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

RICHARD G. JOHNSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Johnson.]

Q: OK, today is 7 October 2009. This is an interview with Richard G. Johnson. The G. is very important because there is a Richard E. Johnson, and the two careers often get, have overlaps. The G. Stands for…

JOHNSON: Garon.

Q: OK, and you go by Dick.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: OK, Dick, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

JOHNSON: New Haven, Connecticut in St. Raphael Hospital.

Q: What year?

JOHNSON: October 6, 1921.

Q: OK, so we are now one day into your 88th year.

JOHNSON: Right.

Q: OK, Dick, let's start with what do you know about your family? Let's start on your father's side?

JOHNSON: Born in New Haven, my father.

Q: What about your grandfather and back?

JOHNSON: This is not much of an easy family. He is an only child. Neither of his parents went beyond seventh grade, something like that. In the homes of these grandparents I never saw a book. But they were very wonderful. They were operators of restaurants, operating a catering system, particularly catering to the Yale community. Classes that would come back to Yale for a reunion would sign a contract with my grandmother, my father's mother, to cater the dinners they had and that sort of thing. I would say my grandfather there, Augustus Johnson, from Mount Holly, New Jersey, had a profession in his early days called wheelwright. I believe he worked on the water wheels that a company in Fall River, Massachusetts operated in textile factories, water flowed through and turned these wheels to create electricity.

Q: Oh yeah.

JOHNSON: He also worked for a pioneer automobile building firm in Hartford, Connecticut, various things like that. My grandmother, as we were told, emigrated from Ireland as a young girl, and went to the textile mills of Massachusetts and there met her husband, Augustus Johnson. Her name was Sarah Raymond. Down through the years of my contact with her I could recognize certain things. She did not like to be recognized as an Irish immigrant. She was not a Roman Catholic. She had a particular dislike for Catholic priests in Ireland. I never acquired insight into what experiences gave her these attitudes. I talked once with a distinguished Irish woman doctor here in Washington. She said she thought that this grandmother of mine was not Irish but part of the English element that was in Ireland at the time. Be that as it may. These grandparents, I don't know what kind of home they had in 1921 when I was born, but I know they had three homes in the 1930's , a fine home, elegant home on a New Haven street called Chapel Street right near the Yale Bowl. All the homes there are handsome. They had a cottage in Orlando, Florida. They went down there every winter. Driving when there was no I-95. And they had a cottage at a place called Pond Point which is a beach between two outcroppings of land which belongs to Milford, Connecticut near New Haven, Connecticut. Anyway they were very successful at their trades, these grandparents of mine. My father was educated at Hill House High, it is called, New Haven High School. That is probably getting ahead of my story. I should be focusing on what happens after my birth. Within a year my father moved from New Haven to Port Washington, Long Island, New York, on the north shore surrounded on one side by Manhasset Bay and on the other by Glen Cove Harbor. This peninsula on a map looks like a cow's head. So the original name of Port Washington was Cow Neck. It didn't get its modern name until

about 1850 or 1860 I think. I was a child in Port Washington. Where should we go in our story now?

Q: All right, so you moved in 1922 to Long Island. Did you grow up there?

JOHNSON: Absolutely.

Q: Let's talk about the town and the area at the time you were growing up Where did it fit in the economic and social system at the time?

JOHNSON: OK, well a prominent element in that town during this period of 1925 to 1945 was the commuter element. The Long Island Railroad has a line right to Port Washington. That is the end of that particular line. It was very convenient. You could always get a seat when going in. It takes about 35-40 minutes and you are in Penn Station. So there are numerous people who are businessmen in New York or journalists or sports writers, that sort of thing. Then you have your business community of this small town really, the people who operate the hardware store, dentists, doctors. Then on part of the town area is a great giant sand bank serving the building of New York City skyscrapers. What do you call these boats that just take sand?

Q: Barges.

JOHNSON: The barges come and tow the sand into Manhattan. A certain foreign element works there. Polish immigrants and other immigrant groups. The conspicuous nationalities there are Polish and Italian. Curious to me was that right up the street from us we had Burton Morris, a New York Times sportswriter but all he covers is yachting, small boats which have competitions with a lot of coverage photographs. Now they don't cover any of that. They don't cover it at all.

Q: I remember when the small sailboat predominant for racing was the star.

JOHNSON: About like that size. And it goes on in the winter. Those races are called the frostbite races. The son of that Burton Morris who was the correspondent still lives there in town. The home that my parents had at that time, the address is 11 Fairview Avenue. The area is called Port Washington Park.

Q: I was wondering, you might talk about, you showed me some pictures, your father went to Yale. He was a towney in New Haven. What do you know of his experiences in Yale?

JOHNSON: He spoke warmly of a professor named William Lyon Phelps who was operating in the field of literature, but he was in the scientific school. Baseball seemed to be important to him, I have heard him say that he went to Yale just to continue playing baseball, and varsity baseball. He enjoyed that a lot. But he was sensitive about a certain thing. He also had an affiliation with a semi pro team called the New Haven Colonials which was created by George Weiss who later became a prominent Yankee gentleman. I

believe that they played in the summer and this team played exhibition games against touring teams of the top pros of the day. My father has commented on playing against Ty Cobb, and yes, Ty Cobb was a spiker.

Q: Ty Cobb was renowned for stealing bases by coming in with his cleats in front.

JOHNSON: Spikes they were called.

Q: If you got in his way you could get up with a pretty gashed leg.

JOHNSON: But I know my father was very sensitive about talking about George Weiss and this team because perhaps it conflicted with his amateur standing on the Yale team. George Weiss was the son of a local butcher. He was a member of the Yale class of '16.

Q: This was your father's class.

JOHNSON: My father's class. George Weiss was in it with him. But George Weiss dropped out at some point and developed a wealthy and successful baseball life. But the reading I have done about George Weiss indicated that he was a rough character. I mean not personable.

Q: You showed some pictures of your father and a couple of pictures of a baseball team with Prescott Bush who became senator from Connecticut and father of George H.W. Bush and grandfather of George W. Bush.

JOHNSON: Right. And they both when they graduated went to work for the same company. My father and Prescott Bush went to work for the United States Rubber Company in Naugatuck, Connecticut, not far from New Haven. So certainly a big part of my father's career was in tires. He was a textile expert. He was purchasing agent for the U.S. Rubber Company.

Q: So he would commute into New York.

JOHNSON: He would commute into New York. Prescott Bush did not last too long in the U.S. Rubber Company. He met a very beautiful and wealthy girl who was associated with Wall Street, and he dropped out and became a Wall Street Broker, and of course succeeded mightily.

Q: As a kid did you have a gang you played around with other kids? What were they like?

JOHNSON: Mixed ethnically. What was an early activity was sandlot football. We had a sandlot where we could play. We had Anglo Saxon kids on the team and Italian children. I would remember the Italian immigrant children for, I don't know how to describe it. They were our linesmen, and they liked to pick up wads of mud and throw it in the eye of opposing linesmen to slow him down.

Q: Of course there were no referees in those games.

JOHNSON: No. I was a backfield runner. But this was fun. Then next to this area where our home was were great enormous expanses of open fields. No housing developments. So hiking around in there, you would get to the edge of these great sand banks which was a dramatic panorama. You would encounter pheasants. I had the experience of seeing a pheasant rise up near me, and I had a hunting knife in my hand, and I heaved it at the pheasant and it hit him and killed him. I gave the pheasant to a gentleman across the street from our house who was interested in taxidermy and stuffing. The next door neighbor is an interesting item. Our immediate next door neighbor was named Loren D. Lyman. He was the aviation editor of the New York Times, I think it was the Times, anyway a leading New York newspaper. He at an early period befriended Charles Lindbergh before Charles Lindbergh made his flight across the ocean. He said to my family that he would take my brother and myself over to Roosevelt Field and introduce us to this young man Charles Lindbergh who was going to fly across the Atlantic.

Q: Roosevelt Field is of course where he took off.

JOHNSON: Yes. We went there, but we didn't meet him. But he did introduce us to several other prominent fliers, Wiley Post and some other famous fliers. Anyway Loren D. Lyman was a close friend of Charles Lindbergh after the great success of the flight. Such a friend that when Lindbergh, after the death of his baby, decided to move to England, he sort of developed an inside story to his friend, Loren D. Lyman, who wrote it up on the flight of the Lindberghs to England. He won the Pulitzer Prize for this story. Then he departed my area and became public relations director for Pratt and Whitney Aircraft in Hartford. A good aspect of living where we did on Fairview Avenue was that just about three or four blocks away was the elementary school. There were no school busses then, and we just walked easily to this nearby school. In later life I paid tribute, whenever I had a chance to say anything about Port Washington, I pay tribute to the school system of that town. It was really excellent.

Q:Do you remember any teachers who impressed you?

JOHNSON: Let's see here, if we just deal with the elementary school I remember the teachers but I don't remember their names. They were just competent.

Q: What sort of subjects interested you particularly?

JOHNSON: Well, in elementary school, there was no choice really. Arithmetic and English Grammar. When we got to seventh grade we got into more interesting things.

Q: How about let's stick to the earlier time. Were you an only child?

JOHNSON: No, my brother is about 18 months younger, and a very different personality. Let's say he was much less studious than I was, and to leap ahead of my story, when he wanted to go to college, he wanted to go to Yale where I was now inscribed, the advisor

said, "No, you wouldn't qualify," so he went to Brown. After one year he easily transferred to Yale. He graduated from Yale in '45. He was more athletic. He was huskier. I don't know, I must have come in some postwar period where I was not husky.

Q: Well at home let's start in elementary. Were you much of a reader?

JOHNSON: Yes, a great reader. I would say. Believe it or not a book a day. I would walk to the New York Library, the Port Washington Library and something that surprises me in retrospect is that my parents would let me walk to this library since I had to cross one major boulevard and then five or six intersections of streets to get to this library. Then, it was a nifty little library.

Q: Carnegie library?

JOHNSON: No, just a Port Washington library. Now they outgrew that little library. They had things like Saturday morning reading for children that would be fun. Anyway they had all these books.

Q: Do you recall any books early that impressed you or not?

JOHNSON: Yes. Travel books. Books about the rest of the world, the histories and battles and so forth about other countries say in Latin America and Europe and Asia. There was a writer of the day named Harry Franck, I read a number of his writings. But if we can go ahead to the first years of junior high school, the teachers there were keen on an American figure named John Muir, a great naturalist who discovered all sorts of things, he is featured much in this new series on the national parks.

Q: Oh yes, Muir Woods and all of that. He kind of stayed basically on Yosemite.

JOHNSON: So our teacher would tell us a lot about him. Teachers at the time, I liked their style of teaching. Their style was to read to us, sit in that chair up there at their desk and read us material about O. Henry stories, Brett Harte Stories, out of John Muir writings. I think all of these readings engaged us in these people and their cause. In junior high we had civics which taught us civic morality and town planning. We were tasked to design small towns with a business section, an industrial section and a recreation section, that sort of thing. We were taught something called propaganda analysis. This was like the seventh grade. The different phrases for propaganda, glittering generalities, one of the phrases, various other phrases. I have lost track of what the children are being taught now.

Q: Well that is a wonderful thing to have because we are exposed to all this propaganda, generalities, simplification, the whole business. Where did your family fit politically?

JOHNSON: Now my father was the only college graduate in my family. My mother did not go to college, went to a New Haven school. All the ancestors, I think they are very interesting and we could talk about them, but I would say that my father was a quiet

Republican, businessman Republican. He somehow made my brother into an ardent Republican, a fanatic Republican, a born again Christian. My brother went into the textile business relating to my father's interests and business. Deering Milliken Corporation, a big textile outfit based in Georgia and New York City. I would say that in the south my brother became a born again Christian. We were Episcopalians until then. He was very much under the whip of a Roger Milliken who was the boss of Deering Milliken. You had to be a Republican to work in that corporation. When I called on my brother in his office and sat in on these sorts of bull sessions with the other sales executives, the measure of them seemed to be the ability to tell a good joke story. One after the other would tell one, each trying to top the other person. When my brother moved away to Georgia, I think the place was Lagrange, Georgia, he had the ability to have business prospects attend all the great golf competitions in that place nearby down there whatever the name of it is. In high school, we can talk about high school athletics.

Q: Of course we can do high school, but then I really want to come back because I didn't ask about the background of your mother.

JOHNSON: Right. Let's see how to describe her. Pretty wonderful, I had to like her. But who were her parents? Somebody named Spang. That is a big chain in my ancestry, the Spang family. But her father died when she was very young, less than 10 years old. Her mother, Mary Jane McCloughlin, Irish Catholic, had no skills or training or superior education or anything. She was a problem. My mother and her mother then battered around sheltered by other relatives, living, say, in Waltham, Massachusetts. Or other places. But marriage in about 1920 to my father sort of rescued her. Her mother, my grandmother Mary Jane McCloughlin Spang became the housekeeper for a Yale professor, the head of the Spanish Language program at Yale. It was a very elegant home, and she was a wonderful housekeeper for that man and wife, professor and wife. My mother was an ardent reader. She had a friend up the street, the wife of a lawyer. Those two made many hundreds of visits to New York City on the train, for shopping. During the war if we skip ahead to that, my mother was an American Red Cross bond saleswoman. Nice uniform going every day to Belmont Park which was a big race horse place and marketing war bonds there.

If we go back to school for me, what could I do athletically in the school system? Track and field. We don't want to get too much into this coach because he was a nice guy, but he cast me as a high jumper. I am only 5'7". At 5'7" you cannot be a great high jumper, however I was the best the school had. He taught me a system which was called the eastern roll, which is not the best system. At that time in the 1930's you could not do the famous Fosbury Flop. Your head could not go over the bar before your feet. Several styles of high jumping developed. The western roll first, and then the rules changed saying you could go over in a certain way. Then my brother took up high jumping. I could do 5'8". He could do 6'2" or something. He even held the country record when he was in high school. He jumped against a famous black American athlete, the football player Jim Brown. But swimming, plenty of swimming for me, because my parents belonged to the Port Washington yacht club in Manhasset Bay. They did not have a sailboat down there, but my father played tennis there. It was great swimming for me to

go down there. Roller skating and bicycling. I guess later on if we could get to the junior high school age, I become a Saturday Evening Post salesman. Do you know about that.

Q: With bikes and everything.

JOHNSON: Magazines, they could not go through the mail for reasons which I don't understand. Later on they could. At the time they had to be delivered to your home by little boys like myself who enjoyed doing it with a bicycle and a basket full of these Ladies Home Journals.

Q: The magazines were a prime source of reading. As a kid I remember the Glen Cannon series…

JOHNSON: Tugboat Annie series.

Q: And the western stories that later John Ford took over and turned into his classic movies all came out of the Saturday Evening Post, wonderful reading.

JOHNSON: Also I marketed these magazines every morning down at the railroad station. You stand there and after the people are heading up the ramp to get on the train you say, "Saturday Evening Post, Saturday Evening Post," And people buy them to read as they go in. Then when they come home in the evening you are down there again marketing and selling them, and they are taking them home to their wives. Then at a certain point union news sets up a stand to sell magazines and other things, and a burly operator of the stand says, "If I see any of you kids around here I am going to clobber you." I read in the life of Russell Baker that he was another one of these Saturday Evening Post salesmen at the same time. I am going to check that out sometime. As I remember he didn't have any good deal like my railroad outfit, and he didn't seem to market them to the housewives. He just stood around on corners in his town I think in Northern Virginia selling them. I don't think he sold very many.

Q: I wouldn't think so. It was very much kids who would come to the door and say would you buy these? Certainly we subscribed to Life and the Saturday Evening Post probably the Reader's Digest which probably came in by mail. But these were…

JOHNSON: Housewives were very nice about having a small boy deliver them.

Q: OK, this is part two of a first interview with Dick G. Johnson. Dick, what about religion? Where did your family fall religion-wise?

JOHNSON: It would be noticeable that neither parent went to church or showed any interest in religion. However they were anxious that we, my brother and myself, have a religion and they wanted it to be Episcopalian. So we were directed to St. Stephens Episcopal church in Port Washington, and it was a strong and admirable experience for me I must say. Particularly because of the rector, William Moon, at this church. He was an English immigrant, this guy. He had been a chaplain in the British navy. He had a

wonderful English accent. The church, I only learned later about the three levels of Episcopal. The middle level is hazy, the high is crazy and the low is lazy. The three levels of Episcopalian. This church is high church, but I didn't know about that then. The three levels and all that sort of thing.

Q: Where are the smells and bells.

JOHNSON: Smells and bells, that was another way to put it. That was quite nice on Sunday, the incense. And in going to church and Sunday school you are training to be confirmed later on somehow. No big examination, but when I reach a certain age I am confirmed by the bishop in the neighboring town of Garden City. Anyway I appreciated that contact with him, and he then became the one to marry myself and wife. She is a Christian Scientist and they don't do marriages. He would come out to my wife's home in New Jersey. I think that was a very nice gesture on his part. Anyway that was part of our life there, that church.

Q: At home with you and your brother and father and mother, would you sit around and talk about the world or day's events? Was this table talk or not?

JOHNSON: No. I don't know why not but it doesn't happen. But about this time sixth or seventh grade, a major impact comes into my life with music. A music director comes to the school system from Oberlin College which specializes in music.

Q: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: And this fellow Paul van Bodegraven, he is a Netherlands guy, Paul van Bodegraven. And he develops a music system where the school provides the instruments. I was provided with a clarinet and after I developed certain skills and was coached by him, I would get my own clarinets and give these other clarinets back to the school system. He nurses along a program, and he is able to impose something that if you are going to play in the high school band and concert orchestras, you have to also have a private teacher and be taking weekly lessons. You have plenty of teachers form the New York Symphonies and everything living in the town. Anyway he hooks me, I get hooked on the band and the clarinet. It means two hours a day every day except weekends. One hour high school band and orchestra rehearsal form eight to nine in the morning, and then an hour of practice at home. This Paul van Bodegraven nourishes this band to win a national championship. We are a band that does not do marching or anything like that, we are a concert band. Many of the people in the school band are aiming to go to the University of Michigan where they have an important music program.

Q: Oh yes and a huge marching band. That was the premier marching band in the football league.

JOHNSON: Later on the war comes and van Bodegraven goes away and Port Washington is no longer a great music power as it was. He goes to universities. He becomes a music director for the University of Missouri. He becomes the president of the

national association of high school music directors, and becomes a very distinguished leader. In his early retirement he perishes in a house fire in Tucson, Arizona. Well anyway that was a big influence.

Q: Well anyway you were playing what was known in those days as a licorice stick. This is also the preeminent instrument of the swing bands. Did you get, you were in the era when the swing band was coming up. Did that attract you?

JOHNSON: You bet. Because the year after winning the national championship the best of the musicians graduate and go on and a very good clarinetist becomes first clarinet in a section of 12 or 14. I become the second clarinet next to him, a great honor. He and I frequently take the Long Island Railroad into New York City to seek out places where great bands were playing, swing bands, particularly great clarinetists.

Q: Well Benny Goodman, but who else?

JOHNSON: Artie Shaw was one, but there were lots of others whose names were not as famous, but they performed in a place called Nick's Greenwich Village. We are a couple of high school students who go in there and we sit at the bar. We are not ordering any beer or alcohol. The bar managers could get impatient and throw us out, we would have tactics for engaging the bartenders in conversation. They were interested in explaining how they keep the pipes clean from the system. So we could listen to these things and then we would combine these swing things with going to the Hotel St. George in Brooklyn Heights because they had a swimming pool. My first clarinetist was an avid diver and I was an avid swimmer. I would swim and he would dive.

Q: You would sneak in.

JOHNSON: No, we were customers. You could use the pool without being a person renting a room in the hotel. He becomes my best buddy I would say. We will catch up with him later.

Q: I think one of the things we should point out, because it is such a different world, is that as young people you could go into New York on your own at an early age, whereas today everything is cosseted and kids are ferried hither and yon. I assume you were taking your bike and could cover a lot of ground.

JOHNSON: It was a great bike experience for me delivering the Saturday Evening Post and Ladies Home Journal to houses all over Port Washington. In New York we would take the subway. One time we fell asleep late at night and the subway train was taken into the yards late at night and we were the only ones on it. Everyone else was off. The motor man came through the train and saw us there, and he just took the train, he drove it himself back to the nearest station where we could get out and get home to Long Island.

Q: I would like to point something out, because I was a beneficiary of this period although I am I think eight years younger than you are. You mentioned sand lot football.

I used to play sand lot football, baseball, these meant that you got together and organized your own teams and you played. There was no basic organization or little league or anything like that. You just went and did it. You also travelled all over the place alone. I can remember going into Los Angeles, I lived in Pasadena, going in to the Follies Theater and seeing my first strip tease and being asked by the ticket seller if I was 18. I said "Absolutely." I was 12 years old and looked it. We could get away with those things in those days.

JOHNSON: He had done his duty by just asking anyway.

Q: The New Deal and the depression, how did that hit you? You were certainly of an age where you knew what was going on. You would have been about 12 or so when the Depression really hit.

JOHNSON: 1929, 1930-'31. I was aware of it. My father was not affected by it in his job at the United States Rubber Company.

Q: Was the area around where you lived one where men out of work would come around asking for food or work?

JOHNSON: The north side of Long Island was a bedside community in a way. You didn't have that impact that you would be having in the Bronx or Manhattan, or Brooklyn or that part of New York State. However I knew we had to be economical. We weren't spending money frivolously at all. That is all I could say. As for domestic help at home we had a high school girl, Polish, Veronica Mazur who would come and help clean up and prepare dinner and then go home and do her homework. She was involved in a noticeable episode in my life here. Walking home from work, she walked by a writer for the Saturday Evening Post, Clarence Buddington Kelland, rather wealthy. His chow leaped out and bit her in the face and hurt her nose. She sued and got a good settlement. She got a good education and benefited greatly.

Q: Chows are notoriously nasty dogs. Did your family sort of sit around and curse "That man in the White House," and all. Lines were drawn pretty firmly about Roosevelt and the New Deal. If you were a New York businessman I would think your family would be on the "Let's go down to the Trans-Lux and hiss Roosevelt."

JOHNSON: These parents were not at all like that. My father had a business colleague named Stuart Johnson who lived in Locust Valley Long Island, a more wealthy family than ours. My father tells of going there for dinner and their young daughter was at the table during the dinner. The name of Roosevelt came up in the conversation, and this young daughter heard the name of Roosevelt, and she piped up and said, "Roosevelt, he is made of dirty stuff."

Q: We are going through, well we do this with president after president, but Roosevelt aroused great emotion at the time. As you are going up through junior high were developments in Europe a matter of discussion either in school or at home?

JOHNSON: Yes. Somehow Port Washington had a very nice high school auditorium. A political discussion program was held in the high school just about every week. It was called something like theater of the air. It was getting together two prominent individuals to debate issues. The issues were what Germany was doing in Eastern Europe and support Britain or be isolationist. We would have speakers there like Charles Lindbergh speaking on behalf of isolationism. And another fellow speaking on behalf of intervention We would also have a representative of the United States Foreign Service speak at these things.

Q: Really?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a fellow named Wilbur Carr.

Q: Oh my gosh, Wilbur Carr was the preeminent head of the consular operations but later was ambassador to Czechoslovakia in the 30's, but was a major civil servant powerhouse in the State Department.

JOHNSON: Well as a young high school student looking at him for the very first time, what am I seeing? I am seeing a man in a completely dark suit and shoes higher than his ankles. He just looks like a figure out of history. Old fashioned, not at all hip or anything like that. But it made me conscious and aware of the Foreign Service. If I could mention at this point in our interview, I became aware of the Foreign Service and I wrote to the Foreign Service about a career. They sent me thick documentation. Part of the documentation was the complete text of the then-foreign service exam, page after page after page. I could see it was a test of knowledge. In the modern day we have gotten away from a test of knowledge because people don't have enough knowledge to compete at all. Anyway you would have a whole bunch of treaties, and then you would have various countries here. Then you would have to match up which treaty went with which countries. The treaty of Leticia Arica, what is that. It is a Latin American thing between Peru and Ecuador. You had to have a lot of knowledge. I knew what sort of knowledge I would need for the exam of the day that they had then. I still think it was a tough test. Also I would say, it just happens that my brain works very well for that type of examination, all these canned prepared examination things I would do very well in. I scored very well in the foreign service exam when I took it. Even in the area where they say if you score that high you will not do very well in the foreign service. You are too intellectual or something.

Q: Well I am sure in your time, certainly I was among the last of the people who took the exam, this was in 1953, it was a 3 ½ day exam. Mostly writing. Can we try to capture what the sentiment on Jews was at the time in your area, because within the business community there was a strong anti-Semitic current. I mean it wasn't violent or something but basically discriminatory. Was that a factor that you were aware of?

JOHNSON: I am rather impressed with how much less strong that factor would be in Port Washington. Let's say my dentist was Jewish, the family dentist. Lots of my fellow

students were Jewish. I had no sense of hostility or disrespect or anything like that. Then New York City was so Jewish, I as a kid going in there many times I would feel that it was practically a Jewish city. If you weren't Jewish you were sort of a minority kid around the place. Nobody was ever writing graffiti on the walls "Jews out" or anything like that. The best soda fountain in town, a pharmacy, would have a Jewish name to it, Schwabs or something like that. I forget now. But an interesting factor to me and it still remains is that we had a girl in the class who was definitely going to be the valedictorian of the high school. The name escapes me.

Q: You can add this later.

JOHNSON: Eleanor Jenkins. She was the picture of the Mona Lisa painting in the Louvre. She looked beautifully Italian but her name was Eleanor Jenkins. Her father ran a grocery down at the other end of town. She was a ferocious field hockey player, and a brilliant student, very admirable. She went on to the University of Middlebury and became a language teacher in the university system of Toledo. Anyway I couldn't imagine that her name could be Jenkins. Only in the last ten years or so did I learn that her real family name was Joaquino, and they were from outside Naples, a place called Torre del Greco. Anyway the family changed the name from Joaquino to Jenkins. They felt…

Q: And rightly so.

JOHNSON: And they are all successful. The whole family are lawyers or doctors and everything. I only learned all this later by going to high school reunions. I learned that she had a crush on me. The typical thing people talk about when you go to go to high school reunions 20 or 30 years later.

Q: What was the boy-girl pattern in high school when you were going there. You would have been going '34 to '38 or so?

JOHNSON: Let's say '35 to '39. In '39 I went away to prep school in Connecticut. That is where I became exposed to Kent, Choate, and all kinds of New England schools by being on the track team. Again I mention I could only high jump about 5'8", but I could win points for our team because nobody else was interested in being a high jumper.

Q: Well in high school was there a dating pattern or anything like that? Did you date, go to movies or…

JOHNSON: Yes, I certainly dated. A girl, wonderful in every respect, Ann Martel was her name. Intelligent, beautiful, she was of Scandinavian descent. But when I went away to prep school I sort of broke away from that community. I was focusing on preparing to go to war. As I am going to Yale I said, "I am going to prepare for war."

Q: Before we get to that, just something. Were you much of a movie buff? Because this was really the golden age of Hollywood.

JOHNSON: I was, yes. I think I went many Saturdays, only Saturday afternoons, no other time. I definitely liked the westerns of the time and some of the classics of the time. Ben-Hur or anyway lots of good Saturday afternoons.

Q: Why did you go to Loomis?

JOHNSON: I would say in high school I had never heard of Loomis. I had heard of a number of other New England prep schools. Some business acquaintance said to my father, "You know, you ought to have your son go to Loomis." He offered it to me as an option and I said, "OK, fine, I will go there." I didn't know something at the time, that he would not have to pay any tuition. The school was so endowed at the time there was no tuition to pay, except something for room and board, so it was not a great expense on my father. I am extremely pleased with having a year there. They had excellent teachers and it was an excellent experience.

Q: Any courses particularly stand out in mind?

JOHNSON: That is a difficult area. The most impressive teacher was named John Horne Burns. He taught poetry. In English, we had one teacher for novels and one teacher for poetry. In the poetry class we were analyzing, discussing poems. We were writing a page a night or two pages about a particular poem. This John Horne Burns, when you get back your paper the entire margin, all this is filled up with his comments. He was also in charge of such music as the prep school had which was very small. I was part of it. Doing a Gilbert and Sullivan play. This one was called The Sorcerer's Apprentice. I didn't understand why. I didn't realize he was also the music director of the school. But anyway the question is, he was gay. This is a period now when this is very sensitive.

Q: And you didn't even know the word gay was there. It was homosexual officially or fairy or faggot. It is not a nice period.

JOHNSON: The only thing that sort of touched my awareness was his particular favoritism for the poet named Hart Crane, who was a distinguished or well known homosexual in our modern poetry world. So certainly maybe Burns is gay too. Then another time, close to graduation, I see one of my favorite professors, John Horne Burns, running down the outdoor corridor. The way his arms were flopping, I said to myself, "The only guys whose arms flop when they run like that are gays." He was a Harvard guy. Maybe that was an affectation on his part to increase his appearance as an intellectual and as a poetry expert. I didn't make anything of it. It wouldn't have bothered me in the slightest if he had been gay. Then he wrote a book. He went into the army and had a very interesting career in the army. He wrote a book in about 1947 or '48 called "The Gallery" based on the war in Italy.

Q: Around Naples.

JOHNSON: About Naples. It was being hailed by writers as the best book or best novel to come out of the war, and I think it is one of the best books I have ever read. Then he was embroiled in an academic dispute with the system at Loomis, and being discharged from Loomis as a gay. Then he becomes a travel writer. Then he comes to my first post in Florence and he calls on me. It pleases me to know that he knows who I am. Soon afterwards he died, he is killed. There were scandal stories about how he was killed. However as far as history goes it is just said that he had a brain tumor. Other stories had to do with heavy drinking in a bar and somebody hitting him. There are other stories like that in Italy. Anyway it is part of my experience with the gay world and the gay situation.

Q: Well then, at Loomis was it a different student body than at your high school?

JOHNSON: Yes, ethnically it was not my high school, which was filled with the children of Lithuanians and Poles and Italians and Anglo Saxons and that kind of thing. But Loomis had a sizable day student body in from Hartford. So some of them are Jewish. It is an anecdote for me possibly of interest to your interview that my very first day on the campus at Loomis I walked into the dining hall, and people were congratulating me, saying, "Nice going, terrific game," and patting me on the back. And here I hadn't done a thing. I hadn't been on the field or anything. Here they were mistaking me for star of the soccer team, Elihu Berman, a Jewish boy from Hartford. There was enough of a similarity in our appearance. The student body, well I can't think of interesting things to say about the student body. They were talented you know, with cliques. Yale was different.

Q: Well, this was also the period and it lasted for some time because I went to Kent, eight years later, but these prep schools had it almost guaranteed that if you did well in one of these prep schools you could go to one of the top colleges in the United States. I mean I went to Williams, and I think like six other guys in my class of 50 went to Williams, three or four went to Yale. These things are unthinkable today.

JOHNSON: Yes. I would say I had a vague impression that a year at Loomis would increase my acceptability at Yale.

Q: I am sure it did.

JOHNSON: I am not sure it did anymore, because another fellow who was in my class said that Yale was kind of sweeping people in that year, 1940. For some reason it would not have been as difficult as I thought it might be.

Q: Well I am not sure they were that selective. This was even after the war, I went into Williams, I was class of '50. Well let's move on. You graduated from Loomis in what year?

JOHNSON: 1940.

Q: OK, the war was on. We weren't in it, but what was the expectation for you?

JOHNSON: In my thinking, we were going to be involved in that war. I would like to be in an intelligence function. Glasses, I am very nearsighted, were going to keep me out of combat I bet. Even though after Pearl Harbor I reported to the Marine recruiting place. When they examined my eyes they laughed me out of the building. I said, "I am going to learn Japanese or German. I studied German intensively. By that I mean I just didn't take the courses at Yale in German. I made frequent visits to movies in upper New York City, the Yorkville section, German section of that city.

Q: 88th Street.

JOHNSON: Yes, East 88th Street in there. The movie was entirely in German, and the audience was mostly German Americans or German immigrants, that sort of thing. I also took up a hobby which I thought would probably affect my eligibility for intelligence functions. I did cryptograms. The New York newspapers published cryptograms every night, a long XYZBBB what does all this mean in English? So, I was doing all that sort of code work. So at some point while I was applying, I said something about doing cryptograms. I half suspected and I was partly right that some evaluators would say, "We are going to put this fellow in signal intelligence, and he is going to be an analyst of German communications." I studied Japanese too. I liked the Japanese language. The instructor was a Marine Corps officer who was half Japanese American and half regular American. A very good looking guy. I liked everything about him. The problem with the relationship between the spoken Japanese and written Japanese daunted me. I did not want to get involved in this hieroglyphic kind of relationship. It is quite pronounceable, the German Language. So I thought, "I will stick with German." Did I mention that in my German class we had a fellow named Steven Tanner who had the same background and the same interest in German. He and I went right through the war in the same unit just like in lockstep because we were so similar in preparation.

Q: Well let's see, you went to Yale in 1940. The draft, were you exempt, the draft started about 1940 didn't it?

JOHNSON: Yeah, about in there.

Q: Because I remember October of 1941 was where it came up for a year's renewal, and it was only renewed by one vote in Congress. So it would have been October of 1940 that they started the draft.

JOHNSON: They had something then called the enlisted reserve corps, and I signed up for that, as did my buddy Steve Tanner. That delayed us from leaving Yale for nine months, or some period of months. So at least I got through the first two years. Then in February, '43, I was called up, summoned for duty let's say, and was sent to Sea Girt, New Jersey for basic training. This was a signal corps camp. It was rainy and cold. I sort of suspected I would be sent to crypto-analyst school later, and I was. After I finished that, I was sent to Vint Hill Farms Station which is outside Washington in Warrenton,

Virginia. It is a signal intelligence center, existing since the 1930's, I am sure it is now monitoring embassy signal communications here in Washington.

Q: Is that around Vint Hill?

JOHNSON: Vint Hill was the name of it. The need for people who spoke German and could cope with codes was very great. The training in signal intelligence was very quick and brief. We were soon whisked off to North Africa and gradually pushed up to the front. I thought it was all going very slowly, and yet it was ten times faster than during this war in Iraq. This war in Iraq was longer than the whole war. Anyway to be in signal intelligence was a good break for adventure, but not a great danger. Because you are very definitely not expected by the military to be killed, wasting all this talent you have. They dread that you would be captured and that you would be interrogated about signal intelligence successes and all of that. So our intercept operation I don't think could ordinarily establish itself, never in a town or anywhere but out in the mountain sides five miles from the front, from where the Germans were. That means you are hearing the rumble of artillery in and out all the time. You never have to wear a tie.

Q: Well now you went to North Africa first?

JOHNSON: Yes, but this was just to get us up to the front.

Q: The front was in Italy?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: So were you part of the 5th Army?

JOHNSON: Yes, but the 5th Army is like a bad word. If you are anywhere near the front you hate the 5th Army. The 5th Army is all those knockabouts back there in the towns who are getting a meal at a table every night and have a shower every night or every week anyway. They are not in any danger. The 5th Army…

Q: Were they lodged in Caserta for the most part?

JOHNSON: Yes. They were, yes.

Q: Which is a Versailles Palace.

JOHNSON: My buddy Leonardo Neher was there at Caserta in signal intelligence. He was sent there for some reason. Anyway his patch was II Corps, Second Corps and our intercept activity covers the front of four or five divisions who are fighting under the aegis of II Corps. Over here at Anzio is VI Corps and later on is IV Corps. And the British 8th army was stuck here over on the right. If we are going to be discussing war I had one of the best company commanders ever. Just terrific. I am scheduled to go

October 30 to Brooklyn Heights, New York, to celebrate the 85th birthday of his wife. He died about 10 years ago.

Q: Well tell me, how did you get, I mean what came in, how did you get the stuff and what were you doing?

JOHNSON: We were set up for tactical signal intelligence. It involves, this is no secret or anything, it involves a company. We will call it the 128th Signal Intelligence Company. It will have in it cooks and bakers and truck drivers and wire layers and all the sort of non intellectual aspect. It will have radio operators. Radio operators who don't know German but who know the Morse code. The Germans at the front are transmitting messages that are coded, but in Morse code. They are even speaking into radio telephones in Morse code. Instead of saying Able Baker Charlie, they would say Anton Bertill, and some word for C, Dora etc. There is something in the middle of this mass of ordinary people, the I staff. They are about ten of the hundred people. They are a detachment from here.

Q: We are talking, we are now in Arlington Hall in Northern Virginia.

JOHNSON: The outfit that is sending us as a detachment was called the 849 Signal Intelligence Service. During war it merges into something else. It becomes the Army Security Agency, then it becomes the NSA.

JOHNSON: It is about ten people. The other people all speak German, the other eight or nine. One of them is named Robert Solow, he becomes an MIT professor of economics and wins the Nobel Prize for economics in 1987 and becomes a millionaire. He is very distinguished in his field. Often he is written up in articles about what is going on in the economy, or in the New York Review of Books. The other fellows are guys who are already instructors or professors of languages, particularly German. When they go back they go into various faculties in universities all over the place. So we are operating in a wooden hut on the back of a small truck which is dug into the side of a mountain and covered over by a big camouflage net. It operates 24 hours a day. So the crypto-analysts are working in three eight hour shifts. These fellows, they know how to gear in onto German nets. A battalion reporting to regiment, a regiment reporting to division about their experiences. They will pass a handful of the messages they have written down in code, just nothing but a jumble of letters and then we were supposed to figure out what sort of a code is this. Is it a substitution code or various things like that. Or else they hear a German speaking so they hand the earphones to me or one of the other German speakers, and we hear them saying certain things. For example, dramatic things. It is so dramatic my friend Steven Tanner, he heard this and sort of convinced me that I heard it, but I don't think I did. The fellow was saying, "We have taken 482 American prisoners tonight." That is an incredible fantastic number. On any given night they took one or two prisoners. This is the famous Rapido River crossing disaster which was a terrible military …

Q: General Clark - the people who were in Texas, the 36th Division, hate having Clark. Clark was just despised.

JOHNSON: Most people like myself didn't like Clark. Then we telephone this back to Corps G-2. That is the first word they get that indicates a disaster is going on here. These Americans who were captured were paraded through the streets of Rome to show the Italians "we have beaten them." Then there are other dramatic things. A thing I heard, I heard a German voice or in a message - do you speak German? It was "Der Feind Greift an." That means "the enemy is attacking." It doesn't mean they are probing. It doesn't mean they are messing around. This is a big push to break out of there, the Gustav Line, and get to Rome. So it was very dramatic to hear the Germans say "Der Feind Greift an." Then a typical message that could be broken because it wasn't in a tough code would be during the night, artillery fire along the whole front, harassing fire. Casualties, so many dead, so many wounded, so many missing. That is a banal ordinary night. Then there are other aspects. At the Battle of Kasserine….

Q: That was in North Africa.

JOHNSON: In North Africa, there were no German speaking people in the signal intelligence company. There were only some Brits. The British Eighth Army loaned a couple to the Americans there. So even when we were starting out in our real work which was north of Caserta and south of where the Rapido River is, we had two Englishmen assigned to us to train us in signal intelligence.

Q: Well, where did you have sort of code books that were put together by us using German sources or by code breaking and all or how did you do that?

JOHNSON: No code books. What was an advantage to us was, say, in Sicily our troops captured a German volume that contained all the call signs of all the German units in the German army in country, Italy. The call signs are all three letters. XBC calling JKL. This handbook tells me what units go with these call signs. So right now we know we are dealing with the 15th Panzer Grenadier division or army. We don't have any book of instructions or anything like that.

Q: Were you sort of able using your cryptographic knowledge to break these things.

JOHNSON: Yes. The secret was there were none of them machine manufactured. The great system, the ultra system or enigma machine, was electronically generated, and the Germans did not want to risk those machines at the front.

Q: And also the people at the front, they were under primitive conditions too, so they didn't have access to the fancy stuff.

JOHNSON: Right . Then the inscriptions on our 2 1/2 ton trucks and other vehicles would say, when I first met them in southern Italy, would say 128th SRI. Then it would say, it would have an owl insignia on the front bumper. Then there would be a short word for our unit. It was Snoopy II. Now the British were rather shocked. They thought this was violating too much about the sensitive nature of our outfit to have Snoopy II. Any

intelligent German seeing this would report back, "You ought to drop a bomb on this outfit here." So what did the British do? They would call their same unit in the British 6th Army a special wireless company. Well, the Germans could learn that special wireless company would mean something. Anyway there are various aspects of this. Because it is shift work my friend Tanner would always take the midnight to dawn shift because he could sleep then. He didn't have to work very hard. He had a higher mission. He was a great opera lover, music lover. In the day time he would go back to Florence or wherever and rescue great Italian opera stars who might be in distress. He would insure that his tenor's mother would send packages of food to this grieving opera star. And political stars too. He rescued him out of want and need. He became a CIA guy later and had a distinguished career in the CIA. I also had a long time to visit Florence because we had a long time when we were stopped in the mountains between Florence and the Po Valley. There are lots of war stories, but I don't think I'll get into them, unless you want me to.

Q: Well this is your first time really I mean you weren't exactly on the grand tour, but you were on the tour that an awful lot of Americans were making at the time. How did Italy impress you, the idea of foreign climes and all this?

JOHNSON: Well, we started out with a troop ship from Staten Island to Greenock near Glasgow, Scotland. We are piped ashore by a pipe band and take lighters to the train which is going down to the area of Birmingham. So I am experiencing England now. We are put in some kind of a rest camp. The stone headquarters of the South Staffordshire Regiment built in 1750. So you see how the British had some tough life. I am able to go out to British pubs and get used to fish and chips. Then we go to London. It is the sight of our chancery in London. Then we are shipped up to Prestwick, Scotland and put in an aircraft, a C-47 type aircraft, two engined thing, and flown to Marrakech. Now we experience in July, '43, the Marrakech heat. The privileges of the air force, big air conditioned hangars. Then we are flown to Algiers, and spent a while there which is allied Headquarters. Eisenhower was there. Then we are trucked across Bizerte and shipped by LSTs to Sicily, across the top of Sicily. Now another war story. The Germans are retreating beyond Naples, and we cross and we catch up with them, with the German front, north of Naples, north of Caserta near the Rapido River. October, '43. The area where we are is called purple heart valley. A photographer, Margaret White, wrote a book about it. We are introduced to warfare, discomfort and everything. In fact, a paragraph probably about the hardship of being with a forward element. The company headquarters with tents is back a ways, and where the intercepts are going on is forward a ways. But there is no tent to sleep in. I am sleeping on the ground, and it is snowing and cold raining. The first thing I have to dig is a trench for myself. I see in the Iraq war the soldiers develop a term for this kind of trench. They call it the 2x2x me. It is not a very deep trench but you could sleep in there because of artillery. I have my full uniform on. Then I have my overcoat over that. Then we had not yet developed the idea of sleeping bags but they give us shelter halves which are supposed to make pup tents with, or make them into a wrap around. So we are all wrapped up. All right, it is uncomfortable. And this is a wartime hardship. Danger occurs in one of these, I am sleeping on the ground one night in a very bad situation, and a battery of long toms they are called, 155 mm cannon, are towed up by big trucks and are deposited just right behind me about ten or

fifteen yards. They could have continued on and run right over me. They could do this at night because it is dark. I don't know they are there but then they start firing. I bounce up and down with each of their salvos.

Q: You went through Naples?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Was Vesuvius still sending up fumes?

JOHNSON: Yes it was.

Up here my war injury occurs. I am on a shift where I go off out of this hut at midnight. I had a light inside there. I have to find my way back to where I am sleeping. I stepped off, I call it the cliff. I would say the cliff is about as high as this room.

Q: We are talking about 12 feet.

JOHNSON: Yes. It is not flat at the bottom. It is sloping down at the bottom like this. It really is a strong terracing of the mountainside. This is the famous mountain called Monte Sammucro. It is around midnight. I land mostly on my right ankle; I am still limping from that. Anyway it is around midnight. I had to sort of whimper down there, "Who is going to come and get me out of here?" Finally one of my buddies hears this whimpering and I am evacuated by jeep to an evacuation hospital. They are busy with really serious wounds, bloody wounded people. So they just temporarily brace this broken ankle. Then I am evacuated maybe after two weeks to the Naples General Hospital, and spend awhile there. I am fearing there is a system whereby people who are discharged from hospitals don't go back to their units. They go to wherever else they are needed now. Or more needed than they were before. I didn't like that prospect. I didn't know it, but my company commander sent two of his officers down there at midnight and kidnapped me. They find me; they escort me out of the hospital. They drive me back to our company, so that I am not duly discharged from the hospital and I am not going to some other company. I am going to stick with my buddies and my good company. All right, there are a lot more war stories if you want.

Q: Probably not. Where did you end up the war?

JOHNSON: The last great offensive comes out of the mountains between Florence and Bologna and it sweeps across the Po River and we go into the Italian Alps which soon after Trento become the German, the Dolomite German Alps, the Sud Tyrol, the South Tyrol. This intelligence guy, Steve Tanner, my buddy through all this thing, tipped me off they are going to want us -- there is no more German stuff to intercept -- they are going to want us to be in the CIC, the Counter Intelligence Corps, to interrogate German captives. So we line ourselves up to transfer to the counter intelligence corps. I am put in the 80th Division counter intelligence corps. I had many nice experiences in that, I don't know if I should be telling them now. Are they relevant to this situation, perhaps they are because

you speak some German. The commanding officer of the company to which I am now assigned, his name is Captain James Garner. I meet him years later in the State Department. He is in the intelligence arm of the State Department, INR. But he is such… he is so secret that people who go abroad never meet him. One of his functions, I somehow learn, is vetting CIA projects all over the world and what the State Department thinks of them. They shouldn't be doing this, this will be good. He was in intelligence. He was terrifically good. I was amazed, when I was assigned to his company at the start, at what an intelligent, sensible captain this was. My opinion about the typical army captain was that he was not going to be as nice and as intelligent as this. Later on, he was a Swarthmore graduate. He is an Oxford scholar, he is a lawyer. He is all of these things. My first case is dealing with a German army unit, which were German army special forces which were called, they had a name. But they were incorporated into the SS one year before the end of the war. This company is called SS Jagdeinsatz Italien (SS Hunter Battalion Italy). "Jagdeinsatz" is a very menacing kind of word. The upshot is all of the guys in the company are themselves Tyrolean Germans. They all used to be intelligence operators on the Russian front as well as other places, and they have buried a lot of munitions and a lot of arms in the mountains which are a security risk for our 88th division. I am to interrogate the deputy commanding officer of the company. "What is going on? Where are these arms?" It leads to how to debrief somebody without water boarding them or something. I would boil it all down to an incentive, give him an incentive. I know that he would rather not be imprisoned for several years after the war. I know that he would rather get out with a civilian career after the war, so he is inclined to cooperate. I go over with him the text of the German surrender agreement signed six weeks earlier. In this I say your honor is at stake in respecting the part of it which says you will turn over all arms and explosives and weapons to the allied forces. Your honor as a German officer is served by doing that. Yes, he says that is a good argument. Yes we will do it. So he and I go out and get some Italian troops and we dig up those arms. He gives me a political lecture. "We have no crazy ideas about blowing up Americans with these things. These were to blow up Italians, and even not to kill them, but to make the headlines. We wanted to publicize that we are Germans here in the Alps."

Q: This is all around the…

JOHNSON: The Festung they call it. The redoubt they call it. This is fun.

Q: I am looking at the time. We had better stop here., and we will pick this up the next time and put at the end where we are. We will pick it up the next time when well basically the war is over.

JOHNSON: Yes, the war is over.

Q: So what did you do then?

JOHNSON: I had to return to Yale to finish.

Q: All right then we will pick that up.

Ok, today is 21 October 2009 with Dick Johnson. Dick let's pick it up. You were in Austria with…

JOHNSON: Captain James Garner, before he joined the State Department intelligence section.

Q: This was when?

JOHNSON: This would be about June of 1945.

Q: So the war was over.

JOHNSON: Yes. So no more listening in. Since I spoke German they switched me to CIC. I understand that CIC doesn't exist in the army anymore. They have absorbed it in some way.

Q: What were you doing? Were you looking for Nazis or what?

JOHNSON: The first case, and the most interesting case, was when walk-ins came in to the CIC office and said, "Right up the street here we have a very dangerous organization. It is called the SS Jagdeinsatz Italien. Its meaning, first of all, it is cryptic in its meaning. SS, Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron), and then Jagd means literally hunting. They use it in the air force too for regular fighter pilots, called "Jagdflieger." But they say this is an outfit from German intelligence, that they were in German regular intelligence up until a year ago, and then the SS took them over and gave them this name. What they have done is to bury a lot of ammunition and weapons. That is the danger. So I start interrogating members of this unit.

Q: One of our big concerns, particularly at the end of the war when the war was still going on, was that there were going to be "werewolves" or something that were going to be planning revolts and hiding ammunition in the Austrian redoubt and all this.

JOHNSON: Yes, exactly. I think this outfit justified itself by being supported by those forces in German intelligence who wanted to play along with this national redoubt business, this Alpine fortress. But all the members of this unit, it turned out, were South Tyrolean Germans. Their argument eventually was as it emerged was they didn't give a darn about attacking Americans. They figured that would be completely futile. They wanted to every once in awhile to blow up a transmission tower to make a little publicity about the existence of a German minority in the Alps.

Q: Oh yes ,that was something that continued up for a couple of decades.

JOHNSON: Yes, it goes way back. And I would say a German official, a high German official at the end of the war stationed in Austria, was promoting it himself. He wanted a new country that would take in all the German speakers from Italy and Switzerland and a

certain element out of Austria too. As it emerged when I was dealing with the leaders of this unit they were saying, 'You know in the old days before WWII, we were part of Austria here. We were not well ruled by Vienna." So it does not make a great deal of difference if we are ruled by Vienna or Rome or Bern or something like that. Anyway, I had no training at all in interrogation, but just through native brilliance I thought of a way to get the commanding officer of this unit to dig up the weapons. I got out the text of the German army surrender agreement in northern Italy. I went through it, he was a lawyer too, this fellow. The pledge was in there to turn over all the arms and ammunition. And it was quite incumbent upon a German army officer with his sense of honor to respect a signature like this. He said, "Yes, I think you are right." Because he didn't want, he wanted to get out and get back into business and earn a living. He didn't want to be imprisoned as a Nazi resistant or something. What else happened? In all of this I had a partner who became a CIA officer. He was with the signal intelligence unit I was in. He came into the signal company, but he was stationed in Bolzano, and I was stationed in Merano. I had another brilliant inspiration as a non-trained counter intelligence officer. I confiscated the contents of the local Merano photo shop. There was only one. I found plenty of photographs there of German army officers including the two who commanded this company, the SS Jagdeinsatz, and they were brothers. The younger brother was the commanding officer and the older brother was the deputy. I sent copies of the photos to my old friend Steve Tanner down in Bolzano, and he picked up the commanding officer. To make a long story short on that, after the war they became great buddies. Steve went and visited this officer many times when he was in Italy in his CIA function. I could go on with the next CIC function because I think it is quite interesting. I am detached from this very pleasant service in Merano to go up to Salzburg and go into the offices of a Department of State officer. He has drafted several Counter Intelligence Corps people and I was one of them. His name was James Orr Denby. He was a principal Department of State representative to the Army of Occupation of Austria. His immediate use for me was to send me to this mountain resort called Bad Gastein and join a team interning Japanese diplomats. These Japanese diplomats had been in Berlin all during the war, and the protocol section of the German Foreign Office, to rescue those people from what was happening in Berlin, sent them down to hotels in Austria. So they were there, and we were still at war with Japan. The notion was we ought not let any of these Japanese diplomats commit suicide, because we had Americans still held by the Japanese and we might want to trade people. So we had shakedown inspections looking for hari-kari knives. And the Japanese were smirking at us, saying we diplomats don't do that. We don't commit suicide. That is for the military. Then I was sent over to St. Gilgen, a delightful spot outside the beautiful city of Salzburg. My function there was to be part of the internment of the children, who were high school age, of the wartime Croatian dictator, the dictator of a Croatian Nazi puppet state. His name was Ante Pavelić. He was one of the worst war criminals there was in World War Two. In the area that I was in we had CIC people who were looking for him. But other elements of CIC had already helped smuggle him out to Rome and to South America. It was all a Catholic caper. He was a Catholic although he was a terrible murderer particularly of Serbs or any democratic force. But between British intelligence and parts of the American intelligence, those elements had smuggled this guy out to South America. Anyway, but it was delightful there.

Q: You are pointing out that the so called intelligence groups, I mean, usually not so-called, but the intelligence groups were very diverse. I mean these were people who had a very loose rein and there was no really overall organization so that you could have sort of Catholics working to get essentially war criminals out within sort of the system. I mean Pavelić caused all sorts of problems because he ended up in California didn't he?

JOHNSON: I don't think so, not this one. Come to think of it there may be another Pavelić. Ante Pavelić died in South America without getting into the United States. If he had reached the United States there would have been a lot more publicity.

Q: Yeah. Artuković is the name.

JOHNSON: That's right, Artuković.

Q: It wasn't Pavelić.

JOHNSON: I must not forget another CIC activity that I had in Merano, the false British pound notes. Movies have been made about this. German intelligence counterfeited millions of dollars in British pounds using slave labor out of the concentration camps.

Q: Yes, there was a Jewish engraver who…

JOHNSON: Everybody was Jewish, with the great engravers. Our office was filled with burlap bags teeming with all this money. While I was there the British arrived on the scene to take those away.

Q: The Germans had made a plan to flood the west, or the non German parts, with the fake notes, to destroy the British currency. One of the offshoots of this was the famous spy who was the butler for the British ambassador in Accra was paid off in these things.

JOHNSON: A fellow contact we needed, his name was Dennis Whitehead, is writing a book on the history of this money and what was done with it, and who was the organizer of the distribution, a fellow named Schwend. That book will come out in about a year.

Q: How did you, had these been stored in a place before full distribution?

JOHNSON: Yes. This whole place of Northern Italy in the Alps, beautiful country, was teeming with evacuated treasure of all kinds out of Germany. The Italian national holdings of gold and cash and all that had been evacuated from Rome up into this area. The area was teeming with treasure. A lot of American army people and other army people were looting treasure there. Somehow, it wasn't my case. I was just a spectator as far as the money goes. I was just on this German company, the SS Yagdeinsatz, which had meetings and squads similar to those of the execution squads of German intelligence in Russia. And Yagdeinsatz in their title. So it was a bit of a warning thing. But I don't

want to stretch this out too much, so let's say I have been in Italy so long, in the war so long, that I have accumulated enough credits to be dismissed from the army.

Q: You got points.

JOHNSON: Points for months of service, and I think for the record I would like to mention one other officer. Not officer, like myself an enlisted crypto-analyst. We don't do anything with American codes, just the enemy. His name was Robert Solow. He was an 18 year old in our little group of ten. Then after the war he became MIT professor of economics. In 1988 he was the Nobel prize winner in Economics. He is extremely esteemed and popular and liked as an economist. I expect to see him this coming weekend at a group reunion. I am going up to New York for the 85th birthday party for the widow of the commanding officer of our signal intelligence unit.

Q: By the way, were you, with all the looted treasure, fake British pounds and all, were you also concerned with communist groups, because they had taken over much of northern Italy. I mean they were on our side, but it wasn't exactly a friendly arrangement there was it?

JOHNSON: Let's say there is a tricky line here between that part of this thing which is called the South Tyrol, and it is called Alto Adige in Italy but it is the South Tyrol. Where the Merano area is was so heavily German that there wasn't a communist element there. The communist element was to the nearby south, wherever there were Italians below this cultural line, you had a problem of ex-partisans and that kind of thing. But in the area that I was involved with, no communist sign of any sort. All of this is preparation for diplomacy, I did my master's thesis on all this business. I went to SAIS, School of Advanced International Studies, later after the war. The settlement between Italy and Austria about this German speaking area really worked out to be a perfect one. The results protected very much the Germanic character of that area. People from Sicily were not able to go up there and buy land in that area and set up a business or set up a farm. They had this sort of pass, culturally, into other German speaking people. Whatever elements there were to that peace treaty it worked out very well. And that is the offering on that subject. Did you have any contact with the School of Advanced International Studies?

Q: I talked to many people who have been there. You got out when?

JOHNSON: December, '45.

Q: So the war was over by that time.

JOHNSON: Yes, all of it.

Q: So then what?

JOHNSON: I returned to Yale because I had left Yale after the first two years.

Q: How old were you?

JOHNSON: Well I was born in 1921, October.

Q: So 23.

JOHNSON: 24.

Q: Well you weren't that old. But you were a vet.

JOHNSON: I was a vet, and when I signed up to take the foreign service exam, right then when I was in Salzburg and this James O. Denby, the State Department guy was there, and he had information about this upcoming exam for the foreign service. It was only open to vets. You had to be in the military or a veteran. So when I did take it I think all my competition were vets. It was plenty tough because there were plenty of vets. But then I needed to go back to Yale. After just six months at Yale they credited me with all my military services as though I had been studying at Yale all that time. So I got my degree in international relations, my BA.

Q: So you were class of '46.

JOHNSON: But they had to play around with the names of the classes. My original class was the class of '44, 1944, and that stuck with me even though I really graduated in the spring of 1946. It was called the class of '44. Other groups who were called out to fight, they were called the class of '45W. There was a certain amount of reorganization in the names of the classes.

Q: Well how did you find the short time you were back in Yale? Was it a little hard to settle down?

JOHNSON: No, it was uneventful. It was just a normal academic effort. One thing I am going to leave with you, just a hasty little throwaway biographic thing. I think I pay tribute there to professors at Yale in the general field of foreign relations. You can just play with it when you have time. But now what am I going to do right after June of '46?

Q: Well you took the foreign service exam, what was it like? When I took it, it was a 3 ½ day exam. How long was it when you took it?

JOHNSON: Well I don't know how long it was. It was the long version of it. It was a long written exam. It just happens with my mental quirks that I can handle that type of examination. I did very well in that. But then we had the famous oral exam, and different people have different experiences.

Q: What was your experience.

JOHNSON: That the board that was examining me was sympathetic to me, did not harass me in any way, and I think I gave good answers to some of the questions they put to me. They asked me what factors would work in the economy that would work towards an improved economy and prosperity and which were negative and working for possible economic trouble. I got into a discourse about the new aviation industry, the Boeing aviation industry in Seattle. I only got on the positive side. I never even got to answer the negative stuff; that was psychologically good. Then when one of the officers started speaking to me in French, I spoke back to him, but I tried not to speak better French than his and so forth. Then when they came to the Department of Agriculture, they said no questions. That was good. All during my foreign service career I wished I knew more about agriculture, which was winter wheat and which was summer wheat and different aspects.

Q: I can recall at one point going on a field trip with Larry Eagleburger. We were both in Yugoslavia and we both looked and said, "Gosh that crop looks good, what is it?" We had no idea what it was.

JOHNSON: All right now, my mother was reading Time Magazine in those days, and she saw a little article about the formation of a school of advanced international studies in Washington. She sent it to me. So I applied for that right away and got into one of the early classes.

Q: This is SAIS, the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins.

JOHNSON: Then it was not yet under Johns Hopkins. It was independent. The person important to me was professor C. Grove Haines. He was an expert on European history of the 19th century, the problem of getting the Turkish occupation out of the Balkans and that sort of thing. It was fun to be at that school. And at that school and in one particular course a girl was sitting there next to me. She had on her blouse nothing but horse heads. I said, "What is that all about?" She said, "My home town is Horse Heads, New York." It was a town near Elmira. Anyway we became friends and she has been my wife for 63 years. I will pay tribute to her in that little part.

Q: Well done.

JOHNSON: She loved the foreign service.

Q: What was her background?

JOHNSON: She was a small town girl really. She decided to go to Smith and got into Smith. That got her into something called French House where she lived speaking French all the time all day. Then she was very interested in the foreign service, and she was just a wonderful wife for someone in the foreign service.

Q: Had you been accepted into the foreign service or were you waiting or had you taken your oral exam?

JOHNSON: I would say I was in pretty shortly after that. As a matter of fact since I had already passed the written to start with, at the end of the oral then they tell you right away as you walk out if you passed. So I knew, but then was the question of what was going to be my first post? Did my wife, Lynn, know that my first post was going to be Florence, Italy, and did that influence her decision to marry me? Such a nice place. However it wasn't that way because when the assignment period came after a brief training…

Q: Could you describe this, because this is early on -- what was the training, because this was before things got really firmed up. This was when, in the first place? When did you come in?

JOHNSON: We'll say the summer of '47, about like that. When I am going to go to Florence, my first post, will be October of '47. In those days, the posting was a little bit erratic, in that if you didn't approve of the first post you were offered you could trade with anyone else who would take it, and you could take theirs. I did a little switching around with an officer named Charles Bidwell, because he went into Yugoslav affairs later very briefly. At first, I didn't know I was going to Florence. I thought I was making a switch to go to Warsaw, or I was making a switch to go to Zagreb. But instead, the State Department decided to send me to Rome. And at the last minute they switched me to Florence. It was infinitely better for the first post to go to Florence rather than to be in Rome. Of course I knew Italian, and in Florence in a consulate you have to use Italian to deal with the police, the academic community and all. Whereas down in Rome you could speak English all the time with the foreign office guys who all spoke English.

Q: Question though before we move to Florence. What sort of training did you get? Because this is before the Foreign Service Institute was really in operation.

JOHNSON: It was unmemorable shall we say. Because it was so brief and superficial. I can't remember very much about it.

Q: In other words they are really moving to beef up the Foreign Service after the war.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: So you were in Florence from when to when?

JOHNSON: Well '47 and '48 and then into early '49. But the wonderful thing about my luck was that the principal officer in Florence was one of the more famous Foreign Service officers. His name was Walter Orebaugh. He had just about then been awarded the Medal of Freedom for what he did during the war. He was an American foreign service officer who was station in Southern France at the time the United States and Britain were invading North Africa do drive the Germans out of North Africa. He was transferred to Monaco more or less as an intelligence officer with what the Germans and Italians were doing about invading France down there. But he was interned by the Germans and was taken to Perugia. When Italy fell out of the war in September, '43, he

escaped into the hills out of the hotel he was interned in. All of the other Foreign Service personnel surrendered to the German authorities for exchange repatriations to the United States. But this fellow, he had served in Italy before the war, Trieste, elsewhere in Italy He spoke Italian with a strong Oklahoma accent, but he joined a partisan band and functioned as such for a couple of months before they escaped through the Allied lines. He knew a great deal about the German army and their tactics in dealing with the partisans and all that sort of thing. He was immediately made consul at Florence, immediately after the Allied army reached there. So he had been consul there, principal officer for about two years before I came onto his staff. But he was very paternalistic kind of guy. He just gave you fine things to do and distributed various experiences among the staff and that sort of thing. It was great to see an officer as effective as he was with the Italian population. He had to distribute goodies to Italian officials like the chief prefect of police, goodies like coal for their cellars for the warmth of their homes. Oranges. But he was so good at distributing something without arousing negative feelings about paternalism or things like that. Anyway he was great in his dealings with the Italians. All the time that he had been hiding in the mountains with the partisans and had been interned, his pay was piling up, so he had money to invest. He invested it wisely. He was pretty wealthy when he finished his Florence tour. Then he served some intelligence functions in the Department of State involving Italian elections and that sort of thing. He retired pretty early and had a very interesting career.

Q: Let's talk about Florence, and then move on to the election of '48 which was a very important one. There had been fighting around Florence, what was Florence like when you got there?

JOHNSON: Let's say I participated in the fighting. The fighting was about August, 1944. So the American army had passed through Rome and had reached Florence about August of 1944. A big drama is going on in the German camp. Whether they should fight inside Florence, whether it should be a defended city or whether it should be surrendered intact. Plenty of the German army in authority wanted to fight in the city. The German consul, Gerhardt Wolf, resisted that strongly. The local Catholic prelate fought against that idea too. One way or another, the German consul and the prelate won, but the Germans blew up the bridges across the Arno River which protects Florence on the south side. Blew them up and blew up the buildings that were at the end of each bridge to make a barrier there to slow down the Allied armies trying to get across the river. My unit was waiting just outside Florence; the British were mostly in charge of coming into Florence as an Allied occupation force. A few weeks later my unit goes up into the mountains and is heading towards Bologna. The German fighting is very tough against us. I don't want to get into too much of the detail. I would say in the fall of '44 a big debate occurred in the American Army intelligence side. Intelligence like this, whether or not we are going to push on into the Po Valley against strong German resistance or dig in for the winter and push next spring. That was a big debate. And when a big debate like that happens, it doesn't happen back at 5th army headquarters back at Caserta. It doesn't happen at the division level. It happens at the Corps level, Corps G-2 was sort of the host officer. Fifth army G-2 is representing us. Well a debate occurred and my commanding officer, who is the best commanding officer ever, just wonderful, is debating the situation. He is in favor

really of not stopping. While the debate is going on, somebody yells out, "Attention." You turn around and General Mark Clark who is overall commander has just come into the room.

Q: He was in command of the 5th Army plus the whole…

JOHNSON: Yes, and he has heard this debate with my lieutenant debating a general. And my lieutenant was raising his voice. He said to that lieutenant, John Faison, "Lieutenant, wait outside the tent until I come out and stand at attention until I come out." When he came out, the general, he was good at this, he wasn't good at everything, Mark Clark. But he just chewed out my commanding officer and just said that, "you don't raise your voice like that to a superior officer, especially a general. Especially an old friend of mine. If I ever hear anything more about you, your tail is going to be sent right back to the United States." Not too long after that my commander was given the Legion of Honor. This was yesterday and it didn't hurt him a bit. He was made captain and the whole bit. But he had a difficult company to deal with. What kind of company intercepts the German radio traffic? The company has about 100 people in it. It is filled with truck drivers, wire layers, cooks and baker, radio operators who do not know German, but they know the Morse code, and the German messages are sent in the German version of the Morse code. Instead of saying Able Baker Charlie, they had Anton, Berchtold, Caesar. So they could copy messages. And they would copy out messages from the German army net, and then they would pass it over to the code breakers, and we would work on them. To hear Germans speaking over radio telephone, they hand the earphones to us German speakers, and we hear what they are saying. We work on eight hour shifts. There is enough interest in this all the time that it makes for an interesting war.

Q: Well I had a little bit of this in Korea where I used to listen to the Soviet Air Force during the war and the Soviet Air Force is fighting the American Air Force. It is not a well known thing, but regular units of the Soviet Air Force are fighting our air force.

JOHNSON: Well then we pushed north during the spring of 1945 and the unit finishes in the early part of the Italian Alps. That is where two of us switch over to the Counter Intelligence Corps. The rest of the unit goes to the shores of Lake Garda in Northern Italy and just waits around there until they are repatriated. There was always a concern that any of us might be sent to Japan until August ended that concern.

Q: Back to Florence, how big was the consulate general?

JOHNSON: It was just a consulate.

Q: How big was it?

JOHNSON: Very small in that it had had a principal officer who was called a consul. Pretty soon after I left it was made a consulate general. Only one Foreign Service officer. It had several vice consuls who were not Foreign Service officers, who were called Foreign Service staff. Now my wonderful commanding officer at the consulate leaves

and George Platt Waller comes in as consul. George Platt Waller, if you don't know that name now. If you read anything by Eric Sevareid as a war correspondent, he writes up George Platt Waller. George Platt Waller, all though the 30's, was assigned to Luxembourg as an outpost of the Embassy in Belgium. The Germans are invading Luxembourg, and Eric Sevareid is interviewing this Consul General, and he is reporting on what a weird fellow he was. While all hell is breaking out around him he is reported as saying, "You know, I am thinking about what I am going to have on my tombstone. It is going to be George Platt Waller III, University of Virginia. He walked with princes and gave counsel to kings." The reporter said, "My God." Later on he said some favorable things too. When he was made Consul in Florence it was one of those graveyard assignments. He was completely unqualified to be there. He doesn't speak any Italian. He isn't interested in being there at all. He is just pushing out the time until he can be discharged and go home and draw his pension. Well he was an object of ridicule. He would get to dinner and he had no wife with him but his sister and elderly mother. After dinner the three of them would stand up in front of the dinner guests and do some southern singing and shuffling and dancing. The Italians, kind of sophisticated in a mischievous way, they would catch the eye of my wife or myself and say, "What is going on here?" It was painful. Well also to go back to this post we had this USIA person there, Marjorie Ferguson, I think she was born in Italy, grew up in Italy. Her father was an important businessman in Rome. She was wonderful, just wonderful. It made it a very happy experience to have as many good people as we did in this small staff. After two years of great pleasure on my part, Mack Davis, an officer who you may remember. He became Director General at one point. He had been suffering up in Prague, a communist bad regime. He was getting replaced. Let me think if I should say any more about this situation in Florence.

Q: So what work were you doing?

JOHNSON: Political reporting and general services. Like American services. If any American is having difficulty, I help that person. A typical case, for my first case, I am reading in the newspaper that a young motorcyclist has crashed coming into the city of Florence at night time. On a big curve he went off the road and fell off a cliff, and is in the hospital. It can't be determined if he is British or American. I had to then go to the hospital to determine if he is British or American and find his passport. I do this, I find his passport and I visit him in his hospital bed I see that he is American. But that he has been studying at Oxford for two years and has picked up the British accent. The Italians picked up on the British accent, so they thought he might be British. Next case, an ex-GI who has deserted has been hiding in the woods around outside Florence for many months. He and an Italian accomplice have been robbing people in the streets as bandits, robbers. He is on trial. I have to attend the trial to see that he gets decent justice. I have to write a letter to the judge informing him that I would be present. When I walked into the court room, I could hear that judge was reading my letter to the people in the open courtroom. I wondered if I was overstepping my interference. But at the end of it he paid tribute to the delicate tone of this letter. Everything went well. When the trial came, the American also said in the letter that he is the sole support of an elderly mother in the Kentucky mountains. This is heartstrings. The trial convicts both this fellow and his

Italian accomplice but gives the Italian accomplice five or six years in prison, but lets this guy go free, the American. I could see the lawyer for the Italian was going to appeal. Well, case after case. The next case is the owner of a hotel downtown who calls up and says, "An American woman is trying to commit suicide here in the hotel. She has gotten into the tub full of water; she has slit her wrists, and she has taken several poisons. The police are all around the front door. But I don't want any of this to get into the newspapers. It will be bad for my reputation and my hotel. Can you come and help me?" I have already made the acquaintance of the head of the pharmacology section of the University of Florence medical school. I get him on the case. It turns out that the woman has taken two poisons that counteract each other, so that is OK. She thought that she had been either made pregnant by an American, or that she had gotten a venereal disease, and this made her want to commit suicide. The fellow that she was involved with on the ship coming over was a famous Italian opera singer named Giovanni Martinelli. He was standing out in the outskirts of the crowd at the door. He was trying to disengage from this woman and have nothing to do with her. One adventure after another is like this. Meanwhile I have to get to know the local newspapermen, and attend rallies by the Communists and the Christian Democrats and the third force people. It is just a delightful experience to serve.

Q: This was the election of 1948 wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: This was the one that has always been, the Soviets have put a lot of money into it, and we put a lot of money into it. We started supporting the Christian Democrats, the CEU, and we didn't get out of the habit of doing that, the CIA, for decades afterwards. We out bought the Communists in that one.

JOHNSON: In Tuscany in my area, Tuscany and Amelia were part of our consular district. They were red while I was there. The mayor of the city was Communist, and it wasn't bad, he made sure there were no strikes on the street cars. He was decent.

Q: This was the red belt wasn't it?

JOHNSON: The red belt. It would take a complicated story to explain why it was as red as it was, but let's say, put a little anecdote into the record here. At one point someone tried to assassinate the Communist leader called Palmiro Togliatti and shot him. A bullet hit Togliatti. When my wife went down to the bakery that morning the bakery woman was very distraught and said to my wife, "We have been on our knees all night in front of the Virgin praying for Togliatti." This is the sort of communism you have got in much of Italy. It was a social rejection of aristocracy of one kind or another. They would hate to be Russians or hate to be Stalinists, these Italians.

Q: I know when I was consul general in Naples I would go to masses for some disaster or something and I would be there along with some representatives of the communist party carrying that red banner. We would all be together.

JOHNSON: Yes. I should return to one aspect of my service in Florence. It meant a lot of contact with a certain Bernard Berenson. He is the greatest figure in connoisseurship of Italian Renaissance paintings and that sort of thing. He had a wonderful villa on the outskirts of the city, and he entertained quite often. People like the director general of the national art gallery, writers of all kinds, distinguished people. And he needed people at his table like myself and my wife who spoke several languages, Italian, French, German. My wife was a very appealing person and after dinner he would walk around the gardens with just my wife alone. But anyway it was such a pleasure. He didn't pick us to come to so many luncheons. His major domo did. She knows the score. Her name was Nicky Mariano. She has written books about life with Berenson, that sort of thing. But it was such a pleasure. And I find if you are like a junior officer, and you are at a place like this, and I am introduced to another guest, they introduce me and describe my function. They never tell me who the other person is, because it would be beneath his dignity to have to be identified. But I had enough background that I could tell this fellow was a Swede and he looks quite important. He looks like the crown prince of Sweden to me. Now he is asking me what I thought about the Swedish exhibition at the World Fair in 1937 in New York City. I give it a good write up. I have to be on my toes to spot what sort of man I am dealing with here. We had British scholars, British writers. Eventually it was like the Harvard establishment, his villa. All right, that is typical. Then we had great music there, musical evenings. At least one month of concerts every night, the best opera. God, it was delightful to have such a good post on your first assignment. Your wife is now hooked on the Foreign Service. It is wonderful.

Q: Then how badly were the Italians in Florence living at that time?

JOHNSON: Very amazing recovery I would say. I would say they recovered very well. Restaurants were booming for the tourists. Tourism was functioning. But it did not require hundreds of busses downtown as it does now. Really it is horrible, not a pleasure as it was then when tourism was OK. Signs of the war, if you were driving from Florence to Bologna you would see some indentations in the ground next to the highway which had once been shell holes where shells had landed. They were all grassed over and it didn't look destroyed or bombed, whatever. There was just an upswing in every way, but then the struggle between the two big parties was something.

Q: Did you feel any pressure on you or any involvement, I am not sure it was the CIA then, but our intelligence apparatus? This is both sides, this is you might say one of the first political battles of the Cold War in this Italian election of '48. Did you feel you might say pressure to go out and do something?

JOHNSON: No, for one thing we did not have a CIA person assigned there. That would be Rome and later on Milano. I didn't feel that going on. I could feel that it was existing. But the struggle just on the Italian side of it, the pro Christian Democrat and pro Communist party, was something. The Communists would organize a speech by Palmiro Togliatti in the big town square, the Piazza della Signoria. A tremendous crowd would show up for this. Then the Christian Democrats would organize the same sort of thing in

the same square. I would be there to notice that this Christian Democratic group is even larger than the Communist group. So this is going to be a struggle. It is not going to be a walkover by the Communists. Also at the time we are having the Marshall Plan in effect. Senators are coming through and having me escort them around while they study the effect of the Marshall plan on Italy in this situation. I designate a number of factories where we will go to see the situation. They say -- Ellender from Louisiana was typical -- he would say, "I don't need that, but could you take me around -- I want to pick up some leather goods -- and get me a discount?" So I would escort him around to these shops. I could palaver in Italian with the shopkeeper to make sure that it is going to look like a discount. Then he would say, "Oh Mr. Shopkeeper, how has the Marshall Plan affected you here?" And he would say, "I don't know anything about it." If he had gone out to the factories, he would have seen some impact of the Marshall Plan, but just sticking to the artisan-made goods, no.

Q: Well Senator Ellender of Louisiana was renowned, this goes as you remember to the 60's where he wanted to go everywhere. He traveled all the time and then would write long reports on what he had done, which nobody read. It was sort of a joke, but he made sure he picked up votes. He went everywhere and wanted to make sure he could go to countries so he had credit he felt at least for various constituency things by going there.

Well when you left Florence, where did you go?

JOHNSON: To Prague.

Q: This is 1948.

JOHNSON: 1949. I could see that behind my back in Washington they had in mind sending me to the consulate general in Bratislava, which is not too far from Vienna. But meanwhile the Communists are organizing the closing of that consulate general. The government was…

Q: Claiborne Pell was there wasn't he?

JOHNSON: Yes, Claiborne Pell was there. I had made my farewells. I had been in charge of the post because the consul general Weller had gone off and no replacement had arrived, so I was the officer in Charge. I had made my farewells with my consular colleagues, but now I haven't left town. This could be embarrassing. I am walking down town, down the street, and I see the Brazilian consul general coming toward me. He has made farewells with me with many "abraços," great Latin American embraces. I could see that he sticks the newspaper out in front of his face so he could seem to be reading it as he walks by. He doesn't have to say "what are you still doing here after out wonderful farewell?" So, now I am switched to Prague.

Q: Well, you were in Prague from when to when?

JOHNSON: Well, ’49 to ’51. I am the political officer. I am seeing the Communist government in action. The Communist government at the time was exceedingly nasty, let’s say. But they are at war with themselves. One group of the Communist leaders is executing another group of them, the Slansky show trial. People who had some Jewishness to them were being victimized, put on trial and executed. Their ashes were distributed along the highway so they could never be venerated anywhere. But the regime has a war on western newspapermen. They arrest William Otis, an Associated Press correspondent, AP, and accuse him of being a spy. He was not any sort of a spy. But he had been an ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) guy in our army, people who have their service delayed while they continue their studies. They just picked on him as looking like a spy. Then they work up one of these show trials where he has to memorize the entire text of his answers to everything, and he knows what questions are coming. I get to attend the trial because when this occurs, I am the sole political officer on the staff of this embassy which has been reduced to 13 people.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

JOHNSON: Ellis Briggs. A wonderful ambassador. A girl secretary named Mary Harak, a wonderful secretary, and wonderfully strong person. She married a Foreign Service officer later named Coburn Kidd. Really much of the trial newsreel stuff was focused on us two sitting in there. We were the only western representatives. They didn’t allow any western newspaper men or anything. I telephoned a report on the day’s proceedings to Frankfurt every night, but I am witnessing a horrible thing exploiting this American Bill Otis. They give him a five year sentence and he serves several years of it. Meanwhile we have an ambassador who is very…we couldn’t have wanted a better one than Briggs, under the circumstances of the hostility of the government.

Q: Well, describe the very early days of this Communist takeover which was in early ’48 wasn’t it?

JOHNSON: Yes it was.

Q: What was it like there? How was the government functioning? It was a brand new Communist government.

JOHNSON: It was getting its grip, a brand new government, solidifying its grip which would mean trying to identify any citizen who had ever served in the RAF in WWII and arresting him and putting him in a concentration camp, and putting him in the Jáchymov uranium mines. Any western experience or anything like that.

Q: Yes, because there were Czechs who had during the war gone to England and had served as fighter pilots and bomber pilots.

JOHNSON: Absolutely. And anybody who seemed to have any sort of democratic sympathy or anything like that was being put in concentration camps. Meanwhile they are tearing themselves apart. But what it means in the stores, you can’t buy anything worth

anything in any store. Anything you ask for just gets one response. The response in Czech was "niema." We don't have it. But some of the Poles who are undergoing the same experience, I think they arrived at a little one sentence description of the difference between what is going on in those two countries. The Czechs are trying to make Soviet Communism work. The Poles say "We know damn well it won't work and we are just pretending to make it work; and we are hardly even doing that."

Q: I mean the Czechs were almost the entire period of the Cold War, the communist Czechs were some of the nastiest going, weren't they?

JOHNSON: Yes, I would say so, and I haven't wanted to think too much about why that is. The Poles were nasty enough but were much better. The Poles arrested some Americans who were related to Noel Field in a way. When they decided to release this American, they assigned a woman to be his nursemaid in a way, but to help him ease back into normal life, taking him to restaurants or whatever. Anyway befriending him and sending him back to the United States in a happier frame of mind than otherwise. Later on I go to serve as political officer in Warsaw. It is an infinitely different situation up there.

Q: Well what kind of relations do we have with the Poles? You know did you go to the foreign ministry and all?

JOHNSON: Do we still stick with the Czechs?

Q: Yes, we still stick with the Czechs, yeah.

JOHNSON: Yes I did, and was I lucky. Why was I lucky? When I was in Florence, and I needed to go and serve in either Bratislava or Prague, I went down to Rome and dealt with a Czech functionary in their embassy in getting my visa. We focused on each other a certain amount. Now that I am in Czechoslovakia, soon after I get there the staff is reduced from 72 Americans to 13 Americans. I am now the sole consular officer where there had been about 10 before, and the only political reporting officer. But I would have to go to the foreign office on various visa matters, and who am I dealing with, but that same young guy who had served me in Rome, and we spoke Italian with each other. He was sympathetic to my consular needs. He didn't harass me on whatever consular problem I had. So that was lucky.

Q: Well were a lot of Czechs trying to get visas to get out?

JOHNSON: No, because they didn't have any chance to be let out with visas. What might be going on there of some interest, the Western press is fleeing the country. Each of the western press representatives, Dana Adam Schmidt, Bobby Beecham, one thing or another, they all wanted a consular officer to escort them from Prague to the frontier so that they don't disappear en route. So I was that person. What else? They were closing the consulate down in Bratislava. That was one function I had to do, seal it.

Q: What about relations with the Church? Was the communist party outlawing the Catholic Church, or what was happening?

JOHNSON: Any church whether it was Catholic or Protestant, and both Catholic and Protestant faiths have big histories in that country. But they were all keeping their heads way down. Although they could see what was going on, they were just completely repressed. A bad experience for me would be to go to a performance in a big stadium. The Red Army song and dance group, now they are wonderful performers.

Q: Now this is from the Soviet army.

JOHNSON: The Soviet army. And filling up the stadium, and the Czechs are filling up the stadium. And in their enthusiasm the crowd is all chanting, "Stalin, Stalin, Stalin." It was sickening to hear a bunch of civilized people chanting, "Stalin, Stalin." That is agony. In Poland nothing like that happened. I had such wonderful experiences in Poland later.

Q: The contrast between the two is considerable. As a political officer, how would you work in a rigid communist system?

JOHNSON: That is a good question because I could hardly see much that I could do. I could read the press. Nothing I could report on, episodes like this trial and other trials, but let's say my consular work was much more important and vigorous than my political work. There wasn't much to say or report. When you get to Poland that is a completely different situation.

Q: What about on your consular work? Was this mainly Americans in trouble, Czech Americans in Czechoslovakia? Were you trying to get them out or what?

JOHNSON: Let's say we have another American in prison there, not William Otis but another one named John Hvasta. He was an American of Slovak descent who had been a tourist in the country. If you were a tourist, a young American tourist, you were probably engaged in black marketing, black market exchanging of money. They had arrested him and put him in prison. So I am dealing with trying to find out what is happening to him in prison, communicating with his family in the United States. Eventually he escapes. He escapes from a very tough prison, with a Czech. The two of them get across the border into Germany, after which an embarrassing result comes about. The CIA is dealing with him. They do not believe him, that he is an American who escaped from prison. They think it is some nefarious farce. So they weren't reporting having him at all. He escaped and that sort of thing. It was a certain strange CIA behavior not to believe something that is a little bit tough to believe. That worked itself out. Also I am serving my ambassador in connection with his support of hunting. When he wrote one of his books he called it "Shots Heard 'Round the World." Because he is a bird shooter, he is hunting birds everywhere he goes. And when he goes hunting birds, I am his aide de camp. I am carrying his guns. He is teaching me how to shoot birds. We go over to Germany and do it over in Germany. We are entertained by our Kries (District) officers, the American

diplomats who are made sort of county governors and administrators. One of our meetings over there, they are having a big regional reunion. They have been drinking beer until late afternoon when we arrive. This is the difference between the sobriety of the ambassador and myself and the jollity of this group of American foreign service officers. Dwight Doves is a host in that thing. Then he, when he is driving back with me to his home, the American flag is flying on the front of the automobile, the Czech police try to stop him on the highway through typical road control. He doesn't want to stop for Czech police, he just gets the driver to roar right on. But he devoted himself to writing a daily VOA broadcast to Czechoslovakia. He would write it, with a USIA guy whose name I can't remember for the moment. His widow is living here in Collington, a nice retirement home. Anyway he goes to great pains to write wonderfully. He is a good writer, this ambassador, but he wants to get a lot of alliteration into it, "the slimy, spoiled, sinister communism," about three or four S's. His USIA advisor is advising him, "But Sir, when this comes out in Czech, there won't be any more alliteration here. You don't have to struggle so much." That kind of thing he was doing on a daily basis as his contribution to the broadcasts to the country. And the western community of diplomats there was very solid in sticking together and entertaining ourselves and sharing experiences. The British secretary, a girl, was arrested by the police and taken into custody, and we are all going to do something about that, and a young British officer, on espionage charges and that sort of thing. They put her on a mock trial, they take this secretary girl and put her in a kind of court with a very menacing décor, communist decorations and a bunch of growling sinister looking men all around. They are trying to intimidate her psychologically. She defeats that completely. We had the good fortune to have an embassy residence. I don't think we have it anymore. It is called the Petschek Palace.

Q: I think we still do.

JOHNSON: Do we? That is wonderful. It has enough space on its lawn to have a full scale cricket match. Cricket is going on there, because there are enough people from the British embassy and the Canadian embassy and a few draftees form the American embassy and some from the Indian embassy to get up a cricket team. I tried it. I was out in the field and nothing is coming to me, and I get bored and just drift away to the tennis courts and I am not missed at all. Anyway, there was much entertainment within the western community. We travel around the country, we go skiing in the mountains that exist between Czechoslovakia and Germany. They exist in Slovakia, and people are breaking their legs, and the ambassador is saying no more skiing. You guys are a bunch of cripples around the embassy. We play tennis, there is a tennis court there. Tyler Thompson is a famous guy who is the deputy chief of mission. I am playing tennis with him a lot. He beats me all the time. I calculate I am a certain age, and he is a certain age. There is going to come a time when he is too old to beat me the way he is doing now. I will be still young enough to beat him. I don't think I ever did get the chance though.

Q: Well did, was there any real contact with Czech officials or was everything done in an official way and no real rapport?

JOHNSON: No rapport. Ellis Briggs was one who just let his natural disdain for Czech officials stand out. No attempt to conceal that at all. There was minimum contact between embassy officers, ambassador on down, or any western diplomats and the regime. The regime was so busy with its own internal fight they didn't focus on us to any degree. Now I should say that when I was leaving Czechoslovakia finally, I drove through the frontier station to Germany. And I had crossed there many times going out to Germany. The head of the border station, an older man, let's say he is 50 years old, and a group of border guards and police people gather, and they have a farewell ceremony for me. And we are toasting or something and the spokesman says, "Mr. Johnson we hope you come back to Czechoslovakia one day in a German tank." I say, "German tank?" He says, "No, Sherman tank, Sherman tank." He had sounded like he was saying German tank. He was saying come liberate us. Bastards. And all the other ….

Q: Well you left there. Where do you go?

JOHNSON: Well, from there I leave Prague and I go to Bad Homburg, Germany, outside of Frankfurt. I join something called the special research division. We reside in Frankfurt and get driven out each day to the suburban town of Bad Homburg. We debrief high level Eastern European defectors. They are provided to us by the CIA who has had first crack at them. They house them in houses not far away. The other people, let's say we have about six people in this office, are Soviet experts speaking Russian. I am the satellite person so to speak. I speak German basically, but these are satellite people. Walter Stoessel is head of this office. It is a very small office, and a very small thing. I am very impressed with Walter Stoessel. Later he becomes Assistant Secretary for Europe, and ambassador in Moscow and in Poland also. He took this tiny office just as seriously as he would being deputy assistant secretary or in charge of a big embassy. Very good. I do that for almost a year.

Q: This would be 19??

JOHNSON: 1951 and into '52. I am going to come back now to be in the office of Eastern European affairs.

Q: Well, let's talk about this Bad Homburg time. What were you doing and what were you getting from this?

JOHNSON: It is more like small pearls. No great necklace, but small pearls. Now what are the Soviet experts getting. They are getting a picture that is more for history than for current affairs. They are getting a picture of Alfred Rosenberg. The influence of various philosophies on how the German armies conducted itself in Russia. Because we are still digging in to what happened in Eastern Europe during this war. Who was this Rosenberg? What influence would he have on the way the German army would treat Soviet prisoners, Russian prisoners, and what sort of philosophy was behind the concentration camps for Russian prisoners. And what struggles were going on between the Gehlen Organization and other factors in German intelligence.

Q: Gehlen was the German intelligence organization which was moved sort of intact into the American and British intelligence system. We just sort of took it over and it became kind of a model for dealing with the Soviet Union.

JOHNSON: I don't remember what kind of pearls I could get out of some of these Eastern European defectors. It would be like a deputy minister of foreign trade or something like that. I would report on it. Later on what this former minister of foreign trade would say was "since I was a communist the CIA is not putting me into the United States the way I wished it would. They are putting me into Cuba." He said, "What a corrupt country Cuba is. I have never seen such corruption. It is much worse than Eastern Europe." This was under Batista before Castro. He said, "Gosh, I want to get to the United States," and he did get to the United States later. I can't say that I could see too much being accomplished in this particular operation except for the historical record. So after nine months or so of this I go to the Department of State as trouble shooter on various desks, the Polish desk, the Czech desk, the Baltic desk.

Q: You were there from '51 to?

JOHNSON: '51 to '54.

Q: Well this is obviously still at the height of the Cold War. What sort of things were you doing with the bureau?

JOHNSON: Oh boy. Let's say with the Baltic desk when there was no one else to cope with it, except myself, what happened about the Baltic desk; why do we have a Baltic Desk when it was all part of the Soviet Union. The governments of the Baltic states in the late 30's, when fate was moving in on them, transferred funds, their treasury abroad to banks in New York. So these banks in New York had Baltic state monies. The State Department was rationing out that money to support Baltic legations in a few places, Washington, New York, London particularly. So we are sort of working to maintain this system supporting these enterprises from that money.

Q: We never recognized the takeover of the Baltic states so that when they did become free back in 1989 we just resumed our relations. We actually didn't have to go through any procedure. We had their embassies here which were maintained, we just accepted the new governments there.

JOHNSON: During the late 80's the Baltic states are in ferment. They can sort of see freedom coming. They have an annual music festival where 30-40,000, singers all come to this festival. It would take a space way bigger then this for all this enterprise. Nationalism is nourished in this singing festival, singing songs. Some American has made a movie of all of this. So it is available. So the Soviets are seeing this nationalism and how strong it is. And the Balts are also organizing things that I learn about later, but didn't know at the time. For example, a chain of people holding hands for the entire Baltic region from one end to the other, the entire distance. While the Russians are still there.

Q: Well at the time during the 50's, you were there in '53?

JOHNSON: Yes, '53, '54, '55.

Q: There was a semi revolt in East Berlin. Did you get involved with looking at Germany at all?

JOHNSON: No. But I can't think of much interesting happening during that phase of my service. Not much happening.

Q: All right, then where did you go?

JOHNSON: Now I am heading off to go to Warsaw as political officer, the only political officer, so I am going to take Polish language training, which I do. That is not too successful because there is only one other fellow taking the language and he isn't bound for the Foreign Service. He is an example of not a good Foreign Service officer, but a fine fellow, Lawrence something. He is only interested in the language. He is crazy about language, but nothing else is of interest to him, so he doesn't get to Poland. It is just the two of us and one teacher for nine months. But it is adequate so that I could read the newspapers, but not so that I have a wonderful time.

Q: So you were in Poland for how long?

JOHNSON: Two years.

Q: From 19—

JOHNSON: Let's say from 1956 to 1958, late '58. There is only one political officer and one economic officer, one agricultural attaché. The economic officer who is there with me is Richard E. Johnson. He and I are great buddies and we travel around the country. The police stop us and look at our documentation but they don't blink an eye. Robert Houston was economic officer there with me also, and various ambassadors, Joe Jacobs, I don't know if you have ever heard of him. He is Jewish from Charleston, from a Jewish community in Charleston from 1750.

Q: It is one of the oldest Jewish communities in the United States.

JOHNSON: Yes. He is a very fine officer, very sophisticated, excellent officer, but he isn't interested in Eastern Europe at all really. Then soon comes onto the scene ambassador Ellis and what was his name? Jake Beam, Jacob Beam.

Q: Well, what was Poland like while you were there?

JOHNSON: Boy, am I happy to be there. The Poles, as I said before, were not even going to pretend to make this communist system work. They are just faking. I can be out in a

restaurant and am talking Polish with a customer, an eight to ten year old boy. A Pole says to me "What do you think of Gomulka, our leader here?' I say, "He has to walk a very tight line here between west and east and how to deal with Stalin," and I go into some double talk sort of thing. He bangs on the table, this guy. "Cut all that crap. He is just a rotten dirty Communist and we all detest him here." I say, "Who knows who is here in the café? You shouldn't have said such things." He says, "Everybody in the cafe says the same as I just said."

Q: I talked with somebody who served in Warsaw quite a few years later. He said that he was convinced that there were probably three maybe four dedicated communists in Poland at the time. The rest were just marking time waiting for the change. Communism really didn't take in Poland, did it?

JOHNSON: No, and while I am there Khrushchev is visiting Poland, and he is arm wrestling with Gomulka the leader of the Poles, if I have got the names right.

Q: I am not sure. Khrushchev was a little later wasn't he. Khrushchev was toward the, well maybe.

JOHNSON: This was 1956. I think he was because it is all in this spirit of how much liberalization are we going to allow here. Meanwhile Gomulka has made a speech, and he is saying, some writer is saying if our collective farms are not working out, let them dissolve. And immediately they dissolved. He just meant that rhetorically. He didn't think that could happen, immediately divide up all the scythes and tractors overnight, and not have any collectivized agriculture.

Q: That is in Poland.

JOHNSON: In Poland. In other words there is a big thaw going down which chills later. It takes an anti-Semitic turn. A lot of the leaders of Poland when I was there, a lot of them are Jewish. It is one pleasure after another that one remembers it so many years later. One pleasure, there is an academy of fine arts in the city, and that academy has always had a tradition of an annual ball. And now we are going to have for the first time since the war, a ball. And the people that go to the academy of fine arts are basically liberal people of course and mainly women. I go to the ball and dancing is going on. It is a position where I am looking at a bunch of women in evening gowns and I am the American political officer, and there is no reason I can't dance with some of these people. I go and start dancing with one without knowing who in the heck she is. While we are dancing a young man sidles up to us and says, "Is everything all right, madam?" She says yes. Secret police, her bodyguard. Then in walks Sydney Gruson of the New York Times and he sees me with this woman. He is Mr. Know Everything about Communist Poland. He knows who she is that I am dancing with. I don't. It is the wife of the communist party official who is the mayor of Warsaw, a big party official here. He says, "Johnson, you are doing very well here." What happens there politically is that lots of things are going on. Soviet officers are returning home. They are reducing their military holdings, the Soviets are. Daily ceremonies are going on at the station where there are goodbyes

between the Polish army officers and the Soviet army officers, that sort of thing. Anyway there is enough going on that Sydney Gruson is telephoning the New York Times every night from his room at the hotel. He lets me sit in with him as he telephones. Just the two of us, so that I know what is going to be in the next morning's New York Times and I can get the thrust of what he is reporting to the New York Times to the State Department. The time is somehow helping me in that it is six or seven hours ahead. For one thing the Department will know what he is reporting before people read it. He wins something like a Pulitzer Prize or some other top prize in journalism. Why, what helped him? First of all he is very talented, a talented newspaper man. His background, he was Jewish. His parents are from Lithuania. He is very handsome, sophisticated guy. What we do, his wife, Flora Gruson, is also a foreign correspondent. Anyway a Polish communist is cultivating me to some extent. His name is Jerzy Urban. A rather younger guy, a prominent fellow who is sort of the editor and brains behind an adventurous liberal publication, perhaps it is a weekly publication. He invites me to his home. It is very rare in Eastern Europe to have a home dinner with him and his wife. He goes with me when I am taking my children out in the snow in some town some distance away, to play in the snow. He goes with me when I travel around the country to go up to a resort near Gdynia, Gdansk, which is an artist colony called Jastarnia Gora. Anyway it is not so much that I am feeling this is the Polish intelligence keeping track of me. That would be too easy. But he is improving his English. So I benefit from having this Polish buddy. After I leave he is given a scholarship to come to the United States. We are picking Eastern European journalists to bring over here. Then he goes back to Poland. He was kind of a leader of the anti-Soviet, but still communist slice of the political situation in Poland. Later on he becomes a pain in the neck for the embassy, and the embassy develops a negative position towards him. Then eventually, what was the general's name? It was Jaruzelski, the Polish army general who takes over in the 80's. He has a spokesman just as President Obama has a spokesman. Who is it but my old buddy Jerzy Urban. He is in an army uniform, a colonel. I am out of touch to know what is behind this, whether he always was in the military intelligence service.

Q: Were you getting information that was of use to you from him? Sometimes you develop these relationships with you might say intelligence service people who befriend you. Obviously it is part of their job, but at the same time they have to give up something in order to get something.

JOHNSON: I can't say that I was getting anything from him. I really wasn't getting anything. What was happening of importance was right out there in the open at the time.

Q: What about the Catholic Church? This was an important aspect of Polish existence during this period..

JOHNSON: Oh boy what a situation. First of all I had seen seminarians in Italy who look like every one of them is a scholar. Not one of them is an athlete. In Poland I have seen young priests who all look like paratroopers, prize fighters, athletes, football players. This church is so powerful, and it is under such good leadership. There is a leader of the church there. His name was Cardinal Wyszynski, it sounds the same as the Russian show

trial prosecutor Vyshinsky. But Cardinal Wyszynski, by one circumstance or another, was just as much, would have been just as good a choice to become Pope as John Paul II was. They were buddies together. What was the name of the one who did go and became John Paul II?

Q: Karol Wojtyla?

JOHNSON: Where would I see the power of this Cardinal Wyszynski? They had a big ceremony, a big observance, at Czestochowa, it is called. A big sacred church and enormous field and stadium. It is a pilgrimage. People walk there from Warsaw or anywhere else in the country. You could see the fervor of the people for Catholicism from all this walking and attending out here. I am accompanying a correspondent named Joe Alsop, a famous correspondent, who was digging very well and deep into what was going on at that time. But anyway there were a lot of experiences. Then on Christmas Eve, this Cardinal Wyszynski holds a service down in the center of Warsaw in his home church. It was big, and I get to go to that. I am not a Catholic, I am a Protestant Episcopal. I am seeing a figure that could have been prominent in the Middle Ages or something like that. He so much exudes benevolence towards his flock. When he gives a talk during this service, the flock is just utterly hypnotized by him, and adoring him. He is really their shepherd. He had every kind of advantage of leadership during this time of communist rule. But anyway you see the strength of the Catholic Church in the country. You can do so many things in that country. You can go to a national park that is right on the Soviet frontier. It is a great national forest called Bialowieza. It has many bison in it. America doesn't have bison for some historical reason. It is deep in snow when I am visiting it. I ride around that place in a coach drawn by horses with a Polish chauffeur who is supposed to be talking back while he is driving this thing. And spurning the vodka because he says my home vodka here is so much better than that commercial vodka. One thing or another. Then when we are inside with the guests of the head of the lodge, we are talking about one thing or another. We will get on one subject and he goes like this.

Q: Pointing out.

JOHNSON: For the microphone. But seeing that this place had been used very much as a meeting place for the Soviet leadership and the Polish leadership. It is right on the frontier. So Gomulka or somebody would come out. Then we had a big track meet. The U.S. Olympic team has taken part in some Olympics in Moscow. They have organized a big track meet between the United States and Poland. I am the sports attaché for the embassy. It gives me contacts so that they give me a permanent pass to the ski resort in Zakopane down in the south of the country, so that I don't have to stand in the infinitely long ski lines to go back up. They give me sort of a little villa there in this ski resort. Various other aspects of contact. I think this is a story that exemplifies what is going on at the time. My relations with my Soviet counterpart, the Soviet first secretary. I call on him upon arriving. I am the new man. He receives me in some sort of little room of the entry hallway. All right. Then when I receive his call back I have him right up in my office. I have a drawer up there open, with a sign on it red, open. My safe stuff. We have our political discussion. Now he sees that I am one up on him. Because he received me in

such a coldish way down in the entry way. So I have to come back to his office for another call. And he shows me his safe which is like a western movie. It is a great big crazy thing. Now he wants to play tennis. I like to play tennis, so I invite him to play tennis with me. I have access to the Polish army tennis club, which used to be the chief bourgeois tennis club of Warsaw. It is called Legia. There is a story about why it is called Legia. The Polish legions of the 1820s and 1830s. All right. We have our tennis. The next day when I am there, the administrative people come to me and say, "Johnson, what the heck kind of an American diplomat are you? You know we don't want Russians in here." I didn't sense that while we were playing, but he did. So we are not going to play any more tennis there. We are going to play tennis at the Soviet chancery. They have a tennis court there. So I am invited there, and I go there. We are not going to play singles; we are going to play doubles. He gives me his driver as my doubles partner. He takes a young athlete in athletic clothes who may not be much of a tennis player but he is an athlete, to make sure he wins the tennis match. But I can talk with his driver. This driver gets on to telling me that when my boss here and the others want to go to Krakow or another city, we have to be very carefully scheduled about when we are leaving, what time we are expected, and we report in on certain points. If we break down on that trip somewhere, someone will come out and kill us. I call that an adventure. If we have more time my favorite experience of all in Poland was when things break out in Hungary. The Hungarian revolution starts.

Q: 1956.

JOHNSON: '56. The Poles are in great agitation wondering whether they should do something to help their brother Catholics in Hungary. I am in the chancery around 5:00 on an October evening, and I hear a noise outside, a weird enormous resounding noise. I go out and walk down a pathway which leads to the highway which is a main street. A procession, a demonstration is advancing down the middle of the road. They are chanting and it is booming off the office buildings which line the road. They are chanting, Do you speak Polish? "Rokossovsky, idz do domu (go home)." Rokossovsky is the minister of defense of Poland, but he...

Q: He is a Soviet general.

JOHNSON: Right, a Soviet general. He is sort of ethnically half Russian half Polish. But that is sort of a rebellious thing to be chanting down the main street. Then they are chanting, "Katyn, Katyn."

Q: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Katyn is where 20,000 officers of the Polish army were executed.

Q: By the NKVD during WWII. A horrible thing.

JOHNSON: Yes. Everybody is supposed to be silent about that. You are not supposed to yell it out. All these demonstrators are the college youth and the high school youth of the

city of Warsaw. They were carrying up in front of them their national flag, and they are carrying Hungarian flags. Darkness is falling and there were Polish troops coming along on each side of them. These are a special defense force that was set up under a certain General Spychalski just for such situations as this. I love something like this, to go out and get mixed up in something like this. I start going alongside of this procession. I can hear an officer giving orders to his troops saying, "We have got to get ahead of this crowd," So they start running, these troops. One of them bumps into me and knocks me down. He stops and picks me up and puts me back up on my feet like this, and says, "I beg your pardon, sir." This wouldn't happen in other countries. This is Polish courtesy.

Q: Was there, did we think…

JOHNSON: They were on their way to the Soviet embassy. I don't know what they had in mind. They were going to demonstrate there, and this defense force guides them all around just like cowboys handling a runaway herd. Just let them tire themselves out.

Q: Were we concerned one way or another that Poland might do something about the Hungarian revolution?

JOHNSON: Yes, absolutely. What did the Poles tell me about why they are not doing it? Whether they told me or not, I figured that why they didn't do it was this Cardinal Wyszynski and their clergy in general figured it would be just suicidal. So much Polish blood has been shed so recently, let's just cool it. Wait them out. Things are going good enough there, improving the situation in Poland, doing away with the collective farms. You could accept the idea that it would be bloody, but no, we won't do it. They reproach themselves in a certain way by saying when the Czechs were like this we criticized them. Now we are like that, and we appreciate better the Czech situation. Eventually the Czechs got just as demonstrative as these Poles were, years later under Vaclav Havel.

Q: I am thinking this is probably a good place to stop. Just about 12:00 noon. Is there anything else we should cover about Poland we will put at the end here where we will pick it up.

JOHNSON: There is some kind of an insertion I want to make, just briefly. It doesn't have to be for the recording. It is family background. Nobody in my family background has ever been to a university except my father. Mother no, grandparents, no. Jut seventh or eighth grade. I know why, it was economics. My mother's father died when she was about eight or ten years old. Her mother the wife, had no skills, and had never been to university. She became a housekeeper for a Professor at Yale University. Nevertheless, no college background except my father. We discussed that a little bit in this document. What else, oh yes. One other notable ancestor. Peter Spang, and he comes over with his father, Nicolas Spang. He is in his early 20's I would say. They come from the province of France which is called Lorraine. However the town they are from is right on the German frontier. Parts of the Maginot line is right through the town they come from . They are right near the Moselle River in Germany. After, when he gets over here, very quickly he marries a colonial girl, Harriet Hubbard, whose parents were Pilgrims. But by

1849 gold is discovered in California. He goes out there, this young Peter Spang, and he goes with the brother of his new bride, the brother of Harriet Hubbard. They go by ship rather than by land. They go for gold. I don't know too much about that. He comes back by way of Buffalo Wyoming, which is a territory, not a state yet, and settles down and creates a ranch. Some of his sons marry Indians. Their descendants are living on the Lame Deer reservation. The only notable liaison in our family is Peter Spang marrying this colonial girl. Several of my nieces have become members of the DAR, Daughters of the American Revolution, because the father of Harriet Hubbard was a soldier. I will leave this record.

Q: OK, we will pick this up the next time when you left Poland and then where did you go?

JOHNSON: Algiers, and there is a war on there.

Q: OK, we will pick this up there.

Today is 2 November 2009 with Dick Johnson. Dick, where are we at, or what do you want to start with?

JOHNSON: I would like to register a few observations about my years in Poland as a chief political officer. In fact we only had one political officer. Anyway a thing I would consider a great experience in Poland, let me think how to describe this. The only time in my service where I saw hundreds of people, maybe thousands, all in tears at once, in one big group. The first is when the Cleveland Orchestra turned up in Poland, a trip supported by the United States government, and was in the major concert hall in Warsaw, thousands of people. It was George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra as they call it. They started the program by playing the United States national anthem and then the Polish national anthem. While those two things were playing the audience was breaking into tears. Talk about public diplomacy or whatever. They were so happy that Poland and the United States were kind of like those two anthems. They were terrifically successful, these public performances. The other was also in Poland in the same hall. A French singer from the 1930's, Lucienne Boyer, who has some great songs in the period of the 30's, like "Dans La Fumee" ("In the Smoke"). Anyway, that Polish audience was in tears too, hearing her and thinking many thoughts which I couldn't quite read -- how much nostalgia for that period, and regret that the war had erased so much, and now they are living it again. Never did I see such emotion. It certainly was a great thrill to have served in Poland, and people who are interested in Poland should read Yale Richmond's book about Public Diplomacy and his dealings with Poland also.

Q: Did you get any feel from the Poles about the problem of anti-Semitism, because there was a very strong strain of this that came out during WWII. I was wondering how this played out when you were there?

JOHNSON: It was, I am trying to think of the expression for something that is not actively bubbling. It was not actively bubbling. It was repressed. Certain forms of it are

preparing to break out. It was at the moderate stage of cooking at the time. If you have the kind of anti-Semitism which affected the situation in Poland, I guess I am not so strongly impressed with how bad the Polish anti-Semitism was before WWII. There was plenty but it wasn't colossal. It wasn't as evil as the German form. Any anti-Semitism that was cooking while I was in Poland was going to work against the communists which were so strongly imbedded in the Polish communist government. They were the ones that were going to suffer from this next wave of, surging of it. I think that is all I can think about.

Q: Who was head of the Communist party while you were there?

JOHNSON: Gomulka. He was head of the government not just the party but the whole communist structure.

Q: Was he, did he have a Jewish wife and kept that kind of controlled. I mean one of the leaders had Jewish connections. I mean we are hearing about Poles who were opposed to the government could bring this up.

JOHNSON: Poles opposed to what?

Q: The Communist government through the Jewish connection or something.

JOHNSON: It was not apparent but it surged later in later years.

Q: You left when?

JOHNSON: Late in '58. It is funny to think about it, what signs still existed of prewar Poland and the strong element of Jewish population it had. If you went into Eastern Poland you wouldn't run into Jewish shopkeepers, Jewish small traders or anything like that. I can certainly remember Lublin which was a center of Polish Jewish life. Right now I can remember from my stay in a hotel in Lublin, I am on the second floor, where each room consists of one great long hall separated by a rope with a blanket hanging on the rope. The blanket on each side constitutes your room walls.

Q: Is there anything more you want to talk about Poland at that point?

JOHNSON: Let me think for a moment. No, I think not. I would just conclude in saying it was a great pleasure to be serving in Poland. To see the amount of forces at work to restore Poland to a freedom which it now enjoys.

Q: Well then where did you go in 1958?

JOHNSON: To Algiers. Let me think for a moment to be sure that I am right about this. I am probably right about this. I think an assignment was blooming for me to go to Surabaya in Indonesia as principal officer, because now I have got so much experience with Communism in Poland and in Czechoslovakia. Communism is a strong force in

Surabaya. I would be perfectly willing to go there and do this. But somebody approaches me, I think it was Albert Sherer, a foreign service officer, who said, "how would you like an assignment instead to Algiers?" I said, "Fine." There was sometimes this switching around of assignments. There are expressions which exist now that did not exist then, like, "Oh, I have just heard about my next post by air kiss." I never heard of "air kiss" in my day. But anyway Algiers, I didn't know it at the time as I was going on this trip to Algiers that the worst of urban terrorism or explosive killing was over in Algiers. The battle of Algiers had been sort of temporarily lost by the Algerian rebel cause, and the army and the police system had it under control. I will jump ahead a little bit to say what this revolutionary situation or this war situation meant was that anytime you ever went into a public performance such as a show or a movie, you could not leave until that was over, because otherwise you might be leaving an explosive device under your seat and kill people. There were various other security factors like that. What am I now, I am the deputy principal officer. The principal officer is a consul general, Frederick Lyon, a career officer, all of his career was in consular work. I certainly esteem him highly, a very excellent officer and a pleasure to work for. Getting settled as a Foreign Service officer was sometimes a little bit difficult. In many situations in that period as a new officer, you might be getting the same quarters as your predecessor had. In my case in Algiers that would have been quite fine, but I did not succeed in that. My predecessor had a villa on the same property as the best hotel in the city, the Hotel St. Georges, I guess it was called. It was allied headquarters during WWII, just a delightful garden kind of property. My predecessor and whoever, the consul general, were not insuring that I move into that place. Somebody else, not in the Foreign Service, got into it. The same thing with another departing officer, an economic officer, who worked things out so his residence went to a local businessman with whom he was very friendly. So I had to scout around to get a property, and I got one, a rental property. It was the very modern residence of a French wine grower from the wine growing region south of Algiers, who wanted to live in France for awhile. It was not a warm building but very practical and satisfactory. Right across the street from a French parachutist camp inside a wooded area. Anyway it was a little problem to get settled in.

Q: What was the political situation in Algeria when you got there in '58?

JOHNSON: All right let me think a moment. Pressures are building, but it is not a violent period in Algiers. War is going on out in the countryside. The question is how much has it succeeded in suppressing the Algerian rebellious spirit and to what extent are the French military authorities and French political authorities struggling with deciding how to continue their role in Algeria. Right at this period they are not going too much in one direction or the other. Let's say that the military is in a phase of dominating political forces from the French foreign ministry. There is that aspect of it. The government is in the hands of a governor general functionary named Paul Delouvrier. What is going on out in the hinterland is a system of relocating villagers into big relocation camps , I forget the word for them at the time, but putting the population out there into a position where they couldn't help the fighters, the FLN (National Liberation Front). I am beginning to get established there, making the acquaintance of my British counterpart named George Finlayson who later becomes consul general in New York City and then consul general in

Los Angeles, where his job is a big involvement with the British movie community in Southern California. The German consul general had been a prisoner of war of ours during the war, and had gone to school in a POW camp in the United States. These were good solid colleagues to have. I had some remarkable officers with me on the staff. One of them was named Johannes Imhof. Unusual in that certainly through the age of 20 or so he was an Austrian citizen. He attended something in Vienna that was something like a diplomatic academy. It was a Konsular Academie spelled with a K. But it is like a school of foreign service, prestige aspects. But he was an exceedingly capable distinguished political reporter and diplomat. He came back to important functions in the department when he left, but dies much too young for someone as talented as he was. And a good political officer with me was Bayard King. His brother Nat King was somewhere in the system of our government in the general area of press and public relations. The function there really required good French. Everybody that I could think of that was functioning significantly had good French. Travel. It is dangerous to travel outside of Algiers despite the degree of control the French army had over the highways of the country. But there was enough leaking so that if you went out and wanted to get out in the hinterland and have a lunch somewhere, a picnic lunch and you went up, you might be tempted to go out on an open hillside and park your little lunch automobile at the top of a hill so that you could see anything approaching from any side. Aim your car in the direction you are not going to go when you do get in it to leave. That sort of thing. In town there was something that was not yet that serious, and that would be the improvised explosive device. The same thing which is such a factor in Iraq. That would be an automobile parked down in the main street of downtown Algiers. It would have an artillery shell in it which the FLN forces fixed to go off at a certain time. The damned thing of it was just as you see in the modern situation, they killed far more Muslim Algerians than they killed government officials, diplomats, police. Well our consulate general was on a winding street that went up from sea level down in the city center of Algiers practically up to the heights of the city. It existed there before the war, WWII. It was so restricted in space that it was divided into two floors, one high floor, one the lower floor which had other businesses. So you would go from one section of the offices to the other. You would have to put a coin into the elevator to make it go. There was not too much to mention about that except to say that before too long, a year and a half, there was a bombing attempt. Quite a charge of explosives was put on our doorstep. But it was primitive. It was on a fuse, not electronic, just something set to burn and explosive materials set up against the door. It was set to go off about 7:00 P.M. Everybody had left the offices, so they are not trying to kill people here. This is an OAS thing.

Q: OAS being an organization of French settlers and army elements.

JOHNSON: The extremists. The secretary who saw it there went out and reported it to the policeman who went by and it was taken care of. Eventually that whole premises were blown to smithereens by the OAS people. Perhaps it was about a year before independence. The French army had property to put us into that was perfectly satisfactory, and that showed a good disposition on the part of the French authorities I should say. The consulate general was now next to what became the future ambassador's residence, a wonderful place called Villa Enfeld. It was one of the nicest principal officer

or ambassador residences that you could imagine in our service. And these premises were right next door to that. It was very convenient. It was up high over the city looking out over the blue water. Anyway it was a decent gesture on the part of the French authorities who controlled Algeria at the time. I should mention the press section, the cultural section. We had a library down on the lower part of Algiers. That was sacked and destroyed while I was acting principal officer. I am trying to think of some aspects of this. Again it was the OAS and a kind of funny supporting group of the OAS. You had high school student people, people like that. And they are wrecking this library which is sort of a storefront library on this main street, and they are wrecking it. They are looting all the books. My USIA officer while I was there, I don't remember whether it was still Howard White or not I am not sure. He wasn't too unhappy to see these books go home into homes. But I had to get down there while the looting was just ending. There were no other USIA officers present in that, so there was a little resentment on my part that they didn't beat me down there, but some Foreign Service officer that I knew and that I had served with, I may think of his name at some point but is now serving in Paris. That evening he was watching television, the child of this officer was watching too, and he ran into his dad and said, "Daddy, Mr. Johnson is on television." So already television had gotten coverage of this sacking. Similarly I decided to at least make some inroads into the Arabic language with no hope to conquer it. So I inscribed in an Arabic language course which was sponsored by the University of Algiers. It was downtown not far from where our cultural center had been. I probably had attended about five or six classes there, getting into how the alphabet is constructed, and how the reading goes from right to left and sort of the structure of the language. The next thing I knew these premises had been blown up completely, again by the OAS. They didn't want the study of Arabic. They didn't try to kill people on that, but they ended that course in language.

Q: What was the feeling that you had and mainly the other officers around you, or were there split opinions about whither Algeria?

JOHNSON: Whither Algeria?

Q: At that time.

JOHNSON: Yeah. Our government I would say was relatively convinced that we are going to have an independent Algeria, and the French are not going to hold onto this conquest of 1820 onward. There is a certain struggle in Washington, and you could feel that in Algiers between people of Western Europe who were interested in the state of our relations with France and this burgeoning African affairs office.

Q: T his was known in Washington as the battle of North Africa.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: The second battle of North Africa. Where did you fall in this?

JOHNSON: Oh I would say non ideological. I see this as just a situation I have to work with and it is going to happen. When my tour of duty ends here more Arabist-oriented people are going to be serving here in my post. Of course as it works out that is what is being cooked up in the wings, Ambassador Bill Porter. That comes quite late in all this situation, but what was developing, what was the most important developing thing in my first year or year-and-a-half or second year was the dissent in the French army, General Salan and other military types. Then finally these currents in the French army seize power in Algiers. That lends itself to sort of an eyewitness scene of how it hits our office, our consulate general. The next morning, one morning I was scheduled to go out into the countryside, some place like Tizi Ouzou for some reason or other. That is why I woke myself up early, say 5:30 or 6:00 and I turned on the radio. I had Radio Paris and I was hearing a certain announcement in convoluted French, like "our authorities in Algiers have been put in a position of not being able to fulfill their functions." That means somebody has taken over the post office, the communications, the radio. So I called up the chief press office, some press office downtown and say, "What is going on there, guys?" It is about 6:00 in the morning. Agence France-Presse it would probably be. And the fellow who answered the phone would say "parachutists have rolled into the center here in 2 ½ ton trucks and have taken over the government buildings, taken over the post office, radio." So then our consulate general is gearing itself to this situation, we find that we don't have telephone communications with Paris or with Washington. But these authorities, these are military authorities who have cut off all communications with consulates general, they missed the telex communications we had with Embassy Paris. So I was able to tap a Telex out.

Q: Telex means a form of wired typewriter in two different places and you could type and it would be typewritten at the other end and vice versa.

JOHNSON: Yes. My next function though is to go to the French authorities to protest this intolerable cutting off of communications with one's government kind of thing. As I am doing this with a French army Major Bounaix. We are sparring in a way and meanwhile he is sounding me out for what I thought might be his job possibilities in the United States when all this is over. Very soon they lift that cutoff of communications systems, so we are back in communication pretty soon. Also the night that all this occurred, I hope I am not mixing up two or three nights, I don't think so. I had entertained at dinner several French generals and their chiefs of staff and that sort of thing. During the meal one of these aides to the general was saying to my wife, Lynn, "Mrs. Johnson, if I am going downtown in my jeep and am honking (the rhythm of the words) 'Algerie Francaise,' would you support me doing that?" She said, "No, I wouldn't." There was a little sparring like that. That night one general there arrests the other general later that night. General Massu, a notable character in this.

Q: He was a pretty famous parachutist.

JOHNSON: Famous parachutist. He arrests General Gambiez who is a democratically minded, not a fanatically minded person. This arrest is not, there is no great hostility or temper in this situation. It was strange. Then the next thing that happens is the French

government officials, at least two that I can think of turn up at my doorstep seeking asylum, so that the French army people don't grab them. I am trying to focus on just what their functions were. One was more or less a French government press and public relations officer. The other was a civilian authority in the office of the governor general. After they are in my home for a couple of days they have arranged somewhere else to go, to hide or get out of Algiers, so they leave.

Q: Did you give asylum?

JOHNSON: Yes, absolutely.

Q: How did that work out?

JOHNSON: No strain. No French authorities of any kind came to reproach me for that.

Q: Were these people who were given asylum Frenchmen, were you able to help them get out of the country?

JOHNSON: No, they were able to find their own means. It was not comparable to other asylum questions that have arisen in various capitals in different situations.

Q: What was the situation with De Gaulle at that point?

JOHNSON: I should perhaps go back a little bit. I think this occurred just before my arrival at the end of '58 or early '59. De Gaulle came and made a big speech saying "Je vous ai compris." ("I have understood you.") He had a more or less double meaning to it. He was really saying, I understand you are a bunch of SOBs and I am going to fix you guys. Don't forget there is plenty of big tragedy on the part of these "colons" (colonial settlers) people too, and their background of having been asylum seekers at the start. Their grandfathers were from Alsace when the Germans took it over, and they had to find refuge somewhere. The best deal they could get at the time was to go there and colonize for France. Anyway so that situation is what France is working with. Now about the next day or two after this army coup takes over, they hold a big session on the esplanade on the big public forum down on the main part of Algiers. There is General Salan and General Massu and these people are explaining what they are up to, what they are doing. I am doing my job. I am on the spot down there. First I happen to choose to stand in the first line of all the people in front of all these generals. Next to me is the Belgian consul general. The next morning in the French Paris newspapers, at least one of them, a beautiful photograph is taken from the esplanade up there, and the two most prominent looking people in the photograph visible in the public are myself and the Belgian consul general. I wonder who is going to make anything out of that. Will the embassy be upset or what? Nothing came of that, but it was a funny thing to see it that way.

Q: Were we doing anything other than trying to help the French, particularly the French military find a way, or were we basically a passive onlooker?

JOHNSON: Well in the sense that we are not denying the French army the right to require our 2 ½ ton GMC trucks, that kind of thing. They have a good supply of helicopters. I don't see us denying them anything which they feel they needed and that only we could provide them. Of course I am involved with a great many relationships with the French army. I am traveling around the country for most of the time I am serving in Algiers, I am going to be calling on a French colonel who is ruling a certain segment of the population in the service of the country. He has replaced the prefect system of civilian government in different cities outside the capital. I am finding they're intelligent men, sensitive to all the political factors involved, and uncomfortable in their situation. Uncomfortable with the seeming impossibility of this whole episode ending in anything but Algerian independence. Some places I go to like Tizi Ouzou in the Kabylie mountains, I have to go in a French helicopter driven by a rather young chap in civilian sport jacket and sport shoes, that sort of thing. That is how that system works, their version of hiring civilians for flying helicopters. What happens a little bit on that side is very few diplomats from foreign countries have come down to Algiers during the war there to see what they think. One that I do remember very well, the Japanese ambassador did come. He chose to make a visit to Tizi Ouzou, and the French army arranged his visit there. But it was a visit just a few days after De Gaulle himself had been down there and visited that same city in a helicopter. So all the means of showing a cheering crowd of people were there, and the Japanese ambassador was not aware that De Gaulle had been there a couple of days earlier, so he was amazed at the crowd that cheered him and welcomed him. He wondered how Japan was so esteemed there and liked there in that mountain town. That was part of the whole tour of duty there, and I have never figured it out. I was acting principal officer there for such a long time over those four years, because Freddy Lyon was not healthy, and he left often, went out of Algeria and went to France, and even went home while he was still nominally consul general. The replacement, Bill Porter, didn't come until close to obvious independence. So I was a principal officer for a long time. That is more fun than other positions that you could have.

Q: Well at this point the military rule was pretty complete in Algeria wasn't it?

JOHNSON: The French military?

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yes it was complete in a funny way. Maybe if I could explain or describe something that would show it. At a certain point here I had decided that I would like to make a trip across Algeria, and over the border of Morocco, and visit the American embassy in Rabat. My British colleague said, "I would like to take my family an automobile back to England, or in truth, Scotland, and go along with you." So he and I write to the French military and say, "Could we drive out of Algeria into Morocco in some security?" The commanding general writes a nice letter in French saying, "Yes, we can guarantee your security up to a point. We can prevent any attacks on you on the road, but we can't isolate you from occasional mortar rounds." So always they have a grip, but it is never too firm. I also have to have some authorization from the FLN who have to

know that these British and American consular officials are going to be crossing the border. That gets cleared in Rabat somehow through our embassy there, this gets taken care of. That was an interesting facet there. At the same time about one part of this period, very few Americans ever see fit to visit Algeria under these wartime conditions. One gentleman does decide to do it. I think his name is Kellams. His sister is prominent in American industrial circles in Connecticut. She is an anti-tax person. She is refusing to pay taxes to the government. She is an ardent right-wing Republican. Well her brother is doing a piece for the National Geographic. So he dares enter Algeria. He is going to travel through Algeria by car. He is coming in through the same road that the Brit and I have gone along. He picks up a German university-age hitch hiker in Morocco. They are both attacked by the FLN and killed. That was a rather rare kind of episode, that they had a highway killing. Most people didn't even dare, but he thought things had quieted down enough that he thought it possible. That is a job too. The consular officer goes out there and makes a report on this death kind of thing. Another tragedy while I was serving there was an airplane crash in the far south Algerian Sahara Desert, killing the wife and children of one of our ambassadors in a Central African country, Alan Lukens. That was a tragedy that occurred there while I was ….

Q: Was this an accident?

JOHNSON: An Air France plane blew up in the air high above the ground. I don't know. I never could find out what sort of a report emerged as to what occurred.

Q: We lost another one, Bonnie Pugh some years later, was killed by Qadhafi on an Air France plane. Did you have any contact with the various tribes in Morocco, in other words with Algerians?

JOHNSON: That would be a miracle to accomplish that. The French army would somehow not let it happen. They would remove any Algerians who were planning to receive any American or British our outside elements. So what would be an exception to that? Pretty late in the development of affairs there, it looked possible that I might be able to go interview a distinguished Algerian writer named Mouloud Feraoun who was out in the mountains in the Tizi Ouzou area. And just have a discussion with him. I have that, and I would love to show anybody his books, he is one of the more distinguished Algerian writers of the period from the mid-1930s through the 1950s, because shortly after I call on him the OAS comes in and assassinated him. I think they did not do it just because he received me, they were hostile to him already. He was a product of the best that France could do in Algiers. He was a completely literate writer of French. He was a French language scholar and was in the school system there in Algeria. Distinguished on all sides. But only these crazy sinister OAS people would assassinate him. However I should probably at some point in the story note that in the last part of the war there, the situation, the OAS and some of their advisors are assassinating Moslems right and left. They are assassinating them under the eyes of American diplomats in their offices, because our offices have a window out to a road that is going along the hilltop behind Algiers. One morning I am looking out there as some other people happen to be doing, and see a car coming along. I could see there are Moslems in it, in the car. Then a car

comes along behind them. The car behind passes this Moslem car and does a U-Turn somewhere and comes back. I could see that people are firing sub machine guns out the window at the Moslems in the other car, and that these people are high school age kids. We have only one Moslem employee. He is our gardener and property maintenance fellow. Each night, myself and the political officer Bayard King take turns driving him home in our vehicle. He couldn't dare try to get home alone. It was very late in the game. He was wonderful. Of course I had to deal with him quite a bit about the property issues that we have. I can explain those in a minute, but every time I greet him he greets me, rubs his stubbly black and white grizzly beard all over my face. My great buddy. We own, the United States government owns, a great big beautiful palace type building down near the governor general building further down in the city. They are all deserted, but there are very fine palm trees in there and fine lawns, and there are fine tiles, these blue and white tiles that characterize North African cities and particularly Algiers. These tiles by the way, all come from, were all made in the Netherlands hundreds of years ago. But he is taking care of that property. One officer, and I am not going to name him, he is gradually picking up any tile that falls off of the wall of a building and taking it home for a souvenir. I am not very happy about this. I don't think I can stop this.

Later years when we were repatriating our prisoners from Tehran, remember our diplomatic hostages, and they were flown first to Algiers as a way stop on the way home, and I saw on newsreel, I saw a Moslem employee out there running the American flag up the flag pole that we have in this situation. I could see that it was my old friend Moilu the gardener and property maintenance guy that we had there. He had been there before I got there. So I am glad to see that he survived that war.

Q: Was there much contact with our embassy in Paris?

JOHNSON: Very little really. I am kind of struck with how little anyone came down from the embassy to kind of take the temperature on the ground. But I went up there several times and talked with the political counselor. There I would have the adventure of when I got out to the airport to return, I would meet the New York Times correspondent covering Algeria. Henry Tanner I think it was. And we would be chatting. Then we would go through the security clearance there which is the form they use where you go into a rather narrow booth . You can't go forward, and you can't go backward. Now you are being examined. Anyway then after we are let out and we start toward the plane. I start toward tourist class, and he starts toward first class. He said, "What, you have to travel tourist class? We get this class because they think we are going to talk with you there." But anyway the situation of press coverage of the Algerian situation means that there is a strong flow of press correspondents coming through Algiers.

Q: Did Kennedy make his speech to the Senate on Algiers while you were there?

JOHNSON: My memory isn't strong enough to recollect his speech, which speech it was, how strong it was indicating sympathy for an independent Algeria. However it was clear that whatever timing was of this, that, or the other Kennedy pronouncement, Kennedy was considered an outright supporter of Algerian independence. The… well you are

dealing with a large press corps. I am forming in my own mind an evaluation of some of the more serious, capable ones. I particularly like this Henry Tanner, the New York Times correspondent. Let's say the other foreign correspondents are mostly British. They are British correspondents who went through WWI and were colorful. I would save some anecdotes that I might relate. I won't relate them now but at some time later I might relate them. If you tell me it is all right to put them in my report. I can't understand how this happened. I seem to think that a French correspondent was operating there named Ted Morgan. Yet how could this happen when he spent quite a bit of the war in the French army as a lieutenant in Algeria under a different name, an aristocratic name. He has given up that name and taken on the name of Morgan, and is now covering the situation as a journalist. He has written a book about his life, and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to learn about Algiers. He was a very well positioned source because he was in combat with his unit down in the so-called "bled" (countryside) which is everything outside Algiers. He also has enough education and character to see the rest of the political situation too.

I would mention that while I was functioning in Algiers, I wondered what it would be like to function there in an independent Algeria a year or two after this war is over. My curiosity was eventually satisfied to quite a degree by another Foreign Service officer named Howard Simpson, whose pattern of assignments was quite curious. He was basically a United States Information Agency officer. Fate worked it out that he was consul general in Marseilles in a certain period before the Algiers, Algerian war. And fate let him be assigned to Algiers two years after independence. In his post service autobiographical book, he describes what it was like in the now independent Algiers from the embassy point of view. That book is called, "Bush Hat, Black Tie: The Life Story of a Foreign Service Officer" Howard Tillman. Howard, I want to get his name straight. Howard Simpson. He has passed on, but I was very touched by his book and approved and found completely credible his testimony. Well then let's say we will take the period of the arrival of the fellow that was going to take over the consulate general when it becomes an embassy. That is the new consul general, Bill Porter. He takes into consideration security aspects. He is a well known famous radio ham. He operates wherever he goes a ham radio and is in communications with people all over the world. He insisted that all officers have radios in their homes so they could be in contact with him at the chancery. That was good advice in those last months. I think he was thinking a lot about economic aid to Algeria as it became independent. So he was gearing his thinking to that side of things.

Q: Well, were you there at the period where there was concern that the OAS might send French paratroopers into Paris?

JOHNSON: Yes, I was aware of that, and though that it was a ridiculously exaggerated fear.

Q: It sounded silly.

JOHNSON: Yes, I would say they would not go that far. I would not expect anything like that. I would expect that here and there exaggerated concerns could occur. What are some of the elements involved in the French military takeover of Algiers: the Foreign Legion people. They didn't opt to be given political functions. That was I would say an embarrassing situation, to have these Legionnaires as part of the takeover element in the center of Algiers. I just wouldn't think the OAS could muster any significant number of the parachutists. OAS did not have a heroic sacrifice smell to it. When they do things they want to kill and escape. They are not like what we would call Iraqi terrorists who are giving their lives to making this political gesture. Of course there is a movie which kind of dramatizes this situation, one where a single assassin is working to get himself in a position to assassinate De Gaulle. It was a very well-done movie that built up suspense on that subject quite well. Ken Brown, I have to find out from him just when he came to Algiers, and just how near to the end of French rule he came before the takeover by the new team so to speak. I am a little out of touch with that.

It is part of the picture of life in Algiers that there is a small golf course in the hills behind Algiers. I understand, I never have seen it, but people on the staff were using it and playing it. Usually it was a woman consular officer, Roberta McKay, an excellent officer. She was trying to urge me to go out and play golf. I hadn't taken up the game yet. That is going to come during a later assignment. But I get a lot of tennis in there. I play a lot of tennis. The British consulate general has a court. It has a British consul general, Trevor Evans. I mention him because I am quite certain that it was he who said this to me. He said, "I have devoted my entire career to focusing on the Arab world, the Muslim world, and I have come to hate them. I consider that very sad." I know that in some other situation in Lebanon or somewhere else in the Middle East, he escaped with his life out the window of the chancery in some attack or assault on the British embassy.

Another tragic aspect of my service there was a new British counterpart to my function as deputy principal officer, a British diplomat named, I hope later I can submit his name. He had served earlier in Saudi Arabia. Even while he was serving he was writing books and getting them published under pseudonyms. He was a war veteran who lost an eye. He wore a black eye patch and was tall and aristocratic. Not too long after the war he was assassinated in Dublin on the premises, large park-like premises of the British residence if not chancery, by the Irish Republican Army. His vehicle was attacked and blown up, that sort of thing. But it was a pleasure to have served with him. In the world of microphoning and all that sort of thing he was quite careful. I would go to confer with him. He would take a dispatch which he had just written. He would just have me read it. He wouldn't talk, not knowing just how much bugging and that sort of thing was going on. So what are we saying here. It is going to be a function of my story now of serving in Algiers when hundreds of thousands of French settlers and their descendants are now trying to get out of Algiers as the things are winding down to an end. There is no packing material left. Everybody has grabbed up whatever they could find and got it out of the country.

Q: Were you involved in observing the, I can't think of the name, the Algerian troops who were loyal to France? Was that an issue when you were there?

JOHNSON: No, however you could certainly know that here you have this force. I forget myself the name of that category of troop. But to a large degree I think that the French army managed to repatriate those soldiers out of Algeria into France, but probably not much more. They just let them loose in France. There wasn't a GI bill of rights or anything like that. So they suffered from lack of a career, lack of work, lack of service. They couldn't be in the French army anymore. The only thing about them was they weren't too numerous a category. Let's say the problem of my ever having contact with a significant Algerian other than various ways ordinary men in the street can convey things to me. I got somehow aware of an FLN dignitary named Tewfik al-Madani. Who was sort of in charge of religious matters within the FLN. He is resident in, say, Libya. He has two daughters who are staying all the time in Algiers in French civil life. They have husbands. One of them has a rural estate, a well off agriculturist about 25 years old. And his brother is a 35 year old doctor. I have dinner with them. I think the only way I did get to them was that they were contacts of a political officer on my staff named Bayard King, who broke through inhibitions of one kind or another that would have prevented contact between somebody related to the FLN leadership and people residing in Algiers. Now these two daughters were movie star attractive good looking women, sophisticated women. But I wouldn't say that any conversation occurred that would be political. It is really a miracle to have any contact with Algerians in their home.

Q: Was there any effort on the part of the "pieds noirs" ("black feet", i.e., persons of European descent born in Algeria) go to the United States?

JOHNSON: Probably, just because that happened so much. But I never was aware of a particular situation like that. The "pieds noirs" that I knew the best, one who owned the villa that I rented, he would strictly go to France and stay in France. I would say that most of them would want to go to France. I am sure there are a number of them who somehow emigrated to the United States. There are issues such as raising wine in a Moslem country like Algeria. I don't know what has happened to that industry, how much has collapsed, and how much has survived one way or another.

Now I remember, I have a note here. The British officer that I enjoyed, the two that I knew the best, Sir Christopher Ewart-Biggs was his name. He later, after he left Algeria and before he was assassinated in Dublin, he was an important deputy chief of mission or something like that in Paris. Then he was made ambassador in Dublin.

Here is a small anecdote about the situation in Algiers. Our household cook and housekeeper, Zoubida, is an Algerian Moslem. Never wears anything except the complete baggy pants costume and never is outside with anything except the local version of a veil. A wonderful friend and person to work with. She would have a daughter that could go around Algiers completely in Muslim clothing but could go to Paris and wear French modern clothing. The mother told me about the time she tried to go to Paris for a visit. She was so uncomfortable not having her veil. Once I heard some form of Arabic music over the radio. She had turned it on. I asked her about it, what is that music all about? She said, "That song is a lamentation of our expulsion from Spain in 1492." She said that. She

indicated that she thought her ancestry went back to the Turkish Beys, the Ottoman Beys that installed a certain amount of political control in Algiers. Her ancestors date back to that.

There is an English writer Alistair Horne that I would like to submit for the record later on when I can get it in. He has written a major work on the history of the war in Algeria. I think anybody who is interested in that war will appreciate that book. There is another angle to all of this, that is, and this book has been written. It is about Abdel Kader. He has been publicized up at the Meridian Hill, the foreign affairs place. They have launched the book. It is the life of Abdel Kader. The gentleman who wrote the book is living down in Northern Virginia. Abdel Kader was the leader of Algerian resistance to the French army going from the landings after 1820 until maybe something like 1840 or 1850. I haven't read the book yet, but Abdel Kader was the leader of the resistance. Finally he was defeated and captured by the French army of the day in that century. The French officer, at least a colonel, who was head of the G-2 version of intelligence in the French army at the time just befriended this Abdel Kader and questioned him for years about everything, every aspect of life in Algeria. Historically, his mobile headquarters -- in the language of the day, his "Smala" -- was a great series of wonderful big tents. After his capture and exile to France, his "Smala" was re-created up in France in the city of Amboise in the Loire valley, on the grounds of an old French royal palace. But the French intelligence officer, that is what he focused on. Well I can't say that I can recall now; I haven't read this book yet, but I hope to read it and see what he had to say. Because the things I have read, the French translations of what Abdel Kader said to the French G-2 colonel concern hunting. The presence of lions in the North African mountains, how the Algerians at the time coped with lions. These fellows did not have weapons, guns. That their belief is that if you see a lion ahead of you on the trail, and when you walk, you walk with a big stave, a big tall cudgel. You wave that cudgel at the lion and say, "Scram. Beat it, Cat." And the lion will bug off. I hope that works because they didn't have much alternative to it. Later on a French writer, I think his name is Alphonse Daudet wrote a book about a French villager who imagines the lions are still there, and come s down to Algeria not too long after the French conquest and wants to go lion hunting. It develops that there aren't any left -- even back then, there weren't any left. But it is a very entertaining story. I think it is meant to be amusing about provincial life in France, thinking that they could go lion hunting in Algeria, and they would like to practice their marksmanship. They didn't have any kind of targets, so they would get caps and they would throw the cap into the air and then they would fire at it. Or somebody would throw the cap into the air and they would fire at it, shooting up all the caps in town that way. They never got a chance to shoot anything in Algiers. Alphonse Daudet is the name.

A little sidelight, when I mentioned this vehicle being shot up within our sight out on the highway, the roadway, where an Algerian Muslim family was shot up. I could see a man get out of the victim car and stand shakily on two legs. I tried to talk with him, to tell him we were going to take him to the main hospital downtown. He said, "Some of you had better stay with me. The doctors down there will kill me if I don't die first." That was a gruesome episode.

Q: Were the Tuareg an element with which you were concerned at the time?

JOHNSON: No. They are so much in the southern Sahara. In the northern Sahara it is kind of a strange place because there is quite a bit of traffic across it. The very interesting parts of like southern Algeria would be the far eastern bottom of Algeria bordering into Libya. There you would get the most cave paintings and other 5,000 year old treasures from the past. To the extent that I traveled in the northern Sahara, what dangers exist there? There was not a presence of the FLN or rebellious troops or soldiers in the Northern Sahara. The danger would be that a fantastic sandstorm could whip itself up so quickly that you might crash into a big sand bank which has suddenly loomed up, with the sandstorm obscuring your vision and creating a big sand bank right in front of your car. You would have a bad automobile crash. Then in the very southern part of Algeria, traveling across that, you would see camel caravans. The camel caravans are a family on the move. The mother rode the camel on a saddle sort of thing and the cooking utensils and everything else are on another couple of camels. You are seeing the true exotic sight of North Africa in that part of Algeria, the part where camel caravans are crossing the desert now. Somehow I happened to find out what was the dollar value of a camel was then. By worth I am also talking about the value of the meat, because first they do all their transport functions, but when they are no longer able to do that they become camel meat. So they are worth something. Today I haven't got my data on that. All I can say is plenty. Let's say it is $1400 dollars. And as you travel around the country you will see big herds of camels, hundreds of them all in the care of a boy about 12 years old. You think in that society that is a lot of responsibility.

Q: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: In some parts of that same region of Algeria you will see wonderful date palms which produce extraordinarily delicious dates. I think those are called Deglet Noor dates. Now the shops in the Washington area have them, like Balducci's has them. They are from Israel. Israel is raising these same dates. I will look for and produce some more thoughts about Algiers service. I will talk with Ken Brown and see if he can remind me where the development of things in Algeria has come along. He tells me it was his first post.

Q: Ken Brown is the president of our Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

JOHNSON: Is the microphone going at the moment?

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Perhaps I can say something without it being recorded and then you tell me whether…

Q: OK, because this is an important factor. You were saying about the relationship between you and our intelligence service in Algiers.

JOHNSON: Yes I think it was a difficult and delicate relationship. When I first arrived as a deputy principal officer, I could hardly be aware that we had a representative of the intelligence agency there. Seldom seen on the premises of the consulate general, seeming to wish to exist as a home-bound scholar. So I have no idea what benefit the U.S. government is acquiring from his presence here in Algeria. His successor was more disquieting in that he isn't present in the premises of the consulate general and does not seem to be concerned about appearing to be a Foreign Service officer, a State Department officer who has to observe some kind of working hours. So he is more or less invisible as much as possible. I am not learning anything as to what his functioning is doing to help the United States government. But the concern I would have is that he might be giving the wrong impression to elements of the French military, that if they tried to block the chain which now seems to be leading to Algerian independence, the United States government would give them support. I guess that I can expect that intelligence agency people would admit that they would try that ploy to get contacts with these people. They would think that, "well I am just trying to find out what they are really up to and maybe I have to give them a little bait like that." Of course in all of my various posts I am just faced with an evolved situation whereby a certain number of officers on the staff are reporting for duty at 8:00 in the morning, and a certain other number are reporting at 8:30 or 9:00. All the local employees are going to notice that. And when parts of the staff disappear behind sort of a barred section it is pretty darn clear who is doing what. That is the problem in intelligence. I might have found myself in intelligence work to be faced with the problem they had.

Q: When I was in Saigon the Agency had, I can't think of the name but anyway, they had hired guards outside of their residence who were not Vietnamese. They were another oriental group.

JOHNSON: Gurkhas probably.

Q: No they weren't Gurkhas. It was another group, but you could immediately know who was who if you saw these guys outside of a house.

JOHNSON: Those were the problems of intelligence operations.

Q: Well were you able to have any social life there?

JOHNSON: I certainly recall having enough social life that I wasn't the slightest bit unhappy about not having a social life. There are enough people in the consulates general in town, Italians, French, English, to have a social life. There is a beach life. There is something called a Club des Pins (Pine Tree Club), it is a beach out west of the city where you can go swimming. You can catch various sea life which the French like particularly. I forget what the word is in French now.

The newspaper community makes good companionship for a social life. Quite a few interesting people pass through Algiers, not getting out of town, people who are interested in Central African affairs who are on their way to Liberia. A woman professor

at Smith College, a functionary in that category, and they would come through Algiers on the way to central Africa. For sport we have our tennis and our golf for those who are aware of what a good sport that is. I wasn't at the time. For a vacation trip there I would go to France. That was an attractive rest.

Q: Were you aware of the time, was there a considerable exodus of "pieds noirs" while you were there. Were they getting out, I mean those who could see how things were coming about?

JOHNSON: Not that I, for example, was aware of their being a particularly strong "pieds noirs" hemorrhaging out of the country. Whatever hemorrhaging there was occurred after WWII. I think I should mention here that my first visit to Algiers came as a soldier in 1943 when I was on my way to the front in Italy. The invasion of Sicily had not yet occurred, but in my signal intelligence function I was on my way there. We were stationed for awhile in the hinterland behind Algiers. And the signal intelligence officers who were there were from Arlington Hall, these very premises where we are speaking. It was called the 49th signal intelligence service. Well, if I didn't have anything to do I would hike around the mountains and hills in this area. They are sort of rugged hills rather than mountains. I would run into Muslim farmers who could speak French and chatting with them on one thing or another and seeing where dwellings were and seeing the way cactus plants were planted around their little cottages and that sort of thing. One of them struck me when he said to me, "Sir, you are going to see something after the war here. We are not going to accept this. We will never accept French rule here in Algeria, and one way or another we are going to get independence." This was in '43, back in there.

Q: Well, you left Algeria when?

JOHNSON: After independence had occurred, gloriously in a way where they can now say that Algeria is independent and you can celebrate. And the celebration kicks off and I would say it lasts violently for four days, and it involves every form of frenetic dancing all through the streets of the capital of Algiers and banging on anything that could be banged on melodiously or non melodiously including the parts of automobiles and all that kind of thing. People of all shades and colors are doing this celebrating and dancing and waving flags. Joy is unrefined. It is about this time, a few days after all this, that it is my turn to move on to Asmara. I think, why was it Asmara? Well now, I think I am going into African affairs because African affairs is taking over for the European affairs. I am a signal intelligence veteran related to Arlington Hall here. Asmara is a new station it is a signal intelligence function. I speak Italian, and Asmara is an Italian speaking city to the extent it is not Eritrean speaking. So that determined that particular assignment. I could say right now that Asmara was a non-differential post, whereas the capital Addis Ababa was a 15% differential post in the calculations of the day.

Q: Differential means it was harder to live in one place than another so you got extra pay. Why don't we pick it up then. This is a good place to stop, Dick, but when did you go to Asmara.

JOHNSON: Well right directly from Algiers, so in the summer of '62, just at the point where Algeria had become independent. I become the principal officer in Asmara. I have the thing that people can be very lucky to have, an excellent predecessor. A man named Matt Looram. I don't know if you know him.

Q: Oh yeah.

JOHNSON: He was really on top of whatever he needed to be on top of there. The nature of the consular residence was delicious, delightful. That relates to another Foreign Service predecessor who was there right after WWII when things were just getting revived in northeast Africa. Anyway a delightful residence. Anyway Matt Looram, his wife was a Rothschild. They knew how to train the cook and the butler. They were very well trained household staff. His reputation in the city was fine.

Q: Ok we will pick this up in 1962 when you go to Asmara.

JOHNSON: Righto.

Q: Today is 10 November 2009 with Dick Johnson. Dick, you went to Asmara when?

JOHNSON: To the best of my memory, it may not be exactly on the month but the summer of 1962, coming out of Algeria after four years in Algiers during the war there.

Q: What was the situation would you say, I mean looking at it sort of politically and economically in Asmara in '62?

JOHNSON: Perhaps to get my thoughts going in the right direction I will say something about why the State Department selected me to go there as principal officer. Because of the existence there of a U.S. governmental communications base there called Kagnew Station. At least 5,000 American soldiers there engaged in this communications work. In WWII I had served in signal intelligence, the same sort of thing that is going on down there in Asmara. I spoke Italian. Italian is really the second most useful language after English in Eritrea. So that I think that influenced greatly my being assigned there. I found it kind of a delightful place, especially after the war in Algeria. There was no real war or conflict visible or going on at the moment. It hadn't come over the horizon yet. It was coming though, later. The post is up on a plateau about 5,000 feet high with a sudden descent to the Red Sea. The climate is wonderful. No great heat, no great cold or anything like that. So our State Department considers it a non differential post. You get no extra pay added to your salary as you would in Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia. Now Asmara at the time was a, I don't know quite how to describe it, but it was under Ethiopian superior authority. It was in a coalition or I don't know the right word for it. It had a form or regional autonomy, Eritrea did as a country. In earlier years there had been much struggle under UN auspices to determine whether Eritrea should emerge after WWII as an independent country, or should it be a wholly integrated part of Ethiopia, or sort of a coalition sort of thing with Ethiopia. But basically civil peace was reigning at the

moment. My first attention will be to the military base, Kagnew Station and the colonel commanding it, and the situation of the relationship between the American military base and the local community and the local government. There would be immediately a problem there in that there is an officers' club on the base, and there is a question of whether dusky skinned people like Eritreans are to be allowed in it to be guests.

Q: Well, we are talking about 1962 and our armed forces were integrated in 1948.

JOHNSON: It is the matter of the Eritrean color that is the problem.

Q: You mean the Eritreans had their rules.

JOHNSON: No, our military had the rule that Eritreans weren't to be admitted to the officers' club. They could work on the base, they can be all over the place. They just can't come into the social life of the officers. My predecessor had worked on that. I would say the military were about ready to cede on that, and that local dignitaries of Eritrean nationality or Ethiopian nationality were to be guests for dinner for dancing, whatever goes on in the officers' club. That was a little socio-political problem that was on the way to resolution as I was arriving. I have to think right away of my predecessor, my predecessor named Matthew Looram, and how good he was at all aspects of being a principal officer there. He had been a paratrooper in WWII.

Q: He came from a family of Episcopalian Bishops.

JOHNSON: You knew him then.

Q: I didn't know him but I knew the Loorams, I mean of the family. They were sort of New Jersey Episcopalian Bishops.

JOHNSON: Ok, that is a good background for the Foreign Service I think. He could do various things that other people couldn't do. There was a swimming pool on the premises of the consulate. Every night the water went down to about a temperature in the high 40's or low 50's. He would swim there in the morning. Nobody else would. One time a bandit sort of a robber broke in to the consular garden premises. The normal Eritrean guard that was there took refuge and hid somewhere. Matt Looram went out and tackled this intruder and subdued him and arrested him. That is the kind of a guy he was. Then his wife was a Rothschild, and boy did she know how to shape up the cook and the house staff. It was a very smooth running operation when I took it over. I was blessed right at the start by having a secretary named Bess Mirabella who was trained in the Catherine Gibbs school of secretarial skills, white gloves. She was wonderful, perfect. Her husband was a senior NCO on the base there, so that is why she happened to be in the city and got that job. I had a political officer on my staff named Hugh Campbell. I bless him he was so good. When it came time to have somebody with local contacts which is going to come up in a couple of months, he had them, and it made a great difference. Altogether a good staff. Then another tribute should be paid to the Foreign Service officer who selected the building which became the principal officer's residence. It is sort of a

compound with another house next to it for the deputy to the principal officer. It has a small stable and a decent sized riding ring on the same property. And it has a swimming pool, and it has a tennis court.

Q: Good heavens.

JOHNSON: Tennis at that altitude if you are not used to it, is an adventure. Anyway it was a very happy post. Also I should mention the prior Foreign Service officer, the fellow who selected this building as the principal residence and the whole compound was Edward Mulcahy. He should be blessed, a wonderful choice.

Q: Well let's talk a bit about was the government, you obviously dealt with the government in Eritrea. They were under the government of Haile Selassie. Were they Amharic or were they Eritrean, the top government officials.

JOHNSON: Let's say the top government official would be Amharic. He would be a governor. Several of them. Most of the time I had a governor named General Abie Abebe. He is related by marriage to Emperor Haile Selassie. He understands perfectly what democracy is all about and is aware of deficiencies in the Ethiopian style of government. He is a thoroughly intelligent and worthy individual who is later executed by the people that take over.

Q:Mengistu and that gang.

JOHNSON: Mengistu and that gang. Then things like the chief of police and that sort of thing are Eritreans. Let me look at my notes a moment and see if there is something that should be mentioned. A strange responsibility there at the post, something called Ghinda camp. It is series of barracks halfway down the mountainside to Massawa, the seaport. Its origins I don't know, WWII? They sort of look like military barracks. There is an American general services officer living down there alone, no family or nothing, managing it, maintaining it, keeping it up. It is being kept up as a point of refuge in case American citizens, consulate staffs, embassy staffs that sort of thing, need to be evacuated from Yemen, Aden, from Saudi Arabia, if things ever get so bad there needs to be an evacuation. This camp is awaiting them. One could consider whether we still needed it at that time. I didn't take steps to close it, but my successor closed it. I assume that is what Washington wanted and Embassy Addis wanted. Small staff. We had the USIS function there, and a Department of Agriculture representative. When I am arriving one USIS officer is just leaving, Don Kent who just died recently here in Washington. His successor Dino Catarini is still active on the Washington scene now. We had an emerging presence at post of the first Peace Corps representatives. Sargent Shriver being present to inaugurate things. All of this was sweetness and progress. And of course I am subordinate to the embassy in Addis Ababa. The Ambassador is Edward Corey and the DCM is Sheldon Vance. Edward Corey is a political appointee from the press world, one of the magazines. I forget which one it is, maybe Look or Life magazine. All right, so it means that I have to fly up every once in awhile to Addis to staff meetings and that sort of thing. I am flying up there in a small military aircraft. And as it goes through the

mountains of Ethiopia which are 12,000 feet, I am going through the gorges with the peaks on either side.

An important facility in the city of Asmara is the American military hospital. Senior government officials, even Emperor Haile Selassie come there for medical services. This is an incentive to Ethiopia to keep that Kagnew Station there. Kagnew Station is named after an Ethiopian military division that took part in the Korean War on our side. That is how the word Kagnew got to this station.

Exploring around the country, now I am getting acquainted with Eritrea. I am driving down a winding road and there is 5,000 feet descent in under two hours to Massawa, the port. In the summer the temperature in that port reaches 120. Not only during the daytime but even at midnight. For Americans and foreigners there is a hotel with air conditioning, and you survive, but for the Massawan population it's hard. If they don't die, then they are sturdy and they stay there. But a lot of them just retreat up the mountain side for a couple of weeks during the hottest part. They just go up and camp out for a couple of weeks. We have naval visits there. We have a destroyer that is based in the Middle East. I forget the places, but anyway those officers on the destroyer told me that of all the hot ports they go to, Massawa was the hottest. But let's say for myself recreation was great. Swimming there is great. The water is teeming with all kinds of colorful fish, including barracuda. I learned this when I went down to learn scuba diving. I could see barracuda swimming around. But they didn't act in any way hungry. I even feel there were sharks around too and they weren't hungry. There are so many fish to eat and all.

Other exploration around the country. If I go out westward I will descend to ground level so to speak, where there is a town called Karen. The location of a serious battle in WWII between British forces coming out of the Sudan and the Italian army forces supplemented by Eritrean auxiliaries. At the time the Italians did not realize how hard the war was going to be for them. They were very feisty and fighty. Some very serious battles took place there. There is a British military cemetery there of some size. There you will meet a different kind of Eritrean from the highland Eritrean. There you meet the Muslim Eritrean. You meet camel riders who have come in from the Sudan. They just come in each one on a camel. They are visiting Karen to get grain supplies or whatever they are coming in for. But these fellows have the Rastafarian wild hairdo and they all have portable radios hooked to part of the camel saddle. They are listening to Radio Cairo. They are part of that world, but they are very up to date. While I was there we had the death of President Kennedy. There I witnessed the phenomenon of reverence for President Kennedy from all sides of the population in my consular district. Every darned church had services to honor President Kennedy. You wouldn't know how many religions there were. It is also touching that some of the people from way out in the desert area trekked all the way to Asmara to come and sign the condolence book. One of them who came in when I happened to be in had his eight year old son with him that he brought up there to show him all of this.

In the country there are monasteries to visit, Coptic Christian monasteries. One of them is famous. I think it is called Debre Damo. You go there, you arrive at a great mesa

hundreds of feet up with no way to get up there. The only way to get up is to go through an aperture that is way up at the top. There is a rope that is let down on a winch. It will winch around underneath your arms. They will winch you up, and you are putting your feet against this wall when you get up there. I was accompanied by at least the Agricultural attaché. I must note that he passed on shortly after that. I don't know if that exertion had anything to do with it. But talking with the clerical Coptic Christian monks up there, I am pretty sure it was this monastery and not another monastery, they had some delicious small bananas that they raised. I asked them how they ever got into the banana raising business. They said, "Oh the early Portuguese showed us how to do this about several centuries ago. Also on this monastery, nothing female can ever arrive up there. Not a chicken, nothing. Nothing female. That would lead me to comment a little bit on Eritreans versus Ethiopians. Here they are now in sort of a marriage. Somebody is pointing out once, and I respect his opinion, that these two folks are like the English and the Scots. The Ethiopians are the English, the Eritreans are the Scots. England and Scotland have their problems about what their relationship should be, whether there should be an independent Scotland and how England got control of Scotland and maintained control, by military force. The Scots accepted, but even now Scots independence still bubbles. Well that sort of relationship was going on at the time. Eritreans were rising in the Ethiopian hierarchy, especially the military. Some of the highest ranking officers up in Addis Ababa were Eritreans.

Let me see what I think I should mention. A great adventure for me was to fly to a part of Eritrea called the Danakil Depression. It is down on the Red Sea. It is below sea level. It is an enormous salt lake. It is again one of these 100 degree temperatures. Several things are going on down there. All the people down there are Muslims. But what is going on, on that great salt lake, is the mining of salt. They are carving out great square blocks and loading them on to caravans of camels. These camel caravans are going to work their way up to the precipice at 5,000 or 6,000 or 7,000 feet and distribute the salt around the rest of Ethiopia. Also an American exploration company and phosphates company, Ralph Parsons, was seeking phosphates there and they had a base in the middle of this Danakil Depression. I went there to visit that base on a small Ethiopian Air Lines charter plane, like a DC-3. It is just what was unusual in the Foreign Service, to see that the pilot of the plane was such a short fellow, his feet didn't even reach some of the pedals he was supposed to reach on the floor. He had to slide off his seat like this to reach these. That is one thing. Then he had emergency instructions on a 3x5 card sort of tacked over here on what to do in case of an emergency.

Q: It gave you a sense of confidence.

JOHNSON: Well a similar situation occurred up at Addis where a friend of mine was the economic counselor. His name was William Dale Fisher. He went up in a chartered Ethiopian Air Line plane with some oil executives from the United States and it crashed. It crashed into a river bed, probably a very early tributary of the Nile. The plane was smashed and there was only one casualty, the Foreign Service officer was killed and his body was not recovered. The river was full of crocodiles there. His wife then was given

work in the Foreign Service Lounge that we had back then. Sally Fisher. But other than that I would say that Ethiopian Air Lines was pretty darn good.

Q: Well, in the first place in the Eritrean area, were there any Falasha, the Ethiopian Jews, or were they in a different part of Ethiopia?

JOHNSON: They were not there. They were in a different part of Ethiopia. That whole story of the Jewish emigration via the Sudan to Israel was a different story to deal with. But what I did have was an Israeli initiative in Eritrea: there was one meat packing plant in the country, and that was Israeli operated and run. There were also Israeli agricultural experiments on the land there. Italians were active in agriculture and manned a very model farm not too far from Asmara. Let's see, what were some aspects of it? It has once been a hemp place where hemp was raised. But now fruit were being raised there and exported to Europe. Milk, cows were existing up there, cows that had been purchased in places like Kenya, forming a milk industry where the milk is exported to Saudi Arabia not frozen. It is the stuff that you can see in the Giant or anywhere now in the cardboard cartons, a way of processing milk that it doesn't have to be refrigerated. It was a lively export.

Q: Were we concerned with Nasser, who was obviously strong in Egypt at the time; were we concerned about Nasserism and Islam in parts of Eritrea at that time?

JOHNSON: To me always in the front of my mind and not even in the back of my mind is the problem of the relationship that is going to exist, that has existed and will exist between the Muslims and the Coptic Christians. The Coptic Christians inhabit the highland part of the country. The Muslims inhabit the lowland around the country. While I was there, there was not significant hostility between those two communities. There was always something that I figured might flare up eventually. The Muslim part of the population was not well represented up in the capital of Asmara or in the government. But they were not up in arms about it. They were just scratching out their lives on the periphery of the country. Eventually I am going to get to the time where Ethiopia ended the co-habitation with Eritrea. I think that is the most important thing that happened while I was there.

Q: OK, before we get to that, was there at all the equivalent to a liberation guerilla movement. I mean there were the Shiftas (armed bands), but these were considered bandits at the time. Were they connected to the liberation fighters or to Nasser's group?

JOHNSON: No, I would rate them as 90% survival banditry, the Shifta, compared with any ambition for a Muslim state or anything like that. Later on the situation may evolve and I was always concerned that at some point there might be a break between those two communities. But I would say the Moslem part of the community would have a tough time getting anywhere without outside support. They didn't have access to industry, machinery, to significant weapons, that sort of thing.

Q: Then how did this coexistence between Eritrea and Ethiopia change while you were there?

JOHNSON: How? Because that was the most dynamic event of my tour of duty there. It was an overnight termination of the co-existence. It was done on two levels, one political and one military. On the political side, there was an Eritrean body, let's call it a congress. They had deputies and everything. They are being called into session, and the rumor is they are being called into session in order that they vote on a proposal that Eritrea end its autonomy and become an integral part of Ethiopia. Practically all of them were opposed to that. They did not want to appear at the designated day for the session. The Ethiopian forces were trying to track these deputies down and bring them into that meeting. They brought them in and they had a vote. The presiding officer, let's say, was partial to Ethiopia. He called for a voice vote. When he called for a voice vote, the voice vote against ending the situation was overwhelming. But he said, they were the nays. He said, "The ayes have it, the federation is ended." There is a farce going on there. This wonderful deputy that I had, Hugh Campbell had all the contacts of deputies in that session and everything to give us on all this, the situation that is going on there. On the other hand we have an overnight military seizure. What do the military have to do here? They have to cope with people who might oppose them militarily. There is no Eritrean army. There is a good and well trained Eritrean police force with leaders who are at the level of a general. The Ethiopians pouncing in at night invade the offices of these officers and kill them. At one point they come out and say, "Oh I am sorry, he committed suicide." Things like that. It was a bloody takeover. How does Washington react to this? How does Addis Ababa? I would say that if I am in the eye of the storm there, neither of those enterprises, the Addis embassy or the State Department, were too exercised about it. They did not rap the Ethiopians on the knuckles about it. They just accepted it blandly. I had a mischievous feeling that somehow the new integral Ethiopia is bigger than it ever was, and it might increase the amount of money we spend in Addis Ababa to run the embassy. It might increase the level at which Addis Ababa is treated as a post, a class 2 post, into a class 1 post whatever, now it is one big country. It is a bigger post. We were, I would say, relatively passive on that situation.

Q: Did we have any interpretation on why Haile Selassie made that move?

JOHNSON: What move do you mean?

Q: Well, the move to integrate Eritrea into the greater Ethiopia. Why did he do it?

JOHNSON: He didn't do it at all. I see what you mean. I would say his government did it. But I am not sure whether he approved of it.

Q: Well he was pretty much in charge wasn't he?

JOHNSON: He was quite elderly, and to me he would be the decider. But somebody else up there decided that. Now I should mention that he came down on one visit to Asmara while I was there. Now in the protocol, the way things work, I was introduced to him, and

he said to me, "Soon I have to go to Algeria to an international meeting there. What sort of people are these Algerians?" For him to ask that of me shows that he has intelligence on my background. What can I say to him in one sentence here? I remember saying, "Your majesty, these Algerians just haven't coalesced on their sense of a nation. They don't quite know what kind of a nation they are."

Q: Did you have any problems with our soldiers in Asmara. They are young men mostly. Ethiopians, beautiful women and all that. I was just wondering of there were any problems?

JOHNSON: A minimum of the problems typical near any U.S. base. I mean compared with U.S. bases all over the world, it would be a minimum because there are so many intelligent personnel in this particular kind of base, so you don't have that proportion of rowdies. But what about inter-racial relations in general? The Italians and the Eritreans were very much inter-related. The women are beautiful, and the culture has taught them all to speak Italian so there are thousands of children of Italians and Eritreans. Naturally the slang term for these children is "Café Latte." In general there is a minimum of problems with soldier activity in the town. There is a slight problem concerning soldiers who go out bird shooting in the wilderness outside the city. Now there are people out there who would like to take away those weapons from them, and they waylay the soldiers and take away those weapons. I can't say whether they are "Shifta" kinds of aggressors and robbers, or just plain people needing weapons.

Q: Were there many marriages between our soldiers and Eritrean women?

JOHNSON: As far as I could say there were not marriages. There may have been but I was not aware of them or invited to them or anything.

Q: Did relations with Somalia come up while you were there? You are somewhat removed from Somalia but I was wondering whether the Somalian equation played a role while you were there?

JOHNSON: I would say no. What we have are interesting relations particularly between Eritrea and Italy, and Ethiopia and Italy, and Ethiopia and Sudan. I am forgetting the name of the country to the west of Eritrea. Sudan, that is the name of everything that is important there. Sudan has a consul general in Eritrea, and Italy has a consul general. The United States just has a consul. Now as soon as I left though, the powers that be decided to raise it to a consul general and they did. Let's see what kind of friction is going on there. Not serious but it is interesting how much the Eritreans and to some extent the Ethiopians would love more Italian influence in their country and the Italians were very careful about investing in that area, and were avoiding involvement in the development of Ethiopia or Eritrea.

Q: Ethiopia in general goes through this usual cycle of great famine every once in awhile. Did you have one of those while you were there?

JOHNSON: No. For some reason or other we did not have a period of great famine while I was there. Certainly afterwards we had. Afterwards one of my successors, I believe, not one of my predecessors, was kidnapped by the -- I don't know if they turned out to be the "Shifta" kind of kidnappers or freedom fighter kidnappers, but they kidnapped the American officer at my level. He was eventually released in some way or another. Jackson was his name.

Q: By the way was there a monument or anything, where was Adawa?

JOHNSON: Adawa? No monument. I guess this is where the Italians suffered a defeat, I think it is about 1898.

Q: Yes. A rather spectacular defeat.

JOHNSON: Yes. I was impressed with what I have seen in the evidence of how much support there was for Italy by Eritreans during the beginnings of WWII. But that evaporated after the British moved in. The British, I think, were admirable in the way they handled Eritrea. They sent a good number of Eritreans to England for training in finance and health and one thing or another, and when they came back to Eritrea these people were good administrators for the place.

Q: How about Djibouti? Did that play, it was a French colony at the time wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes. It really doesn't relate to Eritrea significantly as it does to Ethiopia. But that little tail of Eritrea that goes down toward Djibouti is as empty as Death Valley. However I had an episode in the course of my functions. I had as guest for lunch a French Naval Officer from Djibouti and an American consul from Aden over in Yemen. We had a very pleasant lunch, I thought, and everything went fine. Later on the French officer said to me, "My goodness I didn't realize that was an American. I thought that was the British consul form Aden. Because of the way he spoke." This American had been there a couple of years and had picked up a British accent. He said, "Our conversation was just not clicking the way it should." He misunderstood to whom he was talking.

Q: Well you left there when?

JOHNSON: Early '64. I am going to go off to the NATO Defense College in Paris. Not in Rome where it is now.

Q: So was it a six month course?

JOHNSON: It was a six month course.

Q: How did you find it? What were you doing there?

JOHNSON: As a -- what do they call it when you attend a session of the NATO Defense College? Well, when you leave you are called an "ancien" (old-timer). Anybody who

speaks any language who is a graduate of that six month tour is called an "ancien." We had as the commanding officer of the NATO Defense College while I was there a German general, Wolf Graf Von Baudissin, who was exceedingly worthy of that honor to run that defense college. He was a strong leader in re-creating the German army as citizen soldiers and proper soldiers. As for general aspects of all the services there I can't say any dynamic episode or anything occurred. At one point we traveled around by air to all the capitals of all the member countries. That was a broadening experience. It is new or startling or something to go up to northern Norway. I think the base up there might be called Bodø. I had never heard of it before. It is a tremendous installation, built into the side of a mountain as a reconnaissance station against Soviet submarines going into the Atlantic. It was just surprising what a big important place that was, with so little talking about it.

Q: Well did you feel a bit like the country boy? You had been sort of on the periphery in Algeria and Ethiopia and all. I assume that most of the people there had worked in France and Britain and Germany or something.

JOHNSON: Well let's see. I had pretty advanced study in French and I think my French was pretty competent to cope with everything I needed to cope with living in Paris there. I spoke German and I spoke Italian. The other Americans there, from the air force or navy or army, didn't speak French. They didn't speak German or Italian. I could fit in Paris and all that experience under French aegis quite easily and happily.

Q: How stood things in France at that time vis-a-vis Algeria? Was Algeria a settled matter?

JOHNSON: The problems were not highly visible ones. They had the problems of coping with the integration of people out of Algeria, the two categories of people. The French, Spanish, Italian origin, descendants of the early settlers, trying to integrate them into France. And then the people you had mentioned before, the "Harki", the Algerians who had served the French military. Many thousands of all these people were ferried across the Mediterranean into France. But nothing dramatic was going on at the time in that sense. Our class there was the last class in France. Then De Gaulle evicted the NATO Defense College from France and Rome picked it up.

Q: Was there a feeling among your colleagues, a feeling of resentment against De Gaulle then?

JOHNSON: At the NATO Defense College?

Q: Yeah.

JOHNSON: Among the various nationalities, I couldn't sense that. That they resented De Gaulle, that de facto he has the power to do what he wants. They are not there to agitate against some system in France. The Defense College is to focus on the Soviet Union and

that sort of thing. And it has its own problems. We had the Greeks and the Turks in the college. They were not on good terms.

Q: I served four years in Greece in the early 70's. They seemed to be in NATO mainly to keep an eye on each other I think. How was the Soviet threat viewed at that time?

JOHNSON: I can't recall that it was any sort of a boiling point or crisis at the time. '56 had been a crisis period.

Q: The Suez. And Hungary.

JOHNSON: The Hungarians and the Polish turbulence. Around '64 France, the situation you just saw slowly cooking in Eastern Europe but not strongly.

Q: Well then, you left there in '65?

JOHNSON: I haven't brought all my records to show how I merged into my next assignment, which was in Brussels, into the mission to the European community. I was a political office on that staff in our mission but with a particular focus on atomic energy aspects. Atomic energy aspects all had to do with so-called safeguards, which meant safeguards against diverting atomic material to military purposes, and a system to prevent the leakage of nuclear material for weapons purposes, called the Euratom (European Atomic Energy Community) security system. It was a European Community atomic energy agency. And what should be the future. Should atomic energy plants in Europe continue under this Euratom watchfulness about any diversion such as Mr. A. Q. Khan perpetrated in Pakistan. Or should all of the European atomic energy plants, and there are lots of them developing, go under the UN atomic energy agency. A sort of arm wrestling was going on while I was there. The forces of UN responsibility won out and Euratom was merged into the UN responsibilities for the non-diversion of nuclear materials. While I was there the battle was cooking. It would mean that I would go to occasional meetings of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Q: What was the role of France? De Gaulle was not a real internationalist. He was French. France has today and I assume had then the most extensive nuclear power apparatus in the world.

JOHNSON: Yes they do. They have really gone in for atomic energy particularly for electricity.

Q: Well what were the French doing in this battle between the UN and the Europeans?

JOHNSON: I just have to confess that I don't have an insight into that, on how that thing was going on.

Q: Well, what were you doing?

JOHNSON: It was very unexciting, jut to follow this development of conflict between European powers and NATO and IAE powers as to what would happen with this inspection system and contributing whatever I could to whatever I find out about different positions there.

Q: How did we view the European Community at the time you were in Brussels? Did we see this as the wave of the future, or were we skeptical?

JOHNSON: Well let's say that if I am serving in that office the U.S. mission to the European Community, I am surrounded by the converted, by the faithful. These people are feeling pretty satisfied about how things are developing.

Q: Really the whole European unity thing with them, I mean in the State Department they were almost like priests. I mean right from the coal and steel community on. Jacques, I am thinking of the Frenchman who started the whole thing.

JOHNSON: Yes, I forget who. My colleagues like John Ritter or Jack Tuthill or other people that I knew in that field were all passionate integrationists. And of course it is a treat to serve in Brussels. School-wise for my children; gourmet-wise for myself and my wife. My children have benefited from schooling in French, to start with in Algiers for several years. Then in Asmara a pretty good military schooling there, American post schooling.

Q: Well being an intelligence center there, you have got particularly the officer corps and the enlisted men are of a higher caliber.

JOHNSON: Yes, one of the officers, I am sorry I can't remember his name. Lt. John, his father was a senior State Department Foreign Service officer. I will have my son come up and contribute it to the record if I can remember it. About the level and category of George Shultz, but I am not sure if it was George Shultz who was the father of this officer.

All right, what is going on in Brussels? I haven't whipped my thoughts in shape for talking about that post. Not much developed in my life. Where did I go after that? I think I am going to go to Bulgaria.

Q: This was when?

JOHNSON: This would be about 1967. Why am I going to go to Bulgaria? Eastern European affairs was my basic field after service in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The newly appointed ambassador to Bulgaria was Jack McSweeney, who was the DCM there in Brussels, and somehow he and I had some contact and he approved of me. But particularly, and this is the way it works in the Foreign Service I would say, his wife liked my wife and they were buddies. He would say we have got these three or four guys, and she would say, "I like Mrs. Johnson very much, and I would be very happy with her." And it worked that way, and they were very happy together in Bulgaria, his wife and my

wife. Bulgaria is another chapter. Probably I should go home and try to organize my thoughts about Bulgaria.

Q: Ok, we will stop at this point. That was when, 1968?

JOHNSON: From ’67 to ’70.

Q: So in ’67 you are off to Sofia.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: All right we will pick it up then.

Today is 18 November 2009 with Dick Johnson. Dick, before we leave the European Community, what was your impression of both the structure and its potential?

JOHNSON: The difference between myself and the other people in the office was they were all pretty much European Community-committed devotees.

Q: They were real true believers in this.

JOHNSON: True believers, yes. It just happened by circumstance as I came into that office, I had been to the NATO Defense College, but with no reason to be a devotee yet. I thought it was reasonable. What surprised me is the burst of membership after the fall of the wall in Berlin. It certainly is attractive to European countries.

Q: But at the time you didn’t see this as being a very dynamic organization or what?

JOHNSON: Dynamic or not dynamic, what you could see was a bureaucratic organization which is going to have some stresses and strains, a big bureaucracy.

Q: Yeah if nothing else sort of the bureaucracy grew before the real concept grew.

JOHNSON: It would, and because of that assignment I would have a European Community ID card that I could travel with anywhere in the European Community, with that rather than my American diplomatic passport. With my American diplomatic passport, I would have to go through various formalities at various frontiers. No barrier to me but go through with a passport. That little ID card just got me right around.

Q: Well you left that job when?

JOHNSON: I would say to the best of my memory this would be 1967.

Q: ’67, then where did you go?

JOHNSON: I was assigned as DCM in Sofia, Bulgaria with Ambassador Jack McSweeney, a Soviet affairs expert. And Political officer Burton Gerber. Does that name mean anything to you?

Q: Who?

JOHNSON: Burton Gerber.

Q: No it doesn't.

JOHNSON: Ok, I see, he is not in here, but he was much in the press at one time when this Aldrich Ames case came up, the great traitor.

Q: The CIA spy.

JOHNSON: Yes, for the Russians. Did a great deal of damage I would say. Got lots of our agents killed. But Burton Gerber was the superior officer to Aldrich Ames. So Burton Gerber was well publicized at the time. So I think I can say he was the CIA representative on our small staff there in Sofia. I always found him a fine officer, excellent.

Q: Ok, you were there from '67 to what , '70?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Let's talk about Bulgaria . How stood Bulgaria in 1967 when you went out?

JOHNSON: Bulgaria was trying to be the last really stalwart partner to the Soviet Union. They have the tradition that Russia liberated Bulgaria from the Ottoman Empire and historically there is plenty to that, but there is plenty to show that Bulgaria was having trouble with Russia back in the late 1800's. Anyway they were trying to be a loyal servant to the USSR. Something was cooking. Now what was cooking on the international scene at the time was growing ferment in Czechoslovakia. Now while I was serving in Bulgaria, the Soviet troops invaded Prague.

Q: This is the Prague spring and its aftermath.

JOHNSON: Yes, and it gave certain piquant aspects to the service there. My daughter reminded me of this, she was there at the time. We are living in an eight or ten story apartment, government apartment. It is mixed, with other diplomats living in the same apartment building, and Bulgarian officials of various kinds and communist party officials and all this kind of thing. On the eve of the invasion by the Soviets of Prague, there came a time when tanks were moving out of one part of the capital city of Sofia, going up the main highway heading out toward the airport, the road that takes you to the airport, the road that takes you to the second city, Plovdiv, the road that takes you to Turkey. Very rarely seen on this road but now one night they were seen in good numbers. My neighbor in the building was the French military attaché, Bernard Hussenot, and he

had a junior high school aged daughter. I had a junior high school aged son who happened to be there at the time, and my daughter, Susan, was there at the time. I didn't know it but Colonel Hussenot recruited these kids to sort of sit on the balcony that overlooks this road at night and count those tanks. They liked this task. Eventually my son's first wife was the daughter of that French colonel. Anyway that shows close cooperation between the United States and France at that point.

Q: Did you ever figure out what the tanks were all about?

JOHNSON: I didn't figure it out, but presumably they were going to be transported to the Czech staging area with the Russians. At that time also the Bulgarians engaged in an evil caper. When the Soviet Union decided to move into Prague, they commissioned their favorite ally, the Bulgarians, with a common Slavic language and that sort of thing, to capture the Prague airport, the Ruzyne airport, with a dirty trick. The dirty trick is to have a plane full of paratroopers and plead medical emergency for landing rights. There was none, there was no medical emergency. This was a reason to get them down on the ground then these paratroopers fanned out and seized the airport just at the crucial moment to give it to the Soviet Union. At the same time the World Communist youth organization was having its either annual or biannual world festival, communist youth coming in from all over the globe into Sofia. So we had western press there in Sofia. We had episodes where the secret police seized one of our rather prominent journalists who was riding a streetcar at the time covering this situation. The situation was bubbling because of Czechoslovakia. They grabbed this journalist right in the street car. A young woman said, "Oh sir, I will find out what they are up to." and she talked to these guys who were state security. She turned to the newspaperman and said, "Oh, sir, don't worry. They are taking you to a concert." That was the kind of baloney that was given out at the time. There were some Czech communist youth who were coming to Sofia at that time who were going to be dissidents, going to be trouble. I think something seriously happened to the Czech ambassador. He had a nervous breakdown. Anyhow the situation was kind of open outside Bulgaria, not inside Bulgaria. There is something that I noticed not there in Bulgaria but elsewhere in Eastern Europe, There was NATO solidarity among the embassies there. France was cool to NATO at the time. They weren't supposed to be as warm but they were cooperating with us as much as possible. In my previous service in Poland there was plenty of the same thing. Plenty of tight cooperation with the French and Italians and so forth. Let me check on some anecdotes that might be interesting here. Let's say concerning the protection of American citizens in Bulgaria. It had several aspects. One, somehow we didn't have a system that gets American citizens aware of Bulgarian ideas about anesthesia. Now either because they don't have them and can't afford them, or they don't believe in them, they do lots of operations that you would be shocked to have done without anesthesia. So Americans get into automobile crashes there and were shocked to find the pain they are going to have to endure without anesthesia. If you want to have a baby there it would be somewhat difficult if you were not willing to have one without anesthesia in any way. In earlier days, my wife had both our children without anesthesia, back in Montclair New Jersey. One of the British embassy wives had her baby in Sofia.

An angle there is something I learned about the British Foreign Service. They had a girl on the staff, a junior officer who had a special entry into the Foreign Service because her father won the Distinguished Service Order in combat. Any child of such a winner has a special entrée into the Foreign Service. I don't know what this girl had to prove, but she was very capable. She was a good skier and she went skiing. When you ride up in a chair lift with Bulgarians, you get to talk with them privately. She was getting insights into public opinions that way that other people like us were not getting. The State security system there was thorough. If my wife and I and our guest John Renner from my previous post in Brussels are going to go down to visit Istanbul, we would drive down there in the car. As we were coming back, they had girl officials in the border crossing building who are like hostesses, in attractive uniforms and acting like hostesses. But at least I had enough Bulgarian to hear one of them coming through talking on the telephone. I can see that she was giving over the telephone the license number of our car, so she was part of the security system as well as a hospitality system. There were certain attractions to serving in Bulgaria. One of them is that it is a very beautiful country to visit, to drive around, so how can I say, so 19th century. It is not very well developed at the time. It probably still isn't very well developed with lots of home construction and that sort of thing. It makes me check into what I could find out about the liberation of Bulgaria around 1878, mostly by Russian forces. I learn there that our military attaché accredited to St. Petersburg came down with those Russian forces and followed the episodes of the Russian fighting in Bulgaria. They seemed to be very modern in their minds, these military attaches, in what I read of their reports. They talked with Russian soldiers, and they found a little theme among the Russian soldiers. The Russian soldiers were saying "What are we doing down here liberating these Bulgarians? They are so much better off than we are in Russia. Every darn one that we ever see has his own property He has trees on his property. He has a cow. He has a small crop. We are serfs." It wasn't all sweetness and light in the Russian army at the time.

Q: Well, that is interesting. At the same time our consul general in Constantinople was up with a British reporter reporting on what the Ottomans were doing in Bulgaria, and it became known as the Bulgarian horrors. Our consul general sort of on his own, was right with on reporting on the awfulness of the Turks at the time and it had a profound effect on the attitude of the British towards the Turks at the time.

JOHNSON: Yes I guess I remember it being a struggle between several big personalities. Disraeli was one personality and I think Baldwin was another.

Q: Gladstone?

JOHNSON: Gladstone. I am not sure. I think it is Gladstone; I think you are right. Gladstone was particularly strong in support for the Bulgarian cause, and Disraeli was kind of cold blooded.

Q: Yeah, Realpolitik.

JOHNSON: That is one aspect of the situation there. The other was the novel process whereby the original treaty arising from that conflict was revised and made into a new treaty. Two consuls general, one American and one Russian, collaborated on organizing this new regime for Bulgaria. The American I can't quite remember his name.

Q: I am pretty sure it is probably our consul general form Istanbul.

JOHNSON: Yes it is.

Q: He is a major figure in American diplomatic history, and his name escapes me now.

JOHNSON: Yes, if I can remember it before I leave today I will give it to you. And the Russian diplomat, his name was Ignatieff. His descendants are Canadian ambassadors, several Ignatieffs who were ambassadors descended from this same fellow. Schuyler was probably the name of this fellow, Eugene Schuyler. He was a multi faceted political officer. He was a Russian speaker and all of that. It was interesting the Americans and the Russians collaborated so much on the new regime. Now the Bulgarians started out to do the same as so many of the other eastern states did in Europe. Recruit a king. That didn't work out too well in the early years..

Q: Well, while you were in Bulgaria, Tito was playing with changes in the system of sort of independent worker owned factories and all that. Was anything, was Titoism creeping into the Bulgarian side or were they pretty much strictly Stalinists while you were there?

JOHNSON: Basically Stalinist. There were interesting angles. The Yugoslav angle for me serving in Bulgaria was important. My best friend as a foreign diplomat was a Yugoslav DCM who was from Bosnia. Let's see how he ingratiated himself with me. One way was that we are having our moon landings at this time, and the Bulgarians are fixing things so there cannot be any transmission of the moon landings on television in Bulgaria. They were censoring it out. The Yugoslav embassy went to great trouble to rig an antenna on the building where they were so that they could receive coverage from Yugoslavia, and the Americans and the Yugoslavs would be all together in the room to see the coverage of this.

Q: In '69, yeah.

JOHNSON: Then at some point we and they organized a trip to Macedonia for myself and my wife and this man and his wife. As Yugoslavs, what they want to show us is that Macedonians are not the same kind of Slavs that the Bulgarians are because Bulgaria historically coveted Macedonia and occupied it during WWII. So they would take me to various town council things on the side and show me the differences of how this would read if it were in Bulgaria. They were excellent friends. Later on he became ambassador, and was injured by a car-bomb in Beirut -- not killed, but he was put out of commission.

Q: From '62 to '67 I was chief of the consular section in Belgrade. I used to go down to Macedonia all the time. Did you run across, the Bulgarians lay claim to Macedonia, but

the Greeks are vehement. I later served in Greece. Did you run across with the Greek embassy there any of their Macedonian concerns?

JOHNSON: No, that was a quiet matter at that time I was there. I would say what was not so quiet was the colonel's revolt in Greece.

Q: That was '67, April 22, 1967.

JOHNSON: All right. That had impact on the embassy up there. Earlier the ambassador and the military attaché were at odds on that situation as it was emerging, as it was developing. The ambassador was a democratic loyalist, and the military attaché was a pro-colonels kind of guy. So that was an episode there, but also I have had numerous occasions to go to Greece. Every time I have every gone there would be a big anti-American demonstration going on there in the city. It was one thing or another. Most of the time it was Cyprus and our position on Cyprus was unsatisfactory to the Greeks. I saw the structure of the British embassy in Athens which is a little bit like a fortress.

Q: It really is. It is on stilts. You have a feeling that they haul up the ladder and pour boiling oil down. At the same time we had a glass embassy.

JOHNSON: Yes, I have had experiences with glass embassies, like in Sweden. The glass embassy's weakness is that the sun just pours in there in the summer and just fries you. We had to put some kind of fabric all over the glass on the upper floors. Let's see, back there in this Greek situation. Greece was sort of a breathing place for us in Sofia. We couldn't buy anything in the shops in Bulgaria that was desirable, so trips were frequently made to Thessalonica and that was a pleasure. Vacations would be spent, we spent one on an island called Skiathos. It takes about an hour and a half by ferry to get to this island. But it is midway off the peninsula. Then another vacation at Thassos I guess it is called. It is off Kavala. It is way at the top of the Aegean.

Q: Yeah, a beautiful pine wooded island.

JOHNSON: Lots of honey raised there; in all different parts of the island you have different honey flavors.

Q: Well how about the security apparatus in Bulgaria? Did it harass you in the way our people were getting harassed in Moscow, or not?

JOHNSON: All right. It was a farce in a way. I am just smiling at how big a farce it is because we did not have a chancery of our own as we do today. We just had space rented in a downtown city-center office building. Right behind my desk there is a wall. Right behind that wall there are Bulgarian security listeners with whatever their apparatus is. Whenever I or my wife or both of us would go down to Turkey, more work would be done in bugging our apartment than was done in building it. Anyway you have got the picture. There was a lot of pressure on my driver, he had a nervous breakdown. As far as I could see a lot of it was the pressure from the State Security They probably recruited

him in the first place, but he wasn't producing anything. Right opposite, right across the street from the building where we lived there is a large multi-acre forest. It was called "Freedom Park." A beautiful forest. There were no roads through it at all except just little jogging trails through these dark woods. I would come home every evening and I would go out in the dark and run through the trails and would get in about 10 or 15 minutes of jogging. These State Security people wonder what I am up to in the dark. I never detected them around looking for me. I don't think they did; I don't think they bothered about surveying me.

Q: Was there a problem that you as DCM sort of have a major responsibility in the event your staff gets compromised State Security sending young girls after your male officers, or were they doing things to keep your attaches from getting out and around or anything like that?

JOHNSON: No, just maybe slightly parenthetically I would say here that it was a feature of our embassy staff that the army attaché and the air force attaché detested each other and conducted themselves with that attitude. That was a real problem. I didn't know how to tackle that and Ambassador McSweeney didn't touch it either. That was a noticeable situation. Then…what else. The Bulgarian security approach was to have the diplomats, most of the diplomats, quartered in an area of eight-story apartment buildings in somewhat of a cluster, just outside of the main part of the city. There was a building, like a cottage, that was sort of across a field. You could see soldiers going in that building from time to time. At one point in the summer when the windows were open, a child came running back to his mother from near the building saying, "Mommy, I hear your voice on the telephone." That was their recording station there. Their soldiers had to go through all this telephone conversation junk to see if there was any useful intelligence there.

Q: Yeah, I often thought of that when you think about the efforts made by these intelligence services. I know in Yugoslavia my wife had lots of calls organizing an international girl scout troop from the kids of all the embassies. She did it, but I am thinking that some poor intelligence person probably knew more about girl scout organizations than anybody had wanted to know.

JOHNSON: Don't let me get too far from this intelligence angle before I think of something here. One time our marines went overboard after some drinking in the marine barracks. They went out and started tearing down Bulgarian flags from poles out there.

Q: So what did you do?

JOHNSON: Jack McSweeney made the marines his baby, his particular subject. So whatever happened to the marines he took care of that. He focused a lot on making sure that the marine barracks were a superior accommodation.

Consular-wise, the only thing that occurred really, with so few Americans traveling there, was that Americans, particularly youths, with marijuana or other drugs would get picked

up by the police. A lot of work for the one singular consular officer we had. I forget who it was during the first part of my tour there, but whoever he was, was soon replaced by a CIA fellow who did the consular work and his own CIA work. No backup on either sides of his life. I have never seen anybody who had to work so hard on these darn protection cases like these cases, and also whatever he was doing for the CIA. But to have Burton Gerber, a very skilled political officer during most of my tour there was a very great thing. There would be some friction between me and the ambassador, I would say, about the amount of reporting that he wanted - a reporting cable every day. But there was not necessarily news worth reporting every day.

Q: Particularly in a communist country.

JOHNSON: No, and I just felt that he wanted to keep his name visible to parts of EUR, the Soviet and Eastern Europe desks, that would matter to serve his ambition which was to become ambassador to Moscow. There was a strong competition among the candidates. You have Dick Davies who was one of them and Walter Stoessel was one of them. One was in Yugoslavia with a Scot's name. I forget. I will think of that one because he was a dedicated golfer, and a very close Scot.

Q: Oh yes, Mc…

JOHNSON: Something. All right. We will remember him at some point. (note: the reference is to Malcolm Toon)

A nice aspect of the service in Bulgaria was music. That opera there is wonderful.

Q: They have those wonderful bass singers.

JOHNSON: All kinds of good singers and good presentation. They have a tradition there of after an opera performance or an important concert, the principals go to a certain restaurant downtown. It was called the Journalist's Club at the time and they just join the public. The public is there and they arrive and just come in and eat. There is excellent food. The food in Bulgaria was better than anywhere else in Eastern Europe at the time. I never ate so many fruits and vegetables, everything good. It was a pleasure to see all that.

I would like to relate something, whether it fits into my story, it is just something I observed, and I have to think about. I was coming back from Western Europe to go back to Sofia. When I got to Belgrade I went to a concert with Emil Gilels, the pianist. It develops that the British ambassador there, his wife would like a lift over to Sofia. Why is she going over to Sofia alone, dressed in mourning as she is? To express condolences to the Russian ambassador in Sofia who is an old friend of this British ambassador. They served together somewhere, and this British Ambassador served in Moscow at some point. One aspect of that is that they had a daughter, the British did, who was a cellist. She, through the help of this Russian diplomat, got accepted as a pupil of Rostropovich. So that was fine. So anyway the Russian Soviet ambassador to Sofia suffered a tragedy. Back on leave he took his daughter, his small granddaughter, out into the woods picking

mushrooms. The ones he picked were poisonous, and the granddaughter died. It was a sort of a shattering thing for this guy. But these Brits had such a contact with that Soviet diplomat that it was impressive to see her effort at making a trip like that. Whether we could match that with our diplomats, I don't know.

Q: What sort of a role did we see the Soviet playing in Bulgaria?

JOHNSON: No matter who was supposed to be the dean of the diplomatic corps, the real dean was the Soviet ambassador. It didn't make much difference. I felt some measure of accomplishment when I was invited to the Soviet embassy. Embarrassingly I forget whether my wife Lynn was also invited to this dinner at the Soviet embassy. Where all the other guests were the DCMs of all the eastern bloc communist embassies. Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, and the Yugoslav DCM. No other westerners. So I am the only westerner, so I feel honored to be put into this group of people there. But I couldn't play the game as well as they are used to doing. What they do is after dinner the women go inside and the men go and sit around in a circle and each one has to tell a joke or a story. Some went over like a lead balloon. I was excused from that. I didn't have any available. I don't feel like I want to fill up the oral history by repeating those jokes. I will leave them aside.

Q: I'd like to hear some. I mean, I remember a Yugoslav joke. A sardine is a whale that has gone through all phases of communism. Can you remember one of the jokes?

JOHNSON: Yes, and it was a time of uncertain relations between the Russians and the Chinese. So one of them -- I am not remembering if it was from the Soviet ambassador, it probably was -- was that the Russian leader gets a telephone call from Mao Tse-tung. Mao says, "I am awfully sorry to announce this to you my friend, but China is declaring war on the Soviet Union at the same time that your anniversary parade is starting in Moscow." The Russian leader says, "Please don't feel upset about it at all. We will start the parade ten minutes later." Another joke, it is lucky if I can remember these. It involved the Czech DCM, and the relations, I don't think we should get into that, the Czechs. We have already handled it enough. Czechoslovakia was wobbling in its position at the time in the Soviet bloc. In any case his joke had to do with the Czech communist version of what the Germans had before and during WWII, the "Bund Deutscher Mädel" (BDM).

Q: The young women's league.

JOHNSON: Young Women's League. This teacher in the school gave an assignment to the class to write an essay. This is where I can't really recall. Well anyway I can't remember it, but it involved the Czech union of girl communists. Something about it, but whatever it was his joke went over flat and it didn't get any laughs. I didn't hear any Yugoslav joke.

Q: Well one of the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union and the satellites is the political joke seems to have kind of died. It was a great art

of these little digs at the whole communist system. Apparently we had during the time of Ronald Reagan an officer in our embassy in Moscow who was tasked with sending back jokes which eventually ended up at the White House, Ronald Reagan liked these jokes, and would tell various world leaders including communist ones the jokes he had gotten from our man in Moscow. Was there in a way, you know, Dick, you were in probably the most Stalinist of the countries at that point. Did you have a feeling that we were just marking time there during the time you were there? Nothing in particular was moving or did it make any difference whether we were there or not?

JOHNSON: I would say that my feeling was that there were enough elements in Bulgaria who wanted things to get better, who wanted things to be better, particularly in trade matters and industrial matters. They were frustrated by their own government. And if anything could reduce the pressure the government was putting on them, they were open to this, that or the other, like trade with the United States.

What else would be a sign of things like that? Let's see if I see any in my notes here.

Yes, in the education field. There are traditions of American support for education in Bulgaria, around 1870 during the time of liberation from Russia and that sort of thing. This support came from the same religious circles in the United States that were creating Robert College in Istanbul.

Q: Yes, and the MS School in Thessalonica.

JOHNSON: One school was created in Sofia. That had to be suppressed by the government. But you could feel that if there was a relaxation, there would be more American-Bulgarian education cooperation. I somehow heard the rumor some years later after I retired that we had the Peace Corps in Bulgaria, and that more American male Peace Corps people married Bulgarian girls than married any other. In no other country did our such a high proportion of our fellows go for the girls and marry them. Because there were plenty of good…

Q: Well, an interesting thing. You say you were maybe nibbling at the system but perhaps you were really sowing some seeds because when the walls came down, Bulgaria, and this was the Stalinist country and all, apparently jumped ahead and had great elections. Really made wonderful strides, more than any other country. It was sort of remarkable.

JOHNSON: Yes, you could feel that sort of repression that would give some fruit once anything changed in Eastern Europe.

Q: By to the transcriber. We were talking about the American Consul in Istanbul. I think his name was Eugene Schuyler.

JOHNSON: Yes. Schuyler.

Q: Who was basically a rather towering figure in our diplomacy. He even ended up in Moscow at one point But very much involved in major movements in the 1870's or so.

JOHNSON: I can tell you other anecdotes. I don't know whether it is worth being in the oral history. There is a diplomatic tennis club, and thank goodness for having something like that, but who runs the club? Well a colonel from State Security does. And he has a young athlete running around with him all the time as his deputy, sort of lieutenant this and lieutenant that. And they organize a tennis tournament for the diplomats at the club. It is going to be a handicap tournament. It is going to be based on somebody's evaluation of the strengths of the different diplomats. You could start out 30 love against another opponent and go on like that. The tournament wound its way along, and I was now the semi finalist. My opponent was this lieutenant who was the deputy manager of the club, the state security guy. Not a good tennis player but an athlete. He had been in the national dance troupe. But anyway I had to play him where I am 30 up at the beginning of each game, and he still wins. He takes the first prize. The host, it is like the host's son gets the cup. I get the second prize which is like a leather folio to keep your mail correspondence in . Anyway I thought it was some kind of Bulgarian nerve to run such a tournament like that. Their staff knew the winner. I could have won except for this athlete. However it was a great break in life there to have that tennis club. We had a recreational facility available to us out in the mountains, Borovets, it was called. You could ski there, it was a good ski place. Also the Finnish embassy had a cottage next door with a sauna place, and they would arrange for us to have saunas from time to time. The ski business has developed. At the time it was difficult to ski elsewhere because it was up against the Greek frontier. It was a forbidden zone.

Q: How about the Black Sea and swimming and Constanta. That today is quite an industry for tourism, but how was it at the time?

JOHNSON: At the time it was very busy we will say because before the wall fell it was the swimming place or vacation place of choice for the rest of Eastern Europe, the rest of the Iron Curtain people, so it was quite busy. There were nice hotels and nice food. The only trouble is the condition of the water. It is an enclosed lake practically, the Black Sea. The motion of the waves is very flaccid, very uninteresting. No surf or anything like that, and it is not clean enough for Western tastes. The water just isn't good enough. If we are looking for good beaches form Sofia, we go down to Western Greece and we find wonderful places. But I don't know how that is doing now, the Black Sea Coast, as far as the tourist business goes.

Q: Did we get involved in the Turkish minority problem there at all?

JOHNSON: Yes we did. It would be quite a difficult history to get insight into the origins of the situation of those Turks who remained in Bulgaria after the Ottoman control was lost. I would say that the more sophisticated people of that time went back to Istanbul. Some small minority of folk remained, working class kind of people. Now those people would not have a proper role in the Bulgarian army. They would be labor troops. As for employment, the system would be that their main employment would be in road repair.

Then it wasn't while I was there but later, they started trying to take their Turkish names away from them, this minority population. I am sure that there was plenty of tension that grew out of that effort. But while I was there a certain flow of repatriation was allowed to go on back to Turkey. It meant that also that the Turkish diplomats who were there were very friendly to us in the American embassy. They felt that they were on our team and we were real allies with regards to the situation of the Turkish minority in the country.

Q: What were you getting from whatever intelligence sources were there, attaches, what was considered to be the role of the Bulgarian army and all in case war came along between the west and the east?

JOHNSON: What Bulgaria would want to gain out of a war situation if it escaped any kind of serious destruction would be to regain a foothold on the Aegean. A foothold it had as of WWII, like an opening toward the Mediterranean. If the situation of a war would give them control over Macedonia, they would like that too. I don't think I have any other deep thoughts about what Bulgaria would be hoping to get out of WWIII. I was just learning recently that in the 1930's Japanese people who wanted to become dentists learned how to be dentists out of books from Germany, and all their dental training was German. Similarly in Bulgaria dentists were German speaking, German trained, German equipped. There is a traditional ease of relationship between Germans and Bulgarians. They get along and don't irritate each other.

An episode there for me was being a pedestrian traffic victim. A very strange traffic situation, hard to describe. It was right in the center of things not far from our chancery where a car had to come around a corner in a not regular way. This car came around the corner and crashed into me as a pedestrian crossing the street there. The car that ran into me was a Trabant, this famous East German car with the plastic hood and plastic body. But it threw me quite a bit into the air so that I am looking down at the hood. It doesn't break anything but it gives me a great black and blue on the inside of my thigh. I say to this driver, can you please take me to my doctor. It is nearby, but take me there I want to be checked out. He is hesitant about that. Then he is even more hesitant when I lean back in the chair and I break a plastic coat hanger on which he has some article of clothing. He gets quite upset about that plastic coat hanger. He isn't too concerned about my leg or anything there.

Q: Did anybody of any importance from the States visit you?

JOHNSON: Boy, I would have to say time out and give me about five minutes of thought about that. Let me take a minute of thought and see if I can remember anybody who came.

Any programs, Sargent Shriver or anything like that... I can't think of any notable visit.

Q: Yeah, I can't either. One of the things I have always found rather remarkable is that you get Romania and Bulgaria right next to each other, but there is hardly, I think there

is one bridge between the two, and they really don't communicate particularly. It is not a hostile thing, but it is a complete lack of interest. Did you gather that?

JOHNSON: I have something interesting to impart about that if you want to turn…

Q: It is on.

JOHNSON: Ok, just when the Romanian national day came about -- the Romanian Ambassador had always been cheery with me – they celebrated it with an outdoor garden party kind of thing. So I had talks with him under those circumstances, without fear of or deep concern about being overheard. At one point in our conversation he said, "We in Romania will never accept the loss of our eastern territories, Moldavia, and the other related territory. We will never accept that."

Q: Bessarabia.

JOHNSON: Bessarabia and that sort of thing, he said that. A remarkable thing to be said by a communist ally of the Soviet Union. The Dobrudja region of Bulgaria is like the granary place, a very nice agricultural place. So the protocol section of the Bulgarian system invites diplomats to come out there and watch the harvest and all of that. There is a history of Bulgarian-Romanian conflict along that area. But there is not much interaction between the two countries and the two populations.

Q: Had there been any appreciable immigration between the United States and Bulgaria?

JOHNSON: Somehow I never learned of anything really serious about that, the extent of that, the nature of it or pattern of it. I have right now just several doors away from me a Bulgarian post war immigrant. I haven't been able to sort of lure him into conversation. Post war, I mean post liberation of Bulgarian immigration here. It would seem to have been a very small immigration.

Q: It is not something that seems to or that I have been aware of but I was asking. Did you have much contact with the government? Could you go to the parliament or visit the foreign ministry. Was it difficult?

JOHNSON: Let's say it was uncalled for, pointless. If we needed to do that we could do it, but we didn't have the need to make representations of any kind with the government.

Sports are a very big thing in Bulgaria, Athletic things. They had before WWII they had one great big New York Yankees type level soccer team. It was called Levski. They had a saying in the country, "Samo Levski."

Q: Only Levski.

JOHNSON: Only the Yanks. Samo Levski. Now they had a bunch of these teams with the Soviet names from the security system, Dynamo, Red Star and all of that. I haven't learned yet whether they have restored the name Levski to any team in Bulgaria. I haven't had occasion to try it out on my Bulgarian neighbor. He is too young to know about Samo Levski.

Just to return to this business about this world communist youth festival in 1968. It brought a lot of attention to the country at that time because Czechoslovakia is sort of wriggling in the grip of the Soviet Union. When the invasion took place the Czech ambassador sort of he went off to some other assignment and committed suicide or fell off, he died very suddenly after that.

There were some security episodes. Every once in awhile something would happen that would pose a possible threat to the security of our premises at the chancery. There was a pattern whereby if you have not received any official warning, which we hadn't, you could know a big demonstration was coming outside our chancery. How do you know? A group of horsemen arrive at the square outside our offices. You hear the clatter of horses' hooves. That is one of their systems of limiting access to the brick throwers who are going to throw bricks through the windows of our chancery that the Bulgarians are going to have to pay for. They have already paid for some from one of these riots. There was one pattern to use these horse-mounted police to protect us. The other pattern is to get the Bulgarian communist youth boys out to be the leaders of this demonstration. They make sure the bricks don't go through windows that they are going to have to pay for. In other countries, say you went to Sweden you would have the same warning, hearing barriers, steel barrier elements being clicked together by the police out there. You hear click, click, click. All right. Demonstrations are coming.

Q: I remember one time in Yugoslavia, we lived on the embassy compound, and our little daughter was looking out the window early in the morning and would say. "OOO, horsies." And we looked and there they were. She alerted us and we were going to have a demonstration. I can think it was about the Congo. You can imagine how interested the Yugoslavs were in the Congo.

JOHNSON: The situation up in Sweden was that Kissinger was coming for a visit. Sweden has taken in dissidents from all over the world and so you had tremendous amounts of demonstrators to come from all different causes from all around.

Somehow we in Sofia thought that we had good morale there. Somehow the system of housing was adequate. We thought that your place, Belgrade was having morale problems about that, housing too many people living right down there in the offices kind of building. It was getting on people's nerves or something. We were glad we didn't have that problem.

Q: Well then, maybe should we move on or do you want to, where did you go after this?

JOHNSON: I should move on now and schedule a meeting next week because we are going to make a big break now. The next assignment will be Diplomat in Residence at the State University of New York.

Q: That should be interesting. Was it during the height of the unrest on campus? So, we will pick that up next time in 1969.

JOHNSON: It will be 1970. It lasts nine months an academic season. My sponsor, Professor James Heaphey has just come out with a book. He doesn't mention me because it doesn't concern him and me, it concerns what his military service was after WWII. I never knew it. He was an intelligence operator for the U.S. Air Force in Morocco. He was operating to cover up something we were doing, putting atomic weapons in our bases in Morocco during the period where they were being slowly handed over from the French through us to the Moroccans. This was to accomplish this insertion of atomic weapons without anybody getting wind of it.

Q: All right, today is 23 November 2009, with Dick Johnson, and Dick, where do we leave off?

JOHNSON: I think that I was just leaving Bulgaria after a three year tour there.

Q: Where did you go then?

JOHNSON: I went to the diplomat in residence program.

Q: This was what year?

JOHNSON: 1970.

Q: Where did you do residence?

JOHNSON: It isn't an easy question as I was assigned to the State University of New York. You are resident in Albany, but you are very peripatetic whatever that word is. You have to go around to the various units in the State University of New York, SUNY they call it. In this situation I can see I was seconded to a professor James J. Heaphey at the government school they have there in Albany. He seemed to want to have a diplomat in residence there and so they give him one. I was perfectly happy to have that one. Interesting thing about it was to move around to the different units around the state. I grew up in New York state and I respect the New York state school system.

Q: Well now, 1970 was a pretty hot year in student revolt and all that. Did you get hit with the force of student protests about Vietnam?

JOHNSON: Somehow or other not really. Somehow I didn't really experience any of that except through the press and that kind of thing. The sponsor there, James Heaphey deserves special mention I should say, first of all for his willingness to have a foreign

service officer there as a diplomat in residence, and his hospitality and his backing. Watching his office in operation was quite interesting. He had a scholar from Beirut named Abdo Baaklini, a sort of deputy director of his government studies there. It was sort of a collegial pleasure to be with these people One of them, professor Zimmermann, whose name I hope to get correct so I am not misnaming him, was very compatible with me. We both liked skiing. We could go just out of Albany just over the border of New York State where they had a night time floodlit downhill skiing. That was excellent for both of us. Also while serving in Albany I could go up to ski runs up in the Adirondacks not a long distance drive from Albany. I am thinking now of what I would do in this role as diplomat in residence. I would meet with student groups who are interested in the Foreign Service and answer their questions about the Foreign Service, and describe some of the pleasures of it and attractions of it. The colleges that I particularly remember going to include New Paltz because a professor there named Eugen Loebl who had been a senior figure under communist Czechoslovakia. As a communist, which he was, he was lucky to have gotten into the States. But he was arrested and made part of a victims group of about ten prominent communists, most of whom were executed by other communists, the famous Slansky trial. There was a certain angle to the Jewish question in that. The Slansky group had more Jewish people in it than the people who were now killing them. They weren't overtly anti-Semitic. He was one of the people found guilty only to a minor degree, only a few years in prison. Anyway it was interesting to me to have been in Czechoslovakia at that time to talk with one of the inside victims so to speak. I appreciated that. I can't really remember everything from that period. Other visits were to the State University in New York at Oswego, State University of new York in Buffalo. I don't think I did get down to the one I was hoping to get down to. It was on Long Island. Do you know of one?

Q: Well there is Stony Brook. That is sort of the one that one sees more of. I guess it has a liberal arts caste there.

JOHNSON: That is right. Now the whole system has a feature of the education system of New York State in that most of them were teachers colleges before they were amalgamated into the one big system. Anyway it was a pleasant year. Now James Heaphey, I should mention more about him because I am going to find out now about him. I certainly didn't have any idea at the time of his WWII background. Now his book is out, about that WWII or immediate post WWII background that makes him not just an academic but an interesting intelligence operative, in air force intelligence in Morocco. His chief mission was to do various things that would mask the installation of atomic weapons by us in bases, air bases which were in a murky transition phase from French establishment and control to Moroccan control. This installation of these weapons was done keeping the French unaware of that. That sort of thing. He has a whole book on the history of his activities as an intelligence operative in Morocco. But he had that experience so it made him more open to have a Foreign Service officer in residence.

Q: Well, how did you find the student body in general both their knowledge and interest in the Foreign Service in general and how they worked with you?

JOHNSON: Somehow that seems to be a hard question for me. It seemed painless and I was never, all I met was positive interest. I didn't meet any hostility or harassment or anything like that. The ones that would want to discuss the Foreign Service, that was a sign of intelligence to start with. So it was just interesting to me. Residence in a situation like that, you have to rent a house somewhere. I rented a house for the ten month period of the studies in Delmar, a small town just south of Albany. I don't know what else I can volunteer. Just a good year, a nice break.

Q: Well in '71 where did you go?

JOHNSON: Back to the department to become deputy director of the office of Eastern European Affairs, the Director was John Baker. I was the deputy director. We shared the countries involved here with his taking the northern ones, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Baltic States. I am taking Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania. He focused greatly on RFE, Radio Free Europe. It was good to have somebody focused on that, and he focused on that. In my first tour of duty in the office of Eastern European Affairs I had all the countries to work on.

Q: Well, you did that in '71 to '73?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: OK, let's talk about some of these countries. How stood things?

JOHNSON: Let's take Yugoslavia. I think that was the most interesting one at the time. It was a time of a Tito visit, which was a rare thing. I don't know if he ever had a State Visit before that period.

Q: He had. He visited Kennedy in I think early '63. In know because I was, I got called from the Yugoslav foreign office and they said, "Does President Tito need a visa?" I looked at my regulations, and it sounded like the chief of state sort of is his own visa, his own passport. I said, "I will get back to you."' I called the immigration people and finally had to send a telegram to Washington saying, "Quick, what to do?" The answer was he was supposed to have one. So I gave him a quick obviously diplomatic visa. It was '63 I am pretty sure.

JOHNSON: We had a luncheon for him, and seated next to me to my pleasure was Ambassador Shirley Temple. She was a very nice person to sit with. She was intelligent, and smart.

Q: She was the chief of protocol then.

JOHNSON: How does this period fit to your service in Yugoslavia?

Q: Oh I wasn't there. I had left in '67. So I was actually probably in Saigon at the time. How stood relations with Yugoslavia?

JOHNSON: I am trying to think if they were in any particularly interesting phase there. I can't remember feeling that inter ethnic rivalry was particularly resurging, yet it probably was. But I didn't sense it particularly. It was just Tito's Yugoslavia. No particular things that I could remember of interest. What to say about the other states. We were still maintaining our policy toward the Baltic states which required drafting annual statements about our non recognition policy. You know how we financed these Baltic missions?

Q: We had taken their gold hadn't we?

JOHNSON: Yes, either their gold or their government funds, out of the Baltics as of about 1938 or so. We were using the interest, only the interest on those funds to pay for a couple of embassies in Washington and London. I was very pleased that a movie was made later. I don't know if you heard about that movie. It is based on the fact that Estonia sponsors an enormous music, singing festival every year. There are going to be 30,000 singers in Estonia. All of that music is going to be deeply motivated by Estonian patriotism. The flavor of the performance was now getting kind of ultra nationalistic from the point of view of the Soviet Union. It was really a problem for the Soviets now. At some point the Soviets were going to clamp down on this. This movie was made by some Americans who were interested in Estonia, a documentary movie which showed Soviet troops moving toward a tower where broadcasts were being created that they wanted to stop. Very intelligent looking Russian officers were walking around talking to people trying to figure out whether they should storm this tower or not. I would say those Russian officers looked like American collegiate seniors or something like that. They looked smart and intelligent, and they decided not to storm the tower. As part of this phase of this tremendous celebration of Baltic identity, the Estonians teamed up with the Lithuanians, Latvians,. I may be mixing up my countries here. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. They formed a human chain through the entire length of the three countries from the top to the bottom, an entire human chain, singing. Things like that. The Baltic countries were in ferment there. Things have gradually shaken down to avoiding any real conflict.

Q: Well what about Czechoslovakia which had just been put down. I mean the Prague Spring had been squelched there in '69 I think.

JOHNSON: Yes, late '68 or .69.

Q: I take it relations were very poor with Czechoslovakia during the time you were there, I mean in Washington dealing with them.

JOHNSON: During that period, yes. And I made a trip to Prague as part of about a three man team visiting Eastern Europe. I forget the leader of it. The leader of the team was assistant secretary of state for Eastern Europe or something like that. Warren Zimmerman was on the same trip with me. Bud Sherer was the Ambassador to Prague when I was there. I am trying to think, this is also a period when we reached an economic settlement with Hungary, and the same visit that took me to Prague took me to Hungary and we

signed an economic settlement agreement with Hungary. That is all I can think of at the moment.

Q: What about Romania? I mean Romania was sort of… Nixon had visited there quite recently. In fact had he visited there during the time you were dealing with Romania? Or that came later?

JOHNSON: I am not sure. But I visited Romania at one point during this period '70 to '73. The atmosphere of sullen resignation and silence in the streets was very visible throughout the country, the capital. So that in more recent years I visited Romania when my daughter Susan was serving there, and I wanted to get a straight feeling. So I was dressed casually and just lounged around down in the center of town leaning against various fences. Not doing anything, just sensing how many people were talking with each other, how much smiles there were on faces. It was a tremendously striking difference from the old days. Susan taught me to say "I am awfully sorry, I don't speak Romanian," because a lot of people addressed themselves to me looking for somebody to ask directions. The most often asked-for direction I was getting was, "Could you tell me where the Lufthansa office is?' Somehow the airline was very busy with that country.

Q: I think Albania, of course we didn't have relations with them. Were we getting much information about Albania?

JOHNSON: I would say no. Not significantly. Now in which country did I see Albanian diplomacy at work? I think it was Poland. I think their diplomats would drive around Poland a little bit and throw leaflets out the window at strangers. A strange kind of thing. But then we had a deputy chief of mission there, Willard Barber, who was a "Wristonee" (a beneficiary of Henry Wriston's 1954 initiative to integrate many civil service employees into the foreign service) with no experience whatsoever with Communist Eastern Europe and Communist Poland. He had a Latin American background. But he thought it was extremely important to get a lot of Sears and Roebucks catalogs and drive around the highways and throw the catalogs out on to the street. That was his idea. Nobody else thought that this was making a significant impression on Poland or that Poland needed this kind of Albanian style distribution of the Sears and Roebucks catalog. But I thought it looked just a little too weird for the degree of effectiveness it would have on a smart, intelligent, well informed population which already knew what was available in the west already. I always had sort of a mark down on rough shod "Wristonization" assignments.

Q: Well then in '73 where did you go/

JOHNSON: To Brussels again. I am now the political counselor in Brussels under Robert Strausz-Hupé. That is a pleasant assignment for me. I like to be in Brussels, in Belgium. Let's see in Belgium Robert Strausz-Hupé and I are at our usual game which is tennis. Every afternoon we go and play tennis. It is his exercise program. He is about at the time 72 years of age and I am say 52. This enables me to beat him regularly but never condescendingly to let him beat me. Not that kind of thing where you try to cater to your

ambassador. No sir. I know that I left in him the desire to keep working on me so that maybe someday he will beat me. So that is one reason that he took me along to Stockholm as his deputy chief of mission.

Q: So you were in Belgium for how long?

JOHNSON: Almost a year we will say. I had barely gotten settled there.

Q: So you really didn't have, I mean had things changed there? How stood NATO at that time?

JOHNSON: Well nothing that I can say I think of interest on that situation. Let me see if… I am trying to think back for a moment. I will take a moment of silence to see how much established NATO was in Belgium already. One of my Belgian tours, either the one at the U.S. mission to the European community or this latest one saw a big invasion of NATO into Brussels. And that meant that the conditions under which I was able to play a lot of golf in Brussels, in the outskirts at the Waterloo Golf Course, one of the nicest I have ever seen, came to an end. I had been grandfathered as a member. I could get in for the very modest charge that was made for diplomatic members of the club. But now the club had to say "no more Americans under these no membership, free membership arrangements. We have too many thousands of interested golfers here." So that came to an end. But this is a thing I like to report I think. The farewell address by the Belgian foreign minister or prime minister, I should know which one it was, honoring Robert Strausz-Hupé and it was all in French of course. What he said, you could consider kind of painful. He said, "In Robert Strausz-Hupé we finally had something good from the Americans, somebody who knows the difference between socialism and communism. Someone who speaks French beautifully." He went on making quite an invidious comparison with other American Ambassadors. They had often had American bankers from Texas. I think they even had an American banker with a speech problem. He couldn't even talk English with the Belgians. This is part of the problem with a political ambassador. The Belgians are venting a bit about getting these political ambassadors. They were venting on that thing. He was emphasizing what he saw as Strausz-Hupé's European qualities, not his American qualities. Whereas Strausz-Hupé was always as anxious to be as American as possible, since his own immigration to the United States was somewhat unusual coming as late as it did. He was 28 years old or something like that when he first came to the United States. Anyway it was a little bit awkward to have heard this talk. Then when Strausz-Hupé got to Stockholm, his abilities and his personality made him persona grata to Olaf Palme, which was good for our cause in Stockholm.

Q: Well you went to Stockholm from when to when?

JOHNSON: Let me see. I would say '74 to '76. Something like that.

Q: I take it relations weren't very warm with Sweden at that time.

JOHNSON: I think they were OK. I think they were respectful on both sides. The problems we would have with Sweden were, well, just from the point of view of security. I don't know if I mentioned this before, but Sweden had been very hospitable to so many lost causes all around the world. The losers all got visas to come to work in Sweden. The country is teeming with disappointed rebels of one kind or another. So while I was in Sweden, Kissinger came on a visit. It certainly brought out of the Scandinavian countryside and towns masses of people demonstrating against the United States, against Kissinger and presenting a big security problem for our embassy was very vulnerable since it was one of those glass palaces, as was our embassy and chancery in Oslo, and I think in Copenhagen also. When the sun beats down on that building in the summer it is intolerable. So we had to put some sort of material over the upper floors. When that happened, when we put that material over, the Stockholm press came out with an analysis of what we were doing, and that the part we were covering up was the CIA floor of the embassy, which it wasn't. It was the DCM floor. While I was the chargé at some point or other, I was presented with a problem by the Saab aircraft people. They had these special Saab fighter planes, but in these planes a lot of the intelligence sophistication in them is from the United States. They aren't allowed to sell those planes equipped that way to anybody without our approval. Officials from Saab came to me and said, "We are not asking for approval to sell these planes to India, but if we were to ask do you think we would be allowed to sell them to India?" I sort of wanted to avoid giving them any false hope on it, but I didn't want to say this is absolutely negative right now. You can't tell how it would be when the situation emerges.

Q: This was a time with Indira Gandhi when we were on very difficult terms, India was very close to the Soviet Union.

JOHNSON: A famous problem with Swedish foreign policy was that they used Finland to argue for a soft approach to the Soviet Union. They say we mustn't do this; we mustn't do the other thing because we are endangering Finland. If we do something that is too irritating to the Soviet Union they will take it out on Finland. They would re-occupy Finland or something, so we should move carefully.

Q: Were the Soviets at this time fooling around with their submarines on the Finnish coast? There is the famous Whiskey on the Rocks episode where a Whiskey class Soviet submarine got stuck on the rocks outside of one of the major harbors of Sweden.

JOHNSON: Somehow that episode did not come to my attention.

Q: Well it might not have been during your period.

JOHNSON: I may have mentioned earlier visiting Bodø, an enormous hollow mountain in Northern Norway just around the Arctic Circle monitoring Soviet submarines coming out of Murmansk and that area into the north Atlantic. It was a tremendously effective operation. It taught me a little bit about fjords and the power of a fjord. This is up on a fjord so that when the tide is coming in a motor craft, a medium sized motor boat could

hardly get out, could hardly go against it. Great fishing, great salmon fishing. Lots of fishermen casting lines alongside of that fjord.

Thinking of any episodes that I can recall. I am not recalling any episodes in Sweden.

Q: Well, every once in a while Sweden did have a major spy case. Did they have a major Soviet spy case while you were there?

JOHNSON: Not that I can remember. I guess they did have the famous Wennerstrom spy case. He was an air force colonel or something like that. He was definitely a Soviet recruit. I am thinking of our own cases. Our own cases are really kind of shameful.

Q: Oh yeah. We had Ames, and Pollard. Well, were there problems with the young men who deserted the United States army and went to Sweden because of the Vietnam War. Then they were sort of stuck in Sweden weren't they?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: Did we do anything; did we get involved with them at all?

JOHNSON: One case particularly we did get involved in. It isn't exactly army. It is the same problem that is involved here. The one case, I don't think I can remember the man's name. He is a criminal from some city in the United States, let's say Cleveland or Chicago. He is African American. His crime is rape and attempted murder of an American woman living in an apartment in a tall skyscraper building. This fellow had some way of getting up the floors of the thing and coming in through a small kitchen window and attacking her in bed and shooting her, but just grazing here. Then came the trial. For the image of American efficiency, how can I confess this? He was in the courtroom with a passport in his pocket. He heard the tenor of the conversation between the judge and the jury and everything. So he excused himself to go to the bathroom and he went right to the airport. He knew the guilty sentence was coming. He fled to Sweden and was just living there. So now it fell to me to focus on changing the minds of the foreign ministry in Sweden, or the Swedish system, their chief official in the foreign ministry who handles legal matters, the chief legal officer, to persuade him in this case to allow us to extradite this fellow. It took some wooing of the director of the legal affairs office. He decided he would approve it. But somebody down the line passed the word to this American criminal that justice is threatening you now, so he scrammed. He beat it. He went to some other country, I think he went to Canada. I think later on I noticed in some press that he committed some crime in Canada now. Whatever happened.

Q: Well how did you find morale at the embassy?

JOHNSON: I am trying to think what could bother the morale of the American embassy in Stockholm. It is such a wonderful country and place. There are so many good aspects of the place. The recreational facilities, the ice skating, the golf, the tennis, their interest in sports. Beautiful parts of the country, I am trying to think of some angles to this

attractiveness. Did I mention in a previous conversation here long distance ice skating? I don't think so. I got into that there. Your long distance ice skate is much longer than a hockey skate. When you go in for it, you are going to go out into the frozen Baltic sea in the winter, and you are going to go out the waterways which flow inland from Stockholm. You are going to go in groups of about 25 let's say. You are going to be equipped in a certain way. You are going to have a knapsack. In it in a waterproofed wrapping, a change of underwear and more clothing, a serious amount of change of clothing. You are going to have a stave, a pole about this high off the ground here.

Q: You are talking about a three foot pole.

JOHNSON: Three foot pole to probe in dubious ice conditions. Usually these long distance ice skating clubs will be organized to that a couple of monitors bring up the rear of the group in case there are any people lagging or people having trouble or breaking something. There are lecturers along, who will speak regarding problems. Let's say we are out on the Baltic and there are some rocks out there just outside the harbor, and what happens to the ice around the rocks There is a geological explanation by these people. I am boasting now because several officials of the foreign ministry were part of this same ice skating group and they credited me very much as an American who joined them in this. They said the only other foreigner who has ever joined them in this is the Dutch ambassador. So the silver skates and the Dutch.

Q: Did you sense that the, how did you sense the Swedish attitude towards the Soviet Union?

JOHNSON: Well, I would say the Swedes from my point of view would be careful not to irritate or provoke the Soviets, and to avoid doing anything the Soviets could say was a provocative measure on their part. All the time they were urging us to be thinking about potential Soviet retaliation against Finland. That was one chief angle about it. Of course we had a situation in our embassy that perhaps I will describe now. If you think it is not to be published you can fix it. We have a CIA station chief who has suffered at the hands of the CIA. He has been under suspicion for years as a Soviet mole. He has been what you would consider punished. Punishment for being under suspicion would be being assigned to be station chief in Haiti. All the time he is completely innocent. Finally the CIA establishes that Paul Garbler never was a Soviet mole. He served in Moscow, a former navy officer. So we will reward him. We will give him Stockholm. All right. He is an avid golfer, we have plenty of golf. So he makes friends with the Soviet station chief. So if you are not CIA or NKVD or whatever you were calling them in the Soviet service at the time, people get nervous about the friendship between the two station chiefs. Well anyway, they were great buddies. One gives a party, the other guy is invited to the same party. So it is a little unsettling, but I would trust Garbler. Later on he skirted some system by having his wife write a book about some of his experiences.

Q: Well you left there about what, '76?

JOHNSON: Yes '76, transferred back to the Department.

Q: What did you do?

JOHNSON: Now I am vegetating, waiting to see if I will get another assignment and what it will be, and so I am put on the board of examiners.

Q: How did you find that?

JOHNSON: Well, darned interesting I would say. Because you are dealing with the future officers of the Foreign Service and you want to make a good selection. Is this procedure we are following the best we could devise for picking the good ones. I enjoyed that for a few years. No assignment was coming up, no embassy, so in 1980 I retired.

Q: During the time you were with the board of examiners, I was doing this from '75 to '76. I was wondering whether, I found it a fascinating time because we could really ask questions. Now it is very mechanistic, but at that time you could look at somebody's profile and ask questions you think they should be able to answer and ask questions they might have problems answering. Did you feel, were you impressed by the people that came before you?

JOHNSON: Yes. The problem was the narrowness between those that passed and those that didn't pass. To me an awful lot depended on the mental state of the team of examiners, who one morning could flunk a certain candidate whereas the next morning with a slight bit of chemistry difference in their outlook he would have passed. There are an awful lot of… I was always concerned about the number of people we were turning down who would have been good. I am thinking, too bad there are so many disappointed people here. There is one category of candidate which was delicate. That is the sons and daughters of Foreign Service officers that I knew. I would be upset if our team didn't see fit to pass them. In a number of cases they didn't, and the Foreign Service lost a good prospect.

Q: Well, your daughter came into the Foreign Service didn't she?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: When did she come into the Foreign Service?

JOHNSON: Let's see, I am not sure, It could be around 1979. And my son also came into the Foreign Service. I think they have done good work for the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, just briefly what have you done since you left the Foreign Service.

JOHNSON: Well then, I did what so many other Foreign Service officers have done. I went onto the team reviewing diplomatic records for release. I have done that in various venues here there and everywhere for about ten years. I gave myself a break from working and finally retired in 1980 or '81.

Q: Great. All right, we'll we will stop at this point.

End of interview