

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

**MERRITT N. COOTES**

*Interviewed by: Lillian Peters Mullin*  
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Background	
Born and raised in Virginia of military family	
Lived in France	
Princeton University	
Entered Foreign Service in 1931	
Port-au Prince, Haiti	1932
Consular officer	
Marine occupation	
Hong Kong	1933-1937
Consular officer	
Shipping	
Temporary duty Manila, Philippine	1935
Temporary duty Saigon, Vietnam	1936
Port-au Prince	1937-1940
Situation	
Moraud de St. Marie	
Rome, Italy	1940-1942
Political officer	
War declared	
German pressure	
Pearl Harbor	
Diplomatic exchange of staff	
Lisbon	1942-1944
Political officer	
Wartime functions	
“Jelly fist” story	
Travels to wartime London	

	Mussolini's overthrow	
EUR	Eastern European affairs Russian language studies at Cornell	1944-1945
Moscow, USSR	Administrative duties Living and working in Moscow	1945-1946
Pakistan	Lahore, consular officer Karachi, public affairs and consular officer	1946-1950
Trieste, Italy	Allied military government Free territory of Trieste	1950-1952
EUR	Swiss-Benelux affairs	1952-1955
Algiers, Algeria	Consul French v. Arabs De Gaulle The Berbers	1955-1958
Florence, Italy	Consul General Operations University of Bologna and Johns Hopkins University Communist Party	1958-1959
Retirement	The Florence Committee – 1959-1966	

## INTERVIEW

*Q: This is an interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies oral history collection. The interviewer is Lillian Peters Mullin. Interviewed today, September 27, 1991, is retired Foreign Service Officer Merritt Cootes. He will begin by telling us something about his early years.*

*Tell us, Mr. Cootes, where you were born and a bit about yourself--your parents, where you were raised and went to school, why you chose your university and the courses you took, and how you happened to be interested in the Foreign Service.*

COOTES: I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, on March 11, 1909. My father was a career Army officer who had been assigned as one of the aides at the Jamestown [VA] exposition of 1906 (300th anniversary). One day in Norfolk he ran into his ex-"rat" [former roommate] from VMI [Virginia Military Institute], who greeted him and said to be sure and come to a party that a cousin of his was giving that evening. The cousin was Mary Louise Cooke. Colonel Harry--he wasn't colonel then, he was Capt. Harry Cootes--and Mary Louise Cooke struck it off, and they finally got married in 1908. Around 1915 my father was sent down to the Mexican border. Pancho Villa was then raising cain in Mexico. My father was stationed on the Mexican border. That left my mother--she the eldest of three daughters--with a move, as she described it, from second floor front to third floor back, with two children. Father was still down on the border.

I lived for the first eight years of my life [1908-1916] with my grandfather and grandmother in Norfolk. Then we moved to Washington [D. C.]. Father was assigned to Camp Dix, as it was called in those days. It is now Fort Dix, in New Jersey. By that time he was chief of staff of the 78th Division, which was being formed in New Jersey. He was living with Mr. Hutchinson at Georgetown. Mr. Hutchinson had a little boy who was the same age as I was. One day he said, "Colonel Cootes, I'm going to my class reunion at Princeton [University]. I'm taking my little son. He's the age of your son. Would you like to go along?" So I went to the Princeton reunion, with the parades and all the rest of it. Of course, it made a rather unforgettable impression on a young child. So when the question came up about deciding about colleges--my mother, who had always advocated that I go to a Southern school and a Northern college--I naturally thought of Princeton. And that's how I ended up in the Class of 1931 at Princeton, after having graduated from Woodberry-Forrest prep in Orange, VA.

During World War I my father served in France with Gen. Hugh L. Scott in the 78th Division. After the war my father was assigned to Ft. Myer, just across the Potomac River from Washington, D. C. My sister and I went to school in Washington. Then we were taken abroad because my mother decided that my sister and I should have some foreign experience. My mother's sister was married to a French doctor, whom she had met during World War I, a popular war. All the male arts students on the Left Bank in Paris had joined the Zouaves in 1914 and were promptly shot down by the Germans because they wore those distinctive red trousers. The girls studying art became nurses in French military hospitals. So Aunt Kate worked for four years in the French military hospitals and ended up by marrying Dr. Jules P.L. Lechaux, who was from Le Havre [Normandy].

My sister and I were taken over to France in the winter of 1922. Then our mother had to come back to the U. S. because her mother had had an accident with a gas burner in a bathroom. I was left with my Aunt Kate. The Lechaux's then had no children, and it was decided that I would stay with them. So I stayed with them for the next three years and was raised in a French household. Naturally, I was raised, speaking French.

Then my father was assigned as Military Attaché in Vienna, so I went and lived in Vienna and went to the Schottengymnasium. Being quite young at that time, I picked up German, along with my "lederhosen" and my "gemsbar" on my hat.

After two years with my father, I entered Princeton. When it came time to choose a major, I naturally chose modern languages. It was rather what we called "hopping the gut"--meaning, taking easy courses for me, because I spoke both French and German, probably better than most of my instructors.

Having had this foreign experience, it was quite natural that I would want to join the Foreign Service. After graduating from Princeton I had been accepted at Harvard Law School, but father said, "Merritt, I've supported you long enough. Now, get out and earn some money. Why don't you go into the Foreign Service right now?" So, I did. I took the Foreign Service examination in 1931. Along with two other friends from Princeton who took the exam at the same time, we passed the written and eventually the oral exam. So I entered the Foreign Service in 1932.

*Q: What were the exams like? Were they the five-day exams that we had?*

COOTES: The exams were prepared at that time by a man named Joe Greene. Joe Greene had been a professor at Princeton, but he and another professor swapped wives. That didn't go down very well with the Faculty, so Mr. Greene was released by Princeton University. He was taken on by the State Department and, with his academic background, he was assigned to prepare the Foreign Service exams. He prepared the same kind of exams that I'd been taking at Princeton, and that's why the three of us sailed through with flying colors because we were used to that type of exam. They were essay type questions, rather than multiple choice exams, which I deplore. I think multiple choice exams are an abomination and the ruination of the writing ability of our younger generation. If you have a multiple choice, you just select one of the four answers you are given. Otherwise, in the case of essay type questions, you have to describe something and you have to write English.

After joining the Foreign Service my first assignment was to the Historical Division of the State Department.

*Q: When you joined the Foreign Service, they told you that you'd passed the written exam...*

COOTES: Then you had to take and pass the oral exam.

*Q: And the oral exam involved facing a panel?*

COOTES: Right. There were five people on the panel. You were shown in, introduced, and then they talked to you about various matters for a while. Then you said, "Thank you very much." And in about a month's time you were told whether you had passed the oral. We knew what the marks were on the written exam. But your average on the written and oral,

combined, had to be 80. After a month's delay the three of us were told that we had passed the oral and were eligible for appointment.

Q: *Who were the other two from Princeton?*

COOTES: There were two of them: Reg Carrie and John Ordway.

Q: *Ordway now lives in Vancouver [British Columbia, Canada].*

COOTES: Ordway is in Vancouver. Carrie has been, as we say in the South, "gathered " [died].

Q: *Was there a class that you attended?*

COOTES: In those days after you had been accepted, you were taken into the State Department. In my case I was assigned to the Historical Division. Normally, you were sent out to a post in a country near the U. S., because you had to pay your way to your first post. After nine months or a year you were brought back to the State Department and given a three months' course during which you were taught to do what you had been doing, relatively successfully, for the past year, anyhow.

Q: *So you had to pay your own way...*

COOTES: To your first post. They paid my way back, by the way.

Q: *Well, did they pay for your expenses? Did you get a salary?*

COOTES: Oh, yes. I was already in the Foreign Service, but they were going to wait until they decided on an assignment. So in the meantime they usually assigned new officers to a fairly nearby post.

Q: *Canada or the Caribbean or Mexico?*

COOTES: Something like that. In my case I was assigned to Haiti. In 1932 I went to Haiti, where I spent nine months before being brought back to the State Department to what was called the Diplomatic School.

Q: *There was a Diplomatic School?*

COOTES: Yes. There were 30 of us who took this three months' course, before going out into the field again.

Q: *Where was the State Department located when you entered?*

COOTES: In the State-War-Navy building, next to the White House. When my father was in the Army, he had an office in the State-War-Navy building. He used to have the horses brought to the mounting block by the Corcoran Art Gallery. Father would ride back to his home in Ft. Myer on horseback. So my father worked in the State-War-Navy building, where I later served in the State Department. As you know, its name has been changed. It is now the West Executive Building.

*Q: So when you came back from Haiti, where, I assume, you had junior officer duties...*

COOTES: Actually, I was in the Consular Office in Port-au-Prince, because we had a Legation and Consulate. The Consul, my first boss in the Foreign Service, was Donald Heath. Donald Heath was later transferred over to the Legation, and a man named Jarvis was sent there as Consul. I served under him for a time. Then I came back to the State Department to what they called the Foreign Service School. There were about 30 of us, I think, in the class, including: Homer Byington, Ted Achilles, Farnsworth, and Elbridge Durbrow. The first thing they had us do in this course was to ask us to draft a despatch. They told us, "You are in a mythical country. There is trouble going on, and you're to write a despatch describing the situation." This meant that we had to use the traditional opening lines of a despatch: "To the Honorable, the Secretary of State. I have the honor to be..." Then we signed it, "Your obedient servant." Well, Farnsworth was in my class and had learned to type somewhere along. The result was that he finished his draft very quickly and went off to the ball game. So I decided that I would have to learn to type. I pasted pieces of paper over the keys, memorized the keyboard, and taught myself to type. We studied the various areas of consular affairs, citizenship, protection, and all that stuff. Then we practiced drafting the various types of despatches that we were supposed to write. And after three months you were then assigned to the field.

*Q: Once again?*

COOTES: Once again, after finishing the course at the Foreign Service School.

*Q: Was the course in the...?*

COOTES: In the State Department, yes. In the building itself. We were there all day, beginning at 9:00 AM. Some of us finished early and were able to go to the ball game, while others stayed there and finished our work.

After this training course, I was assigned to Hong Kong. I remember vividly at that point going to the single transportation officer in the State Department. I think we now have a transportation section--I don't know how many people are employed there. But this was the single transportation officer. When I told him that I was going to Hong Kong, he looked up the schedule and said that if I left San Francisco on August 1, when a ship was scheduled to leave for that port, I would get to Hong Kong 28 days later. I thought, "Spend 28 days of my young life on a ship? I can't do that." But I did and served three years in the Consulate General in Hong Kong.

*Q: The State Department paid your transportation costs?*

COOTES: Oh, yes. They paid my transportation expenses back from Haiti to the State Department and then from the State Department to Hong Kong.

*Q: And when you got your salary, did you also get a housing allowance, or did that come out of your salary?*

COOTES: No, we did have a very modest housing allowance. But I remember that when I was in the course in the State Department, we would go down every two weeks and be paid in cash. The entering salary, when we were all commissioned as Vice Consuls and Third Secretaries, was \$2,500 a year. But, shortly after I entered the service, President Hoover decreed a moratorium on salaries. All officers receiving salaries were required to take one month's leave without pay. The Accounting Office said that they weren't going to take one month at the end of the year. They were going to deduct a portion from our salaries as we went along. So when I first entered the Foreign Service, I was earning the magnificent sum of \$2,500 a year, minus the eight percent that was deducted to cover a month without pay.

*Q: Of course, you didn't have to pay any income tax on that.*

COOTES: Oh, yes, we did. The income tax had hit us already. The income tax amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1913. So we paid--well, it wasn't very much, obviously. So here I was in Hong Kong. I served there under Douglas Jenkins, the first of my Consuls General. He was a very respected member of the Foreign Service. He had had duty in China and then was assigned to Hong Kong. Then he was transferred and Charles L. Hoover replaced him. He always claimed that he was responsible for the instruction from the Department saying that all officers would type their names under their signatures on letters and despatches because Mr. Hoover once got a letter back, in reply to one of his letters, addressed to "Elias P. Hoona." So the Department ordered that officers would type their names under their signatures.

*Q: So all despatches were sent on paper?*

COOTES: Oh, yes, because at that time there was no air service from Hong Kong, and cables were frightfully expensive. There was no telephone. A ship left every week, and it took 21 days from Hong Kong to San Francisco. So the mails were pretty slow. But all of our despatches went by mail--or pouch, rather. There were no couriers from the Consulate. We did have sealed bags that were dispatched. But all of the reports from the field were signed by, usually, the Consul General, unless it was something in the order of routine, administrative work. Then it could be signed by one of the Consuls.

*Q: But they were all typed?*

COOTES: Oh, Good Lord, yes.

*Q: They weren't written by hand?*

COOTES: No. Handwritten reports went out--I forget when. At one time I had to clear out the archives of the Consulate General in Hong Kong, and that involved a lot of handwritten correspondence, especially when the Consul General was the purchasing agent for Admiral Dewey, whose fleet was in the Philippines. At one point the Department instructed us to send back all of the despatches from before 1912. So I had to go through these reports and package them up. I found some perfectly fascinating things that were sent back. I don't know what happened to them, but...

*Q: If we could back up just a little bit. When you were in the Foreign Service School in Washington, were there any women in that class of 30? I think there were one or two women in the Foreign Service at that time.*

COOTES: Not at the time when I was there. That came later. I recall that a Ms. Wilkowski was one of the first women in the Foreign Service. When I entered the Foreign Service, there were no women then serving.

*Q: The first woman entered the Service in 1924, as I recall. I used to give a speech on that subject. [Laughter] I forget the details. But she was not in the Foreign Service when you came in. She married and left the Service before then--about 1932. I just wondered whether there were any other women...*

COOTES: There were no women in my class.

*Q: So when you went to Hong Kong, what was the makeup of the staff? There was the Consul General and how many others?*

COOTES: There was the Consul General, there was a Consul, and there were three Vice Consuls.

*Q: And these were all men, of course?*

COOTES: All men, yes.

*Q: And how about...*

COOTES: The local staff? I remember that the very dignified Consul General Jenkins called me in on a Friday and said, "On Monday I'll assign you to the shipping desk. You will be in the outer office there, where there are 10 Chinese employees. I have had to ask them not to smoke. I don't know what your smoking habits are, Mr. Cootes, but I hope that you will be able to conform." Well, he was such a wonderful, dignified person that there was no question in my mind. I never touched a cigarette in the office. Throughout my career



that practice continued. I never smoked in the office. So there were no dirty ashtrays on my desk.

*Q: Did we have any American staff--or was it all local staff?*

COOTES: In Hong Kong?

*Q: Yes.*

COOTES: Well, as I've told you, there was the Consul General, a Consul, and three Vice Consuls.

*Q: I mean, beside the officers, were there any staff personnel?*

COOTES: Yes, we had two young American women--the secretary of the Consul General and one other secretary to handle the correspondence of the Consul and the three Vice Consuls. The routine work of the Shipping Desk, where I served, was handled by the Chinese members of the staff.

*Q: So the Chinese members also did what we could call the admin work?*

COOTES: Oh, yes.

*Q: And they all spoke English?*

COOTES: Yes, very well. I began to study Chinese. I thought it was ridiculous to go to a country without knowing something about it. So I started studying and eventually reached the point where I could read 700 characters. But I then realized that you had to be able to read 1,100 characters to read a newspaper easily. By that time I knew that no matter how long I studied Chinese, the people in Hong Kong were going to speak better English than I could speak Chinese, so I gave it up. Also, of course, among the Chinese in Hong Kong there were many dialects: Fukkianese, Cantonese, Swatow...

*Q: And Mandarin?*

COOTES: Yes. The educated people spoke Mandarin, in addition to the local dialects. I decided that I would never be that fluent in Chinese, so I gave it up.

*Q: Tell us what was the major function of the Consulate General.*

COOTES: As I said, my first job at the Consulate General was on the Shipping Desk. The Shipping Desk was a lot more important in those days because, by law, the captain of an American vessel putting into a port had to come to the Consulate and deposit the ship's papers. Prior to sailing, he'd come to the Consulate again and pick up his papers. If any member of the crew had to be signed off, it had to be done before the Consul. If a new crew

member was signed on, it also had to be done before the Consul. On the Shipping Desk the Vice Consul had enough authority to do this. The big ships of the Dollar Line were the PRESIDENT COOLIDGE and the PRESIDENT HOOVER. The Dollar Line had a staff of 106 personnel. Naturally, the Dollar Line signed on Chinese mess boys and others in Hong Kong. So, I would go on board the ship, and these people would be signed on in my presence. Then I would certify that I had signed them on. A large number of the cabin and diningroom personnel on these ships--but also including some of the crew in the engine room and so forth--were Chinese from Hong Kong.

Another function of the Shipping Desk was the signing of Consular Invoices. In those days any goods imported into the United States had to be covered by a Consular Invoice. Hong Kong was a great port for exporting foodstuffs to the United States.

Q: *What kind of foodstuffs?*

COOTES: Vegetables, fruits...

Q: *Fruits?*

COOTES: That would stand 21 days at sea. And then, of course, dried fruits and rice. Of course, a lot of the rice came from Indochina, but much of it came from the area in South China near Hong Kong. I remember that on one of my first days on the Shipping Desk they brought me an invoice that was 100 pages long, with the details of what was included in that shipment, because Hong Kong was a big port for export to the United States. So shipping and signing on the crewmen and consular invoices were the major portion of that particular vice consul's job.

The number two man in the Consulate General, the Consul, usually was the economic officer. He did most of the economic reporting, and one of the vice consul's did whatever political reporting was required, under the supervision of the Consul General.

After I'd been there for a while, in 1935 the Commonwealth of the Philippines was scheduled to be established. The U. S. Government sent over a delegation composed of the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Vice President, John Nance Garner. This delegation of 16 from Congress came over to Hong Kong. In those days the Dollar Line used to stay over in Hong Kong for two days, ostensibly to favor the tourists who could go up to Canton or other places in China. Actually, the reason the ships stayed there was that they could get all of their maintenance work done with cheap Chinese labor in local shipyards. We had this delegation on our necks for two days. It was quite a job, entertaining them. Of course, we had very limited funds--I think the Consul General had the large sum of \$300 per year for entertainment. You can imagine how far that would go with a Congressional delegation. Of course, we had to have a reception to which the Governor, the senior military commander, the various Consuls and Consuls General, and important shipping people were invited. I remember that one of my sailing pals, a man who later

became the head of Jardine Matheson, one of the big shipping firms on the China coast, attended the reception for our delegation.

The Commonwealth of the Philippines had just been inaugurated, and it was given an immigration quota, covering Filipinos who wished to emigrate to the United States. Well, in those days the Oriental Exclusion Act was still in effect, and the quota for the whole of China was 100. That was the minimum quota granted to any country. It had been decided that the Philippine quota would be 50. But we needed a vice consul down in Manila to administer this immigration. The first man who held this position was Henry Day, who had been Vice Consul in Hong Kong with me. They sent him down to Manila from Hong Kong. As he was a very energetic officer, he added political reporting to his immigration duties, which previously had only been done through the Governor General's office or through the military. He wanted to take some leave, so he asked if I would come down to Manila. Well, I was coming down anyhow--my mother was going to visit there. So I was assigned to the Philippine Islands for one month, while Henry Day went off on leave.

I was just about to go back to Hong Kong when a cable came in on January 1, 1936. I said to Henry, "Oh, you can decode this thing tomorrow. Don't bother about it today." Henry said, "No, I think we'd better go down there right now." It's a good thing that we did, because the telegram covered my transfer to Saigon, to fill in for the Consul, Quincy Roberts, who had not been back to the U.S. for 17 years! In those days, if you took home leave, you paid your own way back to the U.S. and then to your post. Roberts decided that, rather than pay his way home from his previous posts in Fiji or Indonesia, he'd stay where he was. So he hadn't been home for 17 years. He wrote to the Department and asked that somebody be assigned to replace him. He received no answer and, three months later, he sent a telegram. That was unheard of in those days. So the answer was a telegram to me in Manila, ordering me to Saigon to take over while the Consul went on home leave. Finally, his home leave was paid, as a special consideration. So I spent seven months in Saigon. It was a one-man post. There were such posts in those days--they don't any more, as we all know.

Of course, when I arrived in Saigon on January 6, 1936, I thought that I would have to do all of the end of the year economic reporting. I thought that this was going to be a terrible burden. I knew nothing about Indochina--I barely knew where it was. But when I was met at the dock by Consul Quincy Roberts, he said, "Look, I've got all of my reports lined up. I didn't realize that I was going to get to go on leave so quickly. I've got all of that done. I'd suggest that you go up to Hanoi, because that's where the Governor General lives. You can establish contact with the office of the Governor General and the Customs, Police, and all of the rest of the officials. So if anything happens while you're down in Saigon, you will have your contacts up at headquarters in Hanoi." At that time Indochina effectively belonged to the French. Cochin China [now southern Vietnam] actually belonged to France, by treaty. Annam [now central Vietnam], Cambodia, and Tonkin [now northern Vietnam] were French protectorates. For some reason the capital was established in Hanoi, rather than Saigon, although Cochin China was the wealthy part of Indochina, where the rice exports were produced. So I stayed there for seven months...

Q: *In Saigon?*

COOTES: In Saigon.

Q: *How did you get to Hanoi--by train?*

COOTES: By ship from the Philippines, from Manila. I went from Manila to Saigon, and then, when I returned to Hong Kong, it was by ship from Saigon to Hong Kong.

Q: *I just wondered how you got to Hanoi from Saigon.*

COOTES: I went part of the way by train, but the railroad had not been completed. So after traveling by train some distance we all got off and onto buses and traveled something like two hours by bus to Nha Trang. From Nha Trang we took the train to Hue and so up to Hanoi.

Q: *I see.*

COOTES: When I was in Hanoi, I met the Frenchman who was the agent for Chrysler cars. He said that he had just taken delivery on some automobiles which he had to drive down to Saigon. Since I was going back to Saigon, would I drive one of the cars for him? So I drove a car, and it was very interesting. We went through the "pays des insoumis," in the hills of Indochina. It was called "insoumi" because the French had really never done more than occupy the towns. At night it was not safe to walk around. The so-called "natives" had never really been subjugated by the French. So I drove back to Saigon with the Chrysler agent. He was delighted to have someone to drive the car for him.

Q: *There were roads?*

COOTES: Oh, yes, quite decent roads. The French have always been good at that in all of their colonies, as I found out later on when I was in Algeria. What the French had done in that area in terms of transportation and communications was literally fabulous.

Q: *So you were back in Saigon for another few months.*

COOTES: I was back in Saigon for another few months. Quincy Roberts came back from home leave, and I returned to my post in Hong Kong. As I said, your transportation on home leave was not paid by the Department. I was entitled to some leave, after three years. My father was a great friend of one of the personnel people who served under Mr. Byington. He arranged to have me transferred from Hong Kong to Montreal, with instructions to proceed via Washington.

Well, when I got to Washington, I said that I had not joined the Foreign Service, speaking two foreign languages, to be assigned to Montreal. Couldn't something be done about it? Selden Chapin was the Haitian desk officer. He said that he understood that I knew the

Minister in Haiti, whom I had met in Hong Kong when he was on his way from Europe, traveling around the world. We called on him, and he asked that I be assigned to Haiti. So I was assigned to replace Burke Elbrick. Now, Burke Elbrick had been in Haiti for three years. I had been there earlier for a year and, as I spoke French, it was easy for me to learn Creole in Haiti.

Later on, Burke Elbrick and I wound up in Lisbon in 1942, during World War II. I was a "refugee" from Rome, and Burke was a "refugee" from Central Europe. Both of us were assigned to the American Legation in Lisbon at that time. When Burke and I were on the telephone--at Estoril and back and forth there-- we always talked in Creole, which we both spoke, being very sure that the Portuguese or the Germans or the Japanese didn't have anybody who could understand our conversations in Creole. So we had a wonderful time in Lisbon.

Going back to Haiti, it was easier for us, even though the Department did send French speakers to Haiti, to learn Creole than it was for the French themselves. The French could not bring themselves to "murder" their maternal language by saying, "Manger pare," which the Haitian house servants would say, meaning that "dinner is ready." We could deform the language and carry on. But Creole is a far cry from French. When I speak Creole to you, you don't understand me. Well, it's based on French, but it isn't quite French.

*Q: What was Haiti like at that time? We're talking about 1937.*

COOTES: When I went back to Haiti, as I said, I was picked up by the Minister assigned to Port-au-Prince. What was the country like?

*Q: Yes. I saw it in 1980. We're talking about 1937. I just wondered whether, physically, there was any forest left in 1937.*

COOTES: Oh, yes. My first time in Haiti was in 1932. At that time U. S. Marines still occupied the country. The Marines had occupied Haiti in 1918 when the then President was dragged out of the French Legation, where he had taken refuge, and tossed over the wall. He was then promptly dismembered. At that time the U. S. decided that there had been too many revolutions, so we moved the Marines in there. That wasn't an unfriendly gesture. If we had moved the Army in, that would have been bad, but we just moved the Marines in. Apart from the humanitarian aspect, another reason for our action was that the Germans were angling to have a base for submarines in Haiti. We'd learned of that, so we moved in and occupied the country. When I went to Haiti the first time, the Marine occupation was still continuing. The President of Haiti was a bachelor. His hostess was his sister. He was a charming man. Col Lloyd Little was the commander of the 1st Brigade of Marines who occupied the country. Also, we had American instructors for the Haitian Guard, including the senior commanders.

Toward the end of my time there we negotiated an end to the occupation. Minister Norman Armour was assigned to preside over the liquidation of the occupation. Armour had been a

Counselor of the Embassy in Paris. Of course, in Haiti most of the better educated people had done their studies in France. In their view Paris was something like Mecca. When the U.S. assigned the man who had been Counselor of the Embassy in Paris to Haiti, all doors were open to him. Norman Armour being Norman Armour, if the door was open a crack, he would finish up by opening it further and taking the place over. In effect, he did this, and I had the great pleasure of serving with him for a time in 1933.

At that time the Artebonitie Valley was the place where most of the bananas consumed in the U.S. came from. That was forest. Then up on a mountain called Morne Laselle [Mountain in Creole], which was the highest point there, several of us in the Legation had something rather better than a hut up there, at 5,000 feet above sea level. At the drop of a hat, we'd bustle up to 5,000 feet and get away from the steamy heat of Port-au-Prince. Already the vegetation was suffering because the Haitians are not very ardent farmers. They do what's necessary. Their goats were eating any shoots that came out of the ground, and that has resulted, as I understand, in the fact that the land in Haiti is now very much denuded of forest cover.

*Q: It's totally bare.*

COOTES: It's a very poor country. I've never been back to Haiti since I left there in 1940.

*Q: I wonder if you would recognize it.*

COOTES: I probably would not. I loved it when I was down there. I had some very good Haitian friends, since I spoke French.

*Q: The Haitian population was speaking Creole, but they remembered their French?*

COOTES: Well, no, they didn't remember it. The people who spoke Creole were the offshoots of the slaves. When the French came to Haiti, which was originally called Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic and Haiti), the Carib Indians were the original inhabitants. They were put to work on the plantations and, of course, they weren't used to this kind of work, with the heat and everything, and they died off. So that is why the French began the importation of Blacks from Africa. Haiti became almost entirely Black, with a certain admixture of White blood. So much so that Moraud de St. Marie, a French priest, wrote very extensively and in great detail about Haiti: the price of carrots in Gonaive was this, the price of carrots in Cap Haitien was such and such. He was very detailed in that respect. He gave names to the various mixtures of White and Black blood. Half and half, of course, was Mulatto. One-quarter White was a Quadroon. One-eighth was an Octaroon. But a person who was 63 parts White and one part Black was a sang mele, of mixed blood.

*Q: What was the name of this priest?*

COOTES: Moraud de St. Marie. If you can ever get hold of a book of his, it will be perfectly fascinating reading.

I was still in Port-au-Prince, and Haiti, by that time, was a free and independent country, with its own armed forces, under the leadership of a Colonel, because our instructors had insisted that they not go back to the old days, when the Haitian Army consisted of all generals and three privates. So I was there in 1939 when we learned that war had broken out in Europe. I was due for home leave, but my Minister, Freddy Mayer, told me to stay away from Personnel because he wanted me to come back to Haiti. But I ran into Sam Reber in the Department. Sam said: "I'm glad to see you because I'm assigning you to Rome."

So this was the spring of 1940. I got on an American ship bound for Naples, which sailed from New York on May 8, 1940. On the ship the Captain called three of us passengers who were in the Foreign Service and said: "Gentlemen, I have a radio in my cabin and have just learned that the Germans have invaded the Lowlands [Belgium and Holland]. I thought that you people ought to know." Well, one of the Foreign Service Officers had been assigned to Rotterdam, so he was naturally quite concerned. I landed in Naples on May 12, 1940, and proceeded to the Embassy in Rome, where the junior man on the totem pole was Red Dowling. I displaced him as bottom man and took over his office, which was next door to the office of Ambassador William Phillips.

One of my first duties was to usher into the Ambassador's office the then French Ambassador, Francois Poncet, and later on the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Campbell. They had been asked by Ambassador Phillips to come in to be told that Ciano [Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs] had informed Ambassador Phillips that same day that, despite the urgings of Sumner Welles [then Under Secretary of State] that Italy stay out of the war, Mussolini had decided that he was going to throw in his lot with Hitler. On June 10 Italy declared war against Great Britain and France. One of my duties then was to see off my colleagues in the French and British Embassies at the railroad station, as they were supposed to be repatriated, as part of a diplomatic exchange.

Later on in 1941 the Italians decided to restrict our activities in Italy and closed all of our Consulates. Our people from the Consulates were assembled in Rome and then put on a train, taken to Lisbon, and sent on to the U.S. We in the Embassy remained in Rome.

*Q: So they closed the Consulates General in Milan and Naples?*

COOTES: They closed Milan, Naples, and the Consulates in Turin, Venice, Palermo, and Florence. Was Trieste a Consulate before the war? No, I don't think that we had a Consulate in Trieste before the war. That came later, when we had the Allied Military Government in Italy. I was loaned by the State Department to the Allied Military Government. This was later on, in 1950.

In Rome, on the Piazza Ungheria, we had an apartment which was known as the Casa Triple Sec, with three Third Secretaries: David Key, Elbridge Durbrow, and Merritt Cootes. After June, 1940, when the British were kicked out of Italy and contact with Malta was severed, there was very little whisky available in Rome. The Casa Triple Sec became

very, very popular. We got to know a lot of young people in the theatrical world. I don't know whether you remember, but the movie, "The Third Man," featured Alida Valli, one of our regular guests at the Casa Triple Sec. After a time David Key left, and Durbrow and I had this apartment together. Incidentally, later on, during the days of Senator Joseph McCarthy, I was interviewed by an FBI agent who asked me questions about the time I lived with Elbridge Durbrow in Naples and with Jack Poole when I was in Hong Kong. Imagine that. And you know that at that time also "Chip" [Charles E.] Bohlen was questioned by an FBI agent regarding what were called his "unclear" activities. Well, if there ever was anybody that was "clear," it was Chip Bohlen, for goodness sake.

Anyhow, to return to Rome, Durbrow and I had gotten wind of the fact that the Germans were not happy with the way that the Italian Air Force was controlling the Mediterranean. They had decided that they were going to establish a headquarters of the Luftwaffe [German Air Force] in Rome. But Rome was too crowded, so they were going to be up in Frascati. Pretty good wine up there. We'd heard or read about that, so Durby and I decided to take my little Ford roadster for a Sunday drive on December 7, 1941. For the sake of appearances we decided to invite two Embassy wives to accompany us, as neither Durby nor I was married. Their husbands were on duty on that Sunday. So we went up to Frascati to see what we could find out. We got our picnic baskets out and had ourselves a drink there. We observed German personnel doing things with telephone wires. At the end of the day we'd traced where the wires went and where the military headquarters was going to be. Then we followed the telephone lines to outlying villas--that's where the generals were going to live. So we thought, "Well, when we get back and write this thing up, the Military Attaché is going to have them give us the Croix de Guerre, or something." This would be wonderful, because we had located where the headquarters of the Luftwaffe was going to be. So, we got back home and gave the "girls" a drink. Durby said to me, "You take the girls home while I straighten things up here." When I returned after taking the girls home, Durby said, "Don't sit down. We're going down to the Embassy." I said, "Why?" He said, "Wadsworth (the Chargé d'Affaires) has just telephoned me that Pearl Harbor has been bombed." We were to go down to the Embassy and start implementing "Plan A" [close down the Embassy].

So, we never got to write our despatch on the Luftwaffe headquarters because we couldn't have gotten it out by telegram, which had to go through the Italian Foreign Ministry or by pouch. We had a courier stuck at the Embassy in Rome, but the Italians wouldn't let him out. So we didn't get the Croix de Guerre after all.

*Q: That's a terrible thing. Really sad. Your cables had to go out through the Foreign Ministry?*

COOTES: Yes, after they declared war on us, you see.

*Q: At that moment?*



COOTES: Yes. It was December, 1941. For three days Durby and I spent our time down at the Foreign Ministry because we knew everybody there at the Cerimoniale, the section of the Italian Foreign Ministry which dealt with foreign embassies. We were trying to find out what was going to happen. It was nip and tuck for a while as to whether the Italians were going to follow the Japanese and the Germans, but in the end Mussolini decided that they were going to stay with their Axis allies. On December 11, 1941, the United States declared war on Italy and the rest of the Axis, following their declaration of war against the United States. Chargé d'Affaires Wadsworth had made a very convenient arrangement with Cilesio, then the head of the Cerimoniale. Cilesio's American wife was killed when she was riding on a bicycle in Forte di Marme. He had a natural affinity for things American. He and Wadsworth worked out an arrangement that when war came, we were not going to be shoved off into an ice-cold hotel, the way the Embassy people in Berlin were. We stayed where we were, on the Piazza Ungheria, in our flat. Finally, it was agreed that we would move to the Grand Hotel, where Wadsworth was living also.

Our landlord had said to us, "Hell, you and Durby are here, and I can't rent this place while you're here. When are you going to get out?" We asked if he had a tenant in mind. He said, "Yes, I have somebody who is very anxious to move in." I had an Italian guard with me. So I went back to the flat and learned that it was to be rented by the Duke of Spoleto's mistress. So I got some hot information there, too.

*Q: Yes. But you couldn't send that out, either.*

COOTES: No, I couldn't do that, because it had been agreed that anything we had to communicate to the State Department we would give to the Cerimoniale. They would give it to the Swiss Embassy in Rome. From there it would be sent to the Swiss Embassy in Washington and turned over to the State Department. So we had an "in" which the British, the French, and other countries did not have in 1940. We were sort of the key in arranging the diplomatic exchange of our personnel and those of allied countries. No sooner would we get the exchange all arranged than another Latin American country would decide to follow Under Secretary Welles' advice and declare war on the Axis. Then we'd have to start all over again. I got to Italy on May 12, 1940, and I left in the diplomatic exchange on May 12, 1942, five months after war was declared against us. The Latin Americans who were in Rome got out on the same diplomatic exchange. We were sent out to Lisbon on four different trains on four different nights. Naturally, we Americans left on the last train. The other countries wanted to be sure that their people got out. The Italians wanted to hold us as long as they could.

*Q: How many Americans were in the Embassy in Rome at that time?*

COOTES: I think that there probably were about 25 of us, plus a few wives who were still there. We had been paring down pretty much. We were pretty much down to skin and bones.

*Q: Had you been allowed to send certain people back home?*

COOTES: After the consuls were kicked out in June, 1941?

Q: *Yes.*

COOTES: Oh, yes, we had no trouble leaving. We had to leave through southern France, unoccupied France, because the Germans by that time had the northern part of France. We'd go through the southern part of France, Spain, and Portugal and then take a ship home from there. By that time, of course, Pan American had its "clipper ships" [flying boats] landing in the Tagus River. They were Sikorsky flying boats, you know. Seaplanes. Well, [W. Walton] Butterworth [later Ambassador to Sweden] was on one of those--the one that cracked up in the Tagus River in Lisbon.

Q: *So you had been moving people out...*

COOTES: We had been cutting down the Embassy staff.

Q: *Even before December, 1941.*

COOTES: Yes. We were down to skin and bones.

Q: *And you moved all of the Consulate people out, including dependents, I suppose.*

COOTES: Oh, yes, they'd all left. When the Italians closed the Consulates in June, 1941, before the declaration of war, there was no trouble about getting them out. Once war was declared, we didn't get anybody out until the diplomatic exchange took place in May, 1942.

Q: *But this group of Germans that came to set up their headquarters at Frascati--was that the first group of Germans you noticed, coming down to that part of Italy?*

COOTES: Oh, no. They were all over the lot. They had not told the Italians, in so many words, "Look, you can't control the Mediterranean. We're going to establish our own units down there." But they set up their Air Force headquarters at Frascati, which amounted to the same thing. German planes were flying out of air bases down in southern Italy. German officers were all over Italy. And after war was declared in December, 1941, I couldn't move anywhere without having an Italian guard with me, one pace to the right and rear.

I remember one time when I was stopped by a well-dressed German officer. He was very obviously not Italian. He spoke to me in German. I pretended that I did not understand him. In halting Italian he asked me for directions to the Forum, which I gave him. Then he moved off. My Italian guard said to me, "But, sir, that's not the way to the Forum." I said, "I know."

*Q: You had your revenge by giving him the wrong directions. In Washington we were preparing to order the Italians to close their Embassy, as war was declared. It took us until May, 1942, to do it.*

COOTES: It took the Americans? It took that long to arrange the diplomatic exchange from Rome. By that time the Italians said that all of the Western Embassies that were opposed to the Axis would be exchanged for all of their personnel in Lisbon. All of those in Europe would be moved to Lisbon. Freddy Lyon was the intelligence officer on the Drottningholm, the [Swedish] ship which took our people home. After war was declared, there was never any question of our moving separately. It had to be part of the diplomatic exchange. As I said, the British and French were out of town in 24-48 hours in 1940. But with us, as I say, there were delays in completing the arrangements. Every time we'd get it all arranged, there were further delays. We made the arrangements on behalf of several friendly countries, because we had this way of communicating with the State Department through the Swiss Embassy, thanks to Wadsworth and Cilesio, the head of the Cerimoniale. The formal means of communications would have to go through the Swiss. They were representing our diplomatic interests there. So we would send a signed despatch through the Swiss, who would send it to Switzerland, and it would be sent to their Embassy in Washington. Meantime, we'd done it by telegram, through this connection which we had with the Italian Government and the Swiss Embassy in Rome. So that's why we were arranging things, because we could do it much better, for example, than the Peruvians or the Mexicans could.

*Q: So you still had that connection?*

COOTES: We did. It was established after Pearl Harbor--I mean, after the declaration of war on December 11, 1941, when this connection was set up, through the Swiss Embassies in Rome and Washington. We'd send a telegram to the Swiss Embassy in Rome through the Cerimoniale. The Swiss Embassy would then send a telegram to the Swiss Embassy in Washington. Meanwhile, we'd turnover a despatch containing a copy of what we'd sent to the Swiss Embassy in Rome, which would transmit it to the Swiss Embassy in Washington, via the Swiss Government in Switzerland. But we had this expedited means of communication, which made it possible to speed things up. Otherwise, it would have taken a year to get us out of there.

*Q: Well, then you were moved to Lisbon...*

COOTES: When we got to Lisbon, theoretically the office was part of the diplomatic exchange. But George Kennan had been in Berlin, when war broke out. He really was the "brains" of the organization up there. When he got to Lisbon, he found out that three of his people--Third and Second Secretaries--had been assigned to Lisbon. He said, "No. We've been in this hotel in the freezing cold, where they put us up." He said that American Embassy personnel in Berlin had been isolated and had had a rough time. He said that he happened to know that the Embassy staff from Rome had an easy time of it and were living in hotels. He telephoned Personnel in the Department and said, "No. My people are going home. You can assign three of the people from the Embassy staff in Rome to the Legation in Lisbon." So Doug Floyd, Milton Reminkle, and I were assigned to Lisbon. We stayed

there, and the staff of the Embassy in Berlin all went back to the U. S. That's how I was assigned to Lisbon.

*Q: Well, you had another two years in Lisbon, without home leave.*

COOTES: Yes. I left the U.S. in 1940 and didn't get back to the U.S. until the fall of 1944. I must say that Lisbon was the keyhole to Europe. Everything went through there. George Kennan was sent over by the State Department to put some order into the intelligence collection effort there, because the Military Attaché wouldn't speak to the Naval Attaché, and the Naval Attaché wouldn't speak to his British counterpart. So they sent George Kennan over to Lisbon to put some order into things.

*Q: You mean that George Kennan returned to Washington and then was sent back to Lisbon?*

COOTES: Yes. He returned to Washington and was put in charge of Policy Planning. Then he was assigned to Lisbon. Thereby hangs a story because by that time I had learned Portuguese. As I spoke other Romance languages, I picked it up very quickly. Actually, when George Kennan got to Lisbon, I took him down to the Foreign Ministry and did the interpreting for him there. I called up and asked for an appointment for George Kennan and the Minister at 1:00 AM with Prime Minister Salazar. I believe that it was November 7, 1942, or something like that. It wasn't easy to arrange a meeting at 1:00 AM with the head of the government there. Of course, I couldn't tell him why we wanted the appointment. The purpose of the call was to have the Minister and George Kennan inform Salazar that the U.S. was adhering to the oldest, written treaty of 1397 between Portugal and Great Britain. The treaty was being modified somewhat to allow the British to control the seas around Portugal against the German U-Boats. That was for the British. But our naval officers wore British uniforms when they were flying their planes from land bases.

Anyhow, George Kennan and the Minister went down and delivered this message. They came back to the Legation and were to send a code word back to the State Department, saying that they had delivered the message. Now, of course, the same message was delivered in Spain to Franco. It was perfectly all right for them to send a message because the message from Madrid read: "SecState Washington: (Then the code word). (Signed) Hayes" [Carleton J. H. Hayes, American Ambassador in Madrid at the time]. However, from Lisbon the telegram went out: "SecState Washington: (Then the code word 'Jelly'). (Signed) Fish" [The Minister's name]. So the text of the telegram from the Legation in Lisbon read, "SecState Washington: Jelly Fish." Later on, at a staff meeting George Kennan told us: "Now, look. That story is mine. You can write all the memos you want, but that story is mine."

*Q: So that was Kennan and the "Jelly Fish" story.*

COOTES: I think he retold this story in his memoirs at some stage. I forget where. Of course, he lives here in Princeton. Later on, when I was assigned to Moscow, George

Kennan was there as the Deputy Chief of Mission. I flew in with him by plane. He'd already been to Moscow, under Ambassador Averell Harriman and was the Deputy Chief of Mission when I arrived there. George was living at the Finnish Legation. As protecting power for Finnish interests, we'd taken over the Finnish Legation when the Finns and the Russians were embroiled in the Russo-Finnish War [1939-1940]. George and his wife lived at the Finnish Legation, in considerable comfort, while the rest of us were shoved into the Mokavaya Hotel, crowded to all get out. But when I flew in to Moscow with George--as I said, I had known him from before-- he said, "Merritt, you'd better come up and stay with Annelise and me. It's much more comfortable out there, until you get settled in the Mokavaya Hotel."

*Q: He stayed there during the two years that you spent in Moscow?*

COOTES: No, he didn't stay there the whole time. As you may know, George never stayed in any one place for very long. He was recalled to Washington and then sent to London to work on the preparations for post-war negotiations. Robert Murphy was the Political Adviser to General Eisenhower. George Kennan worked with him for a while. Then they went on to Rheims and Potsdam and stayed on in Berlin. By that time George had been assigned to the Embassy in Moscow.

*Q: We have some space, and I'd like to return to Lisbon. You served there at such a crucial time. You must have been terrifically busy.*

COOTES: We were. Later on, the State Department ruled that if you worked overtime, in those days you were allowed to take compensatory time off. Well, in Lisbon, during World War II, nobody took any compensatory time off. But the administrative people back in Washington decided that that was enough. You could accumulate up to a certain amount, but no more. The figure was set at 1,029 hours [just over 42 days at eight hours a day]. That was the maximum that you could accumulate. Well, I had at least twice that much accumulated. So when I finally retired from the Foreign Service in 1966, I had 1,029 hours of compensatory time, and I was entitled to be paid for that time, at my then salary. I knew someone in Personnel and arranged for my retirement to take place in December, 1966, so that my regular salary was taxable for income tax purposes at that time. The payment for these 1,029 hours was something like \$15,000. I arranged for it to be paid back in January, 1967, by which time I was into that first year and a half of retirement when you were paid back what you had already contributed to the Retirement Fund.

*Q: Until Congress did us in in 1986.*

COOTES: So I didn't pay any income tax on this "bonus," so to speak, by switching it over to the following year, when I was exempt from paying tax. It pays to know people.

*Q: Yes. How many officers were there in Lisbon in 1942? Was it an Embassy?*

COOTES: When I first got there, it was a Legation. As I said, Bert Fish was the Minister. Then he was succeeded by [R. Henry] Norweb. Norweb had a lot of clout with the Department, and Lisbon became so important a place that it was made an Embassy. Norweb was Ambassador during my last days there.

*Q: Was the Embassy in Lisbon handling refugees? What was the refugee problem, or did we bring somebody over to handle them?*

COOTES: We had a Consulate General in Lisbon. Both the Legation/Embassy and the Consulate General were functioning, and the Consulate General took care of most of that. "Pardy" Parsons was the brains of the Consulate at that time in Lisbon. Of course, we didn't have too many Americans over there. By that time most of the resident Americans had returned to the U.S., so that we didn't have very many Americans to be concerned with. Of course, there were still some Americans coming out of France and some still coming out of Spain and Portugal who wanted to go home. But that was not the big thing there. At that time Lisbon was a political reporting and intelligence collection center. I had an apartment in town, and Doug Flood, whom I had known when he was Consul in Naples, had a place out in Estoril. So if he was in town for dinner, he'd stay with me, and if I were in Estoril, I'd stay with him there. The Palace Hotel in Lisbon was sort of the epicenter for all of the spies. The Japanese would nudge the British and say, "You were behind the potted palm last night. Now it's my turn." The place was crawling with agents, double and triple agents, and all of that.

*Q: The Japanese were there?*

COOTES: The Japanese were there. At the airport--I used to have to go up to London from time to time--there would be a British plane to take me to London. And right next to it would be a Lufthansa plane to take people to Germany. Portugal was neutral. At one point there was an awful scare. It was reported that Churchill was on a plane coming through Lisbon, and we wondered whether the Germans were going to break the previously respected neutrality of Portugal and shoot him down. They had shot down a plane carrying one of the great British actors, who was traveling on a plane over the Bay of Biscay. The Germans thought that Churchill was on that plane.

*Q: I never heard of that.*

COOTES: Churchill wasn't on that plane. I forget the name of the actor [Leslie Howard]. A wonderful person. A great loss. In those days the British planes would fly to Land's End. Do you know where that is? Down at the end of Cornwall. Then travelers would go by train up to London. The trip took quite a long time. With the Germans around, none of the commercial planes were landing anywhere near London.

*Q: When London was being bombed.*

COOTES: All the time. Yes. As a matter of fact, I was having a drink with a friend before getting on the train and being flown back to Lisbon. I said, "How am I going to get to Waterloo Station to take my train?" He answered, "Who do you think that is, playing chess over there? That's your taxi driver." He was a kind of built-in taxi for this man, who had guests. So he'd entertain the taxi driver, so that the taxi driver would take his guests. The air raid alarm on the walls of the station there sounded. So I said, "Aren't we going to duck?" He replied, "Aw shucks, forget about it."

Q: *He was like you.*

COOTES: There was this bang-bang-bang all around us. I was very happy to get on the train, because I thought that it wouldn't be bombed.

Q: *So you went frequently to London, back and forth from Lisbon?*

COOTES: I wouldn't say quite frequently, but, for instance, when the Anglo- Portuguese treaty was scheduled to be implemented, we did not report it ourselves. George Kennan made an agreement with the British Embassy that we would not send out anything in our codes, because the British said that our codes were leaky and were no longer trustworthy. So we reported nothing on the implementation of this treaty. One time George Kennan said, "No, Merritt, you can't take the courier run down to Tangier," which we used to have to do once a week. He said, "You're going up to London because I've got some despatches. We had agreed with the British, as you know, not to send out any cables from here."

Q: *So you hand carried the despatches?*

COOTES: I hand carried them. I got there on a Sunday. John Winant was the Ambassador to Great Britain. Jake Beam was his man Friday. Jake's an old friend of mine. Ambassador Winant had a high regard for Portuguese Prime Minister Salazar, the head of the Portuguese Government, as you know. Ambassador Winant questioned me about Salazar, and when I finally got out of his office, Jake Beam said, "Damn you, I wanted to get off to lunch, and you kept me in there for over an hour." I said, "Jake, it wasn't my doing. It was the Ambassador who was so much interested in Salazar and what he was up to that I just had to keep talking." So we went out for dinner that night with Ambassador Harriman's daughter and with the lady who later became Ambassador Bruce's wife. We had a little foursome. I had brought up some lemons from Lisbon because Jake Beam said he hadn't seen a lemon in he didn't know how long, and he couldn't wait to have a whiskey sour. So he took the lemons over to the two women there to make whiskey sours, and they rinsed their hair in the lemon juice instead. So we had our usual drinks of straight whisky. But they fluffed their hair nicely. What was the name of Ambassador Bruce's secretary?

Q: *Evangeline Bell.*

COOTES: Evangeline Bell, yes. I met her when she was working for Ambassador Bruce, when he was the head of the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] office in London. She was

his private secretary and was a great friend of Katherine Harriman, Ambassador Harriman's daughter. So that was the little foursome we had.

Q: *What were they doing in London?*

COOTES: They lived in London. Evangeline Bell was working for Bruce in the OSS office, and Kathy Harriman was with her father there, who was the Ambassador [in charge of Lend-Lease affairs, not Ambassador to Great Britain]. So that was a jolly evening, but Jake Beam didn't get his whiskey sour.

Q: *So in 1944...*

COOTES: By the fall of 1944 I had been abroad for almost four years. It was arranged that I would be transferred to Washington. So I took some pouches up to London. And in England I got on the SS Mauretania, one of the fast ships which went without escort. The ship was escorted by plane for 600 miles West of England and then picked up by American planes on the other side. Meantime, they zig-zagged back and forth across the Atlantic.

I got to the State Department and ran into my ex apartment mate, Elbridge Durbrow, who was number two in the Eastern European Division, under Chip Bohlen. Durby said, "Fine, Merritt, you're back here now. Why don't you join us? That will make three of us in the Eastern European Division. It's been cut back since Larry Duggan left." Larry Duggan was head of the Eastern European Division. He was very much in sympathy with people like Alger Hiss and company and did not like the Soviet specialists, who were rather critical of the Soviets. Duggan wasn't as bad as Kim Philby and that crowd, who also thought that the Russians were a better bet than the Nazis. Anyhow, he'd left there, so when I joined them, that made three officers working on Eastern European affairs. I don't know how many there are now--probably 120 or something like that. So I used to try to protect Durbrow and Bohlen from correspondents. Half way through the conversation with correspondents, they'd ask, "How long were you in Moscow?" I'd say, "Never." I finally went to Durby and said, "Listen, I'm not doing you fellows any good. Every time I just about get them prepared to leave you alone, they ask me when I was in Moscow. I think you'd better send me over to learn Russian, and I'll come back to you."

So that was decided on. I went up to Cornell University to study Russian. This was late in 1944.

Q: *How long were you at Cornell?*

COOTES: Three months.

Q: *Is that all?*

COOTES: Three months. I took one of those accelerated Russian courses given by the Navy. Actually, it was a Navy course called the V-12 program. There were three of us from



the State Department taking this course. Then there were about nine other people in the V-12 course. Of course, they were in their late teens and had very active minds. They learned things a lot quicker than we could. So the three of us really worked a lot harder than the young students did. As a matter of fact, the three of us were at the top of the class. We were there to work, naturally, devoting all our time to it.

One day I was walking down the street in Washington. I had some note cards with the words in Russian on one side and the other side of the card in English. I would sort of leaf through them in English and try to see whether I could remember what the equivalent was in Russian. I was talking to myself about it, trying to pronounce something like "Thank you very much" in Russian. I was muttering this as I walked down the street. A policeman tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "Are you all right?" Anyhow, we had a perfectly brilliant instructor, a man named Stillman. He was of German extraction, but he was one of those "Volga Germans" whose families had migrated to Russia and settled on the Volga River. They were 100% Russian culturally but had German names. He was a brilliant instructor. The three of us from the State Department had a great deal of respect for him, because most of us spoke other languages.

Having finished that course, I went to Russia by ship, traveling to France. I arrived in Paris and was going to fly to Moscow. But there was a delay at Orly Airport, due to foggy weather. Just at that point George Kennan arrived. He was then Counselor of the American Embassy in Moscow. He came through Paris and said, "Merritt, I've got to get back there. I've been waiting for three days now for the weather." So we took the train up together to Frankfurt and had Thanksgiving dinner with Tony Biddle and a man who later became an Ambassador, Reinhardt. George Kennan and I took the train up to Berlin. The Ambassador in Moscow was so anxious to have George on hand that he sent his plane to Berlin to pick him up. So I coasted on George Kennan's coattails and got up to Moscow. As I said before, George Kennan took me in with him at the Finnish Legation, where he was living.

*Q: This was 1945?*

COOTES: This was 1945, yes. This was in October, 1945.

*Q: The war ended in Europe in May, 1945.*

COOTES: Yes. I stayed in the Embassy in Moscow for two years. At first our Ambassador was Averell Harriman, whom you knew about later on. After he left, there was a short period when George Kennan was chargé d'affaires. Then came Ambassador Walter Bedell Smith, who had been chief of staff to General Eisenhower, initially in England, when they were talking about the arrangements for the post-war period and what was to be done. You will remember there were a lot of people who maintained that we should insist that the Germans surrender unconditionally. The British were 100% in favor of that. As it worked out, as you know, the surrender was fairly unconditional because the Nazi Government was completely liquidated, and with it came the American, British, and Russian occupation.

The three countries occupied different zones in Germany. Later, the French were given an occupation zone, and there was a Four-Power occupation of Berlin.

*Q: And the entire country. And there was no German Government at all.*

COOTES: The occupation covered the entire country. The German Government was formed later on.

*Q: In 1952.*

COOTES: In 1952, yes. While the "De-Nazification" process was under way the, Nuremberg Trials were taking place. Goering was one of the German leaders charged, but he committed suicide by taking a lethal pill which, they say, his American guards had helped him obtain. So he bumped himself off.

*Q: You were in Moscow in 1945. What was Moscow like? It must have been badly damaged. What were the conditions?*

COOTES: Moscow was not particularly badly damaged because, you know, the Germans never really got there. It wasn't like under Napoleon when the French actually got into Moscow. The Germans were defeated at Stalingrad, but Moscow was not much damaged.

*Q: Except from the air.*

COOTES: Except from the air. There was a certain amount of damage from air raids. The Bolshoi Theater was damaged but not destroyed.

In Germany the British, the Russians, and ourselves had our occupation zones. Our military controlled the situation in our zone, but we had a State Department political adviser to General Eisenhower. Initially, Eisenhower was the American commander in Berlin. However, very shortly thereafter he went elsewhere and left General Clay as his deputy and commander of the American forces. General Clay had Robert Murphy, later Ambassador Murphy, as his Political Adviser. He had inherited him from General Eisenhower. Murphy stayed on in Berlin. Later, the German Government was established, and we set up our Embassy in Bad Godesberg.

There's an amusing story about the time we had the Berlin Airlift. The Russians had cut off access to Berlin by land. General Clay arranged to have an airlift of supplies to Berlin. Our planes took off and landed, I think, every six minutes. According to the story, there was a British correspondent up in the control tower in Berlin, listening to the communications between the tower and the pilot of a plane that was about to take off. The British correspondent heard the American pilot say to the control tower: "Give me the woid and I'll make like a boid." Naturally, the pilot was from Brooklyn. The British correspondent said, "Oh, you Americans. I find it very difficult to understand you."

*Q: When you got to Moscow, then, how were the living conditions?*

COOTES: Well, as to living conditions, I lived at first, as I say, at the Finnish Legation with Mr. Kennan. Later on, I was moved down to the Mokavaya, an apartment building right on Red Square, which the Russians had turned over to us to use as our Embassy, after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1933. We had our offices on the first two floors. Above that, were apartments. On the top floor were six studio apartments with a Northern exposure. Evidently, this building had been intended for artists. On Soviet national day, November 7, the anniversary of the "glorious October Revolution" (The calendar had been changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar.), when they had military parades in Red Square, all the friendly military attachés came over to our apartments there overlooking Red Square so that they could see things.

Our contacts with the Russians were zero.

*Q: This was in 1945?*

COOTES: In 1945. Oh, absolutely. We were then, as the saying went, taking over from the British as Number 1 Enemy. We were not allowed to see Russians. The man who was handling American affairs in the Soviet Foreign Ministry had previously served in the Soviet Embassy in Washington. He used to come down to the State Department when I was in EE [Eastern European affairs]. So I saw him regularly in Washington. We exchanged lunches. They always invited us to lunch at the Carlton Hotel because they had some of the waiters on their payroll.

When I got to Moscow, I invited him to lunch frequently, but only once did he come, and that was when Dick Davis and I gave a party to celebrate our moving into this new flat. Our Ambassador came. When I told this man, the head of the American Section at the Foreign Ministry, that our Ambassador would be there, and I hoped that he and the chief of Protocol would be there, they both came. However, a man named John Davies was First Secretary of our Embassy. He devised a wonderful system for handling invitations to a cocktail party. When you invited people to an event of this kind, you kept a list of how many were invited, how many replied, and how many turned up. In our case we issued 117 invitations, 19 replied, and five showed up. So, we were not allowed to see Russians, except when we would go skiing. We could chat with Russians when we went skiing. One time when I was about to leave a ski slope, there was a Russian who had been very nice to me. I said, "Look, I've got a car. Could I give you a ride into town?" He looked at my car and said, "Oh, no. If I went into Moscow and got out of your car, one of the militiamen would pick me up right away and interrogate me." So our contacts with the Russians were absolutely zero.

*Q: What kind of parties did you give then?*

COOTES: We invited other colleagues--the British, the French, the Dutch, the Swedes.

*Q: What kind of reporting were you doing, then?*

COOTES: Well, our other colleagues didn't have any contact with the Russians, either. There was one time each year when the Soviet Foreign Ministry would have one of their men give a party in what had been one of the old houses, like Spaso House, where our Ambassador lived. I lived at the Mokavaya on Red Square, but the Ambassador lived in Spaso House. The Soviet party was given in a very nice apartment, and this man was obviously in public relations. He gave a party and invited people from the various embassies. It was well attended by ballerinas from the Bolshoi, half a dozen skaters, and so forth, who were allowed to be in contact with us that one time. But don't worry. They were pretty closely watched.

Now, it's true that George Kennan and I rented part of a dacha, a country house. This had been turned over to the Allies by the Russians when the Red Cross was operating in the Soviet Union in 1945-1946, and even earlier, during the war. This building had been kept, and George Kennan and I were two of the six people who had access to it. We used to go out there for weekends. There was a custodian, a man who took care of the place when we weren't there. He was really the only Russian we ever got a chance to talk to, person to person. He, obviously, was an ex-farmer, so we weren't getting the highest level opinion of Russian affairs from this man. But at least we did get some feel of what the people were thinking.

I stayed in Russia for two years. During 1947, the last year when I was there, we had the meeting in Moscow of the Conference of Foreign Ministers. This conference had taken place once in the United States and then in England and France, so the Russians said that they would host a meeting, too. They cleared out six floors of the Moskva Hotel, which was the hotel right near Mokavaya Square and our Embassy. They kicked out commissars, under secretaries of state, and people like that to clear the six floors there. There were two floors for the Americans, two for the British, and two for the French.

The Secretary of State was then retired General George Marshall. He came up to this meeting of Foreign Ministers in Moscow, which lasted about a month in March, 1947.

We had a rule then that you did not serve for more than two years in Moscow.

*Q: What Section did you serve in when you were in Moscow?*

COOTES: Well, I was on the administrative side. I was responsible for physical arrangements at the Embassy, in other words. I was First Secretary of the Embassy. I was responsible for the accounts, the administration, the personnel, and all the rest of it.

*Q: How about supplies? How were you getting things like that?*

COOTES: They came in by ship through Murmansk.

*Q: How did they come down from Murmansk?*

COOTES: By train.

Q: *That's a long way.*

COOTES: It was, indeed. You see, I was there just after the war. They hadn't been able to get anything in during the war. That was the route they used during the war. They couldn't receive supplies through the Baltic republics, --Latvia, Esthonia, and so forth. So they had to go around to the top of the country, to Murmansk.

Q: *Why couldn't they come in through the Baltics?*

COOTES: Through the Baltics? Lord, no. The Germans had all of that mined.

Q: *And the mines weren't cleared out yet?*

COOTES: They hadn't been cleared out yet. The other route would have been through Tehran [Iran], but that was very long, devious, and very expensive. Then, after the war was over, we were able to get things in from Berlin, by train. Actually, on one occasion the British, the French, and the Americans got together and placed a big order for alcohol--wines and things like that. Since the rest of the stuff was coming in through Murmansk, there was a risk that the wines would be frozen. But Mr. [Ernest] Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, couldn't fly. So he came in by train from Berlin. We got all of the wines loaded on the train that came in from Berlin to Moscow.

Q: *You mean that there were cases and cases of booze?*

COOTES: Yes. Later on I went to Berry Brothers in London to order some things. I was going down to Algiers later on. I said I wanted three cases of their whisky and two cases of their 12-year-old whisky. They said, "Are you a regular client?" I said, "Do you keep records?" They replied, "Oh, yes, we keep records." I said, "You look it up. Last year I ordered 350 cases of whisky. I guess that makes me a client." You see, I had ordered for the British, French, and ourselves to have the whisky put on Mr. Bevin's train.

So after I'd served for two years in Moscow, I was transferred to Pakistan.

Q: *Perhaps you could tell us a little bit more about Moscow before you go on, because we're really interested in what you experienced there.*

COOTES: Well, as I say, we had no contact with the Russian people.

Q: *Was the Ambassador seeing anyone in the Government?*

COOTES: Oh, yes, he'd see high officials in the Soviet Government, but there was no social contact--no cocktail parties with conversation and so forth. It was all just strictly official. Naturally, we all felt very much cut off from everything. But fortunately, all of our

colleagues in the other embassies were pretty well chosen for this post there, so there were really some very stimulating contacts with them. However, not with the people of the country.

Q: *Were your families with you?*

COOTES: I wasn't married then.

Q: *Did the other diplomats have their families with them?*

COOTES: Very few of the families were there, because of the housing shortage. You see, we had just this one building. Actually, Mr. Kennan had his wife there. One other American diplomat, Third Secretary Bill Crawford, somehow or other had been able to rent a house from an American lady who had done a great deal of study about the origins of mankind and our descent from an ancestor common to us and the monkeys. She became known as "the monkey woman." Bill Crawford had a house there and was able to bring his wife and two children there. But he had provided housing outside of what was officially available.

Q: *The Russians had no objection to that?*

COOTES: No.

Q: *What about food?*

COOTES: Well, we had a commissary there.

Q: *Already?*

COOTES: Yes. It had basic staples and things like that. Then there was a shop where the foreign diplomats could purchase things. Only the foreign diplomats. The Russians couldn't buy things there because you had to pay in foreign currency. There was very strict rationing in Russia at that time. We used to buy things in that way, and then there was a certain amount of open market activity for fresh vegetables and things like that in the summertime.

Q: *Not during the winter.*

COOTES: Very seldom. I was horrified the first time I bought anything from the free market. There was this man standing outside one of the shops there. He had three lemons in his hand. He was trying to sell those for \$85, or the equivalent thereof! You see, everything was strictly rationed, and your money wasn't any good unless you had tickets to buy fruit and things like that. They'd rather have three lemons than \$85 worth of rubles that they couldn't use for anything else.

Q: *Were there ration tickets for everything for the Russian people at that time?*

COOTES: Oh, yes. The Russian people were strictly rationed, and, as I say, we could buy from this one store, a limited, diplomatic store. It was called "Torgsin." We paid in foreign currency.

Q: *What could you get there?*

COOTES: Well, sheets, suits, trousers, and things like that. But most of us brought our own stuff in. But then, as far as food was concerned, we could get meats and things like that which were rationed to the Russian people, but they were available in the diplomatic store there. That really didn't present much of a problem. I was darned lucky. I had a German girl, another one of these Volga Germans, who spoke, naturally, perfect Russian but also spoke German. I'd been to school in Vienna and also spoke Russian. I spoke German to her. She took very good care of us. Of course, she reported everything that happened in our flat to the NKVD [secret police], as it was known then.

So after two years in Moscow [1945-1947] I was transferred to Pakistan, where they were just envisaging the partition of India into India and Pakistan. We were going to open a Consulate in Lahore. [Mohammed Ali] Jinnah [the founder and first leader of Pakistan] wanted to have the capital in Lahore, because it was much more of a city than Karachi, which was a little fishing port with a population of about 250,000 people. However, Lahore was too close to what was to become the Indian border--only 15 miles away from Amritsar [Punjab]. So Karachi was the capital. Later, of course, the capital was moved to Islamabad, near Rawalpindi. I opened the Consulate in Lahore. That was extremely interesting, because I was there for the last of the big migrations, with the Muslims moving over from India into Muslim Pakistan. The people involved in the migration movement passed by the former Christian College, which was run by the Presbyterians. It had long been in Lahore and was connected with Lahore University and run by an American married to the sister of the Condons. When the Hindus and Muslims in the Faculty at the university couldn't decide whom to appoint, they made this American the head of Lahore University, because he was neutral. When this last group of Muslims coming from India went by the former Christian College, it took eight hours for them to pass by in a column, four abreast and carrying their possessions on their heads.

Q: *This was right on the route?*

COOTES: Yes, in 1947.

Q: *They were coming from Amritsar?*

COOTES: They were coming from Amritsar on their way to the airport. They put up tents for them out there. There were about one million of these Muslims settled out there. Then, of course, we had the threat of a cholera epidemic. So I had the doctor at the former Christian College come down and inoculate all of my servants. I only had 14 servants in

those days. When he arrived with a suitcase full of the serum, I said, "My Lord, I've only got 14 servants. I'll have to have my wife go into the compound where the servants live, because the women are in purdah." My wife could go in there. I couldn't, but, of course, the doctor could. He innoculated 44 people in all.

*Q: You didn't know you had that many people?*

COOTES: I didn't know I had that many. I had 14 servants on the payroll, but...

*Q: How many officers were assigned to the Consulate?*

COOTES: There were three of us in Lahore at that time. Then, later on the Consul General, Hooker Doolittle, came. He was in Lahore for a time. Then our Ambassador in Karachi died of natural causes. The Department assigned Doolittle down to the Embassy and made him chargé d'affaires.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador who died in Karachi?*

COOTES: I think that his name was Barnes.

*Q: He was our first Ambassador to Pakistan, then?*

COOTES: He was the first American Ambassador to Pakistan. Maynard Barnes, I think his name was. As I say, he died, and then Hooker Doolittle moved from Lahore down to Karachi. By that time I had been transferred from Lahore to Karachi, so there I was with my old boss again. In Karachi we entertained Robert R. McCormick, the publisher of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE. On this occasion, when we had tea on the terrace, Hooker Doolittle was feeding the Myna birds. Mr. McCormick saw a bunch of sparrows come down and chase the Myna birds away. He commented, "This is Great Britain's contribution to civilization," referring to the sparrows.

It was very interesting to be in Pakistan during those formative years of the Pakistani Government. Under the British the whole Indian subcontinent was run by people who had graduated from British schools and had what they called the "Cambridge Certificate of Education." It amounted to a high school education. They were trained, but they were almost all Hindus. The Muslims were not particularly taught clerical skills. The success of Liaquat Ali Khan was to keep on all of these British who had been training government personnel, because they didn't have the clerical class which existed over in India. Then up in the Punjab, in Lahore, there was that wonderful race called the "Pathans." They are mountain people and they are somewhat reminiscent of our American Indians. Their skin color is not quite red, but it is not quite like the chocolate color of many Muslims. The color is more like "café au lait." The Pathans are erect and a very proud race, something like the Cossacks in Russia.

*Q: They're taller, too?*



COOTES: They're taller, and the men are very handsome. They are great fighters, of course. Their center is up in the Northwest Frontier area. Of course, the British never conquered Afghanistan. And when the Russians tried it, they weren't any more successful. They should have had better sense than to go in there.

I spent about a year and a half in Lahore and then almost two years in Karachi. Then I was transferred to Trieste [Italy].

I was loaned by the State Department to the Allied Military Government. You remember, after World War II President Truman felt that Trieste should be established as a Free Territory because it was partly occupied by the Yugoslavs and partly by the Italians. Most of us, although we were there, working for the Allied Military Government, were against the idea because we said, "This is going to be another Danzig." And you know what happened there. Danzig was partly responsible for the outbreak of World War II in 1939.

*Q: Before you went to Trieste, you were in Karachi until 1951?*

COOTES: About three and one-half years in Pakistan, altogether.

*Q: Were you doing administrative work in Lahore and then Karachi?*

COOTES: In Lahore I did a little of everything. For a time I was the only American there. I was acting Principal Officer and did political reporting. Later on, I had a very, very competent Vice Consul, who did the administrative work of the Consulate. He had previously served in China and had a Chinese wife. There were three officers assigned to the Consulate in Lahore until the Consul General arrived. When we opened the Consulate in Lahore, when the area was still part of India, we had no one to perform the public affairs function. USIS [United States Information Service] kept sending us films, books, and so forth. But they hadn't picked out anybody to assign there to represent USIS. Wonderful films were being shipped up to the Consulate in Lahore. The Pakistanis all spoke English, liked films, but were a little browned off by the British films. When these American films became available, my wife and I learned how to run the projectors we had there. We'd have these gatherings at the Consulate to show these films. We were doing the public affairs job for the Consulate, just the two of us.

Then I was transferred down to Karachi as Public Affairs Officer. I held this job during the two years I was in Karachi.

*Q: Were the Pakistanis happy with the partition?*

COOTES: Well, they didn't like the idea of splitting the country up, although Mohammed Ali Jinnah said that he recognized perfectly well that, with the departure of the British, there would have to be a partition of the country between India and Pakistan. This created the anomaly of East Pakistan and West Pakistan, 2,000 miles apart. Well, you can't run a

country like that and, of course, Bangladesh [the former East Pakistan] separated from Pakistan later on.

Many Pakistanis spoke English very well. They had their own accent, but they spoke English. They liked to continue with English. After all, that was the language of trade. So we really stepped in to fill, in part, the sense of satisfaction which the Muslim people of Pakistan derived from the English language. We Americans were very well regarded. They were all in favor of Americans and American aid. The funny part is that about five years after partition and the independence of Pakistan and a lot of British had left-- their businesses had been taken over by Pakistanis--someone added things up and found that the British were doing more business with Pakistan as an independent country than they had when it was a British colony. They had overcome their feelings of resentment against their former masters, the British.

Q: *Where was your sister's place?*

COOTES: In the Department of the Jura, near Geneva.

Q: *What was your sister doing there?*

COOTES: Her husband was a naval officer, and this property was something which his father had bought there, a chateau in the Jura. But my sister was there in the summer, so I took this young woman down there. We became engaged, went up to Paris, and were married the next day. I got 16 signatures out of the French authorities in one day, which I think must be a world's record. Of course, I spoke perfect French, so that made it easy. That, plus a pack of cigarettes to this fellow and a package of coffee to that one. After we were married, my wife said, "Merritt, this is the most "Black Market" wedding I've ever been to. Isn't there some church we can go to?" And I said, "As a matter of fact I was confirmed in the American Cathedral in Paris. I'll call them up." And the minister I talked to said, "Oh, drop around about 5:00 PM, and we'll take care of the matter." So after that she felt really married. She went back to Berlin, and I went back to Moscow.

Q: *Was she stationed in Berlin?*

COOTES: With Ambassador Murphy, yes. So she had to go back and finish up there, and I had to go back to Moscow and finish up there. Then she went home to her family in Oregon. I went on down to Pakistan, and she later joined me in Lahore.

Q: *What did your families think about this?*

COOTES: Well, her family didn't know anything about it. She didn't tell them that she was getting married until it was all over. My mother was staying with my sister down in the Department of the Jura, in France, so she knew that we had become engaged and were going up to Paris to be married.

*Q: So you were married in the French...*

COOTES: In the 8e Arrondissement [Eighth District] of Paris.

*Q: In the French administrative office and after that in the American Cathedral at 5:00 PM.*

*Well, the post we need to talk about now is your assignment as Deputy Chief of Mission in Algiers in 1955.*

COOTES: Well, I was doing a stint in the State Department and received orders to proceed to Algiers. I was delighted with the assignment because the wife of the Consul General was the sister of a classmate of mine at Princeton. When my wife and I got off the ship we had taken from Marseille to go to Algiers, at 6:30 AM, lo and behold, there was my Consul General, Lewis Clarke on the pier. I said, "Lewis, it's awfully decent of you, but I think it is uncalled for to come down and meet me at this hour." He said, "This isn't a call, and I'm not meeting you. I'm picking you up and taking you to the office. Last night the people involved in the revolt, which started in Oran about six months ago, blew up a dinner theater"--which was East of us on the coast there--"and 139 French were killed by the underground. I've got to go and do some reporting."

Well, that was a very poor time to arrive in Algiers, because, as you'll recall, the French had been in Algiers since 1830. Most of the people who came down there at that time, after the French defeat in 1870, were from what had been Alsace [a French province annexed by Germany after the Franco- Prussian War] and did not want to continue to live there under the Germans. They pulled up stakes and went down to live in Algeria, in North Africa. They turned out to be very successful colonists because they were mostly farmers by occupation. In Algeria, if you were driving through the countryside, you could see, on the left hand side, a field strewn with boulders. Well, that was a field owned by one of the Muslims, the Arabs. Meanwhile, the right hand side was a beautiful, manicured field belonging to one of these French who had come down to Algeria. That's the way they liked to do things.

The climate in Algeria is wonderful. They get four crops a year--for example, four crops of tomatoes a year. The area around Algiers was the source of the "primeurs" [high quality, choice fruit which commanded premium prices on the metropolitan French market]. All of this came from Algeria. One of the major products of Algeria at the time was wine. Of course, it was produced in a Muslim country, so it was a little incongruous. Algerian wine is very strong and was imported into France and used to "cut" French wines from Bordeaux. Some of the Algerian wines had an alcoholic content of up to 18%. Metropolitan French wines were around 12%. So if the French wine was below 12%, it was mixed with Algerian wine. The funny part is that even after the French turned Algeria over to the Algerians to run their own country, wine continued to be a relatively big item in their economy.

Algeria was a very interesting place to be at that time. At one point we were notified at the Consulate General in Algiers that a young gentleman by the name of Ted Kennedy was coming through. He was the brother of Senator John Kennedy, and we were told to be nice to him. Lo and behold he arrived in a white Ford Mustang, which he had driven over from Morocco, right smack through the Western coastal Departments of Algeria, where the fighting was going on. How he got through safely, we never could figure out. Well, he was a young man at the time and he said that he wanted to see some farms down in the "Petiches" area. Well, that put me on the spot. If I took him to an Arab farm, with the boulders and everything, I would have been accused by the French Government of trying to show him something awful. If I took him to a French farm, he'd say, "Wait a minute. I want to see the people of the country." Well, I hit on a wonderful solution. I took him out to the farm of a man who was the son of the chief justice in Brussels, a Belgian who had come down there and settled down outside of Algiers and had a very profitable farm. So I took him out there, so neither the French nor the Muslims could accuse me of favoring one side or the other. I believe that this farmer had about eight children and already had applied for a visa to go to the western part of the United States and raise cattle.

He and Ted Kennedy struck it off very well, and Kennedy asked him to come and stay at the Kennedy home in Hyannisport, MA. Ted Kennedy was perfectly all right. He had been to my sister's house in Washington, and I had seen him there on one occasion. We had 24" of snow in Washington that year, the heaviest snow since 1918.

I was living in Washington at the time of the 1918 snowfall and was attending Sidwell Friends School, which has come to be well known. That's where President Clinton's daughter attends school now. It's a very fine school. Anyhow, I was in Washington at the time of this heavy snowfall. The roof of a movie theater on Columbia Rd., N. W., in Washington, collapsed, and six of my classmates at Sidwell Friends were killed.

*Q: What year was that?*

COOTES: 1918. In Europe, during World War I, the winter of 1917-1918 was terrible for everyone. Well, I've strayed from Algiers, the "primeurs," and so forth.

My tour of duty in Algeria was very interesting. Most people don't remember that in 1942 De Gaulle visited Constantine, East of Algiers. At that time he said that the Muslims must be given a greater say in the administration of their country, which included several overseas departments of France. Most people forget that De Gaulle had long been in favor of a bigger role in the administration of the country for the Arabs.

*Q: Well, when you were there in 1955, were the French negotiating turning over Algeria? I can't recall exactly when that was.*

COOTES: Well, those negotiations took place a little bit later. In 1955 there were many very capable Arabs who were calling for a greater role for themselves in the administration

of their country. But of course there was a certain dichotomy also, because the hill people in Algeria, the Berbers, had never been completely subdued by the French.

*Q: They are not Arabs, isn't that so?*

COOTES: They are Muslims but not Arabs. They are hill people.

Anyhow, it was an interesting time because the Arabs of the lowlands who were agitating to be granted a larger role in the administration of their country were not completely in agreement with the Berbers, the hill people. As a matter of fact, at one point there was an American missionary who was kidnapped and taken up to the hills East of Algiers. We had a hard time trying to negotiate to get him out. Finally, we had word that if we'd send somebody up there, they'd turn him over. I was elected and drove through all of this country, where there had been armed activity against the government. I met the people who had been holding this American. They turned him over, and we drove back through the countryside. It was a most interesting drive. They held me up there for a time, and I met a Berber who knew all about the situation. He was very much in favor of turning over more powers to the local inhabitants, including the Berbers.

*Q: Weren't the Berbers in favor of independence?*

COOTES: As they had resisted domination by the French colonists, or by the Arabs, they were agitating for a certain amount of independence, which, of course, they never achieved. You know, the Algerians, and the Tunisians and Moroccans who live on both sides of them, were all descendants of Mohammed and his Arab followers. The Arabs moved toward the West there, culminating in their taking over Spain, which they occupied for a long while. The Moroccans were known as the warriors, the Tunisians were known as the women, and between them were the Algerians, who were known as nothing in particular. In the Maghreb, which is the northern part of Africa, they never had the outstanding character that either the Tunisians or the Moroccans had.

During the Algerian War, under General Massu, the head of the French paratroopers, including the Foreign Legion, what was the year?...

*Q: You're talking about the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt [in 1956]...*

COOTES: By the French and the British. British Prime Minister Eden was behind it. And Secretary of State Dulles would not go along with that. Since the British and French did not have U.S. support for this operation, they decided to pull out from the Suez Canal Zone. General Massu was a great friend of ours who had a charming wife and who had served in Indochina. When he came back from Suez, he said, "If they had given me another six hours, I'd have taken Cairo." He was highly disillusioned that he had had the skids pulled out from under him. That was one of the low points in Eden's career, you know.

It was an interesting period. I certainly enjoyed it very much being there. Of course, if you met someone, you had to be careful. If he was violently pro-French, you didn't want to be accused by the other people, and vice versa. So you were always on a tightrope there. Then,

of course, terrorism spread there-- people were blowing up lampposts and things like that. That was one of the nastiest things there. They put a bomb in the base of a lamppost. Then, when it blew up, the lamppost acted as shrapnel, and it killed all sorts of people.

I was told by a friend of mine to come up and see Florence, because the Consul General was going to be transferred from there, and the post was going to be open. He asked me if I were interested. Well, I was certainly interested. I had been in Rome before World War II and Trieste for a couple of years, so naturally I was interested.

*Q: Then this was in 1957?*

COOTES: That was at the end of 1958. I was in Algiers from 1955 to 1958. We left Algiers...

*Q: Before you leave Algiers, I'd just like to ask something about the post. That was an interesting time. How big was the post at that time?*

COOTES: I think we had about six officers, all told. We owned a piece of land that had been acquired some time back. It had been a pasha's palace, which we had acquired, somehow or other. Our officers were in an office building downtown. We had always planned to do something with that piece of property. We were balked on this by the French, who rather suspected that we wanted to build something bigger. As it eventually turned out, that's where our Embassy is right now. But the French wouldn't let us build, so we were still stuck in the tiny little corner that we had downtown. We had this beautiful palace, with a lovely garden available to us.

*Q: Were you reporting to Paris?*

COOTES: It was a Consulate General and did have connections with the Embassy in Paris. But it was one of those posts which are regarded as sort of independent, like Saigon. Saigon didn't report to Paris. It reported directly to the Department. We were more or less on our own in Algiers. Consul General Lewis Clarke was eventually transferred from Algiers and was succeeded by Freddy Lyon, who had been a senior officer in the State Department in Personnel. Incidentally, while in the Department Lyon was in charge of the Washington end of the diplomatic exchange of our diplomats from the Embassies in Romania, Hungary, Berlin, and Rome in 1942, after Pearl Harbor. As I said previously, our diplomats went to Lisbon, where they waited for the arrival of the Axis diplomats coming in from the U.S. and elsewhere on the Drottningholm [a Swedish ship]. Freddy Lyon was in charge of that, and I got to know him that way. Now he was my boss in Algiers.

I was scheduled to leave Algiers when he was away. I had to wait for him to get back. We had Foreign Service Inspectors, and I couldn't leave in his absence. I was most interested in getting up to the Consulate in Florence before the position was snatched away from me.

Finally, I arrived in Florence on December 23, 1958. My wife said that this was not a good time to arrive there, as everybody had made plans for Christmas. I knew the number two man [in the Consulate], Sam Lewis, who later was our Ambassador to Israel. We had written to him and said that we didn't want to interfere in any way but asked him to book us a place outside of Florence, where we would stay until after New Year's, when we would come back to Florence and get started. So that's what we did. A reception was held so that we could meet the staff of the Consulate and USIS, the U. S. Information Service. Then we left Florence and came back after New Year's.

So there I was, assigned to Florence. Florence has the most wonderful location for the Consulate. It's on the Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci, an avenue along the Arno River. You can't beat that for an address, can you?

*Q: You sure can't.*

COOTES: And, of course, it was one of the last houses built by a man called Poggi, a famous Florentine architect of the late 19th century. It was sort of a "hotel de ville," to use the French word, which we later acquired and used for our Consulate. The ground floor was used for offices. The "piano nobile," [second floor], as it was known, was where we lived. We had no children, and there was plenty of room for us up there. The third floor was where Ruth Wagner, in charge of consular affairs, lived. We had the stables on the other side, and there is where my deputy, Sam Lewis, lived. I also trained another Ambassador, David Newsom, who later became Deputy Under Secretary of State for political affairs!

*Q: You did a good job! Was that building which Poggi built originally intended as a private residence?*

COOTES: Oh, yes. As I say, it was a "hotel de ville," a private residence. It was an enormous building, by the way, with a big entrance and a courtyard, stables, and the rooms above it where the servants lived in the old days. We had three people living there, with offices for the U.S. Information Service on the ground floor. We had a three-car garage.

*Q: How many officers were assigned there at that time?*

COOTES: We had four officers.

*Q: Four from the State Department?*

COOTES: There were myself, my number two, the consular officer, and the head of the U. S. Information Service. So there were just four of us, and two American secretaries--six Americans assigned. Now, there are three Americans assigned to the Consulate in Florence. The Consul General and the number two are both women.

*Q: Your communications and so on. Were they then handled by the American secretaries?*

COOTES: Yes. We were still using the old code systems. You used strips of paper and one thing or another, known as Brown Code. Of course, that's been replaced by the typewriter, or computer. You don't fuss around with codes any more. I remember one time--in Haiti--they called up the Consul General and said that a message, an incoming cable, had been received. He called me up and asked me to go down to the office and see what it was all about. I didn't know the code, and the message didn't seem to make any sense, so I didn't know what was going on there. Finally, it dawned on me, this was the time when Sumner Welles had been in South America, urging them to declare war on the Axis. I suddenly realized that the message wasn't in English. It was in Spanish! The State Department had sent this message all over the world so that the text would be the same in Spanish for all of the Latin American countries. Some dumbbell didn't realize that they didn't speak Spanish in Haiti. They speak French--or Creole!

*Q: Then you began your assignment in Florence at a very interesting time, in 1959.*

COOTES: It was particularly interesting because a cleavage was beginning to develop between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. Up to that time, the two parties had worked closely together. That was the period called "the opening to the Left." The Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy in Rome was Outerbridge Horsey. He was very much interested in this development in Italian politics, which meant moving away from the coalition led by the Christian Democratic Party. There was a possibility of the Socialist Party splitting away from the Communist Party. It seemed possible to get them to work with the Christian Democrats, which, in fact, did take place. Our relations with Italy at that time were greatly improved. I remember that Horsey came up to Florence several times.

Florence was a very interesting place because Tuscany had always been pretty much independent. The Milanese, the people of Milan, couldn't stand the Tuscans, and vice versa. Then, off to the East, was the Emilia Romagna, which was strongly Communist in orientation. This area had been the Papal States, administered by the Vatican, prior to 1870. Opposition to the religious domination of the Vatican had built up. That's why this area supported the Communists.

*Q: Well, the university was fairly active in that, too.*

COOTES: The University of Bologna. Absolutely. At that time, also, Johns Hopkins University [of Baltimore] had opened a branch in Bologna. I remember that one of my first jobs in Florence was to entertain a gentleman, a professor whose name escapes me for the moment. He said that he had just been authorized by Johns Hopkins University to set up a branch in Italy. He was interested in two areas: one in Trieste, because Doxa, which had started up the Gallup Poll in Italy, was from Trieste, and the other was Bologna, which, of course, was in my consular district. Having known Trieste fairly well, I said to this professor, "Forget Trieste and set yourself up in Bologna," which they did. Thank goodness they did, because they have a continuing influence there. The interesting thing about Tuscany at the time was that there were, I think, 33 different American institutions that had extension courses there, including Stanford, Mt. Holyoke, Harvard, and Yale. Princeton did



not, but there were "tie-ins" there. One of the things that Sam Lewis had tried to do was to get them all together and plug American ideas and one thing or another, instead of trying to do it individually. That effort materialized into an organization which still continues on, based on the Stanford Library, which has a very nice building in Florence. But there always has been interest in Tuscany, apart from the Johns Hopkins effort up in Bologna. So higher education is very much a part of the scene in northern Italy--much more so than in southern Italy. More so than in Milan which, after all, is the financial and economic center of Italy.

*Q: Why did the American universities cluster in Tuscany?*

COOTES: Because it's Tuscany--a nice place to live, and the Tuscans are a delightful people. And, of course, the Renaissance began in Florence. That had a lot to do with the fact that these various institutions went there. The Renaissance had left its mark, and the Tuscans are much more amenable to education and thought than the Milanese. Now I am speaking as a good Tuscan.

*Q: The Consulate General, then, had pretty close contacts with these American colleges and universities.*

COOTES: Oh, and how.

*Q: How did you interact with them?*

COOTES: Fine. We got along perfectly fine. The only trouble with all of these extension courses is that the students go to class Monday through Thursday, and then they go off to visit Rome, Pisa, Lucca, or something or other. So the American Church there in Florence didn't get as much patronage from the various American academic institutions as might have been anticipated. The students were always out of town on the weekends, so that, while we knew them, and we had closer relations with the faculty, the students were in class work from Monday through Thursday and then were out of town.

*Q: The American institutions sent their faculty members there and...*

COOTES: Usually, they had at least one or two professors there--at least one, who sort of ran the program.

*Q: Did these faculty members or students need any kind of visa from the Italian Government?*

COOTES: No, they didn't. They didn't have to have work permits. The Italians opened things up. If you came in for six months, you didn't need a visa. Later on, the Italian authorities insisted that they have a work permit. That's why Emilio Pucci had lots of very stylish young ladies working there, because they didn't have work permits and were working, you know, "black market" style for him and for a lot of the other institutions in Florence. Emilio Pucci died not long ago. In a well-known film of the Renaissance there is

a picture of Emilio Pucci, riding his horse in front of a church, dressed in naval costume, over to the square in front of the City Hall [Piazza della Signoria], where they still have football games, with no holds barred. I think that there are something like 15 on a side and no holds barred. It really is something to see. They were playing football there when Charles of Spain, or, rather France, was around the walls of Florence. He wanted to take it over. The good Florentines thumbed their noses at him by having that football game right there.

*Q: I think that you mentioned that in 1959, during the first year of your tour in Florence, the Communists in Italy were quite active.*

COOTES: They were quite active, but there had been a rift. One group which had been connected with them branched off and became the Independent Socialist Party. At that time the Communists were developing the idea of "Eurocommunism," which did not go down too well with the French Communists, who always maintained that nothing counts unless it's French. So much so that when the United Nations wanted to create a University of Europe, then the question was where the university was going to be located. The consensus was Florence--Tuscany--which had been the center of the Renaissance. But, of course, that didn't go down well with the French because if you're going to have a University of Europe, in their view it had to be in France. Otherwise, it didn't count. So that to this day this institution is not the University of Europe. It is the Institution for the University of Europe, located in Florence. The French can go along with that, because it's not called "The University of Europe."

*Q: But the Communist Party of Italy didn't get any further with this idea of Eurocommunism...*

COOTES: No, they got a very high percentage of the vote--next to the Christian Democrats. For a long, long time the Communist Party of Italy was the second largest in the country. Then the Socialists began to make inroads on the Communists. Craxi, the leader of the Socialist Party, attracted votes away from the Communists, so that they were never able to take over the nation or the government. But they did make inroads to the point where the Christian Democrats, in later years, had to have a coalition to form a government. At one point the little Republican Party--with only six members in the Italian Parliament--was a member of the coalition. One of the six members was Spadolini, who was a very potent influence, even though his party's numbers were small. He was Prime Minister of Italy for two terms of office. He is a bachelor. His brother lives in Florence. His mother lived there. He had a very extensive library. He was what was sometimes called, a "Mama's boy," that is, he was very close to his mother. He lived in her house, where the library was located, until she died. He has kept the house in Florence. Spadolini is practically a Florentine, although at one point he was the editor of the Bologna paper, the *Resta del Carlino*. That's a very interesting point. A "carlino" is a coin. You give this coin to a merchant in Bologna, and he immediately gives you your merchandise and a copy of the paper. The paper thus became known as the "left over," your change from what amounted to a quarter. They gave you a newspaper instead of change. So Spadolini was the editor of that paper for a while.

And then later on he was the editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, the big Milan newspaper. That was before he got so mixed up in politics that he had to give up editing these newspapers. He was quite a man.

Q: *But you saw him, you knew him in...*

COOTES: Oh, yes. We knew him quite well. One evening we had him and an Italian who had gotten his degree from the University of Yale and teaches at New York University now. Spadolini and this brilliant professor. We had two equally bright young women, and there were six of us. At the end of the evening I told my wife that I was mentally exhausted, trying to keep up with the conversation, which was going so fast. These young women were just as bright as the men...

Q: *In discussing politics?*

COOTES: Oh, they went into everything. But the professor and Spadolini--one was a convinced Christian Democrat, and the other one was leaning toward the Republican Party. One of the two young women was the daughter of a naval officer. The mother of the other young woman was an American. Her mother had gone over to France with her husband. They liked it so much that they settled down there. They had three daughters--all married very well. They founded the hospital which is still in Florence. It is known as the Hospital of the "Blue Sisters," because the nuns belong to a community of Irish nuns. Their veil is blue. So to all of the Florentines, those are the "Blue Sisters." Their convent is near the church of Santa Maria Novella.

Q: *Did you spend much time in Rome during your tour in Florence? Did you have to go to the Embassy very often?*

COOTES: No, we were quite independent up there in Tuscany, the center of the Renaissance and a law unto itself. I had Tuscany in my consular district, and I also had Emilia Romagna, the Bologna area. Of course, Bologna was anything but a center of Christian Democratic influence, because it had been the Papal States [until 1870], and the proletariat, the workers, were against the Catholic Church. As a result of this reaction, they were strong Communists. So my consular district included Bologna, Florence, and San Marino.

When I would go down to Rome for meetings which we would have from time to time, I'd walk into the Embassy, and people would say, "Oh, here comes the Red Consul."

Tuscany always had a life and system of thought of its own. That was one of the interesting things about being in Florence. The reporting from there did not cover all of Italy. It was Tuscany and its influence on the central government, which was rather extensive.

The mayor of Florence was a very fine figure, by the name of Bargellini. And I remember that when the flood occurred in Florence on November 4, 1966, I had completed about 34

years in the Foreign Service. I was getting close to retirement. While the Department was trying to get me to move out of Florence, the Ambassador in Rome was a great friend of mine, and every time the Department proposed moving Merritt Cootes out of Florence, the Ambassador would say, "Oh, no. That's the most comfortable guestroom I have in Italy. You leave him alone." So when I left there in 1966, I decided that rather than go to another post and incur all of the expense of settling down elsewhere, I'd just retire early from Florence.

So that was decided. We booked our passage to go back to the United States. My wife found a ship that left from the Mediterranean, straight back to the United States, so there was room for my wife and me, my car, my dog, my cat, and 23 pieces of baggage. Fortunately, we found that the ship was leaving from Livorno, which is near where the Breda Works are located.

[February 4, 1993, continuing with Mr. Cootes' account of his tour of duty as Consul General in Florence.]

*Q: You were telling us, as the last tape finished, about your departure from Florence, getting a ship that took you and all of your baggage back to the United States.*

COOTES: Yes, I was saying that my wife had found that there was a ship that was leaving from Livorno, because that is near where the Breda Works are. The Breda Works had just completed three cars for the subway in Washington, D. C. So instead of the ship sailing from the Mediterranean to Gulfport, New Orleans, etc., it went to Baltimore. Since we were coming to Princeton, that was much better for us. So we and the three cars for Washington got on the ship in Livorno and all got off in Baltimore.

In Princeton I stayed at the house where we now live, because Mrs. Lowrey was an old friend of ours. Her husband had been the Director of the American Episcopal Church in Rome for 20 years, including the time when my wife and I were in Florence. We came to know the Lowreys quite well. Therefore, when we left Florence after the flood, Mrs. Lowrey asked us to spend some time with her, which we did. I was listening to the radio, the BBC in the morning, and heard that Florence was cut off. So I asked Mrs. Lowrey if I could have a copy of the Sunday issue of the New York Times. She said that she didn't take the New York Times on Sunday--it was too heavy. So I went downtown in Princeton and got the copy of the New York Times and found out about the flood in Florence. Then I went down to Washington the next day. We still had some wags in the State Department. One of them saw me coming and said, "Ah ha! Merritt le Quinze" [Merritt XV], recalling the fact that Louis XV had said, "Après moi, le deluge" [After me, the flood.] So that was kind of fun there. Well, I jumped over my last time there, because then I retired from the Foreign Service.

The interesting thing about that was that Senator Claiborne Pell got hold of me and said that he was organizing a fund for the relief of the artisans of Florence. He did not mean the art of Florence, because that was taken care of by CRIA, the Committee for the Restoration of

Italian Art. Mrs. John Kennedy was the chairlady of that. Senator Pell was organizing something for the artisans themselves, such as the young women who made shirts and lost all of her equipment, typewriters and sewing machines, and all the rest of it. Senator Pell and a group of people were organizing this for the artisans of Florence. And he said, "Merritt, don't tell me that you're busy, because I know that you've just retired, and therefore I want you to go over and be the head of this committee." The Senator continued, "You know, I did relief work after the 1956 revolt in Budapest, and I know that the only way to run a thing is to have one head and one paid secretary--not a volunteer--plus all of the committees that you want. Now, you are it. Come see me in New York after you and your wife are home for Christmas, and we'll get you started."

So I was asked by Senator Pell to go over there. He said that I'd have a certain amount of money for administrative expenses. But since I had lived in Florence all of this time, I knew all of the people on the committees that had been organized to help in one way or another on relief for the Florentines. Iris Origo was an American lady from Boston who organized a group to buy sewing machines and typewriters for people who needed them. She had her group of committees. I just took them over because I had the money and she didn't. I never will forget that when I arrived in Florence in January, [1967]--the flood had taken place at the beginning of November, 1966--they had just reestablished, the night before, electricity in certain parts of the city. I arrived in Florence after dark, having flown over from the U. S. It was really horrendous and to see this town that I knew so well, with not a light on in it.

Anyhow, I worked with these volunteer committees, and when I made my final report on FLORECO [The Florence Committee], as Senator Pell had named it, I think that we had given away something like \$750,000. I had not had to draw on my administrative expenses. As a matter of fact, my administrative expenses were less than half of one percent! When I told my Italian friends that, they said, "Oh, Merritt, that's remarkable. But usually it's the other way around. The recipients get less than one half of one percent. The rest goes for administration."

So that was my post-retirement association with Florence, thanks to Senator Pell.

*Q: So that was after you had been in Florence from 1959 to 1966. But maybe we could go back again to your period of active duty in Florence. The Consulate, I assume, stayed in the villa on...*

COOTES: The villa on Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci.

*Q: Did the Consulate stay about the size it was when you arrived for those six or seven years?*

COOTES: No, the Department was already beginning to pare down the staff. As a matter of fact, they wanted to close the Consulate in Turin, but Giovanni Agnelli [the director of FIAT] got hold of his friend, Mr. Kennedy, and said, "Look, you can't do that to me. That's my hometown. You'd better keep the Consulate open there." So that was decided. But the

Department was cutting down consulate staffs. It actually closed the Consulate in Venice [in 1953], which I thought was a terrible mistake. So many American tourists go through Venice in the course of the summertime, and they have to go either to the Consulates in Trieste or Milan for consular services. This was a very stupid idea.

They were cutting down. By the time I left Florence, instead of having nine Americans, as it was when I got there (six in the Consulate and three in the United States Information Service), there was one person in the Information Service. They had eliminated their American clerical help and replaced them with Italians, which was just as well. When you are involved in propaganda, you want to speak the language of the country. The Consulate was cut down from six, all told, to four: myself, my number two (the consular officer), an administrative officer, and one American clerk, who handled the codes, which were done by hand in those days before we had computers to do the work.

*Q: So you were doing all of the political and economic work...*

COOTES: Toward the end. As I said, I had a deputy who filled in when I wasn't there, which was frequent. Having a deputy gave me a good excuse to get away. The political "opening to the Left" had developed, and by that time the head of the Communist Party of Italy was a man by the name of Berlinguer. He was from a titled family in Sardinia. It seems rather incongruous to have somebody who was known to his friends as "Il Marchese" [The Marquis] as the head of the Communist Party in the whole of Italy. He was a very intelligent man who was really behind this idea of "Eurocommunism." He wanted to have all of the communist parties, including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopt a common stance on Marxism, socialism, and all the rest. His brother was not at all involved in the Communist Party. He was a friend of mine.

Since this was happening, it made it a lot easier for us to follow developments on the Italian political scene, as observed from the Tuscan viewpoint. It didn't vary the monotony of the situation in Emilia Romagna around Bologna. They were anti-Catholic Church to begin with because the Church had ruled the area [until 1870], so there was no change. They were against anybody who was in power, although there were some very capable people in Bologna in the Communist Party, right next door to the Johns Hopkins extension program. During my time this program was flourishing. There were about 50 [American] students there, I think, plus two or three professors from Johns Hopkins. It's a going concern and has a very definite role to play in relations between the United States and Italy. It had greatly improved since the days when I first got there--not that I had much to do with the improvement. It was certainly my observation that that was the way things were going.

I was very happy to turnover the Consulate to [William J.] Barnsdale, who had been sent up from Rome to replace me. He had previously served in the Consulate in Florence and knew something about it. So things were in very good hands during his tenure.

I can't think of any other incidents which would illustrate my career in Florence.

*Q: Tell me about visitors. I have always imagined that a place as marvelous as Florence, with the Consulate General, would be inundated with people purporting to be official visitors. Did you have a lot of that, and who came to see you?*

COOTES: The Consulate was very centrally located, about two blocks away from two of the largest hotels. We had a lot of visitors who would stop by.

*Q: Did you get Congressional or official visitors?*

COOTES: Not so many. They tended to go to Venice or Rome. Not many of our Congressional visitors were fundamentally interested in the Renaissance, which, of course, was the big item in Florence. We didn't have too many Congressional delegations. We did have lots of American tourists. I was always very grateful to President Kennedy because, in the old days, an American Consulate always had a party on July 4. In the old, old days, any Americans in the neighborhood would want to go to "their" Consulate for the reception on July 4. Of course, things had gotten a bit out of hand in that regard. I remember one time in Florence--just as our reception was about to break up--a bus drove up, and I heard a man announce, "Now, everybody is going to the American Consulate. They're having a reception on July 4." And out they all came from the bus and ate us out of house and home.

The next year we did not have a July 4 reception because President Kennedy had decided that the reason for expecting the American representative in a given area to have a sort of "at home" reception for Americans who happened to be around there was not really a very good way to spend official funds. American visitors couldn't expect me to do it, because I did not have a large enough entertainment allowance to handle it. So the July 4 reception was eliminated. What I did was to have a reception on Washington's Birthday. This was much better because the people in the Italian Government in whom I was interested in doing something for were all in town, whereas on July 4 most of them were on vacation, down at the beach. It made no sense. I had no officials attend the reception on July 4 but had all of those American tourists. Kennedy eliminated that. I held an official party for the authorities in the town and the leaders in the academic world on Washington's Birthday. Now they've changed the date of Washington's birthday. In the old days it was February 22.

*Q: I remember it. You were in Florence at the time of the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. Was that something that people paid attention to in Florence?*

COOTES: On that day the Public Affairs Officer, a very nice lady named Coughlin, was giving a reception for the people with whom she had been in contact. Of course, she invited me as Consul General. She took me aside and said that her mother had been listening to the radio and had heard that President Kennedy had been shot. I said, "Don't say anything about it now. We don't want to disturb your party. We'll see what happens." About five minutes later she came back in and told me that her mother had just heard that the President had died. I said that I had better get back to the Consulate.

When I got to the Consulate, Mr. La Pira, who had been Mayor of Florence for many years, an outstanding and well motivated gentleman who did not always follow the party line of the Christian Democrats, was at the door, saying that he had come over to sign the book. He had already heard about the President's assassination. The first thing he did was to think, "Well, I must go to the Consulate to sign the condolences book," because that is what's done in Italy. You go and register your condolences by signing the book. But I didn't have a book. I had to go upstairs and get a leather bound book. And the first name signed in it was that of the former Mayor, La Pira. Then, shortly thereafter, the then Mayor of Florence, Bargellini, came over. So the assassination of our President in the United States did have an impact on Florence. We had manifestations of good will outside of the Consulate for the next couple of days, because President Kennedy evidently had captured the imagination of the Florentines. They are very volatile people. They express what they feel.

Our Ambassador in Rome was Freddy Reinhardt. He was Ambassador in Rome for something like six years. He was a great friend of mine. I had known him since long before he entered the Foreign Service. As a matter of fact, he used to court my sister. So we were very close friends. That's why I stayed in Florence for almost eight years, which is very unusual.

*Q: You were assigned there for quite a while, but then you said that you went back again, almost immediately.*

COOTES: Well, I went back at the behest of Senator Pell to run this committee, as I said. While we were still in Florence on regular assignment, before the flood of 1966, we had bought an old farmhouse there. After living in Florence for eight years and as we had no children whose education had to be seen to, we had decided that, when we retired, we would fix up this farmhouse. In fact, that's what we did. We got so used to Florence after eight years at the Consulate that we stayed on for the next 20 years after that.

*Q: Until 1986?*

COOTES: 1987. That's when I came back with my wife on the ship, which stopped off in Baltimore. Then we came up to Princeton and opened up the house here in Princeton.

If I may return to my time in Hong Kong. When I was there--I arrived in 1932--the only means of communication at that time was the mail. There was no airline service, and cables were so horribly expensive that despatches from the Consulate went by mail. As a matter of fact, the day I sailed out of Hong Kong in 1936 was the day the first Pan American "Clipper Ship" [flying boat] came in from the Philippines. So from that time on you could send reports by air mail.

*Q: What did it look like?*

COOTES: It was a four-engine plane which landed on the water in Hong Kong harbor. It was a Sikorsky seaplane.



Speaking of mail, I remember a story about a Canadian friend of mine in Hong Kong back in the early 1930's. The custom in Hong Kong was that when a ship was about to sail, such as the Dollar Line ship, which went from Hong Kong to San Francisco in 21 days, we all rushed down to get our letters on board to people back home. This Canadian dictated a letter to his wife, which was taken down by his Japanese secretary. She typed it up and put it in an envelope. He was going to read it on the ferry going out to the ship to mail it there. He told me later, "Thank goodness I read it, because this lady had misinterpreted it. I had said to my wife, who was in Canada at that time, 'Things are not so lonely, since I have a chap and his wife living with me.' She had misunderstood what he said, though it was close to it. The letter, as typed by the secretary, read, 'Things are not so lonely, since I have a Japanese wife living with me.'" It's a good thing he read that letter before he got a divorce.

*Q: I think that you knew Dean Acheson personally, when he was Secretary of State. Can you tell us something about what you remember concerning him?*

COOTES: I remember him very well. The Secretary of State used to have official luncheons for distinguished visiting firemen at Blair House, now the President's guest house. I remember that the Secretary gave a luncheon for the visiting Chancellor [Prime Minister] of Austria. One of my colleagues in the Office of Public Affairs of the Bureau of European Affairs was of Viennese origin. He spoke perfect German, with a Viennese accent. He was supposed to interpret for the Austrian Chancellor when he made his remarks in reply to Secretary Acheson. Unfortunately, my colleague, who was having a hard time making ends meet on his Foreign Service salary, had had a little too much wine at lunch. When he got up to interpret for the Chancellor, he couldn't remember things very well. I remember that on the way out Secretary Acheson said to this man, "George, if you can't remember anything better than that, just take out your penknife, cut your vein, and make notes on your cuffs." A typical remark of Acheson's--very understanding.

*End of interview*