

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

ROBERT THEODORE CURRAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: November 6, 1998
Copyright 2000 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York
Haverford College; Columbia University; Middlebury Language School
Russia travel and study
USIA experience
Entered Foreign Service - 1956

Berlin, Germany - Public Affairs Officer 1956-1957
Environment
Russians
McCarthyism
Hungary uprising
Amerika Haus
Exchange programs

Stuttgart, Germany - American Institute in Tübingen –
Executive Director 1957-1959
Environment
Amerika Haus
Property claims
Tübingen University
German refugees

Washington, DC and Beirut, Lebanon - FSI 1959-1961
Arabic Language Training
Course of study
Environment
Ambassador McClintock
Religion
Nabatia
Beirut
U.S. relations

Israel	
Amman, Jordan - Assistant Cultural Attaché	1961-1962
History	
Environment	
Arab Legion	
Nasser	
Government	
Arab-Israeli relations	
CIA	
AID	
Cultural contacts	
Palestinians	
King Hussein	
Glubb Pasha	
Johnson Plan	
Taiz, Yemen - Public Affairs Officer	1962-1964
Environment	
U.S. interests	
Infrastructure	
Imam Ahmad	
Isa Sabbagh	
Soviets	
Mokha	
Robert Stookey	
Nasser	
Saudi Arabia	
Jews	
Ambassador Pete Hart	
Oil	
Progress	
Chinese aid	
James Cortada	
UAR aid	
UAR-Yemen war	
Government	
Security	
USAID	
Aden	
Students to U.S.	
Bunche visit	
CIA	
Naval visit	
Smithsonian at Marib	
Kennedy assassination	

YAR

Washington, DC - USIA - Near East Desk Officer/Special Assistant to Director Cairo library	1964-1966
Washington, DC - USIA - Assistant to Director Leonard Marks Montreal Expo Foreign language lack Nixon	1966-1968
Mexico City, Mexico - Press Attaché Black Power problem Tlatelolco uprising Politics Rio Grand islands Environment AID CIA Ambassador McBride Nelson Rockefeller visit Nixon visit Cuba U.S. relations Immigration Cultural exchange	1968-1970
State Department - Executive Secretariat and Personnel Management Duties Nixon Kissinger Black September Dean Brown Security breach China visits Kissinger-Rogers relations SADI project	1970-1972
State Department - Personnel Management Grievance cases Middle East Hostage crises Khartoum murders Terrorism	1972-1974

Career management	
Kabul, Afghanistan	1974-1977
Ruling family	
Daoud	
Environment	
CENTO	
Russians	
Opium	
AID projects	
John Givens	
Clans	
Peace Corps	
Missionaries	
DEA	
Tunnels	
China	
Ambassador Ted Eliot	
Kabul Gorge road	
Bamiyan Buddhas	
Women	
Taliban	
Joint USIA-State Task Force	1977-1978
U.S. International Communications Agency [USICA]	
State/CENTO USICA	
Problems	
USIA - Near East/South Asian Affairs - Director	1978-1981
Camp David	
Palestinians	
Iran	
Teheran hostages	
Afghanistan	
Sri Lanka	
Israel	
Arabists	
Voice of America	
Morale	
Charles Z. Wick	
Ambassador Joseph Reed	
Exchange Program	
State Department - FSI - French Language Training	1981
Rabat, Morocco - DCM	1981-1984

King Hassan's U.S. visit
President Reagan
Environment
Western Sahara
Algeria-U.S. relations
Peace Corps
Ambassador Joseph Reed
Secretary Shultz visit
Personnel
Shah to U.S.
King's message to Reagan
U.S. naval visits
Tangier relay station
VIP visits
King Hassan relationship
Lieutenant Taweel case
Spy case

Retirement - Munich, Germany
Radio Free Europe - Radio Liberty
Observations on Foreign Service
Family

1984

INTERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

It was a privilege to be asked to take part in the ADST Oral History Project. I am particularly grateful to Charles Stuart ("Stu") Kennedy for his patience and attention to our interviews.

The history is divided into several sections beginning with my childhood and education/work experience before joining the Foreign Service. In the first section, the influences of growing up in a rather parochial environment with religious parents and the uncertainties of a World War in the background seemed to have produced a sense of mission in me and many of my contemporaries. We really believed that we as Americans could change the world for the better and we believed that the U.S. had the human and financial resources to back up this crusade.

As I reread what Stu Kennedy led me to relate, there seems to be a great deal of emphasis on people and surroundings rather than policy - in the official government sense of the word. Therefore at the beginning of each segment, I have added a few lines of introduction so that readers may acquire some background on the circumstances that led to a U.S. presence and policies in the areas to which I was assigned.

R.T. Curran
Frankfort, Michigan

June, 2000

Q: Today is the 6th of November 1998. This is an interview with Robert Theodore Curran, and you're known as Ted. Well, to begin with, could you tell me when and where you were born, something about your family and early years?

CURRAN: Thank you. I'm very pleased to do this, and I appreciate your courtesy. I was born in 1931 in Brooklyn, New York. My mother and father were missionaries in China before I was born. They spent eight years there and came back, I think, for two reasons: one, the situation in China was so unsettled in the '20s, it was hard to raise a family there; my father did finish his term of service, but also, I think, he wanted to move on professionally. He was a doctor, physician, and he felt a great call for service and wanted to come back to the States and do some medicine here.

Q: What denomination?

CURRAN: He went to China under the Congregational Board, and he was basically a Protestant. His own father was a revivalist minister in the '80s and '90s. Both his mother and father died when my father was very young, and my father survived with a very strong spiritual component which I think he passed on to me and my brothers.

I grew up in what I think we would call a Victorian house in Brooklyn. It was five stories high, one room wide: two rooms deep per level. Even though my father was receiving very modest compensation - my father went into medical education, and he once told me he never made more than \$15,000 a year, which doesn't sound like much now but in the '30s and in the midst of the Depression it was certainly a comfortable income.

Q: I have to say that when I graduated from college in 1950 I was asked what I hoped I would be receiving, and I said \$10,000.

CURRAN: Big difference in people's perspectives. And the things that I remember most about that era in Brooklyn were, first of all, that it was very clearly a white world. People of color, people of other ethnic backgrounds were hardly visible except for Italian immigrants, who used to pick up bananas from the docks in Manhattan and put them in pushcarts and push them over the Brooklyn or the Manhattan Bridge and go through our neighborhoods, and I can still hear them yelling, "*Banan, Banan.*" And my mother, and we had a full-time maid, would run out and buy bananas. And speaking of the maid, current households would be terribly envious to know that we had a Finnish lady who could speak pretty good English, but it was I would say on an FSI standard of about a 3/3. She worked six and a half days a week. She did all the cooking, all the cleaning, all the laundry and all the baby-sitting and, of course, lived in the house. I think she was paid

\$60 a month. So that was a pretty good deal for my mother.

Also the thing that, I think, surprises certainly my children and many people now is that in the 1930s in Brooklyn horses were still very much in evidence, delivering milk and ice, for example. In our house we had an old icebox, and a man would come in through the back yard and push a block of ice into the old wooden icebox. Of course, frozen food was unheard of, let alone television, or some of the things that we're all so used to now. I also remember the electric cars that used to do a lot of deliveries, and the sound of them, still, when I occasionally drive an electric golf cart, that sound is still the same, and it really brings me back.

Our family - and many families - had a very settled routine in those days. I went to a little Quaker school in Brooklyn called the Brooklyn Friends School. My father was a very early riser, and we had a serious family breakfast before we went off on the day's routines, and we had a very set routine for every evening. There was a regular menu every particular night of the week. Monday was, I think, hamburgers; Tuesday was hot dogs; Wednesday was hash; Thursday was liver; Friday was fish; and Saturday and Sunday were slightly more elevated type meals - ham or roast beef. But it was, I mean - on today's standards - quite spare. My brothers and I dreaded Thursday night because we hated liver, which is a fairly common "hate" for kids.

The Sunday routine also was unvaried. We went to church usually twice on Sunday, Sunday morning and then Vespers in the afternoon. Then we would come home, and from somewhere in his background, my dad used to love to have crackers and milk for a first course Sunday night, and then he would pop corn and we'd eat popcorn and maybe have some cheese with it and then a little fruit for dessert, and then everybody went to bed very early after listening to Jack Benny on the radio.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: The Second World War made quite a change in our family life. My brothers, who were considerably older than I was, were studying at Harvard and Princeton, and both enlisted in the war. One served with Merrill's Marauders in Burma, was seriously wounded, but fortunately survived. The second brother was in the navy in the Pacific, also survived, but had several scares, not so much with fighting, but he was on a DE (Destroyer Escort) and a couple of times got into very heavy weather.

Q: Was he in that major typhoon that hit during the Philippines?

CURRAN: No, he didn't get to the Philippines; he worked between Hawaii and the West Coast. But anyway, they were both very glad to get out of service. I was on the home front and still in the Friends School until 1945. I felt the burden of war very much, and there were a lot of young people's and children's radio programs then which encouraged our interest - Hop Harrigan, Jack Armstrong, and so on - and I think they created a sense in us, certainly in me, that there was right and wrong in the world and there wasn't too much gray area. And we all knew who we were for in the war and who we were against,

and people who remember the Second World War remember the propaganda was really strong against the Germans and the Japanese.

Q: What about the newspapers, because many people came out of this - and I'm of the same generation - and got a great sense of geography because we followed the war in the newspapers, so we knew places like Guadalcanal and Rostov and that sort of thing.

CURRAN: My father made sure - especially at our major meals together - that we followed the war closely, and yes, we had very good geography lessons. And my dad, who had served in the navy in the First World War, considered himself quite an expert on military matters, although I don't think he did very much in the navy. But yes, I would say that we had a very, very personal sense of backing "the boys" up. I mean, we collected aluminum and did savings stamps and worked very hard to support the war effort. Another thing I remember is that during the war we moved from the brownstone on Remsen Street to a tall apartment building on Henry Street in Brooklyn, and we had a warden on top of our building who was charged with watching for German planes. That made the war seem very close to me, and I used to stay up - we had blackouts during the war in the city - and help him. Of course, I wasn't up on the roof, but I was in my bedroom in my pajamas watching out the window to try to help find German planes. And the windows in the apartment overlooked the Brooklyn Harbor, and I can still remember the big troop transports coming and going. The *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Queen Mary* and the *Normandie* - painted gray - all went right past our windows there.

The war ended and fortunately my brothers survived and my father, who had to work very hard, also survived. I remember especially August of 1945, when the first atomic bombs were exploded. It's very interesting in retrospect to look back and feel the sense of relief I would say 97 percent of Americans felt that we had a big enough weapon to end the war. The battles at Okinawa and Iwo Jima were the first ones where they had a lot of film taken of those battles, and those horrific battles brought the war home to people in quite a different way from some of the earlier coverage, which was done by radio correspondents. Seeing the death and devastation showed Americans what might be involved in an invasion of the mainland of Japan, and everybody felt "thank goodness" we had a weapon which was big enough to end the war. There was none of the moral complexity that came along later with radiation and the whole question of some of the more fundamental human issues.

After eighth grade (1945), my parents decided that being in New York City in school wasn't a good idea. They felt the city was changing, as indeed it was. There was then, of course, a much bigger ethnic mix coming in, a lot more stress in the city, a lot more gang warfare and things like that, so they signed me up for boarding school. But my mother, particularly, was worried that I was too much of a sissy. So she sent me out in the summer of 1945 to work on my uncle's ranch in Casper, Wyoming, to toughen me up a little bit. The extraordinary thing to me now is they gave me a train ticket, and I got on at the station - I think it was Penn Station - and went to Casper without a second thought, including changing in Chicago from one train station to another. I think I had an uncle in Chicago who watched over that. I got to my Wyoming uncle's ranch, a Bing Crosby ranch which he ran. My uncle's name was Lansing Rose. He was a dedicated alcoholic,

and somehow I don't think he was really aware that he was going to be stuck with one of his nephews all summer. In any event, he put me down with the cowboys and the wranglers, and I worked as a wrangler all summer, and I guess I did get toughened up a little bit.

Q: You might explain what a wrangler is.

CURRAN: Right. This was a working ranch and there were probably 25 cowboys. They worked all day moving herds around so they get the right pasturage, separate the pregnant cows from the other cows and whatever. But they need horses when they start work, and they start work about 6:00 a.m. So we got up around 3:00, and a wrangler gets on a pony and goes out to find the grazing boy horses and "wrangles" (collect) them and gets them back in so they can be cleaned and saddled. The cowboys would come out after breakfast, and if there was the slightest thing wrong they were quite apt to let us know in very colorful language what the problem was.

In any event, after six weeks I got fed up with my uncle and his abuse and so on - not of me personally just, but generally he was a very abusive person - I left the ranch. I had a friend from school who lived in Medora, North Dakota, and somehow I found my way by train to Medora. This is a famous town in its own right because Teddy Roosevelt spent some time there. After the visit, I took the train back east and arrived home in time to depart for boarding school. But one anecdote that my children think is pretty funny is that my father took me aside one day after I returned and said that my mother, after hearing me talk in my sleep (and swearing in my sleep), wasn't too worried about my being a sissy any more.

Q: What type of books were you reading when you were in elementary school, I mean at Quaker school and all that?

CURRAN: Well, you know, I never read much in school. I remember some early Seuss books and some adventure books, such as *Treasure Island*, but the Friends schools don't direct you religiously, so I don't think I ever did much serious reading till I got to boarding school.

Q: Speaking of religion, what about the time you were in Brooklyn, about the Dodgers?

CURRAN: You might enjoy a Dodgers story. It sort of follows on the business about swearing in your sleep. My "Brooklyn years" were the beginning of the glory years of the Dodgers: Leo Durocher, Jackie Robinson, Duke Snider, and Carl Furillo. We lived and died on their every move, and mostly died, because they lost the World Series every year until 1955. But my father's board chairman at the medical school he ran, George McLaughlin, was also involved with the early financing of the Dodgers; and one day, my older brother and I and my dad were invited to go to a Dodger game at Ebbets field, sit in a box seat and then go into the locker room after the game. Well, I actually don't remember much about the game, but I do remember that the Dodgers lost. And my father, who was the original straight arrow - and I might point out, by the way, that in those days

when you went to a ball game the men wore suits and hats - none of this casual clothes mode. Well, anyway, we went into the locker room with the professional athletes in various stages of undress, the language, of course, searing the air, and my father went back to see Leo Durocher, who was the manager, and he said, "Ah, Mr. Durocher, it's certainly a privilege to be here. I'm sorry your team lost, but I thought your fellows played as well as they could," and so on. And Leo Durocher said, "Blank" - you know, for the purposes of the tender ears of the State Department, I won't say - but he said "*blank*" (a lot of the F-word) and so on: "Blank blank pitchers can't pitch, blank blank hitters can't hit, blank blank this, blank blank that," and on and on and on. And my brother and I, who if we'd said the word *damn* at home would have had our mouths washed out and been exiled to the bedroom, looked at our father out of the corner of our eye with absolute horror, and my father showed no reaction at all, just said, "Hm, uh huh, yes, very interesting, yes, I can see your concern, yes." So we left, and my older brother, who was kind of a needler anyway, said to my dad, "Well, Dad, what did you think of that language?" My father said, "Well, colorful but not very articulate."

Q: And then you were off to boarding school. When did you go to boarding school?

CURRAN: The fall of '45, and I went to the George School in Pennsylvania, quite close to Trenton, New Jersey, right across the river near Washington's crossing, and it was a rather small school, 400 students in high school and about half boys and half girls. It was really a great experience for me, a great atmosphere, and gave real structure to all of our lives. And in those days most of us lived at the school. It's changed quite considerably now.

Q: You were there from, what, '45 to -
CURRAN: '49.

Q: '49. Can you talk about the George School, I mean how it was set up, the classes and what you were getting out of it?

CURRAN: Right. Well, it was founded in the 1890s, as a lot of those boarding schools were. It was founded on Quaker principles. There were honor systems, and we all worked to help support the school, and we went to religious services twice a week. Quakers have a silent worship. But at our school, the principal was named George Walton. He had been there at least 30 or 40 years, and he believed that one should use these opportunities to exhort young people to higher performance, both spiritually and mentally. So, the services weren't very silent meetings when he was around. He was known as "the Pope" by the student body, a name we thought would probably horrify him, but I find out later, when I got to know him as an adult, that he loved it. We had very good sports there, which was good for me, and we had a lot of opportunity for young people to compete, and everybody was on some sort of a team. A very closely controlled social life - young people nowadays probably would be aghast to know that we had maybe two evenings a week when there was a very "proper" dance and very limited opportunity for one-on-one contact with the opposite sex, and very strict dress codes. I don't think we suffered too much. In fact, I'm certainly going to sound like an old fogey, but I do believe that a certain

amount of structure is good for teenagers. In fact, I think kids respond to it pretty well.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: I studied Latin and German at George School. And it was just at the time when the American Friends Service Committee was considering a work camp overseas, so I applied to take part in the German work camp. And probably that was a pivotal moment in my life. I was accepted to go and left George School a little early. I guess I went to graduation, although I don't remember that very well. And then we spent four months in Germany, and I'd like to say a few words about that.

We went by Victory Ship. A lot of people don't remember what a Victory Ship was. They were some basically steel shells put together by the Kaiser Company during World War II on the West Coast and fitted out with an engine and that was about it - not much ballast - and when they were packed with troops and supplies they were, I guess, okay, but when they traveled as student exchange boats in the late '40s before the era of the jet plane, they were really tough to ride in, and on the North Atlantic, even in the summer, they rolled like anything, and most of us were sick going and coming.

My first landfall was in Le Havre, in northern France, and as American kids who kind of thought, well, we sort of knew what war was all about, it was really shocking to see the bomb damage in a place like France, which one thought had kind of escaped the war, but, of course, the North Channel ports were really beaten up during the war, and not much rebuilding had been done. We went on to Hamburg and Bremerhaven and finally landed and got on a train for Düsseldorf. Düsseldorf was at least 75 percent bombed out, and we lived in a rat-infested, bombed out school, and our task for the summer was to clear the rubble in that school. We had one hot meal a day provided by the British army. There were 12 of us and there were 12 German counterparts, and we all lived together in that school. It was a marvelous experience.

Q: This was '49.

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: What about the German youth? You were all about, what, about 18?

CURRAN: We were all about 17 or 18.

Q: 17 or 18, so-

CURRAN: One of the older boys in the German group had actually served briefly at the end of the war. But I think the wonderful thing about it was that the war hardly came up. We were all just kind of enjoying what guys did. We played soccer and we hiked and we swam in the Rhine - full of trash and rubble! Most of the American boys did some serious drinking for the first time. There weren't many girls around, so I don't remember that girls played much of a role, though why I don't know. Probably the German families were being very protective. But the great thing about it for me was, because the German boys

really didn't know English well, we began to use German for the most part, and my German really took off. By the end of the summer I was really comfortable and, perhaps, even thinking in German.

I should also mention that the American Friends Service Committee took us into Berlin by train during the summer, and if Düsseldorf was bad, Berlin was terrible. There really wasn't a building standing. You could see remnants of the Victory Arch; Unter den Linden looked like it had been flattened with bulldozers. Of course, there was nothing left of where the Reich's chancery was, where Hitler had his headquarters. You could still get into the bunker, if you paid the British guard a little consideration, and we all did that and wandered around. It was pretty horrible. And we also went down to Munich to take part in a high school feeding program there. Munich also was just about flat, although the wonderful "Frauenkirche" somehow survived the war, that beautiful old brick Gothic edifice.

I guess maybe what was really extraordinary about that German experience was that - although I wouldn't have articulated it that way at the time - I think the survival of the human spirit and people able to talk to one another and deal with one another was a great influence on my feeling that almost any human problem can be overcome if people of reason and intelligence can get together, particularly younger people.

Q: You were that in '49. What about the Berlin Airlift? Were you getting any feedback about how that had worked?

CURRAN: No, I heard more about that later. In fact, we were able to travel in as civilians because the Russians capitulated, I think, in May of '49, and so by the time we went in in the summer there was no blockade. My parents would not have been happy about a Berlin visit.

After the German stay, I went to Haverford College, also a Quaker school, near Philadelphia. Haverford was also a very small school at the time, 400 undergraduates, and now as I was thinking about it and doing these notes, it really comes to me what a sheltered upbringing I had - I mean leaving Germany aside - to go to a 400-person nurturing high school and a 400-man (I say that advisedly) nurturing college, you know, probably gave me, until I was about 21, really an unnecessarily privileged life.

Q: Any student counselor would have said, "Go to a big city university," or something like that, I would think, just the general idea to mix it up a bit.

CURRAN: Well, I think my parents were really so involved during and after the war, so they were happy to have me at George School and I more or less went to Haverford by accident. I mean, I didn't even think much about college; I was thinking about going on this German adventure, and I think a week or so before I left, one of the people at the George School said, "By the way, where are you going to college?" And I looked sort of blank. And they helped me write a letter to Haverford, and Haverford accepted me, and I never imagined they wouldn't. I mean, if you think about what's going on now in college admission, it's incredible. George School probably sent a transcript for me.

Haverford was a nice interlude. I played soccer there. I played varsity soccer, varsity basketball, and cricket, which was a new game for me, and had good friends. Many of the people that I knew in college are still good friends. I don't think anything particularly exciting happened at college. I did begin to study Russian, and that was the second pivotal event in my life.

Q: What about other things? Were you looking at diplomacy, or - you're shaking your head - international politics or anything like that?

CURRAN: No, my main interest in coming back from Germany and appearing apparently rather odd to the other American undergraduates by clothes - and I had a little accent, I guess - my first preoccupation was to Americanize my self as fast as possible, and the second preoccupation was to play basketball and sports generally. Actually, I should say that I signed up for the pre-med course and soon found out I was completely unsuited for natural science, no doubt partly due to the fact that I didn't study. And about half way through my second year - my advisor was a very venerable historian named William Lunt, an English historian and an absolutely marvelous person... I was sort of waffling my way through his basic course in English history, and I was quite startled to get a note from him saying he would appreciate it if I would take tea with him.

So I went over there, and he was really a semi-god in that community. I mean, he had a wonderful sense of humor; he was a wonderful professor. And I went in and sat down. We drank tea. He didn't say anything. And then he finally leaned over to me and asked, why was I attending this college? I don't think I gave a very effective answer, and he said, well, in his opinion I was wasting my time. I was quite startled, and he said, "Your work in my course, for example, is totally inadequate, and I've been considering what measures I should take with the school." Well, I won't elaborate, but the interview went on in that fashion for some time, and I guess the one thing I would have really worried about would have been being thrown out of school because my mother and father, who were very saintly figures to me, would have been crushingly upset and it would have been very hard for me to take.

So I thought I had better get on with studying, and from that point on I really began to study, and athletics faded slightly. I also got hurt playing basketball, so that "enabled" me to study more. So I would say that Lunt picked me up and gave me a push. It was actually more fear than intellectual stimulation at first, although as I got into his courses and began to work on some of the issues that he very cleverly got me to work on - reformation and so on - I began to get involved intellectually and read more deeply and so on.

Q: Were you sort of moving over, then, towards an English major or-

CURRAN: History.

Q: -history major?

CURRAN: I majored in history and actually - it sounds a little conceited, but anyway - I did manage to graduate *cum laude* in history and became one of Lunt's fair-haired boys. It was a great time for me and I'm terribly grateful because, probably, at a larger school they just would have thrown me out the door.

Q: You graduated in '53.

CURRAN: In '53, but there's something that happened during college that's also quite important. After my freshman year I was drafted into the army, not having taken advantage of any of the reserve programs, and I went to Fort Dix to have basic training. And I think we were divided in groups of a hundred, maybe, a company, something like that. And there were exactly two white boys, and all the rest were black. And that first night, I thought that was it, and all what one considered in white families to be harmless chatter about the inferiority of blacks all suddenly came back to me, and I was really worried. But, of course, it didn't turn out to be worrisome. They turned out to be just as scared as I was, and I had many, many friends in that company, including the black top sergeant, who terrified me when we started out. But, of course, human beings are human beings, and it was a tremendous liberating experience for me.

Q: You were fortunate.

CURRAN: Very fortunate. And I was doubly fortunate because that whole company went to Korea. I was called the day we finished boot camp and I was getting my stuff together to go to the West Coast to go to Korea. I was yanked out of the line and told I'd washed out of the army because they found that I had had childhood asthma. So I was discharged and was back in college to open my second year. I guess you could call that lucky. That whole company was very badly hit. They went up to the Yalu, and a lot of them must have been killed. I never followed it up. We lost 50,000 men in Korea and 8,000 are still missing.

So I managed to get through college and, again, was looking around for something to do after college, and my father, I think, caught on that maybe I wasn't as directed as he would have hoped I was, so he sat me down and we talked a little bit about this and that, and I talked to a professor at Haverford named Holland Hunter, who was a Russian specialist. I'd studied Russian. (I can tell you why I took the Russian course. Russian courses were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays for, I think, an hour and a half or two hours, and by taking the Russian course I could escape Quaker meeting on Thursday, which was compulsory.). So on that high idealistic note I studied Russian for two years, and Holland Hunter, apparently, knew that I was studying Russian. So when I asked him for advice, he suggested that I go to the Columbia Russian Institute. And again, I wrote one letter, got accepted, and went off to Columbia via a summer playing semi-pro basketball in the Catskills in New York. That was quite an experience because I was just about the only Christian in the resort that I was sent to.

Q: This was, of course, called "the Borsht Circuit."

CURRAN: Yes, and also called "the Jewish Alps."

Q: It was the Jewish Alps?

CURRAN: Yes. It was a wonderful summer, and I learned a lot. I was in a very Orthodox hotel, my first experience with kosher eating - of course it's very good eating. And also, very much more informal living relationships between single men and women than I was used to, and discretion prevents me from carrying that any further.

Q: Well, you also worked as a waiter, didn't you?

CURRAN: That's right. We waited on tables and played basketball.

Q: You didn't only play basketball, but you were also there to be male companions, to fill in at dances and like that.

CURRAN: No, that wasn't part of the deal. Nothing like that.

Q: Because I think that the waiters often did this at places of that nature.

CURRAN: In my case, when you serve three meals a day starting at 7 a.m. - 7, noon, and night - and then play basketball till midnight, you don't have too much energy - which is probably by design - for anything else.

Columbia was an eye-opener for me. I studied, as I've mentioned, fairly hard in the latter part of college, but Columbia was the big league of studying, and graduate school - I mean, if you don't study, no one takes any time with you at all. So I worked pretty hard at Columbia, and I had an advisor named Philip Mosley, who took a personal interest in me, and during my first year Stalin died.

Q: He died in '53.

CURRAN: Early '53, March '53, I think. So we were in Columbia one day, and we had a seminar in the afternoon. There were about 12 of us, I think. And Mosley, who was - I'll repeat again - an absolutely wonderful man and, unlike Lunt, who was sort of a godlike figure, Mosley was a day-to-day down-to-earth man more or less our age. Probably in his '40s. Mosley one day said to us, why don't some of you apply to go to Russia and see what it's like after Stalin's death. So eight of us did apply, and nothing much happened. And I went to Middlebury that summer to polish my Russian.

Q: The language school.

CURRAN: The language school, the Middlebury Intensive Language School. And I got a phone call from I don't remember whom saying four of us had gotten our visas but the Russians said if we didn't leave in three or four days they'd invalidate our visas, or something ridiculous like that. So I rushed down to Washington and took my first ride in

an airplane, which again you know, when you think someone 22 years old had never been in an airplane reflects on another difference between then and now. My grandchildren are already flyers!

In Washington, we got U.S. passports over the objections of Ruth Shipley - State didn't want students traveling to the USSR - and Russian visas. My family, my mother in particular, was opposed. She thought this was a terrible waste of time and money. But I got a grant from the Ford Foundation to pay some of the expenses; I borrowed some of the other money; and we went.

Well, Russia was quite an eye-opener in a different way from Germany. We flew via Helsinki to Leningrad to Moscow. We were under the care of Intourist, and we were put in the National Hotel in Moscow, which is about a block from Red Square, and still exists. I think we only were allowed to be there 12 weeks, so the first few days were spent making the Russians understand that we weren't tourists. We were students and we wanted to be in student programs, which took them a lot of time to figure out how to handle. And to their credit, they finally did, so we went to some courses at Moscow University, and then we went on a tour from Moscow to Tashkent to Samarkand to Bokhara to Tbilisi in Georgia and then to Rostov in the Ukraine and back to Moscow and then to Leningrad.

Having been through the whole German-Japan-American confrontation and then beginning to pick up - even in my sort of removed state in college and graduate school - the whole Cold War business and the McCarthy business (Joseph being the senator who was so wildly anti-communist), I don't think any of us were prepared for the gray, Orwellian reception we got from Russia. You'd go out on the street - and since I spoke, you know, credible conversational Russian after Middlebury and several years of study - I could at least talk a little bit - you would immediately draw a crowd of Russians who were just flabbergasted to meet an American graduate student who spoke a little Russian, and they just bombarded us with questions of the most trivial and trite kind. "Why do you lynch Negroes?" "Why are there so many unemployed?" "When will capitalism die?" I mean, a very stereotyped view of the world. And what would happen would be that after about 15 minutes of this, a militiaman would come along and literally break up the "demonstration" and usually haul us off to the nearest police station to check our credentials. And this happened - it wasn't really an arrest, but it was certainly detention - in eight weeks probably, oh, at least 30 times.

And if you lifted a still camera to take a picture, invariably someone would say, no, "*nezal*," it's forbidden, can't do that, because everything to them was a military objective. Fortunately we had a movie camera with us, a black and white movie camera, and we took a lot of motion pictures, and that didn't seem to bother anybody; but the still pictures were a problem.

Q: What were you getting from your classes that you were taking?

CURRAN: Not much. We were put in a course for foreign communists and were given

the straight Marxist line. It was all pretty boring, and the students, with the exception of the Chinese, who were very pleasant friendly, everybody else was very hostile. That part of it was quite unpleasant. The travel was more interesting. We went around in whatever the Russian equivalent of a DC-3 is or was.

Q: Ilyushin, or something like that.

CURRAN: Yes. We went from Moscow to Aktyubinsk down to Tashkent and then bummed around Tashkent for a while. The further we got from Moscow, the more relaxed everything was, particularly in Central Asia, and my particular interest was in what happened to the cotton cultivation and the Muslim civilization in Central Asia in the '30s. I got some material on that, wandered around and saw some collective farms and collected enough stuff to do a master's thesis when I got back. And then we flew on to Bokhara and Samarkand, which were, in those days even more remote and bizarre Muslim places. We saw the old observatory of Ulug Beg, the famous astronomer from the days of Tamerlane, went over to Baku to see the oil fields and on to Georgia, saw Stalin's birthplace, which, since it was only about a year or so after his death, was still very carefully preserved. You could tell that the Georgians were quite proud of him; but again, the whole environment in Georgia was so much more friendly. People would sit around with us at night and drink wine, and we went out to farms and sat around and had picnics, and there was none of this business of inhaling a breath when they heard we were the Americans. Oh, no, it was "Sit down and have a drink, have music, have a beer," and so on. And then back to the Ukraine, began to pick up for the first time on the trip a lot of anti-Russian comments by the Ukrainians. We also went out to see Stalingrad. What a shocking place that is. People say, you know, Normandy was a big battle, but Stalingrad was Normandy for a year and a half - a terrible, terrible slaughter.

I would say that what that trip did for me was convince me that, I mean, we were really in for it with the Russians. They were the enemy, and we were the enemy, and it was going to be a long cold war, and I thought they were really implacable. The Russian state, any time we had any contact with it, was very, very difficult. And even the Russian people, we thought, were pretty well schooled in hostility and defiance. They confiscated all our still pictures when we left the country. We did get the movie out, which was nice, and there was then a bonus for that because after the trip *The Ladies' Home Journal* asked two of us to do an article on our trip, which was - I really hate to read it nowadays - titled "They Let Us Talk to the Russians." And it was simplistic, but in a certain sense an accurate reflection of what it was like for a naïve American to go into a country that had lost 20 million people in the war and now regarded us as the new fascists.

Q: Before you went on the trip, what was the thrust that you were getting from the Columbia School? In other words, where were the teachers coming from? This was the height of McCarthyism, and I was wondering how that...

CURRAN: Well, the economists kept thinking that the economic system of the communists wouldn't work, and they kept being bedeviled by the fact that it seemed to go on working. It was Bergman who was the chief economic man at the Russian Institute.

Mosley was a cold-warrior. He felt that - this was now '54 - the Russians were implacable, they were going to try to hold Central and Eastern Europe, and he was a close advisor to Nixon, Kennan, and "the wise men." All were working on containment in those days. John Hazard was the political science professor at Columbia. He felt that Stalinism was alive and well. But I would say that, if anything, our reaction to Russia was amplified by the atmosphere in the Russian Institute, which was after all trying to prepare people for service in the American government.

Q: It's interesting because Columbia during the '30s, the university itself, was a hotbed of, you know, sort of the New York socialist left and all that.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: Somebody I've interviewed and served with.

CURRAN: Well, we were talking about the matter of New York being sort of a hotbed - New School of Social Research and so on and Lincoln School and sort of, one could say, the left wing. In the depression there were a lot of people who with good conscience felt that maybe the capitalist or entrepreneurial approach to societal problems wasn't going to work. But the only person I ever ran into who I thought was really a fellow traveler was at a Quaker camp in the early '50s named Scott Nearing, who was a self-proclaimed communist and who talked about the collapse of Western civilization and the whole Marxist dialectic idea that socialism is the wave of the future. A fascinating historic character that I ran into at Columbia was Alexander Kerensky. Alexander Kerensky, who was ousted by Lenin's putsch in 1917, was still alive and gave us a talk in Russian about Russian politics. And you could imagine he wasn't very pro-Soviet.

Q: Kerensky was the last democratically elected, about the only quasi-elected official. Well, in other words probably the Russian Institute was better sited for the onslaught of McCarthyism than most of the Harvards and other places which had more across-the-board people coming from left and right.

CURRAN: Right. I would say that particularly with Mosley there, they were pretty well positioned to defend themselves, and I don't remember that any of us joked a lot about the Russian situation. You know there are a couple of sort of general observations. One is that I would say that growing up in the Second World War with the feeling that there was always a right and wrong in a situation; the trip to Russia with the shock of facing another enemy in my lifetime; my family's "right versus wrong" religious values left me, on the eve of entering the Foreign Service a person who felt that there were black and white situations around the world but that it's possible to fix it if you apply enough energy, righteousness, human resources, and financial resources.

Q: I take it that you came away from your time in what we would call today Russia, rather than on the periphery which is no longer part of the Soviet empire, but the Russians you met you felt that, you know, these aren't people you can get to particularly.

CURRAN: Right. That they had pretty much been co-opted or allowed themselves to be co-opted by the system.

Q: How about your fellow students? Did you also come back with the same thing?

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: I mean, you looked at the enemy and

CURRAN: -he was there.

Q: -he was there, and he was going to be there for a long time.

CURRAN: It was going to be a long haul.

Q: This is around '53?

CURRAN: We got back in '54. And I'll just say a few more things before I turn to the Foreign Service. I mentioned the *Ladies' Home Journal* article, and I also did a speaking tour with the movie that we took. I went to about 30 campuses and ladies' groups around the country. And in a way, you know, I think saying over and over again what the experience was and looking at the film, which even today is very stark, might have reinforced the experience I had there.

Anyway, in the fall of 1954, after getting back, someone said, well, why didn't I take the Foreign Service Exam? And for lack of a better thing to do, I did. And in those days it was a three or four day exam.

Q: Three and a half days.

CURRAN: Yes, and I thought it was awfully difficult, but they also offered you extra credit if you took languages, so I took German and Russian. And when they sent me the score, I actually was just below passing on the exam, but the language credits got me above whatever the mark was, and I eventually was invited to Washington to be sworn in.

Q: This was in-

CURRAN: -the fall of '54.

Q: You took the exam in '54.

CURRAN: And then I got invited - I think it was during the summer or fall of '55 that I finally got through all the clearances and stuff.

Q: You must have taken an oral exam at that time, did you.

CURRAN: Yes, I think I was invited for the oral exam in the fall of '55. I had a problem, having been washed out of the military. There was a gruff old doctor in the State Department who had to look me over personally. But, you know, I was an intercollegiate athlete and I was in fairly good shape, and he said the military had made a mistake.

Q: Do you remember the oral exam at all?

CURRAN: Not very well. It was a lot more pleasant than the written exam. You know, I think again that an applicant with a father who had been a missionary in China and a brother who was in the Foreign Service - my older brother was in the Foreign Service, the CIA, and my other brother was a public health doctor in the Foreign Service - you know, I think they sort of decided I was part of the milieu, and they just chatted a little bit about this and that. I remember it as being basically pleasant. And again, it wasn't life or death for me. I had other things. I had worked for IBM since 1954 and had a rather nice career started with them and was traveling down to Dahlgren, Virginia, to help with the Vanguard rocket program. The interview was a pleasant experience and I felt I belonged, you know. I would have been very surprised to be turned down, to tell you the truth.

Q: So you entered the Foreign Service when?

CURRAN: Well, I was brought to Washington finally in the spring of 1956, March or so, and was told, well, sorry there are no jobs in State now. There was some dust-up with Lyndon Johnson about the budget. Jobs in State were frozen. But they said, "You can begin as a junior officer with USIA." And so I did, and I had a wonderful time.

Q: I think it's a good place to stop. I'll put at the end here where we are. So we're going to stop now in 1956. We have just entered the Foreign Service-

CURRAN: -just been sworn in-

Q: -having been sworn in-

CURRAN: -and I'm on my way to Berlin for my junior officer training.

Q: You didn't get any training at all in the USA?

CURRAN: Hardly. I don't want to embarrass anyone, but we were in Washington for about two months, and mostly we sat around learning how to answer hostile questions about America and took a few A-100 courses.

Q: And also coming into USIA, it was separate - you were trained separately. Sometimes they're mixed and sometimes they're not.

CURRAN: But the interesting point is that I kept my original commission, and when we get further into this that will turn out to be something very good for me.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick it up then. Great.

Today is the 9th of November, 1998. Yes, you wanted to say something more about New York.

CURRAN: Yes, I had been thinking about that period in my life, and I mentioned briefly the work at IBM. I was taken into IBM after the Russian trip when I had to repay my debts by a chap named Byron Havens, who was working on a special computer project for the military, for the Defense Department. It was the Vanguard Project, and it was a great team to work with. Mostly I worked at night, which fitted in well with my studies, and I would finish usually about midnight and go have a glass of beer someplace and then wander back to my apartment at Amsterdam Avenue and 122nd Street. And when you think about what it was like in New York in the '60s and '70s and '80s, New York really in the '50s was a very tranquil pleasant place. All kinds of people were around at night, and I never felt the least bit threatened. My parents still had an apartment in Brooklyn. I used to go down there weekends very late at night on the subway, get out at the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn and walk through the streets of Brooklyn. I never had the slightest feeling of any concern. We certainly had a minority population in the New York area, but we didn't have a lot of drugs yet, and I think that was probably the big difference. I mentioned 122nd Street and Amsterdam. Two students and I shared a cold-water flat there and evenings on weekends when we were around, we'd play stickball with the distinctly multi-racial kids who were there. It was a very, very pleasant life.

I also want to mention that the people that Philip Mosley had among his students at the Russian Institute, there were some really very colorful characters. One of them was Colette Schwarzenbach, a very, very brilliant student, lovely person, who went on to be Ambassador Bohlen's nanny in Moscow and married Marshall Goldman and is still very much in the picture in U.S.-Russian relations. Also Francis Randall, son of the famous Columbia professor. Morton Schwartz, Peter Juvalier, another leader in Russian studies, still teaching in the New York area. Peter actually was nice enough to lend me some of the money which enabled me to go to Russia in the summer of '54, and finally Nathaniel "Nat" Davis, who evolved through Philip Mosley's Russian studies to become a protégé of Henry Kissinger, and they played a key role in the Allende business in Chile, the overthrow of Allende and so on. Also, there was one very unusual, I would say extraordinary, foreign student there named Tom Riha (he pronounced it *ree-ha* in Czech), a spectacular personality, a serious scholar. I began to wonder in later years if there hadn't been maybe a little bit more to him than just an ordinary student, and my suspicions in that regard were heightened when he was allegedly murdered, under very dubious circumstances. I don't know what happened to him, and I'm sorry to say, I never had the courage to ask any of the intelligence people what happened.

Finally in New York, I had the immense good fortune of meeting my future wife, Marcia Mattson. I invited her over on a blind date to have some Pimm's cup on the roof of my apartment house on a beautiful spring evening. She was and is a woman of great

intelligence and beauty and energy, who raised two great daughters and now (1999) works at the State Department in the Office of Inspections.

Q: What was her background?

CURRAN: She went to Oberlin, and she was studying history at Columbia.

Q: Before we go on to Berlin, I was tracking the last part of what you were saying. You were saying that you were trained to answer hostile questions, 1956. I would imagine that race would have played quite a part. I mean, this was just around the time of Little Rock, and the Eisenhower Administration was not terribly forthcoming. Everything was grudging. Do you recall what your line that you were given on this sort of thing was?

CURRAN: This is really a good question. I think that in the mid-‘50s we were still living in the aura of “Maybe America does have some problems, but by golly, we’re really trying to do the right thing.” “Maybe we have these minorities, but we’re trying to get them educated and try to turn the Little Rock situation around as the government helping minority people,” and so on. Perhaps my experience in Russia trying to deal with that type of question prepared me a little more than some of the other fellows, but I didn’t think the training was particularly difficult. Anyway, I passed.

GERMANY 1956-1959

The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) established after the breakdown in 1948-49 of cooperation over the German Question between Russia on the one hand and the U.S./Britain/France on the other, was just getting back on its feet economically and politically in 1956. The U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, James Conant, was now the U.S. ambassador and the other allies followed suit. The capital was in Bonn (our embassy was in Mehlem in a small community called Plittersdorf), Konrad Adenauer was chancellor of a government controlled by Christian Democratic Union (CDU) with a Bavarian partner in the government called the Christian Socialist Union (CSU). The SPD (Socialist Party) was very much in the minority and - with the exception of Berlin - a marginal factor in FRG governance.

Despite independence and the end of occupation, the FRG was still very much a client state and the occupying powers still held considerable influence and privilege in the country. Partly because of the isolation of Berlin, behind the communist lines, as it were, the U.S. especially maintained a very large military presence with major bases in the Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Munich areas. Americans in Germany were very highly regarded both because of the protective stance vis à vis Russia but also because of the enlightened policies of the occupation period especially after Germany ceased to be regarded as an "enemy" and the rebuilding of the country began with currency reform in 1948.

Official Americans enjoyed fine housing (some of it still held after post-war confiscation), PX and commissary privileges, cheap gasoline and a generally pleasant relationship with all Germans.

U.S. objectives in Germany included defending the country against an armed attack from the east; continuing the progress of western Germany towards democracy and a free enterprise economy; promoting western European friendship and economic union and nurturing German-American relations at all levels. In addition to the embassy in Bonn, the U.S. diplomatic establishment had consulates general in most major cities and 25 Amerika Häuser or German American Institutes each with a library collection and a strong cultural program.

Q: Well, then, moving on, you were in Berlin from 1956 to when?

CURRAN: To the fall of 1957. My new wife and I left. We traveled to Germany first class by air via Copenhagen and Bonn in order to serve in the U.S. mission in Berlin. I must say - and this is something I will come back to several times - that government officials were treated better a generation ago. As one hears, what employees now go through in terms of what they're permitted to do in mode of travel and the way they're sent around the world, going coach most of the time now, and usually discount coach (and of course, when you go discount you're treated accordingly by the airline and it produces a different attitude), I must say in the '50s, it seemed to me, you were made to feel special from the beginning of your work, and I believe people responded accordingly. I don't remember my colleagues talking about eight-hour days or earning overtime. There was never any question about that.

In Bonn during my orientation, I had the great privilege of meeting James Conant, who had just changed from being high commissioner to being ambassador, a very kind and very special person - he and his wife were unusually attentive to us. And then we took one of the night flights from Cologne to Berlin. The flight to Berlin and the commercial flights came into Tempelhof, and if you came in from the east, you made a very tight turn over the sector border where the Russians held sway, and the approach into Tempelhof went down between some apartment houses. I remember being quite startled. The roofs were higher than the airplane. We were met by a person named Jay Gildner, who was a USIA officer in Berlin, my first real boss. He took us to Harnack House, which was a mansion that had been confiscated by the American government for use as an officers' club. It was very, very pleasant. And Jay introduced me to my first work as a trainee in Berlin.

I want to say a few words about Gildner, who was one of the really superstars of USIA from the period it existed, from 1953, and I'm assuming it will go out of existence in 1999 (USIA was consolidated into State effective October 1, 1999.). He's retired now. He was in the Service until, I would say, the mid '80s. Very good with people, great vision, understood the relationship between policy and public diplomacy, and an absolute bear for work. There are some other people I also think were stars in that period, Michael Weyl, a fantastic cultural affairs officer, had a great career in USIA, John McGowan, who not only was public affairs officer in Berlin but he was an ex-stunt man. He used to regale us late in the evening, after perhaps a drink or two, showing us how you fall down stairs without sustaining any injury, a great show. I wish my kids had been able to see it. And finally, a marvelous person at RIAS, the Radio In the American Sector, which was our means of broadcasting into the Russian Zone, a man named George Czuczka, who was bilingual. His parents were immigrants from Vienna, but he'd been in the occupation working as an interrogator after the war. He had a wonderful human sense, was a skilled diplomat, and is still a good friend.

Eventually, we were moved from Harnack House into a new block-style apartment on the Argentinische Allee, close to the headquarters, which were on Clay Allee. It seemed to us when we first moved into this new apartment that the subway, or the U-Bahn, went right

through our bedroom, but we got used to that pretty quickly. Many of our senior colleagues still lived in requisitioned German houses, but our apartment was really pleasant and much nicer than our dwellings as graduate students.

Berlin was still very badly battered, especially in the eastern or Russian Sector. I'm sure everybody remembers, but I just might mention again, there were four Sectors in Berlin under the High Commission: Russian, French, British, and U.S.; and we all had access to all four sectors, but not outside the city, which was called the Zone. It took a while to get used to that terminology. My starting pay was \$4450 a year - FSS (Foreign Service Staff)-11, which doesn't sound like too much, but almost 45 years ago and with four marks to the dollar, it wasn't too bad. We had, of course, a free apartment, and we had access to the PX and the commissary - so we lived, I would say, comfortably, if not too luxuriously. Berlin was still in such meager shape or bad shape that if you drove from Dahlem, where our apartment was, to go downtown to a film or a play, you could drive in about 15 minutes. There was practically no traffic and very little German traffic, certainly, after dark. For the first part of our stay there, we couldn't afford a car, but we were lucky because, as I mentioned, we lived right on the U-Bahn, so we could get downtown almost as quickly.

My German was pretty good, after being a Quaker missionary, sort of, and studying German in college, and so I was put right to work, and my German got better quickly. I was doing a lot of press work and also was a tour guide for visiting American VIPs - typical junior officer work, but I really loved it because it gave me a chance to really see the whole city, and particularly the eastern part of the city. We would get into our black USBER automobiles, with U.S. Forces in Germany license plates, and we'd go through the Brandenburg *Tor* and then we'd go buzz around the Russian Sector. One of the favorite spots that I would take them after Unter den Linden, which was famous for the big German parades and the opera house and the old Hitler bunker, was the Russian military cemetery at Treptow, which is in the southeastern quadrant of the big city. It was a monument the Russians built to their soldiers who had died capturing Berlin, and at the time it seemed very much a monument to Russian imperialism and military power. Later on in this discussion we're having, if discussion is the word, I'll come back and give you the impressions that I had of Treptow when I went back in the early 1990s. It was quite a change for me, I think, attitudinally. At that time (1956), it looked like the Russian mailed fist - a constant reminder of their power.

Q: On these trips was it sort of almost implied that you were going to show them how much better our Germans were than their Germans.

CURRAN: That's a good question. I would say it was more a question of showing them how bad the Russians were. That's a theme we talked about before, and again, I think prepared for me the Cold War mentality: we're on the side of the angels and we can see that they aren't. There were really acres of bombed out areas in Berlin, and that unbelievable smell, which came back to me from working in Düsseldorf in the '40s, of what a ruined building is like, with the damp basements and so on. We touted this as a failure of communism and the indifference of the Russians. There was an uprising in

Berlin in 1954, a couple of years before I got there. It was a spontaneous attack on the authorities in Berlin, and the authorities made some effort after that to pep the place up a little, but it was still pretty drab.

Q: This uprising, I know, I happened to have been an enlisted man in the air force in Darmstadt, and we were confined to barracks when this happened because we weren't quite sure what was going to happen.

CURRAN: That's right. It was very scary, and don't forget that when Eisenhower, and particularly his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, came into office in 1953, Dulles issued lots of rhetoric about rolling back communism. A lot of people were wondering whether the U.S. would use the Berlin riots as an excuse to apply some force - even attack weapons.

West Berlin in the post war period was under the leadership of three particularly brilliant mayors: Ernst Reuter, Otto Suhr, and then Willi Brandt. And West Berlin was really beginning to blossom. By the time we left in the summer of '57, many display lights were on and rebuilding was going full-blast, and there was a lot of economic interest, especially by Eleanor Dulles, the Secretary's sister.

The German staff at the USBER, or the U.S. Mission in Berlin, was very, very energetic and positive about their role. It was symbolic of the team spirit that at the end of the work week on Friday there would be a trooping the colors by the American guard unit. They'd come up a little alleyway through the middle of USBER - and they'd present arms, lower the colors, and then that was the end of the work week. And I can remember standing with my German colleagues, feeling kinship, and it was really quite moving. You felt a unity of purpose and friendship and so on. An ironic note to that is about a year after I left, one of those people who was a regular at the trooping of the colors turned out to be leading Russian spy. He worked in the Labor Section, and it was, of course, a great shock to us to imagine a nice person like that could be a spy for the Russians. The Russian presence was always very, very clear. There were guards at all the key points. They even had a guard in West Berlin at a monument they had at the Brandenburg *Tor*, and I'm not sure whether this had any military practicality or not, but during summer nights anyway, when a lot of windows were open, the Soviets conducted artillery practice near the Wannsee, at the sector border there, so you were always aware they were around. I don't know, I don't think we were particularly scared, but it comes back to the theme that one could tell who the enemy was.

Berlin of the '50s, I think, were glory years for the city. Eleanor Dulles, who was the sister of the Secretary, made regular visits there. It was kind of like having the royal family come and see it. And in addition to Ms. Dulles, who was married but didn't use her married name, we had some real superstars in the Foreign Service. One was Bernard Gufler, who was the chief of mission at USBER under the overall command of an Army general. Gufler was a very senior and distinguished Foreign Service officer with years of experience. His leadership style was pretty gruff and also very thorough, but he had a kind heart, and his wife was very nice to my young wife. It must have been a pretty tough

job because Gufler had the military on the one hand and he had Bonn on the other hand, and, I thought, from my very small vantage point, he did a wonderful job. There were some other great people there, Martin Hillenbrand, who eventually became Assistant Secretary of State, and David Henry ran the East European section, and of course there were a lot of intelligence people. But I'd like to just pause at this point and ask rhetorically - I've been asking myself - why it was it seemed to me there were so many really good Foreign Service people in the Foreign Service in the '50s. I think it must have had something to do with the selection process, and I think it had something to do with the way people were treated. It also had to do with a lot of the senior people knowing each other and trusting each other. Also, the Foreign Service was just beginning the era of excessive oversight visits by people from Congress. I remember we had Cohn and Shine come through from the McCarthy Committee.

Q: Would you talk about that?

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: Because this is a traumatic thing in the-

CURRAN: There were other flaps with the Congress from time to time, but in my experience it was the first "witch hunt." Cohn and Shine swept through Germany, determined to find communism under every chair and in every American library book. For example, Shine went into one of our libraries and found a book by Theodore Dreiser, and he said, "I don't know whether we can have a left-winger like that representing our library." Fortunately we had very senior people who said, "Well, you know, that's none of your business." But these characters were really difficult and imperious and scary.

Q: Also, the way it was reported was that there was sort of a comic aspect to this, too - for the reporters, not for the people who were directly involved - because these were two - to use the present term - gay gentlemen, in other words, homosexuals, who were very overt in their playfulness and all. I mean, they were very young, very arrogant, but they kind of romped when they weren't doing this stuff. And it was well reported, yet it didn't seem to... I mean, McCarthy was able to use this very dubious duo for his own nefarious work.

CURRAN: It's interesting you mention the homosexuality. I never caught on to that aspect of their relationship until actually it must have been years later when somehow I heard that Cohn had HIV.

Q: He died of this, and Shine, I think, was stabbed by a lover or something like that.

CURRAN: Nothing of personal sexual behavior was a factor. We felt fear and distaste for this kind of political behavior. I might say as a footnote that years later I was working for the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, and I was called on a Saturday morning - I was very thrilled - by the Secretary's secretary, who said that the Secretary had a favor to ask, and I began to imagine I was going off on a secret mission. Actually, I was ordered to

attend Bernard Gufler's funeral, which I thought was fine, and I went. He was a Ruthenian Catholic, which I had never heard of, and I went to their service. And if you've ever been to an Eastern service, they're not short, and I was there I think for three hours.

Q: Holding a candle?

CURRAN: I didn't have to hold a candle, but my zest in representing the Secretary declined pretty rapidly.

Q: You were there - when did you arrive in '56?

CURRAN: May, '56, and I was just going to mention three or four or five highlights of that time.

Q: Obviously, I'll ask about the Hungarians.

CURRAN: Well, the Hungarian uprising in the fall of 1956 is the first thing on my list. Both my wife and I remember the Hungarian Uprising as one of the most impactful moments of our time in Berlin. It is a gloomy time in Central Europe, as you know - it gets dark very early - and the news began to come in of this uprising, and then I think it was around the 2nd or 3rd - early November. There were a few hours of hope and then the Russians sent tanks in and just brutally crushed the uprising. In the background of what had been evident encouragement by Radio Free Europe that the rebels were going to get some kind of assistance and the Dulles rhetoric about rolling back communism, it seemed the West let the Hungarians down. As we now know, Eisenhower was so preoccupied with the Suez Crisis, the British and Israeli and French invasion of Egypt that even the Hungarian revolt became a sideshow. And by the time the Suez thing was calmed down, there wasn't time any more to do anything about Hungary. But to sit in Berlin, close to the whole problem and living next door to the mess in East Berlin, it was a very, very demoralizing time for us, probably the most difficult time I had in the Service.

Q: Were the Soviets making noises?

CURRAN: No, I don't think we were conscious of the fact that they might do any reprisals or take any steps against Berlin, but it was communism at its worst and the U.S. did nothing. In contravention to that, in early '57, there was some kind of an embassy picnic or party or something, and all of a sudden the Russians called and asked if two of the members of their mission could join this picnic. Usually, the Soviets might ask about Four Power events but never came. This time, two Russians came. One of them was a tremendous character named Vladimir Krivoshey, who was bilingual in English, exuded power and authority, and everyone assumed immediately that he had to be KGB, and he probably was. We got to know Vladimir pretty well, my wife and I, and entertained him a couple of times - of course, each time with permission. One time we had Krivoshey and his "shadow" for dinner with a small group of Americans. Vladimir's sidekick, whose

name was Ivan and who called himself “Johnny.” As you probably know, Russians party seriously, and that one night they finally rolled out about 3:30 in the morning. This must have been getting on into the spring and summer because as we were cleaning up the last dish the sun came up. Subsequently, we entertained Krivoshey and his pal a lot, and we started complaining about the fact that we were never allowed to drive into the Zone, and why couldn’t we do that? The Russians, you know, because they had an embassy in Bonn, could travel in West Germany, why couldn’t we travel in East Germany, and so on and so on? All of a sudden, Krivoshey said, “Fine, I’ll get you permission.” And so, lo and behold, six of us got permission to make a trip into the Russian Zone, Russian-occupied Germany. And we drove through the Russian checkpoint - the letter just got us right through, no questions asked - and we took two cars. One of the fellows in the mission had a black Packard, which looked pretty much like one of the Russian cars, the Zim, but the other person who went with us, a wonderful character named Lamar King, had a Ford convertible, and as it was terrible weather we started out with the top closed. We worked our way up toward Bansin, Heringsdorf, and Ruegen, a former restricted area, and we stopped for lunch in some little town up there - maybe it was Bansin. A big crowd gathered around. They saw these U.S. forces in Germany license plates and these unusual looking cars, and then Lamar pushed the right button and the top came down automatically on his convertible. I thought those people would faint away, they were so taken aback. We journeyed on up the island of Ruegen and stayed at a labor resort. When we came down to dinner, the managers had found an American flag somewhere and it was sitting on our table. And of course, there was a long speech about how wonderful it was to have the American comrades here and so on and so on. And we made a little speech back, which made it clear we weren’t American comrades.

Q: Speaking of the American flag, I’ve talked to people who served in the Soviet Union who said that when they’d go out often they’d put the American flag on the table to tell people to stay away.

CURRAN: Well, this was the opposite. Anyway, it was an extraordinary experience, and I don’t know why Krivoshey thought it was a good idea. He was probably just showing his power. It certainly underlined the rural part of East Germany was, if anything, worse than the eastern Sector of Berlin. Limited electric power, no motorized tractors, worn-looking animals, and terrible-looking people, and dismal housing.

Another great event we had in West Berlin was a concert by Louis Armstrong, who came through with his Hot Seven. And he packed the Sport-Palast, and he’s a tremendous personality, as everybody knows. But I want to recite one anecdote which we all thought was very funny. Mrs. Gufler - the Guflers had a dinner reception, and Armstrong was sitting next to Mrs. Gufler - turned to Louis and said, “You had great success at the Sport-Palast tonight. How do you manage a crowd like that? I mean, it was 20,000 people. How do you do that?” “Well,” he said in his gravelly voice, “Mrs. Gufler, I waits in the wings and wait till the crowd are really cheering their heads off, and then I go out and I wave my hand and wave my handkerchief and lift my horn, and then I hold out my arms and I lift my horn, and they start to quiet down and, Mrs. Gufler, I wait until it’s so quiet you can hear a mouse pissing on cotton.” And of course there was kind of a stunned

silence because Mrs. Gufler was really a very proper Foreign Service wife. But she didn't miss a beat. She said, "Oh, Mr. Armstrong, that's so picturesque."

Q: I'll have to remember that one.

CURRAN: In the fall of 1956, the U.S. also dedicated the Congress Hall in Berlin, a spectacular building, a conference center, fairly near the Charlottenburg *Schloss*, down near the Spree. It was a very unusual building. It had a revolutionary roof design and the Berliners immediately named it "the pregnant oyster." But it was a great festival and included Thornton Wilder, who came and directed one of his plays, *The Long Journey from Trenton to Camden*. And Eileen Heckart was there, Ethel Waters - a tremendous array of stars, and we got a lot out of it and made a big impact.

I also was involved with the first major space show the U.S. government put on. We put it on in exhibition halls near the Olympic stadium in Berlin, and I worked with a person named Paul Child, who was at that time running the exhibit sections out of Bonn. I really enjoyed working with him. He was enormously creative, and we had a great exhibit. But one day he said, "Well, I'm bringing my wife up to see what's going on." And it turned out to be Julia Child, the cook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and she was a natural wonderful person and we still have remained friends, although Paul has passed away. Our exhibit, "Space Unlimited," anticipated an American satellite in space, but as everybody knows, the Russians beat us to it. But eventually the Apollo program won the race to the Moon.

Before leaving Berlin, I want to just say a word about the new *Amerika-Haus*, which was dedicated in my last few weeks in Berlin in 1957. We had been operating at an old place on Nollendorfplatz, which originally had been a warning station during the worst days of the immediate postwar period. And even in the mid-'50s, before we opened the new center, many of the clientele seemed to us pretty much the same crowd that came to get warm, and we weren't really reaching students, officials, opinion-makers, and so on. There was one particularly amusing time when the staff was told that one of the "super" cultural attachés from Bonn was coming to town and had to be sure to impress him.

The U.S. used to hire distinguished academic types for short assignments. This was one. I guess I'd better not mention his name. He was a terrible stuffed shirt, and he insisted on giving a major talk in English in Berlin - he didn't speak German - on some obscure American poet, and we knew that we'd never get an audience. So the staff advertised a cartoon show in the Amerika Haus, and the place was packed. The super CAO [cultural affairs attaché] came in and we sat him down. And we knew he didn't speak German, so the head German said there would be a brief introduction to the film show by a distinguished American guest, and he went on and said, "Please, welcome him." Of course, they all gave him a tremendous hand, and he stood up and talked for an hour. Now, the Germans are used to long introductions, but they began to look at their watches and say, "What's going on?" So when Mr. Super CAO finally sat down, we ushered him out, and the film show began. He was very pleased with his reception. We moved to the new *Amerika-Haus* in May-June '57. It was a wonderful facility, and it's still there. It's

“Am Zoo,” right by the S-Bahn stop. In those days, before the Wall, you could come across the border even if you were East German, even if you lived in the Zone. You could come on the S-Bahn and stop there. And they did. They came by the hundreds. We had a special room for the East visitors with special magazines and newspapers and books. I must say, it was a brilliant success from a propaganda standpoint. I think it was a terrible irritant to the Russians, but we felt good about that at the time.

That was pretty much my Berlin time, in overview.

Q: Yes. At the time, by this time, would you say that we were seeing the Germans solidly in our camp as allies. You know, '48 had changed things, the Airlift and all. But was there concern about, are they going to do it again? Is there going to be a Fourth Reich and that sort of thing?

CURRAN: That's really an interesting question, and if you and I survive long enough in this interview and I get back to Munich in the '80s, we can talk about that some more. But in the '50s it was almost indecent how friendly the Germans were to us and how close they were to us. Chancellor Adenauer was still Prime Minister of Germany, and Willi Brandt was mayor of Berlin - if anything they were a little too close to us. But it was a tremendous era of good feeling, and these warm relations were amplified for us when I went to Tübingen assigned as *Amerika Haus* director and consul in September '57. I was picked for that job, I think, because my German was at that time almost bilingual and my wife and I made a reasonable representation couple for the U.S. She'd learned German from scratch in Berlin and spoke it really very creditably and was doing some research on the German Social Democratic Party and the arms question, which complemented some of our interests in what the Germans were up to.

Q: While you were in Berlin, was USIA looking to target youth with the Amerika Hauser (plural in German of Amerika Haus) perhaps trying to get a hold of the opinion-makers of tomorrow - thinking about university students and that type of thing.

CURRAN: Definitely. In fact, let me just mention some notes I took at the time. It was of enormous interest for the postwar world and the present world that in that period of 1948 to, I would say, 1969 and the advent of the Nixon administration, the U.S. really made an extraordinary contribution to a peaceful postwar Germany. We helped restart the economy, which was no small thing; we really saved Berlin from the Russians; we began to build up libraries. It's always amazing to me that an open shelf public library is an idea that's uniquely American, and the post-war Germans were stunned by this notion. “What's going to happen? All the books will be stolen, etc.” But the idea took hold and it was an important building block of the new, open Germany.

Q: The libraries - we belonged to one - and they were curators, conservers as well as distributors.

CURRAN: There had been a distinct culture of the old German research library basically closed to the public. We, of course, through the *Amerika Hauser* and other facilities,

provided endless lectures on civics and history and so on, all of which was unfamiliar for people who grew up in Germany in the '30s and '40s. Also, there were thousands of youth and adult linkages between the U.S. and Germany. It's hard to comprehend now how much we did in terms of Fulbright Grants, Leader Grants, student grants. There were refugee camps in East Berlin and West Berlin, where a lot of my time as a junior officer was spent, and since I spoke German, I organized soccer games and soccer leagues and civics courses and movies and so on. Over 20 years, the cultural exchange effort was a tremendous and very effective effort.

Q: You know, something that occurred to me - I was in Frankfurt at that time, from '55 to '58, as a consular officer - it didn't occur to me then, but it occurred to me later on, but still I was in the Foreign Service - about what a horrible thing the holocaust was as far as the elimination of the Jew in Germany, not because of just the horrors of the concentration camps, but what it did to German culture. And I think still today, there isn't there the spark, the salt, that gave, you know - and I was wondering whether you, being in the cultural field, were noticing this. Some of the old timers were talking about, you know, "We used to have a real movie industry. We had great authors, and all." Here's this big vibrant country with no really interesting culture, at least for a long time.

CURRAN: I'd have to say that in Berlin there were other issues that were of more concern. I'm a member of the Society of Friends, and I used to go to Meeting for Worship, which is a weekly service the Friends have. We met in East Berlin, actually, and there were a number of Jewish Germans who'd survived the war and come back, and I have an anecdote coming up from my days in Tübingen on this particularly poignant matter. But again, I would have to say that I don't think we were repressing the holocaust, but the whole Cold War confrontation seemed so much more dominating that I don't think we....that we were sufficiently sensitive to the great loss to German culture that had been the result of the expulsion and holocaust of Jews in Germany. But for myself at least, it didn't seem to be a major issue. I do want to say, for example, that George Czuczka, whom I mentioned earlier, a distinguished diplomatic American at RIAS, was Jewish, and certainly the issue of the Holocaust came up in his conversations with Germans, but it never came up really in a confrontative way. When the subject came up in my presence in those days, the Germans were always very apologetic and just retreated; they didn't really discuss it.

Q: During this time, did problems in the United States come up? Still it was just the beginning of the race problem moving into the front page.

CURRAN: Civil rights, I think, really began to emerge certainly after I'd left Berlin, and even after I left Germany in the summer of '59. We certainly didn't hear much about Martin Luther King, for example. I don't remember his name from that period. We certainly had, I am proud to say, interracial American cultural programs. The USIA programs, in buildings called "America Haus", played a leading role in introducing Germany to black music, and we had many distinguished black singers who came through, and many of them joined the German opera companies because there was less prejudice than there was at home. But again, like your previous question, I don't think it

was really a troublesome issue for official Americans.

Q: You left Berlin in '57.

CURRAN: Right. I went back to the Department system then, nominally, because my main job in Tübingen was the consular officer, and again, because of the original business of coming in as an FSO. In the '50s one didn't jump back and forth very much. In my own case I was able to do it. In addition, since our Center was in what the French considered their "occupation area." Our center was called the German-American Institute instead of Amerika Haus and it had a German board of directors. We had programs in 30 cities and quite a large staff, several automobiles.

Q: Tübingen is where?

CURRAN: Tübingen is on the Neckar River west of Stuttgart, and it's in an area of Germany called Swabia, or "Schwabenland," and when we went to Tübingen it was really a country town, something like going out to, oh, Leesburg in Virginia 20 years ago. I mean really a small town: everyone knew everyone; market square on Saturday; quaint customs; all that business. And our house was on a street which was called Op dem Viehweidle, which is Schwabian which means "On the Cow Path," and that gives an idea of the flavor of the place. Our immediate neighbor was a Catholic priest named Father Arnold, who had survived the war in Germany, and when I get to it there's a little story about that. I was proud of many things that my German colleagues and I were able to achieve in Tübingen, and in the area called Südwürttemberg-Hohenzollern, which translates as South Württemberg in the Hohenzollern area. We worked from Tübingen south to the Lake of Constance, or the Bodensee, the Germans call it.

Q: And you were given a consular title.

CURRAN: That's right. I was called the consul and had my office at the German-American Institute. My French counterpart was a major in the military, and I don't remember his name any more, but he was very pointed in believing - and he said this publicly and loudly - that I was an intelligence officer. Every time the major wrote me he would ask, "Well, how's the information collection going?" So officially he was quite difficult, but personally he was very nice to us, and opened the French PX and commissary, so we were able to buy wine for a very reasonable price, like 25 cents a bottle, very nice Beaujolais and Bordeaux. And that turned out to be a big help because modern day officers might be stunned to learn that my representation allowance was \$50 per year, and I had to use that in 30 cities.

Q: You were the consul, but what were you doing?

CURRAN: The main consular work was passport control and it was lucky I had the cloak of the German-American Institute around me, because Germans were, I think, more friendly to me generally in spite of the things that began to come up in the consular area. What was going on was under the contemporary citizenship law, the people who had fled

from Germany, Jews and others, who went to the States, got into the States - Roosevelt and his administration made some effort to let refugees get in, not enough, some people say, but in any event, if you got American citizenship in the 1930s and then after the war you came back to teach, let's say, in Tübingen, you could only stay three years without returning to the States and "reestablishing" or reaffirming citizenship.

Q: I think it was three years if you returned to your native country without showing that you hadn't given up your citizenship, and you could have your citizenship taken away. And I used to do it, too.

CURRAN: That's right. And that's what I had to do in this relatively small-town area. You can imagine what "fun" it was to go down to an elderly Jewish couple who were getting settled in Reutlingen and knock on the door and say, "Give me your passport." Of course, it didn't happen quite that way, but it was just about that way.

Q: Were you running across the things that I ran across, that you didn't have to go back if you could get a medical excuse, and doctors were always saying, "Well, they have to go to the Kurort somewhere and take the baths, and they can't leave," and all that?

CURRAN: The real horror story in my work was a man named Professor Hans Rothfels, a German academic who escaped to the States. He had polio, and as a result he got special attention from the Roosevelt people, and he came back to Tübingen and set up the American Studies Department. He lectured and was a huge influence in Germany, radio and television, wrote for *Die Zeit*, and yet, he felt he could not go back to the States because his health wouldn't permit it. He wanted to have his passport extended, and the Department turned him down. And I had the, I could say, speaking ironically, the tremendous privilege of going to him and telling him that and hearing what he had to say about it. He was very, very angry and hurt, and I thought it was awful policy. Again, I was so junior I don't think I had much impact. It certainly got looked at, but it was just too difficult. There were too many people involved to make one exception.

Passport confiscation was one thing, and the other thing I did a lot of work on was property, which Americans alleged they'd owned in Germany and which Hitler was alleged to have confiscated. That was easier in the sense that Germans are great record-keepers, and certainly, if plaintiffs wanted to pay a lawyer, they could usually get some satisfaction. That took a lot of time. And the rest of the time I went around and gave talks on what's going on in America, and I'd go out every night in the car and be out till midnight and get back and work in the office during the day.

Q: Tübingen is a university town, isn't it?

CURRAN: Yes, and that's all it was when we went there, a tiny little village, really.

Q: Could you talk about your impression of the university? I mean, you'd already been through the American system, both the small school at Haverford-

CURRAN: -and Columbia.

Q: -and then Columbia, and here you are looking at a major German university.

CURRAN: The German universities, at least Tübingen was still under the spell of what I would call the “old system.” If you got through *Gymnasium* (German secondary school), you pretty much could go wherever you wanted to go to university, and you piled into the classrooms and you listened. For the first couple of years you did pretty much what you wanted, which included a lot of drinking and running around. There wasn’t too much running around you could do in Tübingen except with themselves, but they did plenty of that. They clustered around the great professors. Theodor Eschenburg was a leading advisor to Adenauer and then to Erhard. In fact, Ludwig Erhard told a very funny story about Eschenburg, who was notoriously absent-minded, and he was holding forth at great length to Erhard on what was wrong with what was wrong with his economic and political policies, and as he left he took a cigar out of his pocket, and Erhard said, “Would you like a light?” And Eschenburg said, puff puff, “No, no, it’s already lit,” and left. And Erhard said, “I was sitting there taking advice from a guy who has a lit cigar in his pocket?” But Eschenburg was a brilliant man, and my wife studied with him for some of our time in Tübingen. Also, Golo Mann, the son of Thomas Mann, taught there. So the students would cluster around these masters, so to speak, and then eventually settle down and study. Medicine was an important faculty there. So was theology, and that’s why our neighbor, Father Arnold, was there as a professor. And *Germanistik*, German literature, was very strong in Tübingen.

Q: Was there any effort to create a chair of American studies? American studies has been notorious and it remains today that if you go to a university and you are at all interested in the United States, you can pretty well do good English, British, French, Japanese, Russian studies, but when you get to Europe, at least in my impression it’s been delinquent all along.

CURRAN: We managed to get a chair endowed in American studies, and the first professor was a man named Robert Irwin, who came when I was in Tübingen, and you’re right. There was a lot of resistance to it and a lot of concern about how serious American literature was, particularly because of this period of the ‘20s, 30s, and ‘40s, when Germans were cut off from America. They’d lost all the great novelists of the 20th century and the poets even. A few of them had heard of Walt Whitman and so on. But I would say even now that you’re correct in that Americans have to compete with the feeling that German literature and French literature and Shakespeare and so on are older and better, but I think we’ve gained some ground on that.

Q: Were you all pushing this?

CURRAN: Oh, absolutely. And as I say, we managed to get an American chair set up in the literature department, and we got a professor there. It was a modest success.

Q: How about at the German-American Institute? Were you getting much in the way of getting picky young people to read American books and things, or was it pretty much

technical?

CURRAN: Well, they certainly borrowed a lot of books. I mean the younger people read. First of all, we had a lot of translation, so they didn't have to read it in English, and in the French Zone, English was not the first language, which is good for my German but not good for what you're saying. I ran a couple of English classes for adults, but that's pretty tedious business when you're trying to do about 12 other things during the day, so I didn't keep that up too long. But I think there was a significant exposure to American literature and culture through the *Amerika-Haus* program, and as I mentioned earlier, I think it was a significant contribution.

I do want to mention a couple of other stories which you may appreciate. One was coming back to the business of gathering intelligence. In the fall of '58, the French were marshaling their forces to do something about Algeria, and because they didn't want to have the French population see what was going on, they were training troops in Germany. And because I was driving around so much, I inevitably saw these training centers. I certainly didn't do any political reporting worth the name, but I must have mentioned this to the consul general, who was a wonderful friend and backer and he was on the Institute board. One day a fellow showed up in my office, a small office like this, and my secretary stuck her head around the corner and said, "There's a strange American out here who won't tell us his name. He wants to talk to you." Anyway, a gentleman came in, very short haircut, a very much military bearing, striped tie, and he shut the door and he said, "We have to talk." And I said, "Well, okay." And he said, "Here's my ID." He showed me his I.D. card. So I said, "Okay, hop in the car. We'll go to my house." "Oh," he said, "I can't go with you," he said. "I'll come separately. Tell me how to get there." "Op dem Viehweidle," where we lived, wasn't that easy to find, particularly if you didn't speak German, but anyway, I drew what I thought was a pretty good map. I went to the house and sent my wife out to have coffee with a friend, and I waited. This was about four o'clock in the afternoon. At six o'clock he hadn't shown up, and my wife came back, and we said, "Well, the hell with it. We'll have dinner." The phone rang, and it was the chief of police. He said, "There's an odd bird down here in the police station who won't tell us who he is, but he said he came to see you, so what do you want me to do about it?" So I said, "Well, I'd better get down there." I came there, and he had refused to give his ID, and the Germans, you know, if you don't have ID, you're a non-person. So I said to the mayor, "Well, he's a young fellow. He's been in some special training, and he's new in Germany. Please release him into my recognizance." So I got him out of the pokey, and I said, "Please go back to Stuttgart, and the next time someone comes down, will you give me some warning, and we'll talk?" But anyway, the police were really puzzled about that, and I don't know what he thought he was going to get out of me.

Q: This was basically an American, probably CIA or military.

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: They kind of sent people and they kind of stuck out.

CURRAN: Well, you couldn't have stuck out more than this gentleman did. There were some other interesting things that we got into politically. The town of Rottweil in the western part of the sub-state I worked in had an annual event called the *Narrensprung*. It's an old fertility festival that goes back to the Middle Ages. It's held in the spring, just before Lent. Everybody has a nice time sinning, and then they watch the *Narrensprung*, costumed people leaping about, and then they go into Lent to repent all the fun they've had in the pre-Lenten celebrations. It's sort of like Mardi Gras. Anyway, it's very picturesque. But one feature of it is that the "fools," who have these masks on and can't be identified, the *Narren*, can say anything to anybody there, and they pick out leading figures and they abuse them. Some of the masks are a hundred years old or older.

And I had as a guest one year a gentleman named Kurt Georg Kiesinger, who was the minister-president, that is, governor, of the whole province of Württemberg, in which I lived. They were our house guests, and we drove down together. So we were having a delightful time. I was feeling confident about what a great coup it was for me to be entertaining a governor, and all of a sudden we were stopped by one of these "fools," who began to abuse the governor in the most personal and really vulgar way, and Kiesinger, unbeknownst to me, had a very short fuse. And after a little while, turned to me and said, "Deliver me from this mess." So I said, "I know where the car is." And we went back to the car, and we left. It was a bad moment. But I went back to that festival several times including in my later years. I love it. It's a wonderful spectacle and Kiesinger told me later he didn't blame me.

The other thing that was worth telling was one evening the mayor of Tübingen was an ex-Nazi, and in fact, worse than that, he'd worked with Heydrich in the SA, the *Stutzabteilung*, which was the most radical of the SS divisions, and he was involved in some way in the retribution at Lidice for the assassination of Heydrich.

Q: This is well known, the elimination of a whole town, and all the men and the women and children were taken someplace else, but during World War II this was remembered.

CURRAN: So this man, whose name was Hans Gmehlin, was 18 during the war, so in the mid-'50s he was probably in his late 30s, very vibrant man, and I'd gotten to know him well. I mean, as a consul you have to know the local mayor - he was *Oberbürgermeister*. And one night he said to me, "You know, I've got to tell you my story because I know you're going to be asked about it." So he sat down and explained that he was idealistic, he was carried away by the National Socialist dreams and was assigned to the SA staff. He said he wasn't a military side, he was a political advisor. But obviously after his boss was assassinated, he knew about the revenge. He said after the war he turned himself in to the Americans - he was in the American Zone - and he got a four-year term, part of it at hard labor, and then he turned himself in to the French and got another four years, including some hard labor. And the Occupation people said, "He's served his sentence; he can go." So then he came back to Tübingen, and he worked his way up through the civil service - he came from a good family - and he became *Oberbürgermeister*. As a young person who hadn't been through the war, I was probably more sympathetic to a story like this. But in contrast, my neighbor, Father Arnold, who was active in the anti-

Nazi resistance, used to sit down with me and tell me what a horrible man this Gmehlin was, not because of anything he'd done but just because of his involvement in Nazi history. So one night we said to him, you know, "Well, if you're a Christian, isn't forgiveness part of the equation?" He gave me this look, and he said, "Never, never. I'll never forgive him." So I said, "Well, if he came to dinner at my house, would you come to dinner?" He said, "Well," and he didn't answer, but finally he said yes, he would. So we had them to dinner with maybe two or three other couples. The Gmehlins were there first, and Father Arnold came into the room with his sister, who cared for him. And Arnold went over to Gmehlin and shook his hand, and it was one of the most moving things I've ever seen. And they spent the whole evening in a corner talking to one another. We did manage to get them to talk, and both of them afterward were very complimentary. It's probably something only a 26-year-old would be dumb enough to try.

Q: A 26-year-old from Haverford, with a Quaker background.

CURRAN: Yes, that's right, gleaming innocence. Well, anyway, it worked. Another funny evening that my wife wanted to be sure I put on this tape was in another one of my "idealistic" moments. There was a group in Tübingen called the *Gesellschaft für Wehrkunde*, which basically means 'Society for Martial Arts,' but they meant military, not jiu jitsu. So they wanted to have a meeting in the *Amerika-Haus*, and after clearing it with everybody, they were permitted to have a meeting there. And the speaker was a general who had served on the Eastern Front who talked about the collapse of the German Army. It was historically quite interesting, as he was somewhere in a control center in Poland. But in the middle of this, one of the local boys - beer drinkers will recognize the name as Dinkelacker - who had lost at least an arm and probably part of his mind in the war, suddenly jumped up and began attacking the German general for giving up one critical bridge on the Eastern Front. He said, "If that bridge been defended, we could have won the war, turned the whole thing around." Trying to be polite with a fellow obviously disturbed was obviously difficult. There was a very large strawberry-blond German in the audience - I thought it was another one of his soldiers - he helped me get the General out the back door and into his car and so on. And then he turned to me and he said, "God, wasn't that awful? Militarism revisited." And then we fell into conversation and Adolf Rieth turned out to be one of my best friends in Tübingen. He was the head of the conservation corps there, and a spectacular and wonderful, funny figure. But we really got to know him well because I took him back to his house, and the house was locked. His wife was a labor leader, and she was off at a rally or something. We had to climb in through the kitchen window, and he was a very heavy-set man. And the chair broke as he went through the window, and he crashed into the kitchen. It was an ungodly mess, which we were just cleaning up when his wife came home. Somehow we turned into best friends. So an evening that started with the ex-Nazis turned into a wonderful friendship evening.

Also I wanted to mention - this is also an interesting matter - there was a Sudanese family studying in Tübingen, and they had a lot of trouble finding places to live, because the Germans were nervous about black people. So we took the boy in. His sister, who was

with him in Germany, had married a Sudanese professor at Tübingen University, and so they had a little less difficulty. We took this Sudanese fellow in, and his name was Zein Suleiman, and I must say, I don't know why we did it, but it was a wonderful human experience. I think it was good for him, too. We kept in touch for many years. He's disappeared now into the Sudanese maelstrom. I haven't heard from him in 10 years.

Q: In this period, were we working on portraying the Soviets as the devil and all that, or was there any particular problem in doing that?

CURRAN: In Tübingen, the issue was more the one you raised about the broader cultural picture. The Germans were willing to be friendly and willing to give us a hearing, but for the most part they were - as one of the high school principals told me - "We're in the middle of an *Existenzkampf*, you know, 'fight for existence,' and we don't have too much time for peripheral things like American culture." The U.S. came late to the French Zone. We didn't get the volume of students out, but we did start a Leader Program when I was there. That was the USIA program where you send leading political figures to the States. We made some impact, but the issue was differently phrased there. The Russian problem was further away, although I do want to say that what was fascinating at the end of my time, the summer of '59, before I left, we began to see some people coming out of the Russian labor camps. The Khrushchev amnesties began to have some impact and we began to get some of those people coming out of the Gulag.

Q: These were prisoners of war from Stalingrad.

CURRAN: Yes, and they were just awful-looking people. Ragged, filthy, hopeless, gaunt lost souls, no idea what to do, and the German government, you know, was doing its best. Some of them ended up on our doorstep asking for help.

Q: What about the impact of American culture - movies. For example, I remember about this time, one of the hottest shows in town was a movie about Audie Murphy with him in it called To Hell and Back, and it consisted mainly of Audi Murphy killing German soldiers, and yet it was immensely popular. Were you running into this?

CURRAN: In Südwürttemberg-Hohenzollern, French-influenced, local governments had control over films and movies, and there wasn't much television, so there really wasn't much exposure to what you're talking about. You had to go up to Stuttgart, where they had an American base and where it was more liberal maybe than it was in the Schwabian cities. Certainly the influence of American movies was not positive.

Q: Well, you left Tübingen, then, in '59.

CURRAN: Yes, and went into Arabic language training, and I think that's a good place to break.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up, then, in 1959. I haven't asked a question which I will next time, why Arabic and all that. Great.

Today is the 11th of December, 1998. Ted we're off to where? 1959, and you're off to language training. This was what?

CURRAN: It was the summer of 1959.

I've been thinking quite a lot about the meeting today, and before we actually talk about language school, I've been thinking about post-war Germany. I was fortunate enough to have quite a long incarnation living and working in Germany in two areas from 1948-1959. There is a lot of discussion today about what people call public diplomacy. And many in government use it as a substitute or as a generic term for what the USIA used to do. Actually, I think it's a term that can be and should be used more in terms of a broader application to all the public, that is, non secret, assets of the American government in particular situations. And above all, I think, in addition to political and security resources and assistance (AID) resources, it's an engagement of educational and cultural intellectual resources. The American government did this public diplomacy to a really brilliant extent in Germany and a couple of other cases I'll mention later on. I think it's really quite extraordinary for those of us now who look back on considerable years in the Foreign Service, to see modern Germany, with its strong economy, its involved citizenry, it's totalitarian past pretty well buried, a vital partner for the West in what I dare to call the Free World. There would be very few people in 1945-46-47 who would have dared predict a unified Germany and I think we and the Germans deserve a lot of credit. But there was also the Japanese case, and the Taiwanese case, where substantial American investment of human and resource capital produced terrific successes. I think it's worthwhile for somebody taking some time to think about why that worked so well. We had good government, we had consensus of the nation, we had a bipartisan Congress, but there's some other piece of chemistry that maybe we don't quite have. Maybe it's a different, less naïve world or something, but it certainly seems to me now, thinking about various other foreign affairs situations, that somehow we have not been able to bring the same successful accommodation to bear that we have on Germany and Japan and Taiwan and a few other countries.

Q: Well, I think, too, something you left out of there was the fact that this was - with a certain patting ourselves on the back, also as a retired Foreign Service officer - we really brought some very responsible, knowledgeable, and dedicated people into the business of doing this. I'm not restricting myself to just the George Marshalls, Dean Achesons, and all, but I'm talking about the spear-carriers, like ourselves and many of our colleagues. It was, and I think it remains, a fine profession, but it doesn't get the credit for what it was doing.

CURRAN: Yes, and I don't think it gets the support, either. I think there are two pieces to that, and I mentioned it early in some of my remarks, that when one entered the Foreign Service in the mid-'50s and before that, one had the feeling that this was something really special, and you were treated very considerately and generously - not salary-wise, I must

say, but the way you traveled and the way you were handled by various embassies. And I think also, somehow, the contact with higher people - I came in as an FS-11, for goodness' sake, and when I came to Germany, Ambassador Conant found time to talk to me about what he was trying to do with Germany. I mean, that made a tremendous impact.

Well, let's move on to the Middle East, shall we?

Q: All right, so in 1959-

THE ARAB WORLD - LANGUAGE TRAINING AND JORDAN

The United States was poorly prepared to play a role in the Middle East after the Second World War. While a number of Americans, notably at the American universities in Beirut and Cairo, as well as businessmen and oil prospectors, had had dealings with the Arab world, there wasn't much interest in the Middle East aside from some notional concern/interest about the Holy Land. President Roosevelt met with King Ibn Saud during the War but there isn't much evidence the conversation had an impact on either party.

The British, who considered the Middle East to be an important 'parish', had a major interest in the Suez Canal and also had played an influential role in the post-World War I politics of the Middle East. The UK oversaw the Palestine Mandate, set after WWI as a territory to eventually accommodate the conflicting interest of the Zionists of Europe as well as the indigenous population, mostly Arab Christians and Muslims and a few thousand Jewish residents and communities.

The British position in Palestine was greatly complicated after 1945 when the Nazi defeat revealed the horror of the Jewish pogrom and there was great sympathy in the western countries for the Zionist goals of settling tens of thousands of the death camp survivors in Palestine - a true homeland for the Jews. The British tried unsuccessfully to arbitrate the competing demands of the Jewish settlers and the local Palestinians for land, water, and governance. As violence escalated beyond their control, the British turned the "Palestine Problem" over to the United Nations. The UN in 1948 voted to partition Palestine between Jewish and Palestinian communities and both sides immediately declared war.

President Truman, influenced by close advisors, recognized the new Jewish government almost immediately over the objections of the State Department, which feared that taking sides in the Palestine issue would adversely affect American interests in the Arab World. Secretary Marshall came close to resigning over this issue.

The period that followed, up to and including the year (1960) I started serving in the Middle East was marked by an adversarial relationship between some Foreign Service officers and a small number of American educators, businessmen, and politicians who continued to be concerned about what they perceived as a pro-Israeli bias in U.S. policy and the White House and much of the Congress, which tended to be sympathetic to Israel and its political/economic and military goals.

To assist in improving the conduct of relations in the Middle East, State increased the number of officers studying Arabic. These officers formed the core of professionals who have played an important role over four decades in the central American policy of keeping the Middle East from being the flashpoint of a third world war as well as working with the leaders of the area in inching towards a long term and peaceful settlement.

CURRAN: My move to Middle East affairs started a year before I left Germany. I had been sort of restive, restless, I guess, in my German incarnation, even though I was having a wonderful time there. Over the long run, as resources began to shrink for the German program and there were so many senior officers better qualified than I was to manage what was left of the programs, I thought it would be a good idea to learn a second language and get into a new incarnation. So I volunteered for the Arabic language training. I'd like to say there was good news and bad news. The good news is I joined a highly motivated group of officers with a specific agenda - to make it sort of a simple expression of the agenda - we were confronted with a very difficult Middle East situation, mostly political but also economic. It was clearly going to require a lot of ingenuity and investment to figure out how to solve this Middle East problem, and I'm referring obviously to the Palestine problem. The bad news is that the U.S. was and is really quite badly divided on the Palestine problem. "Divide," I would say, is a generous way of looking at it, because the history of the Middle East, particularly after the Second World War, made it very, very difficult for the indigenous people, who lived in the Middle East. The end of the war, the displaced person camps, the death camp shocks, the very well organized lobby for a Jewish state in the Middle East, and what were really unlimited resources for the new state of Israel amounted to the insertion of a very powerful new political entity into an already very fragile area - fragile in the sense that it was divided politically; it was an area which had been crossed by invaders for centuries; it had very, very difficult problems of space and resources, especially water, and the area nations were having enough trouble dealing with their problems before, as I say, a basically European state was plunked down in the middle of Palestine. It probably sounds as though I'm making an anti-Israeli statement. I'm not. I'm trying to just state the fact that this was a relatively sudden historical event, and certainly Arab nations, speaking broadly, didn't handle it at all well. But, on the other hand, it's hard to imagine really - as our French friends used to tease us - if a radically different group had been plunked down in St. Louis, Missouri, and took over the State of Missouri and so on and were totally different from us, how Americans would have been able to handle it. But in any event, I think recent American governments have been much more adept in terms of handling the difference that I've just described.

I might mention some of the other background factors in the Middle East. From 1954 to 1970, the United States was confronted with an articulate nationalist leader, Gamal Abdul Nasser, who was virulently anti-Israel, pro-Russian and very generally quite hostile to American interests. And he exploited what was perceived by the Arabs as our special relationship with the Israelis to make life very difficult for us during most of my time in the Middle East.

I was packed off to language school. It was a two-year intensive program. It was very poorly administered by the State Department. The most serious flaw was that, for reasons which I never got a satisfactory explanation about, six of us, instead of being sent to the Middle East to study Arabic, were sent to the basement of Arlington Towers to try to learn Arabic with some U.S. teachers - two of the three of whom didn't know Arabic - they were linguists, but they weren't Arabists - and tutors whom they'd scraped off the streets who'd never taught anybody anything. So you were sort of in the hands of

amateurs in terms of learning the language, and you had no opportunity to practice away from the classroom. And your family went on with their life as usual. So it was very, very difficult learning. And the second, in my opinion, fatal flaw was they tried to teach us oral, that is no written, Arabic for the first 12 months, and the basis of Arabic is the written language. So if you spend the first year studying your head off only trying to reproduce sounds from a screwy transliteration system, you end up after 12 months being illiterate.

Q: It sounds like they were trying to replicate learning Chinese, but they have ideographs, which are completely different.

CURRAN: And also, Chinese is taught in Taiwan; it's not taught in a basement of Arlington. I took the French program later on. The Washington School more or less works for French, because it's not so difficult. You don't have to spend that much time doing it, and you're immediately plunked into French-speaking countries.

And I must say, the Foreign Service Institute, which is mostly run by European language scholars, were completely unsympathetic to the problems of students of Arabic. The British, by way of contrast, took their Arabists off to a village in the mountains of Lebanon, with the families, and you lived in what was sort of a movie-set village. I mean, all the villagers were in on the act, and they spoke simple Arabic at the beginning and more complicated as you got more advanced, but you and our family were immersed in the culture. And they, of course, started students on literary or written Arabic right away. Why our country couldn't come up with that, I don't know.

Well, after 12 difficult months in Washington, we were transferred to the Beirut school, and at least now the students were submerged in an Arabic-speaking city. But again, our American linguist supervisors were academics, completely uninterested in foreign service needs or in Foreign Service officers, and to add to that, the embassy didn't accredit us to Lebanon, so we were on our own for logistic support. For example, we couldn't have a diplomatic automobile. We did get apartments, but all the furniture we had to provide ourselves. I mean, it was really a mess, and a disgrace, really, a serious waste of resources, because we lost at least six months of learning the language.

Lebanon, in the summer of 1960 was a badly divided place. Superficially some people said, "Oh, Beirut's the Paris of the Middle East," but the Paris of the Middle East existed in a very badly divided and upset country. The French had devised a formula which basically was designed to protect the Christian, pro-French elite. The government was divided into three parts: a Christian president, a Sunni Muslim prime minister, and a Shia Muslim Speaker of the House. And supposedly they divided power. As this formula unraveled through the years, the Christians became increasingly a minority government. I don't know whether there's an easy answer to why there are fewer Christian children than Muslim children, but in any event there were. And also the French contract took no account of the substantial Druze population, so Lebanon was a real powder keg. It had blown up once before. Eisenhower had had to send the Marines in in the late '50s.

Q: '58.

CURRAN: '58. And we did keep a substantial carrier force in the area. But we really, as I'll say in a few minutes, paid very little attention to the realities of what was going on in Lebanon, and we paid a dear price later on when the Palestinian powder keg was thrown into that mix. Everything blew up in our faces.

We had very few Arabic-speaking officers in the embassy. I can remember two. One was in AID and the other was in USIS. And the embassy officers themselves were unable to deal with or understand what was going on. They talked to the AUB people, American University of Beirut, a terrific university and a marvelous investment of American resources, and of course there were French-speaking elites among the Arabs, that is, among the Lebanese, not all of whom were Arabs.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CURRAN: McClintock was still the ambassador, Robert McClintock, a real proconsul type, went around with a riding crop in one hand and a big black poodle. He took the poodle to official calls, and if you know anything about the Middle East, you know that dogs are not exactly the most welcome of household animals. So anyway, it was kind of prototypical of the approach the U.S. took. We sent a diplomat who was a swashbuckler and took great pride in having waded ashore *à la* MacArthur with the Marines, and so on. The great surprise to the American soldiers was that the first line of resistance were little boys selling Coca-Cola, and the second line - you could imagine what they were selling. Language school went more smoothly in Beirut. Again, there were opportunities to get out in the country, and we actually met a few Arabic speaking Lebanese. I was talking to my wife last night, and remember a limited number of special events. Mostly it was a struggle for survival there. The big event for us was the birth of our first child, Sara, at AUB hospital. That was very exciting, of course, and the second, I would say - you could call it a sort of seminal event - was toward the end of my language study I was assigned or I guess you could say I'd bulldozed my way into being assigned to a village in southern Lebanon to live with a family for the better part of three weeks. The town was Nabatia, which was a Shia town. Do you want me to go into the difference between Shia and Sunni Muslim?

Q: You might just briefly mention this, yes, I mean at that time.

CURRAN: Well, it's always been the same. When the Prophet Mohammed died, he left his religious oversight to a series of successors (caliphs), who practiced the way of the Prophet. They became the Sunni Muslims, or you could say loosely, orthodox Muslims. And in Mesopotamia a different strand of Islam emerged from Muslims who believed that there was more or less constant revelations going on and that a series of imams was the source of these revelations. Whereas the Sunni, or orthodox, Muslims believe that everything that had been said had been said by the Prophet and written down. And eventually these two main streams evolved into - it's hard to use these words, but I would say - sort of orthodox Muslims, the Sunni Muslims, and you could say less orthodox,

maybe more emotional, maybe rather more fundamentalist Muslims called Shia.

Anyway, this episode in my Foreign Service career was a terrific language-learning experience. I went to a town where nobody spoke English, and I had enough grammar and vocabulary and structure training so that I was able to sop up the rhythm of the language, and it really turned the tide for me in learning the language. When I got back from Nabatia, I started dreaming in my sleep in Arabic, and people always say that's where you know you've turned the corner. So there was the language experience, and also the first encounter for me in Nabatia with the kind of the fanaticism vis-à-vis the Israelis that the U.S. now encounters almost on a daily basis. Nabatia was within eye-shot of Israel, and the people weren't personal to me about Israel, but they would literally foam at the mouth talking about what they alleged the Israelis had done to the Middle East. My wife and new baby joined me on a long weekend, and during that time it was the festival of "Ashura." "Festival" isn't quite the word. It was observance of Ashura, which is the commemoration (that's a better word) of the martyrdom of Ali's son and grandson at the hands of the Sunni Muslims. And because Ali and his cohorts were betrayed, the *Ashura*, or the blame, contrition, for this act is celebrated every year. And the way it's done is people flagellate themselves first to the point of bleeding and then make a small razor cut in their head and then walk through the streets patting their heads to keep the blood flowing, and, of course, the blood flows down on their clothes and they, of course, are chanting religious slogans. It's just unimaginable now that an American would even be invited or dare to attend something like that, but we sat on the rooftop and nobody paid any attention to us and went ahead with their ceremony. So I suppose I could say I was pretty fortunate to be allowed to be included in something like that, and it gave me a different insight into a part of Islam that I otherwise wouldn't have had.

Following that, I was so excited by being immersed in the Nabatia language and cultural situation, I talked the school into letting me take a three-week trip through the Middle East from town to town using the *servis* taxi system. I don't know if you know how that works, but in the Middle East of those days, you went down to the central market, and here were a series of diesel-burning Mercedes taxicabs. We would call them five-passenger cars, but, of course, many more people traveled in them.

Q: 180s in those days.

CURRAN: Yes, 180s or maybe lower, I don't know. Anyway, you would look for the sign to the city of destination. My first stop was Damascus, so I looked for a sign saying Ash-Sham, and you went over there and someone came up to you and said, "Are you interested in going?" "Yes, how much?" Of course, you already knew how much, but they'd bargain a little bit, and then when you had assembled a crowd of seven or eight, off you went. And I can't remember what the cost was, five dollars, maybe, to get to Damascus. And the wonderful thing about it for me was it turned out to be a terrific language-learning experience because you're clearly the only foreigner, so everyone in the car starts asking you questions and talking, and it forces you to repeat and repeat and repeat phrases you know and you learn new words. And then they lecture you on various aspects. And so in five hours at a crack I got a lot of language and also learned to relax

about how to do border crossings in those days and kind of got into the rhythm of life and went to Damascus and stayed not in a Western-style hotel but in an Arab hostel, so everybody thought I was a crazy foreigner. But anyway, the hostel was very clean. It was run by the Red Crescent, the Muslim equivalent of the Red Cross, and it was very simple and cheap, I think a dollar for bed and breakfast.

I should say a few things about Damascus. Damascus was still very much of the old Lawrence of Arabia city, or Crusader city. It was a very small walled town, basic town. It's where the small gate is which they call the "eye of the needle," which Jesus used in one of his proverbs, saying it's more difficult for a sinner to get to heaven than it is for a camel to get through the eye of a needle. I remember in Sunday school wondering how a gate was the eye of a needle, but the gate - it's a very low gate - would be hard to get a camel through.

There's a big underground market there that still exists. If you ever go to Damascus don't miss it! Wonderful shops and everything possible for sale - and I mean everything. Incidentally, the people, everywhere I went, as soon as they heard that one had made the effort to learn Arabic, it changed the whole chemistry of how they dealt with you as an American. That was invariable. I haven't been in the Middle East now since the mid-'80s, but even now if I speak to someone in Arabic in one of the restaurants of Washington, it makes a complete difference in the way they view you as a human being, and that's a lesson we should remember.

We didn't talk a lot about politics in the *servis* taxis. We talked a lot about life. They were very curious about many basic things. Particularly, having seen a lot of American movies, they were very interested in personal relations between men and women, down to the very most basic details, and shared their own experiences with me. I went from Damascus to Amman, Jordan, and went as far south as the head of the Hejaz Railway, which is near Ma'an and Aqaba in Jordan, and then I went east to the Iraqi Border and then back to Amman, back to Damascus, back to Beirut.

Q: Was Jordan at that time inundated by the Palestinians? I'm trying to think when was the Black September?

CURRAN: I'll get to that. Jordan was my next assignment after Beirut, so I'll probably tell more than you want to know.

Q: Oh, no.

CURRAN: My family and I got around Beirut - because we couldn't get a diplomatic car - in an old Citroën I could afford, and we batted around the countryside in great style. Citroëns were wonderful automobiles, and again, Americans so rarely drove a car of that vintage and that appearance that it also eased many of the burdens of getting to know people. But my family still teases me. We were on a trip with some friends and we got lost, as is common in the Middle East. There are few sign markers. We were trying to get to Baalbek, something like that, where the old Roman ruins are, and there was an old lady

selling drinks by the side of the road. So we stopped, and in my now, what I considered, fluent Arabic, I said, "Which way to Baalbek?" And without blinking, she said to me in Arabic, "I'm sorry but I don't speak foreign tongues." And I said, "Excuse me, but I'm speaking to you in Arabic." And she said, "I just told you, I don't speak foreign tongues." So I said something very emphatic with the word *God* in it, and I said, "I'm speaking to you in Arabic." "Oh," she said, "you speak Arabic!" (I was a blue-eyed foreigner and her preconception was they don't speak Arabic, so she didn't "understand" it.)

Q: Yes, I've had conversations when I was in Yugoslavia where a man or somebody older would speak to me in German and I'd be speaking Serbian to them, and we'd go on in that regard because obviously I was not a Serb and the only other language they'd know was German.

CURRAN: I want to talk a little bit more about Beirut as we kind of got into the scene and understood Arabic better. A lot of Americans we knew came to Beirut in the late 1960-61, a lot of Westerners, and they were just agog at what a wonderful city it was and how pleasant it was. And they would see AUB, the American University of Beirut, and they would see what was called Pigeon Rocks, which was where a lot of the foreigners lived and the Christian quarter, and Saint George's Hotel, bikinis, booze, and plenty of bigamy and all that stuff. But what they didn't see was the men, or they were called in Arabic "coolies," who did a lot of the work around. When we were moving in a refrigerator into our apartment, a brand new, big American refrigerator, I had no idea how they were going to get it up to the apartment. One of these "coolies" put it on his back and walked up five flights of stairs. And we ran into these men, and you could collect them on a street corner, pay them a dollar a day because they were desperately poor people; some of them were so dirty you could see the fleas jumping around between their neck and their clothes. At the same time you had people driving in air-conditioned Mercedes and living the high life. And then in between there were large populations of students who saw no future and spouted a lot of rhetoric about socialism. I once challenged one of these young men and said, you know, "I don't see how you, as a Muslim, can espouse a godless political philosophy." And he said, "Well, you don't understand. Socialism is the fastest way to an American standard of living." The other thing that was really extraordinary was the contempt that each of the divisions in Lebanon had for each other, including among the Christians the Armenians, the Muslims, etc. There were several different varieties of Christian. The Druze, the Muslims didn't care for each other. For them, their community was what was the critical thing, not the state, and as I say, when we get to the eruption of the Palestinian problem, the fact that we didn't, as a country, I think, understand the basic fault lines in Lebanon cost us very dearly.

Q: Did you notice that our embassy was sort of captured by one or two of these groups.

CURRAN: Well, McClintock was totally beguiled by the Christian President, whose name I've forgotten now.

Q: Was it Chamoun?

CURRAN: Yes, it was Chamoun. Chamoun was the Maronite Christian leader.

McClintock felt that because he knew the Christian President, we could control the destiny of the country. And as long as it involved threats of force, we could, but when it came to the basic evolution of society, we had no idea what was going on, and I don't think we had sufficient force there to actually enforce our view.

Everybody runs into bargaining if you've been in the Middle East. I loved it and learned to love it, and it's a great pastime. It's not personal. You never get angry about it. You come to a shop and you try to make several visits - particularly if it's a valuable item - you try to understand how much the price is, and then you sit down, as we're sitting down and you begin to talk very elliptically, and eventually you come to a discussion of price, which on your part, since you're the owner of this invaluable piece, whatever it is, is very high, and since I've seen a hundred like it, my price is very low, and in a good natured way and over coffee we eventually arrive more or less at the right price. We spent a lot of time doing it, and my wife, who loves to shop, got very good at bargaining.

The other thing that was helpful in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East was that I learned a lot of Arab proverbs. And I found that to insert a proverb into an awkward moment - there are many of them that are very clever and quite cute; they're quite parallel to our own - would stop a problem in its tracks while they thought over what you had said. Or another device is to use a famous set of stories called "Hoja stories," which are quite common also in Turkey. "Hoja" or "Juha" is a bumpkin who makes his way around the world riding on a jackass and always brings wisdom to difficult situations. If you could quote proverbs or Hoja stories, you got a long way in your life.

So I would say, just looking back over Lebanon, it seemed like a struggle for us without embassy administrative support, and I think we overcame it pretty well despite the total disinterest of the embassy. We dealt with a brutal city, sensing underlying hostility but not really understanding it and being sort of sad that there was no real U.S. policy to deal with it.

Q: Something I try to bring up every time I talk to somebody who has taken Arabic, particularly in the earlier years. One of the charges that's been levied against the American Foreign Service is that Arabic officers are somehow spokesmen for the Arab world and anti-Israeli. Can you comment on this about the people you were with and the officers you knew at that time, not in general, but I mean this specific group in, what, 1960?

CURRAN: I was active in the area from '59 to '84.

Q: Yes. Let's talk about this group 1959-61 or so.

CURRAN: Right. Many of us, maybe most of us, came to the Middle East from the American idiom of looking at the Middle East, particularly feeling that Israel is modern

and progressive and Arabs are backward and dirty. I think many people in our group were shocked suddenly to see that many Arabs are quite advanced and intelligent and that history has been unkind to the Arabs. I think it's correct, the book that was written - I can't remember the author - called *The Arabists*, recently.

Q: Robert Kaplan.

CURRAN: I think there's much that's fair in that. There were Arabic-speaking officers who got localitis in a big way, and I probably was guilty of it myself, particularly as a younger officer when I was living with Arabs in Jordan and talking with them in Saudi Arabia. You have wonderful, personable, hospitable people who look at you with tears in their eyes and say, "How could your country do this to us?" It's hard not to be sympathetic. In my own case - I spent probably six, seven years living and working with Arabs, maybe eight years - I began to see that it really is not one group's problem or the other but that it's really a problem both Arabs and Israelis have had. If you want to speak very generally, both have had great chances to resolve this problem and so far have unfailingly not met the challenge. But there's always hope.

Q: I've heard the expression - this is earlier on, I don't know if it may be true today - two things you could count on: one was the Arabs to shoot themselves in the foot, and the Israelis to miss the trains.

CURRAN: Well, in a more contemporary manner, it's that the Israelis have been very fortunate in their enemies, and the Arabs have been very unfortunate in their allies. I think the total disillusionment of the Arab countries came in 1967, when they took all their carefully acquired Soviet equipment and threw it at the Israelis, and the Israelis took their carefully acquired American equipment and just wiped them out.

Q: Mostly French at that time.

CURRAN: No, the F-4 was available and flew rings around the MIGs. I guess the Mystères played a role, but by the way, the French, who had equipped the Syrians, did not fare, their equipment did not fair particularly well, because the Israelis took the Golan during that war, and in fact, the Syrians got out as fast as they could because they were afraid that the Israelis would go to the Biblical northern border of Israel, which was right on the gates of Damascus.

Q: The officers that you were dealing with, particularly the younger officers, who were just getting into it during the early '60s and all, Arabists, was the motivation of getting in - I mean, this was a career move, rather than a ideological commitment or something. Could you comment on that?

CURRAN: Well, certainly many of the great Mandarins of the Foreign Service in the '40s and '50s, Ray Hare and Rodger Davies, Pete Hart, and I'm trying to think who the great Under Secretary was of Administration in the '40s and '50s.

Q: Loy Henderson.

CURRAN: Loy Henderson. They were all people who were interested in the Middle East. Wally Barbour was another. They were all people to whom you could reach out. They were all great anecdote relaters and so it was a nice club to belong to. But that first wave of “giants” was heavily influenced by oil interests, not in the sense, obviously, that they got any money out of it, but they could see the strength of the U.S. strategic need for petroleum and the reserves, and they didn’t think we were taking a balanced approach to the Middle East in view of the need they foresaw that we would have for oil. We didn’t do a very good job as a country, and I’m sure you know the crunch point came when President Truman decided he would, probably for domestic political reasons, recognize Israel. George Marshall almost resigned.

Q: It was 1948.

CURRAN: Yes, the spring of ’48. It’s funny that in the aftermath of that, a big chunk of the Jewish vote in New York, where most of the Jews, I guess identifiable Jews, then went to Dewey rather than Truman. So that’s politics.

I was taken out of language school “a little early,” probably May or June of ’61, because I was asked for by Ambassador Bill Macomber, who had been a special assistant to John Foster Dulles and had been sent to Jordan to be the ambassador in Amman. So I went, obviously, and the transition for us was day and night. First of all, the climate in Jordan is delightful, and we were taken back into the embassy administrative fold.

Q: You were there from ’61 to when?

CURRAN: ’61 to ’62. And Macomber had a lot of energy. He was very young. It was very unusual in those days to have such a young ambassador. He had his 40th birthday in Amman. And unmarried, but certainly not a swinging bachelor or anything, just worked all the time, and those of us who were used to the “old” Foreign Service ethic enjoyed that very much. It was a great embassy. The political officer was Bob Houghton. There was a good AID team, a small USIA staff, and a very large intelligence unit. I’ll get back to that in a minute.

If I may, I’d like to just talk a little bit about the history of Jordan.

Q: Sure.

CURRAN: After World War I, the British were given “The Mandate for Palestine” in the Middle East. The Mandate has been subject to various interpretations, but it’s now pretty clear that the Mandate included what now is the occupied West Bank and Israel. East of the Jordan River, there was a general region which was basically tribal and before the First World War didn’t come to many people’s attention, called Transjordan. During World War I, there were a number of conflicting promises made to the Arabs and the Israelis, Jews-

Q: You're talking about World War I.

CURRAN: The Balfour Declaration was a product of British politics which promised a Jewish homeland in Palestine. There was the British/French Sykes-Picot Agreement, which promised French-managed independence for Lebanon and Syria; there was a set of agreements made between Lawrence and Allenby and the Arabs in the Hejaz about independence for the Turkish territories - all of which were completely conflicting, of course. And at the Paris peace conference, the Europeans all sat down and divided the Middle East up - the Mandate, the French area, and the Hejaz - and the Arabs arrived late and just found the game was over, and they were furious about it. And a good deal of pulling and hauling went on. The British Arabists set to work, including Lawrence, with the backing of Churchill, and General Allenby set to work to kind of reorganize things, give the Arabs a few crumbs, and get the world back to "normal." So the British continued their oversight of the Mandate, and one of the sons of Sharif Hussein, who sat in Mecca, Abdullah, was given Transjordan and another son who thought he was going to get Damascus got Baghdad. That was Faisal. And the British proceeded then to administer the area (I'm speaking now of Palestine and Transjordan) up until '48, when the conflict between the increasing pressure of Jewish settlers and the increasing pressure of the Palestinians to the Jewish settlements and the terrorism, the British just decided they'd had it, and they said, "Well, as of May 1, 1948, we're out of here." And there was a discussion in the UN. Palestine was partitioned. There was an initial fight, the Israelis were able to defend the partition borders with a little bit of additional territory, and then Abdullah seized the portion of the West Bank using his British-trained Arab Legion. So if you think of looking at a map of the Mandate after partition, the borders look pretty much the same as 1950-1951 except that the West Bank is "occupied" - that's using an Arab term - by the Israelis. In 1961, the U.S. called the West Bank part of the territory of the Kingdom of Jordan. The first King of Jordan was Abdullah, and by the time I got there in mid-1961, King Hussein was the ruler. A person in his 20s, Hussein had a British wife, the mother of the present king, and really was sort of not what you'd imagine a king to be. He was a very down-to-earth individual. I'll get back to that in a little bit.

People who would like to learn more about the era between the wars - I'm not going to go into it in any detail - should read Alec Kirkbride's book called *Crackle of Thorns*, a wonderful book about what it was like to be a British proconsul in those days and how Jordan evolved.

The impressive thing about the Jordanians was that from my wife's perspective and many other peoples' perspectives, in addition to a very salubrious climate, somehow the Hashemites had combined the best of the British and Jordanian systems so you had a modified parliamentary system, and an English-speaking king with a loyal and consenting population. I would say the only downsides of the country that I arrived to serve in were the huge refugee camps of Palestinians who had fled from or been chased out of Israeli-controlled territory, and the Palestinians on the West Bank, most of whom were, of course, very unhappy with the idea of a State of Israel right next door and almost equally unhappy with being managed by the King of Jordan, whom they regarded as a

foreigner.

The glue that held Jordan together was the Arab Legion, a group of tribal levies who were very loyal to the King, considerable foreign subsidy, and a very large middle class, which was involved in business and agriculture and could see that their future lay in having a stable Jordan. The King and his family were and are very sensitive about not living to excess and not being arbitrary and who retain to this day, actually, a great sense of loyalty and admiration from the people because the first family is seen as leaders and examples.

Q: And I wonder if you could talk, both the time you were in Beirut and in Jordan, about how the U.S. perceived the influence, and what it was, of Nasser? I mean as you're talking.

CURRAN: I was going to interject something about the Palestinians, but let me respond to your questions about Nasser and Arab nationalism. Amman, when we arrived in the spring of '61, was a very small town, probably 100,000 people on three or four hilltops called *jebels*, which means 'mountain' in Arabic. But the "jebels" weren't really mountains; they were heights of a plain overlooking valleys, old river streambeds. The valleys led to the center of Amman, which was the ancient city of Philadelphia. There was a Roman amphitheater in the center, still preserved. In those days, Amman had three traffic circles from the town center on the road to Jerusalem. Now, I think, there are 11, and I think the population of Amman must be several million. In 1961, you could literally walk to work, and you got to know a lot of people personally, and the new mosque on Jebel Lewebdeh, where I lived, had a live muezzin every morning, not a recorded one. He was a wonderful tenor, and we used to start the day listening to his tenor Muslim invocation. It was quite beautiful. Lovely desert air, warm days, cool nights almost year round. As I said, the climate and the people were very friendly. The U.S. had a very clear set of objectives, a very highly qualified staff, and a willing partner in the local government.

Politically, even though there was a parliament, it was still pretty much under the thumb of the King, and maybe not the King so much personally as his secret service, and behind the scenes, if anyone stepped too far out of line, they were taken away for a little talk or worse - but it was done in, I would say, more of a sort of elder-brother-punishing-younger-brother way. There were probably some thumbs twisted and so on, but there were no death camps, certainly, and you never ran into many people who felt that the monarchy was oppressive. And there were an emerging number of very young, bright Jordanian civil servants who were running the country, many of whom we got to know and like and work with. Nasser was not somebody that held much attraction for the Jordanians. He was, of course, a tremendous demagogue, and everybody listened to his speeches - even we listened to his speeches - because they were, you know - well, I don't even want to compare it to anyone else in history, but he had code phrases, and when he talked about *isti'mar*, which means 'imperialism,' and people would just roar, it didn't matter what the main sentence was. There were certainly people who were pro-Nasser, but in Jordan they were insignificant. The problem the Jordanians had to worry about was

Syria, north of them, because the Syrians cozied up to Nasser, and in fact, they were in his United Arab Republic for a while, and at one point during my stay in Amman they actually led an armored column into Jordan to test what would happen, and the Jordanians fortunately dealt with this threat effectively and without a lot of bloodshed. I think the Syrians came four or five miles into Jordan before they were stopped, and it was a pretty scary time. And the Syrians, in their public broadcast, made no secret of the fact that they regarded Hussein and the Jordanians as lackeys of the Israelis and they didn't deserve to continue. And certainly Nasser said the same kind of things.

We certainly, and the ambassador in Cairo, maybe not then but starting a little later, John Badeau, a serious scholar of the Middle East - I think he came in under Kennedy-

Q: Yes, he did.

CURRAN: So that would have been '63.

Q: Yes, he had been president of the University of Cairo, or something like that.

CURRAN: Something like that. And he managed to temper our approach to the Egyptians, and in point of fact, we did considerable business with the Egyptians because we supplied them with PL-480 wheat and we had a very large PL-480 currency account there. So I guess we existed on two levels. What I remember most about going to Cairo - I'm not sure exactly what era this was, but it was within that five-year period; I think it must have been before '67 - Haile Selassie came to visit Cairo, and there was a huge banner at the airport which read in Arabic, "Down with Imperialism - Long Live Emperor Haile Selassie." It gives an idea of the dichotomy that people in some cultures are able to deal with.

In our relations with the Jordanians: I think we were very effective on the assistance side. We worked very hard on developing intellectual capital, both AID and USIA. The military people in the embassy were superbly trained, very good people. We had to keep an eye on Iraq, but it wasn't the problem it is now. They had killed Hussein's cousin, but they didn't seem to me, at least much of a threat. It was possible to drive over to Baghdad - a terrible drive, you had to do it at night because of the heat. But once there, it seemed like most Middle East cities.

I think you could say we had two or three main objectives in Jordan: to maintain security and stability in Jordan, develop the society, and develop the intellectual capital. I think we did that really splendidly. When I went to work for the Secretary of State and read a lot of the secret files in the Secretary's office, I realized that I didn't know a lot that was going on when I was in the embassy. But anyway, there were a lot of meetings between the Israelis and the Jordanians that went way back to Abdullah, and between the Labor Party and the Hashemites. There was quite a wide understanding in terms of how to deal with the Middle East situation. Don't let me forget to tell when we talk about Black September, that was an interesting factor, because it was that ability to talk behind the curtains that probably saved the Jordanians. The third objective we had was to try to bring the population of the West Bank into this peaceful dialogue. I would say that was

less successful.

Ambassador Macomber really understood how to manage diplomacy in all its aspects, even though he had a small embassy staff. The CIA had good relations with the palace, but they were weak everywhere else. I don't think there was a single Arabic speaker in the CIA station in Amman. They went with their SOP [standard operating procedure], which is to find paid sources who fed them stuff, usually of mixed value. I didn't have a very high regard for their work there. It wasn't general, I'm not making a general condemnation, but the Agency people were really living too much for easy work and not really doing the hard work of talking to Arab radicals and other "outsiders." AID was, I thought, very competent. Because I'm a member of the Society of Friends, it was very interesting to me because they used the Quakers to set up a land co-op up in the Ghor Valley, which is on the east side of the Jordan River. The Quakers set up a co-op farming system. I don't know whether that's ever been done again, but they did - I'm probably a little biased - a terrific job, and several Quakers spoke Arabic. They explained the Rochdale principles to the Arabs, and the area became a real garden spot.

One of the interesting parts of the broad intellectual development which always struck me as being amazing was that we had a Columbia alumni club in Amman with about a hundred Jordanians who had been either undergraduates or at one of the graduate schools of Columbia. There was a Princeton group, and there was a Michigan group. So we had really been successful at offering that kind of opportunity and broadening. Macomber had me work on several things. Macomber wanted more U.S. contacts on the West Bank, and in fact, I was asked to spend about half my time over there. And because of my Arabic, I was able to give little talks in high schools and talk to, for example, the Friends School in Ramallah. Ramallah was an intellectual center. Palestinians interested in dialogue were available and we set up some talks for the ambassador. It was notable that Ambassador Macomber made the effort to talk to the Palestinians. At one point, I organized a colloquium. I think it was the first one in a long time, anyway, on Arab studies in the U.S. and on U.S. studies abroad in Ramallah. The colloquium was organized in cooperation with the Jordan Ministry of Culture and had a terrific turnout from three countries: Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan - I think 500 people came. I even gave a lecture in Arabic (I was told afterward I had a Lebanese accent and I should fix that.). Still, I was pretty pleased that I was able to do it.

Another time, the ambassador and I went on a series of visits in towns on the West Bank, and I increasingly was used as his interpreter. So we began to extend the sense that the Arabs at that time had that there was something more than just a military office in the embassy.

Finally, in my tour, we brought the Philips Oilers, the basketball team, to Jordan and ran clinics for Palestinians in the refugee camps. I would say that the availability of new Arabic-speaking officers in the various embassies began to make a difference for the better in opening doors to non-English speaking Arabs.

Q: Who were some of the officers who came in that time?

CURRAN: Dick Jeanneret joined me in Amman; Fred Galanto and Phil Gray went from the FSI school to Iraq. Let's see, John Wheelock went to Aden; Harry Sizer went to Yemen; Bob Paganelli went to Basra. Certainly, in my view, the Arabists offered a new dimension, and when a new "technocrat" government came in in 1962 in Jordan, the bilateral relationship flourished. A "technocrat," pro-Western government, Wasfi Tel... Many of us knew the Tell family from Irbid, from our trips around the country. As a result, the prime minister asked Macomber if I could devote my time to education - to the minister. I was in his office half days every day working on education projects. And I think it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't had Arabic.

Q: You were talking about these projects. How were the Jordanians treating the Palestinians? Were we looking at the Palestinians, or were we looking at what I would call the Jordanians? How was this going?

CURRAN: The Palestinians in Jordan were pretty well absorbed into society. The Palestinians from the West Bank came from the British education system, and they were well qualified. King Hussein was very good about treating them equally. The Palestinian refugees, in contrast, were pretty well walled up in camps, and the only projects we had with them were UNRA projects, basically to keep them alive and provide some minimal education. The Palestinians on the West Bank were reserved about the Hashemites. There were political factions already talking about a Palestinian state.

In concluding, I might say - it was kind of a euphoric era for us - for example, we were close enough to the Royal Family so that we went to the King's birthday party in the spring of '62. We drove down to what was called a Winter Palace - actually a modest little home with a canvas-covered deck and so on. There was no alcohol, but a lovely buffet. The King said to his guests, "Please call me Hussein." It was really an amazing experience, but it was a time when he was reaching out to Western people and learning a lot.

We also traveled a good deal. We got down to Petra, which was not a tourist site then. You had to ride in on muleback and stay in a rough camp and battle the scorpions. But it was really a very special time.

In the summer of '62, Ambassador Macomber was telling Ambassador Parker (Pete) Hart - I understand - some of the stuff that I had done, and Pete Hart said, "Well, I want him in Yemen." So during the summer of '62, I was sent down to Yemen to see if we should open a public affairs office in Yemen.

Q: We had limited relations. What did we have?

CURRAN: We had a legation in Taiz accredited to the Imam Ahmad. The U.S. embassy in Jidda was our support base.

Q: When I was in Dhahran in '58 to '60, there had been some efforts down there. Charlie Ferguson was somebody who was involved.

CURRAN: Mike Sterner and Bill Crawford made visits from Aden. The U.S. opened the legation in 1960 or 1961.

Q: Yes. They were talking about this, but it wasn't really going very far.

CURRAN: I think this is probably a good place to break, but let's go back to the Palestinian question.

Q: Okay, but I would like to ask, too, were we doing anything - I realize our military was involved - with the Arab Legion? Was this pretty much given over to the British?

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: I mean, were we doing anything to make the Arab Legion officers happy or anything like that?

CURRAN: No, it had been pretty much a British show, and then increasingly, a Jordanian show. By the time I arrived, Hussein had already dismissed John Glubb - "Glubb Pasha" - as head of the Legion. The one anecdote you might enjoy involved a great parade every year on the King's birthday. The Arab Legion played the bagpipes. And one of my Quaker associates was a Scot, and as these fellows were marching by in full headdress and so on playing "Scotland the Brave," an Arab leaned over to Andy Braid, the Scot, and said, "I guess you didn't know the bagpipe was invented in Jordan." Braid didn't get the joke.

Q: Actually, the bagpipe has always been a shepherd's instrument. There are Greek bagpipes and all.

CURRAN: Don't tell the Scots!

Q: Well, do you want to talk about while you were there the Palestinian situation?

CURRAN: The Palestinians in that area, in the Jordan-Israeli area, were a powder keg waiting to explode. The biggest camp was called Aqabat-Jaber. I think there were 100,000 people living there, and they had nothing to do but breed and listen to broadcasts. We are talking about Nasser broadcasts. And the level of emotion went higher and higher. When the '67 War pulled all the plugs on the means of keeping refugees quiet, and more Palestinians were dispersed into the region, a lot of them went to Jordan and a lot of them went to Beirut. In both cases, this turned out to be a threat. So it was the period from, say, '67 to '80 that the pot boiled over in many places. Our diplomacy was at best keeping a lid on an uncertain kettle. I think it's probably best to go through the Yemen experience and then come around back to that.

Q: Black September happened when?

CURRAN: 1970.

Q: Okay, fine then, good, we don't want to touch that. But at the time, this '61 to '63 period, the Palestinians, from the embassy point of view, weren't considered a problem that was going to blow up.

CURRAN: Correct. Many Palestinians in the refugee camps and on the West Bank were the most virulent anti-Americans, anti-Israelis. The Hussein family in Jerusalem was especially vocal. But for the most part, the West Bankers didn't care for the Jordanians very much, but they didn't at all care for the Israelis, so they were willing to put up with the status quo, that is, governance by King Hussein.

Q: What were you getting from Tel Aviv? I mean, was there a relationship between our embassy in Amman and Tel Aviv, or did you get the feeling that these were two different worlds?

CURRAN: Two different worlds. In early 1962, we made a visit to Israel and were just assaulted every minute we were in Israel about "How can you possibly stand to live in that dirty Arab culture" and "Why don't you live in the land of the free and the brave here in Israel?"

Q: This is from our own people.

CURRAN: From Americans and from Israelis. I don't know if you've ever been in Israel, but outsiders get the "sell" a hundred miles an hour 24 hours a day. I learned to understand it, particularly when I ran the cultural program in Israel for five years, from Washington, and I learned to appreciate the Israelis. They are in a pretty tough spot. If you're in a country where you stand on your eastern border and you can see the sea, you have a pretty heightened sense of your security or lack thereof.

I might say, by the by - we can come back to this - I think our government has in a laborious way arrived at a pretty good way of dealing with this situation, which is to try to make the local people in the area deal with the basic problems, not having the U.S. in the middle all the time.

Q: Well, I'm just trying to catch the mood before we break. Were you in a way getting results of cables between our embassy in Tel Aviv and any sort of joint process, "Well, you'll do this, and we'll do that," or not?

CURRAN: No. The major peace initiative in the early 1960s was something called the Johnson Plan. The idea would be to take the refugees out of the camps and resettle a few of them in Israel but settle the rest in the Mideast region.

Q: This was Joseph Johnson, who was my professor in college.

CURRAN: The Israelis were adamantly opposed to accepting any Palestinians into Israel, and that was the rock on which the ship foundered.

Q: Well, then we'll pick this up-

CURRAN: -in the New Year.

Q: -in the New Year. This will be 1962. And we'll be picking this up where you have been assigned to the Yemen-

CURRAN: -where I'm about to make a prospective feasibility study.

Q: -a feasibility study in 196-

CURRAN: It was the 1962-63 period.

Q: '62-63.

CURRAN: I finally got there in January of '63.

YEMEN

The Imamate (Kingdom) of Yemen was one of the most remote areas of the Arab World. Probably only the Empty Quarter ('Rub el-Khali') in Saudi Arabia was more isolated from the modern world.

U.S. contact with Yemen was very limited until the 1950s when Washington attention was drawn to increased investment by the USSR and Communist China in Yemen. Because of the fears engendered by the Cold War, it became American policy to establish a diplomatic presence in Taiz, the southern capital, and then to invest in an infrastructure project: building of a gravel road from the post of Mocha in the southwest corner of the country through Taiz to the northern capital of Yemen, Sanaa. Throughout the 1960s, U.S. policy in Yemen was based on maintaining some kind of influence with the Yemeni governments to prevent communist and later Egyptian use of Yemen against U.S. interests in the Middle East, the Red Sea, and East Africa.

The initial diplomatic presence was accredited through our embassy in Jidda and managed from Aden in the late 1950s and then a legation was set up in Taiz in 1959 with a U.S. chargé d'affaires. Taiz was made an embassy in 1963.

The lack of any Yemeni infrastructure usual to the establishment of a western presence was daunting. There were few roads, no national currency or banks, no running water or sanitation, pre-World War II communications, little modern housing, no paved airfields, and a very primitive government system. Also, the Imam personally approved almost all matters applied to foreigners such as property leases, travel permits, and food imports and his terrified underlings refused to take on any decisions without clear signals from the Palace.

The Italian and Ethiopian governments maintained substantial presences in Yemen. The Italians had built a hospital in Taiz and had a medical facility in Sanaa. The Ethiopians flew cargo - mostly 'qat' - out of Yemen to East Africa. Both the Italians and the Ethiopians were most helpful to the first Americans in Taiz and by 1960, the living conditions for American embassy personnel were comfortable and adequately supported. It certainly helped to have a USAID mission beginning in 1961 as a part of the American team since the Agency supplied a doctor and eventually helped set up a primary school and provided a small airplane.

Communications with the outside world were extremely difficult until it was possible to install a U.S. radio. Before that, the choice was to send an officer by car (10-12 hours) to Aden or by plane to Kagnaw Station in Asmara. The Yemeni telegraph operators were illiterate in English, so one-time pad messages were not much help. Because of the lack of telegraphic traffic, policy cables were almost always late or didn't come at all and the embassy in Taiz was pretty much "out of the loop" on the tactical discussions concerning events in the area until late 1963, early 1964.

Q: Today is the 14th of January, 1999. Ted, let's start. First the dates. You went to Yemen when?

CURRAN: In the summer of 1962. I was still assigned to Jordan.

Q: And you were there till when?

CURRAN: Well, I'll tell you now.

Q: At the beginning I just like to get the two dates.

CURRAN: Originally my assignment to Jordan was for two years, from '61 to '63. In the summer of 1962, the Department and the ambassador in Jordan asked me if I would be willing to take part in a feasibility study of opening an embassy in Yemen. And in those days, Yemen was a very, very isolated place. We didn't even have an embassy there. We had a small legation reporting to the embassy in Jidda.

Q: All right, well, let's start on this, then.

CURRAN: I want to muse with you for a minute, Stuart. I've been thinking a lot about this privilege of talking about this situation, and the mood and the circumstances under which I went to Yemen. We spoke, when I was talking about Germany and Jordan, about the resources and the atmosphere that existed in the Foreign Service in the early '60s, and I think two things come back to me very strongly. One is that the government, not in an impersonal way, but in a very personal way, singled me out, for whatever reason, and made me feel as if I was doing something special and that it was appreciated that I would undertake this assignment. And the second thing which is striking to me in thinking back 37 years ago is that there was not even a question of whether my wife and child would accompany me. They of course were interested in the adventure and wanted to go along and felt they would be protected and happy. And the contrast now that I hear from my younger colleagues about the difficulty of spouses - often with careers - figuring how to sort out these assignments, it's quite extraordinarily different.

Yemen, not to be too pedantic, is a small country on the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It had a great era several thousand years ago. The Queen of Sheba came from Yemen, and her capital was a city called Marib in the southwest quadrant of the peninsula at that time, probably in the context of, say, 3000 BC pretty well developed because the spice trade came overland, rather than by sea, and there were routes through the mountains of Yemen, proceeding west from India to the corner of Yemen and then north up the Red Sea. I think most people who think of that part of Asia think of it as one unrelieved desert, but in fact, Yemen is very rainy. They have two monsoons a year and it's highly cultivated, and the Arabs call it *al-yaman as-sa'id*, which means 'the happy Yemen,' because of the rainfall. Marib, which I just saw briefly, is still quite a sight. There's a granite dam there, one of the two dozen wonders of the world. Even now it's

about 75 to 100 feet high and extends for half a mile across the desert, and some people think it was large enough to permit very widespread irrigation projects.

The advent of Islam in the 7th century brought conversion very early to Yemen, and one of the few mosques built in the lifetime of the Prophet stands near Taiz, which is the southern capital of the country. Divisions in Islam were reflected in Yemen, and the country was divided between the so-called *Shafis* (Sunni Muslims) in the south and the *Zeydis* (Shafis) in the north. The Zeydi Muslims claimed direct descentance from the Prophet through his daughter. The Zeydis dominated the ruling circles. The Ottoman Empire had a certain amount of influence in Yemen in the 19th century, but it was a long way from Istanbul to Sanaa and Taiz, and so it was basically a very isolated place. The Imams of Yemen were not the same as the Imams in Iran. Imam in Yemen is more like a king. And the Imams kept their headquarters in Sanaa and ruled the country by playing off rivals and taking bribes and so on. And when I went to Yemen in the summer of 1962, the last Imam was still alive, Imam Ahmad. I'll get to a meeting I had with him shortly.

The last imam before Ahmad, was Imam Yahya, who had a long rule from 1904 to 1948. And he realized, apparently, that he had to have outside help. He somehow sensed that the country was so poor and so backward they couldn't resist outside pressures from the Saudis, who were pushing from the north to take some territory away from what Yemenis regarded as their country, and the British, who were ensconced in Aden, a 19th century coaling station, and still a substantial British base in the period we're talking about in 1962. Yahya was assassinated in 1948, and his son took over the throne. Ahmad was the first imam to turn to the Russians for additional assistance, and the Russians answered his appeal and began to modernize the army. This was an early step the Russians took in the Cold War and the deal they made modernized the army on the basis of loans and then the USSR used the loans to try to advance their political purposes on the country. The Imam also turned to the communist Chinese, and they built a remarkable highway for him from Hodeida, a port the Russians built, up to the capital in Sanaa. And that had two impacts. One, of course, the Yemenis could control the port, and the second impact was that they could export *qat*, a mild narcotic that many people chew in the Middle East and Eastern Africa. They could export that more readily out through Hodeida. The presence of the communists in Yemen and the increase in the influence of Nasser resulted in U.S. enhanced increased interest in Yemen, which is the reason coming back to why I went there. I think the American concern, if you look at a map, was that the communists might get a firm foothold in southwestern Arabia. The strategic airfield which they were starting to build when I was there could threaten the oil fields in Saudi Arabia as well as provide a secure way station on the path to Africa. And it may seem to us here in 1999 that that was pretty silly, but in the 1960s, when the Cold War was really going strong, that seemed to be quite a serious concern.

I want to make a few more comments about the geography of Yemen when I first arrived there. Yemen is a mountainous country which frames the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula. There is a very hot, steamy coastal plain, which runs from roughly Hodeida in the northwestern corner of the country down to Mokha in the south, basically the point of the country, and then east to Aden, which, of course, was still under British control. This

coastal plain is known as the “Tihama.”

The first trip to Yemen was arduous. First, I flew to Jidda to meet with Ambassador Parker or Pete Hart and was briefed on what he wanted. Basically, Hart wanted the U.S. to set up an embassy in Yemen. Hart believed that an embassy in Yemen would encourage the Yemenis to be a partner in the anti-Nasser forces of Arabia. And so I flew to Aden and from there flew with Yemen Airlines in a DC-3 piloted by a British pilot into Taiz, where there was not even a paved runway; it was a gravel runway. And I was met by the chargé d'affaires, whose name was Robert Stookey, and I started my work.

Q: How long had we had a legation there?

CURRAN: For many years we had managed our relations, such as they were, out of Aden, out of our consulate general in Aden, and people would make sorties up into Taiz by jeep, a trip that took in my day anywhere between 10 and 12 hours, about 100 miles. It gives you an idea of how fast you could travel. And then about 1959-60 we opened a legation, a very primitive stone building in Taiz without a communications system.

Q: Also, just to clear up the picture, what was the situation around in Aden then. I know there was quite a bit of terrorism, fighting. Had that already started?

CURRAN: The British colonial office ran Aden. The area was called The Protectorate. The tribes in the area were either paid off or threatened. In 1962, there was little threat to the Brits. The UK maintained an air base, a place for their ships to resupply. Their idea was that they would have their base in Aden and keep a friendly or at least confederation of tribal elements around them, sort of as a buffer against the Yemenis. This scheme caused great mischief, because the tribes were susceptible to being bribed by both sides, and they made a lot of trouble, and the British had continuing difficulty. And the Yemenis were generally willing to make trouble for the British. But it was a very low-level, much more of a medieval type situation than a modern insurgency.

Stookey drove in a jeep - the official American cars in the legation were all jeeps - through town, and it's going to sound like I'm exaggerating, but I promise you it was like going in a time warp back to the middle ages. People were mostly barefoot. As we went by the main gate of the little downtown of Taiz, a little walled city, there was a severed hand of a thief nailed to the gate who had had his hand lopped off the previous Friday and “posted” as a warning to thieves. For minor misdemeanors people were shackled and then turned loose into the street to walk around. They'd clank around in their chains and depend upon relatives and other people to give them food to keep them going. There was no national Yemeni currency. Transactions were in Theresa (Austrian) silver dollars and to a certain extent British gold shillings. Men wore dresses and had a big dagger they would stick into their belts, called a *jambiya*. Every Friday the Imam had a kind of an audience in the central square, and if there was a capital punishment, the capital punishment was carried out at that time by a beheading in public. I was invited to one of these, and I finessed the “opportunity,” but I did see a poor fellow lose his hand for thievery. There was practically no skilled labor, and the society was feudal. There were

landlords, and then there were people who worked for the landlords - a few drivers, a few people who did crafts, like making pottery and pots and carpenters and so on. The country was suffused in disease: bilharzia, which is a disease you get from a snail, a liver fluke that gathers in still water, and the Yemenis all had it. No roads to speak of, except for the one Chinese road I mentioned in the north, and then the main project the U.S. had been asked to undertake. We were starting to build a road from Mokha in the southwest up to the capital in Sanaa through Taiz. When I got there in 1962, the road was just barely coming out of Mokha.

Q: When you say there was no skilled labor, how were they able, with Chinese and Soviet help - build a port and build this road and also maintain both port and road?

CURRAN: Most of the labor was hand labor, and most of the skilled personnel were Russians and Chinese. And when they finished the work, they departed and left very little expertise to maintain the road, and a little later in our story we'll get to what happened. In fact, one of the issues that came up and came up regularly in my time there was the fact that our road was a gravel road built so it could be maintained by the Yemenis. And the Yemenis said, "Why aren't you paving it like the Chinese road" and we kept explaining how it was better for them, but the Yemenis were never happy. It was eventually paved by the West Germans.

I thought I might just read briefly from my impressions of the town which I wrote at the time. I wrote,

It's a small town, and the city proper, or "*medina*," must have changed very little in the last 500 years. It has narrow streets, old mosques, donkey transport, and many small markets, or *sugs*, where merchants sell their wares under the haughty gaze of the family camel. The medina no longer dominates the city. Stretching away up the slopes of the *Jebel Sabr* [which was a mountain about probably 12,000 feet looming over Taiz] is the so-called New City, with a few shops, a few hand-run factories, and some automobile, that is, jeep, traffic.

In 1962, the cars ran on the left-hand side of the road after the British model. Up on the slopes of the mountain, in the so-called New City, was the Royal Palace.

The Imam Ahmad, who took over from his father in 1948, left Sanaa because he was worried about tribal intrigue, and he set up a second capital in Taiz and built a so-called Royal Palace, and left his son, Crown Prince Badr, to live in Sanaa and deal with the tribes.

The Yemenis generally make a different impression than the Arabs of the Eastern Mediterranean or Saudi Arabia. They're not as volatile. They tend to sit back and take a person's nature and talk about world affairs with much less emotional involvement than is common in Lebanon and Jordan. The U.S. mission [This is summer 1962.] had 140 Americans, which was really quite large considering our interests in Yemen, but most of

them were working on the road project, starting with some port development at Mokha. Also, because there was no potable water we developed a water purification system. The Russians and Chinese were around, but in diminishing numbers and in my initial contacts they did not seem to play much of a role.

After I'd spent a week or so in Yemen; and by the way, I stayed in the government guest house. This was a former house of some substance, built of stone, with an inner central courtyard, and the rooms we lived in were around a balcony on the second floor. There were no toilets and no running water. There were communal meals, one at breakfast and one in the late afternoon, at four o'clock. And if you wanted to eat in the hotel, that's when you showed up, and you ate whatever was available and tried not to drink any water or eat fresh salad. I was sort of used to that type of living from previous travels, so it wasn't so bad. After I'd been in Taiz a week or so, an amazing American joined me, an Arab-American named Isa Sabbagh.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: Many people have heard of him. Ambassador Hart sent him to Yemen to help, and he was a huge help, because, of course, he had beautiful Arabic and was very well known. Sabbagh was "Mr. Radio" in the Arab world and he was presented as a person to modernize Yemeni radio. The main radio station was in Sanaa, so we had a reason to go there. Generally, the Yemenis were very resistant to having the Americans see what was going on in the north.

After Isa arrived, we were given an audience with the Imam Ahmad of Yemen, and I will take a few minutes to describe this. We went to the Royal Palace escorted by one of the Imam's sons, and after going through various rooms of what I can only describe as a fetid slum of a series of dwellings paved with junk from Western Civilization - plastic furniture, rubber duckies, strange dolls - and it smelled terrible, we finally arrived in the so-called throne room. Imam Ahmad sat on a cushion, and he had a trapeze right over his head to move around because his legs were largely incapacitated. His appearance was striking, even grotesque. In order to make himself appear more ferocious, he wrapped a shawl or scarf very tightly around his neck, so tightly that his eyes bulged out. He looked for all the world like a very large, dirty toad. But of course, the Yemenis were all terrified of him, and we tried to show proper respect.

Isa Sabbagh explained that we wanted to help the country and we wanted to go to Sanaa and we wanted to see if we could modernize the radio station, and the Imam listened glassily and then finally said, "*La bas*," which means, 'okay.' So we turned around to leave, and we asked the royal prince when should we leave? And he said, "What do you mean when? You're leaving now." We said, "Well, can we pick up our bags at the guest house?" "Well, all right." Anyway, we went right to the guest house, grabbed our bags, went to the airport, got in one of the Imam's Aero Commanders, with a Yugoslav pilot, and flew to Sanaa.

Q: You might just explain very briefly who Isa Sabbagh was.

CURRAN: Isa Sabbagh was originally from an Arab Christian family. He became known during the Second World War when he broadcast to the Middle East for the BBC. Then he came to the U.S. and joined VOA [Voice of America] and then was transferred into the U.S. Foreign Service and eventually became public affairs officer in Jidda, *highly* respected and, in my humble opinion, probably the greatest communicator between the Arab world and the Western world I've ever met.

Anyway, the Imam's private plane climbed over the mountain barrier between Taiz and Sanaa, and we flew over the Sanaa plain, which is at 7200 feet. We had our first look at the capital, which was a city of tall building, five, six, seven stories, built in tower fashion, which make them look taller than they are. The city had many parks, minarets, and lots of colorful people dressed in turbans and robes carrying the ceremonial *jambiya*, or dagger, thrust in a gold or silver belt. Sanitation was not a part of the municipal order, and paved streets were unknown. Individual houses behind forbidding mud walls that line many streets were sometimes quite attractive, with gardens and occasionally a small pool.

These small pools, of course, were a double-edged sword because they were very pretty, but if you put your foot in it you ran the risk of getting infected with bilharzia.

Some well-to-do people kept gazelles as pets to roam in their gardens. The Sanaa guest house was built in the late 19th century. It was a step up from the Taiz guest house because it was larger, had a more ornate central courtyard with a fountain and two floors of balconies with crowded dormitory rooms.

The staff service was much better than in Taiz. One could order coffee and room service - if you could get someone's attention. The main floor lounge in the Sanaa *dar ad-diyafa*, or 'guest house,' was a favorite meeting-place for all the in people in the country, so it was a great place to stay. The director of the radio station did not share his government's enthusiasm for the survey of his station, and it was three days before we were allowed entrance to the premises. We spent the time meeting members of other missions who were working in Sanaa.

And there was one very interesting person, whose name was Ibtihaj Arafat, who is the sister of the present head of the Palestinian Authority. She ran a UNESCO girls' school in Sanaa and actually was beginning to educate some women, which was very revolutionary. I got to know Ibtihaj very well, and I liked her a lot. She looked just like her brother.

Q: Without the beard.

CURRAN: Without the beard. She had had polio when she was younger and so walked with a pronounced limp. She was very cheerful and friendly. Later she was accused of being involved in espionage. I never had any sense of that, but I suppose I was maybe naïve about her.

The main problem with the radio station was not in personnel but in lack of adequate budgetary support. Isa Sabbagh spent most of his time working on teaching program techniques while I tried to analyze the technical side of the operation. The station had one transmitter, which only broadcast short wave, and had only one generator, both on their last legs and needing replacement. Our week was highlighted by an 80-minute interview with Crown Prince Badr. The Prince made daily trips through the town in an antique black carriage preceded by jeeps with a mounted machine gun, camels at a gliding trot, prancing horses, and soldiers who accompanied the march with a piercing falsetto chant and waving of daggers. I was expecting a man who stood on ceremony, but the Prince was a very kind and warm personality, expressed great pleasure at our frankness in making recommendations for the expansion of the broadcasting operation. He wore a coat and vest over a simple robe and gave both Sabbagh and me the impression of being a rather decent fellow who was overwhelmed with the problems that he had in the country.

Q: You talk about this radio station. Why were we interested in a radio station? Nasser was sort of dominating the Middle East airwaves, right?

CURRAN: Yes, *As-saut al-'arab*, (the "Voice of the Arabs").

Q: So what was our interest?

CURRAN: Actually, we didn't have any interest in the radio; it was our pretext for getting up to Sanaa. We had nothing to offer. We weren't the least bit interested in getting involved with Sanaa radio. In fact, we had our own radio, VOA, which we would like to have had better heard in that part of the world. No, no, it was strictly a means of getting in there.

Q: Were we looking at Soviet and Chinese influence there?

CURRAN: Definitely, particularly in Sanaa - this is pre-revolutionary Sanaa now - you could tell the Russians and Chinese, particularly the Russians, I would say, were looking for anti-Western opportunities. It was very troubling.

Q: They were training the army, weren't they?

CURRAN: Right. They had equipped the army, and we thought it was very, very likely that the Russians would build a modern jet airfield, and it turned out that was correct. In any event, Isa and I returned to Taiz with Yemen Air and the British pilots, and then he returned to Saudi Arabia. I spent two more weeks sort of looking around Yemen. And one of the places I went to was Mokha, where we had the so-called American port. I'll just read a little bit about my impressions there:

Mokha is one of many port cities on the Red Sea [and it, of course, is down on the coast called the Tihama, a steaming plain]. Weather hot and humid. Insects abound. The port is a man's city. I didn't see any women. It's directed by a Yemeni, and the U.S. had a colorful ex-Marine there named George Shedd, who had an MA in Middle Eastern studies from the

University of Michigan and was an expert from his military service in shallow water off-loading. He'd been in Iwo Jima and Okinawa during the Second World War. He was a real roustabout, but charming in his way. He had a forked (that is, profane) tongue, which the Yemenis for some reason thought was very charming, and he also had an unbelievable capacity to absorb alcohol of one kind or another.

The port facilities were fair, and the acquisition of a generator has made it possible for the American staff to air-condition offices and mess hall. The three Americans lived in trailers so poorly insulated that a night's sleep is hard to come by. Night is a social time for tropical places in the world such as Mokha, and there also was a rich variety of insect and other life going on at night.

Towering over the port was a remarkable structure, a lighthouse erected by the Turks during the 19th century. Ten stories high and very narrow, it dominated the scenery for miles around.

(The metal supports were rusting in 1962, and I understand it's now come down. Too bad. It was really a sight.)

The town of Mokha looks attractive from the port across the bay, but as you approach, the palm trees become a shelter for hundreds of hovels, and buildings that look white from far off take on a dirty yellow hue. Everything was pervaded by the smell of rotting fish and nonexistent public sanitation. There were three bosses in town: the governor of the port, the chief customs inspector, who is in charge of keeping smuggling within reasonable bounds, and the chief of the stevedores, whose role it is to hand out work assignments when a ship anchors offshore. The town was calm, in spite of the frontier living conditions and low wages - 75 cents a day was standard.

One of the clerks in one of the offices remarked that he'd never heard of a riot in a Red Sea coastal town, and I was wondering whether there were some profound political implications in that, I don't know. Anyway, I had never heard of one either.

I returned to Jidda and met with Ambassador Hart and told him that if this question of opening an embassy was to be considered in a Cold War context, then we should do it. That was my recommendation. I wrote a report, went back to Jordan, collected my family, and headed for home leave.

I want to say a word about the chargé of the legation, Bob Stookey. He was a remarkable person, probably one of the great Foreign Service Arab scholars. He wrote articles in Arabic on Ibn Khaldoun, which amazed the Arabs, and he was able to discuss in classical Arabic philosophical issues - an astounding linguist. I would not call him a people person. He was very, very remote and aloof, and he would retire to his home - he

somehow had a piano in this little house he lived in - and he would retire in the evening with a jug of martinis on the piano and he would play Bach late into the night. But he was amenable during intervals of piano playing to talk and chat. He was very nice to me personally, but he was certainly an exotic, in the old school. The British had many of these, and Stookey was a great advisor on Yemeni affairs, but I can't imagine that he ever did anything in an executive way outside of that environment. His wife, Louise, was a courageous, thoughtful, and brave lady.

Q: Do you know anything, did you follow him?

CURRAN: I believe he's still alive, retired, and living in Texas. Another thing about Bob was that he was one of the great performers of Bach on the piano. Anyway, I thought very highly of him and shall always be grateful for his hospitality and attention to me.

Well, another character I have to mention in this story was an American doctor in the Taiz mission from Baltimore, named Gireau Foster. Gireau Foster was ostensibly, or allegedly, the doctor for the American community. Actually, the U.S. had decided that it was in our national interest to keep the Imam alive, so his main job was to minister to the Imam. Gireau was very popular at the palace and with the Imam. He told me that the Imam probably had every disease known to man and a few that weren't and that keeping him alive was a very strenuous and difficult operation. And I'm going to kind of mix the timetable a little bit, because while I was on the ship going home, the Imam died, of "natural" causes. And I saw Foster later in the States, and he told me the events of that night, which were quite striking. Foster obviously knew the Imam was coming close to the end, so he prudently got himself an exit permit and always kept his bags packed. He had his wife and children with him. And when the Imam expired, Foster was with him, and he then closed all the doors to the royal bedroom, and he said to the retainers: "His majesty is sleeping, and he's got to have a good night's sleep, so I don't want anyone looking at him until tomorrow morning. He'll be very upset if anyone looks at him." And he went home, collected his wife and children and threw his stuff in the car and drove to Aden in the night and got out. He correctly, I think, assumed that he might be blamed for the departure of the Imam. About a week later - I'm not sure of the timing exactly, but I'm pretty sure it was September '62 - there was a coup d'état in Sanaa, and Prince Badr fled. The coup was Egyptian-managed, probably with Russian connivance, and the whole Imamate family in Yemen was murdered. They were swept up and just gunned down. So when I got to Washington, I found myself in the startling position of having recommended by cable that we set up an embassy in the Kingdom of Yemen which was now the Yemen Arab Republic. So that starts a new chapter. Shall we try a little more this morning?

Q: Oh, yes. In the first place, what about the eastern Yemen, between Oman and Aden, more or less? What was the situation there?

CURRAN: Well, the Protectorate ran over to the Oman border, and the Sultan had a palace in Shalala and was in those days on good terms with the British. Our consul in Aden used to call on him as well.

Q: I did want to ask you, obviously this was the time of high Nasser, before the '67 War, which didn't go well for him. The Soviets were obviously a big threat, but you must have been looking at Egyptian influence there, which was part of the coup later.

CURRAN: Well, in the summer of '62, when I was looking around with Isa, you could tell the Egyptians were on the scene - and I think maybe even in some of my messages back I shared the view that the Egyptians would like to play a larger role - but as long as the Imam Ahmad was alive he fended them off and used the Russians to keep them off.

But the Egyptians ran the coup, so there was a curious debate in Washington: "Yes, it's important to have an embassy there, but who's the enemy?" The enemy had shifted. Exactly what you were saying was that instead of being a question of a communist threat, it was Nasser *cum* the communists which became the threat.

Q: What about the Saudis? At the time you were up there on this initial survey, what was the role of the Saudis?

CURRAN: It was a mixed role. The Saudis were generally on good terms with Yemenis, royal families and so on. There was disputed territory between them, which had to do with the takeover of the Saud family from the Hijazis in the 1920s. Sabbagh and I spent a good deal of time with the Saudi ambassador in Sanaa in the summer of 1962, and even though he was very worried about being assassinated by the Egyptians, he certainly felt he was on good terms with the Imam and the Crown Prince. Then when the coup came, the Saudis pulled their ambassador out, and also took Badr in and supported Badr's effort to get the northern tribes to help him take the throne back, a campaign that never worked.

Q: While you were up there on this trip, did you have much contact with the various tribes and get a feel for the tribal nature of the government?

CURRAN: Well, everybody you talked to under the Imamate had a tribal connection. In fact, the Iryani family were one of the key tribes in the north, and eventually the so-called revolutionary government took the Iryani tribe into the government and Abdurrahman Iryani, a man that I knew, became president for a while.

The other interesting thing is that there was still a Jewish presence in the summer of '62. This small contingent had originally had a significant community in a town called Sadah, which was north of Sanaa, and some of the jewelry that was available had supposedly been made by Jewish craftsmen. There were a few Jews in Sanaa, although I never met anyone who called themselves Jewish. Sadah was inaccessible. There was no road, and we didn't have access to helicopters. After the Egyptian inspired coup and the new so-called Field Marshall Sallal became president, all of the remaining Jews left.

Q: Yemeni Jews became a distinct feature of Israeli society later, gave it a very Mideastern look, as opposed to the Jews that had come out of Eastern Europe.

CURRAN: Well, yes, they were very exotic-looking, with painted lips and very dark

complexions. The women as portrayed in “The National Geographic” of that era were lovely.

Q: Now let's turn to Washington in the fall of '62. We talked about what we do next in Yemen.

CURRAN: And Ambassador Pete Hart from Jidda kept saying, “Well, it doesn't make any difference; Yemen is still a geopolitical threat.” And there were many people in Washington, stimulated by the British to a certain extent, saying, “Don't do anything, don't recognize now. Hold off. We'll handle things in Yemen,” and so on. I'm not sure why the U.S. persevered. I think the Cold War years probably prevailed, and we said, “Well, we want to have a seat at the table in Yemen, and we won't have a seat without an embassy.”

Q: Oh, yes. This was very much the attitude. We weren't going to give up anything.

CURRAN: Right. Pete Hart, who was, after all, in Saudi Arabia and was, in fact, arguing against the Saudi position who opposed recognition, and I think at that period, as I've been thinking back on it, there was a certain amount of anti-British feeling in American government. Why should we follow their lead?

Q: Oh, definitely, and the British were beginning to give up things, too. We were beginning to take over from them in the Persian Gulf. I forgot to mention, but when you were there, what about oil?

CURRAN: The Yemenis were hoping to find oil, and the Mecom Oil Company, run by John Mecom, who was very fond of Yemen and invested a good deal of money there, couldn't make a major strike. It was while I was on home leave during the coup when one of his airplanes crashed at the Taiz airport, and that was the end of Mecom operations. He sort of regarded the crash a jinx, and he pulled out. So during my period, which lasted till the summer of '64, Mecom had no operation there. Now Yemen has discovered oil, and it's a great help to the country.

In any event, in January 1963, the Kennedy administration decided they would open an embassy in Taiz and I was asked to go back. I went back with my family, my wife and daughter, Sara.

Q: How old was your daughter?

CURRAN: My daughter was not quite two.

Q: That took care of the school.

CURRAN: Yes, there was no schooling problem. I'm going to describe what it was like for my wife to go to Yemen. She was really a good sport about this. The embassy consisted of the chargé, Bob Stookey; there was an economic guy named Bob Brown;

there was a consul, and there was me. And, of course, I was in Washington when recognition occurred. I can't say I felt I played a particularly significant role in the debate, but in any event I was somebody who'd been on the ground, and I'd been up in Sanaa. I could describe the new airport they were building in Sanaa and the communist profile. Perhaps it had some influence.

The family and I flew from the U.S. to Cairo where we met the Michael Sterners (who had served in Aden and visited Taiz), and people along the way were very nice to us, both in Cairo and Jidda. The consul in Aden, John Wheelock, also was very kind. We got out to the airport in Aden for the trip to Taiz. The British pilots were gone, and the airline was now run by Yemenis. I might add that the British eventually came back because the Yemenis proved they couldn't fly the DC-3s, but anyway, in those days they were trying. Luckily we didn't know that. We got out to the Aden Airport - it was probably 6:00 a.m. - and we got into the plane. We were the only passengers along with all kinds of goods sort of loosely thrown in, not very well packed, but no pilots. And my wife, who was, as I say, a pretty good sport but not without concerns about flying in rickety old airplanes with her daughter, was not very happy. Finally, two guys in flip-flops jumped into the plane, went up and shut the cabin door, and started the engines. The plane taxied out to the tarmac and started hurtling down the runway for takeoff and then screeched to a halt and stopped right in the middle of the main runway, with aircraft - you know, British military jets - around, and so on. And one of the Yemenis jumped out of the plane. My wife said, "We ought to get off of this plane." I said, "You can't get off in the middle of the runway," and almost had to restrain her from jumping. The copilot or whoever he was jumped back in the plane and explained they'd forgotten to take the cover off of the air speed indicators, so that had to be done! Then they shut the cabin door and took off.

We got to Taiz - to the dirt airstrip - and I couldn't say it was old stuff, but anyway it was not unexpected. This was all new to my wife, and as we circled over this airport, she said, "I don't see any airport." It looked like a cow path. But of course, we did land there. Then there was no one to meet us because the telegraph service wasn't operating. So it was kind of a tough arrival for a Foreign Service wife.

I might say that because there was only one telegraph line, it was very difficult to communicate with the outside world. And as some of the old timers will recall, and probably you do, Stuart, we had to use the so-called one-time pads. We would laboriously compose our classified cables and take them down to the Yemeni telegraph office, and they would charge us a dollar a group. A "group" was a five letter encoded block. And of course, the groups were in western letters, and the telegraph operators were basically illiterate, so there were garbled names. First you had the technical problems, and then these guys were more or less transliterating what they saw - so most of the time we didn't even try to send cables. We would collect our outgoing traffic, put it in a bag, and an American would take it down to Aden and transmit everything from Aden. Taiz was a very primitive place.

Marcia and I eventually got to town and everyone was very welcoming, including the Yemenis, by the way. And there were a couple of things that I'd thought might be

interesting to recall, and then you could ask some questions.

One big adventure we had was to build a secure vault. We had a young person from AID who was supposedly an administrative officer, but he knew nothing about the Arab world, and he contracted with a local contractor to build the vault - reinforced concrete - in the back of the embassy building - basically a stone shed. This young fellow was very proud of what had been built. You know, it looked really terrific, a lovely whitewashed edifice. The next day, the monsoons started just after we had our ribbon cutting, and had a particularly violent rainstorm. The next morning, all that was left of the vault was the wire reinforcement, because the contractor hadn't put adequate concrete in the sand, and it all washed out. So that was one of the little hazards of doing business there.

Another job that we had as embassy officers, which might be of interest to young officers going overseas now. In those days, there was a large number, probably 500, of Yemenis who had served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during the Second World War and were entitled to Social Security payments in their villages. Incredibly, we had to go from village to village in Yemen with a jeep load of silver thalers and pay off these accounts. The recipients would put their X on the account, and we would drive on. Because of my Arabic, I accompanied the consul on two or three of these trips, and there's an adventure my children love to hear about, so I'm going to tell you.

We were driving in the Tihama from Taiz to Hodeida. We drove to Mokha and then started north over the sand track to go to the next town, which I think was Zabid. As it happened, there was a rainstorm in the afternoon. And what you did traveling in Yemen in this situation was to get yourself up on a dike, so that the flow of the water wouldn't sweep you away. So we were sitting on a dike waiting for the water to return to normal levels and eating a peanut butter sandwich when there was a sudden scratching at the windshield. It was pitch black. So we got a flashlight and flashed it out, and here was a baboon looking at us, and a big fellow - he was about three or four feet high - and he smelled the peanut butter and he was trying to get his fingers in the crack of the windshield and tear the windshield off. And it looked to us as if he was making progress. We had a pistol with us, and I was trying to reach out - I was not driving, I was in the passenger seat - to try to at least scare him with a pistol shot. What happened was, he tried to get the pistol away from me. The other thing we had was a flare gun. We thought we'd scare him with a flare gun. I went to the backseat and went out and shot a green flare up in the air, and that really got his attention, and he looked up, and suddenly his hair stood straight up, and he turned around and just ran down the dike and disappeared. And we thought, Are we clever or what? Green must mean "Go" to baboons! And then there was another thump on the car, and a desert leopard had landed on the car, took one look at us and then took off after the baboon. I'm telling you, our blood pressures were up. Finally, the rain died down with no further alarms, and we went on into Zabid and stayed in the guest house there and "held court," and passed out the *riyals*. Then we went on to the next town.

Q: Speaking about passing out Social Security and all, Yemen had traditionally sent its men abroad. I remember - we're talking about three or four years before - issuing visas

to Yemenis when I was in Dhahran who were going to, as I recall it, Youngstown, Ohio, and Lackawanna, New York.

CURRAN: And Detroit.

Q: And Detroit. And there were large Yemeni communities there.

CURRAN: Many are active in the auto business.

Q: An awful lot of Yemenis left from Dhahran. I know because we didn't have really any Saudis emigrating. It was just Yemenis. And they would appear with scraps of paper saying, "Ahmad Muhammad was born in Yemen in 1373," or something.

CURRAN: Yes, of course. Yemen was on the Muslim calendar. As a footnote, my daughter, Diana, who is an obstetrician, was practicing near Detroit and called me up to get some urgent lessons in Arabic because quite a number of her patients were Yemeni women or children who still don't speak English, and she had to know how to ask them where it hurt.

The British and the Saudis continued to meddle and muddle in 1963, but as I say, it was fairly low-level fever. The Egyptians had all they could handle with the tribes in the north, and we were pretty much left alone. The Yemenis wished we'd invest more in our road, but they were glad to have us there, and I think that people who were worried about the British and the Saudis and the Egyptians and the Russians saw us as maybe a long-term counterweight.

Q: You were the public affairs officer, and I would have thought that Radio Cairo would have been fulminating against the United States and its Israeli connection. Did you get into that?

CURRAN: Two comments on that. First of all, my assignment was as public affairs officer, but in fact, I found most of my work was as a political officer until we got a full-time political officer. And the second point I'd like to make is that the Yemenis were not much interested in the Israeli issue. All the fulmination from Cairo about *isti'mar* ("imperialism") and *sahyuniya* ("Zionism") didn't strike a chord with the Yemenis. They were interested in what was going to happen to their country, and as is the case throughout the Arab world, personally they were very welcoming to Americans. And the fact that two or three of us spoke pretty good Arabic didn't hurt either.

I thought I might go back now to text for a minute and read part of a comment I wrote going back to Sanaa in January, 1963. Since earlier I described what Sanaa looked like before the revolution, this is what it was like after the revolution.

The municipal airport is still unpaved, and the road to town still meanders over irrigation ditches, straining the springs and shocks of every vehicle heading for the city. The manager of the government guest house is the same swarthy rogue who must be dealt

with before lunch, as his addiction to *qat* reduced him to unconsciousness after the noon hour. The streets of Sanaa are still dusty, and many persons still wear the exotic national dress complete with rifle and dagger. But in spite of many physical similarities, Sanaa has undergone a profound change. Instead of an atmosphere of intellectual stagnation, there are ideas and bright young men promoting them. Government officials are accessible, aware if not informed about the outside world, and eager to talk with foreigners. It's true that much of the thinking and intellectual ferment is disorganized, even chaotic, but there's no question that the younger generation now in command in Sanaa is hurling Yemen into the modern era.

The changes are not only intellectual. A great deal of building has been done, particularly in the western part of the city near Bir al-'Azab and out along the road constructed by the Chinese communists towards Hodeida. Preparations are going forward to pave the central square, "Freedom Square," and new and better hotels are being installed in one-time royal palaces. The Qasr el-Fashayer hotel, for example, is head and shoulders above the government guest house in terms of food, service, toilet facilities, and there is even talk of a bar. The Egyptian presence is obvious, but by no means dominant. They bear the brunt of the military effort, and the number of planes on the ground and in the air over the capital attest to the magnitude of the UAR [United Arab Republic] investment in Yemen's external security. UAR military police in red berets are scattered around the city to keep an eye on the well behaved Egyptian GI's in their fatigues strolling the streets and haggling with storekeepers, but there are no Egyptian officials holding government positions, nor is there any likelihood there ever will be. How long Egypt will stay is another question. Many Yemenis believe they will leave soon.

The size and impact of the communist effort is hard to measure. The Sanaa-Hodeida Road, built by the Chinese communists, is greatly admired as an example of the way communists get things done. Contrary to Western predictions, the road has not disintegrated; it is constantly if extensively maintained, and the U.S. gravel road in the south is held up to frequent ridicule. There is not much enthusiasm about the Russian-built harbor at Hodeida. Facilities are proving expensive to maintain for the small amount of commercial traffic, and the long channel into the harbor tends to silt up. The result is the Yemenis are wondering now out loud if it wouldn't be better to find ways to improve road link with Aden an international port and one which these Yemenis consider an outlet for Yemen. International organizations are playing a small but important role. WHO, UNESCO, and the International Red Cross are all present. Their staffs, many from other parts of the Arab World are playing an important part in the maintenance of Yemen's independence.

It think that that kind of sums it up.

Q: You were mentioning the United Arab Republic, as it was called in those days. At one point, Nasser included Yemen as well as Syria. But you left there when?

CURRAN: Egypt and Syria created the United Arab Republic in 1958. It fell apart in 1961 or so. I wouldn't bet my life on this, but I believe that Syria, Egypt, and Yemen

negotiated a new UAR in the spring of '63. The final papers were to be signed sometime after the revolutionary celebrations in Yemen in September '63. Then the Syrians backed out and the Egyptian/Yemeni "union" continued for several years.

Q: In Syria there was a lot of objection because a lot of Egyptians came in and took office in Syria, which didn't sit well, and it didn't last. You mentioned there that the Egyptians probably wouldn't do that. I would have thought that Yemen would have been ripe for that, if for no other reason than that you needed clerks who were literate and that sort of thing.

CURRAN: Well, I think the Yemenis were and are a lot like the Afghans were in another of my incarnations, which we can talk about later. The Yemenis are very independent and basically unwilling to accept ground level foreigners running their lives. And they resisted it. This was evident in our new chargé's (James Cortada) visit to the new President of Yemen, Abdullah Sallal. Did you know Cortada.

Q: Yes, he's down in Orange, Virginia, and I've interviewed Jim. He was mayor of Orange at one point.

CURRAN: Was he? Is he still alive?

Q: I think so. [Note: Cortada passed away in October 1999]

CURRAN: Jim Cortada was quite an unusual person, very dynamic and fun to work with. He and I went to see Sallal, and Sallal, you know, was a man of very modest background. He had been a sergeant-major in the army and was promoted to field marshal before he became President. And what we found was a very weary man - this is April '63 - showing signs of the power struggles between tribesmen: Zeydis, Shafis, army elements, and internal security problems caused by the Egyptians. His health doesn't seem to be the best either. During the interview his hands kept straying to his stomach and heart to try to ease the pain he felt. We thought he probably had bilharzia, too, although no American doctor ever got near him. Despite his political and physical discomforts, he obviously enjoyed our visit. He was very friendly and asked us to come back and see him any time. We managed to announce some emergency wheat, which he was very pleased about, and we made the point that we hoped that someone beside the army would get the wheat. He expressed gratitude and said, of course, that they would. We talked about our scholarship program, which USIS had started, and we had 60 people on scholarships in the States in those days, which was really quite dramatic. Sallal said, "Well, 60 isn't much." And I also pointed out to him that we weren't interested in competing with the Russians; our main interest was in maintaining the independence of Yemen. And the President then turned and said, "Well, we appreciate this." This comes back to that point you were asking before about in what light did they see us. They didn't really see us as major players, but as a smallish trump and they could play against the Egyptians and the Russians.

Q: What about the CIA? Did the CIA get into this? I can't imagine, particularly in those

days, not getting them there.

CURRAN: Of course, they were present. I doubt that it's possible to talk about that. The people that were involved there were very discreet, very careful, and I think very effective - and also very much in tune with our attempt to keep a lower profile and not be seen as confronting the Egyptians and the Russians directly.

Q: Very soon after, a real solid war developed between the Egyptians and the Saudis, which we ended up arbitrating. Was that happening when you were there?

CURRAN: Well, it certainly happened, but we were such a sideshow it didn't have much impact. However, Saudi propaganda about their attacks against the Egyptians in Yemen got such a high profile that CBS sent Winston Burdett in to Yemen to cover "the war" and I still have a copy of that tape. And Burdett and his cameraman, a fellow named Joseph Faletta, did an absolutely fantastic job of assessing what was going on. I could say he had some help in terms of being taken around Yemen, but the bottom line of the CBS report was: "This is a very serious situation, but it's not World War III." Burdett pointed out that the Egyptians were trying to use air power, which was correct, to crush the Yemenis, particularly the tribesmen of the north, but he said in his opinion it wasn't working, and we agreed with that. One thing that was interesting was when he was in the Saudi zone of Yemen, the Saudis, or the Yemeni royalists, took him and Faletta on a trip, and they said, "Okay, now we're going to let you watch while we bombard Sanaa." So they went off to some place, and there were some lights in the distance, and they set off some artillery, and then they went back. A week later, Burdett was telling us, "Boy, I was right in the middle of the war and I watched Sanaa being bombarded." We asked, "What date was that?" And both Jim Cortada and I had been in Sanaa that day and there was no bombardment at all, so it was complete hogwash. Burdett did a really first-rate job on analyzing what's going on, and he said, "You know, Yemen is a poor but honest independent country caught between the British and the Saudis, and they're trying to figure out what to do."

And in the long run, of course, the Egyptians gave up. It was too expensive to conduct a Vietnamese-type anti-insurgency program in Yemen, and the British wore out, too. And now the whole place is under the control of a Yemeni. I use the word control loosely. [Note the number of tourists being kidnapped]

Q: While you were there at that time, basically '62-'64, were the British a presence at all?

CURRAN: Well, for a while we had a British chargé in Taiz, but they pulled him out to underline opposition to the Yemen Arab Republic. That had repercussions because in June of '63 a bunch of British personnel on some kind of training mission strayed into Yemen and were caught. I think there were about 20 or 30 of them. And they were brought to Taiz and locked up, and we - Cortada and I - were alone there, had to negotiate their release. And the Yemenis, and this is kind of typical, instead of threatening show trials or anything like that, treated the British pretty well. They put them in one of the

former royal “palaces,” and they had a swimming pool. (They all got bilharzia swimming in the swimming pool.) Eventually, we got them out for about \$20,000, and it was all pretty businesslike bargaining.

At the risk of telling war stories, I will tell a couple of stories about the British soldier release. After capture, they were brought in by convoy and I met them at the South Taiz border. The governor of Taiz was somebody I saw a good deal of. We’re talking about a “government” in Taiz of maybe 20 people total and the governor made most of the decisions. Plus, the Americans were about the only foreigners who had movies... and so we entertained officialdom a lot. When the lights went out they could have a little drink of something stronger than tea. So good personal relationships prospered.

The governor and I were waiting for the convoy to bring the British troops in - all men, by the way; the Yemenis released the women - and we were standing around, and what happened gives an idea of the brutality of the place. The tradition, as you know, in the older Arab World is that when a person of authority is given a scroll and he accepts the scroll, he has to do something about whatever is written on there. As we walked, an old crone was trying to give the governor a scroll, and he didn’t want to accept it. So while we were talking he kept turning his back on the woman and walking this way and that. And she kept right after him, whining and pushing the paper at the governor. And finally - I could see his temper rising. She came up to him, and he said to me in Arabic, “Just excuse me a minute. I have a matter to take care of.” And he turned around and smacked her, right in the side of the head with his fist, knocked her sprawling, and I looked around to see if anyone else was shocked. No. The governor turned back to me and said, “Let’s see, what were we talking about...” and just left her there, unconscious, I think. Maybe someone came and dragged her away. That was one level of human dialogue.

The wait for the convoy dragged on and to relieve the tedium, the governor said, “Would you like to see the Imam’s lions?” I said, “Sure, I’d love to see the Imam’s lions.” So we went up to a “palace” which was nearby, and we went into a courtyard and we stood on a wall about five feet high. Five lions were let out into the enclosure with their trainer, and he ran them through some paces, sort of like a circus, ran them around in circles and maybe through a couple of hoops, I don’t know. They were as close to us as three or four feet, and if I hadn’t been with the governor I might have been really concerned. I know this tale sounds bizarre, but that kind of stuff happened every day in Yemen.

Q: Was a gate locked at night at this time?

CURRAN: Absolutely, in the Old City.

Q: The Old City, yes.

CURRAN: Of course, we could go around with our diplomatic jeeps, but one didn’t. But there really was no police force.

Q: Tell me about your wife. How did the wives of people, how did the Egyptian wives get

along there?

CURRAN: Well, my wife, first of all, was quite occupied getting the house that we lived in habitable, which she did. She actually found a reliable servant who had been trained by the Italians. We had the best pasta in town. Marcia spoke Arabic by then and was able to manage quite well. Obviously, she had to worry about having a two-year-old around, but in a way, having a small child meant that the upper-class Yemeni women felt comfortable coming to our house with their children, and Marcia would sometimes arrange “coincidentally” to have the American doctor there, so he would look at the children. Oddly, the male-female thing didn’t seem to be a problem when it’s medicine, although they always kept their veils on when he was in the house.

My mother and father came to visit us while we were there. My wife had a tea party for her acquaintances there, and my mother was treated the way senior women are treated in the Middle East - with great respect. But life in Yemen was generally an effort to keep active and occupied. We had a primitive golf course; AID built us a tennis court, and we had lots of colorful day trips. And one of the things that I think is not true any more is we never had the slightest fear that anybody would lay a finger on our wives or children. And I guess you know, if you’ve been in Dhahran, Arabs are very strict about the way foreign women are treated. I don’t know whether you had the same experience, but I never had the slightest worry about leaving my wife alone when I went off on field trips, and it would have been unspeakable if they’d ever been molested or hurt.

Q: What about AID?

CURRAN: The AID people didn’t have much leadership during the 1962 revolution and were subject to poor morale, but during the spring of ’63, a very visionary and good guy named Jim Megellas came to run AID. Megellas had been mayor of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and was a friend of Kennedy’s and I suppose got a job in AID as a result. He was a wonderful public administrator, and he restored order. The basic AID program was managed by the Bureau of Public Roads, the Mokha-Sanaa road. And the BPR was run by an old Oklahoma tough who had been used to dealing with prison labor in building roads in Oklahoma, and he treated the Yemenis the same way. So one of the early situations we had was how to teach him to be a little more respectful of his Yemeni employees. In addition, to get Americans to work in Yemen, AID had to hire a lot of contract employees. Some of them - this fellow who ran the port in Mokha was an example - drank too much, or tried to “date” Yemeni women, or just brawl.

Anyway, Megellas sorted everything out very quickly and smoothly. The big thing he did was build a little trailer camp for most of the BPR employees out away from town. They had a perimeter fence and community activities so that these Americans, who came in from Middle America, had a place to live where they had a doctor there and they had a little school and they were pretty much protected from the outside world. And the road made progress. By the time I left they had gotten past Taiz and were on up into the mountains. And I think the road was completed in 1964, all the way to Sanaa.

Q: There was a problem - I can't remember exactly what it was - with AID and people having come out of Cairo to go look at a safe or something like that. That doesn't ring a bell?

CURRAN: No, I don't remember that. It might have been later.

Q: It might have been a little later.

CURRAN: No, I would say the main problems we had, I mean to the extent we had problems with AID, were the attitude toward the Yemeni workers, and occasionally exotic health problems, particularly viral meningitis, and a couple of times we had some very, very scary evacuations.

One of the things that was a huge help to the U.S. mission in the summer of '63 was that AID approved an airplane for our mission, a little Piper Aztec. It was a 6-seater, so it meant in terms of Medevacs you could get to Asmara, instead of having to rely on the twice weekly DC-3 service, or you could get to Aden. One could even go to Sanaa for a day to work and come back instead of having to beat your way up the road and back. So the airplane was a big help. The pilot was a former Air America flyer. It took a while for him to learn that Yemen wasn't Laos!

The U.S. has an aid program of considerable scope [this was the spring of '63], centering on the Mokha-Sanaa Road and the Taiz water project. This has been augmented in recent weeks by the arrival of a public administration specialist and by the gift of medicine and by the USIS scholarship program. U.S. aid was not stopped by the revolution and has continued in the face of some harassment from officials in the Taiz area.

I'd like to interrupt and say when our people talk about "harassment," we're really talking about the fact that Yemenis couldn't understand why we didn't pay bribes, and as a result, they would make their presence known by holding up paper and permits. We saw it as harassment, and they saw it as our not understanding how to do business. We had a GSO assistant who came in for a while who was magic. Suddenly, in the spring of 1963, a new Yemeni administrator was hired and our "harassment" problems vanished. His name was Abdulla Saidi. He got everything done for us. We got road permits in 20 minutes and all other permits which had been problems. But then, suddenly, we had an audit during the summer, after Megellas came in, and the auditors found that Saidi was tacking 10 percent onto all his transactions and using the money to pay off. So we had to explain to him that Americans don't do that, and he said, "Oh, I'm very sorry, well, I guess I'd better resign." "Well, okay." So then he disappeared into Aden.

I was down in Aden in the fall, and I was in the back streets wandering around and I came across Saidi, who had opened a little hardware store. And I went in and it was a beautiful little store, kind of like Sears of Aden, with lots of American tires and parts and so on. And I said, "By Allah, you've really prospered, and I'm glad to see it." (He was a nice guy.) "Oh, yes, God has been good to me," and so on. Well, I went back to Yemen, and I mentioned to Megellas, "There's something funny about this. We'd better have a

look at it.” So AID went through the purchase orders, and they found that what he’d done was take advantage of an AID GSO who was not terribly attentive. Saidi had had the American sign a series of purchase orders. Then he took them along when he resigned. He went to Aden and very carefully doled them out to suppliers over a period of several months and bought jeep tires and things like that, set up his shop, and was living happily ever after. And because of the complications of trying to go get him from Yemen in Aden under British law, there was nothing we could do. The “happy” ending. But anyway, the general situation in Taiz began to improve. Some of the new government began to try rational planning, resource allocation, budgeting. There were fewer people running around the country with favorite schemes. The U.S. tried to push the Yemenis to start a regular tax collection system. That was very, very difficult.

At the same time, the U.S. had to keep up its own assistance programs. But also, there were people in the Congress who were saying, “Suppose the communists take over. Aren’t we sort of funding a future communist government?” But outside of Taiz, things were still shaky. I wrote in June 1963: “The Yemen Arab Republic is broke and has no prospects of filling empty coffers. The UAR is beginning to withdraw its troops, even though Yemen has many troubles with internal security, and the people are waiting for the government to show some results. Sallal is trying frantically to get financial help, and he is turning to the Russians and to us. We gave him wheat, but we wouldn’t give him money, and neither would the USSR, so (in that period into the summer of ’63) they are having a lot of difficulties.”

I think it wasn’t until the Egyptians took another look at it in the late summer, and came back not with troops but with money, that the situation turned around. So by the time I left in the summer of ’64, everything was relatively stable.

Q: Well, now, down in Aden, sort of the Yemeni opposition force against the British was a rather violent Marxist type of people, you know, sort of like the IRA or something like that. Was that reflected, or was Aden just a different world?

CURRAN: Aden was a different world, and in 1964 before I left in the summer, the insurgency in Aden, such as it was, was pretty inchoate. Some anti-British terrorists were able to pull off the near assassination of Sir Charles Johnson, who was the British High Commissioner - and in fact I was at the airport when the attack occurred, fortunately on the other side of the building - someone threw a grenade at him. Sir Charles was unhurt but angered. He was the prototypical old Brit, “You’ve got to use force with these wogs,” was totally unsympathetic to development of any kind of self-government in Aden. Eventually, the British got tired of dealing with the tribes and pulled out.

Q: A question I wanted to ask: what were you doing with having scholarships for students? I would have thought it would be a very unpromising hole, not because of their intellectual capabilities, but really because of their preparation. How did you work with it?

CURRAN: Well, the Yemenis are great survivors, as you know from your experience on

the Gulf, and most of our kids had gone to secondary school in Aden or in Ethiopia and had come back to USIS Taiz with enough academic credentials and language to pass whatever the English language test was. And also one of the things USIS did during my tenure was start English language training.

Q: Where were they pointed, the Yemenis, the 60 scholars?

CURRAN: A lot of them came back and were in the government in the '70s and '80s. In fact, my two successors, Dick Jeanneret and his successor, who was there in the '67 War, found that Yemenis were remarkably loyal to their home country and didn't stay in the States, which you might think, but came back to live in Yemen.

Q: Where were they going to school, do you remember?

CURRAN: Well, a lot of them went to Middle Western schools, and Kansas was a favorite location - also Texas. Many of them wanted to be oil engineers and pilots. As I say, a lot of them came back; a lot of them went into government.

Q: We've covered Yemen up to... You might tell what we want to cover, Ted.

CURRAN: Yes, well, we've covered my first basically full year in Yemen, up to the first celebration of the Yemen revolution, and I would suggest we turn from here to the second year I was there, with the more or less consolidation of the revolution and then plans for my departure for Washington in July 1964.

Q: Today is the 22nd of January, 1999. Okay, Ted?

CURRAN: Yes, I've been doing some reflection since our last conversation and particularly with the suggestion that you had, Stuart, to look at Parker Hart's book, *Saudi Arabia and the U.S.: The Birth of a Security Relationship*. It was fascinating to me to read this book and realize that, in Ambassador Hart's, view what was going on in Yemen was pretty much of a sideshow. In fact, his main concern was the birth and maintenance of a security relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States, and the threat that Nasser and the UAR posed to that relationship, and Yemen was really only seen from his point of view as a sort of minor subset of a much bigger and more important problem, whereas we poor peasants in Yemen were thinking of ourselves as being really important because the Yemen situation was geopolitically important, but also because of the relationship with the British, which Hart takes into account, but again, pretty much as a sideshow.

In any event, I wanted to start this section by just mentioning again, as I have several times in this oral history, what a huge advantage it was to have my family supporting me so conscientiously in this very, very difficult and backward place. My wife and I had one two-year-old when we went to Yemen and we started another baby in Yemen - arrived after we left - but it was a really terrific aspect to have unqualified support of them, in

addition to which most people can't believe my parents made two visits to Yemen during my two years there. And again, that was really a wonderful feeling.

I want to move now to an event which happened actually just before this previous tape ended. I'm reminded of it because in Parker Hart's book he referred to it, very much in passing. I went back to my notes and looked at my notes and saw it rather differently. It was a visit by Ralph Bunche, who was the special emissary of U Thant to Yemen-

Q: U Thant being-

CURRAN: -the Secretary General of the UN, and Ralph Bunche, of course, a famous figure in the UN. We remember the visit as a culmination of the hope we had that the Egyptians and maybe the Russians would be playing less of an intrusive role in Yemen. Parker Hart saw it as a card to play to try to get the Egyptians to be more cooperative. In any event, Bunche came to Taiz, which was, as noted, a very primitive airport, still unpaved, and the UN staff, who rejoiced under the acronym of UNYOM (UN Yemen Observation Mission), had never been in the southern part of Yemen. I don't think they'd even been in the northern part very long. There was a Major General Riki from India, who was in charge of UNYOM and he sent an advance man down from Sanaa. Riki's representative was startled to find it took two days to drive the 80 or 90 miles between Sanaa and Taiz.

When the announcement was made that this great man, Ralph Bunch, was coming to visit Taiz, my wife and I can still remember standing on a hilltop overlooking the airport, and it was the only time in my life I've actually seen hills black with people. I think the whole population of southern Yemen turned out to see who this "miracle worker" was, probably imagining - I don't want to be denigrating Yemeni mentality, but it was sort of as though a great magician or shaman or savior was coming. And the crowds were so huge that they couldn't land the plane, so the UN plane, a DC-3, circled over Taiz while the Yemeni militia finally managed to clear the strip. And then, when the plane landed, the crowd surrounded the airplane, and UN security people were absolutely petrified. But Bunche had great presence, got into a jeep with the governor, and they rode to town, the distance of about four miles, and it took them I think four or five hours because all the way they were surrounded by people who wanted to be touched and hand in petitions. It was really quite an extraordinary time.

Now, as I was thinking about the Parker Hart book and Bunche's visit, I think one of the handicaps we were under in Yemen in addition to the unbelievably primitive conditions, was the lack of really adequate communications. I think I mentioned earlier that whenever we did a classified cable we had to use one-time pads. I don't know whether you ever ran into that or not.

Q: Well, I know of the one-time pads.

CURRAN: Well, you can imagine trying to do a 10-page cable on a one-time pad. That's a very tedious and difficult exercise. And that's what we had to use, or we had to fly to Asmara or to go to Aden to use more modern facilities. And it wasn't till this period I'm

beginning to talk about that we got an updated communications system.

Q: Well, Bunche's trip was for what purpose?

CURRAN: Well, the idea was that the U.S. government was very nervous about, not Yemen, but whether the Egyptians and/or the Russians would use northern Yemen, particularly a new airport that was being built near Sanaa, for geopolitical reasons. The Egyptians to threaten East Africa and the Russians, East Africa and beyond, maybe the Middle East. But the idea was to use Bunche to get the great powers to back off and leave the Yemenis alone. It didn't work, but I think it's very hard to see these things in long contexts, and as I'll mention later on, I think the tide, in a way, did turn that summer because, as the Yemenis got more self-assurance with their new form of government they began to take a more careful look at the outsiders and what their motives were. The Bunche visit may have helped Yemeni self-assurance.

We got a new telegraph system installed in 1964 and it made a tremendous difference in our ability, obviously, to receive messages and send messages. It was "clandestine," meaning the embassy had not declared the system officially. Originally, it was a hand-keyed system, and I was on a visit in Asmara, which was operated by the National Security Agency Kagnev Station in Asmara, and the man who subsequently was a good friend of mine in Washington, but we didn't know each other in Yemen, heard I was in town from Taiz and said to me - we went into a secure room and he said, "I've something very serious to tell you. There's a new communications facility opened up in Taiz and we've no idea who has it." And I said, "I don't know. How I would know?" He said, "Well, we can tell it's an American-trained operator." You know, I wasn't supposed to talk about it. So anyway, they knew about radio. My colleague said, "It's near the U.S. embassy. You'd better look into it."

Q: This was obviously an Agency (CIA) operation.

CURRAN: Yes, but the man in Asmara was trying to help, and I guess I should have said something, but I didn't.

So I want to kind of go over some of the highlights of the last year without going into a lot of the detail I went into in the first half because the scene is pretty well set. Interrupt any time.

One sort of thing that was very clear to me after the first year and a half there was that being an Arabist was a huge advantage, almost an indispensable advantage, and I have a copy of a message I sent - nothing like a 30-year-old to tell the Department how to run their business-

Q: Oh, absolutely, yes.

CURRAN: - and I said that it was in a way shocking that the U.S. Information Agency was training people up to this level and the State Department wasn't. I mean, there was really only one Arabist at the post. And the result was that the USIA trained another

Arabist; the State Department didn't. They had people in school, but they weren't trained up to a level of being able to communicate speedily and well. So I thought that was an achievement and that at least the next PAO was an Arabist. I also got started on an English teaching program which I'm very proud of, and it still exists in Yemen after all these years. It was modeled on the old binational center we had. Ostensibly, we had a binational board, and it was set up by an English teaching expert whose name was George Wishon. Because he heard about this place and probably because I was whining about needing more resources, he came to see what was going on. I met him in Asmara. I brought him over in a Yemen Airline DC-3. It was kind of a typical story. I know it sounds a little like a "war story," but it gives you the flavor of what it was like to work there. Halfway across the Red Sea, the Pilot came back and said to me, with George Wishon listening, "You live in Taiz, right?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, you know, I've never flown into Taiz before, and I'd appreciate it if you'd help me find the airport." And Wishon is looking at this guy, you know, what is this? So anyway, I went up front, and actually it was difficult to find the airport in Taiz. They had no beacon, and you had to know the topography. There was a very large mountain next to the city, and so you had to come in on the north side of the mountain, around the corner of the mountain, and then you saw the dirt air strip, and that's where you landed. And you only got one shot at landing because at the south end of the strip there was a hangar, so if you missed you couldn't take off again, so it was very exciting. So we landed just before a horrendous monsoon thunderstorm. We drove shakily through the roads of Taiz. We got to the house, and my daughter, who was then two, two and a half years old, was lying on the floor being tended to by a doctor because a wild dog had jumped on her while they were walking home from something or other, and she banged her head or something, you know, head injuries, covered with blood. Anyway, the doctor turned around and very matter-of-factly said, "Well, a wild dog knocked her down." And poor Wishon's eyes were now big as saucers. And then the power went out, and in the middle of the power outage - we were tending to the daughter, getting supper, and so on - there's a knock on the door, and a Yemeni tribesman arrived, with a huge dagger and a gun over his back, and Wishon opened the door. It was a messenger from the governor, and he wanted to see me at the Republican Palace - and because there are no telephones, that's the way you got messages. So anyway, the messenger's arrival was spectacular and did nothing to hurt my reputation in Washington.

There was one more story connected with Wishon. Wishon did an inspection, and one of the things that he also reported was that it was very hard to get English teachers, so USIS had to use the expatriates who were available, and one of them, our best teacher, was a Greek lady. And Wishon was testing several kids in the school, and one of them he was sitting down next to - you know what they go through on these: "What's this?" "It's a-." And this little boy said, "What eez thees? Eet eez a benzil [What is this? It is a pencil.]," in perfect Greek-American. (We always wondered what happened to the little boy. Anyway, the English-teaching program really took off, and it was a big advantage for our AID program and for the government, and a lot of the kids who went on scholarships to the U.S., young officials and so on, passed through our English Language Program.

Another really extraordinary event, and I'm not sure how this happened, but it wasn't

called the Central Command then, but it was the fleet based in Bahrain.

Q: It was COMIDEASTFOR, Commander, Middle East Force.

CURRAN: Correct, it was the precursor to the Central Command. In any event, for reasons that still defy my understanding, they decided that they would make a ship visit to Hodeida. Apparently the Yemenis thought that this was a good idea. I think the Yemenis were always glad to tweak the Russians, who had built the port, so we got Yemeni approval, and the USS Turner arrived offshore Hodeida.

Q: A destroyer.

CURRAN: Destroyer Escort (DE) actually.

Q: Destroyer Escort.

CURRAN: Yes, not a big ship, but still pretty big for those times in Yemen. And the Hodeida Channel, which came in from the Red Sea, was about three miles long and not very deep. And I went out with a lighter to meet the destroyer, and the first thing I noticed was the destroyer was flying a Yemeni flag, but it was the Royalist flag, so we had to fix that right away. And then I said to the captain, whose name I've now forgotten - wonderful guy, but about as uptight as you can get, as you know, the commander of a ship, if anything happens, he's finished... The captain had never been to Hodeida and nobody else had, and they didn't have any charts or anything. They had a Yemeni pilot, you know, who kept looking around at this modern ship. I told the captain, "You know, the Yemenis are going to fire an 18-gun salute when you come into the harbor." He said, "Oh, that's fine." I said, "Well, you know, they have kind of old guns, and I'm not sure how this is all going to work." And he couldn't understand why I was talking to him about it. Anyway, we inched down this channel with radar going and sailors doing soundings all the time. We get to where the honor guard could welcome us, and these guns start going off. They didn't have ceremonial rounds; they were firing live ammunition over the ship. And I thought the captain was going to die.

However, we made it safely, and were greeted by the Hodeida governor, who was a tough old bird and was charmed by the ship! We had a tour of the ship. Of course, the sailors were just entranced by this guy with the dagger and robes, and so there was a crowd going around the ship. The governor came to one of these over-the-horizon guns with special radar you can see over the horizon. So the ensign was proudly explaining to the governor that they could hit, you know, a dime 15 or 20 miles away. I was translating all of this, and the governor said to me, "Well, what about closer targets?" And I said, "Well, I suppose they could hit closer targets." And he said, "Well, could they hit that boat" - and he pointed to an old fishing boat about 200 meters away, which had people on it. So I said to the sailors, "Well, for example, he's very impressed you can hit these targets. Can you also hit that boat?" "Oh, yes, Sir, we could." So the governor said, "Well, do it." And the ensign said, "Sir?" I said, "I think it's a joke." Actually, it wasn't, I don't think.

And then they gave the governor and his staff a dinner, and then afterward showed a

movie. They had a very safe movie, a cowboy movie or something. And when the lights went down, the governor said to me, "When do they serve the alcohol?" Of course, as a Muslim, he wasn't supposed to drink, but he'd been a guest in other U.S. facilities, and when the lights went down, the Muslims enjoyed having a little drink. Maybe they did that in Dhahran, I don't know. But on the USS T, no drinks were served.

Q: No, they didn't. We were with Wahabis in Dhahran, you've got to remember. I mean, we drank, but only with Americans. There was a lot of alcohol around, but mostly bootleg.

CURRAN: But you didn't serve it to them.

Q: It was called sadiki.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: But we didn't serve it to Muslims.

CURRAN: Guests. Well, obviously, when you get a little away from the center of things it's different. When we get to Afghanistan I have a few stories, too. Anyway, the poor Governor was really disappointed.

Q: You might want to explain that American naval ships have, since the time of President Wilson, been dry.

CURRAN: Yes. Anyway, I actually didn't realize that at the time myself, and I thought that probably they could accommodate a visitor, but nothing doing.

The other thing that I remember particularly from the trip was that the governor was so pleased with the hospitality on board that he invited all the men on the ship to what he called a picnic. So as was usually the case, I went along with this, and we went into a kind of a courtyard, and I didn't know what on earth they were planning to do. I thought it would be a *mansif*, where you have food around. Well, they were so to be honored particularly, to show how fresh the meat was, that they herded the lambs in and did them in right in front of the sailors, cut their throats. And of course, you know, Americans aren't used to seeing that, and a couple of them fainted dead away, which the Yemenis thought was really a howl; these tough American warriors passing out.

Another project in that last part of my tour involved the Smithsonian Institution sending Gus Van Beek, at that time a leading southern Arabian archeologist - he wasn't an Arabist - to look at the Sabaeen ruins of Marib. And Gus Van Beek turned out to be a wonderful man. I'm afraid I've lost touch with him; I don't even know if he's alive. But he was a very loose and relaxed scholar. And the time came to go out to Marib. We were in Sanaa, and the UNYOM people, the UN mission people, were still around. When they heard Van Beek was going to go out and see Marib, which at those times - if you didn't mind being kidnapped by a tribesman - you could go out and look at it, this incredible

granite dam and some ruins. So the UN all wanted to go with him. And Gus said, "I think Mr. Curran should go with me." And I was really tempted, but they were going to go on an Egyptian military plane, and I had at that time one and three-quarters children and I just thought - with still some active fighting going on - I really wasn't sure it was a good idea, so I didn't go. And as it turned out, there was a dust storm in Marib, and Van Beek had a hard time seeing very much. The Smithsonian, I think, would have been interested in taking on the Marib ruins, but the United Nations, because of the trouble with the UN mission, wouldn't fund it, and I guess the American government thought it was just too far out and too dangerous. So nothing was ever done, and I don't know now whether anyone's working on Marib.

Q: I don't.

CURRAN: The next big event was something in which we took a good deal of "I told you so" satisfaction. I mentioned earlier that there was a quite conflict between us and the Yemeni government because the Chinese had built a poorly-engineered paved road between Hodeida and Sanaa, whereas our road was gravel and graded and so on for local maintenance. And the Yemenis didn't care about how easy it was to maintain; they wanted a paved road. Well, after a tremendous rainstorm, the Chinese road in July of 1963 washed out, and I can't tell you how pleased we were to point out why to the Yemenis. It was terribly expensive fixing the road because it washed out in a mountain culvert and blocked traffic for, I don't know, a month; they'd barely got it fixed before the celebration of the first year of the Republic. It may not merit a mention in an oral history, except that we got so tired of arguing this issue that for us it was a great feather in our cap that that road finally collapsed.

I want to talk a little bit about the celebration of the first year of the Yemen Arab Republic. It was really quite an event. It was held in Sanaa. It was a two day event. The Egyptians didn't actually pave the central square, but they put liquid tar on the surface to keep the dust down; the Egyptians put on a parade, and two of the Egyptian leaders, Amr - and was it Hassan el-Amr - and Anwar Sadat, came down from Cairo. The Egyptian leaders brought President Sallal with them. Sallal had been treated for bilharzia, which is a very debilitating liver disease. And the UAR had Cairo trying to get him well, or that's what they said. And when he came back, he looked to us worse than when he'd left, so I don't know. I don't think he ever went back to Cairo for medical treatment again. The government built a special parade ground in an area outside of Sanaa (not in the town - I think there may have been a security concern) - and they had quite a crowd there. First they had a speech by Sallal. There was a very dull part of the speech while he was thanking the Egyptians and talking about Arab brotherhood, and then the second part of the speech was very popular because he really took out after the British, and the Yemenis all ate that up, and there was great applause and so on. I had one quote: "If those dwarfs invade, our brave soldiers will kill two British for every Yemeni in battle." Great cheers and so on. Then the Egyptians had a parade, and their parade was marching a bunch of their raw recruits, young Yemenis that the Egyptians had tried to train, and these poor kids had no idea about marching to music or what to do with their guns, and the Egyptian noncoms were marching along, pushing them into place. Mack Sennet stuff. This was

followed by a tribal parade which everybody got into, the audience, the camels, the horses, daggers, and rifles. And that lasted for about two hours, and it was a huge success. And then there was a mighty fireworks display in the evening. It was really quite an impressive display.

The next day was geopolitically important, because the Russians opened an airport which no one had been able to get near, and we all got out to photograph it. It was a huge jet airfield, a 9000 foot strip, and of course, our intelligence people - we had our military attaché there from Cairo - they were all just absolutely clicking film right and left. And it said a lot to Washington in terms of adding to the danger of having this significant Russian and Egyptian presence. The only thing they hadn't thought of was automated stairs, you know, to bring up to a big jet plane. So military planes were okay because they're close to the ground, but in the course of the ceremony, one of the VIPs came in from Cairo - I don't know who it was - in something like a 707 or the Russian variety of that, and they had no way to get him out of the plane. So they finally backed up a truck and a stepladder and got him out.

The year 1963 ended rather tragically for America, not so much in Yemen, but because it was, of course, the year that Kennedy was assassinated. When you're living in a small overseas community where everyone is very close and where you feel very intensely your Americanism, it was really probably one of the two or three biggest shocks of my life. I was in Aden actually the morning we heard about it. The first reports were that he'd been shot but not killed, and by the time we got back to Taiz, we knew that the President was dead. Not only were the Americans struck, but the Yemenis were - terribly, terribly affected. And we had a condolence book at the chargé's house, Jim Cortada's house, and I think it took us three days to accommodate all the people who wanted to express their grief.

Q: We're talking about a condolence book that people come in and sign and put anything they want.

CURRAN: Yes. Right. It took us three days to accommodate the Yemenis who wanted to come. Guests cried and tore their hair. I suppose there were two reasons. One is that they saw America as kind of being the "great hope of the world," as it were. And I think Kennedy came across generally to the world as a new spirit in international relations. So it was a very, very sad time, and the Yemenis were casting around for some way to honor the fallen President, and they fixed on the city water system for Taiz. And after a debate, the Kennedy family agreed, so there exists still in Taiz the John F. Kennedy Municipal Water System.

Looking back at my notes and having read the Parker Hart book, there was a significant change in Yemeni internal politics at this time. A very distinguished tribal leader named Abdulrahman Iryani began his ascendancy and eventually became president, after about 10 years. And I have a long message which was written by the well-connected German ambassador, a message I translated and sent to Washington, which predicted what would happen. What the ambassador said was that the Yemenis really were fed up with the

Egyptians and the Russians and they wanted to have a more independent government. And Iryani and his tribal group, as I say, over a long time, were able to do that.

Q: I just wanted to ask - you were there when the Republic was established in 1962.

CURRAN: No, I was on home leave. I was present at the first birthday of the Republic.

Q: What was our feeling by the time the first year was over? How had the Republic worked - difference, changes from the monarchy - what was the approach?

CURRAN: The Yemen Arab Republic was completely different from the Imamate. It was a real national government, not a tribal confederation. The Yemen Arab Republic introduced some things which the Royalists never bothered with - secondary education, more educational opportunities at the college level. Progress wasn't an enemy; it was one of the goals of the state. The revolutionaries, I think I mentioned earlier, wiped out, murdered all of the Royal Family, so that they got rid of a lot of infrastructure, but they replaced it pretty quickly. They established a national currency, including paper money, which Yemen had never had before. They had banking. They had a serious government service. So in the context of those days, as I think back on it, although many Americans were worried about Yemen being a communist base or an Egyptian base, I think we thought - that is, most of us who were there - that the revolution was basically a good change for Yemen. Public health was established, water systems.

Q: The John F. Kennedy Water System.

CURRAN: Yes, and others. And the roads were modernized, and the airports were modernized. So I would say, on balance, the revolution helped Yemen.

Q: Well, then, you left when?

CURRAN: The summer of '64.

Q: And whither?

CURRAN: Well, I was assigned to be the Near East Desk officer for USIA, and we can go through that pretty quickly.

U.S. INFORMATION AGENCY/WHITE HOUSE: 1964-1969

From 1964-1969, there were many events inside the U.S. which have marked history even to the present (2000). President Kennedy had been assassinated in 1963 - a terrible event in America and even more devastating to Americans serving abroad - and this period included a serious escalation of the war in Vietnam as well as the killings of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy.

The King murder stirred up passions among the African-American community, passions that had been muted in the 1950s and early 1960s while the war in Vietnam increasingly divided Americans. The Tet offensive by the Viet Cong in 1968 really rattled Americans, who up to that point had been convinced by their Washington leaders that the war was virtually "won."

President Nixon's election in 1968 brought a man to office who had very strong views on who could be trusted and who not. (Sadly, the State Department was on the dislike list.)

All of these events began to erode the confidence Americans had in their governance and the we/they conflicts over Vietnam and civil rights began to have particular impact in the Congress, where certain matters, foreign affairs, e.g., which had had bipartisan consideration and support, became arenas for partisan rancor.

With the exception of the Vietnam war, where the demands for personnel created something like "press gangs" in foreign affairs personnel offices, none of the events described here made much impact on people working at my level in Washington that I can recall. The exception was the preemptive assignment of young Foreign Service officers (State and USIA) to the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) in Saigon. In this case, with the (covert) support of the director of USIA, Leonard Marks, I intervened in a number of cases which seemed especially egregious with regard to personal hardship and Director Marks intervened on behalf of the officers.

There also was a day in 1971, I believe, when an anti-war group tried to shut down Washington by blocking main roadways. The blockade failed after massive intervention by the police and National Guard. But the fuss over the blockade and President Nixon's public anger about the demonstrators was more evidence to Americans of the deeply troubled nature of their country.

Q: Sure, you were doing that from when to when?

CURRAN: '64 to '66. Our return to Washington was marked by two great events. One was buying a house, which was a big thing for us. We're talking in 1999 now, and this was 1964, and we bought a house in American University Park for \$30,000, which seemed like a huge sum then, and of course, you're looking at 10 times that now for a house. Anyway we were very pleased, and then our second child, Diana, was born very happily. So we settled in for several years in Washington.

I think appointing a field officer who is very well known to State as a USIA Desk officer - and in those days Desk officers were still important jobs - was useful because it helped in articulating the use of USIA resources overseas, particularly in the Middle East, with State Department policy. And two great Americans, Rodger Davies and Harry Symmes, were leaders in NEA at State, and they were very gracious to me personally, along with Curt Moore (George C. Moore), who later lost his life in Khartoum.

Q: And Rodger Davies lost his in Cyprus.

CURRAN: In Cyprus, yes. One of the events in this period I might mention illustrated the effective articulation between State and USIA, was that the U.S. participated in an industrial fair in Baghdad, which USIA paid for. It's hard to believe now, but in 1965, the Iraqis welcomed actually our participation, and I went out there and I was quite startled, amazed at the number of middle-class and intellectual Iraqis who spoke good English and were interested in better American relations. And I've often wondered what happened to all those people.

Q: You know, I think it was a little earlier on, but was it Walt Rostow who had said that many economies were taking off. There was a theory that certain economies were ready to take off and enter, really, the modern world, and I remember, Iraq was pointed out as a country that was not completely dependent on oil. It had water; it had agriculture; it had a rather small, literate population. Really, it was considered one of the places, probably the country in the Middle East, that had control, could really do something. And yet, you know, particularly from was it July 14, 1958, or so when the King was killed - not that the King was that wonderful - but the military took it over and have kept it ever since and it's been a disaster.

CURRAN: Tragedy, a great tragedy. And I think '65 was probably the last hope, you know, that there might be some accommodation, but the military there has never understood what the benefits would be, and they've just mired themselves down. But I thought it was just interesting to mention that at a certain point there was a little renaissance in American-Iraqi relations, and I was very pleased to be there.

Another thing that I thought was effective was owing to effective relations, the relationship between State, AID and, USIA, State was very sympathetic to the use of PL-480 currency, which we had in abundance in Egypt, to improve USIS facilities. In 1965, our library burned in Cairo. It was an accidental fire, not a terrorist attack. And everyone

was wringing their hands about what to do about it, and I did a paper, obviously with USIA approval, for Rodger Davies to use some of the huge stocks of PL-480 money to rebuild the library, and he agreed. And we built a new library in Cairo and a new library in Alexandria, and they're still going strong. This illustrates the obvious point that if you have the opportunity to have a coordinated use of resources, you can really get a few things done.

Another couple of things that I think might be interesting are that I was frequently called to the White House to be an Arabic speaker - not, I'm careful to say, as a translator, because I don't want to get in trouble with my translator friends at State - at the White House dinners, and I met a lot of people in the course of that, including President Johnson, obviously, Marvin Watson and Harry McPherson, who went on to be Assistant Secretary at CU, of which more later. Anyway, it was really fun, and again, I urge any young people who are thinking of the Foreign Service, I really urge them to get one language really under control, because you can never tell what opportunity comes along when you can speak a language well. I was called on to escort the King of Jordan's younger brother, Prince Hassan, who was interested in looking at American universities, so we took two weeks and drove around looking at Harvard and Yale and Princeton and went out to Carnegie-Mellon and so on. I think it was partly a boondoggle for him. Can you imagine, I mean, that the King of Jordan would allow his brother travel around with a relatively junior American officer by car? I mean, there was no thought about terrorism or anything. Just amazing. He was a charming guy. The CIA grilled me afterwards for any signs of mental instability in Hassan (Hussein and Hassan's father suffered from mental illness.).

Q: As you say, the King's father had had a problem, and this was the time psychology was a big deal in the CIA.

CURRAN: I see. Well, I gave him a clean bill of health. Isn't it lucky, because he's the backup to the monarchy (Note: One of King Hussein's last acts in 1999 was to change the succession to his oldest son.). There was an incident - to show what a nice guy he was - we went to Harvard, and this must have been in the summer. At any rate, it was a very hot day when we got to Harvard, and the Harvard University, thinking to do him great honor, put him up in the Harvard Guest House. The Harvard Guest House has lovely, lovely old pictures and furniture and so on, but it wasn't air-conditioned. And I think the room - I went up to the room with him - was about 110 degrees Fahrenheit. I could tell Hassan was really dismayed. And my mother and father lived in Cambridge at that time, so I said, "Why don't you come and stay with us? You can at least have a decent night's sleep." He said, "Great, great." So I called my mother and father and said, "Oh, by the way, I'm bringing the Crown Prince of Jordan over." And my mother was a missionary lady and was totally unflappable, and she said, "Wonderful." And so we arrived. My parents were very natural and unassuming and my mother said, "Now I'm at a loss to know what to call you. Do I call you Your Excellency, Your Highness, Prince?" He said, "You'd better just call me Hassan." And he entertained us all very graciously. Then something very funny happened after my mother and father went to bed. The Prince and I stayed up having a drink or two and talking or whatever. And then he went to bed, and I

can't remember exactly how the apartment was laid out, but he and my mother and father had to use the same bathroom. The next morning he said, "There was something a little odd happened." He said, "It's alright, but I went into the bathroom and the tub was full of water." I said, "Well?" He said, "I decided not to use it."

Much later, I said to my mother, "Do you have trouble with the bathtub filling up?" She said, "No, of course not, why?" She said, "Oh, my God. I had a bath and I forgot to empty it." You know I told him that later, and he thought it was really funny. We've been friends to this day. It's really a nice friendship.

Lastly, during this period, I had the experience, which I would recommend - not everybody can get it and in those days it's different than it is now - but each desk officer went up to the Hill and had to defend our little budgets in front of Congressman John Rooney. It was very painful to go through that. Nothing like hanging to focus your mind. And I got away with it without too much damage, but Rooney delighted in tormenting Foreign Service officers, and perhaps it was good experience.

At the end of 1966, I was invited to become the director's assistant at USIA, and that's slightly different from State. There's no executive director or executive secretary. There's one person called a special assistant, who is in charge of the secretariat and the Director's papers. I really don't have a clue why I was picked, but anyway I had a lot of fun doing it.

Harold Nicholson writes: "The biggest thing you can do as a special assistant is be invisible." It happens I read that chapter, and I did my best to be invisible. The Director was Leonard Marks, still alive - in fact, I occupy an office in his law firm as a retired officer - a very unusual person, a friend of Lady Bird Johnson's, and in fact, was instrumental in setting up the Johnsons' communication empire. The first experience I had with him was, I was summoned upstairs and told here's your office, get to work. I didn't know what I was supposed to do, and the buzzer buzzed and Marks called me in there and he said, "We're going up next week on the hill to appear before Mr. Rooney." And I said, "Oh, my goodness, I don't know whether we can get everybody together." He said, "Oh, no. We don't need everybody. I'm going to do it all." And believe it or not, Leonard Marks did the whole USIA budget all by himself. He memorized the whole thing, right down to the nuts and bolts. He took the chief budget officer with him and me as bag carrier. Ben Posner was the budget officer. And we got there and Rooney said, "What's this I hear about no witnesses?" And Leonard Marks said, "Well, I'm the witness." And Rooney said, "What about all those other people who used to be hanging around?" And Marks said, "Well, I have them doing their job." And Rooney said, "Well, how could they have enough to do?" And Leonard did it all, and I sat there and passed him papers, you know.

Anyway, the director's office was a very, very interesting contrast to desk officer work. There wasn't much routine work. I read the cables every morning. I learned that Mr. Marks was only really interested in the one or two most important things, particularly if it affected American politics.

Q: You were doing this-

CURRAN: Starting with the fall of '66.

Q: Until when?

CURRAN: The fall of '69. I just might mention some of the things that happened, because I think the routine of what goes on in a director's office is really not terribly useful. As indicated, Leonard Marks was not interested in day-to-day operations, but he was interested in anticipating problems, and he delegated all of the day-to-day management details to a friend he had from the old days of broadcasting, a man named Howard Chernoff, who was a remarkable person, came out of nowhere in terms of foreign service experience, and really was a very effective manager. He was the equivalent of Under Secretary for Management, and handled the whole thing, with a personnel officer and a budget officer, and I think did it a lot better than it's being done now, in either organization.

My first special assignment was in the winter of '66-67 to be the Director's representative at the Montreal Expo, and that was interesting, in the first place, because I'd never seen a World's Fair being built from the ground up and, in the second place, because there was enormous political explosion over it. I don't know if you remember it at all, and if you don't it's probably just as well. But it was a beautiful, beautiful pavilion. It was a Buckminster Fuller, a geodesic dome.

Q: I remember pictures of it.

CURRAN: Right. There was a monorail which went around the whole fair grounds, and and Fuller designed the dome so the monorail could go through the dome, very dramatic. And everything was great and was getting lots of favorable publicity until the fair opened up. The exhibit highlighted modern American art and culture; the pavilion began with children's games and then made its way through films and visual arts. The film portion was where the monorail went through, and when visitors rode into the pavilion, the first thing that they saw was a huge Warhol poster of Marilyn Monroe, with her come-hither look and huge cleavage and all the rest of it. Middle America went up in smoke about this. "American taxpayer money was being misused." (None of them had been to the pavilion. They'd only taken the monorail ride.) When you came to the pavilion, by the time you got to Andy Warhol it was all in context. Well, it was my first experience with a political "firestorm." People wrote their congressmen, and literally I spent day and night answering letters, answering phone calls, trying to calm people down. And finally, John Rooney was detailed by the President to go up and give an independent view of this pavilion. And Rooney said, "Well, I want somebody to go with me." And guess who got to go with Rooney.

So I think we went up in an Air Force plane. I know we did, in a small jet... The Montreal Fair in the early spring of 1967, and I was in the airplane with Mr. Rooney, and for some

reason he was in very mellow mood and so we sat there and we had a drink. The air force doesn't have the same problem as the Navy has.

Q: I know. Movies and liquor are a theme that kind of runs through some of our oral histories in a certain period.

CURRAN: Well, this is another one. So he confessed to me that a certain brand of bourbon and water was what he really loved, even though he said, "Don't tell my Irish constituents, but I really love bourbon and branch water." So we flew up, and he was getting his stuff and getting organized, and the manager of the fair was a wonderful guy named Mickey Fredman, from California, and I took Mickey aside and I said, "Be sure we go into the guides lounge, and be sure he has his brand of bourbon." (One of the sponsors was the Seagram Corporation, so that wasn't a problem.) And in Rooney went, with his swagger, and here was this bunch of gorgeous young American girl guides, and they all gave him a lot of attention, and he had a couple more of his bourbons. And we walked through the Pavilion, and he came out and the press was there. And they said, "Well, Mr. Rooney, what did you think of the Pavilion?" "It's the best god damned show I've ever seen. I don't understand the criticism. I'm going back. I'm going to tell the President it's a credit to America." So we flew back into Washington, and literally the firestorm just stopped, like that, and that's all it took.

I might tell a couple of more stories about Expo '67. As a result of Rooney's report, Johnson said, "Well, I think I'd like to go see the thing." So Johnny Simpson, who eventually became head of the Secret Service, and I went up to do the advance. Johnny's orders were he was not supposed to say the President was coming; it was supposed to be Larry O'Brien was going to represent the country on America Day. So the Canadian Mounties (who handled national security) kept hearing from the embassy, the President is coming, and so they kept saying to Johnny Simpson, "We hear the President..." "No, it's Larry O'Brien," Simpson insisted. So about 10 o'clock at night, before American Day, the head of the Mounties, a wonderful sergeant-major, said, "Okay, Simpson, I'm asking you for the last time, otherwise I'm letting my guys off - is it the President or isn't it?" "Larry O'Brien." So I heard the guy pick up the phone and dismiss a regiment of these agents.

At one a.m. the White House said, "The President's coming." And I was with John when we went back to see this sergeant-major. Actually he had to be waked up and brought in to hear this good news. I never heard a person swear like that. He was so cross. And Simpson, who somewhere picked up Canadian French in one of his lives, so he started talking in this patois, and was able to calm him down. What could the Sargeant Major do, anyway?

The next morning Johnson arrived, and you'll understand that I'd never had much contact with people at this level, and I had a rather idealized picture of what a President was like. And Johnson came down the ramp with the tremendous presence he had with him and got to the bottom, and there were handshakes and so on, and there was kind of a moment he was looking around, and his eyes lit on me, and he said, "You work for us?" And I said,

“Yes, sir, at the fair.” “I need some help.” I said, “Yes, sir.” And then in a very vulgar way which I won’t put on tape, he said, “You find that [expletive] Marvin Watson, and you tell him get his [expletive] over here, and make it [expletive] quick.” Well, that a President would talk that way, I was really dumfounded. Anyway, I went rushing around, and I had met Marvin Watson, fortunately, so I said, “Mr. Watson, the President is quite anxious to see you and wonders if you could come right away.” And Watson said, “I bet he didn’t say it that way, did he?” I said, “No, sir.” He said, “Well, don’t pay any attention.”

The President liked the trip too and had a good time, and the Canadians were wonderful hosts. He had such a good time he sent Lady Bird up, and again I got to go with Lady Bird, and this time was a joyous occasion. A lovely lady.

Q: People who’ve escorted Lady Bird say that she was a real lady, just a delight..

CURRAN: I can’t really say enough of her graciousness and beauty and personality. I spent a lot of time with her, and the thing that was really remarkable was, in addition to being totally herself, she also had a wonderfully refreshing sense of doing things that were “wrong” but were right to do. And one of them was that there was an injunction that we were not to have anything to do with the Cubans. Lady Bird was leafing through one of the brochures on the second night, and she said, “Oh, I think I’d like to see the Cuban Pavilion.” I said, “Well, Mrs. Johnson, we have this - “ “Well,” she said, “but I’m not really an official of the government,” she said. “You just tell them to set it up.” The Secret Service was crazy. We went around in little golf carts, and it was like a convoy, of course. So I was riding with Mrs. Johnson and the head agent, and we came around a corner of the fair ground and here’s the Cuban Pavilion. And despite the Mounties’ assurances there would be no security problems, here were a bunch of the scruffiest-looking guys you ever saw - beards and dirty clothes - all kind of lurking around. And the head of our U.S. Secret Service detail, John Simpson, said to the head Mountie who was with us, “God,” he said, “what’s that?” And the Mountie said, “Don’t worry, Johnny, they’re all our fellows.”

Anyway, we had a really lovely time. Liz Carpenter was with Mrs. Johnson.

Q: Who was her social secretary.

CURRAN: Yes, and press secretary. And I guess I could tell you one more story. We were dining out on the third night. The Canadians had given her a lovely dinner, and the deputy commissioner, Philippe Beaubien, was with us, a handsome young guy, and Mrs. Johnson clearly enjoyed his company. And so he said after dinner, “Let’s take a ride in the moonlight on the monorail.” And we did. Mrs. Johnson and Philippe and obviously a couple of U.S. agents, and we were in one of these small cars, and off we went around the Fair. It was lovely, and Philippe was charming Mrs. Johnson and telling her all kinds of history. There were, I suppose, about 12 stops, maybe 15 stops, and I was in the rear of the car, and I began to notice, as we would leave one of the stations, there would be someone pounding up the stairs, waving at us to stop. I wasn’t going to say anything. I figured they had radios if it was *that* important. Anyway, this was repeated practically all

the way around. We got to the last station, and these guys were all panting, and I couldn't imagine what was wrong. I thought maybe the President was sick or something. So this agent, this poor young kid, said, "Mrs. Johnson, the President wants to talk to you." She said, "All right," and very leisurely went down and said goodbye to the Canadian escort, got into the car with me, picked up the phone, and said, "Lyndon? Yes, Lyndon. Goodnight, Lyndon." And apparently, he always wanted to talk to her before he went to bed. And if you read the stuff that Michael Beschloss put together on taking charge of power, some of the conversations that they had - and they've recorded some of them - are really something. I mean, she had his respect and affection, and whatever people have written about him, Robert Caro particularly, it must have been a very, very special relationship. It was a great privilege to have been there.

Anyway, as those years wore on, coming up to 1968-69, I think the Vietnam War began to impact lots of things. I think it impacted the spirit of the country; I think it impacted the feeling of not infallibility but idealism a lot of us had with regard to our government. Of course, it was a television war, and we saw Americans involved in a lot of dreadful things, terrible scenes of people having napalm thrown at them and bombs dropped on them and so on and so on. A most unpleasant aspect was that Personnel officers in Washington were under instructions to fill JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. For many reasons, there weren't many volunteers to serve in Vietnam. But it was really shocking the way Personnel officers dragooned young people, young officers who had no background or interest in Vietnam. All Personnel staff were interested in was filling quotas, and they didn't care very much about personal circumstances. And with Mr. Marks' support, I began to start intervening in some of the cases, particularly in grabbing young fathers who had two or three children, no background in Asia, no interest in Asia, and you know, just being plucked out of their desks and sent overseas. And I got to know about 20 of these cases really well, and some of them we could help out.

CURRAN: I just thought it was one of the bad days, hours, in the Foreign Service, and State was doing the same thing to its young people.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: And as I say, I thought it was kind of the first toll of the bell in the diminution of respect and affection for our government.

Q: As an Arabist, although you no longer had direct responsibility, there was the October '67 War, or the Six-Day War - it was called a number of things - between Israel and Egypt and Syria and Jordan. Did you get involved in that at all?

CURRAN: Only in that I was able to be at one briefing as the Six Day War started with George Ball, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, later Director Leonard Marks, and a couple of other people. I was in the background as Leonard's assistant, and someone said, "Has anybody here been in the area?" And I said I had. Secretary Ball asked for my prediction. I "fearlessly" predicted the Israelis would wipe the Arabs out. Most of the group was skeptical. But generally, Leonard Marks wasn't really interested in

the Middle East, and you know, we had a Middle East bureau, so I didn't get involved.

Q: I was wondering, with Marks, being Jewish, did he get caught up in the support-Israel-at-all-costs things or not, or did he duck that? How did he do that?

CURRAN: Well, Marks doesn't regard himself as pro-Israeli or Jewish. Obviously, he supported U.S. policy. I don't believe he has a religious affiliation.

Q: Well, maybe he's not Jewish. I just -

CURRAN: As far as I know, Leonard Marks was never crowded or pushed on anything except Vietnam. He was very unhappy about Vietnam, and I guess he at one point told the President and got a dose of the Lyndon Johnson temper and never bothered to raise it again.

I wanted to mention that I had developed a friendship at that time with Ben Reed, who was Dean Rusk's special assistant and executive secretary, a wonderful man, terribly kind to me, and because of Mr. Marks' relationship with the President, it was really important for us to see some of what's called "caption traffic." Ben Reed, who understood my problems, allowed me to come and read a lot of that traffic so I could keep Mr. Marks posted.

One not-so-memorable trip was a press liaison for Air Force One. President Johnson wanted, as the war was getting worse and the politics were closing in on him - I don't know if you remember - he did a trip around the world in December, 1967, and I went on half of it. I was in the backup plane across the Pacific to Christ Church and then up to Manila over to Vietnam, and then I got off at whatever the rest stop was between Vietnam and Washington.

Q: Bangkok?

CURRAN: No, it might have been Sigonella in Sicily, because the President went on to Rome. I think that's where a lot of us split off and I got to ride home. I got home Christmas Eve and my wife said I didn't know where I was; we'd been three days without sleep. As for the trip, we played a lot of gin rummy. There was nothing to do. Johnson was all for show, and there were no serious talks. Well, Mr. Marks was up front with the President - and it was a little bit like President Nixon's trips just before he left office. Johnson was trying to just kind of fill in the time. I think he already knew he wouldn't run again. His health was bad, and he just was doing something, playing the imperial president. Of course, in the spring of '67, Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and wasn't it also in June '68 that Robert Kennedy was killed?

Q: Yes.

CURRAN: And all those events occupied Leonard's attention. Foreign affairs kind of went by the board, except for a major study I helped do on the effectiveness and

management of the Voice of America. I know it's not historically very interesting, but it was the first time I'd ever really come to grips with, you know, why one has short-wave radio. Is it efficient? Is it useful? The really extraordinary thing is that all our radios, whether it's Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, now Radio Iraq, have to have native speakers to broadcast. There aren't always enough candidates for some of the more exotic language jobs, so you take what you can get, and many of the finalists bring prejudices and views with them, which are reflected in their work. Not only do they do news programs, but they also broadcast commentary. And when we get to my Munich incarnation with Radio Free Europe, I can tell you a few difficult stories about how the lack of language talent hurt the U.S.

President Nixon was elected in the fall of '69, and Mr. Marks disbanded his office. I went off to language school. I learned Spanish because I'd been assigned as press attaché in Mexico City. Actually, I was pulled out of language school because President Nixon was considering a tour of the border states. I was part of a team that made a trip with Nixon's staff, to Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and some of the border towns. And this is kind of a teaser for the next chapter, but there were two interesting things. One was there was a young lieutenant-colonel on board named Alexander Haig, whom I go to know very well. And the other thing that was immediately apparent was that Nixon disliked Foreign Service officers. I don't think he realized I was a Foreign Service officer because he was quite polite, although he was a quite polite man to everybody. But he detested Foreign Service officers, didn't trust them, and each time when the President came to a post the principal officer would come out and say "Hello." Nixon was abrupt to the point of rudeness. I mean he didn't want to see them.

Q: It's interesting, I'm told that practically his dying words were "Damn the Foreign Service," and yet the Foreign Service had considerable respect for Nixon because he knew his brief.

CURRAN: And he was very bright. If he had had a different National Security Advisor, things might have turned out a lot different, but Henry Kissinger did everything he could to nurture Nixon's hate and to further his own ambitions for power.

MEXICO: 1968-1970

The Johnson administration ended and the Nixon administration began in this period and the internal tensions in the U.S. over Vietnam and civil rights continued. Nevertheless, the major part of the policy focus for the embassy in Mexico City was the bilateral relationship. Perhaps some edge was taken off the Vietnam issue in this period by the last-minute efforts of the Democrats to achieve a settlement and the early promises of the new administration to end the war.

As far as the U.S. mission was concerned, there was a sense (to me) that the structure and attitudes were slightly anachronistic. Many of the officers in all parts of the embassy had served in Latin America all their lives, had Latina wives and extensive Mexican friendships, friendships that - in my view then and now - colored their ability to function as representatives of the United States.

In another area, the CIA officers in Mexico were still immersed in the Cold War and tilted heavily against "leftists" in Mexico who were critical of the U.S. or who supported the government's neutral position on Cuba. Again, this tilt - in my opinion - prevented the embassy's intelligence assets to accurately read what was really going on in Mexico as business and media rapidly became increasingly free market and democratic.

Many of the attitudinal problems ended with the arrival of Ambassador Robert McBride in the summer of 1969. McBride was a tough, focused diplomat with beautiful Spanish and he made short work of some of the more parochial attitudes in the mission.

Q: Today is the 1st of February 1999. Ted, we're in Mexico. You were there in 1969 to when?

CURRAN: To 1970.

Q: To 1970. What were you doing?

CURRAN: Well, to begin the story slightly before the beginning, I was finishing my assignment as a special assistant to Leonard Marks in the various White House incarnations and went to language school in preparation for my assignment as Press Attaché in Mexico City with USIA. While I was in language school, my hat's off, by the way, to that program. It's one of the best language programs I've ever taken, I was pulled out of school twice, both times to go to Mexico City to help the embassy there with two eruptions. One was the Black Power eruption during the '68 Olympics in Mexico City, and the second one was a very serious student uprising, which ended with, I don't know, at least dozens of students being killed by the security police, who at that time were under the direction of Echeverria, who eventually became President of Mexico.

So I had had several kind of introductory chapters, when I arrived for service in Mexico in January of 1969.

Q: Why don't we talk about your excursions first, because they predate your going, don't they?

CURRAN: That's right.

Q: Do you want to explain what the Black Power problem was and what the dates were when you went there, and the next one was the student one.

CURRAN: The Olympics were in late October, early November, in Mexico City.

Q: 1968.

CURRAN: In 1968. And at that time there was a serious eruption of African-American feeling about their relationship with the American government, and it manifested itself in a movement, under various names, but it was characterized by a slogan "Black Power." And two of the leading sprinters on the U.S. team who won medals at the medals ceremony had their right hands in black gloves. Instead of holding their hands over their hearts during the American National Anthem, they raised their right fist in the air. And it caused actually in the perspective of time rather an unnecessary fuss. But the embassy in Mexico City was without a press attaché, and the chargé, a wonderful man named Henry Dearborn, was very, very nervous about handling this issue. And so USIS plucked me out of language school - I think it was about a week, maybe 10 days - and it was good for two reasons. I got to practice my at that time rather primitive Spanish, and secondly, it gave

me a chance to look the post over. And I thought that would be it for interruption, but then in I think early December, the Tlatelolco riot took place on the central square and I was called back again to spend another 10 days helping the embassy deal with what was essentially, really, a domestic internal problem, and most of what I did was tell them to stop commenting on it officially. [Note: Events relating to the Tlatelolco incident are still not clear. Mexico has consistently maintained it was a “minor” matter.]

Q: Tell who to stop commenting?

CURRAN: The embassy community. I mean it really wasn't embassy business. There was a tendency on the U.S. media side to color this as a threat and an anti-government uprising - which it wasn't.

Q: New boy on the block there, what were you picking up from our political reporters and all that? Did they see this as maybe something that might change the ruling structure of Mexico at the time, or did they see it just as another blip?

CURRAN: I'd like to answer your question by going to my paper now, or my notes here. It's a very good question, very pertinent, and actually, the answer to it relates to my whole assignment there. Before I went there, some iconoclastic friends of mine, particularly Ted Eliot, whom I later would work for, told me that when I went to Latin America I should watch out for the “cucaracha circuit,” or the “cucaracha mafia.” And what he meant by that was there was a generation or maybe two generations of Foreign Service officers who had served pretty much their whole tours and lives in Latin America, and they tended to be, in current terminology, very, very conservative and identify maybe not so much with U.S. foreign policy as with the interests of the ruling elites of Latin America. And this was particularly true in Mexico. When I got to the mission I found that easily 50 percent of the senior officers had Spanish-speaking, *Latina*, wives, and everybody was bilingual in Spanish and very cliquish. And it was hard for them to accept having a non-Spanish background person, particularly without my family there - because my kids were finishing school - and I thought this attitude also reflected rather badly on the way we handled certain problems. Black Power was one. There was a lot of resentment among the American officers that these, quote, “uppity” athletes would have ruined a nice event by making the Black Power demonstration, and many of them, and particularly those on the CIA side in the Political Section in Mexico were quite inclined to see the Tlatelolco incident as sort of an incipient communist uprising, and it was something that the conservative side and the Mexican government were pleased to encourage our people to report. In my first two brief visits, I didn't get into the middle of the politics too much. I did go back and talk to some people in Mexico and talked to people in the university world whom I thought were generally more balanced in terms of how they looked at Mexico and how we treated Mexico over the years. And of course, I did a lot of reading. I don't want to be too superficial, but I think it's correct to say that in 1969 the “First Families of Mexico,” the title of a book about Mexico at that time, was still pretty correct. There were about 20 families who held oligarchic power in Mexico, a very, very wealthy group of people, who controlled the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which was the ruling party. There was no really effective opposition at all. And that, with the military, keeping a pretty tight lid on what was happening. The

media were right under the government's thumb. There was only one newspaper down in Mexico which dared, if you could use that word, to occasionally disagree with America and the Mexican establishment. It was a newspaper called *Excelsior*, and it was run by quite an interesting person called Julio Sherer García, whom I got to know quite well as the months went on.

So to answer your question, it was a rather different environment than I was used to with people who had much deeper roots in the society and - to put it bluntly - much deeper interests in the society in a way that was not helpful to the conduct of American foreign policy. I was just (in 1999) reading the Johnson book by Beschloss about taking power, that Johnson, when he saw the situation - or when someone got to him on the situation - in Latin American, he determined in his Presidency to begin to change that and several people who came to Mexico City were clearly bearing the Johnson stamp of making Mexico more of a partner and less of a protégé of the United States. President Johnson was very impatient when he perceived that bureaucracy was hindering what he wanted to do. While I was still working for Leonard Marks, President Johnson was on a trip to El Paso, where there's a bridge over the Rio Grande. And looking down from that bridge you can see a set of islands in the river, really sand bars. These "islands" had been the subject of intense debate between the lawyers in Mexico and the lawyers in the United States for years, if not decades. One of the things on Johnson's long agenda was to discuss the islands with President Díaz Ordaz, and they had a wonderful lunch on the bridge - I think it's called Friendship Bridge. I might add that the bag carriers feasted with the eyes only! President Johnson was feeling very relaxed after this lunch, which had - I don't know whether they drank tequila, but they certainly drank wine. And as they were getting up from lunch, President Díaz Ordaz gestured to the islands and said, you know, "Señor Presidente, this is really a difficult problem for us." And Lyndon Johnson said, "Well, what's the problem?" Díaz Ordaz started to give him an explanation of the islands moving and with the river currents and that the Mexicans felt deeply about this land and so on and so on. So Lyndon Johnson in my presence said, "Well, I guess you all want these little bits of land, is that right?" And Díaz Ordaz said, "Yes, that's it." LBJ said, "Well, you got it." And I watched the lawyers on the American side just about jump off the bridge. Ten years of work down the river! Anyway, Johnson, to his credit, was really trying to change the whole U.S. attitude, and I was fortunate, I think, to be present at a time when one saw other results. One of the real terrific moves LBS made was to send a man named Bob McBride, a fluent, actually bilingual, speaker of Spanish, as career ambassador to Mexico City. And he was the active representative of Johnson's policy and, in my opinion, very effective.

Mexico City - it's hard to believe if you've been there recently - in the late '60s was quite a livable place. There are 20 million now in the area there were only eight million then. Very livable, very friendly city, very nice to foreigners, including Americans, or *gringos*. Terrific things to see, a fabulous, gorgeous anthropological museum; great archeological sites - Teotihuacán and Tula and Tlaxa and so on and so on. Wonderful provincial towns, great air service, good roads. The rhetoric of society was very socialist. There was a lot of talking about "the people" and "the workers" and "socialism" and so on, but it was all rhetoric and all for public consumption, and the real business of the country was

conducted over the financial pages. It was a paradox, and I think that part of the troubles the Mexicans are seeing now is that the people who were the underside of the paradox, if you will, the PAN people, the have-nots were shut out of the establishment. These folks, at least slightly more liberal than the 1969-1970 incumbents, have now become a viable opposition, and a lot of the things that were not argued about or, at least, certainly not argued about publicly in the late '60s are now being very much brought out on the table.

Because my family didn't join me until the summer of 1969, I stayed in various abodes till they arrived. For most of the first six months, I lived with the representative of something called the International Executive Service Corps (IESC), a marvelous irreverent guy named John Michel. The IESC was and is still is a fascinating concept which uses AID financing to a large extent. What they do in all countries they serve is to send expert retired business executives to industries that need help. And my favorite example is the Mexican cracker industry that had asked for help. IESC sent down a wonderful Jewish cracker maker from New York. As I remember at the time, there were only about 10 really major cracker bakers in Mexico. And he arrived at nine o'clock at night, and I was meeting him. Michel talked me into meeting a lot of his guests because my Spanish was beginning to pick up a little bit. Of course, I was his houseguest, so it was a little hard to refuse. So I went to the airport with the Spanish business people in the cracker monopoly, and we met this gent. I don't remember his name anymore; he was about five feet tall and about five feet around and he was just a walking dynamo. He bounced off the airplane - the Mexicans began telling him that he'd go to his hotel and then he'd have the weekend off and then they'd see him Monday, and he said, "Nothing doing. I'm going right now to the factory." And he went to the main factory that night, and he walked through the factory at midnight. The Mexicans said, "Well, you know, it's our time to go home." And he said, "So go home already." And he continued his walk around the factory, taking notes. We stayed there till two or three in the morning. He was back there at nine in the morning, and in about two weeks he drew up a blueprint for modernizing their plant and he left as abruptly as he came. A terrific AID project, in my view.

I think probably the thing that impressed me the most about working in the U.S. mission in Mexico City, in addition to the fascinating and complex country we were supposed to be interrelating with, was the role that the CIA station was playing in the embassy. And I guess I had my most serious disagreements with that group of people, mostly because they insisted on characterizing any media person who had an independent point of view as someone who was a "leftist." And that would be kind of a theoretical disagreement except that the CIA evaluations of people found their way into visa files. And somebody who tried to get a visa to go to the United States would find himself denied. And I began to hear about this and particularly about some very important media people who were getting their visas denied to travel to the U.S. It was kind of a losing battle until Ambassador McBride arrived, and then he began to take a personal interest in some of these cases and we were able to turn that around, including Julio Sherer Garcia, whom we got a USIA Leader Grant to go to the States, and if I say so myself, he came back a changed person, not only because he felt like he was welcomed to the States, but also he got a real view of what America is all about, and it wasn't the stereotype he was seeing in

the atmosphere in Mexico.

Another sort of interesting facet of the time in Mexico was that the Russians and especially the KGB obviously had their eye on me from Yemen and perhaps from my German days, so that I was sought out by the KGB fairly early in my assignment and talked to generally - you know, they were very friendly - and taken to a few lunches and so on. Of course, I reported every contact I had to the Political Section. But when my wife arrived during the summer we were at a very large cocktail party, and a fellow with a Russian accent walked up to her and he said, "Well, Mrs. Curran, how do you like Mexico City?" And she said, "I don't think we've met." And he said, "I'm Igor..." something or other, "and I'm from the Russian embassy." She said, "Well, let me tell you a little bit about where I've been." He said, "Oh, I know all about where you've been." They were really "clever and subtle."

I was very, very pleased, as I said, with the Spanish language training. It was extraordinarily helpful to me, both in finding my way in the embassy and because of my Spanish, Ambassador McBride started using me a lot on his own agenda, so I got really an exposure to Mexico in a fairly brief period of time. I would say that the American policy under McBride was to enhance the partnership of Mexico with the United States, to try to downsize or at least reduce the pressure of the bilateral disputes we were having and try to begin to get a handle on our border problems. And what Ambassador McBride did to implement this was invite lots of prominent Americans, very high level Americans, to come to Mexico; and also travel a great deal himself. And there was a major Mexican industrialist - I think it was one of the Alemáns - that McBride had known for years. He was even a former President, Miguel Alemán. He heard that McBride wanted to get around the country, and he said, "Well, why don't you just use my airplane whenever you want to?" And McBride, after consulting State, decided there was nothing he could do to try to influence us - he had all the money he needed - so we did use the plane - a Lear jet - and it was a tremendous asset for the ambassador to be able to get around the country. I was able to make several trips with him, and it was really fun.

And I thought that rather than go into a lot of personal anecdotes, I might describe several of the high level visits, which I think pretty much were designed and were successful in carrying out the American objectives.

I might say parenthetically, my family, my wife and two children arrived in the summer. Sara and Diana fitted successfully in to the school system and both had good school years. They were still young enough to be able to do that.

I guess the first big visit was Nelson Rockefeller and his wife, Happy. It was after his tenure as governor in New York.

And as everybody probably knows, Rockefeller had been very active in Latin American foreign policy since the 1940s, and the pretext for his visit in 1969 was a really extraordinary spat over tomato exports from Mexico to the United States. Mexicans grow what they call a green tomato, which I guess is used in a lot of canned products and

pizzas. But the way the agriculture treaties were developed at that time, they could only export them at certain times of year and if there were only a certain number of American green tomatoes on the market. It was very arcane. And through some kind of administrative glitch - or maybe it wasn't a glitch - several trainloads of green tomatoes got stopped at the border, and it bankrupted some marginal Mexican businesses. It turned out that the Florida tomato business, pulling wheels and strings in Washington, had been behind this railroad stoppage. And Mexico was very, very upset, and Rockefeller came down with Happy to talk to the Mexicans.

I don't know whether you've had anything to do with those two Rockefellers. I've been lucky in my life to meet a lot of unusual and wonderful Americans, and they were certainly near the top. He was so personable, it was really quite incredible, and he had a marvelous knack of meeting a person once and, at least for the next couple of days, remembering names and something about them. I found out later that he was dyslexic and had developed this technique because he couldn't read, but he had an unbelievable memory. And Mrs. Rockefeller, Happy Rockefeller, was very personable. We put them up in one of the nicest hotels there, and I was with the ambassador, and the governor was asked, "Well, how's the room?" "It seems very nice," and he looked around a little bit more. "Well, is there anything we can do?" "Just a minute." And he checked his whole suite out personally, and then he came back. He said, "Yes, there's one thing missing." We looked really startled. He said, "I love Oreo cookies, and so I'm going to need a supply of Oreo cookies." That was his only vice.

Q: How about his staff, because at one point Rockefeller was sent around Latin America by President Nixon. -and when he went around, I've had people talk about this thing saying the staff was a pain in the neck, particularly those who were in Brazil and all that.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: How about on this one?

CURRAN: Well, they had a fellow with them whose first name was Joe - and I'm not going to be able to remember his family name - who was the chief pain in the neck. And he was Rockefeller's flak. And he was constantly tearing around trying to get the right pictures and the right people to pose with the governor and get the governor's face on the front pages and so on. But I think they weren't much trouble in Mexico City, first of all, because they were on the front pages anyway, and Rockefeller spoke fluent Spanish, and they all fell in love with Happy. So, you know, I don't think there's anything he could do to enhance the profile of them; plus, McBride ran everything himself.

Q: This was also the thing. I think that other places they tried to bypass the embassy staff and do things until things got bad and then all of a sudden they'd run in and say, "You've got to fix it." That type of thing.

CURRAN: Ambassador McBride was very adroit at preempting that kind of thing. And one thing your friends didn't mention to you, that there was a funny rotund little man

who came down with Rockefeller with a very heavy German accent, and none of us could figure out what on earth he was doing there. But he went right back to Washington.

Q: Ha, ha. This was-

CURRAN: Henry the K.

Q: Henry Kissinger.

CURRAN: His accent was so - I'm sure we've all heard it now - but when you first heard it and you heard he was a Harvard professor, you could hardly believe it. But he's a person of great charm, and he was, of course, a protégé of the Rockefellers and he was very well behaved on this trip.

The next visitor is Richard Nixon.

Q: Let's talk about the Nixon visit first, and then I'll have some questions.

CURRAN: Okay, the next visitor was Richard Nixon himself, and Rockefeller apparently went back and said, "Well, you can really help the policy of better partnership, and so on, by dedicating a bridge over the Rio Grande from Del Rio. (You may recall I had advanced the trip.). After Johnson, it was my first contact with the next president. I thought it might be interesting to just say a few words about the difference. First of all, President Nixon in - it must have been - the summer of '69, was very correct and very professional and very attentive to staff people - he didn't like the State Department much, but I think that was because of the Alger Hiss business. He was very easy to be around, very thoughtful, very good. The one time where I sensed that there was an unusual and perhaps very self-conscious facet to his personality was preparing for the part bridging ceremony to exchange *abrazos*, or 'embraces,' with President Díaz Ordaz. President Nixon was very, very nervous about this, and I was called upon to rehearse with him, and it was very clear that it was almost written on his cuff was, you know, "You put your left arm on..." and so on. And we rehearsed it five or six times, and he did it perfectly.

We were talking about the contrast between President Johnson's staff, which I had worked with from '66 to '67/68, to the Nixon staff that I met in the course of President Nixon's visit to dedicate the Amistad Dam. And the contrast to the Johnson staff, who seemed to work together as a team and get along with one another pretty well, the tensions between the senior Nixon staff people were quite evident, not only in terms of if one person told you to do something, you might have a Haldeman come along and say, "Well, what did Chapin say? Well, I don't want you to do it that way; you do it this way." And then someone else comes along and says, "What did Haldeman say?" "Well, don't do it." It was very hard to work in that environment. And the short man with the German accent was back. Again, he seemed to play a very minor role, but he was certainly around. Mrs. Nixon struck me as being on the point of a nervous or physical breakdown. She was a two-dimensional figure at that time. I never heard her say a word.

Having said all this, Nixon was very, very good with the Mexicans and went through the *abrazos* flawlessly and said all the right things and followed his briefing book to the letter and made the Mexicans feel very, very good indeed about the event. It was hot as the devil there. It was high 90s and Nixon looked like he'd just stepped out of a refrigerator the whole time. I don't know how he did it. No sweating like the Kennedy debates.

The next major visitor had a connection with one of the innumerable drug conferences that we had with the Mexicans, where - just not to overstate this, but it always seems to me that we say, "I wish you'd stop letting people export drugs to the U.S.," and they say, "Well, why don't you stop your people from using them?" And it's a real dialogue of the deaf. But anyway, it's gone on for quite a long time now.

Elliott Richardson was the next visitor and he was an extraordinary human being. He and his wife and his party, and his chief aide was a man named Wilmott Hastings were really a joy to work with, the whole group of them.

Q: He was at that time-

CURRAN: Under Secretary of State, before he went over to the Justice Department. Elliott Richardson wanted to hang out with the embassy staff, including the McBrides, and we did, but they also had serious discussions with the Mexicans, and Elliott - he didn't speak any Spanish, and I don't know if you've ever been around him - you have to focus. He doesn't speak English, I mean, he speaks English, but he doesn't speak English very clearly. He has a kind of Brahmin drawl, which I think he may even do deliberately. You have to listen very carefully to be sure you understand what he's saying. And I think the Mexicans loved him, you know, loved his *persona*, and he was just elliptical enough so that he made them feel good, but I don't think we got a lot done. But anyway, we had two or three days serious discussion on agriculture, drugs, etc., and then on Saturday night there was an absolutely super splendiferous dinner put on by the Mexicans. The party, as is the case in Latin American and the Spanish cultures, went on till about one or two o'clock in the morning, and I think some of us in the embassy party were thinking it would be nice to grab a little sleep. But Richardson said, "Well, what do you do in Mexico City at one in the morning?" And off we went, and we partied till about four, and then they got back to the airplane at seven. Of course, we all had to be there to say goodbye. Again, McBride was very clever at orchestrating this visit so that the Mexicans felt that Richardson was coming to them to seek their help and their consultation.

And then there was a series of visits which happened a little bit with McBride's encouragement but also by accident were three extraordinary theatrical people - John Wayne, Raquel Welch, and Gina Lollobrigida. And actually, you know, you would have thought, well, this is pretty frothy, but the ambassador cleverly organized a series of parties particularly with the media potentates and most especially with the Escáraga family - the old gentleman, Emilio Escáraga, I think, was the founder of the empire, quadrillionaire, hugely rich man, with a son a little younger than I was - and they ran a series of parties around the country including a party in Acapulco on the Escáraga yacht. And John Wayne - I won't attempt to imitate him - with that wonderful cowboy drawl

took me aside and said, "I want you to find out what this boat cost. I bet it cost three million bucks." So anyway, I tiptoed around and I asked the Escáraga son, you know, just generally speaking, "How do you maintain an operation like this." He said, "Well, the ship itself cost \$15 million, and it's about" - I can't remember - a million a month or something like that, because it had the crew and God knows what else. So I reported back to John Wayne that his estimate was a little low, and he said, "Well, I guess I'll have to wait till next Christmas."

But they were really good sports, John Wayne and Raquel Welch and Gina Lollobrigida, and they really put on a good show and were good soldiers and went to endless dinners and parties and, again, made a big hit and gave the Mexicans the feeling that someone, the Americans, were really taking them seriously, not just the actors, but a whole panoply of visitors.

Q: I've got a number of things that I wonder if you'd comment on.

CURRAN: Sure.

Q: One is while you were there, dealing with the Foreign Ministry - I've never served in Latin America - my understanding is the Foreign Ministry has always been sort of tossed to the left and they make great anti-American statements - and of course, Vietnam was big at that time - whereas really the business of Mexico and the United States, the CIA and the FBI have very close relations with the-

CURRAN: And the ambassador at that time.

Q: With the United States. That goes on, but the Foreign Ministry goes off on its own thing, and it's sort of like a bit of raw meat that they toss to the left. Did you get that feeling at all?

CURRAN: Well, let me redescribe the paradigm as I saw it. It sort of fits what you said. In McBride's era, he dealt directly with the President, and the President had - I don't know what you'd call him - a senior Minister of Information named Fernando Garza, who was assigned to work with me. The other group you didn't describe along with the intelligence people and the Justice Department people were the American businesspeople. I mean, they all did their thing no matter what was going on, and I'm sure they still do. But the Foreign Ministry, I thought - if you wanted to say it frankly - was irrelevant to major bilateral matters. There was some consular stuff that went on, and it's funny, I don't remember especially being beaten up on by the Vietnam issue. What I do remember is tomatoes, and there was another issue on beef. Texan ranchers complained that Mexico was exporting too much of this lean beef that's used for McDonald's hamburgers - you mix it with fat and that's what you eat when you're eating a McDonald's hamburger. But I don't remember much about Vietnam.

Q: What about Cuba?

CURRAN: Well, that's a good question, and the Mexicans had two hang-ups at that time, as far as the U.S. was concerned. One was they insisted on maintaining good relations with Fidel Castro, which caused many in Washington to fume, and the other thing was they had a really serious hang-up about the Catholic church, and vice versa. And if we heard anything from the Mexicans or if we had sort of a *contretemps* with the Mexicans about anything, it was the Cuba policy. And McBride steered this off to a siding. I think as a matter of fact that got put in the embassy political section and the Foreign Ministry, and they debated one another and hurled beautifully crafted lightning bolts at one another, but it wasn't done in the public domain.

I neglected to mention to you that the greatest visit we had - in fact, maybe it's the biggest visit I've ever been involved with - was when the Apollo 11 astronauts came. Their first foreign visit after going to the moon was in Mexico City, and McBride was really thrilled. We met Armstrong, Aldren, and Collins with wives at the airport. It took us from 10:00 am to 3:00 p.m. to get to a luncheon at the Presidential Palace, a press conference at five, dinner at the residence at 9 or a later hour. I've never seen a crowd like that. I think all eight million in the city were there - not unfriendly, tremendously excited and thrilled. It was the astronauts' first visit, thank God for us, because they got the same treatment everywhere they went, and of course, it was enormously fatiguing. But they were wonderful, and again, it just set up this tremendous feeling of coincidence and good feeling between the two countries.

Q: What about dealing with the intellectuals and the students?

CURRAN: Well, USIS was very concerned about this area and we had a very effective cultural attaché - Gaylan Caldwell - and an influential binational center program in Mexico, one of the best I've ever seen; and for people who aren't familiar with the binational center, I might just say a few words about that.

They were set up in the '30s, again I think, as a result of the Rockefeller incarnation, when he was working with Roosevelt.

Q: Part of the Good Neighbor Policy.

CURRAN: The Good Neighbor Policy. And the way a binational center worked was you had a board of directors of Mexicans and usually Americans, some English, and they would basically fund the setting of a library and an English teaching facility and a lecture center in various towns. And then we assigned USIS officers, called branch public affairs officers, to work with the binational centers to try to get to students and ordinary citizens below the level of this upper crust that one tried to deal with in Mexico City. And complementing that was a very nice exchange program, scholarships to the United States, both outgoing college students and incoming Fulbright teachers coming to Mexico.

Q: Did you find, though, that there was a sort of a solid Marxist intellectual group that spent most of its time sitting around talking about the colossus to the north and that sort of thing, particularly within the universities and all?

CURRAN: The public affairs officer, George Rylance, set up a number of important university relationships. The most important partnership was in a town called Hermosillo in the northwest. Of course, we had lots of contacts with the Mexican National University. Let's recall the Mexican National University had 25 or 30 thousand students, and most of them were getting *licenciado* degrees so they could go into business. Maybe there were three or four hundred radicals who talked out loud about Marx and poor Mexico, you know, "So far from God, so close to the United States." And of course, the great leftist tradition in art - Diego Rivera as an example - represented a group that was generally anti-American. But I have to tell you that, aside from my early encounters with the media, who were attacking the embassy and the new kind of ideas in the embassy as "leftist" because they were probably trying to pander to the owners of the right-wing press, we didn't run into much "leftist" flak at all. And in fact, efforts to get visas for some of the media who were on the CIA's blacklist - I don't want to personalize this, but anyway - the ambassador's help in kind of getting rid of the blacklist for people who had unconventional opinions resulted in many of these so-called "leftists" getting to the U.S., and of course that's the most effective way to demolish the negative stereotypes of somebody who's uninformed.

Q: It's always been this peculiar thing. I was in Yugoslavia during the little war with Iran and a whole of years; really the real threat is not a communist coming to the United States to us, it's to the communist movement. Turn 'em [them] loose.

CURRAN: That's right.

Q: What about immigration, or not immigration but illegal immigration and all that? Did that crop up on you?

CURRAN: Yes, and I want to now turn to some visits I made with Ambassador McBride particularly in the northern and western part of the country which addressed this issue. Let me start with Tijuana, which is the town right next to San Diego. Perhaps you've been there, but if you ever want to see in microcosm the problem we have with emigration/immigration, that's it. Here you have a very modern Mexican city on the border of a very vibrant American city. If you had been parachuted from the moon on either side of the border, it was almost impossible to tell where you were. Everyone was bilingual with a bias towards Spanish. This is 20-30 years ago. The pressure on the Consulate on the visa side - and this you would appreciate because you've worked in this area - is that I think all these officers were handling between 600 and 700 interviews a day, required just by the volume, which meant that they were making decisions basically in maybe a minute or two minutes. I don't know how many minutes that translates into, but anyway, they just worked flat-out eight hours a day just looking at "Miguel" and trying to decide whether he should get a visa or not. And in effect, many of the Mexicans didn't. So what happened was that they pushed their way over the line one way or another, and in those days we didn't have very adequate border coverage, so they just slipped through across the river beds and into the U.S. And yes, it was a big issue, and the states weren't able to deal with it very well. The only difference was it didn't have the volume it does now. It was very frustrating.

The second big issue was the salt content of the Colorado River by the time it got down to Mexico, having wound its way through a series of irrigated farmlands in the Southwest, where it was put onto fields and then leached back out to the river. Each time the salt content was higher and higher. And in a dry year at the headwater of the Colorado, there was less and less water to use. Whatever water was flowing was virtually unusable by the time it got to Mexico. And that was a cause of great Mexican anger.

The border industries were getting going, and I don't think I was too conscious of the feeling in the United States about the great sucking of jobs across the border, but what you could see, as McBride went through these various communities from San Diego over to Brownsville on the Rio Grande, was, to put it directly, the exploitative nature of the situation. You had people making automobile engines earning maybe 50 cents to a dollar an hour, whereas union scale a mile away was, whatever, \$10 or \$15 or \$20 an hour. And it's very disruptive and difficult, and it's the same thing with Nike sneakers now being made in China and all kinds of other products. And we saw that at the ground floor, and I don't think anybody sees any solution to that. As long as you have, quote, "free trade," it's hard to tell somebody in another country that their workers, who think 50 cents or a dollar an hour is terrific pay - it's hard to tell them to stop doing that.

And a third area that I worked on a little bit more intensively because of my USIS and VOA background was the signal interference between the transmitters on both sides of the border. In those days it was mostly radio, although beginning to be a television problem. Interestingly enough, the Mexican television relays were microwave at that time, so they weren't subject to broadband interference, but the radio stations were subject to it, and one of the things Ambassador McBride did was set up a group to try to negotiate various umbrellas or footprints of the various radio stations to minimize interference.

You asked about cultural exchange. I used to go up to Chihuahua to meet with student groups. Chihuahua is in Sonora, and it's really back country Mexico, serious ranching country. And the first time I went there, I, kind of naively I guess, got to the hotel at about 8 o'clock at night and thought I'd go out and get a beer and a hamburger, and I went to what looked like a pub - it had swinging doors and quite a noise coming from inside, sounded very cheery. Anyway, I walked in with my Western suit. It was a cowboy bar, and I walked in and it was just like a western. The whole place just quieted down. So I went to the bar and everybody just quieted and looked at me. I ordered a beer, drank it as fast as I could, and left. As I walked out the door the noise level built back up again. I never felt so strange in my life, not even in the Middle East. But those interior towns are really fascinating. Taxco, great old silver town; San Miguel de Allende, an artists' center. My wife and I stayed in a hacienda there where the owner was one of the "leftists" you're talking about. We would call him an East Side New York liberal, you know, inveighing against American imperialism and so on and then running a wonderful business, taking American business - kind of a salon socialist, if you want.

I really think that what I took out of Mexico was a terrific respect for diplomats who, like

McBride and his deputy, Jack Kubisch - did you ever run into him - did so much personally to embrace their professional roles.

Q: Kubisch was an ambassador to Greece.

CURRAN: Right. He and his wife, Connie, were a tremendous complement to the McBrides and between them gave every Mexican they met - and I think the Mexican staff in the embassy - the feeling that they really respected Mexico, and they used the resources they had to reinforce American objectives and constantly reinforce them. I think it began to worry me that some of my State and, indeed, USIA colleagues resented the fact that "traditional" diplomacy was being overtaken by what they saw as a more superficial approach to solving international problems. I'm going to have more to say about that as I work through my S/S and Personnel incarnations and then into my final USIA job as area director and then on to Morocco as DCM.

But I think in a way it's a long-term problem for the "formal" Foreign Service. I'm not sure young officers are trained, many of them - maybe I'm wrong about this - but I think that if you insist on wrapping the letter of the law and regulation around yourself when you go overseas and particularly if you're a political or economic officer or, needless to say, a public affairs or cultural affairs officer, you're not serving your country well. When these major political figures come along - the Richardsons, the Nixons, the Rockefellers, and so on - and you say, "Well, I'd like to be involved in this visit, but I have to finish my report on such and such," or "This isn't part of my job description - I can't work after five o'clock," somebody's missing something. And I know I'm regarded as somebody who, you know, went too far in the personal diplomacy way, and maybe I'm not the best judge of this, but I have written an article about this subject I'll be happy to have everybody look up in the *Foreign Service Journal*. I really believe that somewhere in the '60s-'70s-'80s, the Foreign Service kind of missed the boat on how to interact between politics, culture, and jobs. And now it's even more complicated as we try to satisfy the many constituencies - 435 of them in the Congress that are all thinking they can stick their oar into foreign policy.

I did write a note to Frank Shakespeare, who was then director of USIA, at the end of my stay in Mexico, and a couple of things I mentioned which I now think were pretty prescient. One was I said I thought that representational funds were hopelessly inadequate. That's no big discovery to any Foreign Service officer. But I'm bemused that when Emilio Escáraga took me to lunch with four or five other people, and I saw with great shock that the total bill was \$300. But, of course when you knew that, I think, our total USIS representational funding for a year in Mexico was \$1000 - and that's for the whole country - in fact, nobody had anything but the Public Affairs officer, so \$300 for lunch was an eye popper.

I also thought that we were overdoing it on staff in posts and not thinking enough about things like television, trips for journalists and so on and building up a knowledgeable infrastructure. I'm not sure I was right about that, but anyway, again, I didn't think we were really thinking about the local people equation well enough.

And the last thing I said in the memo to Shakespeare was that I thought that our senior officers in Latin America just couldn't be allowed to stay in Latin America for 15 or 20 years. They simply had to have an excursion assignment to find out about the real world. I think I was really right about that.

For my own part, I really felt I pretty much hit the ground running in Mexico and did a fairly good job there for 12 or 14 months and was quite startled when Elliott Richardson called me and asked me if I'd like to come back and work with him in the Department. I guess I did what most people did. I said, "Yes." And I found out that he and Ted Eliot wanted me to come back and work in the Executive Secretariat as one of two, at that time, deputy executive secretaries. Ted Eliot I knew slightly from AFSA days, and I was pleased to think that both Ted Eliot and Elliott Richardson would invite me back. I guess the great irony is that I arrived back in July, 1970, and Elliott Richardson departed about two weeks later for the Justice Department, so my interrelationship in S/S was mostly with Secretary Rogers and Ted Eliot and U. Alexis Johnson.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT (S/S) AND
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT(PER/MGT): 1972- 1974

This four year period was difficult for the Department of State and for the country. Initially, the Department was blindsided by Henry Kissinger's power grab using President's Nixon's dislike of the Foreign Service and the machinery of the National Security Council to undermine State's leadership in foreign policy. In many ways, the erosion in the effectiveness of State and the Foreign Service can be dated to this move by Kissinger. By reducing the authority of the Secretary of State, the effectiveness of Foreign Service officers was diminished, as was the clout the Secretary had in dealings on the Hill, where vital resource requirement issues are decided.

The Vietnam War was extended: Marshall Green, the incumbent assistant secretary, referred to American policy in this period as "Widening down the war," and as popular and political resistance in America mounted, the administration spent more and more of its political capital in this one area.

At the same time, President's Nixon's problems over Watergate increased, producing enhanced disillusionment, distrust, and anger among many Americans about leadership in Washington.

Under new and emotional public and media scrutiny, the State Department began to struggle with evidence that demonstrated prejudice and insensitivity to a wide array of areas, including women's rights, retiree rights, African American slow promotion rates, and the ineffectiveness of the Foreign Service entrance exam.

The American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) became much more militant in this period and increased the sense of division between the leadership of the Department and its employees.

Terrorism in the Middle East and Latin America became a new and dangerous dimension for the public and for U.S. diplomats.

Q: You were with the S/S, Executive Secretariat, from when to when?

CURRAN: From summer of '70 through '72, and then I had two years in the State Personnel Management Office, and then I went to Kabul.

Q: Let's talk about the '70-'72 period.

Today is the 12th of February 1999, and if Lincoln hadn't been shot he would have been, what, about 190-something years old today, but Mr. Booth took care of that. Ted, 1970-72, what were you up to?

CURRAN: Well, in 1970, as I mentioned in the last tape, I was recruited by Elliott Richardson while I was in Mexico City, where I was serving as press attaché, and Richardson was trying to build up the staff - at least that's what he told me - of the Executive Secretariat, and so he asked me if I would come back and work as one of the deputies to Ted Eliot, who was the Executive Secretary and Special Assistant to the Secretary. And the Secretary at that time was William P. Rogers. As I mentioned earlier, the irony was that the month I reported for duty in the Secretariat, Elliott Richardson moved to Justice, so that's government for you.

Any Foreign Service officer who gets the chance should grab an opportunity to work in the Executive Secretariat in the State Department. The workload is enormous, but the work environment is really super, very professional, and everyone who worked in the Secretariat was very supporting of one another. The Secretary of State at that time was William P. Rogers, a very, very distinguished gentleman, a great public servant in my view. He had been Attorney General under Eisenhower and had had a very close personal relationship with Richard Nixon, then President Nixon, 1970, for many, many years, I think going back to the early California campaigns. The Executive Secretary, as I mentioned, was Ted Eliot - Theodore L. Eliot - one of our most successful career officers, I would say, certainly in the post World War II era, very well and favorably known throughout the Foreign Service. He was originally a protégé of Douglas Dillon at Treasury. Dillon met him somewhere and took him to Treasury as a special assistant, and he got the visibility and the credentials. After some service in Iran he went on to State and was asked by Rogers to be the head of S/S. Other important players at this time were U. Alexis Johnson, who was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs; Bill Macomber - at that time he wasn't Under Secretary; he was Deputy Under Secretary for Management - Tom Pickering, who is still with us and very active, was head of Political-Military (PM); Arthur Hartman, who is still alive but no longer in the Department, was head of Policy Coordination, called SPC; Marshall Green was Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs - and this was the height of the Vietnam War, so he had special burdens - and his deputy there was Bill Sullivan, another very, very distinguished diplomat. Joseph Sisco was Assistant Secretary for NEA, and Martin Hillenbrand was Assistant Secretary for EUR. It was really a great bunch of people. And I'd just like to point out in passing that as you think about it - as I think about it, at any rate - if you look

now at the people who have assistant secretary jobs and deputy assistant secretary jobs, there are many more outside, what I would refer to as political appointees, and I think this is not good for our foreign policy.

Q: Well, there isn't the depth of experience. They're seen to run more for almost political purposes.

CURRAN: Well, the danger is that if you're a part or directly associated with the party in the White House, you might make decisions which relate to politics more than policy. This is old stuff to you, Stuart, but let me just mention what the executive secretary does. S/S, which is kind of, for Europeans, particularly Germans, a startling set of initials (but in any event it's *S slant S*), managed and manages communications for the Seventh Floor of the Department, which is the executive floor, where all the what we called - I guess they still call - principal officers have these mahogany-paneled offices, very elegant area. So that includes the Secretary, and in those days the number two was called the Under Secretary. And then there was an Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Political Affairs, and Macomber was Deputy Under Secretary for Management. A job added in the Nixon administration was called Under Secretary for, sort of, Defense and Humanitarian Resources - I mean, it was kind of an oddball title, but the idea was to kind of pull in all the aid-related stuff, defense and satellite portfolios in one place.

Now in theory, all decisions on paper and requests to principal officers came to the Secretariat and were dished out to what we called our line officers, S/S/S, for staff, and they then - in coordination with State offices - would prepare replies. A request might come to Rogers from a foreign diplomat. The line officer would be sure that all the interested parties who ought to see this response by the Secretary would see it and it would get back to him in a reasonable amount of time. Of course, you can't control everything that goes on in these offices, and we never thought we could, but for the most part, it was a pretty coordinated and good system. The Secretariat also managed and distributed all the highly classified cables that didn't go directly to the various offices. Now I'm not sure any more what all the highly classified captions are. In those days the main captions we dealt with were something called "NODIS" and "EXDIS," and the difference between those two was that NODIS was hand carried and enveloped and receipted, when we got it and when we handed it on, and EXDIS was controlled, but it was distributed electrically, that is, once we put the distribution on the cover sheet it went back to OC (Office of Communications) and was distributed by them electrically. In our immediate office, Secretary Rogers had a personal secretary from the outside, whose name was Maggie Runkel, and he had a career secretary, Jane Roth, and a special assistant to deal with his daily schedule and travel and getting around. We generally worked from 8 am to 6 p.m. five days a week, two out of three weeks. There were three of us, by the way, I should have mentioned if I didn't. Ted Eliot had two deputies. On the third week one of us worked from 7 am until 8 or 9 p.m. five days a week and was on call Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. That was a week that one was very glad to get through. It's a long, long time, and many times the person who was the deputy or the executive secretary just stayed in the Department; it was too much of a hassle to go home and come back, with the phone ringing all the time. Anyway, I'd like to say, in case they ever read

it, that I really appreciate what my family put up with during this period. It was a very difficult time. My children were quite young, and my wife was really terrific about it. So were Sara and Diana.

Now one of the things that happened - I'd just like to start out with an administrative task that was carried out during this period, and then I'll go on to some policy stuff that came up. It was pretty clear when I came into S/S - and I think because of my IBM background this was one of the reasons they brought me back - was that managing paper by hand was increasingly impossible. In the early days in the Secretary of State's office - I'm talking post-World War II - the office might handle four or five thousand documents a year. By the time I got there the number was up to 25 or 30 thousand a year, and I mean, it was just a terribly difficult task to manage that flow of paper. So we were confronted with how to be responsive and yet get everything to move faster and keep everybody informed. It was inspiring, in this environment, that everybody knew that mistakes would be made. So, if you made a mistake you didn't get hammered; but you were encouraged to try to figure out how to fix the mistake. And I'd just like to tell a personal anecdote which really drove this home to me. I think it was the first week I was on duty, September, 1970. That was the week Black September broke out in Jordan between the King and the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization). I'll come to that a little later, a terrible mess.

So it was very tough for a new person to come in at that moment. Every night, we produced something called the "Letter to the President," which the Secretary personally signed. So my first letter to the President - you know, I read it about five times over and sent it in - and BUZZ, I got the red light from the Secretary and he asked me to come into his office, so my blood pressure went up to about 300 over 200, and I went in and he said, "Now let's see, you're new here." I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, there's something about this letter I don't like." He said, "You put in at the end here, 'We're following the situation closely, and we'll advise you as circumstances warrant'" - or something like that. He said, "I just want you to understand, Ted, that the President imagines and hopes that that's what we're doing all the time. We don't need to write it in a memo to him." I said, "Okay, I've got it." He said, "Well, I thought you'd get the picture. Now," he said, "I'd just like to have a drink with you." And he got a little bottle out from the desk, I'm sure very expensive Scotch, and we had a Scotch and soda, and he said, "I just want you to understand that mistakes are human, and you guys I know are handling enormous amounts of pressure and paper. I just want you to remember one thing: if you make a mistake, just make sure I'm the first one to hear about it, and tell me what we can do to fix it." I thought that was really terrific!

Q: Oh, that's wonderful, yes.

CURRAN: Yes, and you can imagine it gave me a really good feeling about working in the office. Now before I describe what became known as the Automated Data Index, I'd like to make some political comments. You had at the top of the Department a devoted friend of the President, a distinguished public servant, and fine array of professional officers trying to manage foreign policy in the State Department, and into this situation

stepped a little-known American named Henry A. Kissinger, a very bright and ambitious person and very personable and charming. And he decided that in order to do what he regarded as the job of the National Security Advisor, he had to control communications and the way foreign policy was organized. So using his access to President Nixon, Kissinger developed a decision system which basically preempted the State Department in terms of anything in which Kissinger was interested. And there's a curious phenomenon I've mentioned before and which I never really understood and maybe you know: Nixon detested the State Department.

Q: I'm told his dying words were something about the State Department, and I've found, you know, this goes throughout here, actually in the interviews I've had here, Nixon, where there are some personal things they don't care about, stands pretty high with the Foreign Service because he knew his book.

CURRAN: Well, I think I mentioned to you that when I was with him on the Mexican border, he was very professional. I think that as I've been thinking about it while writing these notes, I believe that it might have gone back to the Alger Hiss business, and that Nixon was so traumatized by having such a high-level person betray his country - Hiss - I don't believe this is an unfair judgment - Hiss was kind of an establishment person in an establishment job (Department of State).

Q: He embodied the thin, spare, eastern background...

CURRAN: Correct.

Q: You know, he looked like what you'd call-

CURRAN: -a WASP [white Anglo-Saxon Protestant].

Q: - a WASP.

CURRAN: And I think those people made Nixon feel very insecure. Anyway, because of Hiss's behavior and his unfortunate conduct. Nixon "hated" the State Department. And Kissinger knew this, so he would say to the President, "Well, I'm going to fix those State Department types this time." He issued a series of decrees which were called National Security Decision Memos (SDM). Well, it was pretty clear what was happening, and Elliott Richardson fought it for a while, but then he was taken over to Justice and his replacement, a wonderful gentleman named John Irwin, was too much of a gentleman to get into the ring with Henry Kissinger. And Secretary Rogers could see what was happening, but Rogers, who had had a 30-year relationship with the President, imagined - I think - that by doing what he was asked to do, run the Department, eventually this would sort itself out, but it didn't. [The culmination of Kissinger's egotistical behavior was scheming to shut Secretary Rogers out of the first meeting Nixon had with Mao in 1972.]

At the same time, many State Department career officers, who were hoping to curry favor

with Kissinger or some of Kissinger's staff at the National Security Council, began leaking documents and especially sensitive cables and drafts over to the NSC; and Kissinger, therefore, was basically able to weigh in on Department deliberations before they were raised to the national security level and kill things that, you know, he didn't like, before the Secretary of State ever got a chance to decide whether it was good or bad. And they were constantly catching the Secretary and the under secretaries off guard with this. Kissinger also used the Central Intelligence Agency's communications, which were not shown to State Department personnel, and he also used other embassies' wires, I mean, other countries' diplomatic communications to keep the Department from knowing what was going on.

Q: Including the Soviets!

CURRAN: Yes, yes. Well, it was an awful situation, and I've sort of been thinking about this, and it's always seemed strange to me that career FSOs would so lightly turn their backs on their Department and colleagues for their own personal advancement. This didn't seem to happen so much with the CIA and the Defense Department officers. And I've sort of been pondering why this might be, and I think perhaps that State Department officers who get up into the middle and upper levels of the political and economic track somehow begin to see themselves as individually entitled to pursue their own interests and careers without necessarily seeing the Department as being something with which they are integrally involved. This doesn't happen with officers in the Consular Service. I don't think it happens much with USIA officers. So it's a real puzzle, and in this particular instance, with Kissinger, taking advantage of the leaks, it really hurt the Foreign Service.

Q: I think, you know, what we're doing here - I come out of the consular wing, and one of my items on my hidden agenda is I'm hoping through these oral histories to begin to develop a feeling of oneness, belonging, and identification with an organization, with the Department of State - not blind loyalty, but loyalty to the principle, rather than a feeling both that you're on your own and you can do what you want, but also discipline. And I think that, you know, there's nothing in our business that tries to inculcate this feeling of oneness. In fact, we're here at the Foreign Service Institute, and I think they give four hours of the history of American diplomacy.

CURRAN: Well, another aspect of this that I've seen a lot of is that as this particular group of officers - and I'm reluctant to pin it exclusively on political and economic officers, but that's where I saw it happen a lot - they would get out into responsible positions in field posts and then see their position in the country they are in as having primacy over wider U.S. interests. And when I get into talking about my experience in Afghanistan and Morocco, please remind me to go to this. Ted Eliot and his DCM in Kabul were somewhat at fault on this in Afghanistan. We got caught up in the idea that the mission's success was in aggregating resources for Afghanistan without necessarily thinking through how this fit in the long range of U.S. interests.

Q: Well, tell me, Ted, while this was going on, I mean, this is something you're reflecting

on now, 20 years later - were all of you, you particularly, but others, aware of the process that was going on, Henry Kissinger's trying to take stuff away, undercutting, that people were leaking, and all that?

CURRAN: Definitely, and I'm going to mention some names now of people who were aware and who survived and became great people despite this terrible situation, and perhaps they all learned about the erosion that this tactic was causing and became sadder but wiser officers: Tom Pickering, Ted Eliot, Arthur Hartman, Michael Sterner, Martin Hillenbrand, Marshall Green, Joe Sisco. These people all understood loyalty as well as the question of what's policy and what's political, and still kept their eye on loyalty to the Department and the end goal, which is a more successful American foreign policy.

Now I thought it would be interesting if I mentioned several policy things that happened during my stint. It's by no means an exclusive list, but I guess they're the things that stood out to me, and I've already mentioned Black September. I guess I had finished about my first day of one of these long "duty" weeks that I mentioned earlier, and I was home, I think I was even asleep, and a wonderful officer named Gif Malone called me and said, "The balloon is going up; you'd better get down here." So I went right down, and I think I was in the office for six straight days. I never even got home for a bath. And what happened was that the Palestine Liberation Organization tried to oust King Hussein, and he decided to neutralize them. The Syrians began to move armor around on the joint frontier between Syria and Jordan, and the Israelis began rumbling around wondering what they could do to advance their own interests. This was only three years after the Six-Day War, so everyone was pretty aware of what could happen. In fact, our chargé there was simply unable to handle the pressure and the work, and he had to be relieved. And Secretary Rogers and Joe Sisco sent in Dean Brown. I don't know how they got him into the embassy. He probably went in through Israel. He might have flown in. But in any event, he got there, and I'll never forget his first message back after he'd had a day or so there and had gone to present his credentials to King Hussein in an armored personnel carrier, because there was still active fighting around Amman. He said everything was well except they were running out of bourbon and peanut butter and would we please expedite a shipment!

There were many Middle East twists and turns in the early '70s, and Joe Sisco was in charge of the Department's Near East policy. Rogers trusted him completely, and Sisco was one of the few very senior State people who stayed one step ahead of Kissinger.

Q: I was going to say, this is still the time when Kissinger was keeping his hands off of the Middle East, and so this was being run by the State Department.

CURRAN: That's right, and Secretary Rogers delighted in keeping on top of this and keeping ahead, and Joe - I'm sure you've talked to other people who've known Joe well; I mean, he was quite a character and a wonderful person; I still think very highly of him-

Q: He's a consummate bureaucrat; he knows all the angles.

CURRAN: That's right. There was a joke they used to tell, and we'd have these resource allocation meetings, and I think it was Pickering or Arthur Hartman, one of the two, came in with a big chart, and they were showing, you know, we have these peas here - they're the resources - and then we have these shells here - those are the various bureaus - and then they'd turn the page and say, "Now let's see where all the peas are," and he picked up the Middle East shell, and all the peas were there.

On a substantive matter, I remember being with the Secretary in New York, I think, and on some meeting with a group of Arab ambassadors. In the aftermath of the 1970s events, there had been a series of fruitless negotiations and Rogers was talking kind of along routinely about what was going on in the Middle East, and he suddenly got very emotional and turned to these diplomats and he said, "I'd like you to ask your head of state one question: is making war for the rest of history, is that a foreign policy?" And you could have heard a pin drop in there. It was obvious he was really upset. So that was quite an interesting moment.

Q: Yes.

CURRAN: The next sort of big thing was Vietnam. I mean, everyone's written and talked about it. The main thing I remember was we went to endless military briefings about the Plain of Jars and we went one way in dry weather and the other way in the wet weather.

Q: That's the marsh.

CURRAN: Yes, and of course, the Ho Chi Minh trail and the Parrot Beak bombing in Cambodia. I don't think I can add anything to it except during one major offensive. The policy of the government at that time was reducing our presence. But at one point in '70-'71-'72, there was an intense U.S. offensive action we took - I can't remember - maybe trying to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail or something.

Q: No, it was going into Laos, I think, at that time.

CURRAN: A major thing.

Q: It was a major one run by the Vietnamese army-

CURRAN: Supposedly, right.

Q: -which didn't work well.

CURRAN: But anyway, it was a huge investment of American resources, and Marshall Green was giving his morning presentation to the Secretary - and he has a very Puckish sense of humor - so he said, "This is, I suppose, another example of *widening* down the war." I'm sure the President heard about that, and I'm sure he wasn't amused. An event which was quite traumatic for us in the Secretariat - in fact, it was probably up to that time the most difficult thing I ever went through - there was I think in New

Orleans a Lithuanian seaman tried to defect-

Q: God, yes.

CURRAN: - and fortunately - I say this selfishly - I was not the one of the three S/S people who was on call when this happened over the weekend. One of the junior line officers or Operations Center officers got the call - let's say it was Sunday afternoon, very quiet time in Washington - and he did the right thing. He said to whoever had called him, "Don't do anything until we can get in touch with the legal people on this." And he told the Executive Secretary on duty that this was going on, and then nobody followed up. And I think Monday was a holiday, something like the weekend we're in. And on Tuesday, whoever he'd defected to had handed the sailor back to the Russians.

Q: I think it was the Coast Guard that had him.

CURRAN: Maybe the Coast Guard.

Q: The Coast Guard had him.

CURRAN: But from Sunday afternoon through the holiday and into Tuesday, nobody thought, Well, gee, maybe we'd better check and see what's going on. Well, there was a tremendous hullabaloo. I can't remember so much anger. The Secretary was furious; Alex Johnson was furious; you can imagine Kissinger and Nixon. And the poor seaman was, I think, beaten within an inch of his life. You know, he eventually got back to the States, but at the time this was an awful thing. State had to write a report about this, how this happened, and in the midst of this, on the front page of *Parade Magazine*, they published - in color, so they had to have had the original - an EXDIS cable with the cover sheet on it having to do with the situation, which showed that, you know, someone had taken this and walked out of the Department, a dreadful breach of security. Anyway, the report, it took us, I think, six weeks to do the reports and satisfy all the people in the Department, and this thing was - I don't know - easily a hundred pages long, and there was a lot of tension getting it ready, everybody signed off, and then it was sent over to the NSC. And Ted Eliot, who was, I think, not one of the three on duty, came in Monday morning to look at the report, and no one had dated it. I thought Eliot was going to throw the line officer out in the street. He's somebody who's still on active duty, so I won't mention his name. That was really an awful time.

Q: I'd like to just go back quickly to Black September. What was the feeling when this thing hit the fan? That Hussein was not going to make it? I mean, what was the initial thought that you were going through?

CURRAN: Save the King. We saw him as a very important element in the Mideast mix, and we wanted to save him. And we also saw the PLO as decidedly bad news.

Q: Were we cranking up things?

CURRAN: Well, certainly, if you're thinking that we were going head-to-head with the Russians, I don't think we did. We certainly were cranking up military aid, and we got aid and money in there as fast as we could. I'm pretty sure we were very active in threatening the Syrians, maybe even with overflights, and certainly the Israelis were told to behave themselves and help the King in any way that they could, and they did. But I would say there was no doubt at that time that we wanted to save the Hashemite family.

Q: We are talking today; the King just died this week, King Hussein.

CURRAN: Well, another sort of interesting and at that time strange substantive situation was that the General Assembly was voting on who would represent China, and the Department worked very hard to see if we could short-circuit that. I'm not making a statement on China policy, but in any event, it was American policy then to recognize Taiwan as the government of China. And we lost the General Assembly vote. What I remember is sitting with the Secretary that night and watching the scene in the General Assembly, where the Third World countries, who had basically led this, particularly the African countries, indulged in a really very unpleasant celebration of the humiliation of the United States. I remember it as being kind of a low moment.

The China trip was planned during this period, the ending of our isolation. Of course, the China-UN vote was one of the early steps. In retrospect I sort of think we acquiesced, that we saw, or Kissinger anyway wanted to get this anachronism behind us and acquiesced. In any event, everybody knows the story, going through Pakistan and sneaking in to see Zhou En-lai and so on. What I remember about the trip is two things. One is one of our most distinguished staff officers, Nick Platt, who eventually became an ambassador in a couple of places, including Pakistan, was picked by Kissinger to go on the trip. Kissinger has and had some saving graces, and one of them was he recognized quality, and in Nick Platt he clearly saw an officer with good Chinese and good savvy and hardworking, and he used him for the China visit. That was a rare upside in Kissinger.

The downside was that when Kissinger and Nixon and Rogers were in Beijing for the first big visit, and Kissinger got the summons to go and see Mao, they left Rogers out, and it was really a body blow for the Department, and Kissinger did it deliberately, and he admits in one of his books he's sorry he did. A little late for regret.

The Secretary handled our participation at the governmental level in the 2500 celebration of Iran, and Spiro Agnew was sent by the President to represent our country.

Q: He was Vice President.

CURRAN: The Vice President. And the scene on the airplane, I guess, extraordinary. He took a lot of political friends with him, and they partied heavily going and coming. And one story, which may be apocryphal, but I think is illustrative, one of the people who went along was Lauren Bacall -

Q: Movie actress.

CURRAN: - movie actress and widow of Humphrey Bogart. And there was one of the parties that went on in Teheran during this thing, and everyone was apparently very relaxed, and the Shah was there dancing with Lauren Bacall, and he said - I know the person who said this to me, I've no reason to doubt it - the Shah said to her, "Well, you dance very well," and she said, "You bet your ass." We lived through that, and then another event we lived through was Secretary John Connolly.

John Connolly was named Secretary of the Treasury. He was a Texan. I suppose from that area he had to have been a Democrat.

Q: He was a Democrat, switched over. He had been governor of Texas.

CURRAN: And he was in the Kennedy motorcade when Kennedy was... In fact, Connolly was himself was shot.

Q: Shot, yes.

CURRAN: Anyway, I think he regarded his appointment as Secretary of the Treasury as a stepping stone to taking over the State Department, and he had his travel managed by the Secretariat, and all his staff clearly saw this as an opportunity to see how the State Department worked and look over the real estate. It was a very, very difficult time. Fortunately, he never made it to State. What I think happened was Kissinger became Secretary and that was the end of Connolly as an idea.

And the last sort of thing that was more fun than anything else was Secretary Rogers decided to make a Middle East tour in June of '72, just about my last month in S/S, and because he knew I'd been in Yemen, he asked me to organize his trip for him, which I did with great pleasure. One of the things I had a lot of particular fun with was airplanes used for this particular part of the trip. There was a modern jet field by this time at Hodeida, which is a Red Sea port, but the Secretary was going to Sanaa, and for some reason he couldn't fly into Sanaa, with U.S. Air Force Two. He had to go in a smaller plane. I'm not sure why that was. Anyway, they went to Hodeida, and because I had had some experience flying in and out of there, I insisted to the Air Force that they have a prop plane there as well as a turbo-prop, which they were going to use, because turbo-props at high temperatures don't function especially well, and they don't have good lift. And I was so pleased they got to Hodeida and they switched to the [turbo]-prop planes and they couldn't get off, and they had to use the prop planes to get to Sanaa.

Q: How did the trip go?

CURRAN: It went very well. I should mention another thing that was very strange.

Q: This must have been the first time a Secretary of State went to Yemen - maybe the only time-

CURRAN: Must be the only time. Rogers had a wonderful time, and another sort of footnote was that at that time he had a special assistant, who was an Orthodox Jew. And you know, we said to him, "This is a very strict Muslim country. Do you want to make the trip?" "Absolutely." And he was very brave about it. I've forgotten his name now, but he wouldn't eat anything while he was in the Yemen.

Q: The food is essentially orthodox?

CURRAN: Well, it's kosher after the Arab standard, but he was afraid that it would not pass Jewish standards.

Now I'd like to just talk a little bit about this modernization of the office. The core of the modernization program was something called the State Department Automated Data Index, called "SADI," and I mentioned the number of correspondence coming in, and I hope this doesn't seem too esoteric to everybody. The problem was that we had this flood of paper coming in, and one piece of the problem was you had to manage the flow and keep up with it. The other end of the problem was what were you doing with it once it was signed off and completed? So we tried to attack this in two ways. And the Automated Data Index didn't try to store in a computer the whole document, which in any event at that time was very difficult. We did have Optical Character Recognition (OCR), but it was very slow and cumbersome, and also no one had the disk space to store so much material. Actually, you could have, but it would have been very expensive. So what we did was we developed an automated data index so that when the document came in, it would describe it briefly ("To Rogers from Golda Meir: Military Aid," whatever the topics were), and then it said who the action office was and, I suppose, where else it went. And then each time the document went from one stage to another, the responsible officer was supposed to enter into the computer when he dealt with it and what happened.

Well you can imagine that, first of all, technically to get everybody having terminals and to get them work all the time and have the officers use them was a challenge.

Q: We're talking about the 1970s.

CURRAN: Yes. Nowadays you walk around, and young (and old!) people are all rattling away on computers; in those days people stayed as far away from automation as they could. But SADI got done, and it worked. And Secretary Rogers, who had watched with great bemusement while this was going on, because the last thing he wanted was chaos in his documents. One afternoon, a letter came in from Golda Meir, and he called - I don't think he called me in, but I guess he called one of his special assistants, who came to him. The Secretary wanted to see every communication he'd received from Golda Meir in the last three years. SADI produced it in about six minutes, and the Secretary was really impressed.

Now, as I said, there were two parts to this situation. What did one do with the documents once they were finished? You know, you couldn't put them in file cabinets - there was not enough space. You could either read them into a computer - too expensive and too

bad - or you could put them on something called "videofile," which was a semi-automated thing which would go on videotape-

Q: Microfilm.

CURRAN: No, videotape, running videotape, with an index so that you could find it (maybe!). The SADI team developed a much simpler way. Documents were on fiches and stored in little shoebox cabinets with the SADI numbers on the boxes, and we were able to retrieve documents in minutes. And from then on Rogers was a fan. And I want to say that the team I worked with, and I want to mention this because I was basically just a cheerleader, included Tom Tracy, a wonderful officer; Jo Ann Jenkins, who's still active in the Service; Sheldon Rosen; and Will Means. Will Means and I were particular friends, because he was in Asmara when I was in Taiz, and he was the one who was asking me about, you know, this secret communications station operating in Taiz and who was it? And I'd told him I didn't know, and of course it was our new telegraph. But despite that we got to be good friends.

Anyway, those folks and a lot of other people made this all work. It was a Herculean effort, and one of the last minute glitches was the National Security Agency (NSA) came over and began bugging us as it were about tempest testing. Now tempest testing is the test which the security people use to prevent radiation from equipment to leak out and be read by a box somewhere in the street. I thought it was pretty unlikely, but in any event, you have to take the NSA seriously. So we worked very hard, and we had to shield all the cables and all the terminals. That was just one problem. There were others, but we all stuck with it and it got done, and I would say, probably, of the administrative jobs I was involved in - again I don't want to overstate my own role, but anyway as a sort of junior quarterback - it was really something, and I still enjoy seeing it in operation, although it's much better now than it was then.

Well, in the summer of '72, partly because of the SADI project, Ted Eliot and the Department asked me if I would go and work in the Personnel Office at State, where they were having lots of trouble storing data, tracking data, managing files. And I guess I was happy to have survived two years in S/S, and I didn't see doing it indefinitely. It was pretty nice to move to a different office and kind of have my own shop. I was made, I think, director, and it was called PER/MGT, and I reported to the director general, a wonderful guy named Bill Hall, sadly now passed on, but a great man to work with and very kind and sympathetic. And also Bob Brewster, who had been in S/S when I arrived and moved over to be Hall's deputy and I think was the one who talked Eliot into bringing me over.

Of course everybody wants total order at all times, but I think that the driving thing in the early '70s was the emergence of grievances against the Department. Perhaps, Stuart, you can remember the name. There was a lady who had led a landmark case. She became a priest.

Q: Oh, yes. Alison Palmer.

CURRAN: Alison Palmer. And that case was very hot. And I don't know anything about the merits of it, but what I do know-

Q: I think the merits were there. It represented - like every revolution, it got blown up, but no, there was discrimination, no doubt about it.

CURRAN: As I say, it's not my purpose to discuss the merits, but the *demerit*, as far as the Department goes, was that every time they tried to find anything in the files, it was screwed up. You know, it was either out of place or out of - it just had to be dealt with. And that was probably the main thing I worked on.

Q: There was another grievance involving Cynthia Thomas-

CURRAN: That involved her husband, Charles Thomas; he committed suicide.

Q: ...whose husband had committed suicide, and that was a matter of, supposedly, he didn't get promoted because-

CURRAN: He was "TICed" (retired involuntarily because of age but without a proper pension)

Q: Was it a problem with his?

CURRAN: What I understood - and this was before I came into PER - he was separated out before he was entitled to a pension. Thomas was so despondent he took his own life. And when his file was reviewed, it was just a mess. As you say, there was real merit in the problem. Well, to address the file mess, somebody - probably Bob Brewster, who knew everybody - identified a wonderful lady, retired, I think, a clerical professional, named Frances Bourne. And she agreed to come on board, and she brought with her another wonderful person named Ingeborg Lueders, who had been an administrative officer both in NEA and overseas. Together and with my fabulous deputy, Ken Hartung, PER designed a way to clean those files up. And Fran Bourne developed a new system. All files were put in order and then microfilmed, so one couldn't switch papers around. Before this, files might go to the selection boards and come back, and sometimes things would be missing, through carelessness. The files modernization was done in 18 months. Fran Bourne was, as somebody who would take that on would have to be, absolutely indefatigable in doing this detail by detail. I have to say - she's now gone to her reward, which I hope is considerable in the Great Hereafter - she drove me bananas a lot of the time. But she was right every time, and it was wonderful working with her. And the file room - I haven't been back in several years - was cleaned up, it was painted, it was nicely air-conditioned, nice furniture, and of course it was great for morale. So hats off to Fran Bourne and Inge Lueders.

I just might footnote. I met Inge Lueders in Syria in 1960, when I was driving one of my children from Jordan to Beirut Hospital (She had some kind of minor foot deformity when she was born and was being treated.) and we got in an automobile accident on the

way back. Fortunately, it was not a serious accident, but it smashed the car up pretty badly. And Inge Lueders was administrative officer in Damascus. She just did everything for us to get the car fixed and get back to Amman.

Another big project in PER/MGT besides the file room was introduction of automated data on the profiles of the Foreign Service - skills profiles, age, gender, and so on and so on - so you could begin to do some kind of planning on the basis of facts. And a wonderful officer named Joe Milrose came along, and he helped do that with Ken Hartung. And the office developed a really effective skills profile, with all the various components. It was tough, and I wouldn't give it the highest marks that I gave to the SADI operation because PER didn't really have enough money to do it right. But the main problem was that the senior FSOs, the clique of people who were the movers and shakers, the political and economic officers who were in the top personnel jobs in Personnel - in other words, they were the ones managing - they wanted nothing to do with any kind of system which would contradict their views about what was best for the Service and the people that they wanted pick for the jobs. And we had a very, very bad time of it. There was an officer named Archer Blood, who led the resistance to modernization, and he was a formidable opponent.

Q: Well, he took them on - I think Henry Kissinger and everybody else - when he was in Pakistan, in Dhaka, and later in Greece, too. His lance was not shattered. He drew blood when he took on issues.

CURRAN: Well, he's had some of my blood on his lance, too, and the interesting thing about Arch was he was a really wonderful person, sincere and hard-working. I really came to like him as a person, but his attitudes on personnel management were 19th-century and he just couldn't stand systems. His vision of the Foreign Service was Platonic - you have some people who are gifted by God with certain capabilities, and they run the things and nobody questions them. That world is no longer... It might have been a wonderful if it ever existed. The Loy Henderson era was sort of that way, but I never met Mr. Henderson.

Q: Well, no, in my interviews I've found that one of the great places where people got more senior positions during the Loy Henderson thing was you happened to be using the urinal next to Loy Henderson and he'd say, "Where are you going, George?" And George would tell him, and he'd say, "Oh, no, you don't want to go there; you want to be ambassador to this place or deputy here." And that's what happened. I mean, it worked well, but it may be one of the reasons why women didn't do too well in that era. But that was the Loy Henderson thing.

CURRAN: I don't know, and again I don't have a dog in the fight over the "Arabist" issue, but Loy Henderson was avowedly anti-Israeli, and a lot of the people he placed in the Middle East were also anti-Israeli, and I think it cost us in terms of a balanced look at the Middle East over the long run.

The third area where Ken Hartung and I worked very, very hard on was equal opportunity

for the minorities who were in PER/MGT, and as it turned out, when we went in there we were the only whites in the office, and the working conditions were appalling. It was in that northwestern corner in the basement of the Department.

Q: I remember seeing that. Awful.

CURRAN: And so we - mostly Ken and his assistant, Cheryl White - started a number of things. There were intra-office discussions. We insisted on bringing the minority people into the future of the office, and of course they were involved in the file room and the data project. We started getting them out on training things. We got awards going. And the funniest thing, I guess, that happened - let's see, I went there in '72 - so '73, we had the better personal relations by then, so Ken and I said to Cheryl White, "Well, it would be nice to have a Christmas party." She said, "Oh." We said, "Well, we thought people could come by, whatever, the last day it was before Christmas, the 23rd or something, and have a little sherry and peanuts." And Cheryl looked at us and said - I can't repeat the language, but it was, if I can use the expression, colorful - she said, "You don't want to have any bleeping sherry and nuts. You want to have a Christmas party, I'll put on a Christmas party, but it's not going to be sherry and nuts." So we said, "Okay." So the day of the party they shut everything down at noon, and I was out somewhere else and I came back and I couldn't believe what my office looked like. It looked like a cornucopia. There was ham and roast beef and chicken - just unbelievable amounts of food. The whole building was invited. There were also, I think, quite a quantity of liquid consumed, and as the evening wore on, the smoke included whiffs of certain forbidden substances. And anyway, we finally closed the place up about 11 o'clock at night. And in retrospect two funny things happened. First of all, I had told my wife we were having our office Christmas party, and she, being a very well brought-up Oberlin lady, who had gone to Christmas parties in her office, Common Cause, you know, with sherry and nuts, if that. I called her about 10:30 and I said, "Well, the party is still going on." And she said rather icily, "I can hear that." So I think I finally got home about midnight. And the next day we were cited by the security office, why, for various violations, which all were correct. But Bill Hall was a good sport. He let it go, and I must say the morale was terrific. Nothing like a good Christmas party.

Now I have to close with a kind of sad event. This is my personal perspective, not an official account. I think it was in early 1973, there was an incident in Khartoum where the American ambassador, Cleo Noel, and his soon-to-be replacement, George C. (Curt) Moore, were seized at a social event - in fact, it was a farewell party, I think, for Cleo - and taken hostage. The hostage-takers were PLO-associated terrorists - I think they were called "Black September" - and it was one of the earliest hostage crises of many, of course, that we've had since then. But we as a country and certainly the Department and the White House were not prepared for this, you know, with the benefit of hindsight. We really didn't have a rescue team, sort of a delta team or anything like that, ready. We didn't know how to approach negotiations. We didn't have a coherent way for going about it. Our official position was - and we kept saying it - "Well, we don't negotiate with terrorists." And we didn't work our network in the Middle East at all. So basically, Cleo and Curt were taken; they were held by these dreadful people; and they had no

communication basically. Cleo was allowed to call the U.S. embassy a couple of times. And Macomber, the deputy under secretary for Management, was sent to the area without any particular instructions - you know, just do what you can do - and the terrorists were apparently on orders from outside. But from someplace where Arafat was, the terrorists got instructions to kill Noel and Moore. And they gunned them down, a horrible thing. The bodies were just shattered. While this developed, Bill Hall asked me to run a control center so we could tell the families what was going on, to the extent we could tell them, and of course we had to call them when the murders took place. And then I went out with the family members who were still in this country to Khartoum to bring the bodies back. Cleo's wife, Lucile, and Curt's wife, Sally, were about as brave as any people I've ever known. My hat's off to them. Heroic Americans! Have you ever been to Khartoum?

Q: No, never.

CURRAN: It's a dreadful city. Our embassy at that time was in a downtown office building with a total lack of security. But, of course, the event took place at the Saudi residence.

And the Sudanese were very, very upset, the people of the Sudan. This was prior to a lot of the more extreme regimes they've had since then. And the parade to the airport, the cortège, which went from the embassy to the airport, there were probably tens of thousands of people weeping and sobbing. They recognized it as being a terrible thing. And I came back with the bodies and the widows, and they were buried in Arlington Cemetery, and the U.S. government was as nice as you can be in that situation. But I think it really left in me, anyway, a deep sense of failure at how little the government could do.

Q: Well, there was also an interesting book called Assassination in Khartoum, by David Korn, I think, but at the time, I think, there was some feeling that Nixon made the normal statement that-

CURRAN: "We don't deal with terrorists?"

Q: "We don't deal with terrorists" at a time when it would have been a damn good idea to keep your mouth shut, because it sounded sort of like, you know, trying to prove that you're tough. I've had several others refer to it at other times, where Nixon particularly would repeat this to sound tough at a time when we just should stay out.

CURRAN: Also, the Department spokesman was required to regularly repeat the formula. I suppose he was told to by the White House. It was a very, very sad time, and an early chapter in a very unhappy series of experiences the U.S. had with terrorism.

Q: I'd like to ask a question while you were in Personnel. I was in Personnel in Career Management in 1967-68, and we were going through an exercise. When we would interview an officer, we would draw up a potential career path. Somebody wanted to be something, and we would carry it through until they reached senior ranks, trying to use

our normal criteria for training and for out-of-cone assignments, and they said they wanted to be this and that. And the idea was that if you took these each individually it wouldn't work, but in mass, if you took them, you could come up with an idea of what your resources were and where they should go, and maybe there should be some direction, and all this. These I think were hand-written or typed or something. Did those occur, come up at all, or were they dead by then?

CURRAN: Career planning was very important. Director General Bill Hall felt strongly about it. I think several things happened. First of all, the volume; as more and more officers came into the service, I think the volume overwhelmed the people trying to provide systematic career planning. I think the second factor was that we had to begin to consider tandem assignments, so you brought spouses into the mix. This made planning more complicated. And then, of course, there was equal opportunity assignments. The variables increased to a point where it was very difficult to operate the system.

Q: Alright. Well, we'll pick this up in 1972?

CURRAN: No, we've gotten to 1974 now.

Q: So we're through 1974-

CURRAN: -on my way to Kabul, Afghanistan.

Q: Okay, we'll pick that up then. Great.

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

American policy in Afghanistan in 1974-1977 was to strengthen the Afghan economy (one of the worst in the world) by building roads, modernizing farming in the Helmand Valley, improving public health (with a birth control component), fight the war on drugs, improve public education at all levels, and work to improve relations between the Afghan government, Pakistan, and Iran. Also, the U.S. was supposed to keep an eye on the Russians and their plans.

To carry out this ambitious agenda, the U.S. mission was huge: at least 2,000 American employees and several thousand Afghans and third country nationals. The mission supported a school, a small hospital with two U.S. physicians and a British dentist, a commissary, two sports clubs, and an eating club. There were 3,000 Peace Corps volunteers in Afghanistan, a military attaché with an airplane, and several hundred AID employees and contractors with their families. All of the full-time American staff had their own homes with 100 % maintenance by the mission.

Ambassador Eliot and his extraordinary wife, Pat, did an amazing job of keeping the whole U.S. enterprise marching in step. Eliot's background and connections with Iran almost achieved an historic breakthrough in improved relations between Tehran and Kabul. [This daring initiative was thwarted by the Russian invasion in 1978-79.] In general though, the Eliots had their creative leadership eroded by a constant stream of difficulties associated with keeping so many Americans - most of them unable to communicate in the local language - content with their jobs and family lives. There just was too much sense of isolation, too much illness, and too much impatience with the difficulty of "making" the Afghans do things the American way. The Eliots worked patiently to reduce the size of the mission, to focus AID operations, to bring the Peace Corps back to realistic sizes and tasks, but time and tides were against them.

If the Russians had not invaded and destroyed all the infrastructure developed by the West; if the Iranians had not imploded; if the American government had had time away from the distracting transition from Nixon to Ford to Carter to focus on foreign affairs, things might have been different.

Q: Today is the 16th of February 1999. Ted, you're off to Kabul in 1974. How did that come about and what were you up to?

CURRAN: I was assigned to Kabul in 1974 at the request of Ted Eliot, who had been my boss in the Executive Secretariat. He wanted me for his DCM, deputy chief of mission, and it was interesting because, in retrospect, as you may recall from the last tape, I was working in the Office of Personnel Management, and the director general at that time, Nat Davis, suggested that I go and be ambassador in Oman. And I talked it over with my family and some friends, and I decided to go to Kabul for a couple of reasons. One was, I didn't see where Oman led to. It would have been nice to be called "ambassador," and I know lots of people who'd die for the title. But at that time I was young enough, so I felt that wasn't important. And I thought Kabul was a bigger show, which it was. And really, the most important reason, was that it really would have been very tough on my family to go to the Gulf. The girls were at an age where they would have had to go to boarding school, and I didn't think that was so great. And my wife wasn't too wild about being separated from the girls either. I think it was the right decision.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: Oman - I visited it later - was really a tiny little place, charming. It was a key place during the Gulf War but I would have been long gone by then.

Q: Excuse me, you were in Kabul from when to when?

CURRAN: I went in the summer of '74 and left in the summer of '77. It seems to me now, and looking back, I went to Kabul about 20 years after I entered the Service, and the Vietnam War was over, and Watergate was over. Nixon resigned in August, just after I got to Kabul. And I believe, looking back now, though I don't think I was so aware of it at the time, that it was the beginning of a transition for our country from the post World War II era, we-can-do-anything, we-can-manage-anything - the famous Kennedy line in his inaugural, "We will bear any burden" and so on in pursuit of our objectives. I think, as I look back on my notes from Kabul, we began to be aware that we actually couldn't do everything, and particularly our people, Americans - it's a wonderful country, but we really don't have a pool of people who are trained and ready to serve all over the world. Quite different, I think, from the British positions in the 19th century, where they sort of had God and Kipling on their side. I think we began to lose confidence in the ability to be a superpower. Or if we didn't lose confidence, we began to lose the ability or recognized the lack of it. In any even, as we go through this, I believe, now, reading these notes again, that it was a little inchoate but I began to sense this problem.

I'd like to start out by setting the scene in Kabul. Afghanistan is located in South Asia. It's north of Pakistan and India and south of the then USSR and east of Iran, all of which countries have had a long interest in what went on in Kabul.

The British called the struggle for influence in Central Asia - including Afghanistan - "The Great Game." Afghanistan in '74 was an oligarchy run by the military dictatorship. The oligarchy centered in the Mohammedzai family, which had been dominant in Afghanistan for about 100 years. A monarchy had been in place until 1972. Then one of the princes dismissed the King and set up a military dictatorship. The ruling family was the same as it had been under the Royal Family, the Mohammedzai, and the president when I went there, President -formerly Prince - Daoud, was in fact a first cousin of the King Zahir, whom he deposed. And Daoud and his brother, Naim, ran the country from about '72 to '78/'79, when they were murdered by the communist opposition. All the governors in the country, of which there were about 15, were personally appointed by Daoud, and they were mostly family; they were Mohammedzais. And then most of the key positions in the country were Mohammedzais, and Daoud had a very efficient secret police, and as a result, the place was really under wraps. It was very, very difficult to meet Afghans. Local officials were very much afraid that if they were seen in the company of a foreigner it would get back to the President, or at least the secret service, and there would be trouble and they wouldn't be able to keep their jobs. One of the devices that Daoud used for controlling people was, if someone got a little bit out of line or the family got out of line, the person who had a government job or even a business job was told to go stay home - no jail time, but effectively taken out of circulation, and in a country which is as poor as Afghanistan was - certainly one of the poorest countries in the world even then - this was quite a threat. That was brought home to me because my dad had had a medical student in the '30s, I think, or maybe early '40s, from Afghanistan, and my father took quite an interest in him and followed him after he left and gave me a note to hand to him when I got to Kabul. And I tried to deliver the note and wasn't allowed to, stopped at the gates and so on. And I finally got word to him that I was in the country and would like to call on him, and it took him a year to figure out whether he could do this, and we eventually met at a third party's house, and it was very formal and stiff. It was quite an amazing experience, a good introduction for me to personal relations in Afghanistan.

Q: I'm surprised. One thinks of Afghanistan as a country with a whole bunch of sort of feuding clans and all, and the fact that you could have a dictatorial apparatus put over this is quite a feat.

CURRAN: Quite an achievement, and it was done by this family over a period of 80 years. They came in in the late 19th century, and they gradually extended control, using members of their own family, and so it was almost a classic oligarchy. I just might mention some features about the place. You might want to think of Afghanistan as an elongated American football, and it was divided east to west in the middle by a spine of mountains, the foothills, more or less, of the Himalayas. In Afghanistan, they're called the Hindu Kush, which means literally 'Hindu Killers,' because in the "good old days" of the Moguls, who came from Kabul under their King, Babur, bearers were swept up in India and brought back to carry packs over the mountains, and they died, I suppose, by the hundreds. Therefore, the name of the mountain: Hindu Kush. Anyway, they ran east-west. On the southern-eastern part, south of the Hindu Kush, the area was dominated by a Pathan or Pushtu group who had also spilled over into Pakistan in what the British called

the Northwest Frontier area. And then there were a variety of Persian and Uzbek groups in the north and west, obviously the Persian groups next to the Iranian border centered around a town called Herat.

The official language in Afghanistan was Dari, or I think literally 'court language,' a Persian dialect, but most parts of the country spoke other dialects, either their own or Uzbek dialect or something related to Persian - very, very difficult to communicate. And I did learn some Dari, but really just about 1+, maybe 2, I got to eventually. The official religion was Islam, but the clergy was undereducated and most people were animists and/or worshiped local gods. The country was, as I mentioned before, one of the poorest of the world.

The main elements of the economy, if you could call it that, included some wheat growing, fruit farming (orchards, olives, whatnot), a little bit of oil and gas, which the Russians were developing in the northern part of the country, opium, and a very large livestock business - again, I use the word advisedly - run by the "Kuchis," or nomads, who managed herds of sheep and goats. The Kuchis would start in the spring or late winter, and drive their basic herd north and east up onto the Russian steppe. In most cases, I believe, the nomads were employed by wealthy individuals who gave the Kuchis a percentage of the herd increase in payment. Then the animals, mostly sheep, would breed and foal up there, and then they would drive them back in the fall to market. And depending on the year, they usually doubled the size of the herd. But these were spectacular sights, these herds being driven by caravans of Gypsies, basically, which I think they are. And so that was a big business, and then opium gum was a big business. You could grow opium poppies - I don't know if you've ever seen one; they look something like a tulip - obviously very easily, and the Hindu Kush were high enough so they caught the monsoon rains, which became snow, so the snow pack stored water for the country for the summer. If you had a poor winter, you had a poor harvest, but that was life there. Anyway, it was a bleak, broken-up, no-infrastructure place, to speak of, and really, looking at it academically, there was no American interest in Afghanistan.

Q: One always thinks of "The Great Game" that was played there, but did we at that time - I'm trying to capture the spirit of that time - was anybody talking about, well, the Soviets coming down through the mountains and on to God knows what, into Pakistan or bypassing Iran? I mean, was that part of our thinking at the time?

CURRAN: Well, as they used to say to us, I'm glad you asked that question. In my notes here - it's funny you should ask this - I have "Why was the U.S. in Kabul with a \$20 million aid program, 2000 Peace Corps volunteers, and a DOD airplane?" And the story really begins in the John Foster Dulles era, 1953 to 1957, when he wanted to set up a defensive alignment of countries around Russia - NATO, CENTO, SEATO. And Afghanistan was supposed to be, if not a part of CENTO.

Q: Central Treaty Organization.

CURRAN: I guess it's just the Central Treaty Organization. In any case, the Afghans

were clever enough, or foxy enough, not to sign on formally to CENTO, but, in good bargaining fashion, they agreed that they would accept some aid and then for this they would remain neutral and inclined to listen to whatever concerns we had about the Russians.

And you're correct. This was a version, if the implication of your question is correct, of the Great Game played in the 19th century, with the British trying to keep the Russians out of Persia and India. And they did, at considerable cost in treasure. There were three major wars in Afghanistan, the three Afghan Wars, and the Afghans won them all because it was hopeless for foreigners to fight a war there. The Afghans knew their hills and they'd disappear up in the mountains and they'd wait till you took an afternoon nap or looked the other way, and then they'd descend and slaughter the foreigners. It was really great "sport" for the Afghans.

So over the years, starting in the late '50s, the U.S. began to develop programs with the idea that we would help protect Pakistan and India. People would make the argument, and I'm sure I made it to visitors - that Karachi was a very important port, and presumably one could easily go to the southwestern towns of Zabid and Zeranjan and from there you go overland by vehicle to the Persian Gulf. But in point of fact, I now believe it was really not worth the effort we were putting into it.

Q: Were we sitting there in the country team meeting almost mulling over this and saying, "Is there any real validity to this and that?"

CURRAN: I'm sorry to say there wasn't, and I'm going to kind of talk a little bit about that because it's part of this thesis I've sort of begun talking about, which was that we kind of got trapped in the fact that we were all there and we had to justify the fact that we were there, even though, I think, if we'd really been hardheaded about it we would have said, "Well, we can achieve U.S. objectives with a much smaller presence."

During the early part of the Cold War, the U.S. started the business of trying to outbid the Russians for influence with the Afghan government. The Afghans were very skillful at encouraging our competition. We built a modern airfield in Kandahar, which is southwest of Kabul, and then the Russians began to equip the Afghan army. We built a road system which went from Herat in the west past Kandahar and up to Kabul and then on down to the Khyber pass. A terrific engineering feat. The Russians developed oil and gas in the north and also developed a fruit production system in the Jalalabad area in the eastern part of the country on the way to Pakistan. And the irony is that neither the U.S. or USSR really enjoyed much influence, after spending all this money. We convinced ourselves that we had a role, and when the Cold War justification began to be a bit threadbare, that the Russians would not be able - at least that was our view at the time - to seriously threaten Pakistan, the drug war took the Cold War's place, and we all began to write long messages about how to save the world from Afghan opium. I remember an interview I had with Roy Atherton, who was Assistant Secretary at the time, and I think Atherton in his heart of hearts knew that this was, you know, maybe overuse of U.S. resources, but his approach to me was he said, "You know, you're going to a difficult place," and so on,

“Just keep it quiet. That’s all I ask.”

Q: I might point out also in the context that you had Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State, who tended to see everything in East-West terms, and I would think that of all the Secretaries of State he would probably be the one who would be least receptive to the idea that a place on the border of the Soviet Union didn’t matter.

CURRAN: We’re getting ahead of ourselves a little bit. Kissinger came to Kabul to check it out because we were at that time trying to develop a formula which would have encouraged the Iranians to have more influence in Afghanistan, and we wanted to have Washington interest in this, and Kissinger came. But I’ll get to that a bit later.

Kabul was a city - of course nobody knew how many people lived there - have you ever been in Central Asia? It was basically a mud hut city. There was a sort of a modern downtown, which was called the New City, *Shar e Nau*, which had an Intercontinental Hotel; it had our embassy, it had some other modern office buildings which the Russians had built. But there was no sewage system in the city. There was no health system. There were some paved streets. There was endemic dysentery, and lots of tuberculosis.

There was a large international community, a big UN group, and about 40 embassies. Everybody had sold themselves on the notion that this was a pivotal place in the world. Rather than try to describe the physical scene, I recommend to anyone who wants to get a sense of the flavor should read the book by George MacDonald Fraser called *Flashman*.

Q: Oh, yes.

CURRAN: It’s his first book, and he describes very accurately what Kabul looks like today, and that was written, supposedly, a hundred years ago.

Q: The fictional hero was the second survivor of the massacre in the First Afghan War.

CURRAN: It was the First Afghan War (1839-1842).

Q: That’s a great series.

CURRAN: Well, the first book is the best, and very accurate as to a description of Kabul - even now. The U.S. community was a huge enterprise - housing, a school, a good embassy building. We had a commissary, a PX. We had sports clubs. We had a Pan Am office there, and they had a subsidiary called Ariana, which was the Afghan airways, but run by Pan Am, which would fly in and out with some security. The marvelous Pan Am representative in Kabul was named Charles Bennett, Charlie Bennett, who made a special effort to take care of us going to and from the States. And since it was about an 18-hour trip one way, it was nice to be well taken care of, the only time of my life when I’ve belonged to one of these airline clubs, courtesy of Mr. Bennett. But our family had a wonderful time in Kabul. Sara and Diana had a horse. They could ride. They had great sports at school. The school was okay academically, but not great. School teams traveled

to Pakistan and India to play soccer and softball. They look back on it as one of the best times they ever had.

I would say that the main issues that I had to worry about, besides trying to help manage this huge enterprise - I think all together we had 3,000 Americans there at the peak, including the Peace Corps volunteers - was the AID program. It was run by a very nice guy named Vince Brown, very able, but in an ironic sense he was trapped, because he had a \$20 million budget, and in those days, as now, if you get \$20 million in the beginning of the fiscal year, you're supposed to spend that by the end of the fiscal year, even though you might not think your expenditure was the wisest thing in the world, or you "lose" the money in your next budget. And Vince was a good spender of money, and he convinced himself that he was doing good work. It was difficult to get qualified people to serve in Kabul. The post was not popular because of the disease, the distance from home, etc., so to get people to serve in Afghanistan, the mission had to offer lovely housing, the PX, and the commissary I mentioned before. Of course, everybody had their own automobile sent in at government expense. In those days, perhaps you remember, in some places you had to get an exception to have a non-American vehicle, but in Afghanistan we had exceptions for everything, plus the 25 percent differential. And all this resulted in Americans really living a life of affluence, and it was so clear to the Afghans around that we were terribly privileged, and they were very angry about it. And I often heard from the AID people, I mean the Afghans who were involved in our aid program, they'd say, "Why don't you send off half these people and give us the money that they're soaking up by being here?"

The Russians, by way of contrast, lived in a huge compound, mostly out of sight, and their technical experts went various places, but when they lived in the field they lived in their own little encampments. So the Afghans hardly ever saw Russians, except on holidays when they came out and spent money at the Afghan bazaars, which was a very nice thing. So in a very funny way, the Russians were quite popular because they didn't seem to be lording it over the Afghans.

Now the individual aid programs, probably the U.S. showcase was the Helmand Valley program, southwestern, sort of generally the province of which Kandahar was the capital. And in order to provide water, AID built a dam up the Helmand River, in the foothills of the Hindu Kush, in a little place called Kajakai. An extraordinary American engineer, whom I knew very well and very much admired, John Givens, was the director of that project. He was one of the few people who was very down-to-earth and realistic about Afghans. He and his crew at the Dam lived with the Afghans and shared everything they had. They shared housing and meals, and everything was on an equal basis. And as a result, Givens was greatly admired by the Afghans. John didn't speak a word of Dari or Pushtu. He just spoke English, but he just found ways to show that he really cared what was going on, and of course the work was very high quality. John also built a tennis court there, and he and the Afghans had a little tennis club and they batted the ball back and forth. And a couple of them turned out to be pretty good players. When I went to visit there I usually took a case of tennis balls or something like that to show appreciation. The first time Givens heard that I played tennis was on a night we were having, I regret to say, quite a boozy party. The Afghans generally didn't drink, but Givens and I were doing our

share. At one point, Givens challenged two Afghans to a doubles match the next morning. I got out of bed with not enough sleep and much too much antifreeze in my system, and we went out on the tennis court. Givens, as we were walking to play - he had this wonderful Tennessee drawl - said, "I guess I ought to tell you, we're going to play for money. We're going to play for \$100." Well, I guess I wouldn't have been wiped out by it, but I never gamble for that amount of money. And the first set, these guys just tore us apart. I couldn't see the ball. But actually we managed to prevail in three sets, and John just laughed. He said, "I can see money means something to you."

Further down the valley, down in the Helmand, there was another story. We had a lot of Americans who were so-called experts from various parts of the U.S. trying to teach the Afghans how to grow wheat the right way and how to market their product. The central part of this effort was in a little town called Lashkargah, and there was a little dirt strip there, and our DOD airplane could fly down there, so often we'd make use of that. It made the trip a lot easier. But the difficulty was the Afghans already knew enough about farming and didn't care to have Americans lecture them on how to farm. There was a constant tension over this, and also it began to be pretty obvious, even to the untutored eye, there was a lot growing besides wheat down there. In these nice little irrigated farms you'd see these little tulip like structures everywhere, and the Afghans if you challenged them, they'd say, "Well, we don't have any doctors, so we have to have opium for the odd headache, toothache," whatever. Of course that was nonsense. You could see the camel caravans going down to the southwest loaded with opium gum. AID legislation prohibited use of AID-supported projects to grow drugs. The U.S. mission couldn't figure out what to do and looked the other way.

A second project area was what was called family health. This was a very ambitious effort to put what amounted to mini clinics in many of the larger towns. A component of the clinics was family planning, although no one ever said it. They called it the Well Baby Program, but they were teaching women birth control, and the conservative Muslims really were angry about this. And I can't underestimate how much trouble that caused.

Q: What type of trouble?

CURRAN: Clinics were trashed. I don't think we ever had anyone attacked, but we had a lot of threats. And the clerics would send in scrolls to President Daoud and say such and such a place is a troublemaking operation, and the clinic would shut down for a while and then AID would negotiate to get it started up again. The Afghans, some of the higher officials, particularly those I dealt with at the Foreign Ministry, couldn't understand why we were pushing this so hard, why it mattered to us how many Afghans there were. Of course, the mortality rate was just dreadful. I can't remember what the infant survival rate was, but I think the average lifespan for males was around 40 years, maybe even 35. It was just dismal.

Another big area we were active in was higher education. There was something called Kabul University, originally formed largely as a place to teach people to recite the Koran,

a religious institute really. So AID signed a contract with the University of Nebraska to send people out to help modernize Kabul University. Now the Afghans really liked this, and the reason is that part of the project description involved trips for the Afghans back to Nebraska. And if you live in a country like that and you have a chance to live in Nebraska for a year and maybe even stay in Nebraska, you grab it. So they loved that program, and the Nebraska faculty and staff over there were wildly popular in Kabul.

By the way, the Germans and the French had organized two very, very good secondary schools in Kabul for Afghans, and these schools were part of the development of higher education. Education programs probably would have led somewhere if there had been maybe 50 years more for them to function. But the problem with all assistance programs was that there was no real accountability. Nobody knew what they were supposed to be achieving besides “educating Afghans better,” and there was no data over what percentage studied medicine, law, and what percentage didn’t do anything. It was really too bad because anyone - and we had lots of critics that came through - would point to this and say, “Well, you’re just throwing money away and there’s no result.” And the answer was, “Oh, yes, there are results,” but in terms of better qualified people in the government, you couldn’t prove it. There were no numbers to prove it.

Q: My impression, looking at what I’ve noticed here in the States and all, is that in some ways the Afghans really took advantage of education more than, say, some other countries where you give education and it’s nice but there isn’t sort of the family commitment to education. For really a very backward country - correct me if I’m wrong - there was a real impulse to get a good education, and many did quite well.

CURRAN: You’re absolutely right as pertains to the elites. The ruling family was particularly adroit at taking advantage of these opportunities, as they would because they were in a position of influence. And when the big exodus took place, when Russian-backed government (1979-1984) expelled or killed this whole Mohammedzai clan, the refugees showed up here with terrific education, and many of them are very successful in the United States.

A case I had to referee is interesting now. A retired Foreign Service officer, Herb Lebezni, who had been in the legal division at the State Department. Lebezni set up a little consulting group, as many Foreign Service officers do, and he had a contract with AID to come to Kabul every year and pick 30 lawyers to come to the States to have a summer legal program. The idea was he would develop people who were friendly to the U.S., understood U.S. law. And one of the U.S. ideas which the Afghans were thinking about was developing a regularized legal system. Without a legal system you can hardly do anything, especially attract investment. Herb Lebezni set up a very good program, and there was only one problem. The people who he picked were supposed to meet a certain level of English. In my second year as DCM, somebody in the aid program blew the whistle on Lebezni and said he was picking people because the Ministry of Justice told him who to pick and they didn’t necessarily qualify in English. And I began looking at the test scores, and I found the allegation was correct. About three-quarters couldn’t pass a TOEFL test, even at a minimum level. So I said to the ambassador, “I don’t think this is a good practice.” He agreed. But in insisting on standards, a storm blew up, because

many people picked by Lebezni at the behest of the Minister of Justice were from very prominent families. The families really howled about it, and people having been, quote, "picked for the program" and then not going, and it's a disgrace, and so on and so on. The situation got very emotional and difficult, and Lebezni was very, very upset, and reported his feelings to Washington. A small incident can blow way out of proportion in posts where people are isolated and unhappy. Finally, a solution was negotiated, but it left a very bad taste in everybody's mouth, and it was too bad.

Another incident in the AID area, which also turned out to be very uncomfortable, was they had a showcase bridge in a rural community. It was probably a three-hour, four-hour jeep ride from Kabul. Somehow the village played some role in the back country trade and the governor asked for a bridge. The village was located on sort of a promontory, with a stream that went around the promontory, and in order to function in the role that the elders and the governor wanted, they needed a bridge to get across that river. They actually already had a bridge. It was a wooden bridge, poles and so on, and about every two years it would wash out in a flood. The American head engineer said, "We're going to build you a beautiful bridge." He got it done, but the Afghans all said to the American engineers, "You know, this is a beautiful bridge, but it's not going to stand up if we get one of these five-year torrents." And the American engineers are very indignant. I think there was some question about spending another million dollars and, you know, lengthening the abutment so that it would divert the water or something. Well, the flood came in one year, and the bridge washed out, and the Afghan engineers came into Kabul to report on this, and one of them was related to one of the people in the embassy, who told the ambassador, who blew up about it and summoned the AID director over, Vince Brown. I still remember, it was a terrible shouting match. And the funny thing - not so amusing at the time, but in retrospect - the AID director wasn't so angry about the bridge as he was angry about the fact that it had been discovered.

Assistant directors from AID came out... Bob Nooter - he's still around - managed to get everybody cooled off. But these instances of Herb Lebezni's legal project and this bridge and other things - the clinics - I mean, we tried hard, our people meant well, but almost none of them spoke the local language. A few of the ex Peace Corps volunteers spoke the language well. What the Afghans really wanted was money and things. They didn't want advice. And we are just good advice givers, and if we're paid to go to a country like that to give advice, we like to give advice.

Q: Well, when you're talking about \$26 million, a significant portion of that went to actually Americans.

CURRAN: Absolutely - 20 million it was. And the Afghans weren't slow in pointing that out to us. And now we get into the thing I talked about earlier. We're in a trap. You've got a budget, and you just wouldn't have proposed to Washington that we send half the AID people home and hand the money over to the Afghans. You know how far that would have gone. So it was kind of a no win for all sides.

Now I'd like to just say a few words about the Peace Corps. There were three thousand volunteers in the country in 1974, many more than the Afghans wanted, but Peace

Corps/Washington had their various country quotas and insisted that the embassy fill them. So we did send the volunteers out, and mostly they taught English in rural areas. And quite a few of them did a great job. I mean, American kids are really wonderful about going out and living in mud huts and living like the people, and generally they were okay. But the volunteers in Kabul, where there were, I think, maybe 500 Peace Corps volunteers, didn't have enough to do, so they hung out at our club or played tennis or they went to the movies. They were expected to be in the classroom for an hour or two a day and that was it. I mean, for grown people who are idealistic, it was just a festering problem.

Mixed with the Peace Corps was another kind of foreign presence problem - conservative Christian. A group of fundamentalist Christians had decided to convert the Afghans to Christianity, and their first attempt was to build a church in downtown Kabul, which the King, I guess, had authorized. And they put up a very large building with a very bright blue roof, and I think that would have been okay, but then they put a large cross on the top. And one weekend the Afghans came and just tore it down - bulldozed it. And that was a setback for the missionaries, but from there they sent missionaries out to remote villages where the Peace Corps kids were, and it didn't take very long for the clergy - that is, the Muslim clergy - to report back to Kabul that "bad things" were going on. All foreigners were seen as disruptive. Fortunately, none of them were injured or killed. Senator Percy got very interested in this issue. I know Chuck Percy pretty well, and he's a wonderful man.

Q: I've interviewed him, and he's a very lovely man.

CURRAN: He's a lovely man. The Christian missionaries were his constituents from Illinois, and they would say, "Gee, Senator, we're just trying to do the Lord's work and the embassy's not helping us." So the first year I was there, I handled a lot of correspondence, and finally when I was back in the summer of 1975, I went to see the senator, at the request of the Department, and I kind of laid out what the problem was, and he was pretty understanding about it, but he also said to me, "Look, I've got my problems, too." And eventually the missionaries lost interest and left. They just couldn't stay there.

Q: Obviously. Trying to proselytize Muslims just doesn't work.

CURRAN: Anyway, it wasn't the Peace Corps' fault, but the combination of underemployment, these rural conservative conditions, the mix of the Christians - all bred trouble. And the Director who was there just as I arrived and had let, pretty much, his idea was, "Well, laissez faire. Let's try to get by and not make big issues. Don't beat on the volunteers. If they want to play tennis all day long, let 'em." And he tried to keep everybody happy.

A new director came in, a fanatic, hairshirt purist named Dick Haig, and Haig's eyes popped when he saw what was going on. I don't think he was religious, but he was very conservative, and his mission was, "By God, we're going to have a "real" Peace Corps

operation here.” His first act, when he had unpacked his hairshirt was to ban the volunteers from going to our club or having anything to do with the American embassy or U.S. mission. Well, it just didn’t work. I mean, the volunteers revolted, and lots of bad blood was created, but Haig dug in his heels, wouldn’t compromise, wouldn’t let them have cars, and insisted that all Peace Corps had to ride in buses. Anyone who’s ever ridden in an Afghan bus would never do it again. People are packed into old buses, filthy, and God knows the condition of the passengers, and so on. So anyway, the U.S. mission had to send him out. The Peace Corps director at the time was a very, very feisty lady named Lorette Ruppe. And so on my second visit to Washington, my 1976 R&R, I was summoned by her and really read the riot act. Who did the embassy think it was changing Peace Corps directors, and so on, and she was really angry. So I listened. I couldn’t do much else. And at the end of this harangue, I, at Ted Eliot’s suggestion, said, “Well, Mrs. Ruppe, why don’t you come to Kabul and visit? You can see for yourself, and if this is the wrong approach, I guess we’ll have to discuss it.” Well, she didn’t come herself, but she did send her deputy, a very nice gentleman, and he saw at once the problem. First of all, there were too many volunteers, and you couldn’t exclude Peace Corps volunteers from the Western community - I mean, that just wasn’t equity. So he reduced the numbers. I think by the time I left there were less than a thousand Peace Corps volunteers there. Even so, they were underemployed, but anyway, there were a lot fewer. And of course, they were allowed to take part in Western activities.

I cite that as a bridge to the DEA operation, the Drug Enforcement Agency. We had, while I was there, two door-kickers as directors.

Q: Would you explain what a “door-kicker” is?

CURRAN: They were agents who had worked in the slums of the U.S., and their method of interrogating people or finding suspects would usually be to knock on the door, and if there wasn’t a prompt answer to kick the door down. So therefore we called them “door kickers.” The first one - I’m so sorry, I don’t remember their names, probably just as well - got to town, of course, didn’t speak any known language but English, and that not very well, and he zeroed in on the Peace Corps volunteers. Instead of going after the people growing the drugs, he zeroed in on the Peace Corps volunteers and “busted” one of them. That means he tried to arrest them. And I remember, he called me, and said he’d caught a Peace Corps volunteer abusing drugs, so he said he wanted him put in handcuffs and taken out of the country. I said, “Well, let’s see now. Maybe we’d better check our legal authority here.” Anyway, I finally got the Peace Corps volunteer into my office, with this fellow, and the Peace Corps volunteer said, “Well, I wasn’t smoking marijuana. I was smoking a bidi.” That’s a local, very fragrant cigarette - I’m not sure what that sound stands for - which smells something like marijuana. He showed me the cigarettes he had in his pocket. So I sent him away, and I said to the DEA man, “You know, I don’t think we can arrest anyone, number one; number two, it looks to me like it’s innocent.” I also asked, “Do you know the difference? Can you smell the difference between this stuff and marijuana?” He admitted he couldn’t and he backed down, so we got over that. But he was a very roughneck guy, and he tried to go out on an opium bust with some of his Afghan colleagues, and they got caught - that is, they were ambushed.

And the next DEA representative who came was, I would say, a more reasonable person, and he decided he would “put heat,” as he put it, on the local governors to stop these camel caravans carrying drugs. And the DEA man and another embassy officer and I drove to a town called Zabid, in the southwestern part of the country, which is quite close to a town called Zerange, and we “amused” ourselves by singing “Home, Home on Zerange” while we were on this trip. And we went down to meet the governor, a very competent English-speaking official out in the middle of, the end of East Succotash, Afghanistan. And he said, “I’m really glad of your interest,” he said to this DEA man, “and if you’ll come with me at sunset, I think I can show you what my problem is.” So we got in this official’s jeep, a rickety old vehicle, barely able to move, and we creaked and groaned up a sort of a hill overlooking a plain. At about 7 p.m., a fleet of Mercedes trucks escorted by air-conditioned Land Rovers with machine guns mounted on the tops came down the river valley loaded with opium gum. These men on the Land Rovers looked like pirates - mean, vicious-looking people. And the governor gave the DEA man a nudge in the ribs and said, “Now, you know, if you want me to stop this, I’ve got to have armor, people, money...” and so on. That was the end of that trip. We went back.

But it coincided with a visit by a Congressman Wolff from New York.

Q: Lester Wolff?

CURRAN: Lester Wolff, good for you. And Lester Wolff was stimulated by what he heard about the drug trade, and came to visit. He and the DEA representative made the rounds and Wolff decided that the answer was an alternative for farmers instead of growing drugs. So he had us send in a cable proposing a five-billion-dollar program-

Q: Five-billion-dollar program?

CURRAN: Yes, to pay farmers not to grow poppies but to grow something else, perhaps sorghum. Well, the State Department gave a tepid reception to that cable. And that was the end of any serious effort to deal with the opium growing. We did one modest thing: under U.S. law, it was legal to buy some of this opium gum and send it off to drug companies to make legal medicine. But these purchases didn’t even dent the supply leaving Afghanistan.

Q: Were you running into young Americans who were sort of on their wander-year, who would come to Afghanistan and then load up with enough to maybe make tuition for their graduate studies or to keep them happy or something like that?

CURRAN: There were certainly a lot of travelers, “world-travelers” they were called, and they did come out to enjoy the drug scene, but because the standards for the kind of stuff they were smoking and injecting were so mixed, a lot of them got in to very serious health problems, and several of them died. In fact, in our own school we had high-school kids getting into trouble. I suppose it’s possible that some of them loaded up to sell the stuff, but I think most of it was just sort of young gypsies. The ambassador’s son was

involved in a problem - this is kind of by-the-bye. Ted Eliot is as straight a shooter as they come, and has a lovely family. The summer after I got back in '77, one son was attending Colorado College. The phone rang at 3:00 a.m. in my house here in Washington, and it was Peter Eliot on the phone, and he said, "I've got a little problem here. Some police officers want to arrest me." And I said, "Well, do they have a warrant?" And he asked, and they didn't. I said, "Okay, you tell them to go get a warrant, and then you meet them in the dean's office tomorrow morning." And in the meantime, I got a lawyer to be there, too. Well, it turned out that one of Peter Eliot's "well meaning" friends had put some hash - hashish - in a map tube, and when he went off to go to college, the boy slipped the tube into his effects, and the dogs at the Denver airport sniffed the stuff out. The agents picked up the tube and went to the addressee, and they wanted to put the arm on him. He swore he knew nothing about it. They found a palm print on the map tube, and he submitted to having his palms printed, and fortunately for him, it turned out not to be his palm print, and he got off. But that's the kind of thing that probably went on.

USIS had a very good public affairs officer in Kabul, a guy named Jerry Verner, a lot of Russian experience. Jerry was a very hard worker. He very much appreciated the role of USIS, and they did some things quite well. One of the most effective things USIS did was hire the spouses of prominent government officials to work as local employees, and therefore they had a lot of influence in getting their programs done. Unfortunately, Jerry had a staff which was, at best, a C+ staff - unhappy officers who were sent there more or less for punishment than for any achievements.

The Defense attaché mainly ran the airplane. We first had Colonel Hutchinson and a Convair and then later a Beechcraft. The DOD aircraft gave the U.S. an extra dimension. For example, the U.S. was concerned about how much Russian armor and so on was around the country. Also, the plane was a great, great convenience to be able to visit the outlying governors. The cities around the country that were critical were, starting in the northeast, Kunduz and then west of that Mazar Sharif and then Herat, Kandahar, and Kabul was kind of a circuit. And those were where the most important governors were. And to be able to go out and back in a day and avoid the dangerous road trips was really a great benefit. The Convair, however, began to wear out, and it developed a disconcerting habit of swallowing a valve in one of its two engines. One such incident occurred as I was flying back from Herat with the governor and his wife, and the engine stopped right over the highest Hindu Kush mountains. I must say, it was one of the few times in my life when I was looking back at my life and regretting some of the mistakes I made. But we got safely back to Kabul.

The Convair had a great merit in that it could, because it was an older airplane and a prop gasoline combustion engine, it could land on rough terrain, like Lashkargah. The new airplane, when it arrived, was a Super King Beech, and couldn't land on dirt runways. Whether I was a jinx or not, the first trip I was on an early flight and all the electricity went out on the plane. Luckily, the engines kept running, but we lost our radar and radio. If it had been bad weather, it might have been difficult. We had to lower the wheels by hand, not an experience I recommend.

Q: Speaking about the military attachés, did they ever talk about the military terrain and the importance of the Soviet threat there, using their expertise?

CURRAN: Well, they certainly did, and as it turned out, the Russians were able to move substantial armor down from the Soviet Union through a tunnel the Russians had built through the Hindu Kush, and the military correctly pointed to two things. One was you could move armor through that tunnel. It was built with the tanks in mind. But the second thing they pointed out was interdicting that traffic wouldn't be very difficult because the tunnel went through one of the most difficult terrains in the country, and as the Afghan guerillas proved later, they could with one dynamite stick blow up the tunnel, and that was that.

But, yes, we were watching the Russians, and I thought that the military - and I think generally military officers - are a terrific asset to our embassies. I mean, they're well trained, they're well disciplined, and they know why they're there, and they have kind of a specific task, and running an airplane is pretty specific.

I also would like to say a few things about the CIA people in Kabul. In general, I think the Agency, CIA people, like USIA and like the consular service and like the military, are very good to work with. They're well trained, good morale, good spirit, they know what they're doing, they have a defined task. In Kabul, their work was mainly trying to obtain defectors from the Russian and East European communities. And of course, that's very "Cold War," and everybody knows how that's done and so on. The first station chief they had was a very, very good team player and very good to be around and sensitive. The second station chief considered himself an intellectual. He studied Chinese while he was in Kabul and was quite gifted, if that's the word, in speaking in Confucian riddles in staff meetings, which made quite an impression but it didn't lend too much to what was going on. He was a very bright guy, and he's still around. I'd rather not use his name.

Q: No, no. Well, what about China? You know, you've got that little appendix, or whatever you want to call it, that actually abuts on China.

CURRAN: Right.

Q: And we've just started opening up to China in this period. Did China play much of a role?

CURRAN: Well, the short answer is no. They had a very large compound there, kept very much to themselves. There are two stories which might be of interest. One was that, while Mao was still alive, Pan Am was thinking about going into Beijing via the big airport in Kandahar, where they could refuel and then fly to Urumchi, which is in northwestern China, and then on to Beijing. And I went with Charlie Bennett in one of the 727s they had up for a visit to sort of look Urumchi over, and I don't think we were on the ground more than two hours, but it was very clear that Urumchi was no place to fly in a multi-million dollar airplane. It was a very rough strip, and no fueling facilities.

And the Chinese were very suspicious. You can imagine. The local officials were very suspicious and nervous about the visit, so it never came to anything.

One interesting thing that happened, as China after Mao's death began to open up, I got a message from some kind of intermediary that the Chinese ambassador wanted to see me. And after getting permission from Washington, I went to see him, or I think we met at a hotel or something. It was a very circumspect meeting, on his part. And he said that Zhou En-lai was coming to a position of more prominence - of course, this was after the "Ping-Pong Diplomacy," and as you point out, as I already mentioned, Kissinger and Rogers and Nixon had gone to China - and he said that Zhou En-lai had known my father and wanted my father to come back to China. So I was of course very pleased and I had a very nice talk with this man, and he told me that China was changing, and I wrote a cable about this. I think the substance of my cable was no news to Washington, but anyway it was quite interesting to me. I told them how to get in touch with my father, and I told my father what had happened, and they did invite him to China. But just about that time, my mother had passed away - it was the winter of '76 - and my father was then in his 80s, and he didn't really feel like making a trip. I mean, he was understandably upset, losing his wife, so he thanked them and so on but said he couldn't do it. So Zhou sent someone. They found one of his medical students that worked with him in China, and she flew to Boston, took him to dinner, and gave him a medal, which is up in the Harvard Medical School Library. And I was very touched and I thought it was a very lovely gesture, and we tried in vain to find out when my father's path crossed with Zhou En-lai, and I can't find any record. My father saw thousands of people when he was a medical missionary in China and then was with the American Board for Military Aid to China and was also on the Marshall mission, so he probably ran into him at some point.

Q: Enough to make an impression.

CURRAN: My guess is he probably treated him in some way, after the Second World War maybe. Anyway, it was a nice moment for my dad. He missed my mother very much. They were a team for 53 years.

Overall, Ted Eliot really did a terrific job in running that mission, and I'm not saying it just because I'm a friend of his. He had to deal with an isolated community, very difficult, things going on, too many visitors coming in to see for themselves; but he kept his morale up and our morale up, and he was very good at improving the dialogue with the Afghan government. He spoke pretty good Persian, which the Afghans appreciated, although we teased him a little bit because he spoke the language with an Iranian accent, and the Iranians were widely regarded as effeminate by the Afghans. Eliot is anything but effeminate!

Q: Sort of like speaking with a lisp.

CURRAN: And they used to quote a poem - I think it's Omar Khayyam - where the poet says, "There's a boy across the river with a bottom like a peach. Alas I cannot swim."

Well, anyway, to be politically correct, you know, we wouldn't have discussed it, but there was in the Eastern cultures - I suppose everybody knows this - there's a lot less tension about sexual relations between males than there is in some other cultures.

Eliot's core idea was to improve the Afghan-Iranian dialogue, to get the Iranians interested particularly. And the Iranians had some interests in Afghanistan. They were interested in Helmand water, and they would have, I think, done some joint projects. There was a very good Iranian ambassador in Kabul. And I think things were inching along in that direction, especially when Kissinger came out and stopped in Kabul (early 1976). It was quite a visit - you know, when the Secretary of State travels, and particularly the imperial Dr. Kissinger, airplanes came in ahead of time with trucks and guns and armored Cadillacs and so on. The Afghans' eyes were popping right and left about this. And Kissinger came in and he and Daoud got along pretty well. Daoud wasn't swayed by much. He knew another *capo* when he met one, and they had a nice talk, and Daoud said to him, you know, "We're standing here holding back the Russian menace, and so we need your help." And Kissinger responded appropriately. What I remember about Kissinger's remarks - he came and talked to the embassy community, and he mentioned the fact that (you know, I was there) and he said that when I was in the State Department in the Secretariat, and he, Kissinger, was running the NSC, he had always remembered me as a bridge - pause - "because vee [we] could valk [walk] all over him." So Kissinger came and went. Indira Ghandi came for a visit. She was, surprisingly to me, anyway - I had a sort of tough cold feeling of what she would be like, and she wasn't - she was charming and pleasant and delightful company and I spent an evening chatting with her. Hank Byroade was the ambassador to Pakistan. He came up to visit. We thought of him as being sort of the John Wayne of the Foreign Service. I think he was the youngest general appointed during the Second World War, a real man's man.

Q: Also a ladies' man.

CURRAN: Byroade had served as ambassador, and knew both Daoud and Naim very well, and the only time that I ever was at a social occasion was the night Byroade came back, stayed with Eliot at the ambassador's residence, and Naim came to dinner and I was there also. A couple of things about the residence. There was some kind of tradition from the Byroade era that high-level gents would come to dinner, and then they'd go out after dinner and have a pee in the Garden and then talk, presumably away from any bugs or servants or anything like that. So they did this. We all went out after dinner and dutifully peed on the petunias and talked to the extent that we could. Naim spoke a little English, which was lucky because Byroade just spoke John Wayne-ese.

Q: In African posts this was known as "going out and toasting Africa." This was Kenya.

CURRAN: Now, when Byroade was ambassador in Kabul, he had a mistress, who was the wife of the Yugoslav ambassador, and Mrs. Byroade was in residence. So the Yugoslav lady was smuggled in through the servants' entrance to the guest bedroom, and Byroade and she consorted, and then she was smuggled out again. And she eventually became the new Mrs. Byroade, and I don't know what happened to poor first Mrs. B. But the servants were still talking about that one.

There were some other sort of notable visitors. Part of the highway we built went down through something called the Kabul Gorge, on the way down to Jalalabad. It was a drop of about, oh, it must have been a couple of thousand feet down a very rough canyon, and somehow our American engineers built this road - very, very treacherous road to drive, and Afghans always drove it with great alacrity and recklessness. And two of our families were involved in a very serious car crash. They were really smashed up and it was pretty clear they couldn't be treated in Afghanistan. So the military in Frankfurt flew in a C-5, and I'd never seen one before - a huge plane. And it flew over Kabul, and the crew flew over Kabul several times to look at the airfield and figure out a landing procedure. It was a good strip, but anyway, they wanted to be absolutely sure, you can imagine. So this thing flew over several times. I suppose it was about 5,000 feet up. And it didn't quite blot out the sun, but that's the sort of general feeling you had. And by the time it landed, there was a great crowd to see what this was all about at the airport. And everyone was waiting. The Afghans, I think, imagined that some tremendously senior important person with glittering medals and so on would leap out of this plane. So after they finally got parked and the little ladder came down, out popped this 22-year-old, and he was the chief pilot. The Afghans just couldn't get over a young person with such authority. Anyway, the people were loaded on the plane, and it saved their lives. I'm sure all the Americans' lives were saved by this. It was a very generous thing for the military to do.

We also had a salesman for the DC-10 - I guess McDonnell-Douglas at the time - brought one of their airplanes out to try to sell it to the Afghan airline. He gave everybody rides. And that was fun to be packed into a plane with the whole government. I amused myself by wondering what would happen if the plane went down. It would certainly have finished off that particular regime.

And Prime Minister Bhutto came up for a visit, after the Byroade visit. Byroade convinced him that he wouldn't be scalped, and he came up, and he and Daoud had a pretty good talk. So, just coming back to the kind of policy overview, I mean, we had the Afghans and the Pakistanis talking to one another, the Iranians, and I think if that had continued, something better would have happened, certainly better than the demolition of the infrastructure and the people that was carried out under the Russian auspices.

1977 was a pretty difficult year for me because my father passed away, and at about the same time, my wife had to be medevaced because she had very severe dysentery and bilharzia, and the antibiotics for treatment ruined her digestive system. Anyway, it was pretty serious, and we determined that the children would stay with me, because of school and we didn't have really a house to move back to. Raising teenage girls in Afghanistan and trying to help run the embassy was a pretty big burden. But out of the blue I was asked by the new leadership in Washington - Secretary Cy Vance, who was in the State Department, and John Reinhardt, who was head of USIA - to come back and help manage the Carter Reorganization Plan #2, which moved CU (Cultural Affairs) out of the State Department and into a new agency to be called the U.S. International Communications Agency. I accepted the new job and my daughters and I left. Kabul was really a tough place to have worked, but it had an even worse future. I think the things

that the kids and I and my wife remember, looking back, are Bamiyan, the town with giant Buddhist statues in the center of the country; the Mazar Sharif Mosque, which was where the Prophet's son-in-law, Ali, supposedly is buried; Herat, which had a beautiful old *madraseh*, they called it, with lovely pillars; the minaret of Jam, which is right in the middle of the Hindu Kush, a beautiful mosque; the Khyber Pass, of course, on the way to Peshawar; and my daughter remembers fondly walking the British retreat route, which she did in her junior year in high school there in Kabul. And probably no American in our lifetimes will ever see this stuff again.

Q: I have just a couple of questions.

CURRAN: Sure.

Q: What about dealing with the government? We have political officers, economic officers; it sounds like a difficult place. I mean, you couldn't really talk to opposition or anything like that. How about just dealing with the government itself?

CURRAN: The one time I got into trouble in Kabul was when the Foreign Minister, whose name was Wahid Abdullah, heard that I had met with some family representatives of what amounted to an opposition. They were one of the elements who led the opposition to the Russians, and we should have been talking to them, but Abdullah made such a scene about it that we then backed away from meeting with anybody in the country. The political officer dealt with the Foreign Ministry. It was a very informal place. You would walk in there and rap on people's doors. If they were around you could talk with them. My interlocutor was a fellow named Samad Gaus. He had a British mother. The father had married on the diplomatic circuit. I think I met her once in three years. The mother was very Afghanized and never came out unless she was heavily shrouded. Gaus had a wonderful sense of humor and was very easy to deal with most of the time. Other political officers dealt with more junior people. Economic people and AID people dealt with the Ministry of Economics, a man who lives here now, a former economics minister. The intelligence people concentrated mostly on the East European and Russian market, as it were. And I don't remember that we had difficulty getting our message across to the Afghans. They could come to our receptions, as long as they were official, and one device that worked pretty well for seeing Afghans that was USIS used to send movies around in those days, and we would have a movie evening and not invite just the official you were interested in but his whole family. And they'd come and have popcorn and watch a movie, and they really enjoyed it and didn't feel it was threatening at all. And the lights would go down, and the servants would slip around and ask them if they'd like a little "English tea," (which meant Scotch), and most of them did, had a nice stiff drink while in the dark.

Q: What about women?

CURRAN: Well, the women were hardly liberated. This Mohammedzai family had some women who were at least educated. There were high schools, as I mentioned earlier, the German and the French schools, but they particularly favored the French school, I'm not

sure why. But I'm trying to think, I don't believe I can remember any woman with any position of authority in the country.

Q: Did what is now the ruling group -

CURRAN: The Taliban.

Q: The Taliban - did that raise its head or anything?

CURRAN: No, and certainly there was conservative clergy, but they were conservative in the sense of being extremely rural mountain people rather than politically radicalized.

Q: Okay, well then we'll pick this up the next time. We're talking about 1977. You're back working for this new-

CURRAN: It's a joint task force.

Q: -joint task force, USIA, cultural affair, and that sort of thing. Great.

REORGANIZATION OF USIA AND STATE/CU NEAR EAST/SOUTH ASIA AFFAIRS

The last years I served in Washington took place almost entirely during the Carter administration. The U.S. had emerged from the Nixon/Ford years with considerable doubt about the national leadership. President Carter tried to make a new start. Personal values and religious conviction played a large part in his make-up. And the new president took on some tough international issues: Mid-East peace; a Panama Canal treaty; energy policy - among others.

There had been years of discussions about the separation of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs - which had responsibility in Washington for the various exchange programs - and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), which managed the exchange programs overseas through the USIS (as USIA posts were named overseas). Someone convinced the President that it would be more efficient to transfer State/CU into the U.S. Information Agency and also to rename the new entity. The name picked was the U.S. International Communication Agency (USICA). The new name pleased no one and the consolidation infuriated the cultural and educational community - led by Senator Fulbright - who likened the change to throwing academic purity to the propaganda wolves.

As director of the consolidation, I took part in a crash course in dealing with anger at various levels, all without much interest or support from the administration. Somehow, the consolidation was completed.

For the next four years, I was director of the Near East/South Asia Bureau of USICA, a collection of 25 countries from Bangladesh to Marrakesh. The Camp David Accords, the Iran Revolution, the hostage drama, the murder of the U.S. ambassador in Kabul, a tense and terrible assault on the embassy in Islamabad, two major corruption problems in Morocco, and the Sadat assassination made my colleagues and my life extremely busy at this time. The privilege of working with Hal Saunders and Peter Constable at State and with the professional officers in USICA/NEA made this period one of the most satisfying in my career.

The defeat of President Carter by Governor Reagan and the wholesale removal of many Foreign Service professionals - including Saunders - and their replacement by political appointees marked the speed-up of a process which had started in 1965 but now assumed significant standing. By the 1990s, political appointees were being inserted into State Department jobs at the assistant secretary level and below, a marked change from the years before 1965. The cost to foreign affairs management is considerable.

CURRAN: I came back in June of '77, and if we have time this morning, I'd like to cover the period of two Washington assignments, from 1977 to 1982.

Q: Okay, your first job in Washington was what in this period?

CURRAN: Well, the Carter Administration had come into office in the early winter of '77, January '77, and one of the early projects that someone had thought up - and there had been a lot of studies on the matter of integration of all the USIA functions into one agency, and this particularly meant taking the Cultural Exchanges Bureau out of the State Department, State/CU, and putting it in what would be called a new agency, the U.S. International Communications Agency, USICA.

Q: Who did you work with?

CURRAN: John Reinhardt, who was the new director of USIA - soon to become USICA - a career officer. John had been head of State's Public Affairs Bureau. His deputy at State, Charlie Bray, also a Foreign Service officer, came over to be Reinhardt's deputy. They were looking for people who had both State and USIA background, I suppose my name popped up on the screen.

Q: Would you talk about this time, what you're working on now?

CURRAN: Yes, I'd like to introduce it. This particular five-year period for me was dominated by two events: one, this reorganization matter, and the second was the fall of the Shah and the consequences of several of my colleagues. I also would like to say that this was a very unpleasant period in my life, and some of it was due to my own naivete and lack of experience. I came back from Afghanistan having had a very fascinating tour with Ted Eliot and with the NEA bureau backstopping us, and as I look back on it now, up to that point in my career I'd always had job experiences where I felt I trusted the people who were my superiors and I also felt that they trusted me. And as I found out when I started into this new situation, I didn't really adequately assess the different paradigm of work relationships which I was about to encounter. It happened to be good for me in the long run, but at the time it was quite difficult.

Q: Like a visit to the dentist.

CURRAN: Well, yes, at least - or maybe the transplant surgeon. I would say the main two goals set out for me in the summer of 1977 were to set up a design for the new agency, U.S. International Communication Agency (USICA), and assist the transfer of State/CU into USICA. The USICA title was unfortunate - it sort of got everything off on the wrong foot, because "communications" or international communications in foreign languages usually came across as technical or "intelligence." There were good reasons to think of a new name, but the President had made up his mind, and that was that. So the first task was to design a new USICA, with all the components, including the CU bureau (to be taken out of State). And the second task was then to kind of implement the design once it was improved.

I returned from Kabul in June. My father, who had passed away in January, was buried on a lovely hillside in Cornwall, Connecticut, and I went to work in July. My family went off to Michigan, which was in a funny way a blessing because the first stage of this work was very intense, so I stayed in Wingate Lloyd's basement - they were away for the

summer - and just worked around the clock.

To design USICA, there were three phases: to design the structure; to blueprint the crosswalks, i.e., who went where, how the grades would be crosswalked, and how the various responsibilities would be laid out. And then I tried to educate everybody in the bureaucracy on what was going to happen, and got their suggestions; those two phases went well. The third phase, which turned out to be the first brick wall that we hit, was how were we going to put all of these new people together, where would we find the space to put the new agency? Working with Peter Szanton, the White House liaison, we began to implement the whole process. One surprise: I had no idea initially how many cooks were interested in stirring the new soup.

I want to mention a few of the other cooks besides Peter Szanton stirring the broth. Obviously the President and the White House staff were interested from time to time. Of course, Reinhardt and Bray, as director and deputy director of USICA; the head of CU, who at that time was Joe Duffey (one of the great ironies of history is that having resigned as he did, because he didn't like the change in taking CU out of state, he's now resigned because he doesn't like USIA going back into State); Senator Fulbright and his staff, Carl Marcy, were very important players; the staff of the CU bureau got to be more and more involved and John Thomas, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for OPR (Operations), was in charge of space for State, turned out to be a pretty important player. By Christmas of '77 we had a good joint State-USIA working group on implementation. USIA officers were all very helpful and creative. We completed our Congressional briefings. We had a new budget. It got OMB approval. And I was beginning to think we were home free. How mistaken I was.

The first roadblock, as I mentioned, was that no one really had thought about - space. Things began to unravel in January of '78. The White House sent me and I can't remember who else, a group of about three or four of us over to GSA to meet the head of GSA, who was an Atlanta real estate developer.

Q: GSA being-

CURRAN: The General Services Administration in charge of all property in the government.

Q: In the government, so it's not just State.

CURRAN: Correct - GSO had governmentwide responsibility for space. And we had a written order from the President to find space for the new agency. And we met in the absolutely palatial office of the director. He looked at the President's order, scratched his head, and said, "Well, I can't deal with this." "Well," we said, "who if not you?" He said, "Well, I just can't deal with it." And that was all he said. So we departed, went back to the White House. I didn't go to the President, but somebody went to the President and said that the director of GSA "Won't deal with this." And the President said, "Well, we'd better think this over." So finally the answer came back that State and USIA should work

this out.

Q: By the way, where was USIA located?

CURRAN: At that time it was at 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, but there was no additional space available there. CU occupied a lot of square feet in New State. If you're going to move people, even with some reductions in staff, you have to find places for them. You can't just stuff them into a building. So there was quite a struggle in which I was involved, with John Thomas, who very clearly had State interests at heart and wanted that space that CU was vacating and kept offering us pieces of property around town which represented significant but, in my mind, not satisfactory percentages of the space required. We finally agreed on a formula that 80 percent of the space that had been occupied at State would be given to us by State in the interim till we could figure out a new building. I went to Director Reinhardt at that time and said, "We've got to be very careful about this because I think what's going to happen is that you'll be in a big meeting somewhere with a lot of people, and they'll ask you to sign off on less than 80 percent of the space, so check with your working group before you sign anything." And I was more prophetic than I realized, because John Thomas took him to lunch on the eighth floor somewhat later and got him to sign off on 60 percent of the space, which Thomas took great delight in showing me as soon as possible. I was really cross about it, and I told the director. Maybe I should have resigned. I don't know. I guess I thought I was so important to the process I couldn't resign. But anyway, I made it very clear that my tenure in that job was limited if this was the way we were going to proceed.

Q: Did you have any feeling just that Reinhardt was weak or were there other - sometimes there are trade-offs, you know?

CURRAN: Well, since I wasn't at the lunch, I don't know. I think when an executive - this is one of the lessons I learned, anyway - is out in front in a negotiation like that and makes some kind of decision which is contrary to what his staff recommendations were, there ought to be some communication afterwards as to why that had to happen.

Q: Did you get any feedback?

CURRAN: No.

Q: What did he say?

CURRAN: Perhaps he was offered a proposal he couldn't turn down. What it was I don't know.

So anyway, the approval chart went through, and the word got around like wildfire about the space limitations. And Dr. Duffey, who was head of CU, was very upset about it and resigned, publicly. Now, Joe Duffey has a history of involvement in Democratic politics. He ran for senate in Connecticut as a Democrat, and he also worked for Bill Clinton in one of his early campaigns - or maybe Clinton worked for Duffey in one of the early

campaigns. Anyway, they had a relationship that went way back.

Q: Did you say Carter?

CURRAN: No, Bill Clinton. No, I don't know how Duffey got to know Carter. He went on, by the way, after resigning from CU, to be President of American University, and he's married to Anne Wexler, who is a very well known lobbyist in Washington, very bright and personable.

Well, the disgruntled members of CU went to Senator Fulbright and used the space debacle to point out that what was going on was nothing less than the savaging of the integrity of academic exchanges and they weren't being treated fairly. Fulbright was outraged. He tried to stop the reorganization, and he demanded to know who was responsible for this dreadful management process. And of course, all the fingers and eyes were pointed in one direction, at me, so I went back to Reinhardt and said if I thought it would do any good I'd be happy to resign and they could all point at me and then throw rocks and so on. He said, "On, no, no, no. This isn't your fault. Please stay on. I want you to stay on." So I stayed on. And somehow we weathered the storm, mostly, I think, because even though cultural affairs is terribly, terribly important, you just couldn't get a national campaign going on the subject, and USICA was officially dedicated in April 1978 by Vice President Mondale. The CU employees were moved into a ratty building on K Street, and so from then until the summer, when I left the management job, I tried to deal with that very, very unhappy situation.

I have to mention that there was a heroine in this period, a wonderful academician named Alice Ilchman, who was brought in to replace Dr. Duffey.

As I was saying, the new USICA was officially opened in April, 1978 by Vice President Mondale in the interdepartmental auditorium. The CU people were put over in some new temporary space on K Street, and I wanted to say that one of the very bright spots in a very difficult period was the arrival of Alice Ilchman to be the new head of the E Bureau, which was the successor in USICA, to CU at State, if this doesn't sound too arcane. Alice was wonderful to work with, and we gradually restored morale, not only mine, but the exchanges staff, and there were some other great people in that area, Jay Gildner, who was a USIA career officer, who was brought in to be her deputy, someone I'd worked with earlier in Germany and a fine professional; and Margaret Thome was a special assistant in my office; and all of these people, all of us, worked together to make the best of a very bad situation. I want to point out that one of the things we did at the end of every day, about 7:30 p.m., was to gather in my office for a little bit of bourbon and branch water, which at least served the purpose of having me arrive at home without having had a vigorous dose of a tranquilizer.

So the summer came, a Congressman Fascell nominated someone to be the management officer at the new agency, to replace me, and I thought this was good, and it was good to have a friend of the Congressman running management, and I was looking around to see what I'd be doing next.

About this time I got my Foreign Service rating from Deputy Director Charles Bray, which was “unsatisfactory.” The rating was somewhat offset by a very understanding and laudatory review by Director Reinhardt, but an “unsatisfactory” rating, as you know, for a senior officer in the Department is pretty bad news. And it came despite a pile of “good job” backslapping notes from the deputy director all through the very difficult period. So it was very, very hard to understand an adverse rating. In retrospect, I think that Charlie Bray had no background in management and no real political clout. It was a good idea maybe to appoint a career officer to the deputy spot, but we really had no direct relationship with the President or anyone else in the administration. When difficult times arrived, represented by the Fulbright siege, I think Bray felt he was under fire and used my rating to record his unhappiness. At least I tried to take it that way.

Q: Were you in contact with your rating officer at all?

CURRAN: Certainly. Practically daily through this whole period, with no indication of difficulty. Nowadays a rating such as Bray’s would be dismissed out of hand because there was no documentation at all. In fact, most of the documentation was on the other side. I went to Peter Szanton at the White House and I said, “You know, I’m pretty disturbed by this. What should I do about it?” And he said, “Well, you just leave your future to me.” So I left it to him, but I was left with writing my comment on the rating. So at this period I took up long-distance running, which I recommend to anyone who is under stress. And I ended up writing a very brief comment on the rating, which said that it had been a difficult and challenging year, I’d enjoyed working with my colleagues, I was sorry that the rating officer was disappointed in my work, and I hope to continue serving the other Foreign Service, period. There’s a very important sequel to this comment on my rating, and I’ll come back to that later.

Anyway, I went out to Michigan for a bit of vacation and to try and recover a little bit, and out of the blue, literally, I was startled and very pleased to have John Reinhardt call me and ask me to be head of Near East/South Asia for USIA.

This appointment made me believe that the director of USICA, at least, wasn’t entirely unhappy with my reorganization efforts. NEA in the summer of ’78 was composed of 26 countries, with at least 2,000 Americans and probably 3,000 national employees. It ran from Bangladesh all the way to Morocco - as we used to say, Bangladesh to Marrakech. It included South Asia. It was a huge managerial job, not only because of the number of people but still we had quite a lot of PL-480 funds available (that’s the money that comes from sale of wheat in local currencies) in both India and Egypt, and it was a big element, and a lot of it was made available to USICA for public diplomacy, and so a lot of it was spent. I came back to Washington at the end of August. My first day practically coincided with the opening of the Camp David meetings between President Carter and Menachem Begin of Israel and Anwar Sadat of Egypt to try to construct a Middle East peace arrangement. It was a very dramatic and important breakthrough. Those people who are not familiar with the Middle East may not know how fundamentally divided the Arabs and Israelis were at this period. There was of course the original civil war in the ‘40s and

'50s. Of course, the Palestine Mandate had given Israel part of Palestine. That was followed by the war in '67, which further shattered things. So to have Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin able to meet in America to set up a peace plan was really amazing. Whether there was unusual naivete, or whether this had been cooked up in advance, an event took place closely after Camp David which has made the peace process since then extremely difficult. This was a concerted effort by the Israelis to put Israeli settlers into the occupied West Bank. This was a violation of the Geneva Convention, as well as the two resolutions covering the cease-fire in 1967. Neither the U.S. nor Egypt made much of a fuss and I've always wondered, and I've never seen the classified documents on this, but my guess is that the Israeli settlements were made possible by three or four things: one is the Egyptians really aren't interested in Palestinians. It's a kind of a shock, but around the Middle East - you've served in Saudi Arabia - well, Arabs (especially Muslims) are interested in the holy places, but as far as the Palestinians go, they've been a pain in the neck or worse for years.

Q: Yes, if you want to talk about anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinianism - the Palestinians represented often a sort of a fluid group of rather bright people who take over jobs and you know, I mean, in a way kind of like the Jews were in Europe or the United States.

CURRAN: Yes, or any sort of aggressive minority: Armenians, Chinese, Koreans in the greengrocery business in New York. And not only did the Palestinians represent sort of this go-go type of people who are faster than a speeding bullet, but a significant proportion of them stayed in refugee camps, clustered around Israel and had to be paid for by the countries in the area. And thirdly, a small percentage of them were big troublemakers and bomb-throwers. So, anyway, it's a surprise to most Americans that not many Middle Easterners care that much for Palestinians.

The second factor I think we underestimated was that the Israelis had clearly prepared to do this and did it very quickly - sending in hundreds of settlers. The lack of response to the Israeli actions started in the White House and included the Secretary of State. The American ambassador in Tel Aviv, a career officer named Sam Lewis, sounded the alarm, but it was largely ignored.

Q: We have a very long account of his recollection.

CURRAN: Of Sam Lewis.

Q: Yes.

CURRAN: Well, I'd be interested, I'd like to read that sometime, because, as I say, it seemed to me that the American government at that period leaned over backwards to be understanding of the Israeli point of view.

Q: This is a theme that comes out in many of our interviews with people who dealt with the Middle East, but it also is a theme that's reflected within the United States body politic.

CURRAN: Perhaps our lack of reaction started in the White House. Jimmy Carter was not a strong president and had to keep his eye on all the political elements. As the Iran situation unraveled and he was weaker and weaker, I think it made it possible for countries with strong agendas to run roughshod over American policies.

Now we have this happening, and at the same time I made I think my first field trip as the NEA director, and one of the places I went to was Iran. Obviously there was a lot going on there. I had learned a little Persian when I was in Kabul, so I wasn't totally helpless, and I flew in there and was met, literally, by an armored car, which was pretty unusual on an ordinary visit, and taken to a hotel, which also seemed to me to be under siege. It was a very uncomfortable atmosphere, maybe as uncomfortable as I've ever experienced. I went to the embassy to see Bill Sullivan, the ambassador, and I said I'd been in and out of Teheran since 1974. This was about four years later, '78. It seemed to me that it was kind of tense and unfriendly. He said, no, no, no, that I shouldn't worry, that the Shah had everything under control, and I should go about my field trip. I went down to Isfahan. I don't know if you've ever been there. It's a magnificent city, gorgeous mosques and lovely parks. Everywhere I went - let's see, I guess I was in taxis; I wasn't even in an official car; we didn't have an official car - people were throwing stones at police and foreigners and cursing and talking about *shaitan*, 'the devil.' To put it mildly, it was very unsettling. And the Bell people - I went to see the Bell Helicopter people - and they said, "We're out of here." They were getting out as fast as they could. And I went back to Teheran. And in fact a person I saw in Isfahan was another student of my dad's, whose name was Torab Mera, and Dr. Mera said to me, "This is going to be a bad time." I went back and reported all this to Sullivan. Sullivan said, well, he thought I was exaggerating. Probably I wasn't used to living in Teheran and Iran. So it happened that I took the last El Al flight that was able to fly in and out of Teheran, which is symbolic in a way, and went back to the airport under armed escort and took off. And I must say, I was really happy to be out of there.

Q: What was your impression of our USICA operation there?

CURRAN: I thought the USICA people there were being very realistic. They were closing down binational centers as fast as they could, or furloughing people, trying to protect their employees. The PAO was Jack Shellenberger, who was in an awkward spot, working directly with the ambassador. The official line was everything's okay; at the same time he was encouraging a reduction in presence. I think USIS or USICA, as they called them now, did everything they could. I mean everything is in retrospect. The embassy wasn't prepared for what eventually happened and believed the assurances of the Iranian government. If you're in that situation, and the government tells you you're safe, it's pretty hard to say officially, "Well, I don't think I'm safe."

By January, 1979, the Shah was gone. The Ayatollah had come. There had been an early assault on the embassy. Many people forget that. But they didn't occupy the embassy the first time.

I was in Sri Lanka, at a South Asian regional meeting, in February, 1979 and Spike Dubbs, the ambassador from Kabul was there. It's very poignant for me because he went back and about 10 days later was murdered in Kabul by a religious fanatic. Then in the fall the hostages were taken in Teheran, so I would say from the fall of '79 - it wasn't that long, it seemed long - through the entire year 1980, it seemed to be about all I worked on, the Iran issue. I worked with Hal Saunders, a great American, I must say, and some of the Brzezinski people from the White House, and some of the CIA people.

Probably there are many low points, but I think probably the worst of the low points was the abortive rescue operation, terribly flawed. I don't know, were you out in the area then?

Q: No, I was in São Paulo, Brazil. Well, actually, I was in Naples at the time. Very badly done.

CURRAN: Yes. The idea that you could move three or four helicopters within shouting range of Teheran and then get into Teheran and pull people out of a city full of shrieking fanatics who were happily ready to lay down their lives - it was just a sad, sad thing. And of course, Secretary Vance resigned because he hadn't been fully informed. When he was informed, he objected and was overruled. You had Walter Cronkite ending the news every night saying, "Well, that's 245 days of captivity," etc.

To talk about low tides, we had I think about five USICA officers among the hostages, and one of them, Barry Rosen, had a young wife and two young children, and I found that I was talking to her every day about not only Barry and whatever we knew about the hostages, but about her shopping and what should she do with the children. I mean, I never saw her, but I got involved in a way that was about as intense as anything I've ever done except getting married. It was in one way a beautiful experience, but in another way very, very difficult.

Toward the end of this period, the Administration assigned a Foreign Service officer named John or 'Jock' Shirley to work with USICA as counselor and because both Reinhardt and Bray had difficulty in dealing with the career officers who ran the various area offices, the geographic bureaus at USICA.

Q: Why did they have difficulty?

CURRAN: There was increasing unhappiness among the area directors about the lack of communication between the front office and the geographic bureaus. Two area decisions that were the most difficult were that the director took all personnel decisions out of the area offices. This is just generally a bad idea, because if you're assigned to work for me, and I have no role in selecting you, neither of us are very comfortable in the relationship. And the second thing he did was to take all the financial decisions out of the bureaus, where they had been made since the beginning of the Agency. Also, the director asked Charlie Bray, his deputy, to manage the area offices. Because of Charlie's lack of experience, he avoided discussing policy matters and made program decisions on his

own. And many times these made no sense in policy terms, and the preliminary decision memos that had been originally done by the area offices in conjunction with State and the ambassadors - they'd go up to the front office and come back completely redone.

Q: It sounds like you had a real lack of communication.

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: Was this from the Director?

CURRAN: Yes.

Q: It doesn't sound like a very good management technique.

CURRAN: No, it wasn't. And as I say, Jock Shirley was tremendously helpful in beginning to bridge that gap and restoring some team spirit. I had mentioned Hal Saunders' name in connection with the Iran hostages. He was also working full-time on the Middle East peace process. And a chap named Henry Precht was the Iran country director, and he was really magnificent during an awfully difficult time.

Q: When you're working on Iran, I mean, in a sense, there's nothing to work with. Your whole operation, they're hostages.

CURRAN: In jail, right.

Q: - in jail, and what are you doing?

CURRAN: A lot of things that the U.S. government did was to try to figure out how to put more heat on the Iranians. There were various ideas brought up. I remember there was one "expert" we all trooped in dutifully to listen to, who sort of detracted from his own credibility because the Muslim group that is predominant in Iran are Shiites, and he kept referring to them as the "Shights." Anyway, his idea was just to deport all Iranians in the United States. He said that would have the effect of a nuclear bomb on Iran.

Q: We had a tremendous number of students.

CURRAN: Yes, thousands. And there were some "minor" civil rights questions to be considered, so... But basically, you're right. We sat around stewing in our own juice, and nothing anyone could do. You could watch the presidency wither away almost minute by minute.

Q: What were we doing within the area, because it was the area? What were we producing? Were we pretty well concentrated in Marrakech and Bangladesh on the hostage question, or could we carry on other things?

CURRAN: I think that I thought of the South Asia as a separate area and certainly the Arab-Israeli dispute as a second focus. Then North Africa as another element. But the Iran hostage crisis impacted on all the thinking. I think Iran affected us, Stuart, and it's a

good question, but I don't think it totally immobilized the rest of the bureau. There were big exchange programs going on, library programs. And a new center in Alexandria was opened during this period.

Q: This is a major indicator that we had a problem with fundamentalism. We had our embassy burned down in Islamabad, wasn't it about that time?

CURRAN: Right. I hadn't gotten to it yet.

Q: And, of course, our ambassador murdered in Afghanistan, plus other attacks. How were you dealing with that? You're coming to this.

CURRAN: Yes. First of all, one of the problems that I think we still have, in a way, is that when these situations come upon us, your reflex is to get very tactical and day-to-day. And I give Hal Saunders enormous credit for trying to bring in some people who knew Iran and knew fundamentalism. We even sent an American Muslim out into the Middle East to assess what was going on: Imam Charles Khalil. He was from Washington. I doubt if he's still alive. We had religious people coming on special visitors' exchanges. We tried to engage this situation intellectually, but one of the things that makes it awfully difficult to engage in something intellectually and seriously and thoroughly and sort of non-politically is that the atmosphere was very high-pressure, high-stakes. Remember, a presidential campaign began in 1980 and the Republicans were doing everything they could to show how impotent the Carter Administration was. So all in all, I would say it was a very, very difficult time.

Q: How about some of the India-Pakistan thing? Let's take different slices of that. What were we doing at that time?

CURRAN: Before I left Kabul, I don't know whether we could say that the United States was instrumental, but certainly we were helpful in getting the Indians and the Pakistanis and the Iranians to think about a different approach to the Afghan situation. After I left Kabul and after we got immersed in this Iranian maelstrom, I think that the interest was lost, certainly on the Pakistani side, and then when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan became, in effect, our military instrument in Afghanistan. I don't think the Indians thought that was such a great idea, and I doubt that the very fragile concept that we'd developed before that lasted. Oh, another problem that was simmering was the Tamil situation and the whole business between the Tamils and Sri Lanka, and at that time Howard Wriggins was the ambassador in Colombo. Howard was one of the early people to understand that this was more than just a difference between Buddhists and Tamils; this was something involving India. And we tried, I know, at that period to try to get some interest in the Indians. But the Tamils are a very significant minority in India, and I don't think politically the Indians could do that much. I never realized that the Buddhists - I think they're called Singhalese - in Sri Lanka are the most radical and warlike Buddhists, so their approach, as you probably know, to the Tamils was the only good Tamil is a dead Tamil. When I was there - my visit must have been in '79 - I didn't have a sense that the country was on the brink of war. There were these minor skirmishes

in Kandy. I think I closed the library there, but that was really for economic purposes rather than political problems.

Another thing I worked on during this period was the political-military interface in the Gulf. The U.S. was beginning dress rehearsals for intervention in the Gulf, and there were a series of things called Operation Bright Star One-Two-Three. And I took part in two of those as political advisor (Pol-Ad) for Bob Jackson, who was the commanding general, Central Command. He succeeded P. X. Kelly. And several of us made trips from Tampa - I think it's MacDill Air Force Base there - to the Middle East and on to Diego García. In fact, I think I'm one of the few Foreign Service officers who's flown nonstop from Tampa to Diego Garcia in a C-5.

Q: On those wars, what were we thinking of?

CURRAN: It's actually amazing when you think about it that somebody had the wit to see that it's the oil that we really have to think about. Iran was coming apart, had come apart, as far as the U.S. we were concerned. Iraq we were at that time not on hostile terms with. And then you had the Saudi oil fields and the littler countries.

Q: Kuwait, yes.

CURRAN: Kuwait, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, UAE, Oman. I think they were all terribly unsettled by the events in Iran, and particularly the Shiites. There were significant Shiite minorities in the Gulf countries. And then in the western part of the NEA area, in 1975, Hassan, the king of Morocco, led a 350,000 person march into the Western Sahara.

Q: The Green March.

CURRAN: The Green March, and not only succeeded in snatching that piece of territory for Morocco, but infuriating the Algerians, who set up a resistance group called the Polisario, which I'll have to deal with in my next assignment, which will come to in our next tape.

Ronald Reagan won the election in 1980, and with regard to the Iranian situation, the story was that he had circulated the following question: "What is flat and glows in the dark?" And the answer was "Iran, if we don't get the hostages back the day I'm inaugurated." And I think the Iranians believed it. In any event, in the run-up to the change of governments, some good things happen and some bad things happen. I think the new people who came in with President Reagan were very pro-Republican political, and they were determined to "clean out," quote-unquote, the people who'd been running foreign policy throughout the various agencies.

Q: Before we get to this, I'd like to go back to the area again. When you went to Israel on this visit - I think it was '78, or '80 -

CURRAN: Well, I went to Israel several times.

Q: Several times, but going to Israel, how were we handling it there, the USICA thing? I mean, here we've got all sorts of interests and problems and all that, and I would think the USIS operation there would be a very difficult one to handle.

CURRAN: Let's see, the period we're talking about is '78 to '82. It was post-Camp David. The Israelis had not really started their settlement operation at the level it is now, but they certainly were starting it. This is a long answer to your question, I apologize.

Q: We want long answers.

CURRAN: They had begun doing things which were very provocative in the Occupied Territories. For example, they would go to an area where there was a lot of farming - let's call it local farming, Palestinian farming - and they would put a farm in that community, and then they would sink a deep artesian well and drain all the water from normal wells off for the Israeli farm. The surrounding farms then wouldn't be able to get water any more and would dry up and blow away. They were beginning to exercise very abrasive road control tactics. I very rarely traveled with official cars; I used to go in *servis* taxis, these diesel taxis that go between towns, and I was in a diesel taxi going from Jerusalem to Ramallah - it's a big town just north of Jerusalem - and we were stopped at a roadblock, and I had a diplomatic passport. And I got out of the car, and the Israelis got to me and said, "Passport!" No courtesy at all. And I handed him my diplomatic passport, and he dropped it in the dirt, and said, "Your passport is worth dirt." And I said, "Well, it's an American diplomatic passport. May I see your identification please?" And he said, "You say something like that again, and you'll get a new set of teeth." Well, I'm not quite that foolhardy, so I didn't say anything more and I bent over and picked up my passport. And they left me alone and I got back in the taxi and went on to Ramallah. But that was the kind of climate which the local people were dealing with day-to-day.

At the time I was also a trustee of the Friends school in Ramallah. I am a member of the Society of Friends, and I was trying to be helpful in terms of helping them survive, and the head of it was a person named Olga Wahbe, a very wonderful person, and over a long evening meal one night she told me that what she was most afraid of - this must have been 1979 or '80 - was that the moderates in the West Bank were being marginalized deliberately by the Israelis, who were hoping to stimulate aggressive reactions and have a pretext then to seize the whole territory. Now I'm not endorsing that point of view; I'm just saying what she said.

Now to come back to your question. There is an historic, and I would say bitter, division between the people who were in the consulate general in Jerusalem before '67 and after '67, who regarded themselves as "understanding," quote-unquote, "what was really going on in Israel" and the problems between the Palestinians and the Israelis. And speaking frankly, I think they were generally anti-Israeli. They were certainly pro-Arab. And the embassy in Tel Aviv reciprocated, and then they regarded the consul general as being hopelessly pro-Arab and anti-Israeli. There was just no love lost at all.

There was a book written by someone called *The Arabists*.

Q: Yes, that was Robert Kaplan.

CURRAN: The Kaplan book. Now I don't agree with a lot of what he said, and I guess I could be considered an Arabist, but I don't believe I ever lost my objectivity vis-à-vis the two sides. I always thought American interests were primary. But there are people, and Mike Sterner's one of them, who believe that we made a mistake very early on not somehow reorganizing our personnel so that people went in and out of that area who weren't caught by one side or the other. Now that's pretty difficult to say, when you know about the strength of the Israeli lobby and the articulateness of the Jewish community in the United States. But I think it could have been done. I think if we had approached it in a more balanced fashion, and I know a lot of the pro-Arab people would be unhappy about this, but you have to remember that the seed of this matter we're talking about go back to the recognition debate in 1947-48 with Loy Henderson and George Marshall practically coming to blows with the White House.

Q: He (Marshall) almost resigned.

CURRAN: Almost resigned. And Henderson never lost his feeling that there had been a major mistake in foreign policy, and a lot of, quote, "his boys," ended up as ambassadors in the Arab world, and they kept this feeling alive a lot longer than we should have let them. So that's the answer to your question.

Q: Did you find, though, that with the information operation in Israel and the West Bank that this intruded? You know, you had this very influential organization AIPAC - American-Israeli Action Group or whatever. But there's no doubt about it. At that time there wasn't much of an Arab lobby, and it was a very, very powerful Israeli lobby. Did you find this would intrude in your operations there?

CURRAN: Before the Reagan people came in, the short answer is no, although if you've ever worked in Israel, everything you do is colored by the Israeli nationalism and on the one hand their sense of empowerment and on the other hand their sense of concern that they'll be abandoned. But I don't think it affected the substance of what we were doing. But when the Reagan people came in - remember how I started to talk about the change and the political nature of them - they brought in people right in to USICA who had an announced pro-Israeli agenda. And they started taking money from other places and using it for programs that went right into the government of Israel to conduct education programs on the West Bank and set up special scholarships for Israeli scholars and people working on the West Bank. It was blatantly political.

Q: During the Carter period, you say this was not much, you say it was sort of straight-line work.

CURRAN: We had Camp David as a straw to lean on, and I think our people did the best they could. Now we're speaking basically Jordan-Syria-Lebanon-Israel. In the Peninsula,

we were more concerned with the stability of our relationship rather than narrower or regional issues.

Q: How about Iraq? Had the war started between Iran and Iraq?

CURRAN: Let's see, no. I think the Iran-Iraq war didn't really heat up until the mid to late '80s

Q: Again, during the Carter period, your area that you're dealing with, one of the cornerstones of the Carter period was Human Rights. How did that reflect itself in your operations?

CURRAN: Well, certainly these Human Rights Reports began to get higher. The State Department report card every year began to get higher and higher profile. It was kind of a new thing to me. I hadn't run into this before. The reports that I remember as being difficult to deal with were the reports on Saudi Arabia, the report on Jordan, and a report on Morocco, all of which were, you know, authoritarian states.

Q: How about Israel?

CURRAN: No, I don't remember that that came up.

Q: It later became very -

CURRAN: Later it became very important, during the *Intifada*.

Q: Well, then, during this period were we working targeting people with our information program, like Qadhafi or Libya?

CURRAN: I would say that to the extent that there was active propaganda against individual leaders, it was done by Voice of America. Of course, we were still pretty concerned with the Russians all during this period, so both the Voice of America and the radios in Munich (RFE and RL) were targeted pretty much against Russia and China. We didn't have diplomatic relations with Libya. We did have a relay station in Morocco, in Tangier, but the footprint of that station was in Central Asia; it wasn't in North Africa. And I don't think, aside from the Ayatollah, I don't think we had a villain like Saddam Hussein to rant and rave about.

Q: What about exchange programs with this area? This is a time you had Iranian students in the United States demonstrating and raising hell in Los Angeles -

CURRAN: -and Washington.

Q: -and Washington. This was part of the impetus for getting the bastards out.

CURRAN: Well, I think a lot of them did leave, and I think we tried as best we could with the help of the INS to be sure when kids' student visas expired that they did go

home. But to look on the bright side, I would say that this was a particularly happy time in Indian-U.S. educational exchanges under the leadership of Jay Gildner and Mike Pastor, both country PAOs in India. We set up a new U.S. Center in Hyderabad, India, and the U.S.-India Binational Commission ran a major exhibit on the East Coast on Shiva, the great god Shiva. I don't know if you saw that, Stella Cranmer, I think her name was, organized it. It was the life's work for her, a great exhibit. And the NEA office was influential in that. NEA also helped fund a program by an extraordinary priest from Harvard University named Carney Gavin, who had discovered by accident a series of photographic plates from the Middle East in the late 19th century. And we set up many, many very useful exchange arrangements with the governments, who were happy to talk about photographs instead of Israel for a while. Mike Pastor, by the way, was one of three or four giants in USIA history along with Gildner and John Shirley. Mike went on to be counselor of USIA and ambassador to Malawi

Q: I think that we have these policy concerns. It was a time of high policy concerns, but also, there is a certain amount of sticking to your last. I mean, your last, which was cultural exchanges, students going back and forth, and presenting America's view without having to concentrate just on policy, but in general, were you able to keep to that?

CURRAN: Yes, and I think it's one of the strengths of this - and we have to, I think, begin to refer to it as "public diplomacy," because that's what it's going to be - that over the years the career officers in those posts from USIA and USICA were actually very skillful at managing day-to-day business without getting caught up in these political flaps.

Q: Let's talk about the 1980 election and the arrival of Ronald Reagan in 1981. I would imagine, in a way, whereas USICA would tend to be more or less liberal, the officers and all, that there would be a delight to know that anything was going to change the management there, I mean, just anything.

CURRAN: I want to start out saying I don't even remember how I voted in that election.

Q: I ended up voting for a man named Anderson.

CURRAN: Well, you'll remember that the view from Washington about Reagan was not very positive. I'm going to say something about that, because I had the good fortune to work in the White House starting about 1982. But anyway, as far as USICA went, the atmosphere there under Carter and particularly under his Director and Deputy Director was pretty sad shape, saved only by Jock Shirley, who began to restore some dignity and system to the Agency. There's a story that I think is very typical of the end of the Carter regime at USICA.

Jock Shirley, whom I'd known for years and cared for a lot, was really a wonderful man, and we all knew that it was a difficult time for the Agency. But after the election when we knew that both Bray and Reinhardt would leave, I said to Shirley I really thought that

though this had been a difficult time we owed it to ourselves as professional officers to have a farewell with the Director and Deputy Director and give them a little, you know, pewter plaque or something. So this was not exactly a wildly popular idea, but Jock was very articulate, and so we all got together and put up a couple of hundred bucks and got these plaques and so on. And on the 19th of January, we had a little champagne and so on and so on and presented these plaques. Neither Reinhardt nor Bray said a word.

Q: Oh, my god.

CURRAN: And that was the end of the Carter Administration for most of us.

Shirley ran USICA for a while, but the man they chose to bring in as director was a movie mogul named Charlie Wick, Charles Z. Wick, who was originally Charles Zwick and changed his name to Charles Z. Wick because he thought it sounded more elegant. He was a personal pal of Reagan's and you can't imagine a more incredible contrast than between him and John Reinhardt if you tried, and I still to this day find difficulty. The great thing that Charlie Wick brought to USIA - the republicans changed back to the original name - during that period was that he had the ability to get money into the budget. The budget went from about \$400 million to a billion dollars in two years. And he had some of his own interests - after all, he raised the money. He wanted a television service. And for ordinary Foreign Service officers who had not been in outside incarnations, he was very difficult to figure out, because you would go to him, you would walk into his office, and he would say, "Hiya [Hi there]" - no idea who you were. And you might say, "Well, did you receive the briefing paper?" "Yeah, yeah [Yes, yes]," not having looked at it. He'd turn on a tape recorder, and he'd say, "Well, what do you want?" Well, most officers would stammer around, not sure what to say.

Q: So you say you developed objectives?

CURRAN: Yes, all of us tried to figure out how we would work with this very interesting man. No question, many people found him difficult to work with over the long run, and I'm not excusing anything, but what we would do is we would bring in a chart and say, "The decision we want," in large letters, "is X, Y, or Z." And that was it. He would look at it - well, I remember one time we were trying to figure out whether we wanted to open a post in Incirlik, where there's a big Air Force base in Turkey.

Q: It's in Turkey.

CURRAN: In Turkey, so I guess it was the European Bureau, but I was there because, I don't know, the Middle East or something. So he said, "So the question is, do we open a library there, right?" "Right." "It sounds like a good idea. What do you think?" he said, pointing at me, having no idea who I was. And I said, "It sounds like a good idea." "Do it." And that was the end of it. No hesitation. But the trouble was that if someone came to him, say, one of these new political types who got himself into the exchanges bureau and he wanted to have approval for using a lot of money for, I don't know, some purposes in Israel, he got to Wick and said, you know, "This is what I want to do," and Wick, you know, mentioned someone in the White House, and it was done. I mean, there was no

further discussion about it. So that's the downside.

One of the characters that I ran into - I say that, at that time - was a man named Joseph Verner Reed, who was a *bête noire* in the State Department because he had been given the job by David Rockefeller of getting the Shah safely out of Egypt and bringing him to the States for a while for medical treatment right in the middle of our major problems with the Iranians. And the State Department people, with some justice, considered that the seizure of the embassy in the fall of '79 was occasioned by what they regarded as flaunting of U.S. power vis-à-vis the Shah. Be that as it may, I saw a lot of Joseph Reed after Reagan was elected because he was interested in having a major job in foreign policy. I'd like to save my descriptions of Joseph Reed for our next session, which will be my last session with you, actually, wherein I talk about the Morocco assignment, because Reed got himself assigned as ambassador to Morocco.

In the mean time, Alexander Haig was made Secretary of State, and Haig remembered our association in the Kissinger days and asked me to undertake a Middle East trip with him, and we came out to Saudi Arabia.

Q: I was in Saudi Arabia way back in the '50s.

CURRAN: Oh, yes, you weren't around. So this was probably - let's see, Reagan came in in '80 - probably was fall of '81, and I don't know really what Secretary Haig thought he would do with me, but anyway he kept me with him on this interminable trip. He'd just had a major bypass operation, and I've never been around anyone quite as energetic as this, at least not so much. We were on, of course, one of those windowless tube airplanes, so you never saw out or anything, and Haig worked 20 hours a day, it seemed to me, without pause. If you were on the staff, you never knew when you were going to be summoned, so it was an exhausting trip.

We went to Saudi Arabia, and Haig wanted to be sure that the Saudis understood that Reagan was going to be a right type of President, and we went on to Egypt and ditto for Mubarak, and then we ended up at the Mamounia in Marrakech, Morocco. Nick Veliotis, the NEA assistant secretary, and Haig and some young CIA officer who was a world-class tennis player and I were playing doubles, and you can guess who was the partner of the world-class tennis player. Well, anyway, we played about six sets, and they had a doctor sitting on the court in case something happened to Haig. It was very unsettling. But anyway, at the end of this visit, he said, "This seems like a pretty good place to work, what do you think?" I said, "Oh, yes, it seems very pleasant to me." He said, "I have a special job for you." I want you to come back here as chargé and DCM here, because we have a very unusual person who's going to be ambassador." And that's how I came to Morocco for my last job. By the way, I made one condition. I said I certainly will do it, but I would like to take French before I come out here, and they let me do that.

Q: I'd like to come back, though, to talk about the Israeli influence on Wick, I mean these guys around him who were coming up with these special programs. What sort of things are we talking about?

CURRAN: We're talking about special visitor and speaker programs. Maybe the Hollywood crowd had a significant Jewish component and a lot of them had a romantic association with Israel, and Reagan probably himself had sort of a good feeling about Israel-

Q: He did.

CURRAN: Moshe Dayan and all that crowd. Alice Ilchman, sadly, departed, and I don't remember who was acting head of the Exchanges Bureau. I think it was some Republican from Michigan. He allowed several political appointees to come in and basically dictate reallocation of resources for the Middle East. A lot of money went into pet exchange programs that the Israeli government wanted done. But I don't think that Charlie Wick was ideological about it. I think he was pro-Charlie Wick and pro-Ronald Reagan and pro-television, but I don't think he was ideological.

Q: What about the -

CURRAN: Excuse me. I don't believe Reagan was particularly ideological, except initially with the "Evil Empire" business.

Q: What was the feeling within the professional ranks that you were getting about Wick's pushing of television as a means?

CURRAN: Mr. Wick thought that you could run television for overseas audiences the way you could run it in the States, and most of our career officers thought that was nonsense, and probably muttered and grumbled about that all the way along the line. In fact, technically still in this period in the early '80s, I don't think direct broadcast was an option anywhere, so we had to rely on local agreements. And as you know well, you can't go into a local station anywhere in the world and say, "Here's a tape of President Reagan. We want you to broadcast it." They just won't do it. So I think it sputtered for a while. But USIA had to get into television just as they had to get on to the Internet.

I had a memorable encounter with Wick vis-à-vis the modernization of the Tangier radio relay station. And if he had an Achilles heel it was the fact that he had no appreciation of how difficult it was to get things done overseas. And he just thought that with enough money and enough clout you could do anything you wanted. I never had the dubious privilege of traveling with him, but I guess that was something in itself.

Q: You were doing this up to '82. When did you leave in '82?

CURRAN: Yes, It was December of '81 I left my job at NEA and went into French language training. It was right after the Haig trip.

Q: So you weren't involved in the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

CURRAN: No, no, except at a distance.

Q: Then we'll stop at this point-

CURRAN: -and do Morocco.

Q: -and we'll do Morocco. You're taking French-

CURRAN: -at FSI-

Q: -and you're going to Morocco. Great.

MOROCCO

Morocco has had diplomatic relations with the United States since the American Revolution. It is a beautiful country and is generally peaceful. In 1982, King Hassan II had been on the throne for two decades and, as monarch and chief religious leader, ruled over a backward but peaceful country.

Of course, there were problems: a rapid population increase, limited resources, resultant unemployment, and a resource devouring war in the south with the Algerian-backed 'Polisario' over the long-term sovereignty in the former Spanish Morocco. Nevertheless, King Hassan appeared to enjoy widespread support and, certainly in comparison to neighboring Algeria, Morocco was a picture of tranquility.

U.S. long-term interests in Morocco increased markedly during the Reagan period. Prior to this period, especially under the Carter presidency, we had maintained a VOA relay facility in Tangier and conducted a few modest education and AID programs. On the Moroccan side, the King cultivated friendships with a wide spectrum of Americans including David Rockefeller, Alexander Haig, Henry Kissinger, Kirk Kerkorian, and especially General Vernon Walters. However, the Carter administration was cool to the King and worried about human rights and the anti-'Polisario' campaign.

But the increasing danger to U.S. interests in the Gulf and an extremely helpful role by King Hassan in the Israeli-Arab conflict combined with a new government in Washington to raise the level of bilateral engagement. Chief among the American goals were: opening Morocco's ports to fleet visits; making available the old SAC bases for refueling and resupply in case of a war; use of bombing ranges east of the Atlas mountains for NATO pilot practice; a major modernization of the transmitter facilities in Tangier. All of these goals were met under the leadership of Reagan's appointed ambassador, Joseph Verner Reed. Reed was a protégé of David Rockefeller with a very colorful personal style. The Moroccans (including the King!) seemed to appreciate his swashbuckling approach to diplomacy. It took the embassy staff longer to get used to the unusual hours and highly personal side of Reed, but by the end of his tour, most of the official Americans came to admire his panache and his results.

Ambassador Reed was very attentive to me personally, as was the King and - aside from difficult personnel matters tied to changes made to adapt to the new style in the embassy - my last posting was one of my best. Promoted to career minister in 1983, I turned down an offer to be ambassador in Abu Dhabi and retired in 1984 to serve in Munich with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Today is the 16th of March 1999. Ted, we're off to Morocco.

CURRAN: Like Webster's Dictionary-

Q: We're Morocco bound, yes.

CURRAN: Well, just to go back, I had had a good personal relationship with Secretary Alexander Haig when he was in the White House and I was working for Rogers, and we maintained a good personal relationship over the years. And we went on his Middle East trip together. As I said earlier, I think it was in the December-January timeframe, 1981-82, and at that time he asked me if I would leave Washington and would be DCM in Rabat, and he said there was a political appointee going into Rabat that there was a lot of concern about, and they wanted to have a senior officer who had some background in the Middle East and in politics in Washington between the various agencies. I was very pleased, and got them to give me some French, which kept getting interrupted, but anyway, I managed to get about three months in before I went to Rabat.

During the later winter, early spring of 1982, King Hassan came to Washington on a visit to see Ronald Reagan, and you might be interested in something that probably isn't too well known. The White House advance man was Charles Tyson, a politico from somewhere in the Southwest. And we had a series of meetings with the Moroccan counterpart, whose name was Mohamed Assad, who died later in a tragic car crash. And we were talking about how to manage the schedule.

Q: This was in Washington.

CURRAN: In Washington. And these state visits, you know, are all pretty cut and dried ahead of time. You have the arrival ceremony, you have a little lunch, then you have a big state dinner hosted by the President, and the next day you have a big dinner hosted by the ambassador and the visiting head of state. During the advance talks we had, and we got to be pretty good friends all of us, Tyson let slip that Reagan hated formal dinners and didn't say anything more about it. But I got to thinking about that, and I'd done some research on Hassan, and so at one of the next meetings, I said, in Michael Deaver's presence (Michael Deaver was one of the triumvirate along with Meese and Baker who guided the first Reagan years), I said, "Well, why not scrub the dinner and let the two principals go on a nice horseback ride?" And everybody haw-hawed at me and that was that. Anyway, we finally went into the Oval Office with the President. Maybe it wasn't the Oval Office. It was fairly large. Maybe it was the Cabinet Room. And Reagan came in, and I'll have a few things to say about him, but anyway, he was very alert and interested, and when it came to the state dinner in the White House, he wrinkled his nose and said, "Boy, I wish someone would figure out some way to not have me do all these damn dinners." So everybody started to say, "Well, Mr. President, you know, this is the way it's always done," and Deaver said, "Well, you might be interested, some sort of far-out idea that instead of dinner we'll do a horseback ride." And the President's face lit up.

He said, "What a great idea!" So believe it or not, they scrubbed the dinner and my colleagues in the State Department were unkind enough to say that my role was to walk behind the horses and clean up, but that isn't true.

But anyway, it gave me a chance to meet the King, who was a very bright person and remembers everything. He remembered me then later when I got to Rabat. And I wanted to say a few things about President Reagan; then we can go on to the rest of this. Four or five times I was in the room with President Reagan in a relatively small group of people. Of course, I was never one-on-one with the President. He was really an amazing character. Everybody said he wasn't intellectually engaged. I mean, that was the conventional wisdom. And people said he would fall asleep in meetings. He was certainly laid back, and he certainly wasn't terribly interested in a lot of detail. In fact, there was a great scene at the bilateral with the King, before they went on the horseback ride, and the President, as everybody knows now - maybe all Presidents - but Reagan was notorious for being given a set of white index cards with notes of the various things to raise with visiting leaders. So when everyone sort of settled back, and the President said, "It's wonderful to have you here, your Majesty, and hope you have a good visit." Then he said, "Now I'm supposed to raise a bunch of stuff with you, but you know, I'm not too familiar with this, so what I suggest is that I give you my cards, and our advisors can work on these issues and tomorrow we can figure out what, if anything, needs our attention." (Actually, it's quite a sensible approach.) And the King was thrilled, and he pulled some papers out of his pocket and said, "Here are my notes." I don't think they were, but anyway...

I just wanted to give an impression. President Reagan was very self-assured. At another one of these meetings - I think it was a pre-visit meeting when everybody was briefing the President - some junior aide spilled a cup of coffee or something like that. Everybody was aghast. But Reagan said, "God, I'm glad to see somebody else does that once in a while. Boy, oh, boy, come on, let's clean up." And he just acted as though it was natural. And I think it created a terrific atmosphere in the White House.

Q: Tell me, how did the horseback ride go?

CURRAN: Well, I can't tell you. I wasn't - contrary to rumor, I wasn't cleaning up. No. It must have gone very well, because it went an hour and a half longer than planned. I think the only problem with the horseback ride was it gave the King the idea that he was really on the inside with Reagan, and Reagan was just enjoying the ride - and he was an expert at making people feel comfortable.

Q: Where did the ride take place?

CURRAN: There's an agricultural farm out in Virginia someplace, and they had the horses out there. The King's a damn good rider, and I guess Reagan is too. They had a wonderful time. It's one of the great unsung triumphs of foreign policy, which I'll never get any credit for. Anyway, I'll try to get it into this tape.

So off I went to Morocco with, I would say, not very good French.

Q: You arrived when?

CURRAN: May of '82 and left in April '84, so about two years.

I might say that FSI did its best. The French program is one of the best programs there are. They worked me very hard, but it's hard in three months, particularly for an older person, to get up to 3/3 in a foreign language, and I didn't. But I was very fortunate, because my wife took a job at that time, so I was more or less of a bachelor in Rabat - and the two or three people who were in the DCM house spoke no English, so in fact, I had to use French all the time, and the level of conversational French got quite up quite early, and I got up at six every morning to take some tutoring. So my French came along, and I was able at least to do business.

Morocco's a delightful country. I don't know if you've ever visited. It's southern France climate and friendly people, and it's clean and neat and everything works. If you think of it in north-south terms starting at Gibraltar and going south, there's an arc to the east, which is the Atlas Mountains, and inside that arc is where the heartbeat of the country is. Lovely farms and fruit and grain and so on. It was one of the breadbaskets of the Roman Empire. Morocco was different than for example Algeria and some of the other French colonies because the French had, for some accident of history, decided not to "occupy" Morocco but to declare it a protectorate. And even though that might seem like a rather subtle difference to some people, in fact, the Moroccans took their independence quite seriously, and the monarchy was maintained. In the '50s, the French decided to give Morocco its independence, but instead of letting Moroccans decide who was going to be the king, the French decided who was going to be the King. And they picked a rival family to Hassan's Ailed family and exiled Mohamed V, who was Hassan's father, and the crown prince to Madagascar. And there was a huge 'uprising' in Morocco, and the French were forced to allow Mohamed V and Hassan to come back. And it gave Hassan and his father, Mohamed V, a tremendous *cachet* in Morocco, that they kind of stood up to the French and had been installed by the people. Mohamed V died in 1961, and Hassan then took over the throne. Hassan had something of a reputation as a Prince Hal when he was Crown Prince, but one thing memorable occurred: there was an incident when Eisenhower came to Morocco to give the bases back, the SAC bases that we'd had there, Sidi Slimane and the base at Casa, which is now the airport. There was to be a return visit. And as Mohamed and Hassan were either in the plane or on the ground ready to take off or they were already in the air, Eisenhower had his 1959 heart attack. And the Moroccans, having made a big thing about the visit, naturally, were terrified that it would be canceled. And Nixon said, "No, we're not canceling it," and he assigned General Walters - I don't know, he was probably Colonel Walters then, Dick Walters, legendary figure - to be the liaison. So Walters met the plane in New York or wherever they landed, explained the circumstances, said the visit would go forward, and the Moroccans never forgot that. Even in my day, 25 years later, they were still talking about the courtesy that Vice President Nixon and the Republicans and now General Walters had extended to them.

The downside of it was that the Moroccans got in the habit of dealing with the White House directly, and therefore, the embassy was pretty well left out of any of the important stuff going on in the country. So when I got to Morocco, this was a post with a "history." I mentioned that relations with the King and the Palace and the fact that the embassy, and particularly the ambassador's Democrats, were pretty well left out of any kind of dealings. The Spanish Sahara issue, which in my opinion, and still my opinion, was really not a major issue for the United States. What happened was that the Spanish pulled out of the Western Sahara. They had I guess a protectorate or colony there, and I think the United Nations made some noises about a referendum. Anyway, the Moroccans preempted the referendum, and Hassan himself in 1975 led what they called the "Green March," and the Moroccans went in and just took it over. And the Algerians were pretty cross about this. Why, I can't imagine, since it's a useless piece of territory except for some phosphates. But anyway, the Algerians organized something called the Polisario. It's an acronym for "freedom fighters" of some kind. And so again, in 1982, there was contention between Algeria and Morocco over who owned the Western Sahara. Actually, there was no contention on the Moroccan side, but the Algerians were angry, and for some reason they enlisted the interest of Steve Solarz, who was a congressman at that time, from New York, and Solarz and the Democrats and the staff on the Democratic side - and they were a majority, you know, in the foreign relations then - just gave us the dickens of a time over this, and kept sending people out to, you know, examine whether the people in this area wanted to be part of Morocco and so on and so on. As I say, it always baffled me as to why we got so excited about it.

Q: There's a certain history of this type of thing. Biafra got support, including support from sort of the glitterati, some of whatever passes for intellectuals in the United States, which is almost an oxymoron as far as the way we use it, and I think there have been a couple of other causes. God knows why but it happens.

CURRAN: Well particularly, I mean, the Algerians weren't exactly our cup of tea. They're really extraordinary. They did help us get our hostages out of Iran, we all grant that. I don't know if I mentioned on my last tape - I'm sorry to be a little disjointed - but did I mention the dinner we had in Algiers?

Q: I don't recall that.

CURRAN: Let me go back quickly. Actually it bears on this business because Warren Christopher, who had really done the heavy lifting along with Hal Saunders to get the hostages out.

Q: He was-

CURRAN: He was Deputy Secretary - had done the heavy lifting on getting them out, and the Algerians agreed to fly them out of Teheran, and Christopher had developed what he thought was a good personal relationship with the Algerian foreign minister. And after we went to Frankfurt and welcomed the hostages and got them all set up, Christopher and Saunders and a couple of others flew down to Algiers to thank the foreign minister.

Q: This is Hal Saunders who is the-

CURRAN: -was Assistant Secretary and was pretty well thrown overboard by the Reagan people, which is sad. In any event, we went to dinner, and Christopher made this lovely toast about how grateful we were, and he said he looked forward to continued communication and better relationship between our two countries. The Algerian foreign minister said, "I don't know what you're talking about. This had nothing to do with U.S.-Algerian relations. We're not interested in better relations with you." He went on and on and on. "This was a gesture we made to international peace, and it had nothing to do with you, and goodbye." So this mental set between Algeria and the U.S. may have played some role in our willingness to support the Moroccans in this Western Sahara thing - unofficially anyway - but what I've never been able to figure out is your glitterati theory as to why anyone was interested in supporting Algeria in this.

Anyway, first of all, the embassy, up till the arrival of the new ambassador, Joseph Reed, had never had much time on the screen in the Palace. They were ignored by the Palace. You had the Spanish Sahara issue with this funny domestic spin, and the American embassy had really become a parking lot or an R&R post for officers from other parts of the world who were tired and needed R&R and Foreign Service personnel offices had wanted to put them somewhere.

Q: R & R being a military term for -

CURRAN: -"rest and rehabilitation." So the whole mission had pretty much become a reactive place and ineffective. Now I'm speaking personally. But there were some examples of some of the sloppy administration going on. For example, officers from the U.S. mission were regularly getting official travel orders and going up to Paris, picking up an automobile, a Peugeot or something like that, and driving them back, and getting per diem for doing this. Fulbright money was being diverted from its authorized purposes and being devoted to special projects supported by American, quote, "friends of the monarchy." There was no significant - that I could discover - accountability in terms of what happened to the food aid that came in to Casablanca. The wife of one of our senior officials got herself a no-competition major contract with AID to do some studies in an area that she was interested in on gender politics or something. There was very poor oversight of the binational center. A binational center is something that USIS does with local cultural types, usually to teach English and have a little library. And an employee there absconded with about \$100,000, and the USIS people, instead of saying to the Moroccans, "Look, we have to sit down and settle this," came back to the U.S. government and said, "No questions asked, we should make the money good." And then we had too many Peace Corps volunteers living all over the country with nothing to do - you know, Afghanistan all over again.

Now into this mix, the Administration assigned Joseph Verner Reed as ambassador, a very politically charged and very Republican (capital R), protégé of David Rockefeller, a knee-jerk anti-Democratic (large D), and suspicious and hoping to ignore the Foreign

Service. It was a “great” combination. He arrived in late 1981, and was received by the King within hours of his landing in the country, the King signaling that he was happy with this appointment. And when Reed got started - this was prior to my arrival - he made several things clear to the embassy. He expected everyone to work around the clock, which he did. He expected everybody to show up and work any time he gave a dinner or any official representation at the residence. Now most Foreign Service officers are pretty good about mingling with guests and so on, but Reed wanted literally people there an hour ahead of time to talk about who was who and what was going to be done with whom, and then stay afterward. And it was just really more than most people were willing to do, particularly since there was no gratitude or grace on his part, or thanks for this. In other words, he treated officers like servants. He didn’t want to have anybody around the residence when he was there, and that was very hard on the community because the residence pool was the only pool that you could swim in. It was quite warm in the summer in Rabat. He also, sort of, adopted a kind of British surprise inspection. He’d go around various places in the U.S. mission and show up unannounced and go around with a notebook and take notes on what he didn’t like, particularly the dress of some of the employees. And the Peace Corps was especially sensitive, because they make a point of being very informal, and Reed hated this.

He told the substantive officers that he would take over all the high-level dealings with the King and the King’s chancellor, a very prickly elderly gentleman named Moulay Hafez. And all in all, this *modus operandi* didn’t sit well with the mission. When I arrived in ’82, there was-

Q: Question, normally an ambassador has right of selection of his own DCM. Here you have Haig saying, “I want you to go out.” How did this work?

CURRAN: Well, Haig called him and said he had just the DCM for him, and I met him, and we got along, and it was okay. But you’re right, that was something to think about. Anyway, the morale was really awful in the embassy, and the ambassador was defiant. We had an inspection coming up in July, two months after my arrival, and some of the American officers were busy leaking anti-Joseph Reed stories back to Washington where they were the talk of the corridors.

Q: I heard them.

CURRAN: I’m sure you did.

Q: I heard them. One of the big ones was that he referred to the King as “Our King,” and that, I mean, that was all over the place.

CURRAN: He was also a top ten dresser and very kind of waving off people who would try to talk to him about something they thought was important. He’d just say, “Oh, well, we’re not going to discuss that now.”

Now I just want to interject here - we’ll certainly have an opportunity to discuss how

difficult he was - there were a couple of things which were really admirable. One was he paid for all his own representation, with never a question asked.

Q: Where was his money?

CURRAN: Well, his father was a silver baron, and his wife was the sole inheritor of Beyer's Steel in Pittsburgh, so I don't think money was a factor. Reed also was scrupulous in the use of the airplane, which we had, and there's a footnote on that; I hope I remember to get back to it. And he was capable of extraordinary generosity. One example, which I don't think many people know about: one of the AID junior officers' wives' father had a heart attack. The call from the States came at about ten in the morning, and it was too late to get out of Morocco, because the overseas planes left Casablanca at nine in the morning. So the wife was frantic, and everyone was very upset about it, and I mentioned this to the ambassador - I don't know - very much in passing - I didn't expect him to be interested - and he said, "Well, why doesn't she go to Paris and get the Concorde and get home?" I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, first of all, I don't know how we'd get her to Paris, and who can afford the Concorde at that salary level?" "Well," he said, "call the Palace, tell Colonel So-and-so to set up the Gulf Stream, and I'll pay for the Concorde." And it all worked and the lady got home and saw her father. The father did pass away. It was a very, very generous gesture. He said, "The only condition is don't tell anyone at the embassy." So I never did - till now.

Anyway, there was a side to him which was appealing, but there were many sides which weren't too appealing. I had heard, of course, quite a lot before I got there. I assembled a small group, Joe Spiro, Val and Rusty Graham, Colonel Jim Hogan, a couple of other people that I had been told were complete professionals, and we went off on a weekend, and I said, "Look, we have to do something to save the embassy." And they agreed, and so we developed a blueprint - it must have been about, oh gosh, about the 14th or 15th of May, just about exactly 27 years ago - and what we decided was we would try to focus on what the mission was of the U.S. embassy, not on personalities. And they nominated the DCM to be the main interface with ambassador and be available to him 24 hours a day. And since my wife wasn't there, that worked all right. And also as a corollary to that, I made it a point to really control ingoing and outgoing communications, including the back channel traffic, which was a particular problem.

Q: Why was that a problem? Could you explain what it was?

CURRAN: Sure. Well, all communicators can send messages back and forth to each other without necessarily putting it in the regular embassy series, and the intelligence people also are able to do this. And it's important that the senior - I considered myself a senior career officer at the mission - knew what was being said back and forth, so I made a special effort in that direction. And because of my work in S/S, I knew pretty well who could send what when and so on. I'll make a diversion now, because the inspection came along about two months later, and here was a new DCM suddenly making decisions and, in my case, apparently getting along with the ambassador, there was a certain amount of muttering and grumbling. Somebody went to the one of the inspectors and said, "You,

know, Curran is playing around. His wife isn't here, and he's got women," and so on, which is a very silly thing to allege. Anyway, the chief inspector came over to see me one morning - well, actually, he made quite a point about finding a time when he could see me privately, so I said, "Well, the best time to see me is about 6:30 on the morning, if you don't mind getting up that early." Otherwise, I'm off for my language and so on. So he came over and he floated this rumor, and I said, "I don't remember the inspector's name anymore, very nice guy - I said, "Number one, it's not my thing, but number two, it would be impossible in this atmosphere and environment to have an affair, because the ambassador pops in any time of day or night, and I wouldn't really care to have him find me in the sack with a dame." And literally the words were no more out of my mouth than in came Joseph Verner Reed with a stack full of papers, ignored the inspector, sat down, went through some stuff, left again. And this inspector said, "I'm sorry I even asked." Actually, the allegation of impropriety was especially amusing since my daughter, Diana, was living with me. We had a great year together.

The second thing our small group did, after we kind of set up a way to begin to focus on real ideas and not on baloney, I sent a message to PER in Washington asking them to freeze all assignments to Rabat so we could undertake a review of the kind of people who were coming out. We also undertook an urgent review of some of the administrative problems, and it was awkward because the administrative staff was very weak and we had several months where we had to deal with this weakness and it took a lot of individual time by our little working group. Joel Spiro took over the preparations for the inspection. We also set up a system that I also used in Afghanistan so that each incoming visitor in Ambassador Reed's high level visit program had an action officer assigned to the visit. That officer was responsible for everything about the visit. And it took the burden, then, off everybody else, and they could go on doing their jobs.

I had to do a lot of counseling with the CIA people, who were very, very uncomfortable and unhappy because the ambassador dealt with the Palace and they couldn't. The King was not very helpful to the CIA; I don't think he trusted them. And so as a result, they were really feeling that they just weren't being assisted in their work. And a couple of times during my tenure there, this frustration was expressed by trying to bypass the ambassador and the DCM in communications to the Palace, and it was kind of Keystone Kops stuff, because General Moulay Hafez didn't want to have anyone bypassing the ambassador, and so he'd send these messages to me and ask, "Who's sending this stuff over?" And then I'd find out. It was a bad scene. But eventually we had a good chief of station there, and we managed to work it out.

Also, when the ambassador was away, which was very often - he traveled back to the States a lot on political business - we opened the residence up so people could use the pool and have picnics in the back yard, and got everything cleaned up before the ambassador got back. Now it sounds like this was all done overnight, but what I'm describing is a process that took about six months, and it really worked pretty well, if I say so myself, and the ambassador actually came to see he could depend on certain people, and he began to enjoy the system. And I always allowed everybody - if he/she wanted to see the ambassador - I never insisted on being present. So he loved having

officers for each visit and he got to know some of these officers a little bit and came to understand that they could be productive.

I'm going to jump around a little bit, but this anecdote fits in here. Secretary Shultz came to Morocco in December '83, almost at the end of my tour, and he'd heard a lot of the corridor stories about Reed and the embassy. The advance team from the Secretariat (S/S) came to Rabat. They go through a book, a checklist, how everything is supposed to be arranged. I had a meeting with Skip Gnehm, the head of the team, and I said to him, "You know, I really think that it's okay to prepare for the staff and the support people, but I counsel you not to try to plan the Secretary's schedule or his arrangements because the King will do all of that." And you know these advance people all say, "No, no, no, we know how this works." So there was a little bit of a tussle because they insisted on talking to the Palace, so the Palace sent over a junior protocol person and we went through that checklist, including the Secretary's rooms at the Hilton, his meetings, and his briefings. Well, anyway, literally as the Shultz plane was on final, wheels-down, coming into Rabat, the King called me in the car at the airport and said, "I'm looking at the schedule and I don't like it and so we're going to change everything, and just tell the Secretary he can't possibly stay at the Hilton. I've made one of my villas available, and we're not going to have any substantive meetings. We'll play golf tomorrow, and then tomorrow night I'll have dinner with him. The second day, we'll have another game of golf, and then in the afternoon we'll have a press conference and that will be it." And so I found Gnehm and I said, "Well, the King has just called, and here is the schedule." Gnehm was *furious*. He said, "You've done this deliberately. You've botched this up." And I said, "Well, I know it's embarrassing, but you just have to explain to the Secretary that this is the way the King operates." So, anyway, the plane landed and parked. The color guard was there. And no Shultz. Everybody waited for about 10 minutes. Then Gnehm came out of the plane and he said, "The Secretary wants to talk to you." So I went up the ladder, and there's George Shultz, who is a very nice person. The Secretary asked, "What's going on? My staff tells me things are all screwed up." I explained what happened, basically that the King had intervened. And Shultz said, "Well, that schedule doesn't sound too bad to me. Let's do it." The S/S staff was upset, but it's important to remember that their job was to serve the Secretary according to a plan. So the embassy was perceived as intervening in their responsibilities. It helped me to have been in the same spot and I didn't really mind the fuss. The Secretary and Mrs. Shultz had a lovely time and were beautifully taken care of. Shultz loves golf, and he and the King played together. The King had *the touch*. Anyway, the Secretary and Mrs. Shultz, "Obie," had a really good rest. As we were going to the airport, Shultz said to me, "You know, this is one of the best run and creative missions I've ever had anything to do with." He said, "I'm really glad I came here and saw for myself." And what he said to me, "What's going to happen to you next?" I said, "I don't know. What would you suggest?" thinking, you know, that I was certainly going to get an ambassadorship or something. He said, "If you want my honest advice, you should get out of the Service, because you have people carping at you from all parts of Washington, and I just don't know," he said. "I don't even know whether I can force them to give you a really good job. You know, it's just something to think about." I thanked him a lot, and anyway, we'll come to look what happened later.

To come back to managing the embassy, Joseph Verner Reed was an extremely difficult person, and he went out of his way to be difficult, and he went out of his way to show his dislike of the Foreign Service, and particularly the assistant secretary at that time, Nick Veliotis. And believe, me the enmity was mutual. But the other side of this was that Joseph Reed served his president and country with distinction. As a result of his (Reed's) work, the U.S. obtained port visiting rights for Navy ships; landing rights for strategic aircraft; and modernized VOA transmitters and firing range rights for NATO aircraft. It also helped that it was possible to add some officers in the first year to the mission, people that I think very highly of. One was Richard Jackson, who was in Morocco for many years, first as political officer, then as consul general in Casablanca, and then back as DCM in Morocco - a wonderful, wonderful officer, now retired and president of an American college in Greece at Thessaloniki.

Q: Yes, who's working with our organization and whom I have interviewed.

CURRAN: Alex Wolff, who now works for Madeleine Albright, joined us. I've mentioned that Joel Spiro and Colonel Jim Hogan were already in place. The new consul, David Whittlesey, was brilliant, and the new administrative counselor named Coleman Parrott was hard-working and flexible. Now this team understood the basic premise, which was, "Yes, we have a very difficult ambassador here, but he has assets. Let's use them and let's get some things done." I'm sad to say that this professionalism of the field officers in Rabat was not shared or reflected in the NEA Bureau, where they just went on sniping at Reed and, I guess, me the whole time I was there.

Well, I just want to repeat, the NEA people, one reason they were cross with Joseph Reed was for his role in bringing the Shah out of Iran to the States for medical treatment. Reed was blamed for the takeover of the embassy.

Q: In 1979, not too long before he became ambassador.

CURRAN: Well, '81 he was ambassador. I'd like to say, and I'll try not to overdo this, that JVR, Joseph Reed, really turned State's hatred back on the Department and spread the word around the White House how difficult and how bad the State officers were, and so on. There was quite a bit of petty harassment from Washington about not paying vouchers and purchase orders - really childish stuff - and it didn't really end until Dick Murphy became assistant secretary in late 1983. I might say that inadvertently - well, maybe it wasn't so inadvertent - I contributed to this problem because on my first visit to the King when Reed was away somewhere, the King said he had a personal message for his dear friend President Reagan and had a scroll in his hand and said, "I'd like this to be sent to Reagan, but I don't want a lot of people reading it. How are we" - how are we - "going to manage this?" And I said, "Well, your Majesty, the only way to do it is to have it go by courier." He said, "Well, I want a very special courier. Will you do it?" Well, I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So the King flew me into Paris, to Orly. I prudently made a copy of the message on the Xerox in the Pan Am lounge there and flew on the Concorde to Dulles, handed the scroll to Bud McFarlane, got the same Concorde back to Paris, and

was back in my office by the next morning. Assistant Secretary Veliotis called and said, "What's going on? Some person came over here with a scroll from the King to the President. None of us know what's in it. What kind of an embassy are you running? Who did it?" I said, "Well, Nick, why are you asking me? I'm in my office in Rabat. How come you aren't able to ask the White House?" He said, "Well, nobody knows who it was." He never found out till some time later who it was, and he was pretty cross about it. And I don't blame him.

Anyway, the general policy directions from '82 to '84, which Reed really carried out - regardless of all the critical things I've said, he was a genius at cultivating the Palace and getting the Palace to do what the government, Reagan, and the National Security people, wanted done. As I mentioned above, to open Moroccan ports to our Mediterranean and U.S. fleet so that they could do port calls and even bring those big carriers in to be serviced and let the men off the ships for a while. I must say, it wasn't till I went through a couple of those ship visits that I realized the economic benefits to Morocco of having a major battle group around for a week or so - and not just the red-light districts. Sailors spend like sailors when they're in town and eat and buy souvenirs and so on.

The landing rights protocol permitted us to modernize two of the airfields that had been set up originally under the Strategic Air Command, when we were having piston engine bombers flying around. The main one was Sidi Slimane, and as I mentioned, in my last Washington assignment I spent some time in the Central Command working on something called Operation Bright Star, which were the original dress rehearsals for moving troops and tanks into the Gulf. And so I knew quite a lot about that. It's a credit to the American engineers of the '40s and '50s that the airstrips needed no repair or maintenance. They were magnificently constructed. But the fueling pumps and ramps, obviously, all that had to be changed.

On the VOA front, the U.S. was able to expand the Tangier relay station, again a huge strategic asset for us, because they're used for not only broadcasting but they're used for other types of communication. And that was very fortunate because Liberia went down the tubes not too long after that.

Finally, the King, at our urging, helped with the first tentative contacts between Israel and the PLO. And I think, before I got there, and before he died, Moshe Dayan actually came over to Morocco for a secret meeting. The King was able to do that because he had a network of palaces around the country with jet airfields so that visitors and officials could fly in and out without going through some civilian airport. That was a very, very interesting operation. It continued while I was there. It's still, I think, fairly highly classified, so I really don't have too much more to say about it. I will say that I think it did lay the groundwork for Baker's visits in Madrid, which were in the mid-'80s, late '80s.

We did have a lot of visitors, and I want to mention several of them.

The first major visitor group that I remember, and I remember it particularly acutely

because of a problem I caused, included Henry Kissinger, Phil Habib, Ambassador Robert Neumann, and Neil Armstrong. They all came at the same time, and they all wanted to see the King. I don't think they wanted to see him all at once, but it was set up so they all had to go together. And the King usually had his audiences at one in the morning, which is very trying for potentates like Kissinger and Habib and so on. Neumann had been ambassador there, so he was not so uptight. Anyway, everyone was sitting around the ambassador's residence getting increasingly edgy about the appointment. And Joseph Reed, as often is the case, vanished. I guess he went over to the Palace. At about 12:30 or quarter of one in the morning, I really thought it had gone on a little bit long. We kept being told, "Another 15 minutes, another 15 minutes." So I called one of the people I knew really well at the Palace, a really nice guy, a colonel in security, and I said to him, "You know, things are getting a little sticky here. Can't we figure out a way to get this cavalcade moving." He said, "Well, I promise I'll get back in five minutes and tell you." So in five minutes, he called back, and he said, "Go out to the commander of the motorcycle team, and I'll give the order, and you'll hear it." So I went out, and you know, I heard his voice saying "Get moving." Of course, everybody got in the cars, and off they went. So I went home to have a shower and a Scotch, and while I was in the shower, my daughter, who was living with me the first year I was in Morocco, rapped on the door and said, "You better come to the phone. Somebody's very upset." So I ran dripping to the phone, and it was the stammering protocol guy at the Palace, and he said, "General Moulay Hafez wants to talk to you." So the general came on the phone, and he read me up and down. He said, "I'm the only one who gives permission for motorcades. Who told you to send the motorcycles?" I said, "Oh, well, it's entirely my fault. I'm so sorry." "Oh, you're going to be more than sorry. I'm going to fix it so you never, etc..." Well, you know. He was just absolutely about to have a stroke. Anyway, you can imagine it really raised my blood pressure as well. He tried to get me to say who did I talk to, and I wouldn't tell him. So anyway, it was a big fuss, but the King was charming when the delegation arrived, and everything went fine. They all had a good time, but I was a wreck the next day. And I went down to see one of the prominent banking people whom I'd gotten to know a little bit named Ali Benjelloun, down in Casablanca, and I said, "Did I really screw up here? What do I do?" He said, "Well, Moulay Hafez, you know, is very jealous of his power, and he either thinks you screwed up or he thinks there's someone in the Palace who screwed up." So I said, "How do I get a message that I'm really sorry?" So he said, "Well, we'll see." That must have been the late fall, maybe even mid-November, and around Christmas the King called me, and he added, "Well, I want to wish you a merry Christmas," and he said, "We'll expand permission for you to use your airplane, and I want to say a personal thing to you," he said. "I know that sometimes people get angry about little protocolary things, and I also know that it wasn't your fault, and I'm also always glad to hear when people are willing to take responsibility and not blame somebody else." I said, "Well, thank you very much." I felt quite a lot better after that, but it was a pretty bad month until I had that conversation. The next visitor we had was Alexander Haig, who came in a private 707 with none other than Kirk Kerkorian, and they arrived at about two in the morning in Rabat

Q: Who's Kirk Kerkorian?

CURRAN: The big Armenian billionaire. He's in show biz, a big producer, I guess, a mogul.

Q: Like Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and so on.

CURRAN: That's right. So he had arrived, some film project he had, but the thing that lit up the night was that first Kerkorian came off, then Haig, and then a very prominent actress - gorgeous actress - came off, Yvette Mimieux, who was Kerkorian's current girlfriend. She was just radiant, you know. How anyone can look that good at two in the morning I don't know, but the whole embassy staff was just thrilled. We had a wonderful evening, and she was just charming.

Anne Armstrong, who had been ambassador in London, is a Texas politico, came over with her husband. She was a lovely guest and was very helpful to us in talking to the King about the basing arrangements. The King was quite startled to have a woman get into substance, but she did it very gracefully, you know, liberally salted with quotations from Reagan. The chief of Naval Operations, General Watkins, came, a three-star person, great gentleman, very helpful on military matters. The attorney general, William French Smith, showed up; it was not such a happy visit because he was presented by the Moroccan attorney general with some kind of ceremonial sword, and as he was touring the Palace, he saw a sword he liked better, so as he was leaving, he handed me the sword he'd been given and said he wanted the sword that he'd seen. I tried to explain that trading gifts didn't happen in Morocco. "I don't care," he said, "I want that other sword." And no matter how many times we told him it wouldn't work, we kept getting these irate messages from the attorney general, and finally, thank God, he left government. I just can't believe the petty level to which some people choose to descend.

David Rockefeller made what amounted to a state visit while I was there, and there's another story you might enjoy. I went over to the little villa in which he was staying, a beautiful place, and he was having breakfast. The King always had everything supervised, so he was giving him whatever David Rockefeller loves to have for breakfast, and we were sitting there talking about the day's events, and the steward came in, who by now knew I was either notorious or well known - anyway I was known around there, and he says, "The King usually likes to have his guests have *harira* for breakfast. Now *harira* is sort of a ghastly bean paste, which is very high protein and is used to break fast, particularly during Ramadan or in the morning for breakfast, and I couldn't stand it. Anyway, I said, "No thanks." I rustled with my papers and so on. The steward said, "Yes, but His Majesty always instructs that his guests are to have this." And I said, "I really like it, but I'm just not interested and I'm on a diet." So anyway, finally, clucking, he left, and Rockefeller and I went on our merry way. Well, the last event of the day, in the middle of the night, was a buffet in honor of the King's birthday, and usually someone of my minor rank wouldn't have been invited, but Reed was away, and I was with Rockefeller. Let's say there were 50 people in line to wish the King happy birthday, and I was the last one, by protocol and every other reason. So the King looked at me, and he did something very extraordinary. He took me by the arm, a very intimate gesture, and walked in to the party. Everyone was buzzing about what this meant. The King was asking about my daughter,

and by then I'd played golf with him a couple of times, and he was very attentive. And we went to the buffet, and right in the middle was a large bowl of this glop, *harira*. He said, "I understand you really like this and you couldn't have any this morning, so I've reserved this whole bowl for you!" (I was flattered at the attention, if not the food.)

We had then Vice President Bush as a visitor. He came and there was another interesting sort of clash of cultures. We had mentioned to the Secret Service that it would be a problem they would have to handle very carefully, the amount of weaponry they could bring in. They chose not to keep us informed and a C-140 arrived, again very late, two days before the visit, and I was telephoned and the Moroccan security people said, "There's an airplane full of weapons here, and what's going on?" And so I went out to the airfield. The pilot was a fairly junior person and the crew were mostly military guys and their manifest included everything you can imagine - Uzis, grenades, stun grenades, all kinds of stuff, all for the Bush security detail. The Moroccans said, "You know, the King will never let this stuff into the country." The Moroccans made the plane take off. They had to go back to Spain, work the issue through with Palace security. It was very delicate.

There had been two assassination attempts against the King, one at his summer palace, so called, at near Rabat [Skhirat] and once when he was flying back from an overseas trip.

Q: I was wondering, though, the one near Rabat was at his birthday party, and I was wondering whether there was a certain nervousness about going to the King's birthday parties thereafter.

CURRAN: Well, I never had even the slightest sense of insecurity in Morocco, but I'm sure people did. Anyway, Bush did very well. You know, he's a very good people person, and he and the King got along very well.

Charles Tyson, who was a White House functionary, came on a separate visit. And he had a bee in his bonnet about visiting a port in northern Morocco in the Rif. It was a, quote, "closed" city in the sense that ordinarily visitors didn't go there because the Moroccans had a problem with drugs, particularly hashish. They didn't encourage, you know, our drug people to go snooping around. But Tyson wanted to go there, so we took off in an airplane, and General Moulay Hafez had said to him he could go anywhere he wanted to, so he told the pilot, "I want to go to this port." And the pilot, as they were required to do, wired back and said the passenger wanted to go to this port. And the head of the Air Force said, "He can't do it." And Tyson said, "I insist." So while we're circling around over northern Morocco, a fight was going on at the highest levels of the Moroccan government, and I think finally the King got into it, and we were allowed to land. But we spent the better part of two hours circling in the air, and I was beginning to wonder what was going to happen when we landed. In the event, it went pretty well, and there was nothing to see there. (By that time, anything you might have found that was wrong wasn't at the airport.)

The Shah's son came to Rabat, a very personable young man, and his mother, Fara Diba,

a very large and elegant woman. I was quite surprised. She was very tall and statuesque, a charming person, but no particular insights about Iran, but I must say I didn't go out of my way to talk to her about it.

We had two senators pass through, Senator Hatfield and Senator Eagleton; that's a story which might bear some telling. The senators were in East Africa somewhere working on a project which they were hoping to support which had to do with a trans-African pipeline. We got a message from their staff saying that they wanted to make a Marrakesh rest stop on the way back to the U.S. after checking with the Moroccans to get clearance, the visit was set up. Then we got a message saying, "Well, not only did they want to stop in Marrakech, they wanted to see the King." And the Moroccans said, well, that wasn't possible; there was a meeting of the Organization of African Unity and the King wasn't available. The senators were insistent and there were some really very intemperate messages. So I went down there myself to meet them and explain things to the senators. Hatfield was okay, but Eagleton was - basically, I'd have to say - out of control - whether he had had too much to drink or whatever. He did have some instability in his background. In any event, you couldn't pacify him, and not only that, when it came time to pay their hotel bill - you know, ordinarily a CODEL pays its bills - they refused to pay the bill, went back to the airport and took off. And the embassy sent a message back to Washington - I think it was a little on the indignant side - but I thought it was really outrageous behavior. Senator Eagleton wrote a note to Secretary Shultz and said, "Just had the misfortune of visiting this miserable place in Africa, Morocco, where we were abysmally treated by the embassy staff and that eight-carat idiot, Joe Reed." Eagleton quote "got out into the papers, too good an anecdote not to repeat." There's probably a moral to that story, but it escapes me.

And the last special visitor was Charles Z. Wick, who came in connection with the Tangier modernization, and he met the King, and in good movie mogul fashion, he thought he had - he and the King had shaken hands; (you never shook hands with the King) - but anyway, he and the King "had a deal," quote-unquote, and off he flew. Well, as soon as the Moroccans generally heard that we were going to buy land and build a new relay station, land prices around Tangier began to go up, and the price for the whole project went through the roof. And Charlie Wick would call me, and with a lot of nice gutter language, tell me what to tell the King about the deal and what was going on, and so on and so on? And I kept trying to explain what was going on to little avail. We had a wonderful attorney from USIA named Norm Poirier, and he was understanding and sympathetic. And finally I sent a personal letter to Wick, and I said, "Mr. Wick, your conversations are all being recorded. We're on open telephone lines, and I'm very nervous that the Palace is going to let the King listen to some of these conversations, and I really think we'll have to communicate on another channel." And after that he did do his ranting and raving to his staff and not to me on the phone. Years later he was reproved - you're not supposed to record conversations, you know, without the other person knowing - he had to write me and tell me he was very sorry, and would I like a copy of the tapes? I didn't accept them.

Well, I'd like to talk a little bit now about my own relationship with the King. I didn't

really have a relationship. I mean, the King was very friendly to me, mostly because I was there during an administration that he thought was in his camp. But having said that, even if I knew I was being treated as a thing and not a person, it was very nice to be around. One of the things I had learn early on was, the King would say, "I think I'd like to see the American chargé" without being specific about time. So the staff would call and say, "The King wants to see you immediately!" And the King was often all around the country in the various palaces he maintained. Before we used the airplane regularly, it meant one had to drive five, six, or seven hours. You'd get there at one or two in the morning. The staff might say, "Well, the King has changed his mind about today; maybe tomorrow." And then you'd have to drive back. So I asked General Walters how to deal with this. It was very trying. And he said, "Well, what you do is, when you get to the city where the King is, you don't go to the staff. You go to the hotel" - they always had a nice hotel in the cities where he had his palaces - "and you check in there, and you get yourself the best of everything - and then you call the staff, and you say you're here at the hotel and you're staying until you're called." And it just worked like a charm. I was always called within an hour or a half an hour, could get some sleep, and check out the next morning. You know, when you're running up bills at their expense, it was a different deal. Then when we got the airplane, it was terrific because you could get anywhere in an hour or less, and Jim Hogan, who was one of our original working group, was really skillful at getting us in and out of these airports at all hours.

Another time that was very engaging was I got a message in the middle of the night, the King was going to be in such-and-such a village at two a.m. and wanted to see me. And I routed my driver out, and luckily he knew where the village was, and we went off. And the driver was really a grumpy guy, Hamidou, and all the way he was grumbling to me about, "Oh, I don't know... Who ever goes to this village? Nobody lives there... Aw, I can't believe it... Somebody's playing a joke on you, etc." So we got there, and it was a tiny little provincial village with a rather large square and a mosque, but there wasn't a creature stirring. So he said, "See, *voilà!*" So I said, "Well, we'd better wait till two o'clock." At a quarter of two, sort of like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, a moving light came over the hill and down, and in came the King's party, and they set up a tent and started tea brewing, and then in came H.M., driving his own Jaguar. And he got out of the car and in the most matter-of-fact way said, "Glad to see you're here for the meeting." And he had something he wanted to send to Washington. And we had tea. So we walked back to the car, and the King said, "Why don't you drive with me to Rabat?" So we went to the car, and they have right-hand drive cars - I mean, it's like the States, you drive on the right-hand side of the road. So the King goes to the left side of the car and reaches out, and the door's locked. And then he tries the back door. Anyway, his courtiers are falling all down in terror. So anyway, I was on the other side of the car, and I looked - I don't know too much about Jaguars - and it looked to me as though the door was open, and it did open, and I leaned across and pulled up the little knob, and the King was able to get in the car, and everyone was able to get up off the ground. So anyway, now the light's on in the interior, and the foreign minister is getting in the back seat, and I look down at the car, and it's just *awash* in weapons - pistols and grenades and God knows what else - and, I suppose, all immediately available in case of emergencies.

So we started down the road, and the King's driving and talking, on narrow country roads talking to me in French, and I'm a little uncomfortable speaking French, and the foreign minister is yakking in my ear from the back seat, and so on. It was a pretty uncomfortable hour all the way back, but we all survived. I'm darned if I can remember what the message was.

Another thing that happened when I was with (General) Dick Walters once, in Fez, and the King, again, being very gracious and so on, asked if we'd like to see the palace that he'd set up for the meeting of all the Arabs in the fall of '82 to talk about the Palestine problem. (The first time I'd ever seen Arafat face to face.) In any event, we had this walking tour of the Palace - just three of us and no security around that anyone could see - and he turned the lights on, showed how the microphones worked - I mean, he was really like a proud papa, occasionally saying, "What do you think of this, Mr. Curran," and so on.

And the last thing that happened several times was I'd be summoned for a golf game in the middle of the night. They had a par three course inside the walls in Rabat with night lights, and I went over there and played golf with him, and he was very cordial, and usually we had a foursome, and since I was the worst player in the group (the King played very well.), I would be the King's partner. The tradition was the King never putted anything, you know, so he'd get on the green, and someone would say, "*Donné (Given)*." So I started doing that, and he made a big joke about that. He said I was making his fortune on the golf course.

One exchange with King Hassan wasn't so pleasant. In the aftermath of a mid-air assassination attempt in the mid-1970s. (The pilot saved him by saying, the King's dead. Let the rest of us live and land. So they did.) Moroccan security mopped up a lot of people who were either alleged to have been or were involved in the plot, and a lot of people were shot. One officer, who was in the control tower, Lieutenant Taweel, and his involvement was at worst peripheral - but it was close enough so they gave him 20 years in the salt mines. And that wouldn't have mattered to us much except he had an American wife. She was tireless in trying to help him. And under Moroccan law, he could receive mail, but he couldn't communicate with anyone outside. So his senator was Chuck Percy, and the Senator's office really tried to get us to intervene on behalf of Lieutenant Taweel so that he could write to his wife. Well, I'd been there about a year, and the King's head of security was an officer named Dlimi, and I was up in Fez with this instruction: "Would you please go to the King and find out what's going on with Lieutenant Taweel?" And so Dlimi and I were having coffee before the audience, and I said, "Well, General Dlimi, I have these instructions. Do you have any advice for me on how to bring this up?" Dlimi said, "Well, if you're going to bring it up, I'm not going to the meeting." He said, "And my counsel to you is to tell your government you brought it up, but don't do it." I said, "I can't do that." He said, "Well, *adios*, because the King just hates that subject, and he'll be very cross with you." So anyway, we had this meeting, several things I had to bring up, and then I said, "Uh, your Majesty, I have to ask your indulgence, but I've been formally asked to ask you about Lieutenant Taweel." God, he just turned to ice. He said, "Didn't someone tell you not to bring that up?" I said, "Yes,

Sir, but I was under instructions, which take precedence over advice I might get in Morocco.” He said, “You may tell your government that Lieutenant Taweel is being treated justly, and that’s all I’ll have to say now or ever!”

So I would say in overall it was fun to be in Morocco. There were great things to do in Rabat, it’s a lovely country to travel in, the Moroccans were friendly. I got to be on the board of the biggest golf club in the country, the Robert Trent Jones Course. The King let us use his golf course in the fortress in Meknès, and we played in Fez. So it was a good life, but I was never exactly captured by the magic of monarchy. I think the country was in good shape. It was well run, pretty well. The King kept national security and internal security in his hands and lets everything else be run by the parliament. It seems to work pretty well. They have some civil services relatively equitable. I’m speaking now of the ‘80s; I don’t know what it’s like now. (King Hassan died in the fall of 1999. King Mohammad VI now rules.)

We did have one major spy problem. That was with the Russian embassy. They had 195 officers in that embassy, and no visible programs, so we figured they must be doing something with their spare time. One of the Marines was dating a Moroccan girl. We didn’t allow fraternization. But youth will be youth and they were spooning, or whatever, over in her neighborhood, and a car came up behind them, and the Marine guiltily thought it was the girl’s father coming up, so they both ducked down, and the car went past and pulled over, and the Marine looked up to see what was going on, and he recognized our Moroccan budget officer from the embassy who handed some papers over to a car with diplomatic plates, which turned out to be a Russian embassy car. So the next morning we summoned the budget officer, and we asked him whether he would like to tell us what was going on, or whether he would like to have us turn him over to Moroccan security. He wisely decided he would tell us what was going on. And he told us about his relationship with this officer, who turned out to be a very high-ranking KGB officer. I don’t know how the CIA did this, but they somehow got word to this Russian that he’d been fingered and that we were going to do something about it with the Moroccans, and the man defected. We got him out of the country, and he provided a lot of material about KGB operations in North Africa. That was sort of the big final excitement.

My departure from Rabat in the spring of 1984 was very sudden. First of all, I’d had an offer from former Senator James Buckley, who was running RFE-RL in Munich with Jay Gildner, a USIS colleague. Gildner knew about my German experience and some of my management jobs, and he got Buckley to ask me if I wouldn’t join them there as an administrative officer.

Q: Would you explain what RFE/RL is.

CURRAN: Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty in Munich were the émigré radios set up to broadcast into communist East Europe and Russia and bring news and events to people living there who did not have access to the free world. Coincidentally, I had had my only really major run-in with Ambassador Reed. I don’t even remember what it was about any

more, except I gave him some advice he didn't like and he asked me who I thought was running the embassy - that kind of conversation - and he was so cross about it and so unpleasant about it and so personal that I really was thinking about leaving Morocco. And then I got the advice from Secretary Shultz. So, I called Buckley and I accepted the job. And then I went to the ambassador and said I'm very sorry but I'd have to leave because I'd accepted another job. He was flabbergasted, but that was it. Interestingly, the sudden parting did no particular damage to our relationship. He has had a great career and has been unfailingly friendly.

When I went back to Washington, I was quite surprised at how anticlimactic it was to leave the Foreign Service. Nobody paid too much attention.

Q: Well, this is true of everybody.

CURRAN: Well, I didn't expect any champagne and roses, but it's quite startling.

Q: It really is. Nobody asks about what do you think about... You've got all this information. As a matter of fact, I might add here, I think these oral histories serve a sort of therapeutic function, among others. We do come out with a hell of a lot of inside information which is never asked anywhere, so I feel I'm performing almost a medical functions as well as a historical function.

CURRAN: Well, anyway, it was a great transition to Munich, because a lot of people, when they leave the Foreign Service, "don't have anything to do." But I was handed a lot of challenging stuff in a country I loved and a language I spoke, and I had a wonderful three years there.

Q: Well, I would like to talk a bit, first, before we leave Morocco, and then I'd like to talk a little about Radio Free Europe. One of the charges that's been laid on Reed that I think NEA spread around but I've heard from ambassadors of other posts around the area used to get incensed at Reed because supposedly he would take a very strong pro-Moroccan stand and also side with Morocco, and this famous charge that he used to talk about "our King." Did you find yourself on the reporting of what was going on under constraints, or how did this work?

CURRAN: No. Dick Jackson had to carry most of the burden of the substantive reporting, and he, as you know, is a total professional; and he was very skillful in guiding the ambassador about how to formulate his messages. Most of the problem came the first four or five months he was there when he didn't have anyone who was really counseling him. Reed used hyperbole, and he used to describe his meeting with the King in sort of Arabian Nights style, and referred to "our King," and all this business. All that was pretty well toned down. Reed had all his cards on the Moroccan table, and he played them in the interest of the U.S. A colorful man in a unique place. Reed was a near great envoy.

Q: Radio Free Europe. Was it Radio Free Europe or Radio Liberty?

CURRAN: It's hyphenated. It's two operations. Radio Free Europe was for Eastern Europe, and Radio Liberty was for the Soviet Union, USSR.

Q: I've just finished interviewing John Richardson-

CURRAN: Oh, yes.

Q: -who was involved with that for some time back in the '70s.

CURRAN: A long time ago, yes.

Q: How did you find dealing with this? Because one always thinks of these radios as being very tricky organizations, because they've got U.S. government money - I think it was CIA money - or whatever-

CURRAN: Originally.

Q: Originally, but the fact that you've got émigrés doing this who will all come out with their own agendas - I mean, was this a problem?

CURRAN: Yes. It was less a problem with East Europeans because they were, first of all, generally very erudite and intellectual people who understood the nuance and the role of the radios.

Q: And I guess the trauma of 1956 and the Hungarian Revolution-

CURRAN: All past.

Q: -had set up some standards.

CURRAN: Right, that's right. And the News Bureau was independent. So I would have said that in general terms the Eastern European services, while there might have been a hiccup or two were balanced and effective. The Russian service was more difficult, because there had been several waves of émigrés coming out of Russia. I'm not sure this is strictly correct historically, but in general terms you had the anti-communist wave, the nationalist wave, the Solzhenitsyn type, the pro-Jewish types, and so on? And they were competing with each other to get their points of view across, and it was a headache trying to manage that Russian service. My responsibility was personnel modernization, equipment resource management, buildings and stuff like that. I didn't get into editorial things very much, but I know it was one of Jim Buckley's major headaches.

Q: Was there concern about Soviet penetration, Soviet efforts to do anything about what you all were doing, not just sort of the broad efforts and all?

CURRAN: Well, there was some terrorism. I think there was an assassination of one of the Rumanians just before my time there, and certainly we had rigorous security around

the radios and the antenna fields and so on. Sure there was concern.

Q: Did you feel the hand of the U.S. government, or were things pretty much run?

CURRAN: I think it was pretty clear that the U.S. was paying the piper and was calling the tune, and I don't think anyone was embarrassed about that. The émigrés understood, particularly again the East European, the Radio Free Europe services. By the way, you mentioned the CIA. I think the CIA funding ended when Clifford Case revealed the covert funding operations. Most of these were ended, and radios were one of them. But there was still a large U.S. subsidy.

Q: What about dealing with the Germans during this time?

CURRAN: Franz Josef Strauss was the Minister-President of Bavaria, and we could do no wrong.

Q: You talk about a hard-line right winger, wasn't the CDU - was it Christian-

CURRAN: Christian Socialist Party.

Q: Christian Socialist Party-

CURRAN: CSU in German.

Q: -which was always a joint party with the CDU, but it was even more-

CURRAN: It was very Catholic and very conservative. Strauss was very supportive, and when he died - and, of course, the end of the Cold War occurred - the Germans began to suggest maybe we could find another place for those radios.

Before we conclude, I would like to make some final points. I was thinking this morning looking back forty-five years, it seems to me that the three things that really make a difference in an effective Foreign Service are well qualified people; knowledge of language where you're working; and a trust relationship with your colleagues and superiors - those three things. And I don't think you can achieve that with computer-run personnel systems. And I wish I knew what the answer was, but I think this is not getting the attention it deserves, and that the leadership of the Foreign Service, the succession of Secretaries, are so busy traveling around the world being diplomats that nobody's really paying attention to essential management. And I think that this is really an important thing. Bob Oakley this morning in the *Post* has a piece on the lack of resources in the Foreign Service, and he's absolutely right on. But resources is only part of it.

I used to try and devise a way in which recruitment would be possible to develop a system maybe much more based on interviewing and that kind of selectivity. Maybe when someone like Tom Pickering retires, who understands the Foreign Service from bottom to top, he could run a special commission to reform Personnel. It would have to

be done in conjunction with Congress, because if you didn't get Congress to sign off on the results, you'd never get the money or the backing to do it. So it may be a Utopian idea.

Q: Well, I think one of the problems that's developed over the years has been, with the series of lawsuits and all, that in order to have a personnel system that seems to be devoid of personal judgment and is sort of automatic, that they have gone as machine-possible and tried to remove human hands from the whole process, mainly as a reaction to courts. And for that I'd blame the goddam lawyers.

CURRAN: And then I have a final footnote which I hope that every young officer or any officer I run into who has a problem in the Service and with an efficiency report will note. When I was doing the transition at USIA from bringing CU out of State I had quite a run- in with the Deputy Director of USIA, who wrote what I considered a very unfair rating, and after a lot of thinking and jogging and advice, I wrote a one-sentence comment on my rating, which said, "I'm sorry he was disappointed. I look forward to continuing my career." Well, I was promoted to career minister in 1982, and Ambassador Neumann, as I mentioned earlier, was on my panel, and he congratulated me, and he said maybe I would like to know why I was picked. There were only a couple every year. And I said, "Yes, I would like to know." And he said, "It was that reply you made to that obvious attempt to screw you in 1978." He said, "If you'd gone into a long harangue about who was right and who was wrong, you would have joined everybody else; but just by being matter-of- fact, that tipped the balance." So my advice to everybody is that if you have a bad rating, don't fight about it. Make an academic comment and go on with your life.

Q: As a matter of fact, that box, for those who have dealt with it, they call it the suicide box. If you make a rebuttal, you're dead - I mean a real rebuttal. Okay, well-

CURRAN: Stuart, this was very pleasant. Let me close with a few comments about my family, who were very supportive during my Foreign Service career.

Marcia, my lovely wife, is now an Inspector at State/OIG and continues her career with some of the perspectives obtained as a Foreign Service spouse and, of course, many other talents. During my 25 years at USIA and State, Marcia made and remade homes in a wide variety of places so that our family could keep together and share the experiences from Germany to the Middle East to Mexico and to Afghanistan. In our first eight years of marriage, we moved seven times.

Sara, our oldest daughter, was born in Beirut and is now teaching at Princeton after work and study in the Peace Corps, farm relief programs in Illinois, and a Ph.D. at Chapel Hill, as well as a research grant at the University of Seattle. Her husband, Ralph Coolman, also has a doctorate - in soil science - and is now at Rutgers. There is no question that Sara's life was influenced by foreign service.

Diana, our second daughter, is a physician (OB/GYN). She and her surgeon husband, Laris Galejs, live in Dayton, Ohio. Laris' parents came from Latvia and he has close

associations with Latvia and the Latvian community. Diana's year with me in Morocco was special for both of us and she was able to have a unique experience on her own with the Moroccan and non-U.S. community in Rabat. During one of her medical incarnations, a few words of Arabic picked up in the family were of help in dealing with Chaldean immigrants to Detroit from the Basra area.

Without the constant support from wife and daughters, I believe it would have been impossible to stay in the government for a quarter of a century and I am very much indebted to all of them.

R.T. Curran March 2000

End of interview