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

MARY KIDD

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INTERVIEW

Q: It's the twelfth of October and I am at Mary Kidd's in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, starting an interview with Mary who is interesting to us not only as a Foreign Service spouse, but she was herself a Foreign staff officer before meeting Coburn Kidd in Vienna

in 1951.

Mary, will you start in talking about this time in Prague which was of such interest to us all, and tell us how you happened to go into the Foreign Service, how you happened to go to Prague, and the situation in Czechoslovakia when you arrived. What year did you arrive?

KIDD: January of 1949.

Q: How did you happen to go into the Foreign Service?

KIDD: Well, it's funny. I've always wanted to go into the Foreign Service. I was interested in political things. Because of foreign affairs, my parents having been brought up in Austria, and they were very much affected by the things that were going on, and I absorbed that in many ways. I mean this was part of my life. And then I worked during the War for the Czechoslovak consulate in New York City. And then in 1948 when the Communists took over, I resigned. There was no way I was going to work for a Communist government.

I sent in my notice of resignation because I had to file -- as an American citizen working for a foreign government, I had to send in once a year to the State Department, you know, that I am an American citizen working for the foreign government. And then I worked at various jobs. And I submitted an application to the State Department to go into the Foreign Service and I heard nothing. While I was in the consulate there was a young woman who had been there with me and she had married a flight officer, a Czechoslovak flight officer. And after the War, she flew out to meet him, and on her way to meet him, he had been killed in the air. She went and convoyed. He was killed in a flight of some sort. So she landed in England, a widow.

Q: A Czech?

KIDD: She was an American citizen of Czech ancestry as I am an American citizen of Czech ancestry. So I don't know how it happened, but she then became attached to the Czech delegation in London and went with them all over through Carpathia, into Prague and so forth. She worked for the American embassy there. She then became a local employee at the American embassy in Prague. She was ready to re-marry and was leaving and apparently somebody had asked her if she knew of anybody who was an American-born citizen who spoke Czech who would be interested in... So apparently she told them about me. Then I got a letter from the State Department asking me if I would be interested in joining the State Department. "Yes," I wrote back, and I sent in an application. They sent me another one in the meantime. And then I didn't hear anything for a long while. And the next thing I heard a friend of mine saying, "Mary, the FBI is investigating you." "I don't know. What have I done?" (laughing) I didn't tell anybody about this because I don't like to tell anybody something's going to happen and then it doesn't happen.

And lo and behold, I think it was in September, I had a telegram from the State Department asking me if I'd come down for an interview at my own expense. I was living in New York at the time. And they interviewed me and then I didn't hear anything else for a long while. And then in November I got another telegram saying that everything went fine with the interview. If you'll come to Washington for training or orientation, whatever they called it in those days -- I can't remember now -- I would be sent Prague. I mean this was in the telegram which I kept -- maybe I have it somewhere, I don't know, but when you move around, you throw away a lot of things.

So I went down and I was there from November and came up for Thanksgiving And I was a little worried about this because my parents -- my mother was a widow at the time and we owned an apartment house. And she was the worst landlady in the world. (laughs) I said, "Mummy, I can't go because I can't leave you." My sister was away, my brother was away. "Mary, you go down and when you come back, I'll have the house sold." And she did. I mean at a tremendous loss, but she sold it and she moved out to Illinois.

And then I was supposed to sail on Christmas Eve on the SS Washington, I think. And that was canceled. I was glad because I wanted to be home for Christmas at least. So then I sailed on January 9th, I think it was. I'm not absolutely certain. And that's how it started. I mean those were the beginnings. This is how I got into it, the zigzags that happen in a person's life.

I got to Prague and they didn't know what to do with me. (laughing) I mean here I could speak Czech and do all sorts of things, so first of all I was on reception and then gradually I got into work with Milton Fried who was in the Political/Economic Section so I was his secretary for a while. Then there was a cut.

Q: Yes, now explain a little bit. How many people were there when you arrived?

KIDD: This is where I'm a little hazy. I'm not sure. I always think it was about 180 or something like that. I'm not completely certain because there were various trials of local employees. This was in a very sticky time, you know, what they call the Stalinist Period. And because of this the Czechs then asked -- this would have been then in 1950, early 1950, spring of 1950 -- that we had to cut our staff two-thirds. So we had to cut our staff from whatever it was -- I don't remember the exact figures. Those would have to be verified by somebody else. I think we were left with about 35 at that time. Then we said, "Okay. We cut two-thirds, you have to in Washington cut two-thirds." And that left them with twelve. When the Czechs cut their staff two-thirds, it left them with twelve. So then they came back and said, "Man for man." So all of us -- the ambassador was not included in the twelve.

Q: Twelve plus one.

KIDD: Twelve plus one or else it was eleven plus one. Anyway, whatever it was I'd have

to look at something where I have a list of all of the people who were there at the time. So then we ended up with that nucleus, that very small core. There was no security guard. We all had to pull guard duty, those who were on the staff. The wives weren't included in this at that time. I think later on they had to be.

Q: No, we didn't.

KIDD: Never? Anyway, it was these officers except the ambassador again. Of course, why should he pull it? (laughing)

Q: But he said once, "I would have, but I wouldn't give them the satisfaction."

KIDD: Of course he would. He was one of the best ambassadors I ever had. (laughs) And he would have of course. So then we were doing our regular work and then bundled up and went up to -- what did they call it -- the Code Room. And barricaded ourselves in there with them. It was a great big door and we were given a Carbine. I didn't know how to use the darn thing. It was just there on the table. Probably I would have used it if I had to. And we spent the night. And when the first American officer came into the embassy, then we could go home, take a shower, and come back to our regular stint. (laughs) It wasn't very troublesome except when the code machines went off or, somehow the Czechs always knew when I was on guard duty and the phone kept ringing practically all night long because they knew that I could speak Czech. And they kept hassling me I guess would be the word. Anyway, Pat, it was a time when those of us who were left there just banded together. We were all working together at it.

Q: Didn't you pack everybody up, they had 36 hours or something?

KIDD: Yes because, I forget, there was a 48-hour period, I think it was about 48 hours, and so everybody had to chip in and everybody did. It was a sad time because a lot of your friends left. I had a friend who shared an apartment with me and it was sad because they were all sad, everybody was sad to leave.

Q: Yes. What was your maiden name?

KIDD: Harak which could be translated as "mountaineer, miner", whatever. But I've got sort of a mixed parentage. My father's mother was German, her father was Czech, my mother's father was Austrian and her mother was Czech. So it's on both sides. And my parents met in Vienna. This was one of those things. Anyway, where do you want me to go?
Q: No, I'm interested in the trial. This was such an important time in Europe.

KIDD: Well that was in 1951.

Q: Was this after Bill Otis?

KIDD: No, that was the Bill Otis trial. There were several local employees of the American embassy who had been put on trial at the time. Then at the beginning of July when Bill Otis, who was an AP, Associated Press correspondent with the New York Times was put on trial. He had been picked up on all sorts of charges of espionage and he was the most innocuous-looking man I've ever seen in my life. But whether he was a spy or not, that's immaterial.

Then there was a vice consul who was -- Dick Johnson at the time -- who was allowed to come to the trial. They didn't allow lots of other people, but the vice consul could. And also I guess because I could understand, I was also given a permit to. So Dick Johnson and I were at the Otis trial which lasted about three days. We had to be at the trial at 8 o'clock and then until 6. And in the course of this trial, they were asking all sorts of questions and this was brought out in one of the books that was written either by Bill Otis later or Ellis Briggs, I can't remember which book it was in, where it mentioned that -- because I was taking down notes all this time, translating from Czech into English and into shorthand -- mental acrobatics anyway you want to look at it! And I'd come back to the embassy with a steno book, sometimes two, full of notes and have to transcribe that after the trial so they could send these things back to Washington. I was finished sometimes at 10 o'clock and the next morning I'd have to be at the trial.

There was one point -- there were several points in the trial that were peculiar. One was when the... They had to translate all these things for Bill Otis from Czech into English and English into Czech. And sometimes the translator got ahead of his testimony, so you knew the whole thing was rigged, even the answers. Unless you knew what the answers were, you wouldn't know. And that was the only time, you know. I could catch it because I could get the first and then I got the second and I could see that Bill hadn't said that yet. It came in at the next... And then the next thing was, it must have been the second day of the trial, Bill was asked to mention all the people who were spies in the embassy. So, you know, he went down. Some who were the obvious ones, let's put it that way.

Q: These were Czechs?

KIDD: No American spies. And then he mentioned my name. And I just sat there transcribing all this into shorthand and I suddenly realized, "He's talking about me!" And then I continued. I simmered down a bit and then I continued. And the day went on and I transcribed these notes. When I got to the point where I mentioned it, I couldn't read my notes! I mean I had a mental block and somebody else had to come and do it for me. Just that one section and then afterwards it was all right. In the meantime, the ambassador knew that this was going to not be well for me. I wasn't a spy! I was just an employee of the embassy!

Q: But still.

KIDD: In the meantime things had been arranged so that whatever effects I had would be packed up and the day after the trial I left. The funny thing is that you have to submit a

list to the Foreign Office of every single item you own. If you had twelve handkerchiefs and you ended up with thirteen, you couldn't take that thirteenth one. And so everything had to be very carefully entered down the list.

Q: Such an inventory!

KIDD: Well, I didn't have much in those days so it wasn't all that bad, but you know -- twelve handkerchiefs against thirteen -- one I had to leave behind! Then the ambassador wouldn't let me leave alone. I had to...

Q: Who was the ambassador?

KIDD: Ellis O. Briggs, one of the best men that I've ever served under. He arranged a convoy to go with me. So there was a car in front of me, my car, and then there was another car.

Q: As you drove out...

KIDD: As I drove out of Czechoslovakia. Leaving the country I was stopped twice. And all of us very carefully followed the rules. If it said 40 kilometers, we went 40 kilometers, even 39 so we wouldn't go over. (laughs) But they stopped me. And one time one of the officers (said), "Well I see you're a careful driver." But they kept this up until I got to the German border. And then that was the end of that.

But while I was in Prague, there were one or two other things, but those are incidental. The first DCM was Jim Penfield. He was very, very good. And so was his wife Anne. One time I had to go to -- I don't know whether this should be said or not. He received a letter from someone who was concerned about a Czech relative in Cardober Vary in the Cazbat. And he asked me if I would be willing to deliver this letter. He didn't want me to go alone, so I asked one of the -- we called them flyboys because he was in the Air Force -- what was his name? Jim Macalroy, something, whatever. So we drove to Cardober Vary to deliver the letter. This woman was in the hospital. I mean those were little things that we were doing to help the American citizens who were concerned about their own.

And then after he left, Tyler Thompson was the DCM. I'd always wanted to go to Vienna. I mean after my posting. Technically I should have left in February, but because all these different trials were coming up, I... And they also couldn't find a replacement who had so-called "qualifications." So I didn't leave until July. But Tyler was on vacation and my transfer orders came in. And I was supposed to go to Frankfurt. So I thought, well Vienna. I'll save that for next time, maybe.

And he came back and was going through all the telegrams. And he called me in and said, "Mary, I thought you wanted to go to Vienna." "Yes, I do, but Vienna isn't offered, Frankfurt isn't such a bad thing." Now maybe you'd better turn this off. All right, he said, "You want to go to Vienna," and I said, "Yes I do." And so he said, "Why don't you go to

Frankfurt and then go to Vienna and see which one of those posts you like." So I flew to Frankfurt and I was interviewed by Walt Stoessel at the time. Then there was another funny officer there. His name begins with a D and I can remember being intrigued because he had his shoes under the table and he had house slippers on. I believe he had corns or bunions or something, I don't know. And then Walt Stoessel interviewed me, and he was very nice and everything was nice. And Blanche Thompson was there at the time. She been one of the girls who had PNG'd out, well, went out with the cut.

Q: From Prague.

KIDD: From Prague. And she was in the peripheral section there at the time. And I stayed with her. And it all seemed very nice. Then I flew to Vienna and I talked to [inaudible]. I didn't talk to Coburn in those days. It wasn't he. I talked to someone in the peripheral section. I can't remember whether it was Fred Salter or whoever it was. I can't remember. Anyway, I came back and he says, "Have you made up your mind?" I said, "No question. I want Vienna if I can get it." So apparently he wrote back to someone in Washington and instead of assigning me to Frankfurt, assigned me to Vienna and that's where I met my husband, Coburn Kidd.

Q: And you served there. You were not married while you were in Vienna?

KIDD: No. I arrived in Vienna, it was the end of October.

Q: And what was Coburn then?

KIDD: He was chief of the Political Section at the time. And I really didn't meet him until the Dowlings -- he was the DCM I guess, Walter Dowling was the DCM at the time. And they had a party for all the new people who came into the Political Section, Economic, whatever. And Coburn was at that party and I remember talking to him, but I mean nothing...

And then at Christmas Tully and Anne Torbert were giving a Christmas party for all of the people in the Political Section. And Coburn at that point had planned to go to Greece so I didn't meet him then. I was supposed to go to this party, but I was living in a flat and it was uphill. You had to walk uphill to get to the Torberts, so I couldn't drive. The roads were glut ice, you know that black ice as they call it here. And I kept going up two steps, sliding down one, going up one, sliding down two. And finally I slid all the way back and I called up Torberts, "I can't make it." So I never got to the party. So I didn't meet him. And he wasn't there either.

Then there were a group of about five of us girls who decided in February of 1952 to give something called a "Gay Twenties" party. And we all dressed as flappers and everybody else dressed as whatever the style was. And Coburn was at this party. Well he didn't put on anything except a false nose. He came in a tux. He didn't have anything except a false nose and that was his concession to the "Gay Twenties." And he taught me how to play

roulette, you know this sort of thing. And then he was talking. And I remember it just hit me. He was special. And we'd go, we went there and things of that sort.

And one time he asked me to get a list of the masses at a church that I hadn't gone to. I went to the Catholic church and he did too, for that matter, when he did go. It was Maria Algastada and so I asked for it. I was living at the Bristol at the time. First of all I lived at the Cottage Hotel or something. And it was a broom closet. I mean I was there only two or three weeks and then they moved me.

Q: Well the Bristol was filled with Americans, wasn't it? Foreigners?

KIDD: Oh, yes, it was requisitioned by the Americans. And so after the two or three weeks in which I lived in this broom closet, then they moved me to the Bristol which was a slightly larger broom closet that I lived in. (laughs) And anyway, he asked me to get the list of masses for the Maria Algastada church in Vienna. And so I asked the porter to get them for me. And Coburn that evening came to pick me up for dinner. And the porter handed him this list. Coburn had asked me by telephone, so you knew that everybody was being bugged.

Q: Even in Vienna.

KIDD: Even more so. I mean just as much as in all the others. So that was one of the funny things that happened in the Service. And then Coburn was transferred to Washington in May and I had to resign from my post. And I didn't leave until after July. Donnelly was the ambassador at the time. Then we got married in September of 1952 and lived happily ever after. (laughs)

Q: Back in Washington.

KIDD: Well we were back in Washington until....

Q: You were married in...

KIDD: ...in Lisle, Illinois because my mother had moved out to Illinois and my brother, being a priest, was out there, too, and he married us. And Coburn and his mother and brother and sister-in-law came. So that was in September of 1952 and then we went immediately back to Washington. Coburn, because he was not yet a full Foreign Service officer.

Q: Oh!

KIDD: He had been working in the State Department, you see. And when he came back he wasn't entitled to home leave so we never had a honeymoon.

Q: He was not a Foreign Service officer. Was he Wristonized?

KIDD: He wasn't exactly. There was one thing, it wasn't the Wristonization. It was something where you were able to transfer.

Q: Cross-laterally into the Service?

KIDD: Exactly, yes.

Q: Did he do that in Vienna?

KIDD: No, in Prague, no not in Prague, in Washington.

Q: After Vienna.

KIDD: Oh, yes. So you see when he came back he wasn't entitled to home leave.

Q: Well, what was he doing in Vienna?

KIDD: He was [chief of the] political [section]. We didn't have an embassy at that time, it was only a mission. He had been on the Vienna desk in Washington and he was sent out to Vienna for two years. He had been there from '48 to -- well I guess from '49 until then.

Q: Well he certainly had by the end of his career a reputation as one of the leading legal authorities on Germany.

KIDD: Oh, yes, that was his specialty.

Q: Even at that time it was his specialty. When you were in Vienna?

KIDD: Oh, yes, it was Germanic things. And he having had a career... First of all, he started out as a philosopher and got his degree in philosophy at St. Andrews in Scotland. And then he came back and his father said, "Can you earn your living at this?" And he said that there was the Depression. And he said, "No." So he went to Georgetown University and got a law degree. So he became a member of the Washington Bar. And he also worked in the Archives in the day while he was doing that. And there were a couple of other things. He worked on Wall Street for a while. And was called into the Army at that time. Then during the War he was in the OSS. When he left the Army, then I think he worked at the Archives then. I can't remember the sequence, I'd have to look up his biography.

How he got into the State Department at that point I'm not 100 percent sure. If he were here he'd tell me. And then in the State Department he was sent to Vienna.

Q: So this was at the time that you met him? During this period?

KIDD: Yes. And he was not yet a Foreign Service officer. I think it was the first few months that we were in Washington after we were married or early the next year I guess, when he was accepted into the Foreign Service. It was not exactly Wristonization, but there was an in-between when there was a crossover.

Q: And there were people who came in, a lot of people who came in after. Well I can find that out.

KIDD: I'm not certain about that. And then he became a Foreign Service officer and went on to three or four... Because he was a Foreign Service officer three Reserve when he was in Vienna, that's what it was.

Q: A Reserve officer?

KIDD: And then he became a regular Foreign Service officer. And he went in as a three and when he left the Service he was an FSO one.

Q: Yes. Consul general in Hamburg.

I want to have you describe Coburn Kidd. You just said he was a Renaissance man.

KIDD: Well someone here in Jaffrey Center after having met Coburn described him as a Renaissance man and he really was. He was a philosopher, he was a lawyer, he was a diplomat, he was well-read, music. I mean, you name it.

Q: He published a book.

KIDD: No, he never published a book. Well, he did make A Portrait of a Village of Jaffrey Center which was photographs of the various houses within the village. The village isn't all that big. And then his last thing, just before he died, was something called Streets and Roads of Jaffrey which was really definitive and it's been really useful for the town. He was involved very much in town affairs on the legal side of things before he died. Assistant Town Counsel, that's what he was. And he enjoyed that. And he did that almost until the month that he died.

Q: You retired from Hamburg and came here to live.

KIDD: Well that was another story. I mean we'd traveled all around to find a place to live and we ended up here which we love. And it was really marvelous because the community here at that time was composed of a lot of retired professors, very erudite. I mean in all fields whether it was English, whether it was philosophy, whether it was history, whatever. And he joined a reading group and he'd come home sometimes and say, "Mary it's like going to a college seminar. I mean all these smart people." He didn't realize he was that way, didn't think that he was smart enough. It was just perfect for his retirement years. But it wasn't enough so he went back to his legal things. And he enjoyed

that immensely.

Q: And passed the Bar exam again.

KIDD: Oh, yes. He had to pass the Bar exam here in New Hampshire. He did that the first year we were here. He was a member of the Washington Bar, the New York Bar, and then the New Hampshire Bar. He had to pass that before he could do anything in the legal field.

Q: You know I want to take you back a little bit to after you served in Washington. Where did you go after you were married and lived in Washington?

KIDD: We were there until 1956 and we were supposed to go to the Imperial Defense College in London. This was in December. We were on the boat, we had closed down the apartment, separated things that we wanted to take with us from things that had to go into storage. We were in New York, we had put the car on the ship, excess baggage, and just kept a few things. We were going to be there for two days.

But you know we all have to take medicals before we left. And he had had his medical and I had had mine. And while we were in New York -- I remember it was the Henry Hudson Hotel -- when we checked in, after we had put the car on the ship and all the excess stuff, the State Department wanted him to telephone. So he called back, called the State Department. They said they weren't completely satisfied with his medical reports. But if he wanted to go to London and then had to take another medical and all this sort of thing. Then he could do that. But we decided no, the wisest thing to do was for him to go back and straighten this whole thing out.

Well, the upshot of this was that we didn't sail. He called me from Washington, "Mary get the car off the ship, get everything else. We're not sailing." He flew up the next day and then told me the whole thing. They had found a spot on his lungs that they weren't completely satisfied with. And so we didn't want to go back to Washington. This was just before Christmas. And they were slightly [understaffed].

But this was the holiday period. So what we said, we've always liked to go to Rehoboth for the holidays, especially when it was out-of-season because the beach was empty, we could walk back and forth and collect shells and whatever. So we decided, "We'll go to Rehoboth and take our chance and we can get a flat somewhere or a cabin or whatever." We were lucky, we were able to get something. So we stayed there until after New Year's and drove to Washington. Coburn went into Bethesda and some very good friends of mine, Jeff and Betty Lewis had me stay with them in Virginia. He was there about a month.

They said at that time that it was TB so then we got in the car and drove out to Colorado to Simmons Hospital. We got there in February. I got a small efficiency flat. Coburn was in the hospital. And they kept taking tests. And finally they decided to do an exploratory

and when they did the exploratory they decided it wasn't TB at all, that it had been lung cancer, and they took out one of the lobes of his lung. And then everything turned out well, thank God. I mean he recovered fairly well, fairly quickly. And we left for Washington in June. And Coburn went into the State Department and everything was fine.
And then we sailed the following December for London, just a year later than we would have gone. And then we were in London from 1957, '58 and '59. One year at the Imperial Defense College, that was fun, and then he was assigned to the embassy as liaison officer with the Parliamentary Labour Party. Mind you, he was more of what I would say a Conservative than a Labourite. (laughs) But this was all right. It was marvelous because you met the most interesting people at that time. And then we went to Japan.

Q: And what was he in Japan?

KIDD: A political counselor at that time.

Q: How did you like Japan? This was new for both of you.

KIDD: Oh, I just felt we weren't there long enough! We were there only two years. And that isn't long enough. You're just beginning to absorb... This is such a different culture. I mean in Europe it's easier to assimilate things. But in Japan it takes time. And first of all to get yourself organized and everything else. I went to classes every single day that I could to take Japanese lessons. You know I hate to get up in the morning, early that is. But I'd go there and the classes started at 9. I had about an hour or an hour and a half. I'd go home and do whatever homework. But it helped me to at least speak some Japanese. Many Japanese ladies at that time didn't speak English so at least you could ask, "How are you? How many children do you have?" And if they asked me, I would be able to answer. That was about the extent because Japanese is an ongoing thing and you never say, "Oh, I know it all." You never do. (laughs). It's just like many other places.

Q: But you made the effort which was...

KIDD: Well it was so fascinating. I mean any country. If you make the effort. Fortunately I was able to speak Czech so I didn't have to worry about that. I did have to brush up on my German because we grew up speaking Czech and German. But I had to brush up on that. So I did lessons there. Well, when we got back to Washington I didn't have to worry about that. There was not a language problem there. And in London, no problem there. But Japan was a world that was so completely different.

Q: And you were there for two years and then?

KIDD: We were there for two years and then we got a telegram from the State Department that he was being assigned to Bonn, Germany.

Q: And what year was that?

KIDD: '59. So we were in Bonn for six years. We had two home leaves I think in that time.

Q: And what was he in Bonn?
KIDD: He was chief of the Political Section. And then he was assigned after that to Hamburg so altogether we had nine years in Germany.

Q: And that was when he was the consul general in Hamburg?

KIDD: In Hamburg.

Q: Where he became a legal authority on Germany.

KIDD: Well he's always been a German expert. He had some of his schooling in Tubingen. When he was at St. Andrews he'd go down to Tubingen in the summertime between semesters or whatever it was. His interest had been German affairs so that I think he might have felt that he was out of his depth in Japan, I don't know. (laughs)

Q: I can't believe he ever was anywhere. (Pause)

KIDD: ...on holiday. The attitude was, "I can't wait to get back. What else was doubling."

Because we were doubling already. And then somebody else taking your duty while you were away. We just couldn't wait to get back. Even though it was a stressful time. I will admit that it took me a long while to get over what I call the "neck twitch," you know, to see who's behind me or who's listening. And you never talked over the phone, I mean anything that was important. I had Czech friends and we always arranged to meet. And if they said, "Come on Wednesday," it meant come on Tuesday or whatever. We changed the code from week to week so there wouldn't be a chance of being followed. I would always get into the least American clothes.

There was one incident when I was in Prague before... I thought I had on the most innocuous clothes. Unfortunately I had a red shoulder bag. I got into a trolley car and I was going from one place to another -- I was going to a museum I think at the time. And there were two women sitting across from me. They had their shopping bags and cabbages, mostly cabbages because you couldn't get very much. We were allowed one egg a month at that time. I think officers had two or three depending on their family. But we only had one egg a month. Anyway, they were sitting there talking and finally one of them looked at me, up and down. And then she sort of whispered something to her neighbor. I couldn't hear the whisper. The other neighbor, her friend, looked me up and down and in a voice I could hear in Czech, "She's not pretty, but she's interesting." (laughs) These are little vignettes that really have nothing to do with the Foreign Service but have affected the people who have been in the Foreign Service in the foreign country.

Q: Of course. You were completely cut off by that time, weren't you?

KIDD: Very much so, yes.

Q: Other Americans were not allowed in the country.

KIDD: Because I wanted my sister in 1950 to come visit me because we were going to drive to Rome -- it was the Holy Year in Rome at the time. She couldn't get a visa so I had to meet her in Frankfurt. Then we drove from Frankfurt to Rome. She stayed with a friend of mine who was one of those who had also gone in the cut in Paris. And then Anne and Lucy drove to Frankfurt and I met them there and she drove to Rome. She couldn't get in!

Q: While Bill Otis was in prison. Wasn't that the reason that we broke off everything but diplomatic relations with...

KIDD: Yes. They kept manufacturing all these things. It's all coming out now. Even when they manufactured things against their own people. Oh, what was the name of the man? It began with a G. It's been so long ago that I haven't even thought about. He was subsequently hanged. It was that very rigid Stalinesque period. They were more papal than the Pope, you know, that sort of thing. More Communist than the Communists. And they still are to this day.

Q: Yes, yes. (Pause)

KIDD: ..to my mother. And she said, "Aren't you Mrs. Harak? And she said, "Yes." "I have all these clippings." She knew my mother, I don't know from where. And she gave my mother all these clippings of me. Mummy hadn't even seen them. I think they were in the Daily News or Tribune or whatever.

Q: During the trial.

KIDD: There was one sharp reporter came. And you see in the meantime of course Mummy had moved out to Illinois so she wouldn't have seen the New York papers. I had originally been listed as coming from New York City. And so they interviewed...

Q: It's 1990 now, nearly a year later, and we're sitting on my porch. I am talking with Mary Kidd on my porch in Rindge, next door to Jaffrey. Mary has been back to Prague since all the happenings in Czechoslovakia. She went back in May and I think it will be very interesting for her to add some of her impressions of Czechoslovakia today as a second-generation Czech who has been going back to Czechoslovakia since she was a young girl. Mary, when did you first go to Czechoslovakia?

KIDD: In 1929 the whole family went to Europe and was there for the whole summer. We went in June and we didn't come back until the end of September, I guess it was. And so that was my early days there. And then as I think about how I felt then, it was a happy time for me of course, being young. I didn't know anything about politics or anything like that. I could sense the happiness and the atmosphere. People were gay and happy, fairly happy.

Then the next time I went there was in 1949 when I worked at the embassy for two and one-half years. And that was a grim period. You were followed everywhere. Pat will know. And people were afraid, that's it, they were afraid and you never made eye contact with anybody unless you knew somebody personally. And even then you tried not to do it. They scurried along. They always had these little suitcases walking around with that shuffling walk. As a matter of fact when I was there one time I even bought a whole outfit of Czech clothes so I'd blend into the crowd. And people still recognized me as a foreigner. And I asked my Czech friends, I said, "What's wrong? Is my Czech bad?" And they said, "No, there's nothing wrong with your speaking language. It's the way you walk." Because I walked straight and I looked around and was curious about things. And they all scurried around like little turtles.

Then the next time, it was in 1964 when I went back with my mother. And that was still in the pretty grim period, although in the countryside it wasn't so bad. Then in '69, Coburn and I went there and we had about two weeks in Czechoslovakia. And that was just at the time, it was in June and July of '68, it was just at the time that Dubcek was starting that "Prague Spring". Everybody was gung ho to get... You know, "we're going to do something, we're going to be free." And of course right after that, it was right after the Russian-Czech soccer game that had been in September or October, I guess. The Czechs won over the Russians and of course the streets were just crowded with young people particularly in jubilation and everything else. And that was the end of the uprising. Because it started then -- and it had been beginning -- but it snowballed until that time, until the Russian tanks came in.

And at that time a young student, I think it was at... I forget now which university it was. Was it Charles University or ... ? Well, whatever. He burned himself right in front of the statue of St. Wenceslas on the main street and to this day there is a memorial. It's really a living memorial started out by people burning candles in his memory. And what has happened in that time is that about a foot-high circle now has formed of wax drippings and into that people still keep adding new candles and they're different colors. They're different colors, it's not just black or white. And flowers are always there. And there's a picture of him that used to be there right in the middle, just him alone. But now since the Velvet Revolution, they've added a couple more of the old-timers like Tomésha and Benes and a few others, I can't remember who they are. There are some women there and I can't remember their names.

And the spirit is so <u>different</u>. You couldn't tell the Czechs from the foreigners. It was crowded. Everybody was walking out, laughing, music. Stores are always crowded. Of

course you can't always get everything. You still have to get in line. If you want to buy a couple of rolls, you stand in line to buy a couple of rolls, and when you get there, they're sold out. (laughs) Or else you go into a shop and you see a hat you like and they don't have it in your size. Or you go there the next day and they don't have any hats left. (laughs) And they're not stocking either.

Q: They don't know when they're going to get them.

KIDD: One thing I remember. That the city is now so beautiful. Fortunately we only had one day of rain and we walked and walked and walked. That old town square is just magic. It looks like all the icing on a lovely birthday cake or wedding cake. I mean it just looks like a great big wedding cake, the whole circle.

Q: So they are beginning to really restore?

KIDD: Well they must have been doing it for a long time. It's a city that really has to be constantly...

Q: Because when we were there in '85, it really looked like nobody cared. People put trash in places.

KIDD: But you see they burn that soft coal and within a few years all these things dull. But it was interesting when you went up to the castle and then, just to the left of the castle as you're facing the castle is the Archbishop's Palace. Well, you've never seen anything more glorious. Of course we thought maybe they had done it because the Pope was coming. But this had apparently been in the works to have it re-done. It was <u>beautiful</u>. Pink and gold, all the gold picked out, all the seals and everything else. The castle itself -- everything looks splendid. What you notice again if you have been there before is you don't see soldiers with guns. Now you do occasionally see two -- maybe they're the local militia, I don't know. I couldn't tell...

Q: Well, like in London.

KIDD: Like the police. But they don't have guns. One of them might have a gun. But the other one has a walkie-talkie. But none of these tommy guns and none of these horrible battle fatigue type of things. They dress very smartly. Their uniforms are nice and neat and tidy and well-fitted, too. Handsome young boys, too. But it was interesting. No guns, even in front of the castle!

Q: No military guns.

KIDD: No military. The feeling of being watched over by the military is completely gone.

Q: Well you were there just before the elections.

KIDD: Yes. I left on the 7th, the election was on the 9th. So that was another interesting thing, listening to my Czech friends and listening to television and watching Havel speak. The spirit of the people was something that was so overwhelming.

Q: It was interesting to me to hear about your friends, three sisters -- two Communists and one not.

KIDD: Yes. My friend is married to a pediatric surgeon who should be retiring soon because he's about 78 now. But he's still going strong. She's my friend. She's about four days younger than I am, that's all. She had an older sister and a younger sister. And I knew all the three girls when we first went there in 1928. I hadn't seen those other two sisters in a long time because one of them was married to a doctor of philosophy, a very strong Communist, as was this older sister. The youngest sister was married to a secretary of the Communist Party, a strong Communist, and she, too. Then he became a Czech ambassador in Rome. He's since died, but the two sisters and one of the brothers-in-law is still living. I didn't get to see them because there isn't much going back and forth especially at this time because my friend...

We don't talk about politics because I don't want them to say, "See I told you so." I mean this is her way of looking at it. I couldn't contain myself. I'd certainly go out and say it. (laughs) But their children, the children of the two sisters who had been strong Communists, are very resentful of their parents now. They're blaming them for what they have caused and they're saying it's their fault because they were the ones who were part of the whole establishment.

Q: Mary, do you think they were Communists because of the situation in Czechoslovakia or were they Communists like so many of the British were in-between the wars. In the '30's, if you had a heart, you were a Communist.

KIDD: No, this I think was part of the way they grew up. Because at the time when Tomésha Masaryk was re-building the republic, he believed very much in what they called the "free-thinking" individual. I think that was part of the whole period of bringing Socialism to the forefront rather than anything else. And that stayed with those... As a matter of fact, my friend was not a particularly... I mean, she came from a Catholic family, but she'd fallen away from the Church, and you know, was shaky about it. But then I guess it was in 1950, one of her children died and she suddenly realized her little girl was going to go to Heaven and she wasn't and she'd never see her, that was her attitude. (laughter) Then her husband -- both of them are friends of my parents, their parents were friends of my parents -- he was always a strong Catholic. And because he never joined the Communist Party, he never got to the top job of the medical profession because he wasn't a Communist, card-carrying. However, anytime there was a Communist who had a child who was ill and needed an operation, they always had him do it, not anybody else.

Q: So they didn't suffer as much as some.

KIDD: They didn't suffer. This is what my friend said -- Emma. She said, "We didn't suffer. True, there were restrictions that we lived with." But to say that they suffered under that... She said that you couldn't say that. And I can believe that, too.

Q: It was a form of discrimination, but it didn't...

KIDD: Exactly. Well, as you know, they had the degrees of shops. When you went shopping, if you were the ordinary man on the streets, you had to take what there was. And whether the head of cabbage was the size of an apple or whether it was the [size of a cabbage], you still paid the same amount for either one. Then they had what they called a lower-grade Communists shop that was tucked away where nobody could see it. They had to have cards and they could shop there. Then they had the ones [for] the Number One Communists. When I was there with my mother, Emma took me to one of the Number One ones because of her sister. I was appalled. I mean every luxury that the average man on the street couldn't get, never had. And the meat when you could get it was all fat, you know that sort of thing, whereas in the Number One and Two stores...

And now the shops had a lot of food. Of course, by our standards, it didn't seem expensive. But then our income is different. For them, certain things, they still had to worry -- not worry, but think about whether they should spend it on this or on that. Necessities like milk they can get, and that sort of thing. Fresh vegetables are still chancy because they haven't opened up the free market yet for them. Farmers come in and bring in their produce. It's coming in slowly. We saw a few around Prague at the time.

But what is plentiful are these smoked meats. Any variety of frankfurter. I mean, you have to know -- those from Arabia and those from... And they had a lot of those shelves. Again, I can't talk about the prices because I'd make the comparisons. To me it didn't seem expensive, but for them, yes. The interesting thing, though, is if you saw something in the shop that you liked -- I remember going in and I bought a small pewter owl for a friend of mine who likes them. And I went another place and I saw <u>exactly</u> the same thing and I thought, "I wonder if I paid more or less?" It was the same price.

Q: Still.

KIDD: Still. They still haven't gotten on to the free economy. The restaurants -- they are few. They are good, but you have to make reservations <u>days</u> in advance. You can't just walk in and say, "Do you have room for two?" Not just that day. <u>Days</u> in advance. And they're always crowded. The theaters are full. Of course, they always were. That was always one of the things -- that was their outlet, too. And while I was there I went to see one of the Capek plays -- "The Insects" -- did you hear about it?

Q: No.

KIDD: It's a sort of metaphysical sort of thing. I think that's what they call it.

Q: You saw Mother Teresa.

KIDD: And my highpoint is meeting Mother Teresa. Oh that was exciting. One of the daughters of my friend called and said that she had heard that Mother Teresa was going to be at the Church of St. Anthony in a working-class neighborhood and she'd be there at 6 o'clock. And I was exhausted. I had just put my friend on the train and she was gone and she'd walked my feet off and I was going to put my feet up and do nothing. But when this came up, oh there was no way you could keep me away! So we got into the Metro, then we took a streetcar, then we walked some more, so it took about an hour and a half or a little bit more. And we got there and the church was packed. It was the last day in May, I remember that now.

And low and behold, before the mass actually began because it was the last of the services that they had for her, Mother Teresa came in with her entourage. She had about five or six young women with her who wear white veils and white dresses and a blue band around them. And Mother Teresa, who is tiny -- I mean she just got lost in the crowd because everybody was towering over her -- she came in and greeted everyone. She speaks in English. She's Yugoslav by birth, but she speaks in English. And I almost had a chance to translate for her and I -- well, somebody else got in and I will admit, I could have done a better job. (laughter) That's not bragging, that's true.

Q: Well, Mary, they want you to come and...

KIDD: Well, they did ask me, but again you see, it's something that everybody wants to learn now. The English -- they have to learn now. Many of them didn't bother to learn English because their attitude was "we'll never need it." They kept thinking this suppression, this domination by the Russians was going to continue forever. Well, they had to learn Russian and the parents did urge their children to have private lessons [in English]. "No, we'll never need it." Now they're regretting it of course. So one of the granddaughters of my friend is studying. And when I was there, she was reading, she could read quite well already. [To Tina] I've got to ask you about some books that I could send to her that are in English.

And now that the interest is everything towards the West, you can't buy a Czech-English dictionary there. You can get stacks of Russian ones if you want, but you can't buy them [Czech-English dictionary]. They're not in any bookstore in Prague. One of the men who was serving -- somebody came in asking for it. And he said, "I'd like to have a Czech-English dictionary." This was in Czech. And he said, "They're not to be had. And when they come in, I don't know." I mean everybody wanted them as soon as they came in, you know.

They have good book shops, though, and they're good books, relatively cheap, too. But that's one of the things that they can get there in that subsidized printing. My friends were surprised when I came in with paperbacks to read. "Why? Don't you have hard[backs]?"

Of course paperbacks are the best thing for traveling. (laughs) You finish it and you can give it to somebody. I just left all the paperbacks I had with them. Except the trouble with that is, the print is small.

Q: Yes, and hard [to read].

KIDD: Anyway they're good to travel. So that was wonderful. (pause)

Q: Yes, it's the young people who started this. It's the young people who...

KIDD: Yes, they're the ones who started it and they're keeping it up, too. The fascinating thing is when they're campaigning the way we do for our elections because they had about 23 parties running. Well, Havel said he wanted everyone to have their say-so in all of this. And if some of them were left of center, some were left of left of center, and others... The main one, of course, was the Civic Forum. And then they had the Catholic Democratic Party and the -- some social -- there were 23, I couldn't name them all. And it was fascinating listening to them on the television. They had the panels, the same sort of thing that we have here.

Q: Free to speak.

KIDD: Well they would have all of them. I mean we have mostly Democratic debates and Republican debates, but there they had all the parties. And then there would be questions. And some of them would be very articulate and others were less so. But they all had a chance to say their piece and then they'd argue among each other. You know, one would say something... And that was fascinating to watch. That wouldn't have been possible!

Q: Well you said the farmers were voting Communist.

KIDD: Most of the farmers voted Communist because most all their farms have been collectivized. And they're very happy with that. They feel that they don't have the responsibility of getting out whether rain or shine to take care of their crops, feed their stock and worry about anything. This is all taken care of by the State. And so many of them, perhaps not all of them, but in many cases they were going to vote for Communists, they said.

Q: Well were they worried about who owned where they lived?

KIDD: No, that didn't bother them that much anyway. And the children had moved away. In the old days, you know the custom was you stayed on the farm and the oldest son or somebody would stay there. But that's all [gone now] or else, if they did work on the farm, they only worked 9 to 5 or whatever the hours were, and they didn't have to stay until it was dark, so they were quite satisfied with that.

Q: Well it's logical.

KIDD: It's going to be a long haul for many of them, and there are going to be some disappointments along the way, too, I think because I'm not sure that many of them know exactly what democracy is other than the freedom of speech and freedom of press and religion and all that. They don't realize that they're going to have to work for it.

Q: The work ethic.

KIDD: That's something that the President himself stressed. That the morality of the people -- he wasn't thinking in terms of their spiritual morality -- but of the whole being of the human morality has gone so low that people don't care. I mean their attitude was, "It's not mine. It doesn't matter."

Q: "Nothing better comes by working."

KIDD: And of course just at the time I was there they were talking about raising prices which they subsequently did on food and housing. Eventually they're going to turn back some of this housing to the original owners, but that's going to be a long process because it has to be proved, and, you know.

Q: Does this worry them?

KIDD: In cases where people are living in those houses, they'll be evicted. And where will they go? Because they have only those kind of box-type houses -- tenements, apartment buildings. And while they recognize the fact that if they had it, they'd want it back, too, it might create some hardships for them. They might have to be moved out to someplace where they don't want to live.

Q: These people who left Czechoslovakia are indeed going back.

KIDD: No, but there are many people who are still there whom the property was taken from because everything was nationalized. They don't realize that they're going to have to pay for it in such [increased] prices because very little will be subsidized. They're going to have to pay in order to have a free economy. They're going to have varied prices -- that's something that they're not used to. But perhaps there will be more for them to buy, I don't know.

Q: But at least they had a taste of it between the wars, they know. They have had a history of it.

KIDD: The older people did, but the younger people haven't had, they haven't lived under anything that was democratic. They might have read about it or heard about it. They did have people who would visit the States or West Germany or England and they'd come back with news of those countries. But they know nothing but this constant obedience of the orders of the Commissar. It's going to take some adjusting, mental, mostly mental,

and physical, too, to a certain extent.

Q: Do they have pensions? What will happen?

KIDD: They have pensions, but they're very little. Now my friend -- he's the pediatric surgeon. He has a very minimal salary now, something like... If I say an exact figure I'd be wrong, but I can just give an approximate of 2000 crowns a month. Now that isn't much. When I was there the exchange rate was 25 to 1. That's going to change too, it's going to be lower. But even so he's been supplementing his income by writing. He writes books, he's written many medical journals and some of them have been translated into German. So people all supplementing somehow.

Q: Well that shows a spirit.

KIDD: Well young people -- young married people have all their salaries of course which aren't high. But if they have children, they get a supplement for each child. Now whether that's going to continue is another thing. This is what they're all worrying... Of course, these are things that affect you economically. But it's going to affect them economically if they're going to cut down on that particular subsidy or if they're going to completely eliminate it. I don't know. But of course if they have a free economy, people will work to promote themselves. Right now they didn't care because they knew they couldn't get up to the top.

Q: It didn't make any difference.

KIDD: No, whether they worked or not. So that's something that they have to adjust their thinking to. Not just to stay in the same rut because you can't get any higher. We can get it if we work.

Q: You get paid accordingly and you rise in your profession.

KIDD: An honest day's pay for an honest day's work.

Q: How do they feel about the East German situation?

KIDD: Well those I spoke to, not everyone, were a little bit apprehensive, let's say, about the re-unification of Germany. Since they'd suffered so much under previous Germans practically all their lives. And whether it's going to be... I tried to reassure them that I didn't <u>think</u> that that would be something that they'd have to worry about, certainly not in the near future. But I know...

Q: They have both Germanies on their borders, they're right there, too.

KIDD: Well you see East Germans could come there very easily because the Eastern Block countries could travel within their own countries very easily. You didn't have to

worry about visas or anything like that. The East Germans used to come and buy up all the stores and that's what the Czechs didn't like because we go there and it's all gone. They're still there. It's going to take a lot of work and a sort of readjustment of their morality in the sense of working honestly, not just...

Q: Mary, again, I keep asking you to repeat this, but tell a little bit about the exhibit that was on [during your visit].

KIDD: It was called "Moy Dema" which is translated "My Home." The street in Prague that turns right to the powder tower, it's called Nebshibgobia. And this street was partially -- almost all of it -- closed off the traffic. What they had done at this point was to have banners or what did you call them before -- bunting depicting the various periods in the history of Czechoslovakia. They had starting with the second World War. And above the street there was this huge camouflage net that depicted the years during the War. Then right after that was more bunting and this was representing the flags of the French, the British, the Russians and the Americans which was the occupation in that short period between '45 and '48. Then you went down along the street and these buntings would be hanging down in flag-type size. Then you had a period in -- gosh, I can't remember now how many rows of it -- it was just the Russian flag, red, red, red, red, one right after the other, until the present time. And now they're starting a new era with the Czech flag, just the Czech flag and nothing else.

Q: And I think the idea was just such a good one. You said there were films...

KIDD: Yes. In each section that depicted, say the war years, and then the occupation, the liberation really, by the Russians and so on. They had kiosks that had the newspapers of that period all over these kiosks. You could read what had happened and what was happening at that time. And this went on all the way down the street under the Nazis, and after that when you had the -- I would say interim government really. That was under Masaryk and Benes and a few of them and then that stopped. There was one interesting part. They had a series of painted faces but they were cut-outs of various figures in the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. Kurdvald and Slansky and all the others going on. But one of the funny things -- again I don't know whether it was by accident or by intent -- one of the heads was knocked off. And I don't know whose head it was at this point. (laughs) It wasn't anyone that I think I knew. That went on until you came to the powder tower and that's when it ended.

Q: What a wonderful idea.

KIDD: It was very moving. Not only the older people were interested. You saw young people... This was the thing that again... The youth -- maybe it's because I'm older now that I was so aware of it. But it was the youth who were interested in this because perhaps they heard about it from their parents, but they weren't even born at parts of it. It was the young people that were really so anxious to know more.

Q: Well you know back in the years when we were living there, they were trying to brainwash the children and have them spy on their parents and so forth. Yet the one thing that every young Czech wanted was a bit of old American Army equipment. A button or an Army insignia. So you realize that they hadn't ever really [gone] over...

KIDD: Well they've been told by their parents many of these things. And of course many of the parents did turn to Communism purely for economic reasons. Others because they really believed it.

Q: Yes. Well that's what I meant about those two friends of yours, too. Well Mary, this has been so interesting and I think this will be a wonderful addition to the tape of your life there.

***

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Spouse: Coburn Kidd

Spouse Entered Service: 1946	Left Service:	1969
You became affiliated with Service: 1949	Left Service:	1951 (as employee)
		1969 (as spouse)

Relationship to Foreign Service: Spouse of AEP, FS Offspring, Parent of FSO, FSO

Posts:

1949-1951	Prague, Czechoslovakia
1952	Vienna, Austria
1952-1956	Washington, DC
1957	London, UK
1959-1960	Tokyo, Japan
1961-1966	Bonn, Germany
1966-1969	Hamburg, Germany

Spouse's position: Political

Place/date of birth: New York City, NY - October 4, 1920

Maiden name: Mary Frances Harak

Parents: John and Lucie Harak

Date/place of Marriage: September 1, 1952; Lisle, Illinois

Education:

Parochial School, NY
Sacred Heart Academy, Lisle, Illinois
New York University Night School

Profession: Secretary, Translator, and Interpreter in Czech

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:
At Post:
Embassy Woman's Club
Meals on Wheels - Bonn
Volunteer at hospital - Bonn

End of interview