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

RAYMOND ELLIS BENSON

Interviewed by: Robert V. Daniels
Initial interview date: April 27, 2000

POSTS

Background:
Moscow 1930
Return to USA -1932
Wisconsin – 1938; New Jersey
Join USIA as Foreign Service- 1957

Zagreb Branch Public Affairs Officer	1959-1960
Belgrade Press Officer Information Officer	1961-1964
Armed Forces Staff College	1965
Hamburg Branch Public Affairs Officer	1965-1968
USIA Washington Assistant Director, Research analysis Office of Policy Research	1968-1970
Russian Language Institute Garmisch	1970
Turkey Counselor for Public Affairs	1971-1975
Moscow	1975
Belgrade	1979-1982
Atlantic Institute	1982-1983

INTERVIEW

[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Benson.]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Raymond E. Benson. Today is April 27, 2000, and we are in Burlington, Vermont, the home of the University of Vermont. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Robert V. Daniels. Ray, let's start with your date and place of birth.

BENSON: I was born in New York City, on November 2nd, 1924; born in the Bronx though we lived in Manhattan at the time.

Q: Can you say something about your father and mother?

BENSON: Well, that's a long story. Both my father, Michael Benson, and my mother, Vera Benson, were born in Russia. Of course, their names were different at that time. They came to the United States before the First World War, my father, I guess, on the very eve of it in 1914. They got their higher education here in the United States, and they met here and were married here.

Q: What was the name in Russian?

BENSON: My mother's maiden name was Peskin, P E S K I N. My father's last name when he came to the United States was Benjaminovich, Benjamin with an O V I C H at the end of it. Of course they both had patronymics in the Russian style. He changed his name in the United States.

Q: Benson is more or less a translation?

BENSON: Well, it's very apt and clever of you. He was going to night school at Cooper Union and working during the day, getting a degree in engineering, and one day went up to his professor, who was an immigrant himself, a Swede, and said that he had been preparing his lessons, if you will, he thought very well, but "You never call on me," said my father to this professor, whereupon the professor said, "I'm so glad you bring this up, because I was embarrassed to bring it up. I just cannot, I don't think, pronounce your name. What does all this mean in Russian?" My father said it means 'new Benjamin'. "Perfect," said the Swedish professor. "We have a name for you in Sweden. It's Benson. You will be true to your ancestors, and I will be able to call on you." And so the name was changed, quite legally, I might say.

Q: Now, your father had some unusual political involvements?

BENSON: You put it very delicately. My father, from the time he was a teenager, was a member of the Social Democratic Party in Russia. He had, while he was at *gymnasium*, the counterpart of our high school, in the city of Uralsk just above Astrakhan, he had fallen out with his father, who was a very orthodox Jew and very severe and a disciplinarian, I am led to believe. In any event, my father left home. How he managed it I do not know, but he continued at the *gymnasium* and declared himself a Social Democrat, an atheist, very much against his father's principles, and he became--obviously I don't know any details--the chief, I suppose you would call it, of a secret cell or group within the *gymnasium* of young men and women who were dedicated to the principles of social democracy.

Q: Can you tell me when that would have been? What year was your father born?

BENSON: He was born in 1892. This would have been a little bit after, I believe--I think I can be more precise next time we meet, to have some papers--a little bit after the 1905 revolution.

Q: Oh, it would have to be, because he would have gone into gymnasium at around age 15, and that would put that about 1907 to 1910.

BENSON: Yes, that fits with other data about what happened to him, because, you see, as a Social Democrat, you very well know, Bill, the Social Democratic in the Russian context at the time is the precursor of the Communist Party.

Q: Well, the Bolshevik faction. Did you know anything whether he was inclined to the Bolsheviks or the Mensheviks within the Social Democratic Party? This was, of course, the time when they were nominally factions of the same party but they were growingly at odds with each other.

BENSON: He was very much inclined to the Bolsheviks. He either was immediately, that is the ground rules of the cell that I refer to, or he later became involved with the Bund, the B U N D, which was the Jewish national arm or group within the Social Democrats. This group was more inclined toward the Menshevik faction. This contretemps or paradox or confrontation he carried with him into New York. We can come to that a little later, but in any case, there he was, back to your first question, in Uralsk at the *gymnasium*, not living at home, at total odds with his father, who was a devout Jew, very orthodox and observant and a very important businessman. On the other hand, here was my father running the cell. He had a *klichka*, he had a *nom de guerre* which was Mikhai, deriving from Michael, and he was caught. The Czar's police--if you want to put it that way, and I guess it was--caught him. What had happened is that one of the graduates at the *gymnasium*, a member of the cell, had moved to Moscow, where he continued his political activity, and he was caught. During interrogation he revealed what was going on back home in Uralsk, and that broke the cell, meaning the police gathered them all in, and my father went to prison there in Uralsk.

Q: At about the age of 20?

BENSON: I think he was probably.... I'll do a little bit of research, Bill, because I have some papers. I did not do my homework, but the question leads me to fill that in. I will if I can from the papers I have, and I can tell you what these papers are. But he went to prison. I have a picture of him snapped in the courtyard of the prison, which, when you think of the conditions under which political prisoners in Communist Russia were imprisoned, is almost either laughable or really a profound commentary. He's sitting on a chair facing another fellow sitting in a chair. They're both dressed in suits. They have high, white collars in the old-fashioned style with neckties. In his handwriting on the back of the picture, it says *"Laudi y ya,"* "Laudin and I." While he was in prison, his father was shot and killed. When he came out, he found that his mother, a widow, had moved to Warsaw, part of the Russian Empire at the time, to be with her sister, and he went off to visit her. From there he went to the United States. Under what circumstances were my grandfather killed? There were not too many Jewish people living in Uralsk. It was outside the pale of settlement.

Well, it meant that you had to be invited to take up residence there and were registered as one who had the legal authority to live there. My grandfather was a *kupietz peiruvagilda*, in other words a merchant of the first guild. I presume this meant that he had to take certain exams and probably had studied accounting, whatever one did in the early 20th century to qualify. He was invited to come to Uralsk and manage the outlet of an Astrakhan brewery and Vichy water plant, and there were several bars in Uralsk which served the beer of this Astrakhan plant, and I guess the citizens of Uralsk would pick up their Vichy water. You know, they'd be in these big glass bottles with a siphon at the top. In any case, there was a protection racket run, in fact, by golly, by the chief of police, which he directed against the Jewish merchants. One day my grandfather sent a letter to a newspaper and said, "We don't think we ought to be treated this way. We have been invited to be here, and we shouldn't have to put with this," and he mentioned the man who was the chief of police, a minor member of the local nobility. It's very hard to explain.

Q: Well, isn't it because any official of certain status automatically got a corresponding noble rank?

BENSON: For his lifetime.

Q: *Like Lenin's father.*

BENSON: Like Lenin's father. That's an odd comparison, but perfectly apt. In any case, the chief of police brooded about this awhile, and one day, very liquored up, he sallied forth from his house with his revolver all loaded and he sought out the two men who were involved, in other words my grandfather and another person, and killed them, killed my grandfather in front of one of his breweries--not breweries, his beer *shtuba*, his bar,

where he had stopped, I gather, on his way home to have a brew with the boys. This happened while my father was in jail.

How do we know all this? I should say that the chief of police got a slap on the wrist. We know all this because, of all things, there was a stringer in Uralsk for a Moscow newspaper, and he wrote up this story, this interesting event which had just in Uralsk, and it was printed in Moscow, a long distance from Uralsk, and had no effect on the local scene or whatever happened to the chief of police. But an awful long time later when my father, then living in the Soviet Union as a Soviet citizen, retired, he was granted a pension from his job at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and he applied for a pension as an old Bolshevik. Now, you know what that means, Bill. It doesn't mean that he was old.

Q: A member of the Bolshevik Party before 1917.

BENSON: Precisely that, yes, and with continuous service to the party. This had to be demonstrated. In order to do this, to prove this, he had to get materials from the archives. So I happen to have a document which is his petition to the archives to go through the records and bring up these data. They granted him this request. This would have been after he retired. We're talking about the 1960s.

In any event, then they searched, and they came up with various materials, Xeroxes of which I have. I'd rather not say how. I don't think it's relevant for this particular interview. But what we have is a typescript of the newspaper article which I just referred to, and we have many other police records which indicate the police, being aware of the cell, trying to track it down, found my father, put him in jail--and I'll get dates from these documents, which are home in my office. So that's how this amount of information generated. You know, I didn't see my father after my leaving the Soviet Union, which was in the early 1930s. There was no communication on this subject, but it's in these documents. Coming out of prison he realized that he was under surveillance, perfectly normal in the circumstances--and I have some documents which attest to that. He trekked off to Warsaw, made his way there over a period of time. He sort of walked, he hitched, he got rides to Jewish settlements, Jewish areas. This is the way that he had to do it. He gave Hebrew lessons for a period of time in these places.

Q: Now once he got to western Russia, Jewish settlements were more common?

BENSON: Yes. I don't know the steps of his journey, but this was his purpose, you might say going from safe hamlet to safe hamlet on his way to Warsaw. There he said that he thought he was in danger of being drafted. This is probably late 1913 or early 1914, and he thought that it would be very punitive indeed for him if he were in service with his background. Being Jewish he thought he'd like to get out of the country. The family in Warsaw gathered and suggested two choices. One was Palestine. A large number of the Benjaminovich family had traveled to Palestine in the 19th century.

Q: In the earliest Zionist movement.

BENSON: Absolutely, this is early, you know, for such a movement in the 19th century.

Q: Well, Herzl started the movement in the 1880s, I believe.

BENSON: Yes, it was probably like that. And he said no, he thought not. Now, you know as well as anybody what the political questions would be. He was not a Zionist. He was an atheist.

Q: The Bundists were not Zionist but really wanted equal Jewish rights within a socialist society.

BENSON: Yes, it was a civil, totally civil, secular movement, and he didn't want to go off in a direction which would put him in a non-secular context, even if there was family there in Palestine. By the way, I have hundreds of relatives in Israel who go by the name of Benjamini. They went down to Benjaminovich, and they're apparently very wealthy, having very early in the 19th century bought land or squatted on land, and they are producing lots of citrus fruit and packaging and selling it.

The other possibility was the United States. There was a woman who was an aunt who lived in Brooklyn, and he said I would like to go to her. So he took the one in the United States. How he got to America I have no idea, nor where he left from. Of course, there was the seacoast there, many ports.

Q: But, of course, immigration into the USA was quite open at the time.

BENSON: I think it was, and to the point of one of your questions, he immediately--and this is what facilitated his pension--became a member of the Communist Party of the United States.

Q: There wasn't any Communist Party yet. It was founded in 1919 out of the Socialist Party, the Eugene Deb Socialist Party, right?

BENSON: This split in the socialist party is what caused a great rupture between my father and some of his friends in the United States whom he knew from his first days here. I know this because of other family ties who have read it in the literature of the period and know with what passion this question of do we go this direction or that direction.

Q: Sounds like the movie <u>Reds</u> [Ed: released in 1981. Co-written, produced, directed by and starred Warren Beatty. The movie depicts the life and career of John Reed.]

BENSON: Well, of course, it was, and even more passionate than that, you know. You can only imagine the Talmudic discussion, especially among the Jews, obviously among the Jews, on this issue.

Q: The Socialist Party then split over American entry into World War I in April 1917 and then over the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, in November 1917.

BENSON: My father was--how to put in the Italian--he was monochromatic in his party affiliation, straight line--and I have documents in this little file I have which emerged from my asking someone if I could see these things--because he had to prove unbroken service beginning before the Revolution to the party which later became identified as....

Q: The Soviets counted his membership in the Deb Socialist Party as continuity for their purposes.

BENSON: Well, there was hardly any other way at that time. It was later behavior, I think, when he had options, which they would have evaluated, and he took all the right steps. He moved into the more radical--if you wanted to call it that, it was--weighing arm part of this movement.

Q: Which tended to attract the East European immigrants anyway, whereas the moderate wing of the Socialist Party was more native.

BENSON: Where do the Wobblies go? [Ed: The Industrial Workers of the world, IWW, known as the Wobblies, was founded in Chicago in June 1905 at a convention of American socialists, anarchists, and radical trade unionists who were opposed to the policies of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Eugene Debs was an IWW founder.]

Q: They're native, but they were not in the later Debs Socialist Party, nor generally the Communist Party. They were anarchist syndicalists. I wanted to ask you if your father had any contact with the Russian Revolutionary émigrés who were in New York during World War I such as Trotsky and Bukharin.

BENSON: I don't know. I have no record of it. One would suspect that he would have, simply because there weren't that many people around who were of his lineage. By the time we're talking, he either has received or is about to receive an engineering degree. He was multilingual already at that time, meaning Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish and English. He later added other languages, French, German and Swedish. So it is not impossible that this would have happened. I never thought of it until your question. That's really fascinating. I have no record of it.

Q: See if you can find any connection with the Russian émigré newspaper Nove Mir, New World, which Bukharin wrote for in 1916.

BENSON: Well, I know there was a connection to Nove Mir. You see, at that time there were many newspapers in New York, many Yiddish newspaper. Freiheit was the left wing, let's say. Der Tag was the general bourgeois newspaper. Vorwarts was the more Bundist Menshevik paper, and the largest and a very notable paper actually. But there

were Russian language newspapers which were counterpart. One for each faction and consequently small.

But anyhow, when he graduated, he went to work for Amtorg [Ed: Wikipedia notes Amtorg Trading Corporation, also known simply as Amtorg, was the first Soviet trade representation in the United States when Armand Hammer established it in New York in 1924 through the amalgamation of the American firms Products Exchange Corporation (1919) and Arcos-America Inc. (1923).] Once again, I will look and see if the chronological record I have says when he joined Amtorg.

Of course, it was establishing trade relations with the West, which required Amtorg. The Russian Trading Corporation in America is what it was. It was not an underground institution. It was quite accepted and, in fact, welcomed by people who wanted to trade with the Soviet Union for whatever purposes. They hired people, Americans. By then my father was a citizen, I presume. At least he was becoming one as quickly as he could.

Q: And his political affiliations did not interfere with that, become a citizen?

BENSON: Clearly not. Those were different days, I guess, Bill. I would suspect that no one even asked such a thing. The question was: "Do you know the answers to these questions on the American Constitution? And, by golly, your English is pretty good. I see you have a degree from Cooper Union. Welcome to the United States." So there he was, a new citizen, with a wife by then, my mother.

Q: Your mother had immigrated about the same time?

BENSON: About the same time, very young. She was in her mid-teens when she came to join--with a younger sister yet--to join an older sister and brother who were already in the United States. The sister was married. The brother was not. And she began to work in, as it is called by immigrants to this day, the shop. You may know exactly what that means. Of course the reference is to the garment industry. When you find old Jews or Puerto Ricans, Italians speaking about the shop--now the Chinese too--they mean the garment workers. That's what she did, and went to night school and became a nurse, a graduate nurse. She worked in hospitals and did private nursing.

Q: Did she share your father's political interests?

BENSON: She shared my father's political interests a hundred percent. She did not have as elaborate a background as he as far as membership in anything was concerned. I am convinced that she was not a member of the Communist Party of the United States, but she might as well have been.

Q: Where did her family come from in Russia?

BENSON: Her family came from White Russia, from a town called Bela, meaning white, which is on the road from Erjev to Sviensk.

Q: That's not really present-day yellow Russia or white Russia? But they referred to it as that?

BENSON: Well, she thought so. That doesn't mean that she would have been accurate. As far as the old geography books are concerned, it was Smienskobenya. The closest large town, she would say, was Vichix.

Q: Which is actually in present-day Belorussia.

BENSON: Bela remains a county center. I visited it when we were serving in Moscow. It was difficult to get to, but we got to it for a visit. As a matter of fact--I should go back--my father was born in White Russia and moved with the family when his father got the job in Uralsk. He was very, very young, I gather, at the time. At Amtorg my father was a civil engineer whose special field was food processing plant engineering, meat packing, canning, then just beginning breakfast foods.

Q: Amtorg was interested in acquiring equipment and know-how for that industry.

BENSON: I guess so. Absolutely, it was a priority.

Q: And this was the time when the Soviet government was trying to revive agriculture in the '20s.

BENSON: You've got it absolutely right. Various delegations came to the United States through the courtesy of Amtorg. That was the institution; we would call it, in the government. My father briefed them, got materials for them, lectured them on what is all this about, and frequently traveled with them to plants or cities or what have you which were of interest to them. All over the USA as far as I understand. Now, on one of these occasions he led a delegation headed by Anastas Mikoyan.

Q: Really? He was Commissar of Trade at the time. And then ultimately titular President of the Soviet Union...

BENSON: President of the Soviet Union. Without this happenstance we would never have gone to the Soviet Union, and without the circumstance that when my father and Mikoyan hit it off, I never would have gotten into the Foreign Service. It's not another story, but it's for a little later in the game. At one point--we are now in the 1920s--the Soviets were very interested in meat packing. Well, they were always, as you said a minute ago, interested in food processing of various types. But here they decided they wanted to begin American-type meat packing. Chicago was the meat packing center at that time. So, it was Chicago; bring them in on the hoof, and out comes the sausage. So they asked my father to go to Chicago to be in charge of a large and sort of, I gather, rotating delegation – people would come for six weeks, three months, and then others would come.

Q: But he would maintain an office there, and delegations would come and go?

BENSON: I don't recall that he had an office, but he certainly had a pied-à-terre someplace, and certainly my mother and I went to Chicago. I think it was probably in some host meat packing establishment. We moved to Chicago. This subunit of the Ministry of Foreign Trade was called *Soyuz Miasso,* the union of meat. My father had a card which said *Soyuz Miasswindal* and that sort of thing. So that's how come just a little while ago we were talking about my going to the Adler Planetarium, and I did it at that time, during that year.

Q: Where did you live in Chicago?

BENSON: We lived north of the Edgewater Beach Hotel, which at that time was for summer folk. Now days, it's no longer just for summer folk. So we lived there. It was very close to the beach. It was perfectly lovely. It was cold as heck, I remember to this day, in winter, but that's where we lived. He had, I gather, earlier been offered a contract to come to the Soviet Union and work as an engineer. As you know, that was what's going on. Belgians, French, Germans, many Americans were being offered other contracts.

Q: This would have been when the first five-year plan had gotten started and they were hiring foreign engineers to develop industry.

BENSON: It fits, it fits, because we were in Chicago in 1929-30, I believe. Shame on me for not having done my homework a little better, but I'll get these dates as far as I can from the records I have, which will be these police records and archival materials, because he had to write a kind of bio to the people he was petitioning for the higher rank in the pension system. It's a pension at the state level. And there are various levels within it. It's like a column of ranks within this, but it's different from and higher than the ordinary pension.

Q: I understand, yes. Everything being hierarchical in a classless society.

BENSON: You've got it. He petitioned for a pension at the state level. He got it, but in order to do it, you had to go through this process which I've described in part.

Q: I must say, you have some unique documents to trace your family history.

BENSON: Well, I don't know. Well, it's virtually unique, yes. There are not too many, you know, and it's through the circumstance of my having this file or this collection of papers that derive from his application for the higher pension. He asked them for permission to access the archives. They said, "Yes, we will do it," and then they sent him the materials. With that he went someplace else, and they approved, whoever they were, this pension at the state level. He kept the papers. He had every right to, I think. By golly, there they are in Weybridge, Vermont. Well, he and my mother decided to go to the

Soviet Union. They decided that he would accept this contract with the foreign trade people.

And the reason, among others, that they decided to do this tells you so much about the ideology, the value system, of people in this movement. They had been having marital problems of some kind. My father was not the most faithful of husbands. That much I have heard from my half-sister, and it's conceivable that he was causing my mother some grief in that direction. They thought that going to the Soviet Union would lessen the tensions between the two of them because, as Marx said, human relations in a capitalist society are rife with tensions which derive from the fact that it is a capitalist society, and in Russia, i.e. the Soviet Union, these tensions would disappear because they would be living under socialism. Bill, this may seem nonsense, to you and me, certainly to me--I've heard it from my mother on several occasions--it's the God's honest truth. They really were motivated in some part by this conviction that in the Soviet Union the falsity of the human relations, which are engendered by the fact that they were in a capitalist society, would disappear and their marriage would return to its earlier. Nothing of the sort happened, by the way. It got worse and worse for various reasons. But we left Chicago in 1930, my father's contract in hand. We bought supplies in Chicago, clothes, trunks and that sort of thing.

Q: Maybe before we get into your experience as a boy in Moscow, could we jump back a bit to the 1920s? Your father remained active in the American Communist Party all the time he was working for Amtorg and in Chicago?

BENSON: He was certainly a member. I don't know what activity, beyond paying dues, he was responsible for or participated in.

Q: Was he involved in the factional fights at the end of the 1920s? The fight first between the Trotskyists--I think it was the Trotskyists under Canon--and the Lovestonites, the pro-Bukharin people.

BENSON: There's a new biography of Lovestone you may have read about. I don't know. But certainly his contract and the way in which he was treated when he got to the Soviet Union would indicate that he was a very good odor, which presumably means that such reports as were written in the United States were positive, because in coming to the Soviet Union he became and remained a good friend of Mikoyan's. That saved him all through the very difficult days which were to come. The purges, of course [Ed: reference is probably to the Great Purges of 1937-38].

This is perhaps a parenthetical story. During the two years when I lived in the Soviet Union with my mother and father there, Birobidzhan was being settled for the first time. The Jewish autonomous region out there to the west of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk on the Trans-Siberian railroad, near the Chinese border, the Amur River. Many people whom my mother and father knew from the United States were coming through Moscow to go to Birobidzhan.

And they came in, Bill, with furniture, pianos, clothes, children of all heights and size to go to Birobidzhan. You can only sort of close your eyes and imagine. You don't have to do that. You would know what Birobidzhan was like at the time and what difficulties they had out there. In fact, there was two-way traffic in our apartment. There were people coming in and there were people coming back. They would be sleeping on the floor on the way and on the way back to the USA.

Q: Which they could still do, although later American immigrants into the Soviet Union were prevented from departing.

BENSON: Many of their children remained because they were in the school. We met years later in New Jersey--I was now myself more or less going to enlist in the Army and go into the artillery --and one young man--he was no longer young--came out from the Soviet Union and came to visit my mother because he was the son of old friends. He had remained. He had been educated there. He had been through the whole war. He was not wounded. He did get out. We are talking about 1945, immediately after the war.

Q: But another year or two later and he...

BENSON: I think this is exactly the case. When I was at the embassy there, there were people--you know of it--who were still petitioning the embassy to help them to get out because they still had an American passport going back to the 1930s.

Q: Let me ask you one more question about the period when your father was still in the USA. Have you had opportunity to look at any of the American literature on the history of the Communist Party such as [Theodore H.] Ted Draper [1912 – 2006]?

BENSON: I know there is a rich bibliography, and I have not. It occurs I might be advantaged to spend a few days in the Middlebury College library and just look in the indexes under Amtorg and all of that, and that's very specific, you know, of possible interest here. But, no, I haven't Bill, I have not. I'm telling you practically all I know. You know very much more about that, because you have followed it through really the secondary and primary memoir literature.

But I have not done that. I know something of how the Communist Party behaved because of my experiences in New Jersey in the 1940s, but that's a later part of the story and it relates directly to how in heaven's name I was hired by USIA (U.S. Information Agency), received a security clearance, and joined the Foreign Service.

Q: Yes, we'll get to that later. I want to focus these background questions on the period of, say 1920 to 1923,when the Communist Party was effectively outlawed and driven underground and called itself the Workers' Party and survived in that guise until the later 1920s. Amtorg, of course, functioned all through this anyway.

BENSON: Amtorg functioned all through this period. I'll take a few notes before I leave here today and look specifically for some reference to that which might be in the biography my father wrote in the form of a petition to which I've been referring .

Q: Well, let's come back to your move to Moscow in 1930.

BENSON: Well, we went from Chicago to New York. We bought things. He had some kind of allowance. It's most extraordinary, you know. We left with trunks full of clothes and some furniture, steamer trunks of the old kind, you know, that you put on their end and open up and they have drawers and so on. We landed in Bremerhaven. We went over on a North German Lloyd line ship SS Bremen, which didn't survive the war. We landed in Bremerhaven and took a fast train from there to Berlin, and we went to Berlin. In fact, it's now functioning again. It's a crack train from Bremen, Hamburg to Berlin, very fast. We stayed in Berlin for a couple of weeks, as I recall the story told me. I don't remember that literally. But there they bought supplies that were very helpful: powdered citrus fruits, lemon, orange--the Germans had them; I guess we did too, I don't know--powdered milk, powdered eggs. Trunks full of this came into the Soviet Union with us. We went in by train.

Q: And this was going through Germany in pre-Hitler days?

BENSON: Yes, yes, Germany and Poland. You know, you stop at the old border crossing point that you must have read about in the literature, Soviet border station Niegoreloje, where the wheel carriages...

Q: Oh, yes, they change the wheels. I had that experience at Brest-Litovsk, which was the Soviet-Polish border in 1966. This is because the Russian railroads had the wider gauge by about six inches.

BENSON: It's the same process but at a different point. The Russian railroads still have the wider gauge. So we arrived in Moscow. We were very laden down. I don't remember much of this, the trip itself. I was young; five and a half, going on six. And we brought all kinds of things. We settled first in some sort of hotel. I recall my mother being--she was a nurse--being absolutely upset at the filth in the hotel. We got an apartment which was huge on Tverskaya.

Q: Which then became Gorky Street and is now Tverskaya again.

BENSON: Exactly so, Bill. But it is Tverskaya again, but it's a big, broad street. It's been widened and in doing so and taking down the building in which we had lived. My Tverskaya was very narrow. Our building was a huge, big building with enormous walls which survived the fire. It was the old road from the city of Kiev, one of the radial roads which connected the...

Q: Oh, it's pre-1812.

BENSON: Oh, yes, it was pre-1812. It was a monster of a building and a monster of an apartment with huge fireplaces all over the place, which we could never get enough wood to burn in, because the central heating, which had been added, was not functioning and, if it was, it didn't bring the heat up to our floor, whatever floor it was. It was cold. It was big. And we lived there, and I recall vividly being at the window and watching everybody parading by, because the road goes right into Red Square. So there would be great activity in the street during one of the celebratory events whether it would be May Day, or the November revolution. Later we moved into a new building which had been provided for the foreign engineers. It was a nice apartment and was off a bit, near Prospect Mir. It was in the direction of Leningradsky. Well, [inaudible], you know, was the four railroad stations. It was in that direction. A bit northeast of the center.

It was very rural at the time. If you could believe it, there were little *izbahs*, little peasant buildings, houses, across the street from this area which had...

Q: Oh, I've notice those even in the 1960s.

BENSON: Really? Well, there you are.

Q: They would just build the new apartment houses around some old settlement and leave it there with all its outhouses.

BENSON: That's exactly it. You saw it. Because there they were across the street, and they had the wooden benches in front of the homes, as in the village, and they would sit there of an evening and they would play the *bedabanchi*--what do we call those things?--accordion, and sing away. But these were fine apartments. Money was put into it for the foreign engineers, and it was only foreigners who lived here. There were schools nearby, my recollection is one in French, one in German, one in English. I started school there in the English one.

Q: Now, was this totally English instruction for foreigners, or English plus Russian?

BENSON: Well, I don't recall taking instruction in Russian. I do know that I ended up speaking, reading and even writing Russian far better than I ever could in the years following. I began reading very early. I was reading English at the age of three and writing. So it came, I suppose you'd say, naturally, but I don't know where it came from, whether we had instruction in school or not. It came from somewhere. I certainly was doing it. I was reading at the age of six and a half; something more structured than what one might pick up from the street. I was reading Jules Verne in Russian at that age.

Q: Mysterious Island!

BENSON: Yes, it's a great read in any language. But anyway that's the way it went. Should I just go on about my father? He went to work for Mikoyan. He worked at his special field, which was food processing plant engineering. As the years go by, I have a little bit more memory of this. Through Mikoyan we met various people. He retained, as I

suggested and said, a friendship for my father and a good feeling about him forever, most, importantly through the 1930s.

Q: As a protector there?

BENSON: Oh, yes. He liked my mother. She said that he was absolutely charming. We're talking about the 1930s, and everybody was a heck of a lot younger at that time. She said to me, "He was a marvelous dancer."

Q: Mikoyan was probably about the same age as your father. I think he was born probably in the early 1890s.

BENSON: Yes, sure, I guess. Not much difference. So he was great on social occasions, she said. He was lively. He drank but he never got drunk. He danced. She loved to dance, and my father hated to dance. So a very good time was had by all. One of the great family friends became a man by the name of Lobofrussian. Lobof was the Minister of Forestry.

Q: There's a Lobof who was an old Bolshevik and figured during the Revolution. Is this the same one?

BENSON: Bless you for having heard of him. He ended up badly during the '30s.

Q: Sure. All those people did.

BENSON: All those people did. Lobof, I really don't know how, became friendly with my father, I presume through Mikoyan, the party or something like that--not the Community Part but I mean a social event party--and we visited Lobof's *dacha*, his place outside of town.

We went many weekends, and I remember them. I wouldn't say opulent, but it was terribly comfortable. There were servants around. It was on a river, and this guy Lobof used to take me--I can't recall his first name, but it's in all the literature because he was indeed an old Bolshevik...

Q: In fact, he was then or previously even a member of the Central Committee.

BENSON: I think he was. I'm not sure of then, but he was at one stage important. Well, Lobof used to take me out to the river which either ran through his *dacha* property or was nearby with a rifle. I don't know if you realize how difficult this is. They used to shoot fish standing on shore. The angle of refraction has to be compensated for, and this son of a gun would shoot them through the eye. Now why do I remember this? It's because he would make sure to pick them up out of the water and bring them home as evidence to whomever was there of his continued skills, marksmanship. My mother became especially friendly with his aunt, an older, very much older woman.

Q: Your mother spoke Russian?

BENSON: Oh yes. She never lost her accent. She spoke perfect English ultimately, but she always had an accent. And her handwriting, to anybody who would look at it, would betray the fact that her first script was in Cyrillic. The loops are different, you know.

Well, there were other people whom they knew and met that don't remain in my memory. Lobof did because we were there so often. He was so kind to me and attentive to this little boy, me, and he was a figure. My father traveled out of Russia on purchasing missions of various kinds, or trade missions, shall we say, and it was only outside the Soviet Union that he could write freely. After we came back to the State, we once heard from my father, he never wrote much, but he did write to my mother once to say that Lobof had been purged.

Q: This would have been around 1937. That's when everybody got purged.

BENSON: Well, some got it in '38, didn't they? But the important ones got it earlier. Well, I recall that for weeks she was affected by this.

The first summer we were there we rented a place in Malakhovka, which is right near Moscow. For a period of time it was off limits. It's now on limits.

Q: Oh, that's the place that we tried to visit in 1976.

BENSON: Yes, Bill, it was you and we in the car. How marvelous! I remember my driver going to the *giee*, the police officer, the highway control point, saying this gentleman is from the American Embassy and he lived in Malakhovka when he was a boy and we should let him through, and the guy said, "Not on your life," and back we went. Subsequently I have visited Malakhovka. Well, we spent the summer there. Things were just fine. I became ill; I was ill a lot. I had pleurisy; I had some kind of pneumonia. They gave me cups. You know what they are? It's an old system of increasing circulation. You take glass cups and you pass them over an open flame holding the open end down over the flame. This burns the air out of it, and you immediately apply it then to the skin of the person, where it adheres to the skin and raises a red welt.

This was a brutal thing for a young kid, but that is what happened. I also had dysentery. I was really not prospering. My mother and father were having vicious arguments, very audible. Of course, I was getting older and I was aware of all this by now, and sort of hiding in my room while this would be happening. It was decided then that we would go back, that my mother and I would go back to the United States. The explanation or the excuse was my physical condition. I remember very well an old doctor who came through these connections.

Q: What connections?

BENSON: Well, my father and Mikoyan and so on, he was not a fellow you go to in the clinic down the street.

Q: So he was a high-level Kremlin doctor?

BENSON: Kremlin doctor type, but he was also an older man at this point, probably trained before the Revolution and with all of the manners and all of the courtesies of that era. And he said to my mother at one point--of course, I don't remember it, but she told me later; therefore, it is fresh in my memory, the quotes--"We can do several things for Raymond," said he. "We could send him to the Crimea for the summer, but they have typhus and cholera there. We could try it with diet here, but we don't have the foods, the various milks." This is post-dysentery, you know; he was talking goat milk. "Or you could go to the United States for the summer and go to your brother's farm in New Jersey, where he would recover his health during those months." So, though my mother and father knew this was the break between them, this was the ostensible reason which allowed us to get tickets. You travel first class when you travel out of the Ministry. So we went to Leningrad. We went by ship, the MS Pushkin, which went down during the war. By the way, a fellow passenger was Raymond Robbins.

Q: Raymond Robbins being a figure in 1917 as the head of the American Red Cross delegation to Russia.

BENSON: Yes, he was. And his name being Raymond and my name being Raymond, he used to take me by the hand and walk me around the deck and so on. He was a grand man, tall, craggy. He was a Wisconsinite, a liberal--you might call him that--but who hadn't liked what he had been seeing in the early 1930s in Russia.

Now I lived in Russia two years and departed in 1932. This trip was back to London, and from there on the Columbus, again the North German Lloyd, another ship that went down during the war. That was a very old ship, pre-First World War, beautiful. You know, you have cabins on ships of this type with fresh or salt water bathing depending on which faucet you wished to turn on. We don't do things like that anymore.

And we went to my uncle's farm. My mother said that the color began returning to my cheeks just through the food I was eating on board the ships and on his farm. I prospered, and she decided that we would simply never go back. This was a tough decision. This was the height of the Depression. She was alone, and how she made it is another story which is perhaps not relevant to this document except that later in the 1950s she did remarry, and lo and behold, the man she married was a Communist.

Q: So she kept this political affiliation after you came back to the States?

BENSON: Well, she kept the political affiliation in the sense that--I don't think she ever belonged to anything--she kept it in the sense that the people she associated with did. Mr. Reuben--Boris was the first name--was an editor of Russkii Golos (Russian Voice), who lived in Brooklyn.

Q: Russkii Golos was the pro-Communist Russian language newspaper in New York until whenever it folded. I remember reading it when I was a student of Russian in 1943. I believe it was published until maybe the 1950s.

BENSON: I should say. But anyway, she knew them from before, and she worked as a private nurse in New York, and she had this little kid, me, to take care of. She couldn't, so I boarded out with them. I lived with the Reuben family in Brooklyn. They included his wife and twin daughters, one of whom had the name of Ninel. You've heard of the name Ninel? For the people listening to this tape, Ninel is Lenin spelled backward. There were a certain number of people, young women, girls, who were given the name Ninel at that time.

Q: Well, of course, there were a lot of people, boys and girls of that generation, who got variations of the Lenin name or political names.

BENSON: Well, anyhow, I don't know whether we need go into--it's up to you--much of this background until we get to her later marriage to the chap who was a Communist, because that played a very specific role in my clearance to join the government, meaning USIA, and then after I joined USIA, the upward clearance from Problems of Communism, which was my first job with the Agency, to a later job at IRI, the Intelligence Research branch or division, whatever--it was more than a division--and then into the Foreign Service.

Q: Let's get into that chronologically. One question still that refers maybe back to the 1920s and your father's work at Amtorg: Did he have any connection with Armand Hammer?

BENSON: I don't know that he did. But, you know, how could he not? I mean, how big was the office?

Q: Did he have any connection with companies like the Harriman interests that were getting concessions in Russia? They were doing that in the 1920s before recognition.

BENSON: In the 1920s. Well, he had to. He was there. He was on trips with delegations, as I've said. I don't know how compartmentalized their work was and how secretive they were about what they were doing, but I don't know of anything more directly.

Your questions raise the image in my mind of the most.... Would that my father would be sitting in this room and we would be talking with him. He would be a little old for it, but....

Q: We're resuming the interview of Ray Benson after a lunch break, and we're picking up with life in Brooklyn with the family of Boris Reuben. About that time you were ready to go to high school, or were you?

BENSON: No, I was in PS 188. I was in the fifth grade. I had begun school in Moscow. I described that. But I had begun school in the United States in the year after we came from Moscow, when I lived on the farm of my uncle's brother-in-law, which was 500 yards away from my uncle's farm. My mother was working in New York.

This was in Farmingdale, New Jersey. This was a little community called West Farms, and I went to a two-room schoolhouse with two outhouses, one for boys and one for girls. The first three grades in one room and the next three grades in another room. They put me in grade three and then they skipped me to grade four. So I finished the fourth grade there that year and then went to grade five.

Q: So you experienced some old-fashioned Americana there?

BENSON: Oh very much so. Right next door to the school was a smithy.
Where they shoed the horses and they made all sorts of other metal implements, clanking away, oh yes, and many, many old men sitting around there chatting and spending the time of day.

You walked to school. There were no school buses, so we walked. It was probably a mile and a half, seemed like forever at that age. My legs were shorter, and you walked there in winter and spring in mud and rain, and that was that. This is perhaps irrelevant for this tape, but those were the days when you washed the blackboards and you wrote on it 50 times, "I will not...." There were dunce caps; you sat in the corner and faced the corner. You remained after school and cleaned up if you had been doing something wrong.

So we lived in New York for many years and then moved to Racine, Wisconsin in 1938, where a branch of the family, my mother's older sister to whom she had come when she came to the United States many years before. She was now established with her husband. They were doing real estate there. They had houses they had refurbished, and they rented rooms and small apartments.

The idea was that my mother would establish residence and that would afford me an opportunity then to go to the University of Wisconsin. The rates were really very low, and I could get a proper education, begging the question about the fact that in those years CCNY (City College of New York) was one of America's greatest academic institutions. But that's what we did. They fell apart, the two sisters. My mother went back East. I remained in Racine and finished my first year of high school there. It was the tenth grade. I had been to junior high in New York. Then I came back and again lived with my uncle on his farm. For my 11th and 12th grades I went to Freehold, New Jersey, High School. Freehold, Farmingdale--it's to the east of Princeton, to the west of Asbury Park, south of New Brunswick by about 30 miles or so. It was great farming country in those days. The Monmouth Battleground area.

Q: Not just the Jersey Turnpike that goes through there.

BENSON: The turnpike doesn't go through there. It goes to the west, and the Garden State Parkway goes to the east. Believe me, there are plenty of highways in New Jersey. This is in the middle, but it isn't any longer prime farm country. The taxes went up such that it's bedroom communities now of north Jersey, Weehawken and Hoboken.

Q: Was there much interest among the relatives you lived with in what was going on in the world at that time? Spanish Civil War and that kind of thing?

BENSON: I don't think a heck of a lot. The Spanish Civil War was going on before and while I went to Wisconsin, because I came back in 1939. I read about it. At that age I was reading--bless my heart--The New York Times and became and remained a New York Giants football and baseball fan, also a New York Ranger hockey fan. No, it was not an environment with political discussions. In my uncle's family the discussions were on farming. He had a hatchery. He had a dairy farm. He was increasingly a real estate agent. He was a Justice of the Peace, which is an elective office in New Jersey.

He was a Democrat. It was great rural farm country then. It was just lovely. It afforded a livelihood for hundreds and hundreds of people. It was going from the old potato farming, which it was--the potato pickers would come up from the South through Monmouth County on their way to Long Island and Maine--and then it became poultry, and it remained poultry for some years after my departure to go into the Army, which was in '1945. After the war poultry farming in that part of the world was swept under by the factory farms in Indiana and Ohio and refrigerated transport of eggs from Petaluma in California. The whole thing changed, Bill. It was just different. It's what is not happening to dairy in Vermont.

Q: Did anyone in your family keep up any interest in Russia in those years?

BENSON: No. The only thing that happened was that from time to time we would get a letter from my father. The last letter came in 1947. I was then in the Army. My mother received it. We had sold our little farm--we had our own farm by then--and she'd moved to New York, and the letter was forwarded to her. What happened subsequently--and this played a role in my security clearance, in the delay in my clearance to serve abroad and in the Soviet Union--was that after a certain number of months the Post Office deep-sixed our change of address. It's not operative for longer than I don't know whether it's six, nine or 12 months, whatever it is.

My father didn't know of the change, and my mother did not renew the change of address notification, and so letters were returned. I found this out only very much later. He didn't know what to make of it. Somebody representing, or some mission representing, the Ministry of Foreign Trade came to the United States, and he asked a trusted colleague to look in the telephone books. He explained to this gentleman, who probably wondered what he was talking about. You know, at that time there were no telephone books in Moscow. He called a Raymond Benson who was in Long Island--my sister tells me this, my half-sister--who said, "What are you talking about?" or sort of "Get out of my life." Reported back to my father. The family concluded, my half-sister and his second wife,

that they had in fact reached me and that I wanted nothing to do with this gentleman who was a Soviet citizen. I had rejected my father. So he never tried to reach me again. This would have been probably the 1950s. The line was broken.

When I came back from the Army, which was in 1948, my mother said we hadn't heard in a little over a year, and we never did hear again. So when I came out of the Army and went to school in Wisconsin, I had little interest in applying for work with the government because I knew I would never get cleared because of my background. It was just kind of ridiculous even to think of it. So I went to the University to try to get a Ph.D. and perhaps be a professor and harass and harangue students, certainly not work for the government, coming back to school in 1948 after having gone to junior college before.

Q: Now you went to junior college before you went in the Army?

BENSON: I did. It was in West Long Branch, New Jersey, at Monmouth Junior College, which by golly today is Monmouth University. I went to evening school. They used the Long Branch High School building after, as I recall, 4:30 pm.

At that point my mother did not live in New York. We were together on the farm. She worked the farm. It was a small poultry farm, but in those days the economics of poultry farming were such that you could make a pretty decent living with a few birds. I would get up early in the morning, do my farm chores, do my homework somehow or other, and drive off, as I recall it, somewhere close to four o'clock and go to junior college five days a week for this number of years, and come home around 11pm and do it all over again. It saved my life. I mean it truly saved my life.

Q: In what sense?

BENSON: Because my mother had said to me that she would never sign the papers to allow me to go into the military service. My draft category was a 4-C, which is an essential farm laborer. She being the owner of the farm and I being described by the draft board in Freehold, New Jersey, as an essential farm laborer, she had control over me to that extent. There were other friends who equally were held on the farm by their parents. In 1946 a bunch of us went in together and enlisted. By that time I had convinced my mother that the war was fairly over and that I didn't want to be a farmer the rest of my life. So we sold the little place. She went back to New York, and I went into the Army.

Q: Meanwhile you had finished at Monmouth Junior College?

BENSON: I had finished Monmouth Junior College. I had an AA (associates in arts degree). Then I went for another year to what they call Rutgers University College, which is the night school of Rutgers University. In New Brunswick, a much longer drive. It was a bit of a bore, I must say. That was 1945 to 1946. It crystallized everything in my life. I just said either I give it up, or we get a larger farm and I become a farmer--I was young and strong, or my preference I wanted to get out of there. She agreed with me, and we sold the farm.

Q: What was the alternative that you had in mind after finishing the junior college?

BENSON: Well, I had hoped all along, you see, to go to a bigger school or another school and get a degree. I didn't know whether it should be in history or in sociology. When I was released from the Army, discharged, on the West Coast--I was in Korea, it was between the wars--I stopped off at the University of Wisconsin and I thought I would stay there a couple of days. I wandered into the history department; I thought I'd look them over first--and in fact, here's your Harvard connection. I walked into the history department about 12 April. It was empty--a beautiful day in Madison. There's a sort of burly fellow sitting at a desk and eating a brown-bag lunch, and he said, "Young man, what do you want? What can I do for you?" So I told him I wanted to talk with somebody in the history department because etcetera, etcetera. He said, "Well, I'm a professor here in the history department. If you don't mind my eating lunch at this time, tell me a little bit about yourself." So I told him about three paragraphs of the past two hours of our conversation, and he said, "I'll tell you what. I want you to study with me." This was Robert Lee Wolff.

Q: Oh really? I knew him at Harvard later. He was on my dissertation committee.

BENSON: For goodness sakes. Well, he was the professor of primarily Byzantine history at Wisconsin. This is a great chair, you know. Vino Grando Federestoftev had taught at Wisconsin of all places, and here was Robert Lee Wolff and he taught Russian and Soviet history. So I said, "Fine." I never visited the sociology department. And I studied with Robert Lee Wolff for a year, undergraduate year, and he took off. He went back to Harvard. But he was great, he was awesome. He really was something else again. There was nothing he didn't know by heart. He died very young, didn't he? [Ed Note: Wolff died in 1980 at age 64.] He was followed by Charles Morley, a guide to research in history and Mike Petrovich, with whom I worked when I got my master's. Anyway, that's getting ahead of the game, but that's the way it was. I came in with my AA. They both accepted the credits and then said, "You're going to have to work for your bachelor's anyway," and of course I finally got it.

Q: Had you been inclined towards Russian and East European history before you met Wolff?

BENSON: I was thinking of history in the abstract because I was interested in history, because if you don't know the past, you don't know the present. I'm convinced of that intellectually, and I had a wonderful teacher at the junior college, Wesley Camp, who was getting his doctorate at Columbia for years while he taught in the junior college. You perhaps wouldn't have heard of him. He taught French cultural history, and his approach to history and to the meaning of it, to the place of history in every civilized human being's intellectual firmament was just fixed in my mind. Sociology was something else again, you know, the explanation of things more broadly, highly theoretical as perhaps my concept of history also is. But I went first to the history department, and he said, "You must study with me. With your background what we will do...." He had it all

figured out in about five minutes. "You will be doing modern European history, Russian. I will be your major professor." He finished his lunch and he said, "Come see me when you hit campus again." And I did. That was it. I had all the rest of the day to myself.

Q: So you worked with him in your final years in undergraduate?

BENSON: Yes. You see, he didn't stay there long enough. I worked with him for my first year, and then he took off. And then Charles Morley came in from Ohio and stayed.

Q: He was in Cambridge by 1950 when he was on my thesis committee.

BENSON: Are you sure?

Q: Yes, and then the oral exam, sure.

BENSON: Well, it figures. As a matter of fact, that makes perfect sense, because he left Wisconsin, I think, for a sabbatical teaching year at Brown, from which he just kept walking and he ended up back at Harvard Yard. His father had been a professor at Harvard. Yes, this was a Harvard family. The whole meaning of it all for him was Harvard. But Morley came in and the Petrovich. Petrovich came in from the Russian Institute. He had been with G. T. Robinson.

Q: And he got you interested in the Balkans?

BENSON: Well, how did I get to Yugoslavia? I was working away on my master's, with him as my guide.

Q: What was the subject of your master's dissertation?

BENSON: It was Marxist attitude toward Russia and the Russians and relations with Russians. It was entirely too much for a master's. It should have been a Ph.D. I think Bert Uzlus wrote a book on this later. What he should have done for me or to me is given me a piece of this as a chapter, and then I could have developed it more properly into a Ph.D. Because I suddenly realized that to do this--I could read Russian okay, and struggling I could read finally a lot of Russian, and I could read French, but for this I had to read German. I had never taken German. So during my first year in graduate school I took German I-A with the freshman girls.

This must have been in 1949 to 1950. I simply had to do it, because I had to read the Die Briefwechsel Zwichen Marx und Engels (The Correspondence between Marx and Engels), and so on.

And then Die Neue Zeit, which is the Social Democratic journal, without which you can't study that period, which is written in gothic script. So I took German I-A, and I realized that I didn't have time to do I-B, II-A, II-B. So with my dictionary and my grammar and the help occasionally of some friends who were émigrés who were students, graduate

students, at Wisconsin, I plunged into the German stuff. I came to be able to read gothic script and Die Neue Zeit very well indeed. I mean, everybody wrote in it at that time in the mid- to late 19th century and then early 20th, because you had obviously people who were participating in discussions. Well, what took me to New York, I mean what happened is that I had to read Kolkol, meaning The Bell, Alexander Harrison's journal, 'journal' meaning 'periodical, which were published in London. And for the thesis I had to read various other documents in Russian. The library at Wisconsin got them for me. They got me Kolkol, the whole thing, from the British Museum Library, but it was white on black. Old-fashioned white-on-black microfilm. Bill, I almost went blind.

Q: Try reading Pravda from 1919 in the same condition.

BENSON: You did that? Well, that's why we're both blind sitting here. But, you know, they photographed the bound volumes by opening the bound volume and then turning the pages, so on either margin...

Q: You lose what's in the middle.

BENSON: You could read the middle, but the margins would be out of focus. You've been there. It was a real problem. But anyway, I did this work. I couldn't continue any longer, and I told Mike Petrovich that what I was going to do--because I had all my credits, I didn't need courses any longer--I was going to take what little money I had left over from the Army and go to New York and use the New York Public (Library), which he recommended.

Q: By the way, did you qualify for the GI Bill?

BENSON: Yes, I had gone through all of Wisconsin in these years with the GI Bill. In those days when you enlisted, you got 12 months. Then you got one month per month of service. I enlisted for 18; I got 30 months of schooling benefit. They would never cut off the GI Bill in mid-semester. If your GI Bill benefits ran out one day after mid-semester, you could study to the end of the semester. So by parlaying summers and these cut semesters, you could do a lot of years, and I did. I went off to New York and I rented a room near Columbia, and I commenced taking the bus everyday down to the New York Public and doing my research. The New York Public at that time was.... You must have worked in it.

Q: Oh, I worked in it.

BENSON: Did you really? It was a charming institution. You had women there who had come out of the Crimea with Rommel, you know, and they're the ones who wrote these 3 by 5 file cards with literally a goose quill pen. Anyway, I worked there. I was finishing my master's, and one day--this changed my whole life--a guy comes into my room--we rented it in a residence hall of some kind where I could rent though I wasn't enrolled--and he said, "Let's have coffee." He had been a waiter at Middlebury the year before, which

was 1951. When I was the chief waiter, he was one of my waiters. He was doing his Ph.D. on Dostoevsky's...

Q: So you went to Middlebury in 1951 for more Russian in the course of your master's work at Wisconsin?

BENSON: Yes, and that was crucial, because I don't think, unless I did what I did in German with grammar book and dictionary.... You see, what happened is that in 1933 the Marx/Engels Archives, or *archivie*, moved from Berlin to Moscow. Again, you may know all of this. The entire material that they had there, which was on Marx and Engels and their letters and so on, but a lot of subsidiary material on that period and on their lives, was saved from the Nazis.

Q: I think that some of it went to Amsterdam too, to the Institute for Social History.

BENSON: There was much there, and I had to use much of that because there were a lot of the Russians with whom Marx had relations relevant to my small thesis who lived in the West. Anyhow, they translated everything in Russia. The Gesamt Alstava was done in Russian and became Polnessa Branya Sechaninya. It was the most extraordinary thing, I mean volume upon volume. And then they had the Archive Marx-Engels, which was a periodical. Well, it would be like a learned journal. Anyhow, into my room came this guy and he said, "What are you going to do this summer?" and I said, "Well, this thing will be finished, I hope, by then, and I want to go to Middlebury again and tie down my Russian." He said, "You don't need to do that. Your Russian is good enough. Why don't you go to Yugoslavia?" And I said, "How and why should I go to Yugoslavia?" and he said, "At the Russian Institute they've just put up a flyer tacked to the bulletin board. You can go there for the summer for free." We stopped at the Yugoslavian Information Center and asked there. He said, "By the way..."

Q: This was a Yugoslav program to get interested Americans to go over?

BENSON: Not only Americans, it was international. It was a summer seminar for foreign Slavicists. I said, "I'm no Slavicist." He said, "Drop by and ask them, because your bus, the number-four bus from Columbia down Fifth Avenue goes by the Yugoslav Information Center and Cultural Center." So for an extra 10 cents, which is what the bus cost in those days, I stopped off. I went inside, and before I emerged I had been declared a Slavicist because they had a quota of four Americans and they only had one to that point. She was a Smith student on a Fulbright at the London School of Slavonic Studies. Off I went on a student ship, which there were in those days.

This would have been the summer of 1952. The ship was half for students, the North American Student Cooperative League and other student organizations. The other half was full of Finns going to Helsinki for the Olympics. One half of the ship was sober, and the other half.... It really was an introduction to Finnish habits.

So I went to Zagreb for the summer. That the summer they were saying, "Things are changing here, and we would love to have American students here. Why don't you stay for an academic year? We shall continue the stipend. I sent a telegram to Phil Mosley, who was then the Director of the Russian Institute at Columbia. I had been accepted as a student for the 1952-1953 academic year. I told him what had been offered me and asked what should I do? I'd like to stay but,… and I got an immediate reply from him saying, "By all means, take the opportunity. Stay. Do not reapply. You are on our list for 1953-1954." So I went out to Norway for the period between summer and fall. When I came back...

Q: Norway?

BENSON: Yes. Why Norway? I had a girlfriend there. She was from Wisconsin. She was getting her doctorate in the history of--how would you call it?--the social safety net. The Norwegians had done very good work. So I came back to Zagreb and they said, "You don't have a stipend." I said, "Why don't I have a stipend?" "Because in sending the budget to Belgrade of International Programs Office of Zagreb University, they noted that you were an American student, and they said such students should study in Belgrade, not in Zagreb. Now, if Mr. Benson wishes to come to Belgrade, he will have a stipend. If he wishes to remain in Zagreb, he will not have a stipend," because it's federal money in short. So I told the people at Zagreb University that I'm stubborn, and they loved me for it. Now, I taught English privately in Zagreb. I had groups of people in Zagreb around town whom I instructed in English, and I lived like a lord for the year. It's very cheap there. I had a fine time. By the time I left Zagreb, I knew enough Serbo-Croatian to have been able to begin. In other words, it was in a sense a very mixed year academically, but again it made all the difference in my later life, especially with Phil Mosley, because when I came back and I went to the Russian Institute, I discovered, which I hadn't known before, that Phil Mosley had done original field research in Yugoslavia. He had, to the day he died, a book planned, which would require further field research, in the South Slav Zadruga.

Q: The extended family coop.

BENSON: Yes, the counterpart, if you will, of the *myr*, Russian *myr*. He had traveled there. He had hiked and walked through Yugoslavia. He had done what I did during my student year there, hitchhiked, rucksacked and all that kind of stuff.

Q: You did this informal travel during the time you were teaching English in Zagreb?

BENSON: Yes, during my academic year, let us say, at the University. And he loved that, Phil Mosley. I didn't know that he had this background at all. To me, he was the guy who wrote about the straits question [ED: the two narrow straits in northwestern Turkey, the Bosporus and the Dardanelles], in Russian-Turkish history and in international relations in the world, as the administrative honcho of the Department. He said, "You must study with me," and we made arrangements for me to leave the patronage of Geroid Robinson,

who was the professor of Russian history, and went to study with him, Phil Mosley, which is what I did.

Q: You were working for the area studies certificate at the Russian Institute?

BENSON: Yes, I was working toward an area studies certificate. I wrote two papers, neither of which turned into a certificate paper because I ran out of money and went to work for the Current Digest of the Soviet Press with his blessing. I should have come back.

Q: Which was located next door to the Russian Institute.

BENSON: A couple doors away, the Turkish Institute, and there was a Genetics Institute and something else in between these brownstone houses. I worked on the polemic between Russia and Yugoslavia in the post-1948 period. Yugoslavia was thrown out of the Cominform on the agricultural question.

Q: Which you knew about from your experience in New Jersey.

BENSON: Well, which I knew about somewhat because of my traveling through Yugoslavia in 1953. I traveled through the Vojvodina and then the Serbian section and Macedonia, interestingly during the weeks when the Yugoslav zadrugas were voting on whether to remain zadrugas or not. Now, in Yugoslavia at that time the word 'zadruga', the old, if you will, name, was applied to the new collective farms. Zadruga in the usage of that time meant collective farm, and they had four types, collective farm type 1, 2, 3, 4, depending on the relationship of the farmer, peasant, to the retained ownership of the land. So the upper level was very close to the *sofhos*, or state farm, which they had there too. That was supposed to be the next step to being a state farm. So I had very interesting experiences--it's a separate subject--traveling, and Phil thought that it would make an interesting paper, and I did write the paper. Then we were going to be working up something on a period of time in the early history of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Phil wanted to have several students, as a major professor will do, work on periods in the 1920s when the party was begun, and when it was a legitimate party, presented candidates for the parliament. He was going to divide this early period into, I think, three parts. I would have one and other people would have two others, and we would see what would happen after that. But I left the Institute. I was never working for a master's there because my master's is from Wisconsin.

Q: You had the master's from Wisconsin already. But the Russian Institute, as I recall, did not give the master's, it only gave the certificate in Russian area studies.

BENSON: Yes, that's what the Russian Institute itself did, but every student at the Russian Institute was also enrolled in a department of the University.

Q: So you were enrolled in history?

BENSON: Yes. Others were literature and so on.

Q: Tell me about working for the Current Digest. You started there in about 1955?

BENSON: Yes, I went to Phil Mosley one day and I said, "Phil, I've run out of money, and I don't know who to borrow from. I've been working since I was 13 years old, and I've always earned my way, as it were. I just can't stand the thought of borrowing money. I want to go away for a year somewhere and work." He said, "Bless you. I will help." He approved of that. He gave me two suggestions. One was to the MESC, the Middle European Studies Center, and the other was to the Current Digest. The MESC was the studies center attached to, what was it called, the liberation committee...

Q: Which actually became Radio Free Europe.

BENSON: ...which ran RFE and RL, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty...

Q: With financing from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

BENSON: Financing from the CIA was all over these offices, which were on 57th Street, and it was a home for scholars from Central and East Europe, who were sort of being eased into the United States. They wrote articles, they were paid for the articles, and so on and so forth. So I went for an interview with MESC. Professor Burns was a section chief, Robert Burns, and I was finally talking with him, and under Phil Mosley's guidance, I told him the story of my life in considerably less time than we're spending here, and he said, "It's fascinating, but I don't think we're going to put you in for a clearance." So I went to the Current Digest, where the security clearance was irrelevant.

Now, here's what Phil Mosley did. We are now talking about 1955, and the McCarthy hearings were in 1953. The Russian Institute is Phil's baby. He's the director of it. Half to three-quarters of the students want to work for the government. Clearance was a great problem at that time. The other quarter thought they would go on to academia. He told me at the very beginning when we met, after my coming in from Yugoslavia, that my chances of working for the government were from zero to one percent. I said I'd never dreamed of it. So he says, "Fine, we'll work on the academic path." In 1954 or 1955 he calls me into his office one day and he says, "Things are changing. I sense it from the government officers who are coming here to the Russian Institute and interviewing people. What I would like you to do, if you want to, is to put your name on these lists—and he pointed to nearby clipboards, you know, 'The NSA is coming,' or 'The CIA is coming' or whatever--as a potential employee, and this is the way I would like you to present your background. Depending on what they say--you will have your judgment on it--come to me each time and tell me how they react and what they say." So I put my name down. Usually, invariably, they said, "Fascinating, Mr. Benson," and looking at their watch they would say, "We have an awful lot of candidates outside. Thank you so much." The Army Mapping Service--that was the title of it--in Bethesda spent more time with me, and I told this to Phil, and he says, "Fascinating." They do very exotic mapping. And I came back, but they didn't want me really to put in an application. They said, "You

know, it would take a long time, and you would be disappointed we think." Phil said, "Well, that's a little different." The MESC, Robert Burns, who's a good friend of Phil Mosley's, he was a little disappointed, I recall, that he said to me rather cavalierly that it wouldn't work, and he was delighted that I took the job at the Current Digest, from which job I jumped to the USIA (U.S. Information Agency). That's, of course, an important other story.

Q: The Current Digest was in its early years at that time.

BENSON: This was 1955. Well, they'd been around for a while, since maybe 1950, that would fit. They came out of the JPRS crowd, Joint Press Reading Service, which worked in Moscow to provide translations from the Soviet press for various interested agencies with CIA funds. Draw the veil of Christian charity over how the Current Digest was funded, but it was formerly the American Council of Learned Societies, ACLS, with Leo Gruliow as the editor--a separate story for an interview, Leo's background.

Well, it came to pass one day that I got a telephone call from Abe Brumberg, the editor then of Problems of Communism, issued by the United States Information Agency. He was in town, wanted to hire another assistant editor, and had heard about me from some fellow at the Middle European Studies Center who had evaluated the materials I presented and encouraged me to see Bob Burns. Of course, I didn't get the job, as I said. But he told Abe Brumberg there's this guy, check him out up at the Russian Institute. So he found me, we spoke and we had a very fine and long lunch which was terribly interesting from many personal points of view. The end of it was, or the gist of it was, that he would not say "no." He had no authority to say "no," nor did he want to. My background was sure as hell going to be complicating, but he would go back to his boss in the press service of USIA. Administratively Problems of Communism was a USIA periodical produced by the press service and tell them about me and see what they say. So I get a call two days later, or three, saying that he'd come back and he presented this to a gentleman there...

Q: Who was his boss there? Do you recall?

BENSON: Oh, I do indeed. Burnett Anderson was his name, the deputy head of the press service. The head of the press service was a man by the name of Briggs, as I recall. He was a political appointee. Burnett Anderson was a Foreign Service Officer and had been the press officer of Harold Stassen in his day, a farm-labor party guy from Minnesota, and he is reported to have said--in fact, I know he said it because I talked about it with him once a year for a bunch of years, "Abe, I don't clear people. We have a security office which clears people. If you think he can do the job, put him in." Now, I talked to Bernie years later, and I said, "You know, this is 1955. In 1954, I don't know about you, but there were not many people who were saying that."

Q: The McCarthy business collapsed in 1954, the Army McCarthy hearings, and he lost influence immediately after that.

BENSON: He tumbled immediately after that, but attitudinally in Washington on the subject of the clearance of somebody with my background, it took, I think, a certain amount of moxy to say, "Put him in," because he has to sign, Burnett Anderson had to sign, all the papers saying this job would be available for him if you clear him. So I hear from Abe, "You're going in for a clearance." I said, "Unbelievable." I go to Phil Mosley; I was no longer at the Russian Institute, but I went to him and he said, "Please don't tell me." Anyway, I was cleared in a matter of months, only months. Clean as a hound's tooth was I. The background was as we have been discussing, but they told me, my clearance was only up to Confidential, no further, and in Problems of Communism you hardly got documents, even up to that level, yet I had the right to read whatever would be in the files. Off I went to Washington to be whatever was my civil service grade level --I forget--but I made $5,540 a year, which seemed like a good wage in those days.

Q: And you were at Problems of Communism from about 1955 till...

BENSON: I was hired at the end of 1955, and I began work right after New Year's 1956 and worked for Problems of Communism through 1956 when I was offered--I think around early 1957--a position in IRI. Intelligence Research it was called. I forget what the other 'I' is, or is it the Information Agency's Research Intelligence? Something like that. It was not in the main building; it was in the old Walker Johnson Building.

There they had a Soviet and East European division, other divisions divided geographically, Africa and so on and so forth, and they wanted me to be the Yugoslav analyst. They threw in Albania and there might have been Bulgaria. My title was the branch editor.

Q: By editing, you mean these were materials to be put out publicly, or to inform the staff who were doing the public work?

BENSON: That's what it was. You see, we put out a daily summary of press items. We had all the news tickers there, the AP (Associated Press) and the English TASS (the Soviet news service) and the FBIS, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which came in on ticker, and we would clip items relating to USIA or to individuals in Congress who had been criticized--this was public relations of the first order--individuals in Congress or in the government who had been criticized in Communist media. We would put out a morning newsletter of items relating to State, to USIA, and to government persons. This amounted to a lot of material. I did this myself for quite a while; then other people did it and I edited it. Each person in the division would write up items of his or her own relating to the work of USIA. For example, if there was something from Yugoslavia that had to do with libraries--exotica these days who would spend any time at it at all--but the people in USIA who did library work and sent money to our libraries abroad, and the people at the embassy, who didn't spend much time reading the newspapers to do this sort of thing, would get these materials. So that's what we would do, exchange programs, academic, cultural and intellectual--an extraordinary background for me who later went to serve there, when I discovered that all of this work that we had done was of extremely marginal interest and importance to the people in the field.

Q: Who was the director of the East European division in those days?

BENSON: Bob Haney, now retired. The head of the whole IRI was Henry Loomis. The head of one of the divisions was Zygmunt Nagorski--you may know the name. He was a Polish diplomat émigré, very elegant gentleman whose son works for Newsweek. Lots of good people there, lots of people who became Foreign Service Officers. I should say, of interest in the general story- that we are talking about, in the move from POC to IRI it was understood that I had to have access to materials that would be beyond Confidential. That included Top Secret on a need-to-know basis.

We were talking about my moving from Problems of Communism to the Research Service, which required a higher level of clearance, which they told me--I guess I had said something like that--they told me that they were going to interview me and that the decision on whether I would be able to move was not certain and a negative judgment might impact on, in fact, my continuing employment. So it was up to me whether I wished to go through this, and I said, "I do," and so in the offices of the security service of USIA we met for two days for a total of about 10 hours, two people usually and one most of the time, asking me questions.

There was no recording, at least that I was conscious of. They took copious notes. They had a huge file which was quote my unquote file based on my earlier clearance, which, as I said, was relatively quickly considering my background, but there certainly was an awful lot of information there in the file they had, and they knew all kinds of names and asked me all kinds of questions. These were attitudinal and informational. For example--questions I will, of course, never forget--they had no understanding of what Rochdale principles were, co-ops, Robert Owen [Ed: a set of ideals for the operation of cooperatives. They were first set out by the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in Rochdale, England, in 1844]. I had managed a co-op restaurant, at the University of Wisconsin; on the farm before that we had sold our eggs to a co-op. We had bought our feed through a co-op. I was deeply involved in co-ops and I had been to a convention of the NASCOL, the North American Student Co-op League, in Minnesota coming up from Wisconsin. They couldn't understand--and we spent maybe an hour on this--the relationship of the capitalist system, which I would defend--that was one of their questions--and be able to explain to people abroad if I went with USIA how I could reconcile my defense and understanding of the capitalist system with my having joined coops, which they thought were antithetical. And, my goodness, Bill, we went through that for the absolute longest time. One of the complicating aspects was the fact that my mother's second husband, who was the manager of the co-op in Farmingdale, New Jersey, which sold feed and other equipment to poultry farms in the area...

Q: As well as being a Party member.

BENSON: Very much the point. He was a Party member, and they used to skim the till for the Party, and they did this very unwisely and they brought the thing down. It turned out, of course, that these gentlemen who were speaking with me knew as much as I about

all this, if not more. We had quite a discussion about all of this, and that poisoned their attitude toward co-ops. I said it had nothing to do with it. We had quite a discussion. It was very, very interesting, I must say. We talked about my father, of course. We talked about my mother and her penchants for getting involved with men who were indeed members of the Party, she not being one, but there you are.

Then they questioned my having recommended for employment at the USIA a young man who had been at the Russian Institute with me at Columbia and, in fact, who was a Geroid Robinson student in Russian history and who was refused employment at USIA because he had, in fact, put in his application that he had been a member, while in high school in Brooklyn, of the Young Communist League in that high school. Did I know this? I said, in fact, I happened to know it, because he told me before he asked me for my recommendation, but he also told me, and he had the letter--which I didn't see, but he said he had the letter, and you all might ask him for it--that he had been thrown out of the Young Communist League because he was a Trotskyite. Bill, they didn't know what that meant. We had a very interesting discussion. He went on--he need not be named--to have a long career with the Washington Post, first with another journal and then with the Washington Post. He would have been a fine USIA employee. But that was the nature of the discussion, which simply went on and on, you know. It was on values, on my value system. On we went. When it was over, it was drenching, five hours a day for two days. Not always was the discussion elevated, because it was definitional, you know, what are Rochdale principles. I think they thought it came out of the Communist Manifesto, and when I said it came out of 19th century England, they were a little disbelieving. I awaited the judgment. It didn't take but about a week or so, and I was told that I was cleared and that I could take the new job. In fact, I would be able to qualify for the Foreign Service if I wished, but I would never serve in the Soviet Union. The question of my father's being alive or not...

Q: Because of living relatives there?

BENSON: Yes, my father. Also by then, because of a letter from my father years before, I knew that I had a half-sister in Moscow and that there was a second wife. I didn't know anything about them, but this was complicating. So I joined the Research Service with their approval and no caveats except that they would write up the clearance with this caveat: the Foreign Service okay if I wished, but the Soviet Union not.

Q: Had you made any application to join the Foreign Service at that point?

BENSON: No, no, but they asked. It was the time to do all of that. No, I hadn't, in fact. You know, Shirley and I were married in Washington on August 31st of 1956. She had finished her master's at Columbia and had come down and was working in the Library of Congress on a Soviet project which was Air Force funded. This was early 1957, so we hadn't really sorted out what we really wanted to do, but when I said to her that they said to me that I could serve in the Foreign Service; that was the first thought that I could do such a thing. You will recall that I had "come a long way" from a couple of years ago when I couldn't even present an application for service to the government because they

wouldn't want to take it. I never even thought of serving in the government, such as the Research Service, and to be told that I could serve in the Foreign Service was unimaginable. This was all very, very new. Shirley, in either 1957 or early 1958, switched from the Library of Congress to INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research), in the State Department. She joined INR and went to work in the Office of Functional and Biographic Intelligence under a chap named Bernie Morris.

Q: I think he went to Indiana and became a professor later.

BENSON: And she did INSs there. Do you know what they are? National Intelligence Surveys. The CIA had, by country, a list of topics on which it liked to keep research papers up to date, be they education, history, culture, God knows what all. Then it had various overall topics on which it liked to keep research records with maps and drafts and charts and bibliographies. It contracted these out, if you will, to several government agencies in Washington, and they did a lot of them themselves, especially if they were related to targeting and other more gutsy issues, but INR did a lot of them, and Shirley either wrote the whole thing or contributed to the one on the 1948 Tito-Cominform split. When I went overseas, she had not finished the paper and so I went without her, and she came only a few months later after she finished the job. But this was very new for me. It was a whole new window of opportunity and a whole area of choice...

Q: You mean the work as a Civil Service employee in IRI?

BENSON: Yes, and the fact that I could become a Foreign Service Officer. To begin with, I didn't think that I could work for the government. Now I have a top secret clearance, and everybody trusts me, which was great, and I could become a Foreign Service Officer. So we took it in short order from there.

Q: Did you then apply or get invited to make the switch to the Foreign Service from IRI?

BENSON: Well, here's what happened. The geographic officers in IRI, I being in charge of Yugoslavia and Albania, related to other units of USIA which dealt with that country. For example, should we continue VOA broadcasts to Slovenia, a question which indeed arose? Slovenia is so small, there are so few people, and so on. Budget has to be presented, budget has to be defended. We are going to be under attack or there will be questions. So requests would come to us, meaning to me, would you defend and how would you defend. In fact, it would be put in a different way: We would like to defend the continued broadcast to Slovenia. Give us material. And you would write a paper. It took some research, you know. Actually it's an easy defense at that time in terms of the GNP, financial profile, people in important positions, the degree of education of the populace, and so on and so forth. And there were other parts of the Agency which would be interested in Yugoslavia, and they would come to me for either a critique of what they were saying or seek back-up. Importantly there was the so-called Area Office. The Area Office is the closest thing to the front office in terms of policy matters.

Q: Area office in the sense of State Department regional bureaus?

BENSON: Well, Yugoslavia at that time was in Western Europe. But that was an Area Office. There was Africa, there was Latin America, and so on. In came a new fellow in 1957, Jerry Gert. He had served in Austria, and he came in and he was giving the billet over in the Area Office of Austria and Yugoslavia, and he came by to meet with me. We became lifelong friends. We correspond now several times a week by email. He's in Napa, California, a great man, born in Danzig. There's a story there that I hope somebody has taken from him, because his coming to America and being in the Army, being in Intelligence, de-Nazification, hired by USIA--it's a beautiful story.

So he came by and he talked with me. He was a bachelor then, and we had him over a lot. And he became aware of the fact that moving from POC to IRI I had heard that I could join the Foreign Service. We told him that I would like to do that, I thought. Shirley and I had decided we would like to do that, we thought. I said to him one day, of course, it would be obvious for me to serve in Yugoslavia; I know the language and know a great deal about the country. He said, "It will never happen. They'll send you to Hong Kong. That's the way the Foreign Service does it. You get somebody who knows Chinese and they'll go to Paraguay. That's the way the Foreign Service does it."

He carpooled with the Deputy Director of the West European Area, and one day he said to this fellow, Walter Roberts... You know that name from the BIB (Board of International Broadcasting). He was the staff director, and when he retired from USIA [Ed: Walter R. Roberts was the Counselor of the American Embassy in Yugoslavia from 1960-1966 and Associate Director of USIA.] He also is the author of Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies, 1941-1945 published by Rutgers University Press, in 1973. So he said to Walter, "Perfect man for the job but, of course, he can't go there. They'll never have him, or you will never have him." Walter said to him, "We've got a problem in Zagreb, because the PAO (Public Affairs Officer) in Belgrade wants to get rid of the present branch PAO. He can't stand him." Jerry said to him, "Well there you are. It makes the point. And, of course, he can't go there." So as the story is told by these old friends of mine, Walter went home and he said to himself "why can't he go there. We don't have anybody in USIA who has been to the University of Zagreb and knows every cobblestone in the town. I've never met this guy." So the next day I get a call to come over and see Mr. Roberts. So I go over and see Mr. Roberts, and he says, "What would you think of joining the Foreign Service." I said, "We think we would like to." He asked, "Would you object going back to Yugoslavia?" So I almost fainted on the spot. He told me that PAO wants to get rid of the Branch PAO. Heath Bowman was the PAO in Belgrade, a grand man. I don't recalled the name of the Branch PAO.

So the issue was left open for later discussion; but he's thinking positively. Next thing I hear, Heath Bowman said, "Not on your life, because, sure, he knows Serbo-Croatia and I'm sure he's been in Zagreb, but he's never been abroad. He doesn't know the first thing about USIA work abroad, USIS, and I can't have that. I've got a lot of problems in Zagreb, and I'd like this to be corrected." So Walter calls me in again, and he says, "What if we could find a temporary assignment for you somewhere en route to Yugoslavia which would satisfy Heath Bowman? For example, we have an assistant

public affairs officer slot in Torino. Would you like to go there? It would be about two months, two and a half. You'd have to go quick, and then you would just go on to Belgrade. Bowman has been the country public affairs officer in Italy. He thinks that program is the best in the world." It really was very good. You know why? Because of the election of 1948, during which the Communists, it was felt, were in danger of winning. So a lot of money was poured into the country and a lot of it went to USIA to use from whichever budget it came. Those were the days. So these were big branch offices. Torino had four Americans!

Q: But you're talking about 10 years after the 1948 election.

BENSON: You don't turn off a bureaucracy so quickly. It eventually was. And Genoa was a branch office of the consulate in Torino, staffed with Italians. And Milano was a huge office. So then I hear from Walter again that he has agreed with Bowman that "if you would go to Torino en route for that length of time, it would be okay." With that I was paneled, meaning I took the Foreign Service oral exam. There was no written exam at the time for USIS (U.S. Information Service) officers. In two shakes of a lamb's tail, toward the end--I think it was November sometime--in 1958 I was sworn in. I didn't go until January of 1959, and went to Torino first and then on to Zagreb, via the briefings at the Embassy in Belgrade.

Q: Did you experience in Torino give you anything positive that you felt met what Belgrade wanted?

BENSON: I think so. Yes, there's no question about it. All experience is cumulative, and the USIA program, in fact, didn't stop in Italy. Whatever you wanted to do, you could do, exhibits out in the field, reproductions of American art, loan libraries, film showing, you name it. It was a marvelous staff of young Italians, a good staff of Americans although the PAO was a phenomenal guy, very interesting man, unique background. I think the answer has to be yes, although, without praising myself too highly, I knew a hell of a lot about Yugoslavia. So when I got into the country, my specific knowledge of Yugoslavia came to the fore, as far as a decision is concerned about how to do something. Whatever knowledge I had gained in Torino, although I couldn't throw that away, it did make me feel--it's not exactly what he had in mind--it made me feel when I came into Belgrade that I had some background.

Q: Just in terms of how they ran the office and all that.

BENSON: Yes, the nomenclature. And he, in fact, didn't relax his concern. He wanted me in Belgrade for a full month of briefing and seeing how things are done before finally I could pass on to Zagreb, also very useful. There I got to know everybody with whom I would be communicating. In those days we communicated by telex.

Q: So it's a good idea for anybody going to a post outside the capital in any country to work in the capital and get to know the workings of the embassy.

BENSON: I think that is without question the case. It did not happen to me in Hamburg, where I had a tour from 1965 to 1968. I think I went there first and stayed for quite a while before I went down to the embassy in Bonn, but, you know, by then I had been promoted a bunch of times and I had been in the field from 1959 for four years. And we had a very rich program in Yugoslavia. It's a phenomenon of the period that the Yugoslav USIA program was very, very rich. There were very few things that you could not do, and it had bottomless funding because of PL-480. Public Law 480 is the law by which Ghana, India, Poland, Yugoslavia, other countries received large cotton, grain at concessional prices, paid for in local currency, so by 1959 we had vast amounts of local currency. This money could be used for United States government purposes or for--that's not quite the way to put it--for projects which the United States would agree served its purposes.

Q: Something like the Marshall Plan Counterpart Funds.

BENSON: Yes, the Marshall Plan Counterpart Funds deriving from the CCC, that's the Commodity Credit Corporation.

We had a lot of that money so that we could do a great many things in Yugoslavia. If you knew how to deal with people there--Heath Bowman did and I did and other people did--you could do just an awful lot of things.

Q: Could you spell out some of the particular things you worked on and what was the most successful of them.

BENSON: Well, the most successful, of course, had nothing to do with the PL-480 that is to say with the availability of funds based on PL-480, food and commodity aid. It had to do with Heath Bowman's idea that the international visitor program, which you may have heard of, had not yet been extended to Yugoslavia and he believed it was be time to do that. I arrived in 1959; the thing was just beginning. In fact, that was one of his most intense briefings of me, and it was in our conversation on this that I think we became fast friends. He got a budget for it and established criteria. These were Communists.

He established criteria by which the post would develop a program for these people when they got to the States or worked telegraphically with USIA officers who would be developing the program for these people, so they wouldn't just arrive, as perhaps a Frenchman would, and Washington would whip up a program for them within an hour or so. So he is a man of great culture and intelligence, Heath Bowman. He set out categories of people whom we would invite first: republican ministers of higher education, republican ministers of education, republican ministers of culture, rectors, other categories of this type. Now, of course, the political section had input, because you have to set up an embassy committee to pick international visitors, and there were obviously other people and criteria. There were economic planners; there were political figures, the head of the Spufshina committee on something or other. It wasn't hard to set up the categories. This should not be buckshot or *ad hoc*. That was very much the kind of mind he had, and I appreciated it a great deal.

When I went off to Zagreb, I had a list of categories and of people. At that time the Zagreb consulate also was responsible for Slovenia. We did not have a consulate or information office in Ljubljana, and so beginning with the Mayor of Zagreb, then to the Minister in Slovenia of Higher Education, then Minister of Education. The former was Clemenshechen; the latter was Ponshesh. Većeslav Holjevac was the Mayor of Zagreb. Then we set up a method of dealing with these people, Heath Bowman and I and others, which maximized the contact I would have, in this case I, with them to plan their trip. You think it's 1959. It's pre-history in terms of their exposure to the United States or in some cases to the West. You come in and you say, "I have the honor, sir, to tell you that we think it would be a wonderful if you would have the time, within the next year or fiscal year following, to accept an invitation from the United States government through the ambassador which I will present to you," and you would get a response something like, "Who, me?" or "Oh, boy, yes." Then we would offer, "What are you interested in? What part of the United States do you think you would like to visit?" Many of them had relatives which were discovered suddenly. It was a great program.

Q: The Yugoslav government had a kindly view towards this?

BENSON: The Yugoslav government, of course, yes. You can't drop in on the Minister of Higher Education of Slovenia without the Foreign Office American Desk having been told that there is such a program, which will involve certain people, we're not certain who, and without any details I am quite certain that that Yugoslav American Desk officer said, "Do it." The second sentence might be: "You mean you're paying for everything?" And the third one might be: "God, are these guys lucky." Things were changing in Yugoslavia. So that was a tremendously successful program, and it kept me busy, and it was delightful work.

Q: Was the Fulbright program operating in Yugoslavia at that time?

BENSON: No. But on my second tour, being 1979 to 1982, I was the co-president of the Fulbright Commission in Yugoslavia, and earlier served in that position while stationed in Turkey. There's always one from the host country.

Q: Yugoslavia at the time being the only Communist country with a Commission, the others being done by our embassies?

BENSON: That's precisely correct, with Poland being a little bit different. Now, I'm not certain that I can recall exactly what the differences were, and I hope somebody is being interviewed who can. There the relationship was between the embassy committee which would do this in Poland, I believe, and the Ministry of Education or Higher Education, which had an office or had people who constituted liaison with the embassy on this matter.

Q: <u>De facto</u> in Poland, it was working like a bi-national commission.

BENSON: Yes, pretty nearly. The one in Yugoslavia worked well, but there were...at that time Gauver Altman and I were co-presidents. You know him.

Q: I know Altman. He was co-president of the Commission with you. What was his background?

BENSON: This is later on. We're talking about 1979.

Q: We'll come back to it. Could you digress a bit about Bowman? What was his background? Was he career Foreign Service?

BENSON: He was career Foreign Service, a man of extraordinary culture. I think he was Princetonian. He had worked for the WPA (Works Progress Administration) doing--do you recall those great guidebooks to America? He may have written one or two, and it occurs that it might have been Indiana, but I don't recall precisely. A great many people came into the Foreign Service or USIA from the OWI (Office of War Information), some from OSS (Office of Strategic Services), but particularly through OWI.

Q: USIA was really a reincarnation of the old Office of War Information, wasn't it? Now, did Bowman have any background on Yugoslavia before he went there?

BENSON: No, no; in Yugoslavia at that time there was nobody except two other persons, and they were the youngest of the young, who had background in Yugoslavia.

Q: In addition to yourself?

BENSON: In addition to myself. One of them, recently deceased, a very dear friend, had been in the CARE program in Yugoslavia right out of the University of Chicago. He was one of the *wunderkinder (German: gifted children).* This was, Philip Arnold, who went to Chicago after his sophomore year in high school.

Q: Under the Robert Hutchins accelerated program there.

BENSON: Remember those days? So when Phil got out, he was a kid, and off he went to Yugoslavia in the CARE program right after the war. UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) was working there. UNRRA's Director General after the war was Fiorello La Guardia, whose mother, I believe, was born in Trieste when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

So he was seen as sort of like a native there. Yugoslavia had a good leg up as far as funding was concerned. So this fellow traveled the country as a young boy. He never spoke the language well. He had a very poor gift for language, but he knew the country well. In January 1957 he joined the Foreign Service, USIA. He went out while I was in IRI. I began giving him a briefing, because he came by for it, which they're supposed to do, then I realized that he knew 90 percent of what I knew, and so we didn't do a briefing, we just became friends.

Q: Other than a couple of people with field experience, could we say you were practically the leading U.S. government expert on Yugoslavia.

BENSON: No. When I first got to Yugoslavia, I was not in the least knowledgeable, but when I got to Yugoslavia and went to Belgrade for this first briefing that I mentioned, the Ambassador was Karl Rankin. People don't remember that name. Karl Rankin.

Karl Rankin was on his last tour as a career Foreign Service Officer. He had been a Foreign Service Officer before the war. He had been assigned to Belgrade when the bombs began to fall on Easter Sunday in 1941. It is Karl Rankin who took the bag of gold--Do you know about the bag of gold? Every embassy is supposed to have doubloons, if you will, so that in dire straits they will be able to pay for services and so on. He took them out of the country. Robert St. John, a war correspondent, wrote a best-selling book From the Land of the Silent People at that time [Ed: published in1942. St John wrote another book on Yugoslavia in 1948, entitled The Silent People Speak.] about Yugoslavia and Greece at that time and mentioned Karl Rankin making his way south in Yugoslavia with the gold.

Q: Trying to keep ahead of the German army.

BENSON: And he did. He got out with his life and with the gold. For his pains he was assigned to the Far East, captured by the Japanese shortly after Pearl Harbor [December 7, 1941], while assigned to the Embassy in Manila, and detained by the Japanese until repatriated 21 months later. His wife too, she suffered physically and showed the effects still in 1959-1960. He was a marvelous man.

Q: He was sent back to Belgrade as Ambassador. When did he go back there?

BENSON: Well, he served in Yugoslavia from February 1958 to April 1961. I got there in 1959. He was followed by George Kennan in 1961. He was a great man. He was an old-line Foreign Service Officer. He radiated, as we say colloquially in America today, 'been there, done that' cool, but around the coffee table of an evening talking away on a highball, there is nobody who is more interesting on just about anything, any subject. He was an erudite, as Kennan was. You wouldn't spend too many hours with Kennan talking away at a highball, but with this fellow you would. He was grand, and he knew a great deal about Yugoslavia. I think there were other officers there, Chris Hill's father...

Q: Chris Hill being the current Ambassador to Macedonia.

BENSON: I think he still is the Ambassador to Macedonia while he is also active in Kosovo, and was working with Holbrook and with others. He was in Rambouillet.

Q: What about his father?

BENSON: His father was in the political section in Belgrade when I got there, if not the head of it. I can't remember. There came to be people who were extremely, you know Larry Eagleburger was a junior officer with us in Yugoslavia in 1959 and he was later the Ambassador; he knew the country very well. He may not have traveled it as much as I, but I knew the language well.

Q: On this third tape, first side, we are returning to Ray's tenure in Yugoslavia between 1959 and 1964. I was about to put some questions regarding the general political context of your experience in Yugoslavia. Let's start with the ambassadors whom you worked.

BENSON: Well, over the course of this assignment I worked under Karl Rankin, George Kennan and Charles Elbrick. Rankin was there when I arrived in March 1959. He had been there a while. He remained until Kennan came in 1961. Kennan was certainly there prior to the first conference of the non-aligned nations, which was in the summer of 1961. [Ed: the First NAM Summit Conference was held in Cairo, from 5-12 June 1961. The first Conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State or Government, at which 25 countries were represented, was convened at Belgrade in September 1961.]

Q: That's right. In fact, that was going on when my wife and I first visited Belgrade in August of 1961. What was your impression from where you sat of the Tito regime and its foreign policy?

BENSON: Well, from where I sat, let's say beginning in Zagreb in 1959, I found that the USIA work was no problem, which surprised me. That is to say, whatever we wanted to do within civilized reason, we could do, and that really did surprise me. I think we have touched on the international visitors program in which important people from the two republics that were under the Zagreb Consulate General, that is, Croatia and Slovenia, would visit the United States. This was not thought of before. That is to say, it was unthinkable before.

Q: Was there a turning point when it became thinkable?

BENSON: Well, I don't really know. Certainly this was one of my first--I think I said this last time--first tasks set before me by the public affairs officer, Heath Bowman. When I set out to visit these people and present the invitations and come back and discuss the program, openness and hospitality was the order of the day. I cannot remember anybody who refused, and if the person would refuse, it was just because of personal circumstances. Exhibits, field exhibits, books to libraries, whatever is the ordinary USIA field programming work could be done without problem. I visited Slovenia. We would drive up about three times in two weeks. It's a short drive, a beautiful drive. I would take one of my staff who was a Slovene, young man, and one of my American staff, and we had a delightful time of it. I made lifelong friends. I'm sorry to say they're all gone now. They were older than I, and they have deceased.

But welcome was warm, and we talked a lot of politics, especially with the news people from Dalo and Tevarish. Dalo was the principal Slovene daily and remains so. Tevarish

was the weekly magazine of the Slovenian youth. Tevarish no longer functions. But Dalo was edited by Shinkovitz and Tevarish by Shtoola, and they're both deceased. They were wonderful men.

Now, what did I think of Tito's foreign policy as reflected certainly in the media? There was much to argue about, and we did, but as far as facilitating our work on the ground, we really didn't have a lot of problems. We had to be deft in what we tried to do, but we could do whatever seemed useful to us. I cannot recall a program initiative that Belgrade wanted me to undertake, or that we developed, that was forestalled. I was there during the first big cultural event, Leonard Bernstein coming with the New York Philharmonic, and (Vladimir) Bakarić, then the President of Croatia and a close friend of Tito's, came to the event. Bakarić's father was in charge of the jail in which Tito was imprisoned in the 1930s, while the young Bakarić was becoming a young Communist. In any case, it was a breakthrough. He and his wife came and sat at the head table with Bernstein and his wife. It was a different environment from the one, of course, when I was there as a student in 1952-1953. But one point, the non-aligned movement, which was crystallized at the conference in 1961, was attitudinally already present in 1959. Tito would have warm relations with the West, trade, commerce of various kinds. He looked for loans. He understood early that tourism on the Adriatic coast and in the mountains up toward Italy and Austria could bring millions. It ended up that tourism brought billions. The tourism infrastructure was being developed with loans from the West. But Tito felt that he had to, and there were other countries which had to, find some sort of practical middle ground in the Cold War, if you want to put it, on the one hand the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact on the other hand the West and NATO. And those were the views espoused. That led to the formality which was to the alliance which became the Nonaligned Conference, a standing conference.

Q: Now this was a time when the Sino-Soviet schism was coming to a critical point and Yugoslavia was, so to speak, the anvil on which the Chinese were hammering out their critique of the Russians, just as Albania was the anvil on which the Russians were hammering out their critique of China. How was this reflected on the ground in your experience?

BENSON: Well, in my experience practically as the public affairs officer in Zagreb and later as the assistant and then finally the information officer and press attaché at Belgrade, very little. There were no Chinese or Soviet diplomatic representatives, consular representatives, in Zagreb. There were in Belgrade. I have very little to do with them, very, very little, and in fact not too much to do with too many diplomatic representatives. USIA had its own special portfolio and Yugoslavia was open to USIA work. I knew the language. Meeting with media people, which was very much a part of my job, to talk with them about various issues of the day, international issues and so on, was easy. It was just very, very simple. Of course, back to your basic question, China's support of Albania was anathema to Yugoslavia. Whatever China's relations with the Soviet Union were, that issue was more distant geographically. Albania's collapse was forestalled by the Chinese.

Q: How?

BENSON: Yugoslavia's vague hope of being able to pick up dying Albania, as it had though it would after the Second World War. Yugoslav and Albanian partisans had close relations. Albania was in a sense a client state of Yugoslavia. The Soviet Union put a stop to that.

Q: Did you have any experience in Kosovo at that time or any indication of tension regarding it?

BENSON: No. I visited Kosovo when I was a student in 1953. I spent a couple of very interesting days in Pristina and at the Gračanica Monastery nearby. I did not visit Kosovo, of course, while I was assigned in Zagreb, and later I did not visit Kosovo out of Belgrade. I visited Kosovo, in fact, many times while I was assigned to Yugoslavia from 1979 to 1982, but that might wait for chronologically a later part of this interview, not in the 1960s.

It occurred to me, Bill, that, all of the excitement of recollecting old times, I would be in error, if I were not to add a little bit anyway to my experiences that student year. It's not to make this a personal reminiscence but to try to single out items of special interest, it seems to me, and those which relate to my later experience in Yugoslavia, especially with certain persons. It occurred to me that I should speak of Ivo Curčin, should speak of Corinne Spencer, among a few others.

Corinne Spencer, when I arrived in Zagreb in 1952, was the librarian at the American Consulate. She was one of the most remarkable persons I have ever met, and one should give her credit somehow for what she did, and I will pause to speak a bit about her. She as a young widow, a Texan, came to New York City and became the librarian of the art library at Columbia University. I think it was the Schermerhorn Library, but I will find that out. After Pearl Harbor she announced that she simply had to be helpful somehow and was brought into the Office of War Information, where she did library preparatory work, so that when in the richness of time the war was over and we opened libraries overseas. Indeed, we opened them in East Europe, we had a USIS library in Bucharest and we had one in Budapest certainly, and she was involved in setting up both of them and moved to Budapest. These were nascent information centers of the kind the USIS developed richly over the years. In 1948, that was the year Yugoslavia was cast out of the Cominform, there was a general tightening in Eastern Europe, as you recall. There were trials of so-called Tito-ites in East Europe and so on. Along with all of the above, the USIS libraries were terminated, and Corinne Spencer was given the responsibility of packing up the Romanian and the Hungarian libraries, i.e. from Bucharest and Budapest, which she did. She got out of Hungary with crates full of materials on the train. I shouldn't say 'got out' in the sense that she was being pursued; she was allowed to pack it up and bring it out. And she offloaded all of this in Novi Sad, the capital, if you want to put it that way, of the Voivodina autonomous region in Yugoslavia, which is close to the Hungarian border. There the reading room in Novi Sad was begun, opened, by Corinne Spencer with many of the books from the Romanian and Hungarian USIS libraries.

Q: Was this all material in English or Hungarian and Romanian?

BENSON: No, no, no, these were USIS libraries in English. That reading room remained for many, many years until it was terminated, I think, in the 1990s for budgetary reasons, an absolutely ridiculous development. But the USIS decided that all of the materials Corinne had wouldn't fit in Novi Sad, and so they asked her to continue on to Zagreb, and so she continued on to Zagreb with the other crates of materials from Bucharest and Budapest. This, I know--I will go ahead a little bit--because in 1960 in my first full year in Yugoslavia as Branch Public Affairs Officer, the post was inspected. Heath Bowman, whom I refer to as the Country Public Affairs Officer, sent me a telex saying that inspectors will look in all of your closets, they will look on all of your shelves, and they will ask you to open all cartons and crates to see if you have not squirreled away Agency publications, books and so on, which you don't really need and are in this way wasting money.

So I began to look around this large area which we had under control and discovered two huge trunks in the basement which, it turned out, had been brought in by Corinne Spencer in 1949 probably. I will put in parenthetically now, but I'll come to it in a minute more fully. Corinne Spencer was still the librarian after all these years. She was upstairs in her office, and I went up to her and said, "What in heaven's name is all this? It's sheet music." "Oh," said she, "the sheet music, yes. You know, we had music libraries in Bucharest and Budapest." I said, "Corinne, these are enormous trunks and they're full of sheet music." "Well," she said, "the OWI and then USIS decided that we should have the sheet music of all works written by American composers, classical music." I said, "All?" She said, "All, up through the 1940s." And we later cataloged this collection and gave it to the Zagreb Conservatory. It was indeed all classical music of any worth written by any American composer up until the war.

Q: It's amazing. Were there similar collections held at other posts around the world?

BENSON: I have no idea. I don't know how far the OWI.... The OWI concentrated its efforts in Europe. That's where the war was. Heaven knows, they might have sent it to Japan too. I don't know. And maybe there was a PAO who didn't have the same love of music who said, "Oh my God, we must get rid of this." But we didn't. We used it and we got rid of the empty trunks. Now, Corinne Spencer, when I was a student then in Zagreb in 1952 and 1953, was extraordinarily friendly to me and the other American student from Chicago. She would give us dinner every week and slipped me the odd box of Knorr soups and oatmeal on which I lived from her commissary run to Belgrade. But she introduced me--and this was extremely important--to a young man, a young graduate student in English, Ivo Curčin. Through him I met a group of young graduate students.

Now, even though Curčin is now teaching, I think, in Canada--and there are other names of people whom I met, which I will add when we do the editing, because they all, Granco Vookmeer and Marian Nova, Amira Hertzog, they all became important in academic life in Zagreb later. Curčin's father, Milan Curčin, whom I came to know very well, he's a

very much older man; Ivo was the child of his and his wife's later years, was the editor of a magazine, a journal, called Nova Europa, published in Zagreb. Milan Curčin and the Curčin family were Serbs who had lived in Croatia. As you know, there were groups of them who did for hundreds and hundreds of years. There were Croats, there were Croatians, Serbs from Croatia. During the war the Curčin family was befriended by the sculptor, Ivan Mestrovic, and lived in his palatial marble home in Split. The Germans did not trouble Mestrovic and, therefore the Curčins escaped any punitive action by the Ustashe [Ed: Croatian Revolutionary Organization, or Croatian fascists allied with the German occupation], which might have happened despite the fact that Ivo Curčin was one of the original Yugoslavs. By that I mean that the Nova Europa journal and the Nova Europa movement began before the First World War when the concept of Yugoslavia was fully developed intellectually. There were Czechs under Manfred Rieger and Croats under (Catholic) Bishop Juraj Strossmayer and Ljudevit Gaj, secular, who espoused the concept of the unity of South Slavs. It was heavily derived from the German nationalist, romantic movements of the early 19th century, and it is no surprise that Rieger, who is of Czech descent but of German background, and Strossmayer, who is a Croat, and the Bishop--by the way, Bishop Strossmayer left many progeny in Zagreb and achieved great importance in their cultural life of Croatia--these were men who were quite connected to German intellectual circles. Milan Curčin, of course, was not, but he was a great friend of Wickham Steed and the elder (Robert) Seton-Watson. These are people, along with others from Great Britain, who, unaffected by the German romantic movement, felt that the Yugoslavs, for good reason as they thought of the development of the Balkans after the war, they felt that South Slavs should be united in one country. The Nova Europa group had an observer's status, I was led to believe--I'm not sure, I've done no research on this--in Versailles. Certainly Wickham Steed and the elder Seton-Watson were there advising the British delegation on what should be done with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Well, Milan Curčin was a grand old man, and it was a great honor to be admitted into his study once a month for a chat with him. He and I and Ivo would talk a bit from time to time. It remains a precious memory.

Corinne Spencer ran a salon in Zagreb --that's the only thing I can call it. She came to know all of the important people, the old aristocrats, the academics, the cultural people. This was the most creative contact person, which would describe it in vulgar terms. She had a grand piano. She had opera evenings. Singers would appear and do leder (German: songs). Nobody I have ever met in my experience had a life like Corinne Spencer. When I was there as a student, she lived in a suite in the Esplanade Hotel. When I came back in 1959, she was living in the Mestrovic Apartment in the upper town of Zagreb, the apartment overlooking the courtyard and his old studio. It was a huge, huge apartment full of gorgeous tile stoves. The place was heated with wood; therefore, it required a staff of servants which she, who had her own funds, paid for, and the place was toasty warm and it was simply gorgeous. Thus, when I came in as a young Branch Public Affairs Officer, Corinne Spencer, who welcomed me as her boss now about as warmly as anybody could. She and my wife became intimate friends. She introduced me to every single important person in the cultural, intellectual and, if you want to put it, the old aristocratic world of Zagreb. It was simply amazing.

In later assignments I will go back to my friends of my student year. We really were close. We met several times a week. We met especially in the quarters of the Supreme Court of Croatia where young Granco Vookmeer was an assistant of a judge. He was getting his Ph.D. in international affairs and international law. We would meet there, and he would gather up once a week all of the international editions of the British newspapers, because they were printed--you may have seen this--on very find paper, and this fine paper was worth a lot of money in Bosnia because they use it as cigarette paper. So every charwoman and the other people who cleaned up the offices of the Supreme Court of Croatia would gather the newspapers for him. Once a week we would gather there to chat, and he would make off with the newspapers. We became close friends. I ran into Granco when he had a fellowship at Harvard later, and we palled around in New York for a while. Here comes the crucial point. As I returned to the country in 1959 driving from Italy to Belgrade--I mentioned this before--I stayed two nights in Zagreb and I reserved one for myself to meet with my old friends. No one was home except for Marian Horvat, who was married to a woman, he met at my farewell party in 1953. He met with me. He said, "Let's have a drink together." I went to his apartment, and he said the following has happened: "The UDBA"--that is the Yugoslav secret police—"have been to see all of us, Ivo, Granco, and me, and they told us that you were returning and they would like us to resume our friendship, and they would like all of us, therefore, to report at least once a week on you and your activities and we had decided we would like not to do this, and we want you to know that it kills us, but we think we should not be meeting with you. All of us have our own paths to go." They were getting their doctorates. Marian was in radio and TV. He was very handsome, had a gorgeous voice, and he was an announcer and so on. "UDBA is convinced that you are from the CIA because during your student year it was reported to them…" --you know the local employees of the consulate would always be reporting, or at least many would, from time to time. It was the thing that they had to do to get permission to work for the Americans. Some of them did it with lust, and some of them did it unwillingly.

Q: This is, of course, a security weakness in the common American practice of filling a lot of low-level embassy and consulate jobs with nationals of the host country.

BENSON: Well, there were tens of them at the embassy. You couldn't have Americans in that number. Furthermore, you needed to have total bilinguality. But it was reported that I was frequently in the office of Consul Lou Bowden, and Consul Lou Bowden, it was thought, ran the CIA effort in Zagreb. Certain habits lead to this conclusion. Local employees were forbidden to cross the threshold and to walk into Lou Bowden's office. If they had papers for him, they were to be put on a table just to the inside of the door. They were to tell him, "Here they are," and when he left, he would lock the door.

All of this I hear from Marian Horvat, but "you"--meaning me--"were in there all the time chatting with him." Well, of course I was. Lou Bowden was graciousness itself. He was a graduate of the Russian Institute. His major professor had been Phil Mosley, and he had worked on Albania, as I recall it. He was a great guy, and he was not probably disinterested in what I was doing. He envied me the opportunity to run around Zagreb as I did. He was a sublime linguist, an absolutely special kind of guy. Married a Croatian

girl, I should say, and it sort of derailed his career. "Well," I said to Marian, "this will pain me deeply" --and it really did--"but nothing can be done and I do understand, and it would make me terribly uncomfortable. Of course, I suspect that they would have been aware of my coming back, and so on and so forth," and so we figuratively shed a tear, and that was the end of that. I met them by chance briefly, these old friends, from time to time, and sort of the warm welcome was exhausted that one night on my way in.

Corinne Spencer superintended a huge library and cultural program that I've suggested. Back in 1952 when I came in, her boss was Tess Mravince, another OWI person, Slavian descent, from Pittsburgh, theater person and a wild woman--she had all kinds of Croatian boyfriends. Zagreb at that time had the residue of OWI preparations for what they expected to be the continuation of their plans in East Europe. It had a mobile film unit in 1952 and 1953. I forget the name of the man who ran it. It was just what I say. It had shelves inside stocked with cans of 16-mm film and a projector or two. It had screens which could be set up, a local employee, and off would go this guy into the countryside, having made arrangements in advance, and set up this screen in a town square and showed them films of anything from O'Flaherty's great documentaries to OWI films on American history. This effort died, thank God, before I got back in 1959. Zagreb was a very, very busy post. It was in 1953 that it moved from the offices of the nationalized Standard Oil of Indiana to the building which it is still in now as the embassy. But enough on that.

In 1959 I arrived there, and I think is to be mentioned in this oral history it should not be forgotten that the USIA had singled out Zagreb as a place to which they would send junior officer trainees. Zagreb was the only East European consulate. There was a bit of a thing in Poznan which became a consulate, and there was finally a USIS officer there.

But let me go back to telling the USIA story a little bit. I said that the Agency, USIA, had singled out Zagreb to be the site of junior officer training because it was the one consulate in East Europe at that time that had a fully functioning USIS program. While this went on, which it did for years, the number of USIA officers who passed through Zagreb as junior officer trainees would define the Agency's later elites. It began with Philip Arnold [Apr 1957-Feb 1958], it went to Jock (John) Shirley [July 1958-Apr 1959], (Jaroslav) Jerry Verner [Nov 1959-Feb 1961], Mike Eisenstadt, (Myron) Mike Hoffmann [Aug 1964-May 1967], Bruce Koch [Dec 1961-June 1965], Dell Pendergrast [Sept 1966-May 1969], John Kordeck [Feb 1965-Aug 1966]. I am not certain, but I think that might run out the string. Now, this went on for years and years. Every one of these became a leader in USIS, and I was graced while I was there with Jerry Verner and Mike Eisenstadt. Jim Conely [Oct 1959-June 1962], who came to work with me, was one year away from being a junior officer trainee, which I think he enjoyed in Latin America somewhere [Rio de Janeiro Aug 1957-Sept 1959]. I thought I would put that on the record, and we'll work that up a bit, because it was an extremely intelligent concept for USIA.

Q: Did many of these people who trained in Zagreb then go on to USIA posts, or diplomatic posts for that matter, elsewhere in Eastern Europe?

BENSON: Let's see. Jerry Verner went from Zagreb to Poznan. He later was in Warsaw. He later was in Moscow on two occasions. He was the Public Affairs Officer in Kabul years before the troubles there. Phil Arnold was in Poland and became Public Affairs Officer in Vienna and in London and in Bonn. Jock Shirley rose to be the Counselor of the USIA, the highest ranking Foreign Service position, nonpolitical position, within USIA. He finished his career as Ambassador to Tanzania. He served in Poland too. John Kordeck served in Belgrade later and in Poland. Bruce Koch became the Public Affairs Officer in Prague at one point. Mike Hoffmann served in Belgrade on several occasions. He served with me there. Mike Eisenstadt--by the way, who was born in Danzig--I cannot recall whether he served elsewhere in East Europe. I think he did serve in Poland.

Q: I hope some of these people have been or will be interviewed for our same Oral History project. Anything more about Belgrade from 1961 to 1964?

BENSON: I'll go back to Zagreb prior to going to Belgrade. I have, I think, a point to make that is stimulated by your question about liberalization and easing up in Yugoslavia, which is that when I came to Zagreb in 1959 through 1961 and indeed in Belgrade in 1962 through 1964, basic USIS contact work was absolutely open. And what does that mean? It means news media, print and other news media, oral elements of cultural life welcomed contact with me and my staff. Now, this doesn't mean that the news media, the newspaper people, would reflect our long conversations, sometimes very confrontational, in what they wrote, or that they would come to our offices and ask for material because I had been so convincing or my press people had been so convincing that they felt that they should like to publish this. That didn't happen, but the exploration of our views and the pleasure with which they polemicized back and forth, debated, was patent. For us young Foreign Service Officers it was terribly exciting. Some of these were extraordinarily intelligent people. Very many in the media--they were substantially older than I--were heroes of the partisan war, very convinced socialists.

Q: And your debates were conducted in Serbo-Croatian?

BENSON: Generally. At that point in the 1950s and 1960s there were not too many who knew much English at all.

Q: Remarkable that there are enough Americans fluent enough in a language like that to have that kind of energy.

BENSON: Well, God bless the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which I never attended, by the way, for any of my languages, but people who worked with me did and, of course, not everyone spoke it equally well. Take a guy like Jerry Verner who knew Russian very well, he was a Russian Institute graduate, worked with Geroid Robinson. He knew Russian very well and had been on the great Sokolniki exhibit of 1959 [Ed: Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Vice President Richard Nixon officially opened the exhibition and later engaged in the "kitchen debate."], came to Zagreb and spoke Serbo-Croatian almost immediately. He came directly from Moscow in 1959, by the way,

wearing the blazer of the exhibit, which he wore till it fell off his shoulders. He spoke Serbo-Croatian very quickly, with a Russian accent all the rest of his life. Not to be *ad hominem* about their abilities in Serbo-Croatian, but, yes, they could, and those who couldn't, faded from the scene quickly. But most of these people had had a year of FSI Serbo-Croatian, where the courses, by the way, were run by the Serbs, who felt that those who went off to serve in Croatia were deviating from the main path which should lead to Belgrade.

But here in Zagreb from the very beginning, as I point out what was there in 1952 and 1953, Zagreb was a center of USIS activity, surrounded by inquiring UDBA officers perhaps. In fact, I came to know two very well whose assignment was to track the library, and one of them, who became a very good friend actually later, the head of tourism in Croatia, now retired, said it was the most beautiful assignment he could have imagined. He, as a young student leader, volunteered to be the person who would go to the USIS library and read and observe who came to use the library. Finally they decided they had to move, and they did move into the building.

Q: At that time in the early 1950s when Tito had broken with Stalin but had not eased up that much domestically, did people get in trouble for evidence of too much pro-Americanism?

BENSON: Well, that's a good question, and the answer has to be not exactly nuanced, but there are many levels that one has to consider. If you were like this young fellow who was in watching the library--his name was Jargo Kralyovich--and you hoped for a career, you want to move up and you want to use the library and improve your English--his English became superb, of course--the only way to do it is the way he did it, because it would become known. Let's take another scenario: Jargo Kralyovich, a good student at Zagreb University, is seen frequenting the U.S. library all the time reading the magazines and the newspapers. It would not only not advance his career prospects, but it would kill them. If you were an ordinary citizen or--let's put it another way--an ordinary student at Zagreb University who wanted, or whose family wanted you, to make your way somehow or other but definitely not by joining the system and rising within it, they would come in and use the library. The consulate sponsored English language courses, which the consular officers would help teach, and people would pay to attend, and Croats who knew English very well and--. When I got there in 1959, these classes were booming. In fact, I would go in and speak from time to time and try to enunciate then better than I do now. The fee was minimal, but there was a fee. We got textbooks from USIA, which had an English language teaching division back in the States.

Back to your question, people who had a mixed background--and this gets to be complicated--with pre-war and then Ustashe period background, not that they were Ustashe but what did they do during that period. Now it's after the war, and these are older people, some of Corinne's friends. Now they are visiting the American library all the time. Whatever they were doing, be it simple administrative job or in a store--some of these wealthy aristocrats would--not wealthy by old-time aristocrats, they were not wealthy anymore--would be salespeople, especially in downtown stores. There was some

tourism, and these people knew many languages and were highly educated. There were decisions that everybody had to make at that time in 1952, 1953, 1954 and so on. In 1959 and 1960 when we returned, Bill, things were substantially looser. In 1952 and 1953 when I was there, they had practically sumptuary laws. There was certain behavior which was bourgeois. Women should not use make-up or lipstick. Women should not have silk stockings.

Q: So they were still in the aftermath of the Revolution at that point?

BENSON: Absolutely. In fact, one of the hot black market items around town was this kind of thing, powder, make-up, lipstick, silk stockings. I did a little bit of that. Playing cards were forbidden.

Q: Like the Puritans in 17th century England.

BENSON: Well, there you are. Playing cards were forbidden because the government decided anti-regime activity could be fostered in the re-creation of the several Zagreb bridge clubs which before the war had been very well known. They had true clubs where the aristocracy would meet in wood-paneled rooms and play bridge. You could get a great deal of money for a deck of playing cards, which I managed to sell a few of. By 1959 and 1960 all this nonsense was finished.

Q: Was the turning point the Soviet repression of the Hungarians in 1956 and the kind of a second break between Moscow and Belgrade?

BENSON: I think you're right, the turning point, but, you know, it was incremental. It's quantity and quality. That's what was going on. In 1948 Yugoslavia was thrown out of the Cominform.

Q: Having been the most radical of all the East European countries up till then.

BENSON: Well, they were not yet the most radical, I don't think. They were the most obstreperous in a certain way because Tito had the authority and power, which in the other East European countries was still forming, so he could command the country. One of the things he did not want to have happen is the Soviets' commanding it, and this is a long story and perhaps a little bit aside, though you know all of it or a lot of it and I know not all of it but a lot of it. The break with the Cominform, being thrown out of the family, was a tremendous shock to the Yugoslav leadership, and for a period of time, to go briskly over this period in Yugoslav history, they tried to in fact answer all of the criticisms which the Cominform resolution and the polemic with the Soviet Union had visited on them. So there was an enormous push to industrialize, very unwise investment decisions, I mean six steel plants in different republics. They needed two for the whole country maybe; one might have been better.

Q: But with Yugoslav federalism, every republic had to have one.

BENSON: You've got it, exactly. You see, once you began this and you're trying to get it through the councils of State at the center, then you have to pay attention because investment decisions have to be made, money has to be invested, and you end up splitting your attention because of the need to compensate for the various national voices at the table. That was a very important thrust led by Slovenian Boris Kidric. Then collectivization, and there was a forced drive to collectivize. I think we may have referred earlier to the four stages of the Zadruga.

The Yugoslav collective farm, *culhaus*, the stages being distinguished primarily by the relationship of the owners of the land to that land. In the highest form you gave it up and had no income which was proportionate to the amount of land which you contributed. These two moves, certainly the latter, almost ruined Yugoslavia. In 1952 when I was a student there, there had the, epochal for them, Sixth Congress. If you would say to an old Yugoslav--God knows where they are now--I was in Zagreb during the Sixth Congress, "(speaking in Serbian) I was in Zagreb during the Sixth Congress." "Oh!" Instant recognition. This is the one in which, led by (Milovan) Djilas and with (Edvard) Kardelj, the Slovene leader, and (Vladimir) Dedijer in the lead, they began to talk about loosening up and about developing in the direction of what we came to know as worker self-management, which we're not going to go into here in any great detail.

Q: Had American military aid or any gestures of supporting Yugoslavs' independence against Moscow taken effect by 1952?

BENSON: Yes, a notable story, it seems to me, in American post-Second War diplomatic history was the action of our ambassador in Belgrade, (George V.) Allen [Ed: who served from January 1950 to March 1953]. He was the ambassador whose reporting telegrams on the break, i.e., Yugoslavia's being cast out of the Cominform and the reaction within Yugoslavia, were crucial in convincing the people in Washington that this was going to be for real. It was a complicated situation because Yugoslav leadership was in a state of absolute shock. It's been widely described. You know, they were very loyal and orthodox Communists and were being told that they had not behaved well and, as I said, began a very important for them and critical and almost ruinous drive to industrialize and collectivize. But Allen saw in what was going on and felt in the future that it was inevitable that Yugoslavia would in fact move further and further and further away from the Soviet Union and that it was in peril, and that to help this movement away we had to help them. Now, at that time we essentially turned to using PL 480, Public Law 480 through the Commodity Credit Corporation, so food supplies and commodities, cotton and other bulk commodities, but food supplies, oil, wheat. This was crucial. Indeed there was the beginning of some kind of military relationship.

Q: This was still under the Truman Administration with Acheson as Secretary of State, which would have ended in January 1953.

BENSON: Oh yes. Very intelligent and very effective.

Q: Was there any cooling of this American effort as the Eisenhower Administration with Dulles as Secretary of State took over? You would have been in Zagreb at the time.

BENSON: I didn't detect any cooling. I don't think there was any cooling. In fact, I think that Yugoslavia was moving more and more to loosening up internal...

Q: I mean any cooling on the American side.

BENSON: I got it, but what I'm getting at is that we were aware and reporting from our diplomats was, I'm convinced, good. Again, this is a bigger subject than we might be able to cover here. Despite the pressure placed on the relationship between the United States and Yugoslavia by the nonaligned efforts of Tito, which he argued were supposed to be creating a very elaborate and solid and substantial center between the United States, NATO on the one hand and the Warsaw Pact on the other. Turned out that in crucial issues, i.e., UN votes, UNESCO votes and in all UN organs, the non-aligned, Yugoslavia voted with the Eastern Bloc. While they were liberalizing at home; Yugoslavs now had passports; they traveled freely; they were acquiring loans and building up their tourism; opening the country; allowing their people to go out for study…

Q: What about the three ambassadors that you worked under in this first tour in Yugoslavia? How would you characterize them as to their respective styles and accomplishments?

BENSON: Well, as we mentioned previously Rankin was on his last tour of duty had served in Belgrade in 1941, and made his way south to Greece in front of the Germans. When I met him, Rankin was a very vigorous fellow. We spent a long three or four or five days together in Split when the flagship of the Sixth Fleet visited. By the way, that's another aspect you might keep in mind to illustrate the relations between the United States and Yugoslavia. The flagship of the Sixth Fleet was berthed in Villefranche in France to the east of Nice in a beautiful harbor, and it had called the Sixth Fleet into Rijeka soon after the war and not since. I don't know if the visit in Split that I'm referring to was the very first, but it might have been the second. In any case, this was a very noticed diplomatic move by Yugoslavia, inviting the Sixth Fleet with all the sailors and the officers. Protocol was very, very heavy. The Ambassador always would go down to the coast, the Consul General from Zagreb, very many of us, would join. I went down with a whole staff of officers in a hotel to set up a mimeograph machine, and we wrote press releases on every single event which took place, however minor, in the sequence of visits, basketball games and volleyball games between the shore-based and crew-based teams, and these we sent out throughout the country. I had a photographer with me, and the ship also provided a photographer, and we could use the ship's darkroom facilities. We wrote captions and sent them out all over, and they were published, at least a picture and a caption. They usually ignored our stories. There was much protocol and toasts between the Yugoslavs and the Americans. Admiral Anderson, later the Ambassador in Portugal, a submariner, gave a toast in which he irritated the Yugoslavs--it was this very occasion--by speaking of peace **"with justice, and I mean justice."** The Yugoslavs could have easily said, "Of course, what kind of peace could there be without justice? But

they took it as a slap in the face, which is very much what he intended. The protocol dinner was after that a rather cold one. But over the years I went down to the coast for five or six of these visits. [Ed: The USS Des Moines, flagship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, visited Split October 17–20, 1958. Vice Admiral George W. Anderson, Commander of the Sixth Fleet, was on board.]

Q: This was all in the course of the early 1960s?

BENSON: Yes, yes. Finally it wasn't only the flagship. The next visit, I think the summer of 1960--yes, it was the next visit--was also in Split, and the USS Forestall came in--that's a nuclear aircraft carrier--surrounded by its acolyte destroyers. That's a big deal. It came into the inner harbor of Split. In any event, Rankin at this first visit, we spent much time together. He came a day early. He had everybody into his suite at the hotel. He was a regular guy, very soft, very old style diplomat. He felt at home in Yugoslavia. He was always recollecting the days when he would walk down to the central square in Belgrade, i.e., 1939-1940, and go shopping for berries in the spring and that sort of thing. He impacted little on what we did in Zagreb. I don't think he bothered the public affairs officer at all. For an old-line Foreign Service Officer, you have to think of it, we're now in 1959-1960. USIA was a strange beast.

Kennan had his, I wouldn't say problems, but he was bemused at all of these people. We had more people on the ground than five embassies in the pre-Second World War era. Kennan remembered the days, and he had pictures to prove it, when all the senior officers of the State Department would line up on the steps of Old State and have their picture taken. That was a Foreign Service in which everybody knew everybody's middle initial and pedigree. Now he had a staff of USIA officers which was larger than all of that. But Kennan had remarkable attributes, of a personal nature, which we became familiar with in Zagreb as he made his initial calls.

Q: Kennan had already taken over while you were stationed in Zagreb?

BENSON: Yes, he came in April 1961 and we moved to Belgrade that year in time for the July 4th weekend. In any case, it was warm. Ted Montgomery was still there. He was the Consul General in Zagreb. For some reason that I never understood, and I never inquired, Ted Montgomery did the minimum and a little bit less than that to host his new boss, Ambassador Kennan, coming into town with his wife and youngest son. They stayed at the Esplanade Hotel. They were there for a couple of days. Montgomery visited, as I recall it, Bakarić, the head of state, and Holjevac, who was the Mayor of Zagreb, and possibly another minister or two, I don't recall, but there was no social event, no proper social event, to welcome the Ambassador. He said to me, "Why don't you take him around." So I said, "What do you mean 'take him around'?" "Well," he said, "there is Otočec, which is in Slovenia just across the border, which is a beautiful place, a monastery on an island in a river where one would go for lunch. It's close to Croatia. And then, you know, there are the museums." So Kennan quickly understood obviously what was going on and what was not going on, was delighted to see a little bit of Zagreb in a

way that he wouldn't be able to if he were full of protocol. So we went up to Otočec and spent a lovely afternoon.

Kennan was a very 19th century man in certain respects. He always traveled with a little case with India ink and several pens and a drawing pad. I mean it was real professional paper. Whenever he would have the time and would see a sight, generally an architectural embellishment, a gargoyle or what have you, which he thought would be interesting, he would stop and draw it and label it. So he sat at the luncheon table in Otočec and did the gargoyles and the rain gutters, and so on, very content with this warm day. We went to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, where I knew the curators, and he was greeted very, very warmly. It was in the upper town in the old ancestral home of the Kulmer clan, Graf Kulmer, and the young Kulmer lived elsewhere. He was a modern artist. He was not there that day. I discovered that Kennan is color blind but goes to museums all the time with his wife, who would describe the colors. Now, how Kennan, who was color blind, would be able to relate the value in the etching or painting of green to yellow I do not know, but he insisted on this. It knocked the Yugoslav host out, it really did, that he cared so much that he would insist on this and that his comments were so thoughtful. We had a fine time.

Q: What was the Yugoslav reaction to the election of John Kennedy, who was very popular in Western Europe?

BENSON: Well, the election of John Kennedy was very popular, and John Kennedy personally was very popular for reasons which are familiar to you. You know, he somehow had an impact. He came through to people, especially in Europe, very, very easily. This is especially true of his last months, the last six or seven months. The Bay of Pigs was from the Yugoslav point of view a disaster, not because the American effort failed, but because in their view and the newspapers' they were absolutely livid about it all; it should never have been attempted. The missile crisis was something else again, because it's once again Cuba, with whom Yugoslavia had warm relations up to a point. Yugoslav relations weren't like the Soviet Union's, with whom Cuba was allied, but the guilty party for having initiated the whole thing was clearly the Soviet Union, and the Yugoslavs thought that was absolutely, shall we say, risky is to underplay it. It ended well. But the captivating aspect of Kennedy's international attitudes were manifested in his last six or seven months or so typified by his American University graduation speech that led to the nuclear atmospheric test ban treaty. And then there was his 1963 visit to Germany. That had several aspects. I'm not sure now in retrospect how the Yugoslavs pieced the whole thing out. There was the June 26, 1963 speech in Berlin which was very confrontational, or had a lot of confrontational moments, shall we say, and that was...

Q: That was the "I am a Berliner" speech.

BENSON: Yes, the "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech. And there was a speech in Frankfurt at the Frauenkirche, which was the church which played such a role in 1848, which was more peaceful in its intent and message. But finally Tito was the last official visitor whom Kennedy hosted in Washington before he went to Dallas. It was a trip in

November, and I was on it. I was sent by the public affairs officer, who was then Walter Roberts, and I was a press attaché assigned to accompany the Yugoslav press corps or those Yugoslav press types who would be sent over. There were a few who were stationed in the United States. Several of them were friends. We had a wonderful time together and for as long as they lived.

Tito's visit was highly and widely reported in Yugoslavia. Daily articles in each newspaper. We had newsmen from Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia; and then there were the news agencies and so on. A grand time was had by all.

There were demonstrations in New York. As a matter of fact, the trip was cut. He was supposed to go from Williamsburg, or from an airport near Williamsburg, which we visited, to the West Coast. It was suspected that on the West Coast there was good evidence that émigré communities were preparing a very hostile reception. Well out of my range of sight and earshot, the decision was made that he would not go to the West Coast. Tito became ill, diplomat illness, and remained in Williamsburg an extra day and a half, which was absolutely delightful. I was surrounded by the Yugoslav press corps who had nothing to do, so we did tourism and drank a lot of coffee and we might have had a few drinks. And then we went to New York. It was at the Waldorf Astoria. That was part of the schedule, but they added a day to it, and the émigré community in New York, various organizations, demonstrated, but were kept--you know the regulation, I don't know what it is--100 feet or 100 yards away. Police barricades were there, and the trip ended well.

Q: Who were the protestors in California and New York, Croatian Americans?

BENSON: That's what it was mostly. I'm sure there were others, but that's what they were. It was a good visit, and the reporting back home, I was told, didn't emphasize this negative aspect. So when Kennedy died, which was very shortly thereafter, there was national mourning, but that wasn't unique to Yugoslavia. This was so in other countries.

Q: Could you say anything more about Kennan's tenure as ambassador?

BENSON: Well, Kennan tended, I think, shall we say, to personalize matters, and I believe that he felt a little disappointed at the fact that Yugoslavia was associating with the unaligned movement, even beginning it and hosting the first conference of the unaligned, which he believed was really a movement which was not so centrist after all. If you took the votes of Yugoslavia and of the other unaligned in the UN, you would see that they were almost 100 percent against the positions proposed and actions proposed by the West. This was very unpleasant for Kennan, who thought that he could have an effect on this, to move their position a little more, shall we say, to the true center. But that never did happen.

Q: I wondered how Kennan got along with Tito, because they were such contrasting personalities.

BENSON: Well, they certainly were contrasting personalities. Kennan had a very alert sense of humor, but he was basically rather dour and quiet. He was not a *bon vivant*, and Tito was. I really don't know how they got along together. It was not a country when you exchanged drinks privately once a week. I think he knew him. I am not certain what language they spoke. You know, Kennan was truly and totally bilingual in German and in Russian, and so was Tito in those two languages. Kennan may have been equally fluent in French, but Tito, who knew a lot of French, didn't speak it really.

We organized one evening for Tito, the USIS office did, on behalf of George Kennan celebrating John Glenn's circling the globe. USIA, NASA put together a film on his journey. It was beautifully done, and a private showing was offered to Tito, and he thought that would be neat. So we translated the narrative text into Serbo-Croatian, and we went to the so-called White Palace, which is the home in which he lived in Belgrade, and in the private auditorium they had there Kennan and some other higher officers of the embassy were greeted by Tito and various of his colleagues. I was up in the balcony overlooking this auditorium with sound equipment and a text, and I read the narration in Serbo-Croatian. I have this document still, signed by Tito and by John Glenn. That was a very warm evening. Tito was a *bon vivant*, and he was delighted at this courtesy of bringing over staff and the film and the film projector and projectionist and all of that. He had drinks and a reception for this small group--I was not included--later. It was a fine evening.

Q: How did Kennan get along with Kennedy? Any impression there? I think Kennan was appointed by Eisenhower in his tenure.

BENSON: I don't really know how they got along actually. I saw no reflection of it.

Q: What about Ambassador Elbrick?

BENSON: Elbrick came toward the end of my tour, in January 1964. He was a total professional, a tall, elegant man. Not that Kennan wasn't socially inclined, but Elbrick was the kind of diplomat who loved to have people over, other diplomats and so on. It didn't involve me much. But one was conscious of a very lively ambassador. I think he had very realistic expectations. I think Kennan may have had slightly more hopeful expectations of what effect an ambassador could have. I think in Kennan's case he was hopeful of the effect he could have. I think Elbrick didn't see his role as being so much a prime mover on the ground because of his person. He was a very fine fellow, Elbrick.

Q: Did you feel, with these close contacts with the Zagreb and Belgrade media people, that, even though they would not reflect agreement with you in what they wrote or said publicly, you were laying down a basis of understanding of American viewpoints and background of American efforts?

BENSON: We certainly did feel that. We made materials available to them too, speeches, texts, this or that. What I think was equally important is that attitudinally we show them what American-style openness was. We were interested in them because of what they

were, because they had a rich history. The best Foreign Service Officers were that kind. We would go to the theater and talk about it with them, and so on, and would come back again and again for discussions, learning as much as we were trying to preach.

Q: Don't you find that this openness is often a factor of attractiveness in the American approach that would be appreciated in many different countries?

BENSON: I think so. It's at the basis of what the USIA set out to do through this enormous structure--not enormous but I should say very well integrated structure. Our diplomats who are not in USIA also, it seems to me, although they were frequently very busy at a very official level with foreign offices and ministries of economics and foreign trade and all of that, but they were likewise bringing abroad this attitude toward life. This is the personal end of it. Much of this, I pause to say, is going by the boards these days as overseas contacts are technologized. The very exciting years of my Foreign Service career, certainly the earlier ones, which were so rich in this personal contact and discussion, discussion, discussion, much of this on social occasions at home, are being replaced by the Internet.

Q: So the impact of that kind of communication technology which is supposed to make communication better overloads everyone with information but diminishes the personal factor.

BENSON: It doesn't make communication better; it makes it faster. But it removes the interpersonal. The kind of discussion that you and I are having, we could theoretically have on the email, but we can't really.

Q: Is this happening more on the American side now as a result of using the electronic media for convenience and not putting the effort into the personal contacts in overseas posts?

BENSON: Absolutely. It is more "convenient" and presumably or potentially or theoretically cheaper. It may also be, Bill, that the interlocutors on the other side, the counterparts of the 200 people I knew in Zagreb and the 400 people I knew in Belgrade are themselves tied to their laptops today and don't have time to go out for a four-hour lunch and a discussion of Timor or Indonesia or what have you.

Q: Probably then even among themselves there is not that much of a real personal exchange.

BENSON: It's going on all over. You know, you're familiar with this from your life at universities. Hugh Ragsdale, do you know him? University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. He told me that the faculty club was about to be turned to other uses--big, beautiful, white clapboard building--because people don't stop off after class to have a drink and talk with their colleagues. They all rush home to their computers. This is as an aside, but I believe it happens in the media world of Croatia and Belgrade too. I could not have those kinds of contacts today that I had then.

Q: When did the Fulbright program extend to Yugoslavia?

BENSON: The Fulbright agreement was signed at the end of October or early November 1964. I left in November of 1964, and it was signed just before I left.

Q: So it hadn't been implemented then, but the program was there when you returned to Yugoslavia in the 1970s?

BENSON: When I came back in 1979, the Fulbright program was booming along, and I became *ex officio* the co-president of the Fulbright Commission; one was a Yugoslav and the other an American. Earlier I had been in Turkey and I was there the co-president with a Turk of the Fulbright Commission in Turkey.

Q: Now you were in your own background prepared to work in Russia, but you never did go to Russia until the 1970s. Is that the first time you ever went to the Soviet Union?

BENSON: I went to the Soviet Union for the first time in 1970. I had been assigned to the U.S. Army Russian Institute in Garmisch in June 1970. At the end of that assignment, which would have been in summer 1971, I was supposed to go to the Soviet Union and be the traveling director of the next exhibit in the USIA series of exhibits in the Soviet Union. After I would complete that mission, I would move into Moscow and be the public affairs officer. So they asked me and a fellow from Washington to travel together into the Soviet Union to visit the potential sites of the next exhibit along with, obviously, the hosts from the Soviet organization which always was responsible for these exhibits on the ground.

Q: What was that counterpart organization?

BENSON: Strangely, the Chamber of Commerce, because the Chamber of Commerce had a department of exhibits, which did international exhibits, you know, Hanover, Bahrain, these big foreign exhibits.

And therefore the Chamber of Commerce was the only Soviet organization which had designers, they had people who had control of equipment, forklifts and what have you. In the Soviet Union this is most important. They had established relationship with transport firms, trucking firms, and with the railroads. If you had to move lift vans from Moscow to Volgograd within a three-or-four-day period, you needed help. In any case, I entered in 1970, and that was my first time there, in the autumn of the year, since my departure in 1933.

Q: We're jumping a little bit ahead. Let's go back to the end of your first tour in Belgrade. You went from there to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia, and how did that happen?

BENSON: Well, USIA sent people to various institutions run by the Army. They sent people to the big Staff College, they sent them to the Industrial College, they sent them to the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force War Colleges, and there was the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk which was run by the DOD (Department of Defense) and was not a uni-service but a multi-service academy at its base. I simply put in for one of these War Colleges, and this is the one I got. It was for a semester. I mean my tour wasn't for a semester; the school was organized on a semester basis, and I went in February 1965 for the spring semester.

Q: Did that turn out to have much value for your future work?

BENSON: Well, it had enormous value for my person; for my future work, yes; for my attitude; for my understanding of the Vietnam War. For example, I had never been in an environment of so many military people. It was understood when I went to the Armed Forces Staff College that my clearance, back to a situation we spoke of earlier, had to be upgraded dramatically. It would be a one-time clearance for as long as I was at the Staff College, but the documents which were available, which would be used in our war games, in our planning sessions, were real. Some were not, some were made up. You know, a war game is a false situation; it's an artificial situation. But when you talk about order of battle and you talk about equipment, supplies and so on, on our side they're supposed to be real and the intelligence of what the "enemy" has at its disposition is also real. So when USIA assigned me, as a student, I made sure that they didn't do it because I had had a fine career in Yugoslavia, which I had, without reference early and immediately to the security office so that we wouldn't get ourselves all tangled up and at the last minute somebody would say this guy can't go. Well, I could. I was cleared very quickly, and I had those elaborate clearances. And it had that effect, because having been cleared at that level, albeit for this brief period of time, that was in my file, and later on when there was this general review of the possibility that I would serve in the Soviet Union, this was much under discussion between me on the one hand and the security people on the other, this fact which was in the file that I had received these clearances. I don't know if you wish this more like a personal memoir, to have much on the record about my view of the Armed Forces Staff College and the American military and the Vietnam War. This week is really a time when all of that is being discussed.

Q: Because of the anniversary of the fall of Saigon.

BENSON: Yes, and I was there at the time when the B-52s began, and in my seminar was a B-52 pilot. So unless you feel it would be useful, or perhaps you talk with Stu Kennedy and he wishes to have me elaborate on it, I could. There were several episodes which speak well of the Armed Forces Staff College as an institution and of the military who were there and of their attitudes in the international political sphere. If he feels that it would be good to have that on the record, I would be able to talk about it. As far as the military was concerned, it was a civilian-ordered war.

Q: After that tour in Norfolk, you went overseas again.

BENSON: After that tour in Norfolk, I went back to Washington for a summer's intensive German. I had used German in my research--we talked of that--but they wanted me to be conversational. It had been years before, so I went through all that, and then went on to Hamburg, arriving in August of 1965.

Q: How did they happen to send you to Germany with your East European expertise?

BENSON: Well, Germany was bellied up against East Europe, and there were certain cities which were very much involved, Berlin being one and Hamburg being one. And to Hamburg I went. It's a stone's throw from Hamburg to the border with East Germany. Now, the territory of the Consul General, therefore, of the public affairs officer, USIS, was enormous. It stretched from Holland across the sea to Denmark to the Schleswig-Holstein, the capital Kiel, and Hamburg and Bremen, which were free cities, and Lower Saxony down to Hanover, which was a branch post run by an American. It was an enormous territory.

Q: Did you get into East Germany at all in the course of that job?

BENSON: No, I did not. We visited Berlin. I did not get into East Germany. East Germany played a great role, you might say, at that time in how my career developed. East Germany began the--what was the name of the East German newspaper; it might have been the Neues Deutschland, I can't recall now--but they began a series of articles in 1967 on who was who in the CIA. It became finally a book, Who Is Who in the CIA [Ed: published in 1968]. The very first article that they wrote in that series; this is 1967, it was very early September--was on four individuals who were serving in West Germany who were, according to them, important agents of the CIA, and, by golly, they had all served in Yugoslavia.

Q: Including you?

BENSON: Including me. I was the first one. Jerry Livingston was in Berlin, and--I forget his first name--Geesa was in Frankfurt, and Yeager, George Yeager, was in, I think, Bonn. We had all been in Yugoslavia. Geesa was a graduate of the military academy, was a retired Army officer, so he was suspicious. You asked me last time who was serving in Yugoslavia when I was there who could be called a Yugoslav expert, and I did not mention Terry Livingston, who had a higher degree based in good part on research in Yugoslavia. He came to Yugoslavia a year after I left, 1953 to 1954, as a graduate student, and while I served in Belgrade; he was the labor attaché and had contacts with economic, banking, and labor officials.

In any event, this article was published very much at the same time that one of our officers was expelled from Moscow in one of those tit-for-tat deals, and it was then felt at the Agency that I could not even begin to aspire to serve in Moscow. Now, how did all this come up? Dick Davies, the Foreign Service Officer of the State Department, was a loan officer, if you will, in USIA and was in charge of the East European/Soviet area. We had lunched. He had heard a paragraph's worth of my background. He said, "We really

have to try to get you to the Soviet Union somehow," and I went off to Hamburg. In 1967 we were vacationing at the beach north of (Leonardo da Vinci-) Fiumicino Airport in Focene, and I got a call from the embassy in Rome saying that there was an eye's only telegram for me. So I dashed in to see what it was, and it was from Dick Davies. He said that Francis Mason had flunked his physical after a year of Russian. He had a congenital eye problem, and the medical officers would not allow him to go to Moscow, and they would want very much to send me. This would have been as cultural affairs officer. And what can I tell them about my father's being alive or not? They had the file there and they had all the rest. So I wrote back and I said, "I know nothing beyond what you have in the file and probably not all of that. I don't know if he is still alive." In fact, he had been dead for three years, but we'll come to that later. I didn't know that at this time. He sent me a message, "We'll be back on line on this channel when I get to Hamburg." By the time I got to Hamburg, the series in the Neues Deutschland, the major East German political daily, had begun. One of our guys had been thrown out of the Soviet Union. It was a tit-for-tat thing. So, USIA decided to leave me alone. The last word from Dick Davies was, "When you come back after Hamburg on your tour of duty" --which had already been decided would be in Washington—"let's have another lunch and talk about it." And it was because of that meeting with him, because of his advice, because of the way he handled it all that I got to the Soviet Union, but, again, we will come to that in chronological sequence. He played a vital role in my career, in my life.

Q: And what was Davies' position at that time?

BENSON: He was the head of what we call the geographic area in USIA for Soviet and East Europe.

Q: On loan from the State Department.

BENSON: Yes. He was later the ambassador in Poland. He was a Soviet hand. He knew Russian very well.

Q: So after Hamburg you were called back to Washington to run research at the USIA? How did that move come to pass?

BENSON: Well, I had a good record and the confidence of the public affairs officers in Bonn who were writing my personnel assessment report, the evaluation report, every year. It was time to have a Washington tour. I had been in the Research Service before. It was not exactly relevant to the new assignment, but maybe we should backtrack and cover my very fiery tour of duty in Hamburg.

Q: In respect to the East Germans' attack on you?

BENSON: No, no, no, it wasn't that. It was in regard to the Vietnam War. Our library was fire bombed by the radical students. The American flag was torn down in front of the Hamburg Information Center, which was a huge library. This would have been probably 1966. See, the bombing had begun in 1965, and there were two groups. Mind you, this

building was the property of the University of Hamburg. It was a block and a half from the university on the Moorweide near the university, a short walk from the consulate, and it was a huge library and had many reading rooms, and the students used it a lot for their work. But they began to break up our lectures. You know, the German USIA program was exemplary. There would be lectures on aspects of American life, American history, American culture. They were very much open to the public. There were not canned prepared by somebody in Washington and given by anybody with a voice. We used American scholars, who were always there in great numbers. We would invite them, visiting scholars or resident scholars, senior graduate students, and we gave some of our own, of course. I gave some. But they would come in in 1966 with cries of "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh" popping up in various corners of the auditorium, obviously quite planned. It became impossible to hold public lectures. Fascinating, and it says a great deal about West Germany, that the important student groups, two of them, the Jugendunion and there was another one. One was affiliated with the Evangelische Kirche, the Lutheran Church, and the other one was, let's say, more secular, if you will, more socialist, and they were in the forefront, the activists from these groups were in the forefront, of those who would break up our meetings, and perhaps the more radical of them threw the Molotov cocktails through our windows and so on.

When we went, or our program people went, to these organizations and said, "But you're really forestalling all discourse on this important issue," they said, "That's the last thing in the world we want to do." And we said, "Well, how in heaven's name are we going to square the circle if you break up our meetings?" They said, "Well, let's have weekend seminars," and that's what we did. We were busy beyond belief for the years when we could not any longer have public lectures. In running weekend, by invitation only, seminars in the various inns and country homes that surround Hamburg and Kiel, and these were splendid and they were good and they were open.

Q: Who were the attendees of these seminars?

BENSON: The attendees were those who came--they were Germans--who came from the bodies of these organizations.

Q: Actually the protestors?

BENSON: You got it. It was extraordinary, and I say it speaks well for Germany.

Q: So they closed down your public lectures, come one/come all, but they were willing to come on a select basis and hear your message?

BENSON: They were eager, not only willing. We had a very active program director at the America House who was himself a socialist, left leaning, and who had many, many contacts over the years with these organizations and who organized these. We had them all over the place.

Q: Was the experience of other posts in Germany similar to yours with the Vietnam trouble?

BENSON: It was similar to ours in phase two. I don't think they were fire bombed. Berlin was tough.

Q: Well, the Free University was the hotbed of the new left student movement.

BENSON: Yes, you got it. Berlin was terrible. Other places had troubles, and they had very active student groups. Frankfurt was bad. They were all not good on the Vietnam War. It was, I should say, a watershed anyway in attitudes toward the United States.

Q: Was this more or less simultaneously with Willy Brandt and Ostpolitik, or did he come a little bit later in the 1970s?

BENSON: Well, I think he came a little later, *kleine schritten,* little steps. I think he came a little later. [Ed: Willy Brandt was chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974.]

Q: As we continue flashbacks, you were going to say something more about your time in Hamburg in the 1965-1968 period. What did we view particularly about the Consul General at the time?

BENSON: The first Consul General I cannot remember. I think I may have said this already. I will get his name and we'll put in the record. He was interesting in my experience for one thing. He was there only briefly. He had been a teacher at Monmouth Junior College. It was an evening school at that time; it's now Monmouth University, of which I am a graduate having gone evenings while working on the farm. We had this bond, but he wasn't there for long. He was replaced *ad interim* by his deputy, Walter Marx, who was an unusual man in the Foreign Service or anywhere. He was a stalwart of the Catholic Workers Movement. The movement started in New York during the Depression. They had various farms in northern New York where they took in poor people and they produced foods which were given to Catholic parishes. It's all a product of the early 19th century.

Q: These were sort of communistic communities or communes, 'communistic' with a small 'c'.

BENSON: They were definitely that, and Walter Marx--a great, big, tall, craggy fellow--used to write columns for the Catholic Worker, which newspaper you might have seen in your days around. What he was doing in the Foreign Service I do not know, but there he was. He was a gorgeous man, replaced by Coburn Kidd. Coburn Kidd had really a great influence on me. He was also, as so many people in the Foreign Service were, an unusual man. He had a Ph.D. in Anglo-Saxon literature from St. Andrews, went back to the States, during which time, mind you, he spent, I think, a year or two studying--did we say this already on the record?--in Freiburg studying philosophy. He became a lawyer. He

worked on Wall Street. And he joined the OSS. What he did was involved with Germany somehow. He was then in the Foreign Service, and he worked with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in his outer office in his early career. They might have met on Wall Street for all I know. But Coburn was a man of great charm when you got to know him. His special interest was bawdy lyrics of medieval England, which he could recite in Scottish accent or English. The man, with only one lung and emphysema in the other, who inhaled cigars, retired to New Hampshire and died close to 80, all of that.

But there is one incident which was quite personal to me but which was still of interest to the Consulate General which occurred something like this: When George McGhee, then the Ambassador in Bonn [Ed: McGhee served from May 1963 to May 1968.], visited in Hamburg--he used to visit the consulates general sequentially--very elaborate preparations were made. It was scripted as if the Secretary of State were visiting. When he came--and he would call on the leading editors and he would do various things in town which affected my work in USIS. Coburn said, "You must attend these meetings, all of them"--in fact, I had to set them up--"and I want you to take notes, and I want you to write memoranda of conversation." So off I went with George McGhee. Most of his calls in Hamburg, which was the press center of Germany, as you know--Axel Springer and the tabloid Bild was there. Die Zeit was there. At that time Gerd Bucerius was the editor. Henry Naunen did Der Stern and (Rudolf) Augstein edited Der Spiegel, and Springer had his whole family of newspapers. So at the end of the visit, I had loads of notes, and Coburn said, "Come on over, and let's talk about it." He was there by the fire in his dressing gown--this is how one dressed in those days--with scotch on the rocks, and he said, "Let me see your notes." So I showed him my notes. I had, in fact, memoranda of conversation, handwritten. So he read these. He paused halfway through and he said, "Have you written many memcons?" And I said, "No, there are my first." He said, "How did you get through Yugoslavia with that record you have, back-to-back promotions and all of that, without doing any memcons!" I said, "Well, I don't know. Nobody asked for them. I did write some telegrams and so on, their oral briefings." He said, "Memcons are the very basis of our work. I'll tell you what. We'll talk about this in the office tomorrow." This was Sunday evening. "After the staff meeting come and see me." We had something like a 9:30 am staff meeting.

There was a huge staff in Hamburg, so the meeting room had a great big table. Coburn Kidd was at one end of the table, and he distributes two stacks of papers, one on one side of the table going all the way around and one on the other side going all the way around. He never referred to me once. He said, "There's something I should have done. I haven't done it. Forgive me, but we're going to do it now. The memcon is the basic document in any diplomatic office whether it's in Washington, and there is a way of writing it and there is a way you mustn't write it." And he offered several basic principles, one of which is that nobody cares what you say. That was never my fault in the memorandum of conversation with George McGee, because I played no role, I was merely a notetaker. "What one cares about in a memcon is what the other person said. That's why you're having this meeting. And your views should be reflected in what that other person is saying, not directly through quoting what you said. Unless you're defending the honor of the queen or something like that, no one gives a hoot what you say. Now," he said, "Mark

Twain visited Germany several times, and what I have done for you is to have hypothesized conversations that Mark Twain had while he was in Germany and which he wrote up in the form of memcons." Now remember, these were done the night before, after I left him.

These were written as though Mark Twain was visiting somebody or other, you know. Two of us, one of my old friends and me, were at that meeting, and we saved these for years. Both have lost them. And they were gorgeous. They were witty, they were to the point of what Mark Twain would be expected to have discussed with a burgomaster and so on. I met him in the office afterward, and I said, "Thank you for not having mentioned my name." He said, "It was totally unnecessary. You get the point." I said, "I get the point." He said, "Do you think you can write some memcons based on your notes?" I said, "I think so." He said, "Do it." I said, "I'll do it fast," and I did, and I learned, and I became a great memcon writer, and thank him for it.

Q: We're up now to 1968 when you returned to Washington for a tour to 1970. You were due to go back, and you became the Assistant Director of USIA in charge of research under Frank Shakespeare. What were the responsibilities of research? Had they changed from the time that you were in the rank and file in that office?

BENSON: They changed to a certain extent, basically not. There was what was called the survey research, or public opinion polling, arm of the office; and there was what we called documentary research, which meant papers written on the basis of other than public opinion polling; and there was a media reaction unit, which tried to prepare papers as quickly as possible based on what is the reaction, let's say, of Germany to some event.

Q: Did this also involving monitoring media reporting in any given country regarding American foreign policy.

BENSON: All countries, yes. If you had a crucial event, you tried to get that office really galvanized. There was input from foreign posts too, in either telegraphic or telex mode.

The Research Service—which also covered public opinion polling, which we'll come to in a second—also covered program evaluation, what do people really think in Colombia or Argentina about the magazines which are issued by USIA.

Q: So part of your job was to sample the reactions of the target countries to what USIA was doing.

BENSON: Target audiences regarding those countries. We did not have teams which went out to do this work. What we had was people who were fully trained, survey researchers, pollsters, who would work with local commercial institutions down there on developing a questionnaire and a sample and all of that and how to get the data in English back up to Washington.

Q: You had these assessments going on all over the world?

BENSON: We had them going on all over, oh yes.

Q: And just at a time when probably the focus in USIA's concerns was Vietnam.

BENSON: Well, the public opinion polling was on gut issues. The product analysis, as we used to call it, program analysis, was on whether anybody was reading it, was anybody paying any attention to it, what was the credibility of the information within this magazine, and of course one would be asking about articles which were important to them. And we had radio programs, the VOA (Voice of America), and we had exhibits going around here and there, and movies which we produced at that time, USIA did documentaries. There was great interest obviously in what data we could bring back and analyze and show effectiveness. But the public opinion polling was done in two ways. In the first place, you took polling that was available--for example, Italian opinion.

Q: Polls done by native opinion polling firms in the respective countries.

BENSON: Yes, it's the sort of material which is in the public domain or you can acquire it. Now, this is complicated, dealing with this. If you have one report, you have one report. But if you go four or five and if the samples are substantially different and the statistical margin of error is substantially different, it's really a conundrum trying to put them together, but it can be done, and we had people who were working away and doing this. Then there is the desire to prepare a survey research instrument--that's a questionnaire--which would get at the questions and attitudes which we were uniquely interest in. The Italians would put things a little differently, of course. So we would do that. Now you have a lot of data. You have the data coming back from the poll or the survey which we had sponsored, and we had sort of free-floating data from a variety of other sources, and you had media reaction. Our office, meaning this Research Service, was the center for all of this, to try to get it into some coherent form for more than USIA obviously. The State Department and the White House were keenly interested in this, and there were other government agencies which were keenly interested.

Q: Because this was a way of monitoring the countries' reactions to American policy in general.

BENSON: Yes. They weren't interested in whether the Bolivians cared a hoot about the magazine which was issued down there, but they sure cared about whether the Bolivians were aware of, and what did they think of, our foreign policy behavior.

Q: Did you have any frictions with American posts overseas in doing this monitoring work?

BENSON: I can't remember any. It was a matter of some sensitivity. In the early years we would be running polls or doing polls that the embassy wouldn't even know of--that was some years before--ambassadors would go ballistic, and so would USIA offices, at the idea that this was being done, American money was being spent, and they didn't

know about it. So a new protocol was developed, and the posts, the embassies, had to be told well in advance: (a) that this was what we wanted to do, and (b) if they agreed that we could do it, if it came to that, what input would they wish to offer, what questions would they feel we should ask. This would go back and forth until finally the survey instrument, the questionnaire, and the sample would have to be approved by them. Now, some of them didn't know anything about anything like this and didn't even care about it and approved, let's say, unwilling but would approve. Others cared deeply and thought this (a) was splendid really and/or (b) could blow up in their faces because it was the United States government which was paying for this so there were political sensitivities.

Q: Blow up in their faces from the standpoint of Congress objecting to spending money on this, or the host country getting upset about American probing?

BENSON: Not the Congress at all but the host country. The opposition party in a given country would interpolate the standing government: Did you know this? Did you have advance notice? So there were all manner of situations, and by the time we would go into the field or the people we would hire, the local entrepreneurs who did this kind of work, would go into the field, we had clearances aplenty. And at that point--now to your question--it was not possible any longer to have a problem with the embassy because they had loads of input. They may not have liked the results.

Q: The Director of USIA during your time there was Frank Shakespeare [Ed: USIA Director 1969-1973], I believe a Nixon appointee, and rather controversial at the time.

BENSON: Well, he was awfully conservative. I don't recall anything specific. I did not play a great role in any of his discussions. I attended one meeting a week. There were many meetings on policy matters, but they did not affect the Research Service, so his contentiousness and his political views, his conservatism, really didn't affect us in the Research Service. You had mentioned German Chancellor Willy Brandt before. He thought Willy Brandt was a traitor to Western ideals and purposes and that the German/East European policy that Willy Brandt espoused was undermining NATO in the most primary way.

Q: Do you think his views had an effect on how the USIA mission was generally formulated--or, should I say, was executed?

BENSON: Was executed? I never felt it, which doesn't mean anything. Not to denigrate the importance of what we did in the Research Service, we had an Administration and a State Department and a National Security Council and a President who, thinking of overseas posts, were creating foreign policy and expressing views about issues of the day. An embassy, an ambassador, a USIA office would react to those inputs, not Frank Shakespeare's particular points of view whatever they were.

Q: Then in 1970 you went back to Europe.

BENSON: In 1970 I went to Garmisch. During those two years when I was the head of Research, the question of my clearance for service in Moscow was settled favorably. When I went to Garmisch to the U.S. Army's Russian Institute, it was as a step already signed and sealed to go into Moscow. This period of two years during which all of this was settled brought to a culmination all of the things you and I have talked about, Bill, in the preceding hours.

In the first place, Dick Davies began, greeted me as the head of Research, and said we must have lunch, so we had lunch. And he said, "It's too bad things worked out as they did in 1967, but this is a great job you have now. You can go in now as PAO (Public Affairs Officer) instead of CAO, cultural affairs officer, but we've got to get the clearance question settled, which remains is your father alive or not. There's no way that we can send you unless we can attest to that." I said, "I have no way of knowing," and he said, "I have an idea. You write to Mikoyan." I said, "What do you mean by that!?" and he said, "Well, let's go back to the office." And he called somebody in the State Department who gave him Mikoyan's address. Well, it was not a very elaborate address. He was then retired from his position as president, and he had an office in the Kremlin and everybody knew that he had an office in the Kremlin, so an address was sort of jerried up. He said, "Write to him," so I did.

In 1968 in the autumn I sent a letter to Mikoyan, mailed it in Bethesda just in a post box, in which I said that for personal and legal reasons I should wish to know of the whereabouts and welfare, or something like that--of your colleague, Mikhael H. Benson. In the spring of 1969, I was mowing the lawn when a truck from the Post Office, came zipping up, came to a stop right in front of me there on the lawn, with a huge envelope from Moscow. I signed for it, and it was a letter from my half-sister, whom I'd never been in touch with before. She said, handwritten in English, "You were right to have tried to find out about our daddy," something like that, "in the way that you did." So then she goes on to tell me that he had died in 1964 and that she had a son, and so on, various other inconsequential family matters. I wrote back to her a letter which I thought was less than gushy--oh, we have found each other, and that sort of thing--I didn't do anything of the type. And I told the security people at USIA, to whom I gave a copy of this letter, a xerox of it, I said, "You see, we now know that he is dead." And they said, "We don't know anything of the kind. We have a letter from your sister. We don't have a death certificate." I told them that I don't know anything about her husband. I said he might be the chief of police of Moscow for all I know. I know that she is a doctor and she has a son, and so on, and my letter was very formal. I thought she should have it in the open, since they knew who I was. So, I wrote I am a Foreign Service Officer of the United States. I've served here and there and I am now in Washington, so on and so forth; and anything you have written to me before, I never received.

Q: We are returning to our Oral History interview with Ray Benson, today is May 1st, 2000. Ray, we were discussing your time in Washington with USIA and the experience of getting cleared to serve in the Soviet Union.

BENSON: I think we got to the point of my presenting to the Security Office of USIA the letter from my half-sister, which they said was not sufficient proof. She said my father had died in 1964. This was 1969. But it wasn't sufficient proof for them. I discussed the matter with Dick Davies, with others in the Soviet and East European area and with USIA's personnel people, and told them I really did want to go there. But there was nothing they could do, they told me, and time passed. Later in 1969, I was at my desk at USIA when I got a call from the Red Cross, Constitution Hall headquarters, and they said that they had a message for me, if I could prove who I was, from the International Red Cross in Geneva; they further said the message was from Russia, the Soviet Union. So I told them who I was and all that. They trusted me on the phone. They sent over a courier, and it was a copy from the Russian Red Cross to the Geneva International Red Cross for me. It was a copy of the death certificate of my father.

Q: Just what you needed.

BENSON: Well, I had sent that letter which said "for personal and legal reasons," and personal reasons were taken care of by the letter from my half-sister, and this was the legal document that I suggested that I needed. It did not say, they could not tell me, from which person or office it came; just that it came from the Russian Red Cross. Anyway, here it was. So I went back to the security people and the Soviet area and personnel people, and the Security people said, "This will do it," and I was cleared just like that, no further questionnaires or panels or anything, for service in the Soviet Union. The question then was how to schedule my departure, so that it dovetailed with the departure from Moscow of the Public Affairs Officer there, who was then McKinney Russell. It was decided that what the Agency would do would be to appoint me to be director of the next exhibit, USIS exhibit, USIA exhibit, which would be going through the Soviet Union, and I would do that, travel with the exhibit as its director. When Russ left, I would leave off being the director of the exhibit and come into Moscow and take up that post. So they decided that the schedule was such--it would be about a year away that the exhibit would be going in--they decided that a good place to park me for a year would be at the US Army's Russian Institute in Garmisch. I forget who replaced me in Washington as the head of the Research Service, but there was somebody who wanted to do it and who was available, and so this would fit.

Now there are always, certainly then, four/five/six/seven civilians at the Russian Institute in Garmisch. The State Department would send two or three, USIA one or two. The NSA had people there. The CIA had people there. The rest were military. The instruction was in Russian. The faculty was all Russians except for one who was a Serb who had been educated in the Soviet Union and through some circumstance that was very strange really but it doesn't matter here, and an Estonian who had been in the Soviet Foreign Service assigned to Copenhagen when the war broke out and chose to remain in the West. There was a Chechnian, Afterhanuf.

Q: I know about him. In fact, I even met him at Radio Liberty in Munich.

BENSON: Sure, Abdulrachman Afterhanuf. The rest were Russians. It was an unclassified school; there were no classified documents there. By then, this faculty, they were all, to a man and a woman, stateless. There was another person who was not--no, she was married to a Yugoslav--she was a Russian, she was in the language department. So we spent the year from 1970 to 1971 in Garmisch. In the spring of the year, April first, April Fool's Day, I got a call from Washington saying that Frank Shakespeare had decided that a friend of his, who was a Foreign Service Officer, Andrew Falkievicz, who had served in various posts and was desirous of being an ambassador--he was very conservative, he had very good connections--they couldn't place him as an ambassador. He was relatively junior, he was a Grade 3 Foreign Service Officer, and there was no place to assign Andy, and he was going to assign him to Moscow and that was that. So friends called me from Washington, from the inner circles of the Agency, and said, "This is a disaster. No one was asked, but at the morning staff meeting--the one per week at which personnel, senior personnel, positions were either opened or closed; that is, people were told that they were open or people were told who would serve there--this was announced, to gasps from the people who knew me well, including Henry Loomis, who was then the deputy to Frank Shakespeare. He ordered a friend of mine--it was Walter Roberts again, who by then had been appointed to the position of deputy, you might call it a Deputy Under Director of the Agency. He would be the fourth person in the Agency. "Call Ray and tell him we owe him." So I got another phone call, this one telling me that they owed me and where would I want to go. And I said, "What, in heaven's name, is open?" The question of being on the exhibit is out of the question now. This was in the spring of 1971. What's open in 1971? Well, there was only Iran, which my friends said to me, "You would not want to go to," because MacArthur is the Ambassador there and he's very difficult to deal with.

I said to them that what I want is to go to the Soviet Union somehow sometime or a country proximate to it with which it has very close relations. That's of interest to me. So we were talking about Germany, perhaps Poland, Turkey, Iran, of countries where I could aspire to speak the language, but Turkish I didn't know. Turkey was going to be open only in 1972. They said, "We will assign you to Turkey as of 1972. In the meantime we will give you Turkish language training in Garmisch if the Commandant will allow you to stay.

The Commandant would, provided, in addition to Turkish language study, I did research on topics he would suggest, Russian-Turkish relations in certain periods, and I would read papers before the various classes. I said, "Fine, that's good with me." They sent a man down. They'd hired a man from Berlin and Munich, the United States Information Agency did, a Turkish émigré, linguist, married a German, living in Munich. He would come down by train every morning, five days a week, and try to inculcate into me, then he would go back. This lasted only a few weeks of the summer. He took a vacation. I went to Berlin to visit a friend with Shirley when we got a call from the embassy in Bonn. They were looking for me.

The Public Affairs Officer in Turkey had been assigned to Saigon because the Ambassador there, whoever he was [Ed: Ellsworth Bunker, ambassador to Vietnam from

1967 to 1973], knew him from an earlier posting. The Public Affairs Officer was leaving, somebody was going to replace him, and the ambassador said, "No, I want this guy, Bob Lincoln." So they called me and said, "How soon can you go?" I said, "I can go soon, but I don't know any Turkish. I know 300 words. It's a complicated language." They said, "It doesn't matter. He doesn't know the language at all, Bob Lincoln." And so at the end of July, early August, of 1971 we went back to Garmisch, and I packed up and drove to Turkey. The family followed more gracefully after I got set in the house. That's how my tour in Turkey began in September of 1971.

Q: And you were how long in Turkey?

BENSON: Four years, two two-year tours, I guess, or one three plus one: I forget how we calculated it, but four years.

Q: Who were the ambassadors that you worked with?

BENSON: There were two, Bill Handley [Ed: July 1969-April 1973] and Bill Macomber [Ed: May 1973-June 1977].

Q: And you were the senior USIA in the embassy under them?

BENSON: Yes, my first position as what we called a CPAO, Country Public Affairs Officer. Now, Bill Handley was a Middle Eastern hand and a State Department officer who had been, as Dick Davies was, on loan and the head of the Soviet and East European geographic area. Bill Handley had been in the Agency at some time in the past as Middle Eastern area boss. He liked USIA. He was sort of taken aback that this rookie, who had very recently thought he was going to the Soviet Union, was now in Turkey with 300 words of Turkish--not that Bob Lincoln knew any at all, but still. I was inexperienced as a country PAO, and I thought, for a certain length of time anyway, about my coming into Yugoslavia. We talked of it last time, where the Public Affairs Officer in Belgrade was appalled that he had a Branch Public Affairs Officer for Zagreb who had never been abroad before. We talked about all that. So it was replayed in part. Bill Handley was at post without his wife or child. They were getting divorced. He was alone. He was a very sweet, very experienced, extremely intelligent, very witty and convivial man, and we came to a very good working relationship. At that time there was a program in Turkey that you may, sitting here in Burlington, have heard of, which was the opium poppy replacement program.

Q: Well, I know they've done that kind of thing in other parts of the world. I didn't know about Turkey. Getting the farmers to grow something else instead?

BENSON: Getting the farmers to grow something else instead, precisely. At that time the onus was on Turkey. The Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia was known, and the fact that you could grow poppy on mountainsides where nothing else would grow was known, but basically it had been grown in Turkey for some 2,000 years. It was a very substantial crop. A lot of it, however, ended up in Marseilles and other places in Southern France,

where it was transposed into heroin. This was quite well established, and so a great deal of money--the figure 50,000,000 comes to mind; it was much at the time and much in Turkey--was appropriated by Congress, and the AID program, which was huge in Turkey, housed in a tremendous building--the head of the AID program held the rank of minister--the AID program administered these funds. But what interested Bill Handley, apart from the fact that he had this responsibility as the ambassador to see that it was effectively used, was the media interest in the United States on how this would be done, was doing and so on, and the press would come in from time to time to find out whatever they could. In Ankara there was one resident American newsman who ran the AP (Associated Press) office, Nick Ludington, a Turkish hand, from a very old and well-off American family, had fallen into Turkey as a student once upon a time, learned the language, and here he was. There was nobody in Istanbul, there were no representatives of American media, but they were now coming in, because the opium question was a sexy issue. Now American media people were stationed elsewhere, notably in the Middle East. They would come from there, they would be sent in. So he briefed me and made sure that I was briefed very carefully. The Ambassador wanted to have only one spokesman for the embassy. He did not want to have two or three, and he wanted that person to be the public affairs officer, not the information officer under the public affairs officer. When I was in Belgrade, I was the information officer and press attaché under the public affairs officer. He didn't like that, he didn't want that. He didn't want the public affairs officer to wonder what was transpiring on this crucial issue, and he wanted a person who would report to him about what Joe Blow of the Christian Science Monitor was interested in. To report to him would be somebody on his country team, and I was to accompany each media type to every meeting and sit in the back of the room with a pad and take notes, which, by golly, I did for four years on all issues. Later, of course, Turkey invaded Cyprus [Ed: 20 July 1974].

Q: Oh, that happened on your watch?

BENSON: That happened on my watch, and a huge number of media came in. Congressmen came in. Charles Rangel, very much in the news now, was the counterpart of Hyde on the House Judiciary Committee, then very junior, very slender, very suave. He came in because drugs in New York and his district was a big issue, and he came perhaps more than once and stayed for quite a while. And there were others. (Television reporter) Peter Jennings came in from the Middle East. I could go on about that, about who came in, but it's irrelevant perhaps to the general picture of how Bill Handley liked to run things.

Q: What about his successor?

BENSON: Bill Macomber was a very different kind of person. Bill Macomber had been in the State Department for a number of years, had been Ambassador to Jordan, but was not, you might say, a professional Foreign Service Officer. He had been, all his career long, a political appointee and had just stayed on and was appointed and reappointed by whoever was the head of the State Department. His special field was administration, and he had organized most recently in the State Department some yearlong study projects.

Every now and then, you know, we'd do this State Department 'whither in the new world, what do we need and how do we reform ourselves' and so on. Really there's nothing about the State Department that he didn't know, and he came to Turkey on his own choice. He liked the Middle East. In the State Department, Turkey was in the European area. His wife had been (Secretary of State John Foster) Dulles' personal secretary, Phyllis, a lovely lady. He had a very unique combination of hands-on, very close-in, face-to-face management, and totally open and relaxed management. We were all allowed under Bill Macomber to read a certain clipboard which was next to his personal secretary in the outer office. The clipboard would have all manner of documents. You know, there are many documents that come through an embassy that you don't normally read. Many are issued by the embassy. And he felt that his country team--this was not for every Dick, Tom and Harry officer--his country team of senior officers, Foreign Service and military, should read this clipboard. It was unique in my experience in the Foreign Service. It never happened to me again. When I say 'officers', you see, the country team in Turkey had a four-star general on it. Ankara was the capital city of CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) from 1958 to 1979, remember that, Bill? CENTO was the *nachfholger*, the successor, to the Baghdad Pact. CENTO rated four-star general. We had another four-star general in the country, in Izmir to the southeast.

Q: For the NATO Command.

BENSON: The NATO Command, and we had a three-star running the air base in NATO chain out in Ankara, which had a lot of soldiers. We had a high school, military high school, in Ankara.

Q: Turkey was quite a different experience from the standpoint of the extent of the American presence compared with Yugoslavia.

BENSON: Oh, it was night and day. Ankara and other places in Turkey; Karamursel, which was across the Bosporus from Istanbul, was one of NSA's (National Security Agency) most important listening points, and they had them on the north shore of the Black Sea. The northern boundary of Turkey and the southern coast of the Black Sea, absolutely, stretching from west to east, and then inland bellied up against Armenia. It has been said in the media--I don't have to tell you from a secret document--that we could monitor the conversations between *tankisti*, from one tank to another, in the Caucasus. The local head of NSA had the simulated rank of a three-star general, an extremely intelligent chap. We had brass around the country team, in the country team meeting. And Macomber was really superb. Not that Bill Handley wasn't; but Macomber had a different, more, as I say, hands-on style. He seemed to feel more at home with this mixture of military and civilians and so on. I never felt that Bill Handley knew all about Turkey before he got there. That's perfectly clear. But I think Bill Handley might have been a little bit more at home in a totally civilian environment.

Q: That's interesting, because Macomber had the political background.

BENSON: Macomber had the political background, yes. He was a fiery, temperamental person. He was explosive. He got mad at me once and he threw an ashtray at me. He threw to miss, and he did (laughter).

Q: Were you able to take advantage of your location in Ankara to pursue your Soviet interest as you had hoped?

BENSON: My Soviet interest, it was of interest to some people in the Turkish Foreign Office that I knew Russian and that I hoped to be there my next tour. This was a different environment from Yugoslavia in so many ways. The Turkish Foreign Office, that is, various offices in the Turkish Foreign Office, were very close to the American Embassy. It was considered the spokesman, the head of the press office of the Foreign Office, was my counterpart. The head of the cultural office, international exchanges to the extent that the Foreign Office became involved in such, was another of my counterparts. There was a fellow whose office was not far from where the USIS office was, who ran such monitoring as the Turks did. You know what FBIS is--of course, you do--Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Well, the Turks had a kind of FBIS.

Q: To translate foreign material into Turkish.

BENSON: Of course, the scope was much more limited, but what they cared about was of great interest to us. One was all of Central Asia and whatever emanated from there, because the pan-terranean movement, or pan-terranean desires, were still around and they played a role in the political spectrum, and they still do within Turkey. And the other was stuff from Cyprus. They had all kinds of monitoring, and our embassy got flimsies. This was the day before computers, and you had these poor typists doing the best they could on several typewriters.

We just had closer personal and professional relations with our Turkish counterparts. The American Desk, all of us in the country team would know them well. The head of radio and television, on my departure, the head, the new head, became Ismail Cem. He is now the Foreign Minister [Ed: Cem served as Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2002]. I knew that half-brother of Abdi Ipekci, the editor of the Istanbul newspaper Milliyet, who was slain in his office while I was in the Soviet Union [Ed: 1 February 1979]. Somebody came in a riddled him. All of this was very, very different from working in Yugoslavia and terribly, terribly interesting. I was limited by not knowing Turkish but, lo and behold, a huge number of the very important Turks knew English very, very well. Turkey was a very rich experience, therefore, for me.

Q: What happened in your function of representing the U.S. at the time of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus?

BENSON: Well, several things, and they're almost predictable. For one, there was a huge influx of American media people. For example, Dusko Doder, who was in Belgrade, discovered that he had in the bottom of his job description from the Washington Post that as needed he would also cover Turkey, and they told him that they had a problem down

there, Dusko, and in he came. Steve Roberts was then the New York Times bureau chief in Athens, very unusual, but he came in. The second time he came in he brought his wife, who is Cokie Roberts. A name that escapes me came in then from Belgrade, another newsman. But they came frequently and they even came from the States. They would come for a week, because they were writing a big story. Macomber had the same policy toward spokesmen that Bill Handley, that only the Public Affairs Officer and no others in USIA report to him direct, go in with every person and sit there and take notes, and so I did that. That was a very important part of it.

In fact, there was probably very little more except taking care of the Washington delegations, the number of people who came from Washington to Turkey because of this situation. He wanted me at every meeting along with the head of the Political Section. I say he was chin-to-chin and face-to-face, Bill Macomber, but he was also sharing with everybody, so they all would come in. Arthur Hartman, then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe, flew in one day in a small jet from Germany for several days. It was the first time I met him. State Department delegations accompanied by media; Kissinger was there, a huge number of press. When that happens, the USIS office becomes the press office of the plane. If he has a spokesman with him--usually does--we provide all the back-up facilities that that spokesman needs. It was great fun.

Q: Did you have any contact with Kissinger either as Secretary or before that as National Security Advisor?

BENSON: No.

Q: Then after Turkey in 1975, you finally got to Moscow.

BENSON: Yes, via a direct transfer. My predecessor had to leave, because of his next assignment, prior to my arrival. My availability for transfer was keyed to the arrival of my successor in Turkey, so there couldn't be an overlap in Moscow. So, they sent me to Moscow under TDY (temporary duty) orders for a week, 10 days. I went up in April, I guess it was, of 1975 and spent a week there, getting briefed and talking to my predecessor. Under my official transfer orders I went directly to Moscow from Ankara in June arriving June 21st--a day that will live in infamy, right?--to find Moscow in a state of great excitation because the Apollo-Soyuz link-up, they were about to blast off [Ed: launch for Apollo and Soyuz 19 was July 15. The two craft docked July 17; last undocking was July 19. Soyuz landed on July 21 and Apollo landed July 24, 1975] . So the place was full of newsmen, NASA officials. It never happened again, but it was appropriate to the time. It was a time of euphoria. Most people now, I suspect, wouldn't know it, and I think that we would forget it.

Q: You mean détente was flourishing.

BENSON: Well, 1975. You know who was in office here. But this was an event that was both literal and symbolic, the link-up and *stehofka*, handshake, in space. We had a space art exhibit opening soon after I arrived. They had one arranged by the Smithsonian--and

they had one at the Smithsonian probably years later--as part of the NASA agreement. Of all things, it was put into some paragraph, and everybody paid attention to that one. It was a very interesting show.

It was a time of great confusion in the USIA office, I should say USIS office. Of all of the officers at USIS, Moscow and Leningrad that summer all but one were transferred. This is an absolute disastrous personnel upheaval. It's just all wrong. It included secretaries, I mean American secretaries.

Q: It just happened by coincidence?

BENSON: There's nothing coincidental about it. It was just bad, careless personnel planning. In the Foreign Service this cannot happen, should not. Two years prior somebody should have been calculating when peoples' tour expired. So during that summer the one person who would be returning to the post was on home leave, in Vermont, by the way.

Q: Who was that?

BENSON: Lynn Noah. He lives in Eden in the oldest asbestos mining area. He was gone that summer. And as my staff melted away and new ones came in, we literally didn't know where the files were. We would call Washington at the end of the day and ask them to find in the area office something that we thought might be there, because we couldn't find it in Moscow. Well, we got a good staff soon and put the place in order, but it was something else. The ambassador then was Walter Stoessel [Ed: who served from March 1974 to September 1976].

Q: What was his style of operation like?

BENSON: Well, I sensed it immediately, because of my unique security clearance situation. The arrangement with the Security people back to Washington again, I told them that this was something that I had to do; they didn't ask me to do it, was I would go into the Ambassador and say, "Have you read my file? Have you been informed? Do you know who I am?" And if not, I would tell him everything I could, and I would tell him, you know, "I have a sister here in Moscow, half-sister, whom I've never seen, never been in touch." And the Security people were very relaxed about that, and I said, "I do not intend at the beginning of my tour to look her up. I know the address. She lives in the same house I lived in when I was there from 1931 to 1933." The return address was on that envelope I got in Bethesda.

Q: Where was that address in Moscow?

BENSON: Well, it's the street that's the first street past Prospekt Mira heading in the same direction. It's (Name of Moscow Street). If you're heading toward the railroad station square, you go past the turn-off to Prospect Myra. The next block you go in about 300 yards and there are these high-rises, and she lives in one of them. So anyway, I told

them, "Your attitude is relaxed. You've cleared me. I can go in and do whatever I want. If anything happens, you trust me to report to the embassy, to the security officers if there are some pressures being placed on me. I don't think I have the nerves during my first tour there, during my tour there--I didn't know how many I would have--to have a nice, warm relationship with my half-sister. I don't know her family; I don't know her mother, my father's second wife; and I don't know her husband. I don't know anything. And I just sort of think I can handle that, and I would so tell the Ambassador." They said, "It's up to you," and that's what I told Stoessel. Well, it turned out that he had heard, and he had a few questions to ask. I don't remember what they were, but he was clear in his mind when I had been there as a child, and what my father did. He was interested. He was a substantial expert in the field, went to school at Stanford, very bright. He was one of those, though slightly younger, who with Bohlen, Thompson and Kennan…

Q: This is Monday, May 8th, 2000, and we are returning to our conversation with Ray Benson. We are now coming back to chronological consideration of Ray's career with his first arrival in Moscow in 1975 and his work under Ambassador Stoessel and Malcolm Toon.

BENSON: I think, Bill, we spoke a bit about my arrival as the Apollo-Soyuz mission was about to be launched, in a period of euphoria in Moscow at that time. Fill it in a bit when we get the final text about that early period. You asked, I think, when we were at the conclusion of that interview session, about Walter Stoessel, his mode of operation and so on. Now, Walter Stoessel was an old Russian hand, or Soviet hand. His knowledge of Russian was good, it was very good, and he worked at it. He got up early every day, he read the newspapers, and every day he read a bit in The Master and Margarita by Bulgakov. He spent a lot of time at it. He didn't read very much every day, but he read every day. He was a very calm and very soft-spoken person, very gentle, very well mannered, and really a pleasure to work with. We spoke, maybe I've already mentioned this, we spoke soon after my arrival about my security file and I asked him if he was aware of all of the complications. He said he was. And I said that I would, of course, report anything untoward if I ever was aware of anything untoward--we were all expected to do that--but that I had not changed my mind since my last interview with the security people--I didn't know if he knew about it, and it turned out he didn't--in which I told them that I would not be looking up my half-sister until toward the end of my tour. He said, "Fine," and I said, "When I think I might want to do that, I'll speak with you first." He said, "Fine," and that's the way we proceeded on that issue. He left, was transferred, replaced by Malcolm Toon [Ed: who presented his credentials on January 18, 1977 and served until October 1979], before that came to pass.

Malcolm Toon, who arrived--bless his heart--on New Year's Eve of 1976, was a very different kind of person. His knowledge of Russian was, if anything, better than Walt Stoessel's. It was really very good. I don't think he read in Master and Margarita, but before he came to the office, he'd look through Pravda and would have Izvestia, which was an afternoon paper, read the evening before. He was well informed. He was a very aggressive person, could be irascible. His relations with the media were very, I shouldn't say "in your face," but were less gentle and genial than Walt Stoessel's. The reason I

mention this is because it was a tradition in Moscow to have a once-weekly press conference for Americans, Americans only, and we had a press corps of some size. So attitudes to the American press were quite visible almost immediately.

Q: When you say that Toon was confrontational, this was dealing with the American press or Soviet press people or both?

BENSON: Well, I was thinking of the American press, but Toon was extraordinarily confrontational in dealing with the Soviets period, not only the press corps.

Q: But wasn't that a period, as I recall, when détente was at its warmest?

BENSON: Détente is a *modus vivendi* which doesn't change its practical pragmatic conclusion on which you base an easing of your policy of confrontation, but it doesn't change the basic nature of the Soviet regime and the fact that they posed great danger to us--I would be quoting him here--there is very much of this that I believe in myself. You have to get along more easily. Détente would have us do that. We would trade more, we would exchange more scholars, we would increase money to exchange of cultural groups and have more exhibits and all of that sort of thing, not to have a congealed relationship.

Q: Let's leave the Front Office and talk about the grunt work of USIS in the Moscow environment.

BENSON: Well, thinking about it now, you know, the way that we've been working, what happens is that I'll go along here and then I'll go home and I'll remember other things and we'll pick it up. It's just the nature of remembrances of things past.

USIS in the Soviet Union at that time was called the Press and Cultural Service, P&C. For some reason or other which escapes me now, USIS was not allowed into the Soviet Union. The Soviets did not want to have the American Information Service propagandizing its people--God forbid--and so we didn't have a USIS in the Soviet Union until many, many years later. We had a Press and Cultural Service. It was divided in the embassy into two parts. One was upstairs, and one was downstairs.

Downstairs was theoretically unclassified, and upstairs was behind the Marine guard in the classified area of the embassy. In the downstairs there was a little library there. Theoretically the Soviet citizens could come in and use the library or come in and talk with USIS officers without--at that time in the history of the American embassy--without being cleared by American officers or Marines. You recall yourself--you were there at your time--you went under the arch. There are two archways which open onto the street you walk through. You walk past the Soviet militiamen, but then if you took the first door to the right, you were in the Press and Cultural Service, P&C down. We had an active program of trying to interest the Soviets, who would not come in, in loan books. We gave books away. We had a film program; we tried to lend them to Soviet institutions. They would be less propagandistic than the films I referred to that were ferried around Yugoslavia after World War II in that film unit. These were didactic, but they weren't

pedantic. They were information on aspects of the United States, its history and so on and so forth. We prepared the wireless file. You may know what that is. It came in by teletype, and it was a series of news items and information on the personnel and management of USIS, which were for us only, and we would produce this in many copies for the embassy--it took quite a while--and for other embassies and for certain Soviet offices as well. We had a very active and very worthwhile program of contacts with cultural and media people. The kind of contact I refer to that we had in Yugoslavia was also the case here.

Q: Where you were able to have personal political discussions with people from the Soviet press and intelligencia?

BENSON: Yes. Well, with the intelligencia, especially on the cultural side, they were less interested in the political discussions. With the media people it would be at lunches, and though they weren't confrontation in the 'up yours, Mac' kind of way, they were not as free flowing, quite obviously, as was the case with the Yugoslavs.

Q: Where did you have these lunches and other meetings?

BENSON: Well, they would be in restaurants or at our embassy quarters occasionally, although that was generally in the evening. The cultural affairs officer lived off campus, if you want to call it that, as did the press attaché. There was a woman on my staff who lived in the embassy, but she lived there because she was married to the chief security officer, and he had to live, had to live, on campus.

Q: When you had Russians for groups like this at lunch, was there anyone who clearly appeared to be a security officer who tried to blend in with the group but didn't quite.

BENSON: No, no. We had a certain number of lunches at the embassy, because we had a staff, cook and so on, to help, so it wasn't a great burden. If you had people from Pravda, Izvestia, or Tass, you were not really worried about somebody else who would be along who would be watching them. These were all people who were perfectly capable of reporting on us and these lunches.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the make-up of Soviet delegations coming to this country for various purposes?

BENSON: Well, let me pause and say parenthetically--we'll come back to that in a minute--one of our main points of contact was the Institute for the Study of USA and Canada, the Arbatov Institute.

Q: Was Arbatov the head of it in your time then?

BENSON: Arbatov was the head of it in my time. His deputy was Radimir Giorgiovich Bogdonov, who became a rather good friend, he with his rich GRU history. GRU is the

intelligence arm of the Russian military [Ed: the Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet Army General Staff of the Soviet Union].

Q: Right. And, of course, the USA Institute, like the other Russian regional institutes, was presumed to be somewhere between an academic enterprise and a research branch of Soviet central intelligence.

BENSON: Well, it was attached, as all institutes were, to the Academy of Sciences. You knew that. The Latin American Institute, the African Institute, and so on and so forth were all separately located and they were institutes administratively within the Academy of Sciences. The institutes had graduate students assigned to them. Graduate students of substantial promise from Moscow State University and a few other academic institutions, who would, as they were preparing their articles after the Candidate degree and were working toward the time when they would publish *the* book and become true Ph.D.s, do work at the USA Institute. Later on, when I worked at Middlebury--which at the very end of this we should talk of very briefly since it's outside of the purview of being in the diplomatic corps--we developed an agreement, I did, with Bogdonov by which young scholars of the USA Institute, i.e., those who were working both substantively there to earn their bread and trying to complete their work for mostly Moscow State University, would come to Middlebury and use the Middlebury library and so on, and Middlebury faculty would go to the Soviet Union on a month-by-month equality basis. These were interesting young people post-1987 when I came here and prior also. There were people in the USA Institute who clearly worked for the factory over there, the KGB [Ed: abbreviation for Committee for State Security, the premier Soviet internal security, intelligence, and secret police organization], and others who were less clearly directly involved with that sort of thing.

But let me return to the Soviet media. Some say that contact with the Soviet media was essentially hopeless because any attempt to be convincing was really quite useless. Therefore the more productive relations with Soviet media would be by political officers, because messages could be passed through some of the media people, when one didn't want to go to the Foreign Office to pass a message. Going to the Foreign office was a much more formal act, to ask for an appointment at the Foreign Office, and to go over, and make a statement, leave a paper and that sort of thing.

Q: So it was assumed these messages transmitted to Russian media people would be passed along through their own channels.

BENSON: Oh, yes. And that was not my function at the embassy, you know, that sort of thing. I had, increasingly in my time in Moscow from 1975 to 1979, a reporting function on cultural matters. But that's different from handling the media quite obviously. Here I was led by Jack Matlock. Matlock lived two floors down from us. He was the Deputy Chief of Mission. You know him well. He is totally bilingual and bi-cultured and loved to have cultural people, especially literary people, coming to his apartment for lunches.

Q: He had in fact taught Russian language and literature at Dartmouth before he went into the Foreign Service.

BENSON: Precisely right. He was, in fact, an editor of the Current Digest of the Soviet Press, and he left off being that--we've talked of that before--he left off being that, I believe, a half year before I joined it. He and my wife, present wife, then still a translator at the Current Digest worked together and were very fond of each other as colleagues. He had an amazing library of materials on Russian culture and Russian literature. His weekends were spent very often going through the old bookshops looking for that book by Turgenev which he didn't yet have, and that sort of thing. He steered me to several stories which were breaking in the paper on cultural events, suggesting that, especially in the theater world, the concert world, where, strange as it seems to the ordinary American, there were political implications, there were great political implications, to what was happening in the new production of Tchaikovsky's Queen of Spades, a most amazing thing. He did read a story about a fracas going on in Pravda, called me in and said, "I want you to follow up and report on this." Without necessarily going it all here because this may be too much detail, it took a lot of terribly interesting work for me to get to the bottom of what was going on, and I did, and reported it. He thought it important for the Department to have this even if ultimate implications were not drawn but just as evidence of how these matters, a new staging of the Queen of Spades, for heaven's sakes, were being handled by the Ministry of Culture.

Q: You saw some signs of a certain thaw in Soviet cultural controls, say allowing more experimentation?

BENSON: Well, you could see things happening, a certain loosening and a certain greater freedom, let us say, in theater life, but it would not be possible to say that this was going on, with the approval of the party, or that there were articles which recommended it. What was happening was that there was a gradual absence of the ultimate sanction, which was to close a play down or to throw somebody out of the party; or to have a critical article which would blast it, which would be a mark against the director, the stage designer, everybody connected with it. So you had more wiggle room, and you know that area well and you know that they, the creative intelligencia, were always on the border pushing and they could sense and feel that more would be possible and more was happening. So there were more theater pieces which were critical of life in the Soviet Union. There were not many critical pieces, except by two people I'll come to, of party *control* of life in the Soviet Union. The two people were (Mikhail) Shatrov and (Alexander) Gelman. Shatrov was an unreconstructed Leninist.

Q: He's the author of that play about the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in the 1980s where Trotsky reappeared in literature for the first time in decades.

BENSON: Yes, precisely that, and he and Lenin were friends, Trotsky and Lenin, which fact had been ignored in history and certain in the theater. The name of the play will come to me.

Q: I think the play is "The Peace of Brest-Litovsk," about the unfavorable treaty that the new Soviet government signed with Germany to extricate itself from World War I, was written in 1962 but not staged until 1987 because its characters included Trotsky and Bukharin.

BENSON: Yes, that could be, but the point is that here was an alternate way of organizing things or thinking about things in the mouth of Trotsky, who was a nonperson, and suddenly there it was. However, it was in the context of describing Lenin as wise, prudent, collegial, a good leader. Later under Stalin, this wisdom and collegiality was done in, so later what we had was a travesty of Leninism that was Shatrov.

(Alexander) Gelman wrote a series of plays which were really very, very good on the relationship between the party and what was going on in real life, for example, putting a factory into production before it was really ready, because the plan had to be fulfilled here, in this place, in this town, because we all need bonuses, don't we; and for reasons we had no control over, the factory can't be put into production; but if we don't put it into production, no one is going to believe us about all these reasons, which are not our fault, so we've got to put it into production. So they put it into production, and catastrophe ensues. It's the fault of the system. No individual fingers are pointed. The Protokol Odnogo Zasedaniya, or the Meeting of the Party Committee, was a beautiful play, again on party life and the difficulty of maintaining sensible, again collegial, productive human relations. Misha Roshin wrote a series of plays on the social effects of life out there. These were milder, but critical. They were terrifically popular, the Russian plays especially. They were played all over the country in various translations.

Q: So as in 19th century Russia, literature became a vehicle for smuggling in a certain degree of political criticism?

BENSON: Well, yes, even more than smuggling. Once you allow the creative intelligencia, especially the literary types, to move five feet ahead, they'll do it, and within limits which they are clever enough to see, they do magnificent things. You had (Yuri) Lyubimov, the director of the Taganka Theater, who adapted many literary works--including Master and Margarita and Crime and Punishment--for the stage, and collections of short stories, which were critical of collectivization, for the stage, in very sharp productions with very modern stage design.

Q: The meetings, lunches and contacts that you and your colleagues had with people in the Russian intelligencia--this is perhaps hard to answer--do you sense that these meetings had some value in giving the Russian participants new perspectives, a sense of assurance in where they were going? What kind of effect did you think you had on them, not necessarily immediate, but were you laying the groundwork for anything?

BENSON: Well, the short answer is yes, there was value. but that's not really quite enough, because the implications of 'yes' to the question as you pose it are rich. A Soviet intellectual had to make the choice to come to the lunch. Having done that, welcoming that, having looked forward to that, and now it is coming, the time is here where I can accept this invitation.

Q: You presume that they were vetted by their respective organizations and given to understand that it was okay to participate?

BENSON: Well, you know how it worked. Some would timorously inquire; others would go without timorously inquiring and wait to see whether there would be any spin-off. Somebody would visit them, somebody from within the theater who was in charge of the party committee of the theater. The theater's political commissar, who could be five layers down from the head of the theater, visits him, closes the door, and says, "Hey, guy, you're being invited to," let's say, the American public affairs officer or the German cultural affairs officer or whatever, and the commissar and theater notable have a discussion, and the fellow, the director of the theater, in the course of two, three, four, five weeks realizes that nothing has happened other than the commissar's visit. And he, being a citizen of the Soviet Union and having been over this before, says to himself, "Ah ha, a tiny little corner I've gone around, and everything's all right." And that's the way it happens. Word gets out. He talks to people. And that was going on. After all, Brezhnev died in 1982, so we're talking about years before he died during the time when no controls were really officially loosened, but it was the time, as they said, of stagnation. Nothing was happening. Of course, some people, who went really too far, would go into the concentration camps and there would be trials, but basically things were imperceptibly loosening up. Again, quantity and quality: they loosened up imperceptibly until it became apparent that, by golly, much has happened in the last year or two that we were not aware of really.

Q: However, this was the time of the rather dramatic efforts to repress dissidents or even expel them from the country. Such as (Aleksandr Isayevich) Solzhenitsyn, or the story of Zhores Medvedev being put in a mental hospital, which he wrote a book about and then lost his citizenship after he had been allowed to visit London. Did you have any contact with dissidents or direct experience in how dissident were being treated?

BENSON: Well, there are dissidents and then there are dissidents. There was a whole artistic community, I mean artists, painters, sculptors, who were suffered. Some were members of the artists union; some were not members of the artists union. Some made their living essentially by selling their works to foreigners. They didn't live well. They may have another job; it could be firing boilers. They didn't challenge the regime the way Solzhenitsyn did writing about the *gulag* or Yuri Smenyenev and others ended up in prison. You see, if you tried to create a movement of any kind, a social grouping, an association, or to develop a program which would threaten in some way the established order, you could be really taken care of and away you would go. Sakharov ended up in Gorky in internal exile. Before they sent him to Gorky Sakharov was holding constant press conferences. Sakharov was visiting the American embassy.

This was at the time I was there, but I never met him. He left various statements and various letters to the American media which ended up in the offices of the American media. Sakharov pulled up in front of the embassy in a car with chauffeur which came from the motor pool of the Academy of Sciences. You knew this? He did. He, as a senior

academician, member of the Academy of Sciences, had the right to call the motor pool and say, "I would like to have a car for two o'clock today," and they would say, "Yes, sir, academic Sakharov." He would get in the car and tell the driver to drive him to the American embassy, and the driver would say, "Yes, sir, academic Sakharov." And there he would be, big, black Volga parked in front of the embassy with Sakharov inside.

Q: In your first tour there were there any dramatic troubles of the American press in Moscow with the police? I'm thinking of, for instance, what happened to Nick Daniloff, I think, later on in the 1980s. He was arrested and accused of espionage.

BENSON: Well, we had several cases that I can remember. I may be confusing first tour and second tour, but it wouldn't matter significantly, and I'll try to straighten it out in the final draft, but one was George Krimsky, George Krimsky in the AP, who--this was first tour definitely--who was accused, as he was packing to leave, by a cleaning lady. You know, all the cleaning ladies, the cooks and bottle washers, what have you were all hired from one office. The businessmen, the journalists, and all diplomats hired all the people whom they wanted to hire, be it a tennis coach or a cook, from the office which was a unit of the Foreign Office and, you might say, intimately connected to the KGB. These people came from that central office. So this cleaning lady reported to her folks, they said, that she was suspicious that Mr. Krimsky was selling things on the black market, and George Krimsky was forbidden to leave the country. George Krimsky came to us and said, "I have this problem."

In cases like this, the media, I would be the action officer representing the embassy if we chose to be helpful. We always chose to be helpful. We had no statutory responsibility for such people. He wasn't a diplomat; he had no diplomatic cover or, should I say, diplomatic rights. So I went to the spokesman. The spokesman of the Foreign Office also was responsible for liaison with foreign press. His office was a big office. At that time his name was Sofinsky. In any case, I went to him and I said, "This is all wrong," and I won't go through all the conversations if I could remember them literally, but finally George was allowed to go. They made him absolutely miserable. I think he went off to Cyprus and we ended up sending him some of his personal books and things like that. These things take an awful lot of time. Craig Whitney of the New York Times and Hap Piper from the Baltimore Sun were accused of writing articles which were slanderous to the Soviet state because they reported that as they were viewing and taping a TV program--do you remember the name (Zviad) Gamsakhurdia?

Q: Oh, yes, a noted Georgian dissident who became its first elected president.

BENSON: Replaced by Shevardnadze, in opposition to Shevardnadze, led a revolt against Shevardnadze, and he is now buried in Georgia. But at that time he was a dissident, and at the end of June 1979, Gamsakhurdia was released from jail and pardoned in controversial circumstances after serving only two years of his sentence. The authorities claimed that he had confessed to the charges and recanted his beliefs; a film clip was shown on Soviet television to substantiate their claim.

Craig Whitney and Hal Piper made a tape of this interview in their news offices, and they played it back and they played it back, and they became convinced that it had been cut and spliced--and they reported that it had been cut and spliced and, therefore, from the Soviet point of view there was a sequential story but something was missing and there was something rotten in the state of the Soviet Union, and the American reporters were visited with a suit, but criminal suit for slandering the Soviet state.

Goodness gracious, this was a substantial offense. There were hearings. There were depositions taken. You just can't believe what a back and forth there was about this. The New York Times and the Baltimore Sun supported their man obviously to the hilt. They wrote editorials about it and so on.

Again, I was the action officer and hung in there with them is really what I did, you know. I visited with them, they would visit with me, they would tell me what was happening, reports would be written by me, and the State Department was terribly concerned about this. They were not ultimately expelled. Their wrists were slapped, and that was that. Now, one of the reasons is that we handled such affairs very properly. There was a *quid pro quo*. Had they expelled Whitney and Piper, we would have kicked out two Soviet journalists. There's simply no question. It would have happened fast. Their journalists were, to a man, employed by the KGB. Ours, to a man, were not employed by the CIA. So there's something very unequal about their loss, and they chose not to take it.

Q: Did your relations with the Soviets, in terms of contacts with the press and intelligencia or pressure on our press people, get noticeably worse after the Carter Administration took office in 1977 with the conflicts that were developing over the Portuguese colonies in Africa or the Horn of Africa?

BENSON: No. I suppose the Portuguese embassy had two extra guards in front of it to keep out the unruly mobs if they would ever appear chanting "Down with Portugal," but no.

Q: I wonder what impressions may have filtered down to you about working with the Kissinger State Department up through 1976 and then Cyrus Vance and Zbigniew Brzezinski under Carter.

BENSON: Well, it really didn't affect our work at all, USIS's work or the Press and Cultural Service's work. Cyrus Vance came in, and he visited several times with his inevitable press corps and his new press secretary, who was Hodding Carter. I obviously had, and my press people, information people, had an awful lot to do at a time like that just on the level of care and feeding of troops. But the effect on our work on the exhibits which were traveling the country and the cultural groups which were exchanged according to the cultural agreement, no, it wasn't that major.

Q: I've forgotten the dates as to when these cultural agreements were concluded that allowed for the exchange of the performers and the exchange of academics.

BENSON: Well, January 1958 was the first one. It was the so-called Lacy-Zarubin Agreement. [Ed: the Agreement was named after its two chief negotiators, William S. B. Lacy, President Eisenhower's Special Assistant on East-West Exchanges, and Georgi Z. Zarubin, Soviet Ambassador to the United States, September 1952-January 1958.] Zarubin, by the way, died within the year the Agreement was signed. After Washington he became a deputy foreign minister. He was along in years then, so he lived to be a ripe old man. These cultural exchanges were renewed regularly and changed, expanded, expanded as a totality and yet the interior texts in some cases became more general. See, the old agreements would be contracts for the exchange in part, contracts for the exchange of specific cultural events.

Q: Such as the contracts with IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) that allowed for the exchange of a specified number of scholars each way each year?

BENSON: That may have been in the early days in the agreement. I think it was actually; later it was a matter of outside parameters and negotiated by us with the help of Allen Kassoff and Dan Matuszewski of IREX. But back to the first contracts or agreements, that's when Sol Hurok was beginning to bring to the United States these big things, the Bolshoi Ballet.

Q: He did some of that entirely apart from these agreements, didn't he?

BENSON: Yes, he did, sure he did, but he had to have the help of the United States government to facilitate it, and the United States government felt that, if we were going to have in the United States all these high profile, famous cultural groups with such wow, we would like to have ours over there. The Soviets were not about to pay--they perhaps couldn't really pay--to bring over the huge American troupes with American wages and all of the travel costs, and so on and so forth, so the American government had to pony up a subsidy to get this reciprocity, and it did. Later as the agreements matured over the years, it would be specified as reciprocal subject to the financial and scheduling capabilities, etcetera and so forth, much more general, allowing, I can tell you, for an awful lot of negotiation. On my staff, on the staff of P & C down, was a staff member whose sole reason for being was to negotiate with Gosconcert, the state concert agency of the Soviet Union.

Q: That job had to with negotiating the terms both of sending the Soviets out and bringing Americans in?

BENSON: Yes, exactly, and if you wanted to have the St. Paul Philharmonic or whatever it was called, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, visiting and you thought it might be a good thing, we would, that they visit the Baltic States and the Soviets would think, as they would, that it would not be a good idea for them to go to the Baltic States, you have a negotiation which has politics at the basis, never mind the costs, which is also going to be there.

These cultural agreements were both fun, took up a lot of our time, brought us into close contact with various ministries, the Ministry of Culture--interesting people there--cultural groups who were going to go, organizations and places which were going to host our groups coming over, and maximized the contact possibilities, the talking, the lunching, back and forth immeasurably. The agreement--and this comes to my second tour, and we should proceed, I suppose, *seriatim*, but I should say that the umbrella agreement lapsed in 1979. By then it was three documents, the overall principles, the program, and then so-called implementing principles. It lapsed in 1979 because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. I was out of the country already, having been transferred.

Q: When did the Fulbright program extend to the Soviet Union? Was it in place during your first tour in the 1970s?

BENSON: Yes. When I got to Moscow in the 1970s, in 1975, the--I should be precise here, but it's not a question of drenching things up from memory, because I just don't know--the agreement was reached in a very different way from Fulbright agreements with other countries, because this was the Soviet Union and the thought of having a bi-national commission, a selection commission, was preposterous. But some sort of agreement had been reached, and we provided opportunities for a certain number of Soviets to go to the United States, as faculty people. The program was at the university level at that point. The other many possibilities inherent in the Fulbright agreement were never thought of as far as the Soviet Union was concerned. It was just faculty, never mind students or lawyers, or what have you. Some few Soviet faculty could go and do research, and we provided to Moscow State University every year a historian.

Well, it worked very simply. They came and they taught in English. They were housed well on campus in Moscow State University and tried to behave as if they were teaching in Frankfurt, in Germany. In a certain sense it worked just that way. The students were overwhelmed, favorably, at having an American instructor. (E. David) Cronon of (the University of) Wisconsin, I think, was the first. Cooper of Wisconsin came later. There were others.

Q: I met a historian from Missouri. It was in 1984 when I was on the Fulbright Committee, and he was having a great time because all these children of the higher-ups who were taking his course. They could get him tickets to things that he couldn't get into any other way. When did study-abroad programs for undergraduates begin? Or, should I say, did you have any experience with programs for undergraduates during your first tour in the 1970s, like the Middlebury program?

BENSON: There was that program. There was the ACTR program, American Council of Teachers of Russian, which had somewhere around 10 people. Had the Pushkin and Student Moscow. There was a CIEE program, the Council for the International Educational Exchanges. They were in Leningrad. There was a SUNY (State University of New York) Albany program, which was reciprocal.

Q: And these exchanges were operating by your first tour in the 1970s?

BENSON: Yes, the SUNY Albany program was signed into being by the chancellor of the SUNY system, Ernest Boyer, in 1975 just as I arrived. There was a program which was run by Leon Twarog--you may have known him--from Ohio State/Purdue Consortium. Those were not reciprocal. The SUNY program was reciprocal, the only one. All of them had a resident American in Moscow to look after their students. They were always getting into some kind of trouble.

Q: That's my next question. What did your office have to do to help them with their problems?

BENSON: Our office was again the action office, where anything could happen between these groups and Soviet institutions, as we were for the press insofar as these exchange programs wished to call something to our attention. The same as with the media; the media has no obligation at all to tell us of any of their problems. We ourselves would have been very irritated with them if they had not, because we would like to be able to extract some kind of reciprocity.

Q: Continuing the afternoon of Monday, May 8th, 2000. We are finishing up the discussion of Ray Benson's tour in Moscow between 1975 and 1979. We were talking, about American student groups in the Soviet Union and what you had to do to help them get out of trouble.

BENSON: Well, there were all kinds of incidents, which were inconsequential in any other country except the Soviet Union. I'll list a few little things, lest we go on forever. My contact point was the Ministry of Education, and one would go there to complain or ask for an explanation. The students did various things they shouldn't have done, such as urinating on Soviet money with the likeness of some of the Soviet leaders of the past. This is literally what happened at the end of a party. They were found, and this was *lese majeste*. A young woman in St. Petersburg--and was in Leningrad--was discovered to have on her bookshelf many books which were not considered proper in the Soviet Union, literature, you know, printed by Ardis, printed by the YMCA Press in Paris.

Q: Were these translations of America literature?

BENSON: No, no, I'm talking about (Andrei) Platonov, I'm talking Solzhenitsyn.

Q: Oh, these are émigré editions of Russian work that they didn't like...

BENSON: Yes, all published in the meantime but not then. Ardis did a lot, Ann Arbor. I could go on and give a rather anecdotal scope, but the point is that the students would get into trouble, and there would be great criticism. Either the student, in this case, herself, in Leningrad was about to be thrown out of the country, it was thought. We would go over and say, "What is going on?" Of course, she wasn't thrown out of the country. There were other incidents when students would get in trouble because they would be accosted by Soviet men. This was not purposeful, this was not a provocation, this was bad stuff.

One near rape was interrupted simply by happenstance. We would ask for an investigation. They would say they will do what they could. We would revisit, and they would say, "We don't have any more data," and on and on and on.

Q: But did you find sometimes that you would get American students or other exchangees out of trouble simply by showing that you were watching the situation and were interested?

BENSON: Well, there was this woman in Leningrad who I think was going to get into real trouble, certainly her program might have. You see, there is concern about what books they have. There is surveillance of the books. There is a complaint. All of this is being done at the level of the people who were watching this exchange program.

Q: Like Vladimir Kutin in Leningrad.

BENSON: Much lower. He was in charge of foreign relations at St. Petersburg state.

Q: But before that, before he went to Germany, he was doing something like this in Leningrad, surveillance over foreign students.

BENSON: Could very well have been then, you know. Brought to him, let's say, by somebody even lower than he. He says, "Ah ha, we cannot put up with this," and the thing begins to stew and begins to be a problem. Everybody begins playing a role, and no one is willing to say at that level that this is really not useful for us, comrades, because it doesn't get us anywhere. And they don't know what to do about excessive low-level vigilance, and the issue is defined, the lines are drawn, and it becomes very, very difficult for anybody one or two steps outside this little circle to change the direction of this, let's say, process. At this point in the process in the 1970s I go to the Ministry, and there somebody could say, "Oh, for heaven's sakes, what have they done?" The ministry has the authority and the power, because they're that many steps higher, to call Leningrad and say, "For goodness sakes, stop it, leave her alone, put her books back on her shelf"--literally what happened, by the way. She had books on her shelf. Yes, we did useful work.

Q: What about your relations with Voice of America in that period?

BENSON: Well, the Voice of America both was and wasn't jammed, you know, depending on the period. We listened to it. I didn't listen to the Russian much. I listened to the English, because you listen to it for the news, and everybody at the embassy really did listen to it. Some people at the embassy listened to the Russian and critiqued it for substance to make sure that they didn't get too carried away with the message, which was that the Soviet system was terrible. But the true listenership, I believe, at that time that was important for us--this is sort of betraying my organization, the USIA--was Radio Liberty. Radio Liberty broadcast out of Munich.

Q: That was my next question.

BENSON: Well, they go together. I knew it would be, but they do go together. Radio Liberty was jammed all the way through. In fact, most of the time we were in the Soviet Union, the Voice of America was also jammed. You know, this cost extraordinary amounts of money and power, huge towers to jam, but in the suburbs of Moscow you could listen to Radio Liberty freely. There are some people, for example, in Piti Yeltin, the artists' colony, which is a suburb not far out of Moscow, came in clear as a bell. They didn't have a jamming tower there. There were some people who spent hours on the weekends listening out there to VOA, to Radio Liberty, and both VOA and Radio Liberty knew that. Weekend programs were very rich. Next time we'll talk about the Metropol Almanac. You know what that was? The literary almanac published by Vasily Aksyonov and other writers who got together. We're talking about something that was in 1978/1979. It became quite clear once. I was having lunch with them, with the editorial board, in Aksyonov's apartment. I'll talk about this more when I'm with you next time. This came into the New Yorker recently. Anyway, I'll put it together coherently then. And somebody knocks on the door and came in. It was one of their friends, and he had just driven in from Piti Yeltin--this was during the week--and said, "Do you know what has happened? Yuri Shanokovski"--I think he's teaching at Wesley now—"is in Munich, and he gave an interview, and he said the following." It had to do with the Metropol Almanac.

Q: So that's the way the word would come in and get around.

BENSON: The word really did get around, and they decided, I should say, at that time that they thought he ought to shut the hell up. He was leaving the country, it was clear, and he didn't sort of appear in Munich, to their surprise. I didn't realize that he had gotten exit permission and he was going away. But they did not want him at that time to sit there and blab away, so we wrote a telegram to Munich, and they stowed his interviews for later use. But that's the way word would get around.

Q: Did VOA have a correspondent in Moscow at that time?

BENSON: No, VOA had correspondents who lived in Munich, who would apply for short term visas. Mark Hopkins was one who came in for years. He did all sorts of other things in Munich. But he knew some Russian, more than casually. VOA correspondents were not allowed to be permanent correspondents. That came later, after my day.

Q: What do you think of the general impact of VOA and RL on the opinion of the Russian intelligencia whom you knew at the time?

BENSON: Well, it was, from one point of view, profound; from another point of view, unnecessary, because the point of view of the intelligencia whom I knew was not in the making. That is to say, it was established. They were Westernizers. Of the intelligencia whom I knew, only (Vladimir) Soloukhin among the writers and a few more who didn't declare themselves would be considered Slavophiles and not friendly to the West. So

these people didn't need, as far as forming their opinions, the VOA or the RL, but for information on political events and social events there was nothing else.

Q: This is Robert Daniels interviewing Ray Benson on June 8th, 2000 on his USIA career, and we are adding some additional points about his experience in Moscow from 1975 to 1979. We have begun to touch on some questions about the cultural life and various incidents that you were involved in or knew directly about, starting with the so-called Metropol incident.

BENSON: The Metropol Group, gathered around Vasily Aksyonov, who began putting together what became an almanac, a compendium of works by the Metropol group in 1978. It was their idea that they should be able to produce a work, this compendium, of literary pieces which would be in a sense nonpolitical. They would not be critiques of the sociology of the Soviet Union or of its society except in the sense that they would be informed. They would take literature beyond that which had been approved or had previously been published. There would be more explicit sexual references. The style would be modern or post-modern. This was not socialist realism. There were no articles which were specifically critical of socialist realism. It was as modern in form as was being produced at that time in the Soviet Union. Some of the works were produced by writers who were not members of the writers' union. Some were produced by writers who were very well established in the writers' union, like Aksyonov or Vaznisenski Achmedulina. Their idea was to produce the work in a certain number of copies below the number above which you had to get official permission to produce them. I think it was 12; it may have been 13. If you produced above that number of copies and gave them out, you were violating Soviet law about having published a work without official permission. Below that level, 12 or 13, you could do it without violating the law against publishing a work without permission. But you're then subject to prosecution for producing works which were pornographic, or were inciting racial or ethnic or religious antagonisms, or espousing war. There were a whole host of other criteria by which this would be evaluated within Soviet law. They thought they were beyond criticism for those purposes or those accusations. They tried to avoid them, not that they self-centered, and off they went to produce this group work. It took them months to put it together, and they did it in a most interesting way. We had no computers in those days, and so everything had to be done by typists. It was "secret" as they didn't publicize it. It was quite clear, as matters went along, that the writers' union knew all about it and that certain people, who were friendly to the writers' union and not to this group which had gathered, knew all about it. And there were some people in foreign embassies who were told what was going on.

Q: This was essentially a Samizdat publication?

BENSON: Yes, it was Samizdat, but it was to be up to that level. See, Samizdat earlier would have one or two copies, three.

Q: Oh, I thought as many carbons as you could get in the typewriter.

BENSON: Well, six or seven, but not 12 or 13, which required two or three typists.

Q: They did it with carbon copies or mimeograph?

BENSON: Carbons. They did it with carbons and they had several typists. What they did was take a--I have a funny feeling that some of this we have already gone through--they took a sheet of paper rather thick and large, large enough to have pasted on it four typed sheets, and they would paste onto this sheet of paper or cardboard or whatever you call it four typewritten sheets, turn it over, they would paste another four. So this large, I'm searching for the word, it's not cardboard, but anyway it looked like thick blotting paper, the kind of paper you have in a photo album. If you held one up, you had eight pages on it, four on one side and four on the other. They involved in their work certain graphics artists: (Anatoly) Brusilovsky was rather a pornographic; Barice Maserer, who was Achmedulina's husband, was a very famous set designer and graphics artist; and other people who chipped in who were never given credit because of putting all this together it took an awful lot of people. Barovsky, who was Lubimov's stage designer, set designer, and now lives, I believe, in Boston, also contributed some of the graphics. In early 1979, having produced this enormous volume--you can imagine something--it's now between boards. It's between, as I recall it, plywood covers, each the size of four sheets of paper front and back. Inside are innumerable sheets, each with eight pages pasted on them, four front and four back. They have 12 or 13 of these monster volumes. This is Metropol. And they had a credo, which I won't attempt to paraphrase now. I have it at home, and it may not be relevant here. But the point is that they very specifically said that they had no intention of violating the law.

What they were trying to do was live free and produce freely as creative artists and writers. The representatives of the group went to the writers' union and presented them with at least one copy of this now finished volume. At the same time they tried to hold a sort of press conference which announced that they had finished their work and had done this. They hired a Moscow restaurant in which to do this, and they sent out invitations to an awful lot of people in the cultural world of Moscow. Of course, this became known, obviously. It was a very public act. Preparing for it was a public act, and they were preparing to mount a public act. People who received the invitations were very important, for example, Oleg Yefremov, who died two weeks ago. They sent them to the Moscow art theaters. Lubimov, the head of the Taganka Theater, and others were called by various official bodies and told they best not appear at this event. And, in fact, the event never took place, because other officials thought it would be too risky to let it happen, even if some of the people invited would not appear, and so the authorities went to the manager of this restaurant and said, "On this day you will close and we will have a sanitary inspection of your kitchen facilities, count the cockroaches, what have you." When invitees appeared at the restaurant in the afternoon, they found a notice on the door saying that the restaurant was closed. It was what they call in Russian *sanitarnyy den'*, the sanitary day, day of examination of their *bona fide* cleanliness of the facility. The event never took place.

Many correspondents were invited and went there and found it closed. In the article in The New Yorker that you and I have discussed by Victor Erofeyev, he paints the picture of practically a cordon of officers and other clearly visible persons from various control organs. I don't know if they were there or not, or whether this was off-putting or not. I myself did not go down to that event. I was the person at the United States Embassy which was following all of the trouble, run up the months and months of their meetings and so on, and reporting on them. Jack Matlock, who was then the Deputy Chief of Mission, was keenly interested in having as much as possible on the record of the State Department's, the Soviet office (Eur/Sov), on this effort. He knew all of the participants as well as I, some better, some not as well, but he was the other person at the embassy who was really forceful in getting me to report on this. What happened at the writers' union is indicative of just how these things were done in the Soviet Union at that time. What I mean, Bill, is that, at that time, one was beyond the period when five or six or eight of these persons would have been...

Q: This is June 8th, 2000 and we are continuing our conversation with Ray Benson's Moscow assignment, 1975 to 1979, focusing on cultural matters. We were still discussing the Metropol group and then DCM Jack Matlock's interests in the cultural sector.

BENSON: I think we got to this point. The Writers Union--you have to imagine such a thing--took this volume, which I described as being as large as it was, you know, and pretty darn heavy. They put it on a table in a small room in the Writers Union Building, which was very large indeed, and they locked it up. And they then invited a series of members of the Writers Union to enter the room and to read in Metropol in this volume, perhaps not all of it but to read some of it anyway, and to offer their judgment of the suitability of this material for publication. This was not censorship. This was judgment by one's peers. And these verdicts or judgments were then published in the internal newspaper of the Writers Union, which all members of the Writers Union got. It was a weekly publication, Literaturnaya Gazeta.

In this house organ, which obviously was given to all members of the union including 90 percent of the members of Metropol--and therefore we got a copy, and therefore I read every issue at that time--there were judgments. Perhaps not every judgment was printed, but many were considered worthy, and of course they were all very, very negative. It was then announced that, according to the judgment of this peer group, this *Almanac*, this compendium was not worthy of publication and the Writers Union would, therefore, not support its publication and, therefore, it would not be published, and it wasn't in the Soviet Union at least.

At the same time a copy was given to a gentleman who worked at the French embassy and a copy was given to me one Sunday at Vasily Aksyonov's girlfriend's *dacha*. I won't pause to go into who she was or what kind of *dacha* this was and all of that. As I had said that I would be willing to take it--please let me have it--and we would see what we could do about having it appear in the United States. I did not say it would go out by pouch. One didn't say certain things. So I put this great big thing in the trunk of my personal car and drove home. My car was parked inside the embassy, and I took it upstairs and put it

in my office, which was behind the Marine guard, meaning in the classified section of the embassy, and on the next day I called Ambassador Toon and said, "I have something to show you." He said, "Come on up," so I dragged this thing up to him and I told him what this thing was. Now, he had, of course, been reading the cable traffic and he knew there was such a thing as Metropol. I said, "Can we move this on?" and he summoned into the office the head of security of the embassy, and he said, "Have the CBs (Navy unit-Construction Battalion) build a box to fit this into so that it isn't damaged." A box was built--I didn't see it--and Metropol was fit within the box, sent off to EUR/SOV, the Soviet office, from which it made its way to Ardis Press. [Ed: Ardis Publishing (the name of the original company is Ardis Publishers) began in 1971, as the only publishing house outside of Russia dedicated to Russian literature in both English and Russia.]

Ardis Press was located in Ann Arbor, Carl and Ellendea Proffer ran it. Carl now deceased, soon thereafter actually--marvelous man. It was published in the United States, it was published in France. It was published in Russian first and then in translation and later in the United States was given over, some arrangement whereby I think Norton & Company published it as a hardback book. It was published finally in Russia, most recently, or recently after--I don't know the dates--but after all that nonsense was over with.

Q: Under Gorbachev or under Yeltsin?

BENSON: I don't really know. But by then the Metropol gang had scattered. Aksyonov was living in the States. (Yuz) Aleshkovsky was living in the States. Some were in Germany. They were gone. There was no need any longer for such an elaborate effort. You could have published whatever you wished, whether it was post-modern in style or very explicit sexually, and one could say a great deal more of the individual fate of the individuals involved.

The New Yorker article that you and I have discussed separately outside of the context of this interview project refers to the effect on Victor Erofeyev [Ed: Metropol editor] himself and on his father, who was a senior and most respected member of the Soviet foreign service of ambassadorial rank, the effect on him of the fact that his son was involved in this project. When we review the text later, if you feel it would be useful to put some of that in here as an aside, we could do it, but let me proceed, as you wish, to other aspects of the situation.

I think it worth mentioning, though, and there is a place here--I've said it a few minutes ago--a place to single out and praise the understanding of the Soviet situation, not quite in quotes, by Jack Matlock and Malcolm Toon, both true Soviet hands. Where the political and social effects of what was going on in the cultural world were fully understood, and to the extent possible, they tried to get embassy reporting to cover this aspect of life in the Soviet Union so that the interested people in the Soviet Bureau and other readers in Washington. You understand that the CIA analysts would also be reading this, as far as the evaluation of trends within the Soviet Union is concerned, since there was a broad range of analysis going on in town. These were data which were interesting, and they

made sure that, insofar as possible, the embassy acquired the data and reported with that encomium to my colleagues of the past. I think it should be, here anyway, a matter of record.

Q: Would you want to add anything more about your work with Matlock in 1975 to 1979 when he was DCM? Was he there the whole time with you under both Stoessel and Toon?

BENSON: Yes, he was there. He was a tough task master, very pedantic and very didactic and very appreciative and very learned and extremely knowledgeable--I've said this--and it never seemed to me that this toughness and didacticism and pedanticism was personally directed, though there were many people who felt that it was. I never did. He guided me and directed me and encouraged me to follow certain events, one of them being the Metropol case, if you will, that we've referred to.

There was another occasion that was very close to him intellectually and to me, when one day Pravda had an article by a man named Juritis, who was a conductor at the Bolshoi Theater, which was very critical of Yuri Lyubimov and Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Alfred Schnittke, who were preparing a new version of the Queen of Spades for the Paris Opera. They were going to change a bit the original score by Tchaikovsky, and they were going to produce, I think Barovsky--I've mentioned him--who was David Davidovich, who was Lubimov's chief set designer, was also producing the sets, and they were going to lay heavy hands on Tchaikovsky on this great work in the canon of Russian musical history and presently on the stage in Moscow. They were out of the country going to violate all of the traditions, the norms, etc., etc., etc. So Jack asked me if I had read it, and in fact we were reading it practically at the same time that morning, and he said, "Well, you know Lubimov." In fact, I did. "Why don't you go over to him and ask him what in heaven's name is going on, and see what you can find out, and we'll see if this is of any interest." So I did. I visited Lubimov then, I don't know 15 or 20 times as this episode played out. In addition, there were newspaper reverberations, that is to say certain aspects became public and I included that in my reporting on what I could find out from Yuri Lubimov. At the same time the American press, especially Craig Whitney, bless him--he's now one of the managing editors of the (New York) Times--he followed the story, and we would run into each other there. Others did too. It was very interesting to see that newspapers could afford coverage of such an event. For the embassy, the interesting aspect of it was the degree to which the Ministry of Culture, the Central Committee's Committee on Culture, on Music, the Composers Union, you know, which was then under the control of Tikhon Khrennikov. You may remember that Tikhon Khrennikov was appointed by Stalin in 1948.

Q: He even hung on under Gorbachev.

BENSON: He left practically in his senility, you know. He ran a very conservative with strange bursts of freedom allowed in certain contexts, which I won't go into here. In any case, in this matter one was trying at the embassy to find out whether it was freelancing by Khrennikov, whether it was the Ministry of Culture, in which case it would have been Lemechev, who incidentally changed the ending of Swan Lake. He ordered the Bolshoi

Theater to change the ending of Swan Lake because he did not think that the Soviet people wanted this great piece of music, this great ballet, to end tragically. So the ending, it was ordered, would be happy. He and his committees of review absolute tortured poor Lubimov every time before a Taganka production would be released for the public. A committee would come to Taganka, the most advanced Soviet theater of the day, view the work practically in-camera, and suggest revisions. There would be a violent scene. Sometimes Lubimov would win; usually he wouldn't. And he was watched like a hawk, so was Schnittke, by the Composers Union. He's recently deceased. Lubimov is still alive. Rozhdestvensky lives mostly outside of Russia. He's a conductor. And we sort of figured out who was calling the shots in the Queen of Spades dispute. It was Lemechev and the Ministry of Cultural and the cultural committee, I suppose it was, of the Central Committee. Beyond that Jack and I had fun finding out what was going on, and we hope other people are interested in it. In any event, the Paris Opera did not put on the production.

Q: Due to Soviet pressure on the French?

BENSON: There was Soviet pressure on the French, by the way. I'm glad you bring that up. Thank you for flagging my memory. The Paris Opera was told by the Ministry of Culture, i.e., Lemechev's bailiwick, that they could forget about any cooperation with the Bolshoi Theater or any musician, singer, dancer, or troupe from the Soviet Union coming there, or any one of theirs, coming into the Soviet Union--not going to happen. Gosconcert, the official booking agency impresario of the Soviet government, sent a parallel message which said exactly the same thing. So there were pressures put on. Now, I don't know if this is the place to speak about various productions of the Queen of Spades, which had become controversial within the Soviet Union at that time, but if you think we should later, I can do so. But the Queen of Spades strangely became the focus of attention in Moscow, and now, for heaven's sakes, look what's going on in Paris.

I spoke later to a person at the Ministry of Culture and I said, "What in heaven's name is going on?" and she said, "Well, we didn't know what in heaven's name was going on, but the way these people were handling a new staging of the Queen of Spades, we didn't know whether the countess after all was going to kill Gherman in the second act." This is what she said and, of course, it's absurd. It's just another example--and we'll touch it up a little in the final draft--of the degree to which Jack Matlock felt that a manifestation of central control over all aspects of Soviet life could be made literal by focusing on a cultural event. For me it was sheer joy and a pleasure to be asked to follow up, and increased and enhanced measurably my credibility and the embassy's credibility--and Jack knew that--among these people who were in the advance guard of the cultural elites.

Q: There were a couple of other episodes in the cultural area during that tour. You spoke about the bulldozer incident.

BENSON: Well, the bulldozer incident occurred just before I came or before I came. It's the incident in which a group of Soviet artist, most of them not members of the Artists Union, tried to erect an outdoor exhibit--I think it was in the Smilevski Park--and they

found a clearing there and they brought pallets on which they put various of their works and very quickly erected their exhibit. I don't know how many works were on display, I repeat I was not there. Now the event had been generally advertised, certainly by word of mouth and maybe 200 people, including newspaper correspondents and representatives of embassies were there. And then, around the corner came a couple of bulldozers, and they leveled the playing field. It might very well have been a playing field. That was the bulldozer incident, and it was widely reported. Let's say there were newspaper reporters there besides Moscow, and they reported on it. It was terribly embarrassing. By the time I came to the Soviet Union in June of 1975, they had decided, the authorities, that they had to handle this a little differently. There was an outpouring at that time of creative energy among the plastic artists, the graphists, sculptors. Moscow was alive with creative energy. What they did--and they couldn't continue having bulldozer incidents; it was just not useful--so what they did was give--you're not going to believe this--the beekeepers pavilion of the Vedanha [Ed: Pchelovodstvo pavilion of the VDNH (Beekeeping Pavilion of the Exhibition of Economic Achievement).] It's an ongoing permanent exhibit in the grounds given over to it. It's located a little bit out of town, but there's a big subway stop right there. Beekeeping is a big deal in the Soviet Union, and they had a beekeepers pavilion, which they emptied out. It's permanent exhibit, you see, which they emptied out, and they allowed a group of artists and individual artists. I'm not certain the administrative niceties of this, but the Artists Union was officially empowered to be helpful, and they did, so that a variety--it was a huge exhibit--could be shown. Press and TV came from Scandinavia, from France, from Germany, Austria, to cover the opening and to cover the crowds which lined up. There were police officers, KGB out there. You couldn't get in for the crowds. People would wait. We're talking about an art exhibit. Bill, both of us are smiling. We know what this is political art.

Now, as opposed to Metropol, which we've already talked about, which occurred several years later, the images in the art which was depicted in the beekeepers pavilion, many of them anyway, had certain political implications. Some were not approved. Others were narrowly approved. And they bore the same relationship to the control apparatus that Yuri Lubimov's Taganka Theater productions did. They pressed against the line of what would be allowed in substance, which the Metropol Almanac, which have already discussed did not really do. In the Metropol there was form; content, yes, but it was mostly sexual, which was troubling to the authorities.

But the beekeepers pavilion's exhibit did have images which were not very explicitly but certainly implicitly very, very critical on one's solitude or aloneness, or the use of colors to emphasize certain gestures. Works of art, as you very well know, thinking back to early Christian art, offer powerful messages and images. It was fascinating. There were, I think, two of these. There might have been three, one here after the other. By the time they had had the second, I guess, the authorities had decided that there had to be another way of handling this phenomenon, which was the creative energies of the Moscow artists, the interests of the public, foreign publicity, a stir within the Artists Union, and so the graphics section, it was called, of the Moscow Union of Artists spun off an unofficial, I guess you'd call it, a unit.

A man, whose name I now forget, became the manager of what became known as the Malaya Gruzinskaya Gallery. Malaya Gruzinskaya is a street not far from the American embassy. There several rooms on two, or where there three, floors in a building, which was owned by Moscow City. There rooms were made into exhibit halls, and a group of artists, some of whom were members of the Artists Union and some of whom were not, were allowed to exhibit. These were phenomenally successful--you know, lines around the block, police, order was being maintained in the line. Obviously we could go in because we had diplomatic identity cards, became very friendly with the artists, very friendly with this guy who ran the outfit. He had an office in the back. It was always suspected that he told the artists that he would encourage them to sell but he thought that a gallery director usually got about 30 percent and that he would not mind being treated as a gallery director. Once again, Matlock thought this was terribly interesting, and once again we reported on it. I was helped in this case by Jack Harrod, who was on my staff. He knew some of the artists, and Ray Smith, who was a State Department officer, also became interested in this phenomenon; remember it was not too far from the embassy. He became very friendly with some of the artists, he and his wife. It was, of course, a fascinating aspect of our years in the Soviet Union. The exhibits here were endless. There was one after the other, one opening after the other, good stuff. You see here in this, of course, an outlet for energies that the Soviet authorities were now more intelligently trying to release slowly and in a controlled way as opposed to putting a total damper on it.

Q: So in a way this is a foretaste of Gorbachev's perestroika, culturally speaking?

BENSON: I think very definitely, very, very definitely. But, you know, as the phrase goes, the appetite grows with the feeding on it, if you know the reference, which we won't go into, but it percolated about and around. It was a time of stirring. It was a time of movement from below and accepting of it from the middle and above.

Q: Did this movement get any protection from some of the younger and more intelligent elements of the party hierarchy?

BENSON: Well, obviously or it wouldn't have happened, but I cannot tell you who would be distinguished in this matter. I do know that--you will find this cute--before the exhibits, pre-*vernisage*, people from the various organs would come down and look at the works, and even suggest that they might like to buy. *'Vernisage'* is the French word for 'opening'. As it was being hung, there would be representatives of the cultural organs, just as they would visit Yuri Lubimov's theater in the pre-dress rehearsal to see whether this would pass, so too would these exhibits be visited. And many people were, we heard, collecting these works on their artistic merit. Yes, it was a period that prefaced or presaged Gorbachev's *glasnost* very definitely, and followed Khrushchev's thaw.

Q: Right, with the support of the so-called 'men of the '60s'. Anything else in general about the experience in Moscow 1975-1979 or the circumstances of your moving on in 1979? What about the USIS exhibits that were touring the Soviet Union in the late 1970s?

BENSON: Bill, I'll have to look at my records, my little pocket calendars, to see what were the names of the exhibits and give them credit in the form of this interview, and I will do that in that in a post-scriptum. They visited six Soviet cities, each of them for a month, each with a month between cities, so it took a year for them to play their way through the Soviet Union. Then there would be a bit of down time, and then would come the next one. During the life of the first one mentioned, there would be advance work on where one would place, and how one would place, the next exhibit. It was a permanently ongoing effort. It cost millions of dollars of USG money. It was an extraordinary effort, and we should speculate a bit later on the effect. But it came to be a traveling USIS program effort which was very broad in its approach. We would have an exhibit on a given subject. There would be people who would be visiting the exhibit and they would see the exponents on the wall. They would get an enormously attractive, really beautifully done, brochure, which was really a magazine, on the exhibit, four color printed, so on. There would be certain handouts that commercial exhibitors would have given to USIA, and some of their machinery or some of their tools or whatever would have been part of the exhibit. There was a library in the core of the exhibit which had books and materials on the theme of the exhibit, to which the general public had no access, but important people and institutions, other libraries in the city in which the exhibit took place would be invited. We had experts on the subject of the exhibit who would be sitting within this library and who were hosts to the people who would come.

Q: Would you make copies of this material available to the libraries, assuming that they could accept them?

BENSON: Sometimes we did and could. The USIA had a budget, separate from the exhibit budget, for the presentation of printed materials, and we could "take orders" or offer a list to USIA and procure materials and, yes, we could do that. Further, as the use of the exhibit as a venue for programming developed, we would use this library as a conference room. The library would be configured so that it had conference tables. Again, the USIA would recruit and bring in people who were expert on the theme of the exhibit, and we would have a person from my staff who traveled with the exhibit. There was always a person from the P&C staff in Moscow, the USIS staff in Moscow, Press and Cultural Service, who traveled with the exhibit. It was a Foreign Service Officer, and this person would make contact in the city with groups presumably interested in the subject of the exhibit, and informal meetings with experts from the United States, and rather more formal seminars would be developed.

An agricultural USA exhibit, for example, in Kiev had some of Iowa's, Indiana's, and Illinois' greatest experts in growing of hybrid corn and the raising of pigs, hog raising, brought in to meet in very formal sessions with their counterparts from the Republic of Ukraine. Finally, as we developed this program extension, we would have the cooperation of the host organizations. The seminars were held outside of the exhibit and were very extensive. The ones in Kiev were exemplary. I learned more about the genetics of hogs and how much cholesterol you can ingest from pig meat as compared with cow meat and became convinced that it was better to eat pork. And then there was feeding.

These were experts, true experts. The United States Department of Agriculture contributed some, as did American agricultural schools. In fact, we found out in this particular exhibit that they knew of each other because they read each other's scholarly scientific literature.

Thus, these exhibits, as they moved through the Soviet Union for a month in each city, if we did our work right and energetically, were extraordinarily impactful. It is my feeling that we got our money's worth, considering how closed the Soviet Union was at the time. We went to Tbilisi, Odessa, Irkutsk, and Kiev. There were many cities, of course, which were closed at that time, as you know. We were in Tashkent, we were in Baku later on, we were in the Baltic States, which offered special problems. In fact, I think we decided not to go there finally. You know, we couldn't fly the flag in the Baltic States.

Q: Because of the American non-recognition policy.

BENSON: That's right. And the question then was can we have an American exhibit which doesn't fly the American flag, and the decision was no. So we contented ourselves with very low-level programming in the Baltic States. We went to Minsk and St. Petersburg, which were proximate, and tried through VOA to advertise the proximity of the American exhibit, which led to terrific, let's say, crowd control problems for the Soviet organs of authority, especially in Minsk. Busloads would be chartered from the Baltic States. We always advertised on the VOA that here's this exhibit in Minsk, for example, and that there would be Estonian speaking, Lithuanian speaking, and Latvian speaking guides, who also spoke Russian. Come on down and you will find people who speak your language. So, busloads would come. Now they had control apparatus up in the Baltic States too, but, nevertheless, somehow or other, busloads would arrive.

Q: Let's now turn to your service in Belgrade as country public affairs officer from 1979 to 1982, any special circumstances about your move from Moscow to Belgrade?

BENSON: No, it was considered logical. John Reinhardt was then the Director of the USIA. You know him personally. He knew that I knew the language and had served there almost six years before. The job was going to be open. I asked for it and I was assigned to it. It didn't hurt that John and Larry Eagleburger were good friends dating to the time that John was an Assistant Secretary and Larry was, I believe, at the National Security Council and then at the State Department. So they knew each other well, and Larry Eagleburger had been a junior officer in the economic section of the embassy when we served there in the 1960s, so we knew him, and John felt that was just ducky. So off we went in 1979. Larry was Ambassador [Ed: serving from June 1977 to January 1981].

Q: Any comments about Eagleburger as Ambassador in those years?

BENSON: Well, Eagleburger, I thought, was superb. He is a delightful man, as far as I was concerned. He was a good friend. He was very clever, he was very witty, a fellow graduate, mind you, of the University of Wisconsin, very intelligent, extremely approachable by anybody at the embassy. Knowing Serbo-Croatian quite well, really

well, he had good access to anybody and everybody. I don't think he himself went to Yugoslav movies or the theater, but he understood the importance of the cultural aspects of Yugoslav life as a reflection of the political scene. He was interested in officers who did that or who participated in Yugoslav life at that level. I found him an absolute delight to work with.

Let me say that he backed USIS's efforts within the country all the way; whenever they needed any ambassadorial backing. There were several instances. Number one was the need to get the information center in Sarajevo upgraded. We had information center, I should say, under the control of USIS in Skopje, Macedonia; Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina; Croatia in Slovenia and in Belgrade itself. We had a great staff in the country. And he pushed with people at the government level in Bosnia-Herzegovina to get our quarters there repaired and upgraded. This worked. We opened a new information center in Titograd, the capital of Montenegro. It is now Podgorica. It's been given its old name again. John Reinhardt came in for the event. We had a very gaudy opening of the new information center in Montenegro.

In fact, we agreed that we should have an information center--this was my suggestion--in Pristina, the capital or the main city of Kosovo. Now, we had a reading room in Novi Sad, which was not run by an American but by local employees. Novi Sad is in the autonomous region north of Belgrade and had a sizable Hungarian minority. It's very close to Hungary there. But, we did not have one in Kosovo. He supported my recommendation that there be one, and to make it more interesting I had suggested that there be an American resident in Pristina who would run the information center, and I suggested that it be a State Department foreign service officer who would have been trained in Albanian--mind you, we had no representation in Albania, no diplomatic representation at that time at all--and that this person would have Albanian at the Foreign Service Institute, would come in and would serve for a two-year tour of duty in Pristina...

Q: …which would include trying to keep tabs on what was going on in Albania?

BENSON: Well, but with a library and other USIA responsibilities. I suppose there would be some relationships between this person and people cruising around who had their antennae up and ears out. The suggestion went on that, after two years in Pristina, that person would be assigned to Belgrade and would be in the political section so we would have a person in the political section all the time who was really attuned to Kosovo, to Albanian affairs, and would know Albanian. Larry thought this was neat.

Q: You were aware of the brewing crisis in Kosovo at that time?

BENSON: Well, we were aware for... What are we talking about here? We're talking about 1979 and 1980. Of course, the crisis in Kosovo was forestalled in 1966 when Tito got rid of (Aleksandar) Ranković, the head of the security services and one of his closest advisors and war companions. What was going on in Kosovo was very complicated, and the idea that it not be a crisis dictated a lot of Tito's policy toward it. There was an

Academy of Sciences founded in Kosovo; there was a national theater; there was a big university.

Q: These were all Albanian language institutions?

BENSON: Or bilingual. There was a big radio station; there was a big television station. They had Turkish programs, Albanian programs, Serbo-Croatian programs, and had cultural centers. There was, if you want to think of what we were recommending to USIA, to John Reinhardt, there was a context into which an American library and information center would fit. In fact, and as I pointed out, the person in charge of it would then move into the embassy and be in the political section, and Larry thought that was just as neat as could be. John, however, thought that this was a little much. He didn't gainsay the political and social importance in the Yugoslav circumstances, but pointed to the fact that we had in Yugoslavia, not that large a country, an information center in Skopje, in Sarajevo, in Zagreb, in Ubiana, we had a reading room in Novi Sad, we had a big one in Belgrade, we were just opening one in Titograd, and that's a lot of stuff on the ground.

Q: Yugoslavia was nearly unique in its ethnic diversity and the federal system and USIA programs had to reflect that diversity.

BENSON: That was the point we made, you know, that each of these reading rooms was in effect a USIS representative in a semi-quasi, well not independent, but within a federal system there was ample justification for this. John Reinhardt never turned it down. He said it would be on his list for funding, were funds to be later available. You're familiar with the verbiage in government circles which means don't hold your breath but on its merits I cannot say this isn't worth it. We never got it, and I think it might have made a little bit of difference later on, but I was pleased at the time at the cooperation between Larry and I as we wrote this up and sent it in. Larry always supported USIA. We had biannual meetings in Belgrade of all of the people from the field, USIS people whom I've mentioned who were from Skopje, Sarajevo and so on. He always had a gathering for them. He always spoke to them. He wanted to debrief them. He wanted the political section to debrief them. He felt these were American government representatives in these places, which in fact they were, where there were no other U.S. government representatives except, mind you, in Zagreb, where we had a consular general. He was damn good, awfully good.

Q: Would you say Reinhardt was showing a lot of interest in Yugoslavia?

BENSON: Well, I wouldn't say that John didn't show a lot of interest in other crucial countries. Yugoslavia was small but crucial, and he had two friends in Yugoslavia, one of whom was Larry, who was the Ambassador and hard to ignore and they went back a ways. They had done certain things that I know of, not to go into in the course of this interview, in the State Department when Kissinger was there. They had worked together on certain issues, and they were very close. And then there was I. So we didn't get to do

something which I think was on its merits worth doing, but there you are. I think it's worth saying that.

I should also note we developed a program with Larry's support for commemorating the 100th anniversary of the United States' recognition of Serbia. Now, that was neat. It was to be in 1980, because it had been 1880. There was no Yugoslavia in 1880, so we couldn't exactly commemorate the recognition of the sovereign state of Yugoslavia.

Q: 1880 would have been shortly after Serbia became fully independent at the time of the Congress of Berlin [13 June – 13 July 1878]?

BENSON: Yes, and we recognized them promptly, or promptly enough. What was that, 1878? So again, with good support from Larry, we got a good grant or an addendum to our budget from USIA, and we had an exhibit and seminars and colloquia, and we commissioned a piece of music that the Belgrade Philharmonic would play which commemorated this event with themes from 19th century United States music and Serbian music intertwined. Leo Smit was commissioned. He did it, and they performed it. We had people who combined with their Yugoslav counterparts in cultural areas, American history/Serbian history, American literature/Serbian literature, and so on. It was a beautiful series of events and a big exhibit, American works on paper, meaning graphics, no oils, curated at the SUNY of Albany, which was exhibited in Belgrade and Zagreb and Slovenia. It was good stuff, and Larry was crucial in supporting this and getting us the money.

Q: How did the political atmosphere in Yugoslavia in 1979-1982 compare with what you sensed in your earlier experience of 1959 to 1964?

BENSON: Well, it was really quite different. In 1979 already, Tito was not feeling very well. He died in May of 1980. In the last months he was terribly ill. He was in a hospital bed up in Slovenia, which is where he died. Things were, in a certain sense, unraveling, not that we would have, nor do I think we said they were unraveling. Now, there was a name I forget now, a fellow in the political section who was from CIA, who was extremely good and expert. What his reporting revealed I don't know, but you may be aware of the fact that it was the CIA which predicted long before, or several years before, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, that it would dissolve, and I shouldn't doubt but what this man's analysis contributed notably to that conclusion. He was good, he was awfully good.

But I don't think that we said, as an embassy reporting to the State Department, you know, "It's June 15th. Tito's dead for six weeks. Things are going to go to hell in a hand basket." But the environment was very different. For one, we had all of these offices around the country. We were dealing independently with the Ministry of Information, with the so-called Foreign Ministry of Macedonia in connection with our information center in Skopje. It was just a different ballgame from what it was before.

Q: So the republics had their nominal foreign ministries like the Soviet Union.

BENSON: Like in the Soviet Union, oh yes, sure, and certainly ministries of culture, ministries of education.

Q: Which made it all the more important for your USIA sub-offices in the republics to be there, because they were the only direct American contact with these foreign ministries of the republics.

BENSON: Yes. Now, one wouldn't want to overdo the length and breadth and depth of the ministries of foreign affairs in the republics. The ministries of culture, education, arts and what have you, had much more, if they weren't even at the ministerial level. The organizations which controlled those aspects of life in the republics played a much more direct and important role. The federal ministries of culture and education and the organizations which controlled academic exchange were not impotent in dealing with the individual republics, but it was a situation that was very interesting to see. You had different languages, to begin with. You had Macedonian, you had Croatian, and you had Slovenian and, in the Voivodina, you had Hungarian, and, in Kosovo, Albanian. You know all this. It made things in our area of work, cultural and academic and information work, very interesting, I must say. You couldn't deal with the whole country with one language. On the other hand, I would go to Macedonia and I would speak Serbo-Croatian; I didn't know Macedonian. I'll elaborate on this later as you and I work on the final version; there is much more to be said.

Q: What about the climate, especially Yugoslav opinion, regarding relations with the U.S. vis-à-vis relations with the Soviet Union. You mentioned in the early 1960s that Tito was trying to take the lead in the world neutralist movement but he tended to vote neutral on the side of the Soviet Union in most international forums.

BENSON: Well, he certainly continued to do that. It continued to be irritating as all get out for the United States. As far as popular views were concerned, by the time I returned in 1979, all Yugoslavs had passports, anybody who wanted to could travel. Visa regulations with neighboring countries, Austria, Italy and Greece to the south, were eased to the point that a Yugoslav could ride his bicycle into Graz [Austria] and go to the opera or his car into Trieste for shopping. Yes, there were border controls, but basically it was free. The dinar was a viable currency in these nearby areas. Many of the Yugoslavs we knew would go on skiing vacations to Austria, especially to what is it, Bad Kleinkirchheim, in southern Austria, which had wonderful slopes and catered to the Yugoslavs. Many parts of the coast of Greece around the Salonika area catered to the Yugoslavs. They had pensions down there which loved to have the Yugoslavs. This was a tremendous difference. Moreover you had a great number, thousands and thousands, of gastarbeiter (guest workers) in West Germany at that time, some of these in the professions, others doing more menial tasks. Foreign currency was coming in Yugoslavia. The coast catered to foreign tourists in a very open way, which was just hardly beginning when I was there earlier in the 1950s and 1960s. I believe it was close to $2,000,000,000 worth of foreign currency came in through tourism, not all from the coast, because Yugoslavia has wonderful mountains in the northwest. That was Slovenia.

Q: What about economic relations with the U.S.?

BENSON: Well, economic relations with the U.S. were moving right along. But, the question at that time was most-favored nation treatment for Yugoslavia, which still had not been granted. I think that's all I should say about that. Yugoslavia was not a major trading partner of U.S., and direct investment was not then possible, the kind that's going on now.

Q: Was American economic and military aid to the Yugoslav government continuing?

BENSON: Not in the way that it was in the 1950s and 1960s. We didn't even have a PL-480 program any longer.

Q: What about your experience as chargé d'Affaires? That would be the first time you did anything like that, at that level.

BENSON: Well, it certainly was. That was in 1981. What happened at the time was that Eagleburger left. He was given an appointment by the incoming Republican Administration, first as Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs [May 1981 – January 1982] and then as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs [February 1982 – May 1984]

Jack Scanlon, Eagleburger's DCM, became chargé. I was the third by rank in the embassy. Jack was called back to Washington. There was to-ing and fro-ing about could he, should he go, what would happen to the embassy, and they suggested, the State Department did, that I take over as chargé *ad interim*. Later that summer David Anderson came in and became the Ambassador [August 1981 – June 1985], and I agreed with some trepidation to take the DCM. It was an interesting time politically. You know, there had been rather violent riots in Kosovo in March of 1981. It settled down by the time I took over, but the embassy was visiting a lot and reporting up a storm. The political section was terribly active.

Q: So your staff was going to Kosovo even though you didn't have a permanent post there?

BENSON: Oh, yes. I was there myself I don't know how many times. We had exhibits there, we had friends there, and we would seek an excuse to visit. You'd write a trip report, you'd write a memo of conversation, the people in the political and economic section. You could get up, in good weather, in the morning early and drive to Pristina and be there midmorning, and you could be there for five or six hours and come home for dinner. The roads were decent. In fact, in good weather it was really a rather lovely drive. It's not that far. You could also fly. You could do a round trip in one day. So I did it for, as I recall it, three months, and various interesting episodes but no problems. One of the most interesting episodes was the visit of Charles Wick. You know, he as the head of

USIA replacing Reinhardt. He came in with a whole team of people. It was really fascinating. Fortunately I had met him in Washington earlier.

Q: Now David Anderson arrives as Ambassador in the late summer of 1981; what were your impressions of his time as Ambassador?

BENSON: David was another fellow who had been with us in Belgrade in the 1960s. He was then a junior officer in the political section. He and Larry were good friends, Larry a junior officer in the economics section. He was very gifted linguistically, spoke Serbo-Croatian very well, German very well. His wife was a German citizen. He was a neat guy. He was again, as Larry, very open, very friendly, very congenial, literally open--I mean, the door was open, people in and out all the time--very politically deft and very good with the Yugoslavs, traveled the country a good amount. It's always tough to leave an embassy, you know, even for two days. You have to make an effort to do it. He did it. He was good.

Q: Then in 1982 you left Belgrade and served in Washington with the Atlantic Institute.

BENSON: I went there as a fellow for a year. The question of what I would do after that year was left open. I think it's fair to say that I sort of milled around for the better part of that year, and then one day in early 1983 I got a call saying that Ambassador Hartman had called USIA and inquired whether I would I would accept a Moscow assignment that summer. So I spoke with my wife, who said she couldn't think of anything she'd rather do, and I said yes, and that in fact is what we did.

Now, it was immediately clear that what was going on--I didn't know this at the Atlantic Council--was that there were conversations, informal, between the United States and the Soviet Union about developing the text of a mutually agreeable cultural agreement or cultural and information agreement. The one which had been signed and in which all USIS work in the Soviet Union and all Soviet work in the United States in the cultural area was organized was the so-called Lacy-Zarubin Agreement of 1958. It had lapsed in 1979 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. There were talks to renew the agreement, which was going to expire at the end of 1979, which had been recessed for Christmas to have each side think over some points of dispute. In the meantime the Soviet went into Afghanistan and the talks were never resumed. The agreement lapsed as of December 31 of 1979. We are now talking about 1983. Both the Soviet Union and the United States thought it might be fitting now to try to get an agreed text between the two countries, and what Art Hartman wanted was to have me prepare myself for leading the negotiating team which would do this. So my Atlantic Fellow stint was shortened and I went back to USIA. I sat in the European area, a little cubicle was prepared for me, and I was asked to prepare a draft text which would be the basis for the discussions.

So back I went home and sat in the European area and, reviewing the files which were available of all old agreements and review sessions, which were annual, and evaluations and God knows what else we had, I produced a text. There were three documents: the basic general agreement, then the program document, and then the so-called

implementing conditions. If you don't have one, two doesn't exist; and if you don't have one and two, three doesn't exist; but they're negotiated separately and signed separately. The total was quite a few pages. So that's what I did sitting there with all of the files at my disposal. By the time I got to Moscow, the text was there. But that's a separate story, and we'll get into that when we talk about my tour of duty and the negotiations themselves. But that's what I did for I cannot remember now how many months, but there were quite a few that it took me working alone. I was given a typist who would take what I scribbled up and turn it into text. That's what you did then; we didn't have computers. We had a pretty good text by the time I left. It was edited, it was critiqued. I argued my points. We had a good text by the time we were finished.

Q: So you were developing the American text that would then have to be negotiated with the Russians to get an agreed text?

BENSON: Yes, exactly. We had reason to believe that they were doing the same thing, but we'll come to that later. The degree to which they were not doing the same thing was fascinating.

Q: Could you comment on your preparations in early 1983 and what you expected the Russians to be doing?

BENSON: I don't recall, Bill, whether I spoke of Yale Richmond and the saving of the files, the historical files on US-Soviet cultural agreements. Did I speak of that? You're an historian, and you would find this very interesting indeed. The first agreement was signed in 1958. It was called the Lacy-Zarubin Agreement because of the two negotiators, one American, Mr. Lacy, and one Soviet, Mr. Zarubin. Every year it was renewed. Finally the agreements were biannual; finally they were tri-annual. Then every year there would be a review. A group would meet, alternately in Moscow and in Washington, and there would be a bill of particulars, complaints and suggestions on how the agreements could be expanded or do we need this paragraph after all. Thus, the agreement grew very pragmatically over many years.

Separately, the Cultural Unit of the State Department was terminated. It ran exchanges. It ran Fulbright programs. It ran all cultural programs around the world. USIA related to CU--it was the only thing left in the State Department when public affairs issues were removed from the State Department and formed as a separate agency, USIA, in 1953. This bifurcation made for complexities in dealing with a part of the State Department which had a budget that had to be fought through a Congress as a part of the State Department on the one hand and USIA on the other. And we public affairs officers in the field had a very interesting bureaucratic and sort of technical series of problems to face.

Well, anyway, this anomaly was terminated in either 1981 or 1982, at which point Yale Richmond, who was a USIA officer seconded to the State Department in charge of the Soviet and East European geographical area of CU, was, along with other geographical unit heads, given an order, which was to clear out the files. We were moving

administratively from the State Department to USIA, and we don't want to move with all these cartons. Yale was surrounded by file cabinets.

Well, Yale, who had served in Moscow, who had served in Poland, understood very, very well the complexities of dealing with East Europe and that these cultural arrangements and cultural programs had enormous political significant in those countries because contacts with the United States were considered under one heading, contacts with the United States. Well, Yale knew all this, and as he sort of tells the story, he sat in his office and he closed the door, and he decided that he simply couldn't be a party to this destroying the entire historical record that he had in the filing cabinets behind him, which went back to 1958, to the Lacy-Zarubin negotiations and so on and so forth. So he packed this material in moving boxes, the whole thing, everything, file cabinets full. Of course, there was no problem to get some sort of official truck, because they were moving certain things over. And he showed up, quite literally, in the European area of the USIA with these dozens of cartons. Well, Len Baldyga was then the head of the European area. He's an East European hand, and he understood the importance of all this, so filing cabinets were obtained. They were set up along the wall, and dutifully all the files were placed within the file cabinets in simple chronological order, just the way they were in the State Department.

When I got over to the European area of USIA and was asked to write up a new agreement, I was given a little cubicle close to these filing cabinets, and the whole history was there behind me. I found material from Malcolm Toon when he was the head of SOV, or Walt Stoessel, Jack Matlock, during these annual talks, during negotiations on the cultural agreement, the Q&A, you know, faithfully typed, the Soviets complaining of this and the Americans of that and so on. It was an inexhaustible source of, shall I say, intelligence; that is to say, my intelligence was fed this background. Now, as I said before, hope you don't take it condescendingly, but as an historian you understand that it's simply impossible to start *de novo*. I wouldn't have known quite what to do. I would have found the last agreement somewhere, to be sure, the one that lapsed in 1979, but here I had for me an absolutely, totally--I hope they still have it somewhere, bless them--fascinating mosaic of, let me see, 1958 to 1979, 21 years of negotiations. Well, give Yale Richmond a heck of a lot of credit for not doing what he was told to do, because it was insensible to follow that particular order. The European area under Len Baldyga shielded, protected and stored these documents; and there I sat; and with their aid I created the new draft text.

Q: Today is June 12th, 2000, and we are continuing our Foreign Service Oral History interview with Ray Benson, who in 1983 was preparing a new U.S.-Soviet cultural exchange agreement.

BENSON: Right, our drafting of the agreement covered 1983. The negotiations began toward the end of 1984 actually, but as I started on the last tape to say, the draft of the agreement which I was producing in the European area of USIA had to be read by Charles Wick before it would be declared acceptable to USIA. He had the idea that the Soviets were out to trump us every time a card was dealt. Therefore, imperatives and

superlatives were written into the agreement at points that both Len, who had never served in the Soviet Union, and I knew, and Yale Richmond to be sure, who was I think by then retired but I spoke to from time to time. We knew it's just impossible to negotiate an agreement with such language in it. So what we decided to do, Len and I, was to qualify the language as sensibly as we could to get Charles Wick's approval, not the points at which there were irritants to Charles Wick, and get on with it, because what we needed was an agreed text at home. The blood on the carpet was being spilled in the USIA building; we hadn't even gotten to the Soviet Union yet. That was a lot of fun, I must say.

Q: Wick, as I recall, was appointed by President Reagan when he took office in 1983, and he did not have a foreign policy background. Was his forte American media experience?

BENSON: No, Charles Wick was a graduate of Michigan University. His name was Zwick; out of that came the name of Charles Z. Wick. He had been a jazz, I think, trumpeter and had some kind of orchestra or played in an orchestra, I'm not sure which--or call them jazz band. How he acquired some wealth I don't know, but some years later he was living in California near the Reagans, he and his wife, and he owned a group of old-age and convalescent homes, which made him wealthy, very wealthy. Mrs. Wick and Mrs. Reagan used to car pool to get their young children to various events like school in the morning and soccer in the afternoon, and they became very fast friends, these families. The Wicks and the Reagans spent every Thanksgiving and Christmas together.

When Reagan was elected, he appointed Charles Wick the head of the inauguration ceremony committee. Wick, I'm told, did a bang-up job in getting the various auditoria and venues in Washington to be ready to do this, that and the other thing all on time and to get Reagan moving that evening among these various venues. A book was produced, which Charlie gave to me at one time, on this marvelous event. Once all of this was over, lo and behold, Charles Wick was appointed the head of USIA, a man who had been in show biz and was a friend of Reagan. There you are. He had no other relevant experience.

I suppose it's fair to say, however--it should be said--that he was a man of tremendous energy, and USIA in a strange way benefited--I shouldn't say 'in a strange way', very directly benefited--from his closeness to the President. The USIA budget lacked for nothing during those years. Perhaps that's enough at this stage of the game to say on this record.

We'll maybe put in a few things later about Charles Wick, but he was very conservative and very concerned about the Soviet Union. By golly, he was the head of USIA and USIA was going to be in charge of writing this text beginning the negotiations, and not on his watch would we give an inch to them. So by the time Len and I shook hands on an agreed text, it had been agreed with Charlie and it was, I believe, very quickly, not cursorily but promptly, vetted by the Soviet Bureau in the State Department and went off in the pouch to Moscow. When I got there in Moscow, it was waiting for me.

Q: This is all very helpful background for your work on the treaty. Now shall we take up your own move to Moscow and the nature of your assignment?

BENSON: Well, the work I plunged into in the first instance was kind of interesting. There was no substantial program anymore. We didn't have an agreement, so we had no cultural groups, we had no exhibits of the kind that used to move through the country, we didn't have budgets for it, we didn't have a covering agreement. Therefore, we didn't negotiate such things, we didn't have warm relations with concert agencies, museums or anything of the kind. There was just nothing going on.

Q: The chronology here can be very important, because Brezhnev had died in November of 1982 and you arrived under Andropov. Did you arrive before or after the Korean Airline [Flight 007] incident [September 1, 1983]?

BENSON: No, I arrived in June. Andropov was last seen publicly in early August of 1983 when his kidney ailments reached critical stage. He went off to be essentially under dialysis, which kept him alive and apparently functioning quite well as far as you can be functioning well under dialysis. Let me go back a step. When I got to Moscow, Arthur Hartman, of course, greeted me extremely warmly. He had asked for me, and here I was. [Ed: Hartman served as Ambassador from October 1981 to February 1987.]

We had met before, and I'll go into this in the post, editing stage. Arthur Hartman in it must have been 1972 or 1973 was flown into Turkey in a small jet courtesy of the U.S. Air Force with an aide or two. Bill Macomber asked me to be at the meeting, and the two of us agreed that was when we first met. But it was a short meeting. It had to do with the opium poppy substitution program. It had to do with other local crises. This was a run-up to Cyprus, the invasion of 1973. But we had never worked together really.

Anyway, he greeted me warmly. He said that there was one thing he had to tell me, which was that I was by rank the third man in the embassy--himself; Warren Zimmerman, the DCM; and me--and that when he would leave on vacation--he took very few vacations, he took one every year in the summer and it was a long one--Warren would replace him, and I would be acting DCM replace Warren. Would I agree to that? And I said yes, I would agree to that if he wanted to do that. We talked about my security file immediately.

In fact, very much earlier when he called the European office in USIA and said that he would like this fellow, Ray Benson, to replaced [Wallace] "Pic" Littell, my answer was yes, I would like to, but would somebody make sure that he was aware of my personal background. He was getting a public affairs officer with a certain, let's say, unique security file. The answer came back that he was delighted that I would come and, yes, he was aware, and with that I fetched up in Moscow of June of 1983. I then told him that when I arrived in Moscow in 1975 I had told Walt Stoessel--I think we've recorded that on these tapes--that I would not be looking up my half-sister for some time and would certainly check with him before I would want to do that. And I didn't do that until his successor, Mac Toon was firmly in place. Just five, six, seven weeks prior to my

departure I said I'd like to do this, and Mac said go ahead and do it, and I did it. I told Art that we all at USIA, talking with the people who were sending me out and who knew the security file, had agreed that I would not be so bound this time and that I would look my half-sister and her mother up and see them as if they were normal Soviet citizens. People at the embassy did see Soviets. And they said, "Just fine. You will keep people informed, won't you?" I said I would, and so I said to Art that's what I'd like to do, and he said, "Fine. If anything comes up of interest to the embassy--you know what that means--you will talk with us, won't you?" I said, "Fine," and that was agreed, and that's the way we proceeded with my contacting my half-sister and seeing her for the rest of my tour. Well, soon after I got there, I started a special section in my own personal file for the American draft of the exchange agreement text, which had been pouched to Moscow and which I now repossessed, and anything relating to it.

It was agreed that, until such time as we went any further with it, it was not a matter for general discussion around the embassy, because there was no agreement with the Soviets about when this thing would be joined, this discussion. Recall I did say earlier, didn't I, that off-line, in fact, the Ambassador himself, actually, had been talking with the Soviets and they with us about, yes, we really should do this. So there were discussions, and they were not widely reported at all. And so that's where that was tucked away. Until further notice, I was not to talk about it among my staff, and we would proceed with the summer's business.

The summer's business was very quickly Arthur's preparation for leave, and off he and Donna went, as they usually did, toward the end of July, as I recall it, and they would be gone for six or seven weeks. An interesting twist on all of this, you know, for me was that Warren Zimmerman decided he would not move from his office and would I mind being acting DCM sitting in Arthur's office. I said I wouldn't mind at all, and we proceeded in that way. Of interest during this period, the KAL Flight 007 was shot down on the night leading to September first. There are time zone differences and all of that, but the night leading to September first of that year, meaning 1983. It was a time of enormous pressure and tension in the front office. There were many cables, which were received which the front office got and certain other people in the embassy got, which related how events were proceeding, which were not a matter of public record nor widely read in the embassy.

At the same time the State Department was preparing an inspection of the embassy. Had nothing to do obviously with the KAL plane but had everything to do with what a DCM was supposed to do in preparing the embassy for inspection. The USIA inspections are a tedious mess for people on the ground. A State Department inspection is indeed a tedious mess. You go by the book, and the book is very thick, so there I was responsible for it, and Oren--I shouldn't say generously but just per force, I mean he couldn't do it--said, "Prepare the building for inspection." So with the Administrative Counselor, (Joseph S.) Joe Hulings, whose his last tour of duty was as Ambassador to Turkmenistan [Ed: Sept 1992 – September 1995]. I visited him there when I was doing the exchange program, wonderful man, now retired, so, we prepared the building for inspection. It was very, very complicated for me. I mean, I'm not of State Department on that, but we did that.

Relations with the Russians were stiffened by the downing of the KAL plane. Arthur came back. I moved back to my office, thought of negotiating the agreement. It was laid away for now. My recollection was that it was in January or early in 1984 that (Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei) Gromyko at a conference in Spain--just ticks in my memory, doesn't matter where--said certain things about the United States and about Soviet-American relations which seemed absolutely to preclude any sensible discussions on almost anything.

Q: Was that before or after (Konstantin) Chernenko took over?

BENSON: That would have been about the time that Andropov was on his last legs or had already been interred. It's about then, because Andropov died in February 1984. Gromyko spoke either just before then or just after then. It was for all intents and purposes an interregnum period, because Andropov was not terribly active.

Chernenko also was not terribly active and, therefore, was elected by the Politburo. That was an interregnum period in so many ways. Underneath all of that, or along with all of that, there were certain USIA-supported programs which continued. In fact, to go back on what we've been talking about, they continued after the termination of the cultural agreement and despite its termination. For example, our support for IREX...

See, the Soviets didn't want the higher educational exchange, the graduate-level exchange, the research exchange operating under IREX to be terminated, and it wasn't. Money was, such as it was, continued to be granted by USIA to IREX.

Q: There was a bit of a hesitancy on their side, wasn't there? In my own experience, I was supposed to go on IREX in the fall of 1983, and at that point after the KAL matter, the Academy of Sciences did not answer its mail. I didn't go until March or April of 1984.

BENSON: Well, yes, no. Why should they? They were in a state of shock, and it was an interregnum in practical terms in the Soviet Union. The top was in a shambles. Some people moved back and forth but very, very few. But I guess my point here that should be recorded--and we'll edit it into proper shape when we get the typescript--is that despite all of what happened and despite all of what we have been speaking, certain programs continued through agreements or letters exchanged between by the partner organizations. That is to say, Kassoff and Dan Matuszewski on behalf of IREX, would agree when the Academy of Sciences on one hand and the Ministry of Higher Education on the other. You know, IREX has both programs, the special programs which, I think, had 11 categories with the Academy of Sciences in gerontology and history and literature and archeology, what have you, and they had an agreement with the Ministry of Higher Education for people who were going to universities, reciprocally, and the Soviets were interested in continuing that, and IREX was interested, as was USIA and the American Council of Learned Societies. So there was an agreement to do this. At that time IREX did not have an office in Russia, in the Soviet Union, and the action on the ground, except when Allen and Dan would be visiting, was accomplished by my office. It was the USIS

office of P&C, Press and Cultural Office, which acted on behalf of IREX and on behalf of the ACTR, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, which was placing people in the Pushkin Institute.

Q: Now, was this different in nature or degree from how you operated with the academic exchanges in the '70s?

BENSON: Really not. Neither IREX nor the ACTR had an office then. It didn't have an office in the 1980s. USIS Foreign Service Officers, my educational officer or cultural officer were doing the liaison work. We had telexes from IREX. That's the way one communicated in those days. We'd get copies of a telex that IREX had sent to the Academy of Sciences or copied back from Allen of one they'd received. It was just an awful lot of, not to-ing and fro-ing, but of back and forth to keep every informed. We had other exchange programs, some of which were recipients of USIA money. There was a program sponsored by Ohio State/Purdue Consortium, Leon Twarog --you must have known him--which had a resident director in Moscow and had a group of students from a Middle West consortium. There was a SUNY program for undergraduates with a resident director.

Q: You worked with these various university programs whether or not they had federal support?

BENSON: Yes. They tended to have a little federal support, but yes, we did, there's absolutely no question. In fact, whenever I arrived at a post--I'm glad you asked the question--I would speak with the staff and I would say that we would operate on behalf of the American academic, intellectual, cultural establishments here on the ground in Yugoslavia, Turkey and so on. In the same way the commercial officer operated on behalf of the American business community. Somebody from Indianapolis could come in to Moscow and say, "I would like to sell widgets in Moscow or in the Soviet Union. Help me." So we were essentially operating as a public service in relation to any American cultural and educational interests? I strongly believe we should be and should have been, and we were. When the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA), I think it was, when they came in, they had no government money, but they wanted to start an exchange program that would involve the big ten universities. It was a big deal. This consortium, which was set up in, I think, Lansing, Michigan, would deal essentially with AID and the Department of Agriculture, and they had an enormous series of grants because they were land grant universities. They worked in India, they worked in Pakistan, they did land amelioration and cultivation, God knows what all, and we ended up, bring the story to an end here, with an agreement between them and counterparts at the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Higher Education, in the Soviet Union. Person months, it was a certain number of people for a certain number of months, and it was a very proud day when this was completed.

Rutgers heard of this. They came in, and they wanted, on behalf of the New Jersey system of higher education, to have a similar agreement, and we got one at that time. The person who at the end was doing academic exchange for us was Carol Dorfline, whom

you know now. You are dealing with her in the Karilian exchange. She was of inestimable help to the Rutgers people, who had things off sort of halfcocked. To complete the answer to your question, these groups would come in, they'd have a draft reciprocal agreement, and we would critique the draft and say, "This just won't go here. It's not France." They would either accept or not accept our suggestions. They're a private institution. But like as not, they would be very grateful.

Q: So you really played a crucial role for American universities or consortia in breaking the ground for them with their Soviet counterparts to get their programs established?

BENSON: Absolutely. We did it before the negotiation and signing of the agreement. We did it afterward on a different base, because there was an agreement already, you see. The agreement did not set up a necessary juridical basis in the Soviet Union for doing these exchanges. It depended on the political climate, whether you could get things done or not. And the political climate in terms of our work was vitally affected by the fact that there was finally an overarching government-to-government cultural agreement. Suddenly there was an outburst of USIS programs.

Q: When did you conclude the agreement?

BENSON: Well, the agreement was concluded and signed by Secretary Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko at the Geneva Summit on November 21, 1985, which was when Reagan and Gorbachev first met.

Q: What about Hartman as an ambassador [October 1981 – February 1987]?

BENSON: Art Hartman was delightful. He was a very loose, very relaxed, very affable, extremely intelligent, charming man. His wife was all of the above. They had in the best sense of the word 'show biz flair', deeply cultural in certainly music in their tastes. They turned Spaso House, the ambassador's residence, which you've been in, which has great public space, into a site of special concerts, chamber music, dances. They lived that way. We had no America House in Moscow. We had no venue to do anything. There was no library there, no reading room, none of that. Through all of these tough times. When they came back from vacation in '83, the plane had been shot down, things were in ghastly shape. They repainted the inside of the great ballroom in Spaso. They put frescos on the walls. Donna Hartman had friends from Paris come to do this. They decided--and we were of enormous help here, USIA, my staff, me--that they would intensify their efforts to reach out and to develop contacts, maintain contacts, enhance contacts with whichever of the Soviet Moscow intellectuals, intelligencia, as would come, poets, playwrights, writers, artists, musicians, and so on.

Q: Did Hartman, by the way, have a Foreign Service background? How was his Russian?

BENSON: He didn't have much Russian. He studied valiantly, but his language was French. Arthur Hartman had been in the Foreign Service since Point Four days. He's

Harvard educated with an economic twist, and he'd been in Paris then, the Marshall Plan, Point Four and so on as a very young man. Joined the Foreign Service, worked with Kissinger in the European area, and had been, prior to being assigned to Moscow, in Paris for a bunch of years. So I say he struggled valiantly with Russian just because he felt that was what he wanted to do or should do or could do, but he was never able to function at all in Russian. Whether he was able to read much, I don't know, but this is not the man who would have, as Mack Toon and Jack Matlock and Walter Stoessel, four newspapers delivered in the morning so that the morning staff meeting would be illuminated by what they knew had been printed, and Izvestia in the evening. No, that was not his background, but still Foreign Service background he certainly had.

Anyway, I would say what distinguished the Hartman tour of duty was this outreach. He would invite to these evenings, which would go on into the wee hours and were not infrequently scheduled once every two months. But you might have two a week. They would invite other ambassadors, of course, and interesting attachés--by attachés I mean cultural or press--in foreign embassies who knew one heck of a lot about the Soviet Union. I must say that our office worked like crazy on these guest lists, on calling people. We didn't have emails then. Putting together an evening of that sort was really a lot of work. And I should say official Soviets were invited too. Some came, most didn't, but groups of them came from the USA Institute; or IMEMO, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations; other special institutes, various people who the embassy was interested in and who were interested in the embassy and could on this kind of occasion get permission to come.

Q: Did those encounters then lead to any softening up of these institutions or the work you had to do with them to promote exchanges, for instance? Was there any benefit that you immediately gained or eventually gained from establishing that kind of acquaintance?

BENSON: The answer is yes. You see, through the agreement between IREX on one hand and the Academy of Science that's 11 different component parts--I think I mentioned economics and history and gerontology and all of that, these separate agreements.... You know, the whole agreement was negotiated during my first tour by Wassily Leontief. He was the one who came over on behalf of IREX and the American Academy...

Q: He was one of my economics teachers.

BENSON: Was he really? He was a great guy, wasn't he?

Q: Oh, yes, way above the students though.

BENSON: Well, he was a Nobel Prize winner in 1973, wasn't he?

Q: That's right, although I didn't appreciate what I was getting at the time.

BENSON: Well, we so often don't. But he did it, he came over. Of course, he didn't negotiate it actually. It had all been hacked out over a period of a year or two. But he came over, and the Soviets were just ga-ga over Leontief. His Russian was still elegant, it was splendid. He was so pleased to be back. I guess he'd been back, I don't know. But anyhow, the people who were at institutes which were involved in these exchanges had more of a "reason" to accept the invitations. There was no other function, no other person, no other way in which contacts were to be developed and maintained with these institutes, with these persons. When IREX came over in the person of Allen Kassoff and Dan Matuszewski, they would visit these contacts we had developed. Of course, there were scholars who would come and spend a day or a week with them, or there were conferences of a certain kind. They would either check in at the embassy or not. And that kind of meeting was not of such interest to the embassy as a functioning source of contacts with Soviet society and a source of reports and reporting on Soviet society. But meeting these people--never mind the American scholars--was of inestimable advantage. This kind of gathering, these gatherings, they went on for years. It was just gorgeous. It was a way of trying to bring them in. As the cultural agreement was being negotiated and then signed, there was just an unleashing of contact possibilities. Most notably the USA Institute, where various of its higher officers, (Georgi) Arbatov, (Radimor) Bogdanov, Milshtane, now became available.

Q: The general?

BENSON: The general, great guy--he was really special—(Eduard) Ivanyan and others. Anyway, an elaborate and mosaic-like answer to your question, and we'll fill in later. The question about Arthur Hartman as ambassador: he was superb.

Q: Let's go back then to the chronology of Soviet events. Chernenko took over in April of 1984 and died in March of 1985. Did the change in the Soviet leadership affect your work?

BENSON: Well, you see, by then we were well into the negotiation on the cultural agreement. The negotiations began in August.

Q: Today is still June 12th, 2000, and we are returning to our conversation with Ray Benson. We are discussing the negotiation of the revived cultural exchange agreement in 1984 in Moscow.

BENSON: The negotiations began, if I recall it correctly, August 8th. They followed a very quick and in a certain sense--to me anyway--surprising burst of meetings, which didn't include me, in Washington and in Moscow in which both sides agreed finally, yes, let's sit down and talk over if we can reach an agreed text. Against a background of some ghastly events in 1983 and Gromyko's blasts in early 1984, one could be surprised but there it was. We gave the Soviets our text; the one I had worked on a year or two before. As a matter of fact, it worked this way. Arthur came to me and said that he had the document--he didn't come to me; he invited me to his office—and said he had a document empowering him--it's an official document; there's a name for it [Circular

175]--from the State Department. He would be the designated chief negotiator, he and such staff as he wished to involve in the negotiations on this agreement. He had that document, and he would be off and running. However, he said, he didn't intend to do any of that. He would like me to do it and to pick such members of my staff as I wanted to accompany me on this. Of course, there would be regular telegraphic reporting on progress as we began to meet through State Department channels, and he would see it all. If there was any reason I wanted to burst in and tell him what had happened or what had not happened at any time, I could do that, but otherwise let's get on with it through this process. So I said fine, and I got my staff together.

We had a cultural attaché, we had a press attaché. The cultural attaché was Greg Gorov on my left hand; Jerry Verner, the information attaché on my right hand, literally on my right hand. He was senior, and he was the information officer, information attaché or press attaché or both. Each of them had with them other members of their staffs. So we would appear in two cars. We had one, two, three, four, five, seven or eight people for each meeting, one of whom was the reporting officer. The first reporting officer who would be taking notes--you know, there was nothing, at least on our side, done with a tape recorder; maybe they did, though they had a reporting officer there to scribbling away like crazy--was Mark Taplin, whom you know, who was in the cultural section. He wrote like a dream, and he was very smart. He caught everything. He knew Russian well. He was sitting off toward the end of this line at this great big rectangular table, and he was taking notes. That's the way we went on. There were no representatives of the State Department side of the embassy; there was just us from USIA.

Anyway, Arthur said, "That's what I want you to do, and we'll set about doing it. We have to agree with them on when they would like to begin. They take their vacation seriously, and we want to have ours." I cannot recall when we agreed on the date that we would begin, but it was agreed, and it had to be done in advance because the Soviets had to arrange their vacations accordingly, and we would begin in early August. I went off as an aside to Yugoslavia with my two sons, and we sailed the Adriatic with a Serb friend from Rovinj to Dubrovnik. It was a gorgeous trip, three weeks.

We got to our first meeting in a room in the Office of International Programs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was right across the street, an old ducal palace. It was right across the street, Karininski from the sort of campus which held the buildings of the Friendship Society, which I think was a Momentov estate. These are old buildings and very beautiful indeed. Our meeting place was a ballroom. They had a big rectangular table, and we sat facing the street side windows. We had 65, at least, meetings there. We started in August of 1984, we watched winter come, we watched the leaves fall, and we watched spring come. The last meeting was toward the very end of October of 1985. We discovered when we had our first meeting, which was just to establish the process, that they didn't have a text; they were preparing their text.

Q: Did you have to wait for them, or did they work from yours?

BENSON: You anticipate the answer. What they did, because they didn't have it, because they couldn't put it together because their bureaucracies were rivaling each other but didn't communicate with each other. But let me get into that little bit more in just a minute. They decided they had to have some darn text to get started, so they translated our text into Russian. We didn't realize this for two meetings, because they didn't hand the whole thing over to us. They told us that, of course, as we proceeded in the negotiation, both sides will reserve the right to change the text as the negotiating discussions indicated the necessity of doing so. We said of course, if we don't give you a bronze tablet, you don't give us a bronze tablet. Well, good, so we can begin. And they immediately began changing texts because it really didn't suit them to accept our text, but they had to have something to begin with. We now had it. We begin with the preamble, where some changes were made. And it went on like that. Later in the process, great hunks of text were changed on their side.

We have already, in talking here, anticipated the reason, and the reason was simply that it was impossible for this office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which handled negotiations of such agreements and had the responsibility of monitoring of such agreements and so on, despite the rank of its senior officers, it was impossible for them to order the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education and God knows what other organizations were involved--we do know which other organizations were involved--to produce a text by date certain. Who could Alexander Churlin who was in charge of this office, communicate with at the Ministry of Higher Education? He's not going to call the Minister; he has no right to do that. Perhaps not even in the United States would it be done that way, but certainly there it wasn't. So he communicates at his level in the Ministry of Education. This guy hasn't received any orders yet to accept the charge from Churlin to produce a text, nor does he know in what context is all this, or if he knows he doesn't know who in his ministry knows. How far has this information been disseminated? He can't rush up to his minister and say, "You know what I just heard from Churlin?" Well, time passed, tediously.

Q: Was Churlin the lead figure in your face-to-face negotiations, supported by representatives of the other ministries involved?

BENSON: Yes, Churlin was the lead negotiator on their side, but other ministry representatives came and went. My guys and gals were there for a year and a half. I had a permanent team. We had really a position of strength. For one, to begin with and for a long period of time, the negotiations revolved around our text. Even when they're getting rid of it, it's our text. For another, we had a team, colleagues and friends. They had Churlin, who was very good. They had a representative of the American Bureau always, the counterpart of SOV, the Soviet Office. He was over on the right hand as I faced the other side of the table. They had a note taker. They had an interpreter.

Q: I was going to ask you, what did you do for languages in these encounters.

BENSON: Well, they had an interpreter; they had interpreters. As time went on, an interpreter would disappear and go to Geneva or go to Paris and what have you, and a

new one would come. They were top notch. Churlin understood English, and obviously we all understood Russian. Some of the people who would appear from various ministries on his side when the relevant paragraphs were up for discussion knew English very well. Some knew it not at all. So what we obviously decided to do was have each side speak his own language; and whether Churlin understood me or not, it was going to be translated.

Q: And that, of course, gives you the chance to hear the other guy's statement twice before you have to answer.

BENSON: That's absolutely the case, and it was of crucial importance all the way through, because you don't get into an immediate repost because you have to wait for the translation, during which you think over whether you should offer a repost or a comment. It eases and softens and makes much more intelligent the response, when it finally comes your turn.

Q: This is a very important point, because I think people often think of language barrier and interpreting as an obstacle, when in fact it can facilitate back and forth. Assuming that you know the other guy's language so you hear it in Russian and then you hear an interpreter put it into English, and vice versa. Say you make a statement in English and then you hear what it sounds like being put into Russian.

BENSON: This is perfectly true, and very often I would correct the Russian translator and say I think there is just a little bit of a shade there, or sometimes they'd get it way off because we speak our language with some idioms, you know. You learn as you're going through the negotiation to speak more slowly and to speak in shorter sentences. You try. You don't use baseball terminology. "You couldn't get to first base," would throw the usual Soviet interpreter. And they too.

Gradually as we began--I say we had 65 sessions--we learned how to deal with it. We would speak more slowly and less in the vernacular. So texts were exchanged, changed text, new text, new suggestions in one language only. They would give it to us in Russian; we would give it to them in English. On the next session they would show us the translation into Russian of the text we had given them in English, and vice versa, and then both sides would correct, because you can go off a little bit. There's a lot of sort of what sounds like minor administrative back and forth but which is absolutely essential if you're going to finish page one and go on to page two and three and so on. You know, our agreement had three parts. Part One was a statement of general principles, let's say. Part Two was the program document. Part Three were so-called implementing conditions. They were interrelated, quite obviously. They had to be signed at the same time.

Q: Did your program document list all of the specific programs that would be covered and how many concerts back and forth, to that level?

BENSON: Oh yes. The implementing conditions would frequently be of interest to people like IREX and money, per diems.

Q: But the agreement didn't specify, for instance, the American organizations that would supply the person-months under a certain category, or did they?

BENSON: They did in the case of IREX. They did in the case of the Fulbright Commission. By that time we had a Fulbright agreement of a kind.

Q: Oh, so that was running even when the cultural exchange agreement had lapsed?

BENSON: Right, limping but running.

Q: You see, I was there on IREX, which was functioning despite the lack of the agreement, as you explained. I was also a member of the Fulbright Committee for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe at that time, and this involved me in a brief negotiating session--it was actually one morning, I think--with Greg Gorov and some of the other people in your staff and a couple of other people, a woman whose name escapes me now, a Polish name, I think. We were discussing with the--I think it must have been in the Ministry of Higher Education--some of the problems in the level of implementation and the difficulties people had experienced on both sides. And that negotiation incidentally was conducted completely in Russian.

BENSON: Well, you knew Russian, Greg knew Russian.

Q: Well, everyone in the American group functioned in Russian. So that was just a little filler that occurs to me that illustrates what was able to go on during that period when we had no agreement. Then what was the impact on the embassy and your work generally when Gorbachev took over in March of 1985?

BENSON: By that time--we had been negotiating since August--Soviet organizations, various ministries, *Gosconcert* and other administrative units on the Soviet side had been brought into the picture, had been made to focus on the texts which did refer to them. They would often say, "Where did this text come from?" and my counterparts would say, "Look, it's the American text that we have had to translate because you didn't give us anything else!" Well, I didn't hear such a conversation, but I know it happened, I very definitely know it happened. "...and if you don't like it, come up with a text. We've been talking to you for the better part of a year, and you haven't come up with anything. We're negotiating now, so it's now or never."

So then they'd come in and they would table a text for discussion next time, and we'd see it changed dramatically. We would wink at each other and we'd say, "Thank you very much. If you think this is realistic, we will talk about it next time." And that's the way it went. By the early part of the year we had moved along substantially. There was one crucial point which the Soviets held out as being basic and if we could not reach agreement on it there would be no agreement at all but "Let's continue talking about the

other points." So we agreed with that, of course. And that point was the use of national airlines to move the exchangees. You know, after the invasion of Afghanistan, the air agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union was terminated.

Q: Oh, so Aeroflot could not land in the States.

BENSON: Precisely right. Nor could Pan American land in Russia. So they said it was ruinous for them and they couldn't deal with it any other way, to have an exchange program, if the Moscow Philharmonic had to pay international rates; it was just not possible for them to do that--or even individual scholars. Parallel to our negotiations, Aeroflot and Pan American under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Department respectively were negotiating an agreement to resume flights. We're both aware of this obviously, and I said on many occasions, "We wish them well. It's got nothing to do with this agreement." And they were saying, "Indeed we wish them well. It has everything to do with this agreement, because we can't afford to send them any other way." We suggested that they send their groups on Lott, the Polish airline, which flew to the United States. I said to Alex, "I'll bet they'll take rubles too." He winked at me and he said, "For us it has to be Aeroflot." The reason I go into this as background is because it will later play a crucial role in the end game as the agreement was agreed. It goes directly to help answer your question about the influence of Gorbachev. As we're going along and we are hacking away at this thing and we're getting changes and we're reserving positions for the end game and so on, underneath is this terrible problem.

They will not sign--and they let us know every time we turned left or right, that this thing has to be settled. We say that it has nothing to do with this agreement, and it keeps getting stated and restated, stated and reiterated that we leave it for the end game. Well, some of the positions--back to Arthur Hartman now--that we were reserving, apart from the issue of the flights, were piling up at one point, and our desire in the embassy, to compromise in this point or to be firm on another point we were communicating fully with Washington. There was a daily telegram that was drafted by Mark Taplin and, when he gave up on it, Mark Smith, another one of my staff on the information side, who was another magnificent drafting officer. And at one point Arthur said to me, "I think we've got positions reserved on both sides, and our views are changing a little on how we might adjust the basic original text. I think it's time for you to go back to Washington." "Oh?" I said. "Yep," he said, "rather than our sitting here and sending a long telegram which would offer the argument for changing this or reserving this or being stubborn here, which is going to be read by everybody in Washington, we think this and we think that, you go back and you talk to SOV and you talk to the NSC." The SOV was then headed by Tom Simons, an old Soviet hand, an East European hand, who eventually became ambassador to Poland and then later Pakistan. In fact, he may be there now. And the NSC person in charge of Soviet and East European stuff was Jack Matlock.

So off to Washington I went, preceded obviously by a message from Arthur saying I was coming, and the idea was that there was massive reporting already in hand and we would get either an affirmation of the direction we were going and a little bit of applause, or we would get new negotiating instructions which would be specific to certain points. They

would analyze where we'd gone and where we might be going, and they would say, "Go," or "Just a moment. This is how you should change."

Q: This must be the trip when you turned up at the Kennan Institute when I was there in the spring of 1985.

BENSON: That could very well be, because I think I came only once in the spring of 1985. This trip was fabulously successful. Tom Simons understood exactly what was going on. He read everything which had come in. He was reading the daily reporting telegrams, or the thrice weekly. He had read what Arthur had to say, and I went over to SOV and we talked about this and that and the other thing. A meeting was set up with Jack Matlock in Old Executive Office Building, which is where his NSC office was. We showed up there with Marlin Remick, who was the deputy of Len Voldig and had been my deputy in Belgrade in 1979 to 1982, and another person. Tom Simons was there, and there was somebody else. We'd go through the argument, recap the discussion, and Jack Matlock says, "You know, I think that these are very difficult discussions. It seems to me you're going along a very productive path. Can't predict the future, but right now I don't see any need for changing the operating instructions. Comes to that, we'll note it. I read the reporting cables. Tom reads the reporting cables. What do you say, Tom?" "Oh, fine," he says, "so we'll stay in touch here..."

All along it's understood that we would report back whatever happened, and if needed the instructions to continue on the basis of this document would change. So Jack was saying there's no need to change that: "Everything's going along fine." Tom Simons on behalf of SOV says, "Yes," and so there it was. We had the verbal stamp of approval. Something must have been written back to Arthur saying, "General review here. Progress very satisfactory. Continue. Keep reporting. You'll be in touch with us and we with you." So I went back and I said, "You know, it really cleared the air," because this decision by SOV and NSC was communicated to Charlie Wick, not that Charlie Wick or his people had been complaining necessarily but that we had been chipping away at some of the language that Len Voldig and I had left in the basic text because that language was necessary to get the text by Charlie. He wasn't reading any reporting cables, you know. But we didn't want to be in a position where somebody would rush to him and say, "Charlie, do you know what's happening? In paragraph 1A this is gone; in paragraph 2C this is gone," and he would say, "Oh, my God, you're giving away the keys to the safe." So, before that would happen, he would have received, and he did, from either Jack or Tom or both, word saying okay, good, NSC approves. So we proceeded.

Now, to talk about the difference in the Soviet Union when Gorbachev come into authority. We'll talk about this and other contacts when we go back and talk about intellectual life, cultural life, and so on in the Soviet Union at that time, but there was something else that was going on apart from Gorbachev's coming in, which is that the Office of International Programs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had finally been able to get all the responsible parties in the Soviet Union to focus on the fact that we were working through, a quarter through, a third through, half through, this major document. "It affects you, it affects you," and so on and so forth. Of course, the knowledge of what

was going on was up at a good high level in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, so increasingly the texts were germane to Soviet interests, and we were proceeding along. Well, not to go through the absolute--and perhaps we'll pick up a little bit when we get to looking at the typed script--picking up the absolute, every...; I can't recall every negotiating session, you know. But, talking about Gorbachev, it comes to a point when we're finished, around the fall of 1985; October of 1985. Aeroflot and Pan Am are negotiating away a blue streak. They don't have an agreement.

Q: That explains how I got there, because I flew American to Rome and then Al Italia to Moscow. If the State Department suspended Aeroflot's rights in 1979, then how could resumption just depend on negotiation between the two airlines?

BENSON: Well, because when there would be a result satisfactory to Pan American, the State Department would be asked to rescind or relax its order.

Q: I see. So Pan Am was really negotiating to get an acceptable deal before asking the State Department to relent?

BENSON: Yes. That's the way it was before too, and the number of frequencies and other conditions attendant on flying back and forth, how many people would be resident in the Aeroflot office: you don't need 60 people for two flights a weeks, and that kind of thing. A very important thing was the security considerations. You needed groundskeepers and all. So they're negotiating away, and the Soviets tell us that we have agreed on everything, except aviation reciprocity issues, and we have told them that we will not have included in the cultural agreement any reference to flights, it's not for this agreement. We'd been saying that for a year and a half, and we ended up saying it. So what we ought to do is prepare the text we suggested as it stands in Russian and in English, and we'll take it to Geneva and it will be decided there whether Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Shultz will sign it. There was no other way to deal with this, you know, and it was agreed by us and by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that that is what we would do. They would reserve their position, we would say, "Your position is impossible," and then we would have completed the text with airline problem pending, this resolution.

They're negotiating away in Moscow, the airlines, and we prepare the text. It's finished, and it's finally in Geneva printed up on the proper protocol paper, which they ran out of--their documents have to be on their paper and our documents have to be on our paper--and suddenly they realized that in Geneva, where they had a lot of offices and a lot of agreements, they'd run out of protocol paper, so they had to wire Moscow to send a special courier to Geneva overnight with a ream of protocol paper.

Q: Now, you were in Geneva?

BENSON: Oh yes, I went with Mark Smith, who was the second reporting officer after Mark Taplin. We had the responsibility of printing up all these copies. The Soviets are amazingly incompetent in doing these things. In the American mission, we had to find a copy machine which could handle the Soviet protocol paper, which is uncommonly thick.

It must have been 19th century paper, for the thickness of it. Most of the printers which we had in the special offices, which were set up in a hotel which we took over to accommodate it, couldn't handle this paper. But in the basement of one of the buildings of the American permanent mission to Geneva, there was an old copier which could handle that paper.

God, we were in a mess. But anyway, it was done. At one point they're ready now to--this is Reagan and Gorbachev--they're ready to have their aides tell them all these documents are ready for signature tomorrow. There were various documents which are signed on such an occasion. I was not at this meeting. Reagan is sitting on a couch. Gorbachev is sitting on a couch. The fire is crackling, and this is the end of the negotiations and various groups have gone off to perfect or cross the final 't', dot the final 'I' on the various agreements which will be signed. Apparently the group which went off to a separate room, headed by (Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi) Korniyenko, had among the documents they were considering the cultural agreement. So finally one by one the chiefs of these various subgroups returned and reported, "We are ready, sir. We'll get the documents ready for tomorrow," and so on and so forth. Korniyenko comes in and he says, "This is ready, but we have a problem with the cultural agreement. Can't sign it." There was consternation. Gorbachev says, "Why can't we sign it?" "Well, it's because the Pan American and Aeroflot agreement is not ready." Gorbachev says, "What's that got to do with the cultural agreement?" Korniyenko says, "Well, because the groups fly on Aeroflot, and it's just very difficult for us to carry off. You know, we have scholars and these are all the people who would move per the paragraphs of the cultural agreement." As I hear it, Gorbachev says to him, "Is the cultural agreement ready?" "Yes, sir, it's ready, but it doesn't have any thing..." "Okay, it's ready. Are they negotiating in Moscow on the Aeroflot and Pan American agreement?" He said, "Yes, that negotiation continues." As an aside, an hour or two, three, four earlier in Moscow, Aeroflot and Pan American had reached agreement. Geneva didn't know that.

So Gorbachev turns to Korniyenko and he says, "I think we're talking about two agreements here. One is finished, and the other is being negotiated. We hope we will sign both. We will certainly sign one." Korniyenko, I'm told by somebody who was in the room, takes two steps back and he says, "Yes, sir." So the cultural agreement was finally ready for signature. On the next day in the auditorium where the various agreements were presented for Shultz and Gromyko, and I was sitting next to Art Hartman, the agreement was signed and he said, "I'll get you the pen," which he did but I lost it.

Q: We have just finished discussing the negotiating and signing of the renewed exchange agreements in 1985. Would this be a good point to turn to your picture of the Soviet cultural scene during those first years of your second tour?

BENSON: Well, why not? The first years of the tour did not presage just yet the changes which occurred so quickly when Chernenko died and Gorbachev took over in March of 1985 under the doctrine of *novea machanya,* or new thinking, Glasnost, and Perestroika. Arriving in 1983--we've gone through this already--there were tough times immediately that year with Andropov disappearing from view, the KAL plane being shot down, but I

found my old friends who were there—(Bella) Akhmadulina; (Andrei) Voznesensky; Roshin, the playwright; Yuri Lubimov was out of the country, living abroad at that time, he's back in Moscow now; (Oleg) Yefremov, deceased three or four weeks ago, the head of the Moscow Art Theater--many people, some of the artists, without going through name after name after name, were very willing to resume our acquaintance.

Q: This is the afternoon of June 12th 2000. Ray, we were talking about the cultural scene in Moscow from 1983 on.

BENSON: You were asking about the differences with earlier and how did things go--earlier meaning my earlier tour of 1975 to 1979--in view of the difficulties of the period, 1983-1984, the shooting down of the KAL plane, lame-duck governments at the top, tough language against the United States and so on, but there was not, as far as our relations with the cultural elites insofar as we knew them and met them--we knew many of them--there was no feeling that Stalinism lurked. They didn't feel it quite obviously, because they did welcome us. They didn't have to do that. They did attend the lunches and dinners and evening receptions, the concerts and so on that Arthur Hartman and his wife, Donna, sponsored at Spaso House, which I've referred to. They wrote for the drawer, meaning there was no substantial lessening of restrictions against publication, but there were no dramatic persecutions of people who were writing. There were no raids of apartments with police standing by and hauling out manuscripts from these drawers.

Q: Compared to some of the repression, the dissidents in the 1970s.

BENSON: Yes, or the 1960s even worse. You had (Andrei) Sinyavsky and (Yuli) Daniel. The refuseniks, some of whom were in the cultural area--these are people who had applied for permission to leave the country and were denied that permission, who had applied for visas to the United States and were denied that, many of them Jewish who had applied for the right to emigrate to Israel and were denied that--were very public in their protests about all of this. Sakharov was in Moscow at the early period here, if I recall it correctly, in the 1970s, and had been remanded to Gorky, where he lived, now named Nizhny Novgorod. He was only released from internal exile by Gorbachev in 1986. It was not too long after he came in and sort of gathered his strength, if you will, and sense of purpose.

But we found the theater very, under Soviet conditions after all, very adventurous. Sasha Gelman's place, Misha Roshin's place, Sakharov's place--although from a Leninist point of view, bless him—they didn't shy away from criticizing things as they were; or things as they might have been were adduced. The younger generation was depicted frequently being in opposition to parents, younger generation clad in jeans on stage, you know, this sort of thing. It was lively, it was interesting, and there was no thought of episodes like the bulldozer incident that you asked about, which preceded our arrival in 1975. The Balia Grozinskya exhibit hall was still in operation. The unofficial artists were selling to foreigners and trying to get out of the country. They were among the refuseniks. Arthur Hartman did marvelous things--I've said this three or four times already--with some of these people. They were hassled, they were interrogated. At the gate to Spaso House they

had to stand in line, these people, with their passports, internal documents that is, with their invitations while the guards at the gate there--you've seen them--would look them up and down and make a great point of writing in a book what their names were. We had embassy officers, notably from my staff, who would wait out at the gate and escort these people in, or try to. They would be stopped by the guards. They would wait while these people were looked over, while this purposeful writing of their names into *the* book went on. Then they would be walked to the front door, somebody else would take over for the next person, and that's the way we did it. But it went on. That is to say, the groups came, the people came in, by and large. The Hartmans' point was made. The invitations were honored, as they were at occasions in our house. Cultural life was active, cultural life was rich. These people were hoping and waiting for change. Change was in the air, although one didn't know where it was going. Brezhnev had died, Andropov had died, Chernenko was on his last legs. You could barely tolerate the sight on television of Chernenko breathing. He had terrible emphysema; that's what he died from.

His shoulder was hunched over as is typical of people with emphysema, as he was trying to create a bellows effect to be able to breathe more easily with his diseased lungs. I think we might go on about this a little bit at length when we can see a typescript and so on, although I can't be encyclopedic in describing all of the things which were happening in the cultural scene below the threshold of the continuation, or within the context, of a system which still had a censor. You couldn't publish freely. You still had reviews by the Ministry of Culture committees, which would go to a theater prior to the dress rehearsal and sit there with the scripts in their hands and look at the text and review what was being said to see that they weren't sneaking anything by, while suggesting changes and so on.

Q: What about the effect, if any, of Gorbachev's taking power in March of 1985 on the cultural scene and your mission in dealing with the cultural world?

BENSON: Well, the effect was almost immediate, of his taking over, or at least it was soon in coming. You know that famous phrase which you have pointed out to me was Rabbi Hillel's rhetorical question, "If not we, who; and if not now, when?" is one that Gorbachev, without quoting Rabbi Hillel, addressed to a group of Soviet writers and intellectuals--not 250 people, maybe 25...

Q: In June of 1986, I think.

BENSON: ...that sound about right--whom he summoned to a meeting, and they talked about the creative arts. He said, "We've got to stimulate creative energies in the intellectual area; and "if now we, who, and if not now, when?" and was quoted in the papers, very openly quoted in the papers, as this meeting was described. Well, there were subsequent and, in fact, immediate developments in the so-called cultural journals, the learned journals, the thick journals, notably one journal which was more popular, which was Ogonyok under the editorship then of Vitaly Korotich. This is a separate story, but if you took on a horizontal level all of what was being published now Literaturnaya Gazeta, the literary paper of the writers' union, and the Soviet Kultura, the cultural paper of the cultural office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party--I think Kultura was a

weekly and Literaturnaya Gazeta was also a weekly; Kultura might have been twice a week, I can't recall.

Picking up after a little break, there may be a lack of perfect transition, which we'll correct later. Things began to be published in various literary journals. Novi Mir; Questions of History, Voprosy Istorii; and so on simply loosened up. There were struggles within editorial boards. Certainly the historical and theoretical journals, which were closer to the core of Communist orthodoxy, had more of these struggles. The literary journals had fewer of them. Grossman's work was published {Ed: perhaps the reference is to Life and Fate published in 1980 in Switzerland], Vasily Grossman, the novelist.

Q: The novelist who wrote on Stalingrad, etcetera.

BENSON: Right. Rybakov, who wrote on Stalin, was published. The changes, the opening went on across the board. It was a time of really great excitement and a little puzzlement. Was this going to be like Khrushchev's thaw, which proved to be, relatively speaking, in crucial areas short lived or nonexistent? Khrushchev was not a great liberator after all. He loosened things up, to be sure, but not permanently and not, they would say, in a basic sense, but this seemed to be heading in a much more forcefully or much more purposefully and a much more basic direction. It was exciting to be there.

Q: Who were some of other key people in the embassy who you worked with during the Hartman years?

BENSON: Well, I noted already his DCM when we came back in 1983 was Warren Zimmerman. He later was very much in the public eye because he was the ambassador to Yugoslavia during the days when the country was falling apart, 1991. In any event, Warren had been in Moscow when we got there in 1975, in the political section. He left very shortly thereafter. He was a good linguist. He was a Yugoslav hand and a Soviet hand; we shared that. He was very intelligent. He had very good cultural tastes, if you will, as did his wife. He was very decisive without being arrogant. He was very quick to penetrate to the core of an issue, of a problem, of a situation, and he did not like for anybody he worked with to anticipate his judgment and to give him their judgment in anticipation of his; i.e., as a clumsy way of putting it, he didn't like 'yes' people. He wanted people to offer their view and to argue them, so that various intelligences could be brought to bear. There are some people who are very sharp in their way of expressing their views. Matlock was one who didn't seem to encourage that kind of behavior by people under them, but Matlock really did, but he didn't have the outward personality to encourage that. Warren did. I'm not saying one is better than the other, because it behooves a younger officer to fight through this until he's permanently squashed and then decide that indeed this other guy does not want to have a free flow of opinion. But Matlock did. He just didn't express his desire for it in the way that Warren did.

Warren was a remarkable wordsmith. He had been a speech writer somewhere in his early career in the State Department. He edited quickly, incisively, marvelously, and was

in general a delight to serve with. He was very sociable, and we hung out a lot together. Matlock came in as ambassador during this second tour of ours. He had been the DCM in the earlier tour. He came in [April 1987] from the NSC after Hartman left [February 20, 1987]. We were old friends, and I don't know quite how to describe the situation, but let me do so, up to a point anyway. He followed an ambassador, Arthur Hartman, beloved by his staff, who had an extraordinarily popular wife, Donna Hartman. I'm talking about internal embassy relations, you know, not with the Soviets. Let me pause a minute to say Jack was totally bilingual and bicultural. There was very little he didn't know about Soviet history, Soviet literature. He had a great collection of Russian and Soviet literature, art, and so on.

Q: I understand he even gave speeches in languages like Georgian.

BENSON: Well, let me say that he claimed to be able to do all of that, and he would give speeches in different languages, but it reminds me of my days in Yugoslavia when I used to give speeches in Macedonian and Slovenian, having had them translated from Serbo-Croatian or English by my staff and coached in the various accents which were different and so on. Not to denigrate it or make it cheap, he thought this was important anyway, to show his respect for the local languages. And if an entire speech was not in Georgian, at least the opening paragraph would be, and it was terribly much appreciated by the local people.

Q: Certainly because the Russians in the non-Russian republics have never bothered to use any of the local languages.

BENSON: Absolutely. These speeches, by the way, were required at the openings and on occasions surrounding the presence in given cities of the USIA exhibits. We would go together. This was during his days as DCM. He would open an exhibit, I would speak and introduce him, he would speak, and so on. He was fine.

Q: In the 1980s you had no exhibits to open because the cultural agreement was in abeyance until 1985.

BENSON: Exactly. The first exhibit per the new agreement came to the Soviet Union after I departed in 1987. I did not witness it. It takes a while to get these things going. But Warren was a lovely man to work with. Jack Matlock, I had no trouble in working with at all. I've described my relations during our first tour when he encouraged me to become a reporting officer on certain issues of the day affecting the cultural scene, which he edited, to be sure, but never cut.

Q: When did Zimmerman leave as DCM in Moscow?

BENSON: Zimmerman must have left by January 1985. He could have left in the summer rotation cycle of 1984.

Q: Who replaced him as DCM?

BENSON: Curt Kamman, who moved up from Political Counselor and later became--I think he's in Latin America now, or South America--but he became the head of the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. He was a splendid linguist also, and was there all the time... In fact, let's look back. During our negotiations, the one who on behalf of the embassy would be looking at our text was generally Curt. It could very well be that Warren left around summer 1984. I simply do not remember.

Q: This is Robert Daniels continuing to interview Ray Benson, picking up on Monday, June 19th 2000. We are in the middle of discussing Ray's second tour in Moscow, which was 1983 to 1987. We would like to talk about developments after the conclusion of the cultural exchange agreement in October 1985 and the Geneva Summit meeting of November 1985 during which Shultz and Gromyko signed the exchange agreement.

BENSON: Remember Gorbachev was there and gave a signal to go ahead and sign it. Well, what happened afterward, after really the Christmas vacation, early in January 1986, I'll point out several things. There was an immediate barrage of program proposals for the "opening of the Soviet Union" which hit the desks of the action officers in USIA in Washington. Every state, every nonprofit organization, it would seem, from the Rotary Club on down seemed to have an idea, or have had pending for the last couple of years, about what they would do once the Soviet Union was "open again," and this swamped the USIA. They decided the only way to handle it, since the desk, the program desk, in the European bureau was just incapable of dealing with this, had other things to do, was to open or create an office to deal with this whole matter. So they started small. Steve Rhinesmith was hired on contract to head the office. Molly Raymond from the Education and Cultural Bureau of USIA was seconded to it. The proper number of secretaries and computers and filing cabinets were scattered around some very nice office. Greg Gorov later joined this office.

Q: What was the office called?

BENSON: What was the office called, you ask. I shall have to look it up, and we'll put it in at a later stage. There was obviously a commitment in space, in resources, in persons by the USIA to try to make all of this coherent and to give form and a little bit of direction in liaison with us in the theater so that this could be reasonable in terms of our priorities and USIA's priorities. That was one effect that was with us for some years. That office no longer exists obviously and didn't last much longer than my tour of duty. But it did fulfill its function. We can talk more about that, and certainly when I review the text with you later, things will come to mind and we'll fill it in. The second interesting effect is one that you are quite familiar with from subsequent years. In January of 1986 several presidents of American universities visited the Soviet Union.

We got a telegram from the State Department saying that these people were coming and were on their way to see Sakharov. They wanted to talk with us, because we were the office which had negotiated the agreement. They were all excited about it, and in fact the leader of the group was Olin Robison, who was then the president of Middlebury

College. They came into town. They contacted us. Three of them said that they would separate themselves from the rest of the group and come with me. Would I set up a meeting with the office which had negotiated--I've referred to this in a previous tape--negotiated the agreement. So David Fraser, the president of Swarthmore [1983-1991], and Alice Stone Ilchman, the president of Sarah Lawrence [1981-1998], and I and I think it was Carol Dorfline, the person in charge of academic exchanges in our office, we went along and talked with the people who in fact had been across the table from me during the negotiations. I've referred to this. The interesting thing was that these people were keen on developing a program of college-level, undergraduate, exchange with the Soviet Union, which didn't exist. There had been some Soviets who went to the States on special programs; some were undergraduates, especially Moscow State University/SUNY Albany exchange. They had a language student, language major, exchange.

Q: The major exchange before that, conducted by IREX, was at the level of graduate students and faculty?

BENSON: Yes, graduate students and faculty. There was a CIEE program that you've heard of. The Council of International Educational Exchange had a program which was located in Leningrad. It was for American students who could pass an exam signifying that they had a certain language achievement already, and they paid for the privilege of going to Leningrad. There was an American who ran the program, and it had a USIA grant annually and continued through all the bad days when there was no agreement.

Q: Go on about the idea of the undergraduate exchange.

BENSON: Well, the presidents led by, as I recall it, David Fraser and Olin Robison, Swarthmore and Middlebury, were saying how pleased they were that the cultural agreement had been signed and they knew this office had played a major role. The Soviet side said that it seemed to them that the time was right to have an undergraduate exchange. Students would go for a full year. This is what they would welcome. Obviously there had to be language preparation, but they would study in each other's country for that year. Certain details, many of them, would have to be developed. But what did they think about the prospect of beginning the new era with such an exchange? And they pointed out that the United States had such exchanges of foreign students from tens and dozens, 100 other countries, but not from the Soviet Union on the undergraduate level. Well, the Soviets, the people on the other side of the table, said, "It's just fine. We think you're right. It's time we move to try to implement such an idea. Fill in the blanks and make us an offer." We discussed other things. The meeting was very congenial, with tea and cakes and all of that. We went away. The presidents were in a state of euphoria. We from the embassy thought this was just idle blabbermouth talk.

Well, what happened then was that Robison went back to the States and had a meeting of his athletic conference, NESCAC (New England Small College Athletic Conference), which was dealing with hockey scheduling, paused in Boston on the way back to Middlebury. After the meeting, he asked them if they would give him five minutes, and he told them of this conversation, just about that much, and he asked for a show of hands

which of the group sitting there would be interested at all, if they could get the details ironed out, in hosting Soviet students for a year and sending theirs over for a year, and everybody raised his hand. So, as Olin told me later, "I now had a problem. I had to do something with this brainstorm of ours." He went back to Middlebury, continued on, and wrote a letter to the group and only two or three backed off. One was not at the meeting; that was Bryn Mawr. Another was Tufts, and the third at that point was Haverford, with Amherst saying neither yea nor nay. The next thing that happened is that--I didn't know any of this until later--Tom Beyer, professor at Middlebury and the chairman of the Russian Department, came into Moscow, called on me, and asked if I was aware of this interest among the small colleges. "No." Well, he would like to bring the results thus far to the Soviet side.

So I said, "You must go to the Ministry of Higher Education, because ultimately it's going to have to be that body which will be the action office on the Soviet side. Don't worry about going to the Foreign Office, but they will have been informed." So he went to the Ministry, and he got to be very, very busy. He called me from the airport on the way out, and he said, "They said, 'Of course, yes, but where is that document or where are those details?'" He said, "I've got to talk to Olin." Well, next thing we heard, from the Department, I guess it was, or USIA, was that Olin Robison wanted to visit. This would have been in the mid-spring 1987.

Let me think a minute on this timing. We signed the agreement in November 1985. This was 1987. I might have earlier said that they visited in January of 1986, but they didn't. It percolated during that year while the office of Steve Rhinesmith was doing its thing. In any case, it was the early spring of 1987. By then I was a short-timer, with order to depart post midsummer, early summer. And into town came Olin with his wife Sylvia toting two enormous bags, Middlebury tote bags, of catalogs from 18 or 19 separate academic institutions. We went over to the Ministry of Higher Education. A huge group assembled. Olin, I, and Carol Dorfline lay on them all of these catalogs and the fact that we wanted to start this agreement; we were quite serious about it. This is Olin speaking. "We, the consortium here..." There might be a very good thing at the end of it, but he said to them that there were certain principles that the American side would insist on. It was arrogant to do that, but at the on-set we should say so so that there be no misunderstanding later. And they said, "We were quite aware," with a certain amount of concern. "Well, what are these principles you would insist on?" He said, "Well, they're very simple actually. Number one and perhaps most important, there would be no accompanying person, an uncle, a watchdog, from the Soviet Union, as these students would go out in twos and threes to each of these institutions. You should, however, have one person resident at Middlebury who would be in contact with them." At that time, you know, emails were beginning, and there were telephones. Olin speaking now: "Middlebury College would provide the basic costs. No trouble in communicating by telephone. So that's a basic principle. Another basic principle is that we cannot sign an agreement with you that does not say that the goal of this program is to have equality among the genders. You would have to send female students in about equal numbers. Further, it would have to be another principle for a full year; no semester students. And as for the rest, we ought to have an agreement. There'll be many, many details, and let's sort of get on with it."

The Soviet side agreed that these principles were satisfactory. They would be difficult, but it was satisfactory. There was nothing really onerous about it. "Let's talk about an agreement." And then, of course, the devil is in the details. Olin brought out the catalogs and--this is an aside--it was really amazing. Obviously he put Middlebury's catalogs on top. Why not? And there was a little description, a little brochure, on the Snow Bowl, the Middlebury ski slopes. The Soviets said, "What is this, a vacation spot?" and Olin said, "These are the ski slopes at Middlebury College's upland campus." They passed this around--I'll never forget this--beautiful pictures of what is in fact a beautiful slice of Vermont. It's a ski slope with many lifts and a lodge down at the bottom. It took them--and I don't know when we left if they really believed it--it took them a long time to absorb the fact that this was open to all students and it was where competitions were held among colleges and that it belonged to Middlebury College and that if their students would come to Middlebury they could ski on the slopes. In general there was both acceptance of the proposal in principle and disbelief about some of the conditions, which were very favorable actually to the Soviet side. Out of that came the request by Olin that I on retirement come to Middlebury and start the program. I did retire in July according to plan and came to Middlebury and we started a program, which is not the subject of these interviews.

Q: Nevertheless your tour in Moscow, which is very much the subject of this interview, underscores your role in this major accomplishment for you and USIA.

BENSON: It was a major accomplishment, if I do say so, though the agreement was only developed later in the year after I retired and mostly in early January 1988.

Q: This is when you were on the other end of it representing the consortium and working for Middlebury.

BENSON: Yes, yes, but to follow up on what you said a minute ago, the fact that they all knew me--after all, I had had eight years there and importantly I had been there for the last four and had headed the negotiation and brought these three professors and presidents to Moscow; that's when the idea was launched--it gave me such credibility with the Ministry of Higher Education that the launching of the program and then the continuation of the program, which was both effortless, one could say, and had so many problems to overcome in the first years because of the translation of the different systems of education for one side and for the other. Again, that isn't the subject of this interview but, yes, I will accept the fact that my being known by all of them was absolutely instrumental in the thing getting going and succeeding for as long as we had the money to keep it going.

Q: Now, the fact that you were able to get this very major exchange program started, from the signing of the cultural agreement through working for Middlebury, seems to reflect the breath of fresh air that came in with Gorbachev in 1985.

BENSON: There's no question of that. There is simply no question, and I suspect that will require a little more time before it is written up well under that heading, Gorbachev's

Gift. But from the point of view of an American who was very doubtful of the sincerity of the Reagan administration in searching for broad-ranging agreements with the evil empire, it was of great interest, a fascination, very warming to see that during a Republican Administration these organizations jumped on the opportunity presented to bring these elements of the two societies together for a series of exchanges which were extremely productive.

Q: Today is June 19, 2000 and we continuing our discussion with Ray Benson of the situation in Moscow 1985 to 1987 and the circumstances around the conclusion of the undergraduate exchange program with the American Collegiate Consortium.

BENSON: The United States government, the USIA budget, found the means to offer financial encouragement to organizations which would send in proposals. They would come to the office, as I said a littler earlier that Steve Rhinesmith headed. There was a serious evaluatory process going on there. They were graded as to the seriousness of the proposal--you know how these things would be done--and the profile of the organization and so on. Offices within the government, the National Security Council, and USIA, Charles Wick and his intimate advisors were solidly in favor of moving this thing along. We are, after all, in 1987. Just a few years earlier it had all been the Centurion evil-empire period on both sides, vituperation, and really akin to saber rattling. It was really reassuring and heartwarming to see that this initiative was taking off and so welcomed. This was a period of resumption of planning for the big USIA exhibits. I didn't see the first one, which came in afterward. This was the period of the resumption of funding for a certain number of concert groups.

This was the period when Vladimir Horowitz, the pianist, revisited the Soviet Union in April 1986. That visit was negotiated commercially. We facilitated that all the way by accompanying the negotiator, by advising, I guess you might say, on the behavior of *Gosconcert*. Peter Gelb was the entrepreneur who developed the project. This is all a subject for longer reminiscence by Peter if he would do it. In fact, Horowitz came, Horowitz played, Horowitz visited various places in Moscow which he remembered very keenly from the days of his youth. He visited Leningrad, formerly St. Petersburg, once again now St. Petersburg. He visited old friends. He visited Scriabin's, a Russian composer, Scriabin's daughter, whom he knew when she was a little girl and he tinkled the keys on the Scriabin piano in the Scriabin home.

Q: You know that Scriabin was Molotov's uncle?

BENSON: By golly, I knew that was his name, Scriabin, but I didn't know he was of that family.

Q: That's what I understand.

BENSON: Well, fie on him, a grand lineage. It was a tremendous event, the Horowitz concert and all of the various episodes in Moscow. He stayed at the residence of the ambassador, Spaso House, he and his wife. Arthur Hartman was still ambassador.

Anyway, I was brought back myself to USIA at least once for long meetings with all manner of offices in USIA who were eager to steer some of their program money in the direction of work in the Soviet Union. It was a problem for us at the Moscow embassy, for me, to say "no." There is only a certain amount that can be done, not because the staff was limited, but it was, and not because our budget was limited, because it wasn't--we were unleashed--but simply because the potential Russian cooperating agencies, bodies, cities were not capable of handling all of this, nor was it useful to overload the circuits. Good, solid programs were initiated, were resumed, and on that basis we thought we would go on to see where both sides would agree on expansion.

But, I think my first visit was in early 1986, to emerge from Washington and return to the post in Moscow with the idea of spending $4,000,000, $2,000,000, for academic exchange student programs, concerts, and so on. Grants would be given to 15 American nonprofit organizations which wanted to have our intimate support in running programs through the Soviet Union, programs which had not yet been defined. This, it seemed to me, was a little too much.

Promises were made about what would happen, how much good work could be done by the new office and by the offer to expand USIA funds to run these new programs. It really was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing between us in Moscow and those in the United States and Washington with the best of will, who wanted to start everything at the same time. We had an enormous amount going, and it was great fun. When I left in July of 1987, everything was moving along marvelously.

The IREX program zoomed in full speed. In fact, when we go back and edit the text, Bill, I should note that Allen Kassoff and Dan Matuszewski came into Moscow in the course of the negotiations, because the implementing conditions, which was the third agreement among the three parts of the cultural agreement, i.e., general conditions, program agreement, and implementing conditions. And the details--again the devil--included details about the stipends, length of time, categories, and what have you, in the IREX program. Dan and Allen came to Moscow and helped for the day or two that we were centered on the IREX paragraph, and that program was booming along. ACTR, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, was looking to expand. SUNY was running its program very well. The Purdue program was running very well. The Rutgers/New Jersey State Consortium, which I mentioned earlier, signed an agreement in 1979 that lapsed almost immediately because of the invasion of Afghanistan, was now interested in resuming its efforts. The Midwest Consortium for International Action, so-called MUCIA was interested in resuming its program. I'll try to recall the name, but perhaps it's not that important. He visited me when I was the acting DCM at the end of 1983 and said that times were tough but they were certainly interested in resuming this. They were nine of the Big Ten universities, and by 1987 they were away and running. It was amazing what was happening. It will be of interest to you that the Project Harmony, which has Vermont roots in the person of David Kelly, whom you know well, visited Moscow soon after the agreement was signed and encouraged us to be helpful as they started their work. Project Harmony at its outset had a very proper name. They were going to exchange choral

groups of high school students. The organization continues and has a much wider scope of operation. It's difficult to go on about every single program initiative, I don't remember them now. I may add a few as we edit this.

Q: But in 1986-87 there was really an explosion of exchange initiatives on the American side and a comparatively wide opening on the Soviet side to receive them.

BENSON: That's absolutely the case. You see, on the Soviet side you had a document. This is a highly bureaucratized society. For SUNY Albany, or Purdue, or New Jersey, or what have you, it was interesting that you have the document because it means that they're more open on the Soviet side to resuming negotiations, but it doesn't have the same weight. In the Soviet Union it meant everything to have the Ministry of Education and Culture; Coskino, you know the film people and the exhibits people, and so on and so forth, have a document on which they could base their work, an approval for action. So there was an explosion absolutely immediately. It was very rewarding for those of us who had spent all of that time negotiating.

Q: About this time, shortly before you left Moscow for the last time, you received an award for public diplomacy.

BENSON: I did, yes. It was at Tufts University. I'm glad you remembered that. Yes, there is an annual award given to a person working in this area. It doesn't offer a financial reward; it's just an award, and so it isn't endowed, but it has been given the name Ed Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy, one a year, and that year they gave it to me. It was really splendid. I went to Tufts and was given it at their graduation ceremony. I was promoted to the rank of Career Minister, I think, the year before. Those were the final recognition of my achievements.

Q: Let me ask a general question about your career experience. It seems to me that you have a very high regard on the whole for the professionalism of the people you worked with in your various postings abroad. On the other hand an American academic often had a jaundiced, if not to say cynical, view of the institutions and the people he's worked with. Is that a fair impression of those two worlds?

BENSON: Well, that's a fascinating question. When I first came to Middlebury to oversee the exchange program we have referred to, Olin Robison sat me down and he offered several pieces of advice, some of which are totally irrelevant but one of which bears exactly on your question. He said, "You will not find here on this campus, even though I am running the college, what you found at an embassy. There is no discipline here. There is no chain of command, even though I am the president here. The most that we can achieve is to have what you might call organized--and he drew his voice out--organized chaos. But nobody listens to anybody necessarily." But the opposite is what happens or should happen at an embassy. You have to have, at an embassy or within your own staff, you have to have it clear that within your own staff, if you are a public affairs officer, that you're the boss. If you're the ambassador, you're the boss. But in order to allow the creative juices of the other people to move, to flow, and to keep on moving and

flowing, you have to encourage and allow discussion of every issue. At the end of the day it may be that the vote, if you want to put it that way, in the country team is 13 to one, the ambassador being the one, and that is what we will do.

Q: As Abraham Lincoln said, "The ayes have it."

BENSON: Exactly, it's absolutely the case. He may have been able to run the government that way. He had his trouble with some of his people under him, didn't he? But that, it seems to me, defines the way in which an embassy has to run and defines the way in which it did run. I suppose what you see--it's not unfair to put it this way, it's certainly not unfair to me to put it this way now--what you see in my judgment of the people I worked under is a reflection of their respect for my work. Even Bill Macomber, whom I may have described this way earlier--I certainly will when we edit--who would become so furious at me for certain things that he would throw things, always threw to miss and always missed, became and really was a good friend. He threw ashtrays. But, you know, the people I worked with--I pause to say this--in Eastern Europe at that time, certainly in the Soviet Union at that time, were very experienced hands. I don't know how Moscow is staffed these days, but everyone had gone through language school. Many people had degrees in Soviet affairs. Many were on their second or third tours. It was a volunteer service then, and the momentum or the excitement in being there--some of the days were tough, with the KGB and the microwaves and all of that; we haven't paid sufficient attention to the microwaves; we will when we do the redraft--there was a commitment on the part of everybody, from the military attachés, the (CIA) station people, bless them; to those of us in the more traditional Foreign Service. If that continues now I do not know.

Q: You've explained the character of your work experience on a structural basis and would compare it with Olin Robison's view of the college from the top down. I'm thinking rather of the view of leaders from the bottom up, that your experience with the people you worked with, the caliber of the people that you worked under seems to be uniformly on the whole much better than the average academic or governmental experience.

BENSON: Well, of course, it's hard for me to compare. My career was spent entirely in diplomatic service except for the 12 years in Middlebury, where I was both within the context of the college and running a separate program where I had enormous independence. The people, I repeat, the people whom I worked with in my foreign service career, there was never a political appointee; they were always deeply experienced. Arthur Hartman I have described as one who didn't know much about the Soviet Union, but he was a quintessential diplomat, personable, intelligent, graceful. Matlock was frequently not so personable, not so graceful. But he was one of the world's great experts on the Soviet Union. Now, if you work under him and you do not realize that and do not respect it, you're a fool. And furthermore, you're not only a fool but you're going to ruin the program that works under you. Now, in my case I was a personal friend of Jack Matlock's, as well as my wife, so it made all of that easier. Mack Toon, this was his third turn-around in the Soviet Union. He'd been the head of SOV, the Soviet Bureau.

Q: Did you find, comparing notes with other people in USIA or in the Foreign Service who had worked under different kinds of people in different situations and worked under political appointees, for instance, did you find distinct different in the atmosphere of your posts compared with others that you came to know about?

BENSON: The answer is yes and yes. A political appointee--as I say, I never worked with one; many of my friends did--could be a marvelous person and could have been a good businessman and knows how to work with a board or an executive committee but doesn't know anything about the country. That political appointee's problem in organizing the staff and playing any role at all in the embassy is a very keen one under the heading of management, but it doesn't have included within it any of the substantive expertise that all of the people I have named brought to their job. Look at Eagleburger, Anderson and Scanlon. I never worked under Scanlan; he was a deputy there. But, my goodness, these are people who began their academic studies in dealing with foreign policy affairs and the language and were on their second and third tours. So there is that matter of substance that you can't expect from a political appointee.

Q: But anyway, the East European posts and USIS were grounded much more in expertise on the area compared with the services generally?

BENSON: Yes, certainly USIS. There were examples of people who were assigned as ambassadors to East Europe, not to the Soviet Union, whose credentials involved their being firm and sometimes very loud anti-Communists.

Q: Perhaps also being of the nationality by descent of the country they were posted to?

BENSON: Yeah. Well, that in itself might make them very sensitive to the situation. It could also make them falsely arrogant about how much they know because they knew the language well. And it could mean that they were vehemently prejudiced against the current regime because they had suffered, or their family had, under them. It doesn't necessarily lead to a balanced approach to relations with the United States. But by and large, your point is well taken. Other posts, other missions, in East Europe were well served by, by and large, experienced Foreign Service officers. Moscow, the mission there was headed in historical timeline by people who were not diplomats: Walter Beetle Smith (1946-48), Thomas Watson (1979-1981), Robert Strauss (1991-1992), or earlier Admiral Standley (1942-43).

Q: In your time it seems that at least the missions in Belgrade and Moscow were very well served by the people who were in charge and people who worked for them.

BENSON: We were equally well served in Ankara. When I got there, the ambassador was Bill Handley [June 1969-April 1973]. Bill Handley, a State Department officer obviously, had worked under Joe Sisco in the Near East Bureau of State and then was seconded to USIA, where he ran the Near East geographical office in USIA as a lone State Department officer. By the time he appeared in Ankara, an East European hand who

knew everything about USIA--Turkey had been moved to the European Bureau in USIA--perfect man for the post. Bill Macomber came in. I worked under Bill Handley for only one year. Macomber came in, had been the ambassador in Jordan, and had been the author of a study on the reorganization of the State Department. He was the head of a series of task forces, the so-called Macomber Report. That's pretty good background. Neither of them knew more than 10 words of Turkish. That was very rare.

Q: There must have been special atmospherics to Moscow, at least until Gorbachev's time, of being almost marooned on a desert island, being the American embassy surrounded by a hostile sea, so that the people in that post would really have to depend on each other psychologically perhaps more than in the conventional diplomatic post?

BENSON: Well, that's an interesting question, and the answer to it is yes, that's what was the case and should have been acknowledged by all. It frequently challenged people. Not everybody is capable of becoming a collegial member of a community, just by the nature of the psychology of that person. The embassy in the 1970s and in the early 1980s was relatively small by all objective criteria. It's a huge country we're dealing with. The embassy now is enormous, as you may have heard, and the function assigned to it. NASA has a huge staff, the DEA has a huge staff, the IRS has a huge staff, and the FBI has a staff there. This was unthinkable in our day.

Q: And these people have filled up the premises of the new embassy while the old one still functions?

BENSON: I think that's what's happening. I don't--this is a little beyond me there; I was there obviously my last tour when the 'oh my God' discovery was made that the Soviets, left to their own devices, which we left them to, had implanted bugs all over the darn place, and so the new embassy was not be usable. That is being corrected. I do not know. I'll know more after our visit in September. We're going to be the guests of the DCM in Moscow. I do not know what they have done with that huge building. I know that when I was there last they were continuing to scrape out the interior and haul away all the stuff. The problem was that the bugs were implanted in the steel I-beams. We had in our wisdom allowed them to provide the construction members. It was really pretty silly.

Q: The bugs were in these beams when they brought them into the construction site.

BENSON: There you have it. Apart from the tunnels underneath the building... It was really pitiful.

Q: This concludes the chronological taping work of interviewing Ray Benson, and we will come back to revision of the typescript when that's ready.

Today is June 19, 2000, and this tape is to provide some addenda to the general discussion of Ray's experiences in Moscow. We have some additional topics to look back on. First would be the microwave incident that occurred, I believe in 1976, shortly after you began you first tour in Moscow.

BENSON: A little less than a year later, yes. It was under Ambassador Walter Stoessel. The decision was made that the fact that the Soviets were beaming microwaves at the embassy for over a decade--may have been closer to 15 years, I can't recall exactly--that this was in danger of leaking, and rather than having it leak, it would be announced. Our side knew about this from the very beginning whenever they started it, because we measured. We had apparatus at the embassy that would measure--don't know how to put it--would react to, be aware of, such waves. This goes back at least to the early 1960s and there was a whole record of protests to the Soviets about this, who say they cannot imagine how this could have happened. The embassy would point out that our apparatus had measured the locations--1, 2, 3, 4, whatever they were, they had names--and the strength of these microwaves. The Soviets will say they can't imagine how we could be in such error about what was going on, and this went on for that length of time.

Q: What was the presumed purpose of the microwaves they were beaming?

BENSON: The presumed purpose, as far as I know it--there may have been a final determination at one point but I don't know that--the presumed purpose was to interfere with our (a) transmissions and (b) monitoring of ambient messages in Moscow.

Q: In a sense it was jamming of your communications?

BENSON: That was one of the possible, if not even probable, uses of the microwave. The third possibility, which was mentioned, is that it can be very damaging of health and that it was an attempt to sicken the embassy. The microwaves were directed at the upper floors of the embassy. That's where our communications were. That's where the attaché's office was with its communications, and that's where, it was presumed, our inward communications, i.e., our listening on the Soviets, was located.

Q: Was there any evidence of people actually being sickened by this?

BENSON: Well, that's a very, very big and long story. There were data which showed that the females, women, who worked in the upper floors of the embassy, notably in the Defense attaché's office, where spouses, who had clerical skills, would be employed. Among this group there was an unusual concentration of breast cancer among such women, if you took the data back awhile. There were other more anecdotal—the breast cancer could be determined statistically--but there were other, more anecdotal, evidence from people who had served in the embassy. For example, my predecessor, David Nalle, reported, as this was made public, that he felt headaches, insomnia, tension as you were trying to go to sleep--therefore insomnia--restlessness. This was, of course, public information as one of the effects of microwaves, and he reported that he had suffered from just that in the last two years of his tour. He had a four-year tour prior to mine. He had my office, and his desk, as mine, was across the wall from one of the major sources. It was a shack on the building across Tchaikovsky Street...

Q: Which was the main drag out in front of the embassy.

BENSON: Yes, that's what it was called at that time. There's a new name now, don't know what it is, but it was Tchaikovsky Street, and there was a shack on the roof of the large apartment house across the street which was, we had determined, one of the sources of the microwaves.

You might as well put on the list of things you want to ask about, the tunnel. These were exciting days. This was the second tour. We had a great deal of concern expressed by the people at the embassy and by people who had served there for many tours over the years. There were, of course, legitimate accusations that the State Department didn't pay sufficient attention to the possible health effects of these microwaves on the employees. There was research which was adduced showing that microwaves can be injurious to your health. In due course, there was a medical survey that the State Department initiated trying to get data from people who served in Moscow and from people who were in Moscow on the effects on them, what ailed them if anything, what was their medical history. There were experts whom the State Department hired who came out to Moscow to talk with us. The basic message of all of this was not quite that microwaves were good for you but it was almost that. Some of us at the embassy were rather furious at the whole effort, and yet what could one say? Are we right? Are they right? What do we know? This went on for a long time. We were all subject to very frequent blood tests. We all became amateur hematologists. We would sit in the snack bar and ask each other, "How are your eosinophils [Ed: white blood cells that are one of the immune system's components] today?" There was all manner of testing. We were encouraged to have blood tests more frequently for years to come. Leukemia was a possible effect.

Q: Was that only feared, or was there any evidence of it?

BENSON: Well, you know, all of us got finally some paper or other on--I think it was Johns Hopkins, the epidemiological folk, were hired to collect all the surveys, collect all the data that could be collected, and to come up with a judgment. And the judgment that we were allowed to see, I suppose--let's not say there was any other--but the result of the survey was the there is nothing they can lay their hand on. [Ed: see http://www.scribd.com/doc/13616226/The-Moscow-Embassy-incident]

Q: How did this come to a head in February 1976?

BENSON: Well, all I know is that there was good evidence that it was about to leak. It could have been to a Congressman or the press, I'm not sure, but a door was about to open.

Q: And then there would be a scandal because the State Department presumably hadn't taken the problem seriously enough.

BENSON: Well, had taken it seriously, you could show there was evidence of how many times they had complained, but they hadn't made it public and tried to use the weight of that revelation as a pressure against the Soviets and, therefore, to help terminate it. In fact

that's what happened in February 1976. In fact, I did not attend that first press conference. Ambassador Stoessel called me to his office and said we were supposed to go off this evening to Minsk with Senator Ed Brook to open the USIS exhibit there. "I'm going to have a press conference tomorrow. I will not go to Minsk. You probably have some remarks." I did." He said, "Expand them by a paragraph, introduce Brook, and you two will open the exhibit." Brook was the honored speaker. We would just do the introduction. And then he told me what was going to happen, and it did happen. I wasn't there for the outcry which the press made. "How come...?" and so on and so forth.

Q: Shall we go on to the next little crisis you had in 1977 with the fire at the embassy?

BENSON: That was an interesting one. It happened in the summer, I think July, of 1977. A fire broke out. It was on the upper floors down the hall from my office on a Friday evening. The economics counselor, who had a large office at the end of the hall, left his coffeepot on. He left the electric coil-wire heating unit under the coffeepot on, and it burned a hole in the floor and started a fire. The embassy was essentially closed and empty. And as you know the American embassy there--we're talking about the eighth floor--the flames went up the eighth, ninth, tenth, and then you have the mansard or the attic in which there was a lot of equipment, and then you have the roof on which there was a lot of equipment. The fire went up, which is a normal thing. It burned down too, but basically it went up. The Soviets had in Moscow some extremely up-to-date equipment. The fire department in the Soviet Union--I have no idea what it is now--was a unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Q: The Ministry of Internal Affairs, of course, was the uniformed police.

BENSON: The uniformed police, yes. Very serious business, the uniformed policy in the Soviet Union, and they had an amazing, it turned out, amount of data on the interior construction of the American embassy. These were the days when the char force, Soviet char force would clean the eighth floor and the ninth floor, not the tenth or the attic--no, seventh, eighth, and ninth.

Q: They'd clean the secret area, but not the top secret area.

BENSON: Well, we had top secret in our safes too. But accompanied on their rounds by Marines. But the location of every piece of furniture and every safe and who sat where was available to the Ministry of Interior on a map, or a plan. Well, the fire broke out, the fire was hot, and the fire moved down the halls of the embassy, moved down the hall of the eighth floor away from the economics counselor's office. The hall had just been refurbished, with plywood wall panels which were separated from the old wall by one-by-two boards, so there was a hollow space between the new plywood wall panels, which had a wood-grain veneer. There was a one-inch space between this plywood panel and the old wall.

Q: Just right for the fire to move through.

BENSON: Precisely what happened. It roared down the hall. This was *post factum* analysis. Well, pretty soon the flames were licking out of the top floor windows. The police cordoned off the street. Muscovites gathered. People were evacuated from their housing areas, like we from the north wing were all on the sidewalk, were all in the street, looking up. Water was being poured in enormous quantities into the embassy. In fact, cascaded down the inside of the building. As you are aware, half of the damage of a fire is the water damage. It took out the seventh, the sixth, and the fifth floors, which were at that time residences for the senior attaché staff. All of their clothes were ruined, all of the furniture ruined. There was a point here with Ambassador Toon had to make a decision about whether to invite the Soviet fire fighters into the embassy. They told him that the building was going to be devoured totally if they were not allowed to go in with their pickaxes and do the right thing, break it apart. They would go in with hoses, up the staircase all the way. After a bit he decided to let them in, which he was quite criticized for later, because the floors affected were all the classified floors.

They went in with representatives of the embassy's security staff and chief administrative officers and did not go into the tenth floor and the attic. They did go into the lower floors, seventh, eighth, ninth, and kept the fire from going down. They shot a lot of water up above, and they shot water from these enormous stepladders they had, also up above, that came down so the top floors eventually the fire was put out leaving gaping holes in the roof. As soon as daybreak came, lo and behold, there were helicopters hovering over the embassy taking pictures of everything they could. It was amazing, Bill. As the fire was put out and they evacuated the area, several of us went up to the top floors, those of us who were not earlier escorts of the fire folk. It was carnage. I have pictures of my melted typewriter. I was one of the persons at the embassy who reported losses. On the left top desk drawer I had a series of small address books and appointment books which went back to my previous tours. I always did that because I could keep up with my friends and things like that. The top two books were missing; both covered contacts from my Turkish tour. They were gone.

Q: Oh, do you presume they were lifted by one of the Soviet fire fighters?

BENSON: Oh, yes, of course they were lifted. They were there earlier Friday, and they weren't there in the wee hours of Saturday morning. Toon took a certain amount of guff but not seriously. I was unaware that anything of true classified worth was missing. Saturday morning we had no communications. By Saturday night we had communications. It was the most amazing thing I ever saw in my life. Where they came from, I think Frankfurt, with a--I forget the name of the kit, something like 'go ready' or whatever.

Q: Oh, you mean some American personnel came flying in that day?

BENSON: Absolutely, either that day or the next, but I think that day. They set up--it was an absolute miracle--in what used to be the basement mail room a jerry-rigged series of apparatuses that sufficed to put the embassy on line so that it could both receive and send encrypted material. Then we sorted out the problem of what to do. The USIS offices on

the top, in other words those that were around my office, the classified offices, were totally unusable. So we moved down into the USIS downstairs offices on the first floor. We moved in eight Americans and two ticker machines, one the TASS ticker and the other the AP (Associated Press) ticker. We assumed we were going to be there for four months. We were there for a little over a year. Our office moved out three Soviet employees which were crammed into closets and things like that. They read the newspapers and that sort of things, not very much more. Eight of us, including myself--I was a PAO--and seven others from the top floor moved into that space. It was absolutely unbelievable, and it was a fine hour for the people who worked under those conditions. They could not replace certain wiring until the whole building would be rewired. I never had a phone that allowed me to connect with my secretary for all those months. I had to yell through the door, "Matilda!" Several of the assistant officers worked on their laps. Amazing.

Q: But this illustrates how people in a difficult post like that under adversity will pull together.

BENSON: Absolutely. Whether it illustrates anything about the American character--where if a barn burns down the community rallies behind to help that farmer to put up a new barn--I would be willing to say yes. It was a fine period in the embassy's life, and we ended up with better offices.

Q: Now, the problems of security continued to plague the embassy. I recall one or more episodes involving Marine guards.

BENSON: Let me talk about that in a minute, but go back to the period under the heading of security, the period after the fire. We had one break-in that I will call immediately to your attention. It was of the Pentecostals.

Q: Oh, these were Russian Pentecostals who were seeking political asylum and camped out in the embassy starting on June 27, 1978.

BENSON: About eight of them. The embassy at that time had open arches, which you recall, for vehicular traffic. The Soviet guard would be walking up and down the sidewalk outside. With Marine guard under the archway, in the archway, not standing there looking out from the archway to the sidewalk. Eight of these people somehow or other got right by the Soviet and passed the Marine, took the first door to the right and, lo and behold, they were in the waiting room of the consulate. There were some doors to the right, and that was our offices where all of the USIS staff. As I said, three Soviets out, eight Americans in. That's where we were after the fire.

So there they were and they sat in the consulate on the leather benches, crammed next to each other, reading their Bibles to each other. We didn't know quite what to do, I mean 'we' the embassy not 'we' USIS. Various officers came down and tried to talk them out of the embassy: "This is no way that you're going to get to the United States." They wouldn't budge.

Q: However, having gotten as far as they did would mean immediate arrest if they left the embassy.

BENSON: They knew that, yes, and so they stayed there. Gradually some of the Evangelists, or some of those of the Evangelical Church persuasion in the embassy, led by the Baptists, created a duty roster to bring food and drink to these people and, of an evening when the consulate would be locked up, to come down and pray with them. This went on for weeks and months. Ambassador Toon was terribly frustrated. He would not grab them and throw them out. He tried to reason them out. People from the consular office and from the political office would talk with them and reason with them. They didn't budge. Finally space was found within the embassy. There was a small apartment, a studio apartment, for the courier who brought in the classified pouch to overnight for a day or two. It had a tiny little gas stove, or electric stove, and it had a shower, and it had a john and a bed and an easy chair. And into this studio they moved eight people. It was called the dungeon because it had a small window opening onto the sidewalk about eight inches high and two feet long and bars on the window. So they were now out of the consulate, but here they were in the dungeon. State Department assigned a small amount of money to the embassy to pay for food, so individual officers in the embassy were no longer on a duty roster. They were fed by the embassy snack bar. Eventually the barber's office--there was a Russian woman who was the barber--next door to this apartment was taken from her and she was put elsewhere, and the apartment was expanded to be a little larger. To come to the end of the story, they did not leave until 1983. They were there for five years. When we came in on our second tour, they were gone. They had left that morning and immigrated to the U.S..

One could go into what one knows of the negotiations with the Soviets to let them out. An important role was played by Olin Robinson, again, of Middlebury. He was asked by the State Department, because of his Baptist Church connections, to come in and deal with the Soviet authorities who were, shall we say, in liaison with the Russian Church. He did that, and it was not to any effect.

Q: The solution to let them out of the country must have occurred before the Korean airliner incident in 1983, which would have soured relations?

BENSON: Oh yes. KAL occurred the night of October 30 to September first. This occurred in June and was the product of much diplomatic negotiation.

Q: Do I recall another episode of someone getting in the embassy and taking asylum, or am I thinking of another country?

BENSON: There were two incidents which occurred in 1979. By then we have now left our temporary quarters down there next to the consulate and were back up in the remodeled eighth floor. Somebody came into the consular section, now expanded in space, and announced that he had an explosive device attached to his belt, he flashed the device, and he would go to the United States through the courtesy of the embassy or he

would blow himself and them up. Well, this went on for quite a while. The press somehow or other, bless their hearts, the American Press, heard about this. They gathered. We are getting calls upstairs in my office for a statement by the embassy on this. We were in touch with Ambassador Toon, who says, "For now, no comment." He was in touch with the Soviet authorities. I cannot say that I had then perfect knowledge or that I have now perfect recollection, but later in the evening--the weather was warm, the temperature's pretty summery--the press is gathered in the inner courtyard of the embassy. I and my staff are trying to hold them back. Looking straight ahead are the windows of the consular general. It's in the north wing, the first floor. Mac Toon invited into the embassy to that point either a sharpshooter or two sharpshooters from the Ministry of Interior, who crawled along the protruding stone baseboard, of the embassy and fired into the inner room where this fellow was holding several senior officers hostage. They did not, to my recollection, kill him but they wounded him badly, and his apparatus went off, and wounded him further, but it was not sufficient to hurt other people. He was taken out and given to the Soviets. Did we know what happened? I certainly do not. The place smelled of teargas for a long time.

The second event was in perhaps May when I and the DCM, who was by then Mark Garrison, were going to go off to Novgorod. As he on the third floor and my wife and I on the eighth floor--or were we on the seventh?--were preparing to pack our bags, there were several sharp noises down in the embassy courtyard which sounded like backfires. We all looked out, and there was quite a scene there, so we tore down the stairs. In the courtyard was a taxi. There was a guy. He had come here in a taxi by placing a revolver against the back of the driver's neck, and he said, "Into the embassy you will go." The guy said, "I can't do that. What is the alternative?" So the guy came down Tchaikovsky Street, gunned his taxi, went right through the archway past the astounded Marines. Have to make a fast left there. He did and came up against the wall between the embassy and the other apartment building. As the car crashed into it, the guy jumped out of the back seat with his pistols and fired them at the wall of the embassy and waited to be apprehended. What he had was apparently a very valuable set of 19th century double-barreled fowling pieces, and he had shot a bunch of shotgun shells from these fowling pieces against the embassy wall. Well, Mark Garrison and I were standing around, and he called Mac Toon, and Mac, who was really very cool, said, "Have the Marines escort the man out of our building." Mark said, "We're already working on that, sir." And, in fact, the fellow very shortly, surrounded by the Marines who didn't lay a hand on him--I should say, everything having happened as it did--rather meekly walked out. Mark calls the Ambassador and says, "Sir, request your permission to continue with the trip with Ray Benson." And he says, "Go ahead. Novgorod's a wonderful city." So off we went.

Q: Can you tell us about the tunnel episode during your second tour of duty in Moscow?

BENSON: The tunnel episode was very widely reported in the American press. It came to pass that the CBs (Navy Construction Battalion workers) were contracted by the State Department to provide certain expert, highly cleared obviously, maintenance people. These were people who would be able to repair complicated communications equipment, but they would also be able to paint and plaster in classified offices. Here we are not

talking about classified offices, and maybe if memory serves, they would also employ the sons of some Foreign Service Officers to do routine painting of bachelor officer apartments in the south wing of the embassy. As I recall the story, they had finished a wall or two and were sitting on the floor enjoying a sandwich and a Coke and talking about the security perils of living in the embassy and listening devices and so on. One of them says to another one, "You know, if you see on the wall, for example, a little black spot, it could very well be the end of a wire, and that wire could very well be a point of reception for an apparatus which is a little further along so that sound, speech and so on can be transmitted to this apparatus." As they were sitting there, this one guy says to the other, "You know, I'm looking at the radiator, and that's a perfect place to have such a wire, and I am looking at a black spot behind that radiator. It can't be, can it?" And so they walk over, and damned if it wasn't a wire.

They quickly brought reinforcements in there and traced the wire through the wall to a nonfunctioning chimney, because these south wing apartments had been part of the apartment structure which was basically Soviet. And the chimney went downstairs to a boiler as part of the heating system for this wing of the apartment complex before we took over this part of it. Having taken over this part of it, the chimney was no longer functioning. It was a huge chimney. Inside of it there was a staircase, or stepladder, protruding rungs. If you find the proper issue of Newsweek or Time, you'll find all this described with pictures and everything. Well, it may have taken more than a day, but they cut their way through. How they camouflaged with all of the people who were listening, I have no idea. They worked their way into the chimney, they came down the chimney, they moved along a hall into the basement of the nearby apartment building, and found themselves face to face with several people with earphones and battery devices, a very proper listening room. Well, what shall I say? Diplomatic protests, news stories. We cleaned up our act on that wall. The whole building was thoroughly inspected. Now, in this effort to get to the bottom of it, there was a lot of digging. You go down the chimney and then you have to dig through...

Q: Roughly when was this episode with the chimney?

BENSON: This would have been probably 1984. I think it was 1984. There was a lot of earth that was piled up outside near the staircases on the south wing. I came home from a trip out of town, saw the earth and asked someone and that is how I became aware of some but not the whole story. Then I soon became aware of the whole story as I talked to people in the security office.

Q: This is June 19th 2000, afternoon. We are continuing on the review of certain special episodes in Ray Benson's Moscow tours of duty, now finishing the story of the bugging that was discovered through a chimney and tunnel in 1984.

BENSON: Early in the morning very soon after I came back from this trip and became aware of what was happening out there, there was a ring on our doorbell, and standing out there leaning on the door jamb was Kevin Close of The Washington Post and Dan

Fisher of the Los Angeles Times, both of them very new in Moscow, very young and tall, good-looking guys, superb.

They said--I think it was Kevin who said, "All right, Ray, what's going on out there with the tunnel?" I can't remember what I said then and how the story played out. I know that pretty soon everybody became aware of it, it was in all the papers, protests were made, guilt was denied. We patched up our walls and made sure there was nothing sticking into them that would lead to any Soviet listening apparatuses.

Q: There was also some security problem involving the Marine guards.

BENSON: Well, that would have been in 1986, because there were still Soviet employees at the embassy. There were two Marine guards who were accused of having become involved with local female employees in our embassy and of having succumbed to temptation, including giving these women, especially one, I guess, materials from safes that they were monitoring as part of their responsibilities, the safe they would open and close. Details are a little remote in my memory. I can't remember exactly. It was, of course, a terrible time.

It was 1986. I now recall that one of the Marines had been transferred to Vienna, but had on temporary assignment gone to the Summit in Geneva. It was he who couldn't bear it any longer and made a clean breast of it with the security officer in Vienna. One was acquitted of responsibility. One went to prison. I think he is now released. He was a Native American, which is irrelevant except that much was made of it because he was the one who went to prison. The other guy was released, that is to say was not prosecuted. It helped create the climate of heightening concern for security which came to a head later in 1986 when, I think it was in October, the Soviets removed all Soviet employees from the embassy overnight. They didn't appear for work one day.

This was in retaliation for the United States government's asking the Soviet embassy to remove from the United States an awful lot--my recollection it was in the 40s, maybe 50--Soviet citizens who were doing various things--could have been newsmen or tourist people--in the United States including some so-called lower-ranking employees of the Soviet embassy in the United States.

Let's say "so called" because they might have been senior officers of the KGB who were driving vehicles around. They were given access to running around town in a way that others would be followed more closely. In any event, we at the embassy on this given morning suddenly had nobody, no char force, no chauffeurs, no customs expediters or travel people, nobody buying tickets, nobody helping in the mail room hauling mail sacks and so on. The word came at a time when my wife and I were in Helsinki on unclassified pouch courier duty. Twice a week somebody from Moscow went to Helsinki by train and came back by train with the unclassified pouches, which were mostly mail for embassy personnel. But we were called in the morning and were told to come back on schedule, but don't worry about accompanying any bags because there wouldn't be any bags because we couldn't figure out how to have trucks driven to the railroad station and we

didn't even know the procedure for presenting unclassified pouch customs clearance papers because the Soviet employees had been doing it all these years. We were told what had happened and "come back and we'll all talk about it together," so we came back without any bags.

The embassy had to go into sort of Plan B. Duty rosters were set up which people were assigned to different tasks in addition to the regular work they were doing, tasks which had been accomplished by Soviet employees including mopping floors and cleaning windows and cleaning toilets and sinks and carrying equipment in the back yard and driving, chauffeuring, repairing motors, clearing things at the customs shed and the airport and so on and so forth. This went on for months and months. We were all assigned to specific tasks. Mine was on the ground floor doing halls and the bathrooms off of the hall; that's what I did, from the consular office bathrooms through the hall. My mind goes back now; I can count the bathrooms for you, but I won't. I was very proud of doing a good job. It was in a way the embassy's finest hour. It again illustrates a point that you have made on several occasions about the sense of community which a time of stress can engender, which has to be there if you're going to keep on functioning. Again, it was a wonderful show by professional Foreign Service officers. Art Hartman was the ambassador. Everything had to be done, vacuuming of the carpets; it goes on and on and on.

Q: How was it finally resolved to get the staff back?

BENSON: Well, I'm trying to think. I do not think that in our day--we left in July of 1987—the char force had returned to duty. We still had no Russian staff. In fact, by then various of functions at the embassy had been contracted out to American firms, Pacific Engineering or Boeing.

Q: I've always wondered since my first experience in Moscow--that goes back about 45 years--why in a country like the Soviet Union we would hire locals to do all kinds of embassy jobs whereas over here the Soviets would only bring Soviets to do work in their embassy. Was there an inherent security problem?

BENSON: Of course there was. There was an inherent security problem. There's no question about it. It was foolish.

Q: But this has been a practice throughout the American foreign diplomatic missions to employ locals for any kind of non-sensitive and non-specialist job. One other episode I want to ask about if we can get it on this tape, and that is the problem of the new embassy building in Moscow and the bugging that was discovered built into the structure.

BENSON: Well, that's a statement of the fact. I cannot remember a date. I would imagine it was in 1986. It was certainly playing out in 1987 as we left this assignment in the summer of 1987. The new embassy was being put up finally. Sophisticated means of testing the security of this building discovered that the new embassy, which was in the center of the complex surrounded by townhouse and a low-lying building in which there

would be two theaters and an exhibit area and the consular section, this building which was in the center was riddled with bugs, many of which had been implanted in the steel construction beams. The framework of the building was riveted steel I-beams, which we had contracted from the Soviets. We had bought cement from them; they poured it.

Which reminds me--I'll put it in right here--of a story I got from a friend of mine who was in Poland at the time when we were building a new embassy there. Part of the contract there was that we would pour the concrete, they would not. Our workers would appear in the morning to discover that six inches of concrete had been poured overnight, which we would then remove, and all sorts of fancy little bugs would be pulled out. The Poles would be scolded. They would say, "Can't understand how this happened." Very tediously the embassy went up, after which, again, sophisticated means of counter surveillance were brought in and discovered the walls were just ridden with the kind of wire, which was a transmitting wire, that I have described a few moments ago as having been found in Moscow.

This experience notwithstanding, we were very, by my likes, very careless in Moscow, which is even a more severe security environment. The new embassy was finally declared not useful, and to my understanding, to this point it has not been remodeled, refurbished so that it is. They were scraping out the insides and getting rid of a lot of stuff and analyzing carefully whatever they hauled out, but the embassy is still in its old quarters. I don't have more in detail about that episode. It added to the whole sense of being beleaguered.

I should speak about the IBM typewriters, which at one point we had ordered a bunch of for the embassy, very sophisticated machines, you know, that had memory and all of that. This is the last step before the personal computer was brought to us. Through analyzing certain behavior on the Soviet side, it was concluded that the messages typed on these typewriters were being read. It was finally determined that somehow or other between the IBM factory and receipt in the embassy, the most fine and small and sophisticated apparatuses had been inserted so that everything you typed could be read.

Well, what to do? Well, what to do is put all typewriters within the secure rooms. You know, the embassy had many of them, though we had not used them to put the secretaries in with these machines, but that's what happened.

Q: In the secure rooms then whatever signal came out of the typewriter could not be picked up from the outside?

BENSON: Well, the first thing you do is remove these devices. Once you've discovered one, you know how to find all of them, then have, you hope, clearer typewriters. But from the on, classified information was typed in those rooms. The rooms were used for dictating. You couldn't dictate anything classified outside of those rooms, or for conferences, one-on-one discussions and so on. But we had not seen them as a typing pool. My recollection is that a large room was brought in, one of these new ones, and put up near the political section and a bunch of typewriters were placed in there. It created--

you can see all of these things together--an atmosphere of being beleaguered in security terms, which I guess we always had been.

Q: It's a little paradoxical that your sense of being beleaguered in the security matters was getting even worse in 1985-1986 after Gorbachev had come in and after you were scoring breakthroughs in the negotiation of the exchange agreement and getting academic exchanges moving.

BENSON: Yes, there is not here in my view a contradiction, because the search by one side for a more sophisticated way of becoming aware of what the other side was doing, thinking, writing, receiving, sending, went on and continues today. It is not sensible to think that it stopped at any time. Means of surveillance would jump ahead of means of apprehending the means of surveillance, and then the latter would jump ahead. Technology was a wonderful thing, and it's probably going on at this minute at a level that maybe one side or the other side doesn't know anything about, but so it goes.

Q: One more question in another matter is, particularly in Moscow, the relations that you had with other diplomatic missions and your counterparts and information services as to the problems you shared in dealing with the Soviets and common insights that you may have developed.

BENSON: Well, with your indulgence, we'll fill this in later. I won't limit myself to Moscow, because this is inevitably an important aspect of any embassy's work and of any embassy sections' work, which is the liaison with other diplomatic missions both of friendly countries, NATO, or neutral, or those which are not inherently friendly. Yugoslavia, way back when in the late 1950s, 1960s and so on, we had very warm relations with the British Council, with Goethe Institute, the German equivalent that is. It was not a major part or a contributing aspect of what we did. When the Yugoslav press law of 1960 was enunciated and a compromise agreement was reached with the Yugoslav authorities in Belgrade--I was in Zagreb--on how we could work in Yugoslavia, the close relations between the British information people, the Canadians, and our USIS offices in Belgrade were crucial. They played no role in Zagreb. In Hamburg, we say in German, "*Spielt keine" "*no effect."

In Turkey some of the warmest and most pleasant interpersonal encounters were with representatives of other embassies, British Council. They weren't crucial for our work. They were just an attribute of being in the Foreign Service which added immeasurably. My recollection could be flogged a little bit to bring in names, but it wouldn't add anything substantive. In Moscow I found in the 1970s that there were only a few people who were really involved with the society enough, to the extent that some of us were on the American side, that made them interesting interlocutors. Very few embassies, you must realize, had programs like ours, so our contacts were immeasurably richer. I had a staff that was as large as some embassies, just trying to do USIS-like work. But there were individuals, such as a gentleman who was the Austrian cultural attaché--I cannot remember his name who in the 1970s was a remarkably well connected person. He was interested in where in his Moscow work. I quickly found out that there was this guy, and

we shared an enormous amount of information, he and I. He was doing the kind of reporting that I said to you earlier Jack Matlock stimulated me to do on behalf of the Austrian Foreign Office. I don't know if they cared. But he knew people in the cultural area. The Germans were good. We really didn't need them to explain things Russian, to make a selfish point, because the most attractive foreign country, the most attractive representatives in the diplomatic world, for the Soviets were the Americans. Some Russians had contacts in Germany, some had contacts in Frances, and there was Italy and so on and so forth, but by and large it was the United States. I don't know if that answers your question. I know that when we were negotiating for all those months, which I have spoken about, when the other embassies became aware of what we were doing, they wanted a briefing on what we were doing. Of course, we couldn't do very much of that. It would not have been very useful, when we weren't reaching an agreement on certain points, to tell them what they were, lest one way or the other that we were talking to the British about it would get back to the Soviets. So it was only when it was all over really did we effectively brief the other embassies. I don't know if that gets at what you are interested in, Bill.

Q: I think the answer is that, other than social contacts, there really wasn't much of program substance that you derived from your contacts with other missions.

[For a general history of USIA, from the ADST-DACOR Diplomats and Diplomacy series we recommend: Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., Inventing Public Diplomacy: The Story of the U.S. Information Agency. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004)]

End of interview