with the Australians. Of course that changed as time went on. But that was the situation back in those days.

*Q: During this period Sukarno in Indonesia was raising hell, getting very anti-American; we had this Ambassador, Howard Jones, who was very controversial, thought not to be tough enough with Sukarno. Were you getting any reflections of this in Australia's concern over that area? That was really in their backyard.*

BELTON: We were interested in it and aware of it, but I do not have any memory of any particular occasion when we discussed any problem or issue of any kind. I have no memory of the Australians ever coming to us and saying, "Look, your guy up there isn't being tough enough," or anything of that nature. We had conversations all the time about what was happening in Indonesia as well as Vietnam; as you say the Australians were more interested then than we were in many respects. I think there was no difference between us as to what kind of a guy Sukarno was. I was trying to remember--Dean Rusk

had a very colorful way of describing Sukarno, but I can't remember what it was, in regard to his instability.

*Q: I read a story from somebody in one of our oral histories who said that Sukarno in talking with Dean Rusk admired his watch and said, "Can I see it?" He took it off and Sukarno took it. Dean Rusk thereafter said, "That bastard stole my watch."*

BELTON: I don't remember that particular story, but Rusk had an amusing and very accurate way of describing Sukarno.

*Q: I don't remember the timing, but were we involved in the East Irian business? How did the Australians feel about it?*

BELTON: Yes we were, but I am trying to remember. I am not sure I am right. I think the Australians felt the Dutch were being recalcitrant and that they had to get out and give it up, but at the same time they weren't looking forward to having Indonesians share the border. I am hazy on that, I haven't thought about it in years.

*Q: Were there any other issues at that time? I assume that Coral Sea Day was a big occasion.*

BELTON: In those days the Australians were still overwhelmed with gratitude to the United States for having saved them from being invaded by the Japanese. That was the way they looked at it and that was the way they spoke. From the point of view of a diplomat you couldn't have had more wonderful and favorable background circumstances in which to work. There was a great deal of overt pro-Americanism. The celebrations of Coral Sea Day and so on were great events and we were always invited to be leading participants in them, to lay wreaths and that sort of thing.

*Q: You left there in 1963?*

BELTON: Yes.

*Q: Oh, your other ambassador there was William Battle. What was he like?*

BELTON: He was absolutely first-rate. There was a long hiatus after Sebald, who left to retire. Sebald was a rather reclusive sort of a fellow. The atmosphere I have described about pro-United States feeling had another side to it; there was a strong anti-Japanese atmosphere still. It was a very, very poor bit of personnel work to assign to Australia a man who had a Japanese wife. So I think that given Sebald's personality and given the fact that his wife felt the atmosphere and was naturally even more reclusive than he was made it easy for somebody else to come in afterwards. There was about a nine month period between ambassadors. It was the beginning of the Kennedy administration and took much longer than it should have to appoint a new man. I was chargé during that period. Then Battle came along. Battle had been on the PT boat with Kennedy and was a

personal friend of his as a result of this association. In addition Battle had an excellent, outgoing personality, a lot of good background in his legal profession, and a very attractive wife who knew how to do things, how to behave socially and be friendly with people. The contrast with Sebald and with the long period without any ambassador when they began to think maybe the United States didn't care about Australians, made Battle a tremendous hit.

*Q: You left in 1963 and went where, to Panama?*

BELTON: I was assigned as political advisor to the commander-in-chief of the Southern Command, in the Canal Zone.

*Q: What were the main things that you were doing at that time?*

BELTON: It is a hard job to define, you know. I should start out by saying that not only was the commander-in-chief there in charge of the US forces in the Canal Zone but we had military missions in every country in Latin America. This was the time when the insurgency business was beginning to be of serious concern. Castro had come in and Che Guevara was at work in Bolivia. There was serious concern that a lot of weak governments in Latin America were going to be overthrown from within by insurgent forces with communist leanings. These military missions at that stage of the game were very important and they were all responsible to General O'Meara, the man that I worked with. It was my job to review all the communications that went in and out between the headquarters and these people; not with regard to little things like requisitions and so forth, but anything relating to policy or their over all responsibilities, and particularly with regard to their relations to the Embassy. Sometimes there would be differences of opinion between the military mission and the ambassador, so it was my job to watch all this and when I saw something that I thought was wrong or that the commander-in-chief should be alert to, I would go in and speak my piece. This also involved traveling with him. He made constant trips to visit these missions and the military people they worked with all through Latin America, and I went with him almost always. When he would go to visit the political leaders, the president or the foreign minister or anybody of that category, I would accompany him. I didn't very often have to translate, there was a translator along, but that was an occasional requirement. It was that kind of job, an amorphous sort of a thing. I didn't have any real field of responsibility on my own and I couldn't at the end of it all say, "Look what I did."

*Q: What was your impression of our military missions in Latin America at that time? The reason I ask is that in some of the interviews I get the impression that this was the place to put retiring colonels and things like this.*

BELTON: I was going to say before you said that, that the quality of each mission, the whole operation, pretty much hinged on the personality of the man who was the head of it. If he was a good lively guy who knew how to get along with people and understood what he was there for and what the United States Embassy was there for in all its

implications, he generally got along fine. Sometimes you would get somebody who didn't have that breadth, or who had a chip on his shoulder--there were lots of military who thought that the State Department really was just a nuisance to be put up with--that reflected in the way he got along. There were a couple of occasions, I recall, when I was asked to go over and check out what was going on because there was such a difficulty of one kind or another that it was hard to know whether the mission chief should be pulled or not. I would go there and try to check it out. That was the picture in general.

*Q: You had retired before the Dominican problem had blown up, hadn't you?*

BELTON: No.

*Q: Were you there when the...*

BELTON: Well, I wasn't in the Dominican Republic at that time.

*Q: No, but were you involved?*

BELTON: No. I said Latin America, but the Southern Command jurisdiction was South America and Central America but not the Caribbean. The Caribbean was under the commander-in-chief, Atlantic forces. We did go to the Dominican Republic on one occasion--Tap Bennett was the ambassador at that time--not because it was in our bailiwick, but we did have some connections. It really was in the bailiwick of Atlantic Command, Norfolk.

*Q: You retired in 1964, didn't you--mandatory retirement?*

A. No, no. I went on to be an inspector and then I went to Rio de Janeiro. I retired in 1970.

*Q: I didn't realize that. You were an inspector from when to when?*

BELTON: From April of 1965 to mid-1967.

*Q: Were there any particular post problems that you ran across when you were inspector?*

BELTON: The very first inspection that I ever did was probably the one with the most problems. There was some unhappiness with our Ambassador at that time; I am not being reluctant, I just don't recall exactly why they were unhappy.

*Q: What post was this?*

BELTON: Libya. I went there, made a report on the situation and got high kudos for my report, but I don't remember the details.

*Q: By any chance would you remember if Leo Cyr was the DCM at that time?*

BELTON: No, he wasn't.

*Q: Who was the DCM?*

BELTON: Maybe it was Hermann Eilts, I am not sure; I went to Libya and Tunisia on the same trip. Eilts was in one of those two.

*Q: You were in the inspection corps, then, for about three years.*

BELTON: About two and a half; a little more than two. Although you haven't asked me much about the Inspection Corps, it might be worth mentioning how it operated in those days, since I understand things have changed rather considerably in the meantime. Under the legislation operant in those days, the Corps was made up of FSOs, who operated in two-man teams. Where an especially large post was being inspected, two teams would unite. Each post was supposed to be inspected regularly every so many years -- I forget now the exact frequency. An inspection would take as little as a week for a single team, as in the case of Malta, where I went in early 1966, or as long as three to four months, as in Iran, where a double team spent from mid-July through most of October, 1966 covering the Embassy and four Consulates. The senior inspector of each team looked at the over-all operation and the personnel working on substantive matters, while the junior inspector concentrated on the post's administrative management and administrative personnel. Our job was to assess how well the post accomplished its mission and how the personnel were performing. We were not out to scratch around for wrong-doing, though of course if we found it we had to deal with it. An important feature of our job was to act as personnel counselors. One of the most rewarding aspects was our ability to intervene, sometimes successfully, when someone was getting a raw deal, and to help people in a variety of ways, varying from assisting settle marital difficulties to helping individuals figure out the direction they wanted their career to take. I felt that the *Inspector* title was ill-advised, for it carried unpleasant connotations, and would have much preferred to be called a Personnel Counselor.

For each post we wrote an exhaustive report on how it was functioning. In addition, we wrote an efficiency report on each individual. I was of two minds about this latter task, for we obviously couldn't get to know many of the people we wrote about more than superficially and often had to rely on third-party opinions about them. On the other hand, we could look impartially at personnel situations and compensate for under- or over-enthusiastic appraisals made by supervisors on their subordinates.

In those days efficiency reports included mention of wives and families. As a result, most officers and many of the support personnel made a point of offering us hospitality so we could meet their families, see their homes, and assess their representational potential. While this kept us busy during long hours, it was another very pleasant aspect of the job and often involved interesting weekend excursions. While from



the career viewpoint inspecting wasn't a direct road to advancement, it was certainly very interesting work. As I look back on it now, it was one of the most enjoyable periods of my career, especially because it took me to so many places that were new to me. In addition to the countries already mentioned, I inspected our posts in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Turkey, Greece, Ireland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. I also spent a few days in Sevilla to look into a particular personnel situation that had arisen there.

I asked for a less nomadic assignment in 1967, and was scheduled to become Deputy Inspector General. The incumbent, Spencer King, was booked to go as Ambassador to Guyana, but there was a considerable delay in his appointment so, with the consent of Fraser Wilkins, the Inspector General, I created a job for myself. It was obvious to me, and many others, that the rank of many officer jobs in the Service was inflated, i.e., a job that could and should be done by a Class 3 officer would be ranked for a Class 2 or even 1. I undertook a survey to rank properly all the higher level jobs in the Service, consulting with people who knew about them, and then drew a comparison of the numbers of jobs for each class, according to this new ranking, with the number of officers in each class. It showed a considerable excess of officers in the highest ranks. We presented this to the Deputy Under-Secretary for Administration, who thanked us and quietly filed it away. Not until very recently has any effective action been taken to correct this long-standing situation.

*Q: Then you went to where?*

BELTON: King's appointment continued to be delayed. In the meantime other opportunities were opening, so I jumped at the chance to go to Rio de Janeiro as DCM in September, 1967.

*Q: Who was ambassador at that time?*

BELTON: Jack Tuthill was there most of the time, then he left and I was chargé for a while. Then Burke Elbrick came.

*Q: Burke Elbrick had been my ambassador in Yugoslavia before. What was the situation in Rio when you were there?*

BELTON: I found it a difficult place to work. It wasn't my favorite post; it wasn't a post where I felt as comfortable as I had in some other posts. The basic difficulty was that the Brazilian government was in the process of moving to Brasília and large portions of the government were already there. The President was there and all of his staff and much of the cabinet; the Foreign Ministry was one of the few that was still in Rio. The Congress was in Brasília too. It was a lot more difficult to work in Rio than any place I had been before because I was accustomed to have the whole range of government to get acquainted with and work with. Rio didn't have that, all you had there were the Foreign Office and a few other government departments, though not major ones. That was one of the problems of working there.

With regard to our overall relations, they were on a fairly stable basis, an even keel. We had a very active AID program; one of the features of our activity was an enormous staff. When Jack Tuthill got there he took a look at this and said, "We've got too many people; this grew like Topsy." He started a program called "Operation Topsy", designed to reduce the staff as much as possible. I came in just about that time...I wasn't in on the actual origination of the program but I was in on the execution and had to do some of the executing.

*Q: You must have gotten into some acrimonious discussions with all the different agencies involved.*

BELTON: I guess we did, but you ask me now where we cut and I can't remember. It seemed to me that we still had an enormous number of people when it was all over with. We did cut a lot of people; I think it was primarily AID programs that were reduced.

*Q: They had a military government at that time, didn't they?*

BELTON: It was a military man who had been elected, he was a general. Let's put it this way: the military had taken over in 1964 when they threw the president out. There was a military government, but it wasn't too intrusive; they had a civilian vice-president. Then the president had a stroke and for all intents and purposes was out of it, and eventually died. As soon as it was evident that he couldn't govern any longer and that the vice-president would become president, the military did step in actively and would not let him assume control. A triumvirate consisting of the Minister of Air, the Minister of Army, and the Minister of the Navy took over and governed for a while. That was a real military government and it sort of couped the coup, as it were, because the other guy had been elected.

*Q: Was this causing problems with our relations?*

BELTON: Well yes. We didn't like dictatorships and I can remember having long and serious conversations with highly placed military men trying to talk them out of this--that, of course, was an almost impossible task --pointing out that in the history of the world there had almost never been a military government that had managed to get out peacefully, that they were just leading to an eventual tragedy in which they would be the tragic figures. Interestingly enough, those predictions didn't come true. Over the years they did work themselves gradually back to a democracy.

*Q: You left when?*

BELTON: I retired at the end of April, 1970. The big event from the point of view of excitement and so forth was the kidnapping of Ambassador Burke Elbrick.

*Q: I was going to ask if you were there at that time.*

BELTON: Yes, it was my job to get him off the hook, get him out.

*Q: Could you explain what happened and how we responded?*

BELTON: This happened, I believe, right after luncheon, on whatever day it occurred in September, 1969, when Elbrick was leaving his residence to return to his office. A few blocks from the embassy residence his car was intercepted, he was taken out at gun point, put into another car, and whisked away into captivity. The minute we got word of it -- I don't remember now how I first learned about it -- I was on the telephone with the State Department; I then went over to see the Foreign Minister, while others in the Embassy fanned out and made contact with everybody we knew in the government who had influence. This was when this triumvirate was in power. That made it a particularly touchy thing because decisions had to be reached by three people. This was an occasion when our military contacts, our military mission, and our attachés were extremely useful to us.

When I went to the foreign minister he said, "Tell us what you want us to do." I said, "I have not had time yet to get any response from Washington as to what they want, but from my personal point of view I would like you to do everything you possibly can to get him out of captivity as soon as possible." The kidnapers were soon -- I don't remember the exact time relationship -- demanding that the kidnapers themselves and a number of political prisoners in jail be sent out of the country. The people in prison were mostly leftists and communists and so forth who were being held by the military authorities. That was their primary demand.

I went back to the Embassy and again got in touch with Washington to report my conversation and eventually got word back that what I had told the Foreign Minister was right. I immediately told the Brazilians that is what we would like them to do and to please go ahead and do it. This presented some rather serious problems for them. First of all because these military types were not the least bit happy about releasing people they already thought were dangerous enough to lock up. Secondly, because the business of sending them out of the country was a form of exile; even though they had asked to be sent out it was still considered to be a form of exile, and the Brazilian Constitution said that you could not exile anybody; it was prohibited by the Constitution. Over a period of about four days they worked that out and did send these people out; freed them and sent them out. And Elbrick was released.

*Q: What were you getting from Washington? I can't remember if at that time we already had the policy that gets bent all the time of "no concessions to..."*

BELTON: That was our good luck. This was the first kidnaping that had been successful. A few months before, during an attempt to kidnap Ambassador Gordon Mein in Guatemala, he had resisted and been killed. No policy had been developed yet. As I

say, fortunately from my point of view they hadn't yet developed a policy, so they okayed the idea of conceding to these fellows to get him out.

*Q: The policy came after that.*

BELTON: The policy came after that. They realized this was a lousy policy; they were right, of course, but from my situation of trying to get Elbrick out, and of course from Elbrick's viewpoint, it was great.

*Q: Elbrick did not stay very long after that, did he?*

BELTON: No. He hadn't been there very long; it wasn't a very happy experience for him. In spite of the fact that he had been in Portugal, his Portuguese wasn't all that fluent--it had gotten rusty, I guess, in Yugoslavia. He didn't understand the informality of life in Latin America. His tendencies and his wife's tendencies were more directed toward very formal relationships, always have the ambassadors of four other countries to your dinner parties, always seat them properly and so on. If that meant that the editor of a leading newspaper was down below the salt, that didn't worry them very much. In my view they just didn't quite get it, so I don't think they were very happy there. Shortly after the kidnaping he was ordered back to Washington for medical checks and all that--it was a real shock to his system. At some stage, I have forgotten now when, he went for a medical exam and had a heart attack during the exam in the department. That effectively was the end of his service. He retired not long after and died within a few years. It wasn't a happy period of his life; it wasn't a good ending for a career that I think had been very distinguished.

*Q: You retired when?*

BELTON: I retired at the end of April 1970. At that time there was a limit of ten years in Class 1. I was a Class 1 officer and hadn't been promoted to Career Minister or designated to be an Ambassador anywhere, which was the next step, so I stepped out.

*Q: Where did you go when you retired?*

BELTON: I went to a town called Gramado in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and started a project: an in depth study of the birds of Rio Grande do Sul. After nine years down there doing that, I returned to settle in our home on a rural property in West Virginia, from where I still keep active in the field of ornithology and bird conservation, with particular reference to the neotropics.

*End of interview*