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

DR. MICHAEL KORFF

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is August 26, 2021. This is ADST's oral history interview with Michael Korff. Tell me about your background.

KORFF: I was born October 1, 1948, to Don Korff and Roberta Borden Korff, in Sacramento, California. My parents were both officers in the U.S. Army during World War II. He had grown up in Oklahoma; she was from Ohio. I grew up in Roseville, California, where I lived until I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to attend graduate school in 1970. My brother, D. Brent Korff, was born in 1950. Our paternal grandmother, Mary Etta Korff, and grandfather, Martin Johann Korff, lived up the street from us, and our father's only sister Marietta Korff Wood and her family lived across from our grandparents. Our cousins Obert R. Wood II and Stevan C. Wood lived with our aunt and uncle and were a constant part of our lives.

Other close relatives included my mother's mother (Bernice Long Borden Moore) and step-father (Harvey J. Moore), who lived in Southern California and my mother's only

sister F. Charlotte Borden Sheffer, her husband Robert Sheffer, and their children Ronald and R. Yvonne Sheffer.

I completed my graduate education in 1975 and moved to southern New Jersey, where I lived from 1975 to 1979, when I joined the United States Foreign Service.

Roseville, California

I was born with strabismus (cross-eyed) and hard-of-hearing. At the ages of 4-1/2 and 5 I had operations on both eyes to correct their alignment; the surgery wasn't totally successful.

At the ages of 7-9 I underwent Nasopharyngeal Radium Irradiation (NRI), in which low dosages of radium were inserted up each nostril in an effort to reduce swollen tissues surrounding the opening of the eustachian tubes. It was thought that reducing the amount of swollen tissue would allow the ears to drain, thereby preventing chronic ear infections that could lead to hearing loss.

In order to finance my eye surgeries and my other health issues, my mother resumed work a couple of years after my brother was born. She went to work for the civilian dispensary at McClellan AFB north of Sacramento. She rose to become the chief nurse. Following a stroke, my mother retired.

When my father returned from World War II, he went to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad. He rose to the position of chief Roundhouse Foreman's clerk.

I attended Woodbridge Elementary School near our home from KG to Grade 6. Because my parents worked, my brother and I were cared for by several "baby-sitters" until we reached adolescence.

I then attended junior high school (grades 7-8) at Atlantic Street School and high school (grades 9-12) at Roseville Union High School.

In high school, I participated in a variety of activities. I was a member of the Model United Nations delegations that participated in the annual three-day excursions to the campus of the University of California, Berkeley; I was a member of the Debate Team that participated in one-day meets in Northern California; and I was a founder of the German and Stamp clubs. I was also a member each year of the Junior Classical League and the California Scholarship Federation, the honor society at the school.

I took high school coursework to prepare me for entrance into the University of California system. Among other things, the requirements included four years of science, four years of mathematics, and either three years of one foreign language or two years each of two languages. It had been my intention to take three years of Latin so that I would be able to take an elective in my senior year. However, after enduring two years of non-conversational Latin and signing up to take Latin III, I sought an appointment with

the District Superintendent to discuss the possibility of offering classes in German. I persuaded some friends to join me at the meeting, which bypassed the school principal entirely.

The Superintendent was a little surprised by our audacity, but he indicated that if we could persuade a total of 20 students to sign up for German classes, the school district would find a teacher for us. I then posted a notice in the school's daily bulletin asking students to sign up. In the end, we had 80 students sign up. Within four years, Latin had died and was no longer offered at the school. I do not claim that my two years of Latin was a waste or that it should not be taught; it was a good foundation for learning English grammar and preparing me to learn other languages.

My interest in German (as opposed to French or Spanish, the other "living" languages taught at the high school) was the result of my family's interest in the language. My grandfather, Martin Johann Korff, had grown up speaking German in a community in Missouri, and his baptismal certificate, which I have framed, is in German. He did not learn to speak English until Grade 1. My mother, who had served in Germany during World War II, always greeted her father-in-law with "Wie geht's?" whenever she visited my grandparents, who lived down the street from us.

Although neither my parents nor their siblings had attended post-secondary education, for some reason it was always assumed that my brother and I and our Roseville cousins, Obert and Stevan Wood, would go on to college. "Obie," who was five years older than I, was the first. After two years at our local community college, he went on to the University of California and lived with our cousins in Berkeley. He completed his Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral degrees. His brother Stevan, who was two years older than I, also attended the community college and graduated from Sacramento State College.

I had expected to follow Stevan's path, attending the community college and then transferring to a four-year institution. (At the time, I thought I would pursue an education in pharmacy.) I knew that my parents would not be able to afford to send me to a residential college. At the very last minute, with only a month to go before high school graduation, I went to my parents and told them I had changed my mind: Instead of commuting to community college, I would commute to Sacramento State College. And instead of pursuing an education in pharmacy, I would become a teacher. After discussing my sudden change of heart, my parents supported me.

Actually, I had a head-start on college. During the summer between my sophomore and junior years of high school, my friend Robert Hardison and I took a speed-reading course at Sierra College. We were the only high school students in the class, and neither of us could drive, so Bob's mother drove back-and-forth to the college. The course required that we read three novels each week for six weeks. We read some great literature by Steinbeck, Orwell, Hemingway, Hersey, and others.

During the summer between my junior and senior years, my mother arranged for my friend Richard Anderson and me to work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture at minimum wages ($1.35/hour) as part of the annual effort to track down and eradicate Japanese Beetles. In those days, cars didn't have air conditioning, so the ten weeks we spent driving around the Central Valley of California searching for the beetles was in blistering heat. Richard and I were not teamed together, but rather, each of us went with college students who drove us from site to site (people's yards) looking for signs of the beetles. Some of their bawdy stories were eye-opening.

During my senior year, I co-wrote a weekly column for the local newspaper, the *Roseville Press-Tribune*, focused on what was happening at the high school that week. Since we were paid 15¢ per column inch, we learned to stretch out our reports to get the most for our writing.

Also, during my senior year, I agreed to chair the Senior Class Gift Committee, a tradition in which the seniors donated a contribution to the school. Little did I know that I also had to raise the money for the gift! Fortunately, my talented friends and I enjoyed singing, and we put on two "Hootenannies," where people paid for admission to get a chance to sing along. I also was chair of the group that organized the "Senior Ball," a semi-formal ball. I had to choose a theme and get the props ready for the event. We decided on a *Through the Looking Glass* theme, and it meant bringing characters from the fairy tale to life.

My other performance that year was as one of the actors in a production of *The Mouse That Roared*, a satire about efforts of the poor "Grand Duchy of Fenwick" that sought to raise foreign aid by losing a war to the United States. I didn't have experience in drama, but I took on the role of Benter, a man of the people and the leader of the opposition, who opposed the war against the U.S. I remember worrying that I wouldn't remember any of my lines, but we had great fun putting on the show.

I graduated from high school in June 1966. That summer I went to work for the Sacramento Army Depot, part of the U.S. Materiel Command, where I was a GS-2 clerk-typist. My responsibilities focused on preparing travel orders, requisitions for materiel, and similar matters. We were in the midst of the Vietnam War, and I had never heard of night-vision goggles until I started ordering them for the troops in Southeast Asia. The job was fascinating and was my first introduction to government work. I worked in an office of perhaps 15 people, and I was the only clerk-typist. Although I had taken a typing class and was pretty proficient at typing, I remember preparing for the job to start by bringing correction fluid, erasers, etc. I need not have worried, since all materials were supplied. In those days we had to insert our time card into a machine to "punch" in and out at the beginning and end of the day. One eye-opening aspect of the job was that I was taught how to use a key-punch machine.

Sacramento State College – 1966-1970

When I applied for "Sac State," I was asked if I wanted to be considered for the College Honors Program, a program reserved for students with high SAT scores. I jumped at the chance.

My friend Robert Hardison and I commuted to the college in my first car – a 1962 two-door Chevrolet Corvair, a rear-engine car with automatic transmission. Because we were freshmen and therefore the last to register, we both ended up in a 7:30 a.m. swimming class – held at the outdoor pool! That meant we had to leave from our homes by 6:30, get dressed, and then scamper across the cold deck and get into the water even when it was freezing outside.

My first year I took a six-unit Honors Class taught by two senior social science professors that required that we write weekly 10-page papers. (In those days, there were no computers, so typing our papers was expected.) To this day, I think the combination of reading so many books in my speed-reading class that one summer and then writing the papers were among the most important elements in my education.

The other classes that remained with me that first year were Government I, Mathematics 101, and German 2B. The Government class was taught by Elizabeth Moulds, for whom I would later serve as Teaching Assistant. She wanted us to understand what federalism was all about, but she didn't want to focus on the United States. Instead, she used Nigeria as a way to introduce federalism in an international setting. I believe she and her husband had been Peace Corps Volunteers in Nigeria.

I also interviewed for and was accepted into the college's Model UN delegation, continuing my four years of high school MUN work. I was the first freshman ever chosen for the college delegation. It would come to be the center of much of my work at the college. The delegation represented Turkey at the MUN of the Far West, held that year (1967) in Portland, Oregon, and hosted by Lewis and Clark College. Subsequent MUNs were held in Tucson in 1968, hosted by the University of Arizona; in Fresno in 1969, hosted by Fresno State College; and in Eugene in 1970, hosted by the University of Oregon. I was head of the delegation in 1970, in which the college represented the Soviet Union.

In my sophomore year, a friend and I decided to mount a one-day high school model UN for northern California, so as not to compete with the multi-day HSMUN held at Berkeley, and we attracted a modest number of high schools. I had gone to the *Sacramento Bee*, our local "big city" newspaper, to ask if it would sponsor the conference. I was hoping for free publicity for the conference. Instead, the head of public relations for the newspaper said that if the Bee sponsored something, it paid all expenses! We had arranged for everyone to eat at the cafeteria but pushing an extra 500 students through the cafeteria on a Saturday meant that what was scheduled for a one-hour lunch break took twice that. The Bee's PR director was present to watch, and he immediately began planning for alternate ways of organizing the event.

That first year (my sophomore year at the college), I had taken a course with political scientist William Dillon. He was a brilliant scholar deeply concerned about the development of his students. He had been a member of the UC Berkeley student delegation to the collegiate Model UN while he was an undergraduate, and he agreed to serve as the presiding officer of the General Assembly. He continued to do so for the three years that I headed the HSMUN.

For the second and third years of the high school Model UN, the *Sacramento Bee* funded a part-time secretary and worked out the logistics for lunch: Instead of sending the "delegates" off to the cafeteria for lunch, the paper funded individual KFC box lunches, which proved to be a brilliant solution to the problem. And the fact that I now had a secretary meant that the paperwork that had fallen on my shoulders was now shared. The Associated Students kindly gave us office space in its very cramped quarters.

For my final year at the helm, we were quite professional in our approach. We had two Undersecretaries General who worked very hard. One of them was my roommate and I ended up serving as Best Man at his wedding to the MUN secretary.

I got involved in many other extracurricular activities, and by my sophomore year I was in class one day when two guys wearing blazers with patches on them came in. They informed the class that I had been "tapped" for membership in Blue Key, a leadership and service fraternity. The following year, I became a member of Phi Kappa Phi, a scholastic organization, and I became president of both organizations my senior year. In addition, I became active in the Associated Students and held appointed offices for my junior and senior years.

For two years, I represented Sacramento State College on the statewide Academic Affairs Assembly (AAA) for the 19 state colleges. The statewide Academic Senate had decided that the Associated Students Presidents were too "political," and if students were going to have any input into academic policies, a separate body would be needed. It reflected the conservative attitudes of many faculty members at the time. So, the AAA was created, and we met monthly or semi-monthly. It gave me a chance to visit campuses across the state. At one point, I testified on student outlook before a committee of the California legislature.

In my junior year, I was chosen as a delegate to the biennial Blue Key conference in Kansas City, Missouri. So, in December 1968, I took my first airplane ride. It was eventful, with the plane flying through lightning and the plane's wings literally flapping!

I continued working summers at the Sacramento Army Depot, and by the summer between my junior and senior years, I was a GS-4 Management Technician working in the Records Management Office.

The Vietnam War and the military draft hung over all the men of my generation. We all faced military service and the question of whether or not we would fight in Vietnam. I

was against the war, despite the fact that both of my parents were Army veterans, but I was not against military service. In fact, if I were doing it, I'd follow the Israeli model and have everybody do some sort of community service or national service. But I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I qualified for a deferral from the draft while in college, but by 1965 or so, they weren't giving deferrals for graduate degrees. On top of that, in 1969 they started something called the draft lottery.

In December 1969, we gathered by the radio as they broadcast live the lottery. They put 366 balls, one for each day into one pool, and then every birthday into another pool. They pulled one ball from each and married them and announced what number one's birthday was. The first 215 numbers ended up being drafted. By then I was working in the Associated Students Office at Sacramento State. We had reached the 300s and I kept waiting for my number. I kept waiting, and finally they called my birthday, and I was number 359. That meant that I wasn't going to Vietnam. My brother was maybe 340. And my cousin, who was going to claim to be a conscientious objector and refuse to go to Vietnam, was a special case. So, we were glad that he also got a high number because that would have been a difficult road for him, I think. Anyway, I didn't have to worry about military service after that.

My senior year in college—1969-70— was momentous. I had taken enough courses so that I graduated in January 1970 (in 3-1/2 years) with a major in Social Science/ Government and minors in German and Journalism. By then I was President of Blue Key, a leadership fraternity, and I was chief usher at my own graduation! For the spring semester, I began working on a master's degree program, but I was close to the Acting President of the College, Otto Butz. I had gotten to know him well while serving on two committees of the Academic Senate, and he sat me down one day for a heart-to-heart conversation. He told me that I had done everything there was to do at Sac State and that I should move on! He said he would help me go to another institution and urged me to think about getting a degree in international relations and getting a doctorate. He said that I should aim to become head of an International Studies Center. My mentor from Roseville High School, Margaret Laughlin, also played a role in my graduate plans. She had known me since my freshman year when she taught World Geography, and she was the faculty advisor for the delegation to the UC Berkeley high school Model UN. She was active in national social studies education circles and knew the head of social studies teacher education at Stanford University. She encouraged me to apply there, and Otto Butz supported my application.

That spring was the 25th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, and the local chapter of the UN Association of the USA invited me to attend the ceremonies at the UN Building in New York at its expense. I was thrilled, but there was a catch: In order to save money, would I be willing to stay at the YMCA near the UN? In those days, YMCA had a reputation that was worrisome, but I accepted the invitation because I desperately wanted to see New York and the UN.

In the meantime, a conflagration hit college campuses when the United States invaded Cambodia and protests broke out on campuses around the country. And then on May 4,

1970, National Guardsmen shot 13 unarmed students at Kent State College, killing four of them. That inflamed the situation and it led to more demonstrations. Eleven days after the Kent State massacre, 14 students were shot at the historically black Jackson State College, two of them fatally. For all intents and purposes, education stopped at many colleges and universities in the United States.

With this as background, students were descending on Washington, D.C., to demand an end to the War in Vietnam. I decided that since I was going to New York anyway, I had to go to Washington.

I remember trying desperately to find an inexpensive hotel in Washington, but students had already reserved almost every available room, either for protests or for internships. I think I spent only two or three days before taking the train to New York. I recall walking all the way from the Capitol to Arlington National Cemetery and back! I was 21 and it was not an impossible walk in those days.

New York was a whirlwind. I was a small-town kid in a big, big city. Sitting in the General Assembly Hall after so many years of participating in and organizing Model United Nations was an awe-inspiring experience.

In the meantime, I learned that I had been admitted to Stanford University's Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP), and that I would have to report for class in June. On top of that, I was awarded a California State Graduate Fellowship to cover my tuition. I had to fund only my living costs. STEP was designed to have students take four quarters worth of coursework while teaching 1/3 time at area secondary schools. At the end, we were to be awarded A.M. degrees in curriculum and instruction.

Stanford University – 1970-75

The transition from a commuter college like Sacramento State College to a research university was a fascinating experience. First of all, at Sacramento State, in the aftermath of Kent State and Jackson State protests, I participated in a lot of meetings and "teach-ins." Students were upset, but there were other groups trying to mediate between the sides, to try to find some way that we could deal with the issues that concerned everybody. And in the end, there was some graffiti on the campus, but no broken windows. I got to Stanford, and every single window was broken. It was a totally different atmosphere at Stanford than it had been at Sacramento State.

Now, we were graduate students. It wasn't quite the same as it was for the undergraduates. And by then it was summer. And so, most of the students had gone home for the summer. So, it wasn't quite the shock, as it might have been if I had shown up in the middle of the tumult. The classes were fascinating. There were lots of things to think about, whereas at Sac State, you wouldn't expect to see many of your teachers having written the books that you're using in class.

By the time you get to Stanford, it's usually your teachers who have written the texts. So that's a significant difference. The Stanford teacher education program had all this money from the Ford Foundation and other places to innovate. And so, we had to teach what were called micro lessons, and then watch ourselves. Videotaping was something new in those days. And so, you had to then watch yourself and see what you did wrong in this micro lesson. Unlike most teacher education programs, including Sac State's, which require students to undertake unpaid student teaching, the Stanford program required that we all got a paid job. We were supposed to teach two classes. Ultimately, I got a job teaching at a middle school in Portola Valley, an area where most of the population is wealthy. It's a bedroom community, and a lot of its residents work in San Francisco or Silicon Valley. The school district was all single-family homes. None of the teachers could afford to live there. People like Tennessee Ernie Ford and Shirley Temple Black lived in the Portola Valley area.

The summer quarter of 1970 was spent in an on-campus dormitory getting to know the area and taking classes full-time. Most of my classes were in the School of Education, but one of my electives was in the Law School, where I took Constitutional Law in a large lecture hall where we were assigned seats and the professor had a seating chart so he could call us by name. The professor looked like John Houseman and had Professor Kingsfield's prosecutorial demeanor from the movie *Paper Chase.* I would pray that he wouldn't call on me, but at the end of the quarter, the students gave him a standing ovation. (Years later I would find out that John Houseman had been Director of the Voice of America.)

As the end of the summer approached, we had to find permanent housing. Four of us from the program—two white and two black—looked for a furnished place to live. Palo Alto was too expensive, and Mountain View (the next community south of Palo Alto) would not let four unrelated people live in an apartment together. We finally found a decent place in Menlo Park. The four of us split up the cooking responsibilities, and I shared one bedroom with a very smart African American mathematics teacher.

I was one of the last students in the STEP program to receive a teaching assignment; I was assigned to teach two sections of 7th grade Social Studies (World History and Geography); because I had a minor in journalism, I was asked at the last minute to also teach the journalism course, essentially advising the school newspaper and the school yearbook. That meant that I was teaching half-time. Unfortunately, Portola Valley School had an unusual schedule: One week, we taught classes from periods one through seven; the following week, we taught from seven to one. I taught periods 1-3, so that meant that I taught classes in the morning one week and in the afternoon the next. As a result, I could not take classes during the day; all of my classes were at night. It was a stressful year.

Because of the stress of the year, I began to realize that I would not enjoy teaching middle school on a permanent basis, so I began looking for alternatives. I even explored a program funded by the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation for a "Trial Year in Seminary." (I was found unqualified for the Trial Year because it was for people who were not

necessarily committed to attending seminary, and the interview panel determined that I was definitely going to attend a seminary!) Ultimately, I was admitted to a Ph.D. in history program at SUNY Stony Brook with no financial aid and a Master's in Religious Studies program at Florida State University with an Assistantship, a program for which I had not applied but which had received my dossier from the Rockefeller Brothers. I also applied for Stanford's Law School, where I was not admitted. However, I was admitted to a Ph.D. in higher education program at Stanford – and my California State Fellowship was renewed. So, I grabbed the chance to stay at Stanford, even though the Ph.D. required that I also secure another master's degree. (I could have accepted entry into an Ed.D. program that would not have required the second master's program, but I preferred the Ph.D.) I decided to apply for the A.M. in History program, and I was accepted right away. (Most of the graduate students in the history department were working on doctorates, so my application was pretty easy to approve, especially since I didn't seek financial aid.)

In the meantime, I had applied for and secured entry into the German Academic Exchange Program (*Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*) and Stanford's half-year program in Germany. I didn't know much about either program, but I was anxious to see Europe and the programs seemed ideal. In the end, I chose the Stanford program. I had not saved any money from the year I was teaching, since all of my income had gone into living expenses. So, with a gift of $1000 from my grandmother and some loans, I headed off to Stanford-in-Germany's campus in Beutelsbach, Germany, for the summer and autumn academic quarters of 1971.

I was fortunate that American history and psychology professors were in residence at the campus during the two quarters I was in Germany, so I was able to take courses that applied toward some of my requirements for my A.M. and Ph.D. degrees.

The Stanford-in-Germany campus was located at Landgut Burg atop a hill that was surrounded by vineyards. It was near Stuttgart, so we could visit the city on weekends and return at night to our dormitory at "the Burg." The tuition included trips to Rome, Berlin, and Prague, and those excursions were memorable.

The Rome trip in the middle of the hot summer was debilitating; we stayed at a pension run by an order of nuns, and we were required to eat every meal sitting in the same seat. We soon found out why: We used the same napkin for all meals. Because pasta was a prominent part of the cuisine, the napkins soon became absolutely filthy from all the pasta sauce! And we had a siesta time each day. It was great to have knowledgeable guides who got us into all of the important sites and helped us understand their importance.

Although we traveled together to Rome, we were given open-ended tickets to return to "the Burg," so I stopped in Florence and Zürich on the way back to Stuttgart. Both were great stops, if very expensive. In those days, it was easier to get into the various galleries in Florence, so I had a wonderful experience. In Zürich, I remember that it was amidst the

annual “Wilhelm Tell Days.” It was a great introduction to a city that I would get to know better years later when I was assigned to Switzerland.

The trip to Prague was by bus and went well until our border crossings. First, several of the men had grown beards during their time in Germany, and thus their passport photos didn’t match their current identity. The bus was held up as we crossed the border until the beards were shaved. The more interesting element was the return. Several students had converted U.S. dollars and West German Marks on the black market and had purchased a lot of souvenirs, especially crystal. The Czechoslovak police insisted on seeing all receipts for the goods and proof of conversion at official rates. Fortunately, some of us had receipts we could share with the others, and in the end, everyone was able to reenter West Germany, but the hours we spent at the border were stressful for all of us.

While in Prague, a pen pal with whom I had corresponded since elementary school, met me and showed me around the city. I will always remember her recollection of the 1968 Soviet invasion. She remarked, “Here is where we threw the Molotov cocktails at the Soviet tanks.” It was a memorable visit.

I was one of the few students who had purchased a car while at Stanford-in-Germany. I bought a Volkswagen beetle while still in the U.S., and on my first weekend in Germany, my roommate and I took the train to Wolfsburg in northern Germany to pick up my car. After that, we drove to Copenhagen for a couple of days before driving back to Stuttgart. It was quite an experience. I later learned that my enthusiasm to drive my new car on the autobahn without first breaking in the car probably caused significant damage to the engine.

Between the summer and autumn quarters, we had a three-week break, so I scheduled a couple of coach tours of the UK. Three women who were at Stanford-in-Germany wanted to bicycle around the UK, so the four of us drove in my car through the Black Forest to a youth hostel in Strasbourg in Alsace. The next morning, the women bought Quiche Lorraine and we drove to the countryside and had a breakfast picnic in someone’s pasture. It was the first time I had eaten quiche!

That night, we reached Paris and searched and searched for a hostel that had room for us. It was quite an adventure driving the streets of Paris. The next day, we drove to Calais, where I left my new car in a parking lot, and we took the hovercraft to England. (The hovercraft went out of service in 2000.) The four of us said good-bye to one another in Dover, and I took the train into London.

The next day I caught the first of two coach tours. The first was from London to Cornwall and back. Since I had made all my arrangements from Germany, the coach company assumed I might have difficulty with English, so I was given a front-row seat! I made friends with the older woman who was my seatmate, and she treated me to sherry each evening before dinner. I had chosen the trip to Cornwall because my father had been stationed there during World War II and he thought I might enjoy the trip.

Once the Cornwall trip ended, I spent a day in London and then caught my second tour, this one to Edinburgh. Unfortunately, I had only one day in Edinburgh before I headed back to London, and everything in Edinburgh was closed because of local holiday. People recommended that I travel to Dunfermline. In retrospect, it would have been better to simply walk around Edinburgh, but people assumed I wanted to shop.

After a quick stop in London, I then made my way back to Calais, arriving in the dark. Having spent several days in the UK, I was acquainted with traffic circles. I knew that one entered the traffic circle and circumnavigated the circle by going to the left. Soon after recovering my car, I drove toward Belgium and came upon my first traffic circle. I promptly tried to enter going to the left. Fortunately, it was late and there wasn't much traffic, so I was able to correct my mistake—but it was a scary experience!

After crossing into Belgium, I continued driving and it kept getting later and later, and I found no place to stay. Finally, I decided I had to pull over on the country road and get some rest. I did so—and promptly drove into a ditch! I was sure I had damaged the car and that I would have difficulty ever getting back to Stuttgart. The next morning, I was awakened by farmers driving tractors and otherwise working their fields. Although I spoke no French, some of them understood my German, and they helped push the car out of the ditch, and, fortunately, the car drove without a problem!

I drove on to Brussels, only to be greeted by an extraordinary Welcoming Ceremony for Japanese Emperor Hirohito, who was then (1971) pretty young. The *Grand Place* was spectacular, and I was really fortunate to get to watch the ceremony. I stayed the night in a youth hostel and then started my way back to Stuttgart.

The other trip that our group took was an excursion to Berlin. It was, of course, still a divided city in those days, and I remember two incidents that stood out: First, we decided to cross into East Berlin in order to see the Bertold Brecht/Kurt Weill musical *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Threepenny Opera) at the Brecht Theater/Brecht Ensemble. When we bought tickets, I decided to splurge and buy orchestra tickets, whereas most students sat in the back. Imagine my amazement when shortly before the start, all of the people in the back of the theater ran to get seats even better than mine! It turned out that in the glorious socialist paradise, everyone was equal—regardless of what they paid! That incident, and not the actual production, made a deeper impression on me.

The autumn quarter at Stanford-in-Germany was consumed with preparation for the annual student production of a play in German for our host families. My own family, which hosted a student from Mills College and me, had invited us to their home usually twice a month for "supper," which we learned meant cold cuts.

Since I was one of the few students who had a car, I was chosen to drive the group that was head of the Thanksgiving committee to a U.S. military base so we could buy turkeys, cranberries, and pumpkin pies. Since we did not have legal access to the commissary, some of the female students stood outside the commissary and batted their eyes at some of the GI's until they succeeded in getting them to buy the necessary supplies.

Traditionally, the students put on a performance each year for their German families and the townsfolk. The production chosen for that year was *Die Physiker* (The Physicists) by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, a Swiss playwright. Since I was the only graduate student at the campus, I didn't take a principal role, but rather, I was the *Souffleur* (prompter). I thought it would be an easier role than one of the on-stage performers; little did I know that it meant I had to memorize the entire set of dialogues, since I had to prompt the *entire* cast. Fortunately, the performance came off without a hitch. I remember that the cast party went on till the wee hours of the morning, with perhaps too much *Wein,* but I had to get up very early the next morning, since I had to drive to a U.S. military base near Stuttgart in order to take the Foreign Service Exam. Somehow, I got through the experience and passed the test. I subsequently took the oral exam for Foreign Service entrance in San Francisco, and once again passed and was placed on the rank-order register for appointment. However, I was warned that I would have to await my call, and that I would be eligible for appointment for only two years. That call never came.

I became close friends with one of the visiting faculty members and his family. He was a Ph.D. librarian at the Stanford library and he and his wife were originally from Germany. I had a pen pal from Salzburg, with whom I had been corresponding since I first took German in high school. I made arrangements to visit my pen pal—whose father was the *Landeshauptmann* (Governor) of the state around Salzburg—one weekend, and the wife and two children of the librarian asked me to drive them to Munich, which is not far from Salzburg. My trip went well until I got to the Governor's residence. I showed up an hour too early, so I sat in my car in front of the residence. When my pen pal finally realized who was sitting in front of the residence, she came out to invite me inside. Unfortunately, I then locked my keys inside my VW. Fortunately, she was able to arrange for a locksmith to come and bail me out.

On the weekend before our return to the United States, a friend and I drove my car to Bremen in order to drop it off for its shipment to Oakland. We spent one night at a youth hostel in Cologne before completing our trip to the north of Germany. We returned by train.

Our charter flight home stopped in London to pick up the students who had attended Stanford-in-England, and then we started our way to the U.S. Unfortunately, our plane hit headwinds and we didn't have sufficient fuel to reach JFK. So, suddenly, we were told that we would make an unscheduled stop in Eastern Canada. My only memory of the airport was that it was very, very cold. Although we had experienced snowfall in Germany, I do not recall Germany as being as cold as that stop in Newfoundland!

We were all happy to return to our families – just in time for Christmas 1971. In my case, I brought back beeswax candles and holders for a real Christmas tree; I also brought back crystal vases from Prague for my grandmothers; following their deaths, I inherited the crystal.

I returned to Stanford in January 1972 and fortunately was able to stay in graduate student apartment housing, where my roommate was the son of a junior minister in the Shah's government in Iran. I had three months to prepare for my Qualifying Exams ("Quals") for my doctorate, but in the end, I had no difficulty qualifying. My doctoral advisor was Dr. Lewis B. Mayhew, who was best known for his ability to synthesize vast quantities of research. It was fortunate that I lived on campus, because the car I had shipped from Germany was caught in a longshoreman strike that paralyzed shipping, with ships anchored throughout the San Francisco Bay. Fortunately, six months later, I was able to retrieve my car.

In addition to taking my Ph.D. Qualifying Exams, I also began working on my master's degree in U.S. history; I decided to focus on social history. Fortunately, Dr. David B. Tyack was an historian who had appointments in both the School of Education and the Department of History, and he agreed to be my advisor. I also began taking on increasing responsibility within my cohort of doctoral students. I started running the Colloquium that met two or three times each month to discuss issues in higher education with senior practitioners in higher education. Usually, we met on the Stanford campus over wine and cheese; it was my responsibility to organize the meetings, purchase the wine and cheese, find venues, etc. On two occasions, I was able to arrange for us to travel to Berkeley to meet with Clark Kerr, the former Chancellor of Berkeley and President of the University of California, at his home. Kerr and his wife met while students at Stanford and were especially generous with their time. Their home had a spectacular view overlooking San Francisco Bay. I also was appointed to the Chapel Board for the Stanford Memorial Church; the Board supposedly advised the Dean of the Chapel, but my main responsibility was to organize the luncheons that took place after the church service; it was a time to discuss the sermon with the preacher of the day.

I continued working on my master's degree in history, and the History Department was the host for the annual conference of the Association of American Historians, which met in San Francisco. The call went out for a "public relations director" for the conference, and I agreed to take on the role. Fortunately, the Stanford Press Service had good ideas about how to create a news event: They recommended I conduct a survey of conference participants as they registered, and then the News Service released the results. We made a splash in the media – a foretaste of my experience years later as head of press and culture at embassies around the world. I was awarded my Master's in history in June 1973, and my family members were present for the ceremony. A few months later, my mother died, a traumatic experience for all of us.

In September 1973, I began a year-long paid "internship" working half-time as Assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs. I was originally supposed to work half-time as the staffer for a study of additional undergraduate housing. The Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. James Lyons, was an especially good mentor, and as we were investigating options for additional housing, I was invited to Pomona, New Jersey, to interview for the position of Assistant to the President of Stockton State College. Dean Lyons arranged for me to visit student housing at Harvard, Yale, and Haverford (where he had served as Dean of Students prior to coming to Stanford) while on the trip to New Jersey. (The interview at

Stockton went well; the President, Dr. Richard E. Bjork, and I got along well and had a similar attitude toward student affairs, but in the end, he decided to change the staffing in his office, and it was decided that greater diversity was needed in the staff.)

During my year in the Dean's office, my work expanded to full time, and I ended up running the Arts in the Residences program and the selection process for the student and faculty residential advisers in the dormitories. After the selections were completed, I became head of logistics for the training of the staffs. We decided to hold the training at the Asilomar Conference Center in Pacific Grove. In addition to the housing and transportation for the students and faculty advisers, I was also responsible for arranging childcare for the faculty. What could go wrong? Well, on the bus ride to Pacific Grove, the chemical toilet backed up, and the odor was so bad, that some people sitting near the toilet became ill!

Once we got to Asilomar, it soon became obvious that the two undergraduates whom I had chosen to provide childcare were inadequate for the 20 children, and so I ended up missing the training and had to join the two undergraduates in looking after the children. What an experience!

On the other hand, I had organized the application and selection process for both the student and faculty advisers using the color-coded forms that I had learned to use while Secretary-General of the HSMUN at Sacramento State. A year later, after the law changed about student access to records, the color-coded forms on which recommendations had been submitted made it easy to go through all the files in order to shred the recommendations. The staff contacted me to thank me for the innovation.

I made very little progress toward completing my Ph.D. dissertation during the year I spent in the Dean's office, and I made a decision that I would spend only one more year working on the degree. I reasoned that five years was enough!

That summer (1974), I attended the University of Southern California's Summer Semester. I took two courses in the School of Education and two courses in the Graduate School of Business. I was fortunate that my California Graduate Fellowship paid for all my tuition costs, and I stayed with my grandmother, who lived in a mobile home in Gardena. While at USC, I spent much of my time in the university's archives and library as I did research on the issue of student-university relations at the institution. I had already done much of my research at Stanford, but my advisers had suggested that I should contrast Stanford with other institutions. So, I chose USC, an institution that was associated with the Methodist Church during its early history, and the University of California, which had been the focus of a dissertation similar to mine. After the summer semester finished, I drove back to Stanford to finish my dissertation.

I still had to worry about my living expenses, but fortunately, I was chosen to be the half-time Research Assistant to Dr. W.H. Cowley, an emeritus professor who was still actively researching a variety of projects on university government. I found a garage apartment where I could live, and the funding from the assistantship proved to be quite

adequate. Dr. Cowley taught me a great deal about sources that could be used to explore the past, and I had evenings free to conduct the research for my dissertation.

Although I had my car, I got around Palo Alto using my bicycle. Since I didn't have a kitchen in my garage apartment, I learned how to take advantage of specials at various restaurants around town. Unfortunately, one day while in a pedestrian zone with my bicycle, I was hit by a car. The police came relatively quickly – this was before cell phones – and determined that I didn't need to go to a hospital, but my bicycle was badly damaged. Fortunately, Prof. Cowley drove to pick me up and put my demolished bicycle in his car.

I found that the best thing I could do in writing my dissertation was to edit the material that I had written. I ended up throwing between one-quarter and one-third of the text away. I'm sure it was still too long, but my dissertation committee decided that I was ready to defend the dissertation, with an April date. Although I was the expert of the material covered in my dissertation, I had people on the oral exam committee who were from the Psychology and History Departments who asked me about topics with which I was only vaguely familiar. Fortunately, I passed the exam. I then had to prepare the final version of my dissertation. Unfortunately, the person with whom I had contracted to type the final version came down with mononucleosis or some other illness, and I couldn't find anyone else to type it, so I ended up doing it myself. The Dean of Student Affairs generously let me use the typewriters in his office after everyone had gone home.

I had to stick around until the commencement in June 1975 and find a job. I began house-sitting for a couple where the husband was from Calcutta and began applying for positions around the country. In July, a strange letter arrived from Stockton State College: The President informed me that the arrangements for staffing in his office had not worked out, and he asked if I was still interested in working at the New Jersey college. It was a truly unexpected opening. I had to explain to the people for whom I was house-sitting that I would be leaving earlier than planned, and then begin making plans to move to New Jersey.

After packing what few possessions I had, and shipping all my books by freight, I said my farewells to my family in Roseville and then drove to Los Angeles. I stayed a few days before beginning my cross-country journey. My grandmother and her niece ensured that I was well prepared for the trip, which began with the crossing of the Mojave Desert in my non-air conditioned VW. With that out of the way, I generally drove six hours a day and then checked into a motel with a swimming pool. I didn't do any sightseeing until I got to Nashville, when I spent a day at Opryland. Although that theme park no longer exists, I really liked the live music throughout the park.

After Nashville, my next stop was Asheville, North Carolina, where I found myself in the midst of a clogging festival. I had never heard of clogging, so it was a nice opportunity to get to know an American folk tradition. After Asheville, I drove up the Blue Ridge Parkway on my way to my new job in New Jersey. I finally arrived at the home of the College President, who had invited me to stay at his house while I settled.

President and Mrs. Bjork were very gracious in opening their home to me, but shortly after I arrived, their daughter's roommate at the University of Delaware died and the daughter returned. I was evicted from the room where I was staying. While driving toward the President's House, I noticed a new condominium development near the Atlantic City Racetrack in Mays Landing. Within my first week in South Jersey, I signed a contract for a one bedroom-plus-den apartment and applied for my mortgage. It wasn't certain that I would qualify for a mortgage, since I had just completed graduate school and had minimal savings, but the President was chair of the board of the Bank, and he endorsed my application.

I didn't initially furnish the bedroom, so I bought a convertible sofa (which followed me to Washington and Frankfurt and Bern and then back to Washington) and bought unfinished wood furniture that I stained myself. I arrived in time for the preparations for the visit of the accrediting team that would visit the college in preparation for its initial accreditation. Among my responsibilities was to pick up the team, drive it to dinners, etc. Since I didn't have an alarm clock, I remember staying up all night so I could ensure that I had time to drive to the team's hotel in Atlantic City and then out to the College, which was 16 miles inland. We were all relieved when the College received word that it had been accredited.

My main responsibilities were initially to assist the President and take Minutes for the Board of Trustees and the College Council and prepare the college catalog. I had two secretaries to transcribe my dictation, at which I became quite proficient. As time went on, I began teaching a class on higher education with Dr. Laurence R. Marcus, who was Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and my best friend. I became concerned about the fact that the head of the Personnel Office at the College was also the Affirmative Action Officer, so I convinced the President that I should become the Affirmative Action Officer, reviewing all searches.

I spent most weekends in Philadelphia, where I loved exploring the city. I got season subscriptions to the Philadelphia Orchestra (Eugene Ormandy was still conductor for my first year), the Opera Company, and a Broadway traveling company. In addition, I attended several summer concerts each year in Fairmont Park in a setting remarkably similar to Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in northern Virginia.

One of my responsibilities at the college was to oversee the production of the non-renewal letters for untenured faculty members. The President was committed to ensuring that the College's staffing was flexible so it could respond to changing trends in higher education. Therefore, tenure was extremely limited. Faculty members not awarded tenure after a few years were given letters telling them their employment had not been renewed. These decisions were made by the President himself, who frequently overruled recommendations of faculty committees. My job was to deliver the letters to the mailboxes of the faculty members who were "up" for tenure. People would steer clear of me as I delivered the letters.

In my third year at the college, the President began applying for jobs as head of multi-campus systems of higher education. He warned me that his successor might want to bring his or her own Assistant, and therefore I should begin looking around. I began applying for various positions, and I received several invitations to interview. (One of the most interesting was an Assistant Deanship at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia. I drove to the college from New Jersey, interviewed, looked at some housing, and then started on my way home to New Jersey, driving up the Blue Ridge Parkway. When I reached Pennsylvania, I had difficulty finding a hotel with openings. Finally, I got the last room in one motel. I wondered why so many pregnant women were at the motel. It wasn't until I got to my room and turned on the television that I learned there had been a meltdown at Three Mile Island and that people were evacuating the area!)

Among the other options I began exploring was (again) the Foreign Service. So, on one Saturday morning, I drove to the University of Pennsylvania and took the Foreign Service Entrance Exam. Again, I passed the written exam, and again I passed the subsequent oral exam. And once again, I was told that all that meant was that I was on a rank-order register. There was no guarantee that my ranking on the register would be reached and that I would be offered an appointment.

Several months later, in the fall of 1978, the Board of Examiners (BEX) called me to say that my position had been reached, and I was asked if I would accept appointment. The timing was really bad. The new Acting President had just announced that he was resigning to take the Vice Presidency of the University of Alaska. I wasn't comfortable abandoning the College under those circumstances, and I told the BEX person that I could not make a commitment. I was warned that there was no guarantee that my place on the register would again be reached. I acknowledged that situation but did not accept the appointment. The year continued, with most of my time spent with my Affirmative Action and College Catalog responsibilities. I also had several interviews, but the only offer I got was to become Assistant to the President of Sonoma State College. While that would have been a geographically desirable position, the President called me to say that he was also going to appoint a faculty member to be his "Executive Assistant." He assured me that I would report to him. But I told him that I felt uncomfortable having someone else whose duties might conflict with my own. I turned down the job.

Fortunately, BEX again called and asked if I could start on May 29, 1979. The Board of Trustees announced the new President's appointment the day before my resignation took effect.

International Communication Agency

KORFF: When I took the Foreign Service Exam, there was an opportunity to indicate what I wanted to do in the Foreign Service. I said I wanted to be an Education Attaché at an American Embassy. I was told that there weren't such positions, but there was this agency that was part of the Foreign Service that was responsible for educational and cultural affairs. I said, "That's for me!" That's how I came to be part of the International Communication Agency.

In 1979, when you entered ICA, we weren't part of the regular State Department A-100 orientation class. We had our own orientation system in public diplomacy. It was entirely new to me. ICA had very small entering classes. Mine was the third training class in ICA, and we had 15 Junior Officer Trainees (JOTs). It was a very interesting group of people and we quickly bonded. Our office was at 1425 K Street Northwest. In those days, 14th Street was a sketchy neighborhood. And so, it made for an interesting experience for us, and all of us were looking for places to live.

Q: In your orientation class, were there more men than women? What was the breakdown, as you recall?

KORFF: It was pretty close to fifty-fifty, I think.

Q: How much time did you spend sitting and listening to presentations as opposed to going around to various offices and learning by doing?

KORFF: To give you an idea of the kind of "learning by doing" we undertook, we were all given 35-millimeter cameras and all the film we wanted to go out and to experiment. For most of us this was the first time we had had 35-millimeter cameras. There were a few of us who had been journalists before, so they had more experience than the rest of us. I was one of the older members. There were several that were younger. So, it was a diverse group by age. A lot of them were in the media field. Some were academics. But it was a great time. You're right, though, we did have a good deal of sitting in classrooms and learning the theory. When ICA was founded, there was a theoretical basis for what communication would look like. For those of us who hadn't studied that background, we all had to learn from scratch. And you may know that in those days, there was a lot of concern about being able to document any interactions with host country nationals. ICA and USIA both had this notion that we needed to distinguish between mass audiences and target audiences—the "influencers" who could reach the mass audience. And so, we had to learn who were the targets and how do you go about identifying them, and then what do you do about it.

Q: Also, in the era in which you entered USIA, the Smith-Mundt Act was still in effect. It prohibited USIA from sending its programming to U.S. citizens because Congress did not want to "propagandize" the American public. To what extent was that emphasized in your training.

KORFF: It was part of the education. And you would ask if we met any real FSOs [Foreign Service Officer], people who did the work? And we did. And so, for example, we went over to the VOA [Voice of America], which was then part of ICA, and they told us why people in the United States didn't get to listen to VOA. There were a lot of different elements that were involved in the theoretical part. I don't know how long the A-100 lasts, but for us, I think our total was only twelve weeks. After that, we all went on to other training or directly to posts. At the end, we all got our assignments, and we were told what languages we had to learn. Unlike State, we were not allowed to go overseas

without getting off of language probation. Whereas I think a lot of State JOs were able to go straight overseas, you then had to worry about whether or not you got off the language probation. We didn't have that problem.

Q: Right, exactly. It continued to be a problem. Because you needed it before you were tenured. But let me go back for a moment to this thirty-five-millimeter camera. I've never heard of that as a training practice. What did you end up photographing? Or how were the photographs integrated into the training?

KORFF: That's a good question. In addition to giving us ideas about how to frame a photo, how to consider what would be interesting, and how you're going to be able to sell a story, because the whole idea is that you're going to place this stuff in local media, right? So, as you might imagine, in the end, I don't think any of us ever used that skill, because we all had FSNs -- local employees -- who would perform that role. But you ask a good question about how we actually went out to practice this skill, because we were across from McPherson Square and Franklin Park, and then further down near 14th Street. At Franklin Park there were a lot of homeless people. And we were warned early on, don't take photos of the homeless people, they will get angry—go somewhere else. So that was a lesson. But they gave us, by the way, both black-and-white as well as color film, because in those days, you did release a lot of material in black and white since most local newspapers printed in black and white only. We would go out and we would learn how to do close ups, how to frame the scene to make the photo more interesting, contrast it with something near and far. Depth of field became important because if you wanted to blur the background, as opposed to having everything in focus, you had to adjust. There was no digital in those days, so no automatic adjustments, so you did it all yourself. It was a very interesting experience for us. In addition to thirty-five millimeter, we also learned about videotaping because that was becoming something that the agency was using more and more. Thus, we had some experience learning how to do videotaping.

Q: Yes, even though the methods of photography have changed, nevertheless having a sense for what a good photo looks like and how a video can come out well or not is still a good skill to have. But to turn back to your training, did you spend a lot of time learning what the Washington offices did?

KORFF: Yes. And in those days, you should know ICA/USIA was at the corner of 18th and Pennsylvania. So, we could walk over to State, and we all had to try to get into our desk officers at the Agency. That wasn't always easy. And we had to go to VOA, which was over in Southwest D.C. Even in those days, USIA was spread out around town. But we did have appointments with our own area offices, or they would come to us sometimes. You know, in those days, there was a second mandate for us: we had to report on public opinion in our host countries. So, we met with the Research Office and the Media Reaction staff to learn what they wanted us to report. How could we submit reports that would be helpful to them?

Q: And I'm sure this is an office within ICA that's essentially funded to conduct the

polling.

KORFF: Yes, and today, just so you know, it's part of INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research]. In 1999, when we merged, everybody had to find a job. And so, the people that had been in USIA's Research Office were all moved over to INR.

Q: Did embassies actually conduct the polling? Or were you finding local polling agencies that you could hire to do it?

KORFF: For the most part, we didn't even do the latter, our job in terms of being able to report useful data relied more on stuff we might find out from our contacts or in the newspapers or things like that. And much depended on the individual post's budget and staffing. My first three assignments were in India, and they didn't have polling in those days. Whereas my fourth assignment was in West Germany, and lots of polling was going on there. And so, it was easy for us to be able to report that sort of information. My recollection is that the Research Office contracted directly with polling companies.

Q: One last question about polling. What did we want to know in general from polls?

KORFF: Well, of course, a lot of it has to do with attitudes toward the United States. That never changed over my entire career, all twenty-five years. But another element is whether or not we were having any impact on the DRS [database of embassy contacts], because it's an awful waste of money if you're bringing all these speakers overseas or you're producing videotapes or sending leaders to the U.S. on short-term visits, if we aren't making any difference. Is it worth the cost?

Q: Right. And how did you measure it? Was it in terms of how many people you thought you could reach with your products, or, and so on, you know, what, what, what were the evaluation tools?

KORFF: You're getting at a good point, because they wanted to be able to count things. Sometimes attendance was a factor. Now in a country of a billion people, you know, it's easy to jack-up your numbers. And that's, I think, one reason why India was one of the best places for DRS. Because there you really could find out if you're getting at the influential people or if you're just getting at the masses. And so that certainly was a really important part of our work -- being able to identify who are the movers and shakers. And who can influence what's going on?

Q: Alright. As your training continued, did you form a mental list of where you wanted to serve?

KORFF: Well, in my case, it was a little awkward. I just assumed when I joined the Foreign Service that I was going to go to Germany. And that would have made a lot of sense, since I had studied in Germany and I spoke the language. But of course, it was a very sought-after place. When the list of posts that were available came out, it was a little distressing, when almost all of them were in places that I'd never heard of. I had no idea

where Ouagadougou was— and, you know, some were places where I never wanted to go— I had no interest in going to New Delhi, which was on the list. (On the very first day in the Foreign Service, we had to take the MLAT [Modern Language Aptitude Test]. And so, when we got our MLAT scores, it immediately let them know that I was not going to Russia, I was not going to China, my MLAT was just too low to learn one of the really difficult languages. And so that sort of restricted the areas where I could apply.) I mentioned to you about the language probation: When I tested in German, I got a two-plus/ three. I don't know why it was only a two-plus, I should have gotten better. But they decided that because I had management experience from when I worked in higher education, they decided that I was going to be a good candidate for a one-officer post.

Most of our one-person posts were in Africa. They decided that I should learn French. Now the decision about what language you're going to take in order to get off language probation was divorced from the assignment process in a way that was really unfortunate. In the end, I got assigned to India, where you don't need to learn French. But anyway, that was the way it worked out. I had no real interest in French, but it was what they decided I needed to learn.

Q: Did they give you the full French course? Did they expect you to be off language probation in French?

KORFF: Yes, I had to get a 3-3 in French before I could go overseas. Three in speaking and three in reading out of a 0-5 scale.

Q: Okay, that's typically five to six months.

KORFF: I began it seems to me in October through March. Our language training was at FSI [Foreign Service Institute], which in those days was in Rosslyn. One day, the language supervisor for French came to me at the start of the day and said, “Well, we've gotten a request from ICA that you report to ICA headquarters. And so, we're going to give you your test in one hour.” I had an hour to prepare for the test! As it turns out, that was a good thing, because I would have just worried if I had advance notice. So, I took the test. And they said, "Congratulations, you're done." So, I then had to report to ICA.

It's a long story, but the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission on Education and Culture was going to be meeting in Washington, and the U.S. was hosting it that year. And at the same time, the office director for NEA [Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs] -- in those days, South Asia was part of NEA-- was going to be away. The India desk officer at ICA was going to take over as Deputy Director for NEA. And so, they needed someone to be the India desk officer. With no idea what a desk officer did, never having done it, I moved over to ICA and became the desk officer for India!

Q: And so, you have essentially basic fluency in two languages. And you end up using neither of them for your first assignment.

KORFF: That's right.

Q: All right. How quickly did you learn the ropes as a desk officer?

KORFF: It was relatively easy. It's a matter of reading the cable traffic and making sure that the requests from the post are answered and that the cables are properly routed. I had a good theoretical understanding of which office did what, so it was easy enough for me to go from office to office and say, “Did you see that cable that came in from Delhi today? Are you looking into it? What can I tell them?” And so on. So it wasn't that difficult. In those days, all cables were on paper, you didn't have anything electronic. And so it was, in some ways, a good experience to learn how the agency operated.

Back to the meeting of the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission that we were about to host. I had never been to India and really didn’t know much about it. But I did know that our Fulbright scholar exchange program was funded out of P.L. 480 money, so a key activity of the Sub-Commission meeting was how best to use those funds. The U.S. Co-Chairman of the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission was the Secretary of the Smithsonian. And so I had to meet all these big wigs. The meetings were held at the Air and Space Museum. And we then hosted them for a reception on the eighth floor at Main State. And I’ll just tell you one very interesting anecdote.

At that time, during the Carter Administration, Cyrus Vance was Secretary of State. My job was to greet the director of ICA, Dr. John Reinhardt, and make sure he greeted the right people. And while I’m explaining who Dr. Reinhardt should meet, in walks Cyrus Vance, who is a little surprised that there is a reception going and starts looking around. And he notices there's all these Indians and several Americans. And he says, "This doesn't look like the Thursday lunch group." At that time, the Thursday lunch group was reserved for African Americans in the department. And we said no, but Mr. Secretary, wouldn’t you like to meet the head of the delegation from India? He wasn't interested. Once he knew he was in the wrong place, he turned and walked out.

Fig.1: Ambassador John Reinhardt, Director of the International Communication Agency (left), Dr. Dorothy Robins-Mowry, ICA’s Acting Deputy Director of NEA, and Michael Korff, Acting India Desk Officer, at the reception at the State Department for the Indo-U.S. Sub-commission for Education and Culture in 1980.

Nevertheless, the meeting went well, everybody was happy. They were all there to make things work. And it came out well from our perspective. I subsequently also attended the Sub-Commission meetings when I was again the desk officer for India from 1990 to 1992. As things progressed, the meetings became longer and so did the prep. Especially

the paperwork.

Q: Did you get an orientation tour of India?

KORFF: No, because about six weeks later, I left for India for my first overseas assignment.

Q: Well, first time in India, and certainly a culture that you hadn't studied before, and so on. What were your impressions?

KORFF: Well, I'll come back to that in just a minute. But before we forget it, you might be interested in the reaction of the junior officers. We had entered in May of 1979. By the following September, a bunch of Americans had been taken hostage in Tehran. And so, some of us began wondering whether we were really cut out for this. We don't want to be taken hostage wherever we are going. So that became a real issue. And Vance was the secretary, so there were a lot of things in the ether. And every night at 11 o'clock or so it seemed to me, on the TV news shows, they continued to count the days the U.S. hostages were in Iran. One of these shows, *Nightline,* got its start with this coverage.

Anyway, getting back to India, on the way I flew first to Vienna because I was allowed a day or so to acclimate to the change of time zone, and a friend from my orientation class was willing to host me. After a few days in Vienna, I took the train to Paris for a few days of practicing my new language skills. (Alas, I found it difficult to understand a French train schedule—I didn't even know the word *horaire*—it's good support for an immersive experience!) I did enjoy my stays in both Vienna and Paris.

New Delhi, India

I reached Delhi in early May at the regularly scheduled arrival time of 1:30 a.m. In those days, even at such an outlandish hour, the embassy extended the courtesy of having a sponsor pick you up. We collected the luggage in the barely air-conditioned terminal and started walking to my sponsor's car. And that's when it hit me. A throng of people so thick you could not see the end awaited us, a literal ocean of humanity. And this was at 1:30 in the morning. So, the overall experience of the heat, humidity, the exhaustion, and the population rush meant that it was quite a confusing time. The assistant executive officer, who was my sponsor, then drove me to the junior officer's apartment.

Oh, I've forgotten something. While I was the India desk officer, a cable arrives. It informs me that the junior officer who had been initially assigned to Kolkata had been medically evacuated because he had experienced a nervous breakdown. This was not encouraging news for someone like me, trying to think through how to prepare for Delhi. But that news was not the important part. The cable continued, "We are therefore going to send Korff to Kolkata after three months of training in Delhi."

That was how I found out I was not going to stay in Delhi, but to the easternmost metropolis of India. I didn't even know it was under consideration. No one asked me. Now let's get back to the arrival in Delhi. As I said, the assistant executive officer takes me to the entry-level officer's quarters where the guy that had been medically evacuated for a nervous breakdown had lived. Can you imagine your sponsor telling you, as he turns the key, that the poor guy with the nervous breakdown was the last occupant of your quarters?

But it turns out to be beautiful. It's the top floor of a two-story duplex in the diplomatic enclave of New Delhi, located six or seven blocks from the American Embassy. But of course, the American Center wasn't at the Chancery—it was downtown. So, I'm picked up the next day. Well, that first night everything was strange, my internal clock was wrong. I'm ready to get up when I should be going to sleep. And suddenly, there's a gecko on the wall. And I didn't know what a gecko was, I had never lived in a tropical country. And so, I killed it. And the next morning, when the assistant executive officer came to pick me up, he said, you know, my children learn early on that geckos are your friend. If you don't like mosquitoes, you want geckos. And so, I never again ever harmed a gecko. But anyway, that was my first night. I was taken into the American Center and introduced around. And early on, I remember, I was trapped in the elevator when the power went out. Apparently, this was very typical. Someone shouted down from the floor above, "Don't panic. We'll get you out." That was part of my introduction to life in the developing world.

Now, back then, USICA used to insist that new officers spend some time in each section of the American Center so that I would have a familiarity with our operations. So, I spent two weeks in the press attaché's office. His office was at the Chancery. And Robert Goheen was the Ambassador. You may know he had been president of Princeton, and he had been born in India, where his parents were missionaries. And so, Goheen, an avuncular sort of fellow--he must have been eighty-- was going off to the External Affairs Ministry to sign an agreement for USAID. And he says, "Oh, why don't you come with me?" So, within a week after I'm in the country, I'm going off in the ambassador's limousine to the foreign ministry. And then I get back and the press attaché says, "Well, since you went with him, why don't you write the press release?" So, I had to write a press release about how we were giving millions of dollars or something—even though I knew nothing about USAID! So that was an early experience. And then I get back to the American Center downtown the following week. And they say, well, the editor of *Span* is going on home leave. *(Span* was one of the magazines ICA/USIA published.) And they said, well, you're going to edit the next issue. I am? And they had a staff of maybe ten FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals], just working on *Span*. So, I suddenly learned all about supervising FSNs, relying on them to do most of the hand-holding. And I learned a lot. It was fun to edit that first issue and it gave me sort of a sense of what was possible with all that money, because it was a very rich post.

Q: You know, I'll only briefly comment that if you're in Public Affairs, it's always better to be at a post with a big budget. You can get amazing things done if you have a big budget.

But alright, you only get three months in Delhi. While you're in your three months, do they send you to all the different offices? Do you spend a couple of days in the Consulate, you know, overseeing the visas and so on?

KORFF: Not in Delhi. That would wait until I got to Kolkata. But I was still dragging my feet about going to Kolkata. I had convinced myself I was going to like Delhi. But this idea that because this other guy had had his mental breakdown, I was going to Kolkata was another issue. I said, but there's a black hole there that we all fall into, and it's going to be awful. In those days, there was an Anglo-Indian who worked for us, in the admin office at USICA, the executive office, it was called. And he says, well, you know, Mary Frances Cowan, the branch PAO [Public Affairs Officer] in Kolkata has bought all this bamboo furniture, and we need to send it off to Kolkata for her: it's going to go by train: Why don't you escort her furniture down to Kolkata and take a look? So, I took the train to Kolkata.

In those days, I ran a couple of miles every day. So, I get down to Kolkata and the Marines have been told there to make Korff happy. And so, they came by my hotel in the morning, so that I could run with them at five in the morning, a time dictated by the desire to avoid the heat! And while I'm there, I get a call from the director of NEA saying, "Well, now that you're there, we're just hoping that maybe you'll reconsider your concerns about Kolkata, and would you be willing to stay there?" And he said, "You know, it's a good experience. It's better than Delhi, because it is a smaller post, you'll learn a lot more and you get to do a lot more." So, I said, okay, but I had to go back to Delhi for a while before I ultimately had the actual transfer.

I did forget one element: I am coming by train between Delhi and Kolkata. And I had been warned that you don't want to eat any vegetables or fruits that aren't peeled, and all water must be boiled, that sort of stuff. So, I was in first class on the train. It was a nice train. But this is a three-day trip, I think: it's a long ride. And just outside of Delhi, apparently it hit a buffalo, which turned off the air-conditioning of the train, and the windows in first class cannot be opened. So, in this first-class cabin, with no air conditioning, the steward comes along and says now we're taking dinner orders. And since you're a Westerner who knows nothing about our country, we're giving you an English dinner. And an English dinner means that they take chicken or whatever it is, and vegetables and throw it all into a pot and boil it. And then you're given boiled chicken and boiled vegetables and that's your meal. (Later on, the more I lived in India, I knew to always ask for an Indian meal, but in those first days, I was stuck in this compartment, no air conditioning, eating this awful food. All I had were bananas, because bananas, I knew you could peel so you aren't going to have to have this problem of having to peel the fruit or whatever.) So, it ended up being a very interesting trip down there. But Mary Frances Cowan, the branch PAO, was just wonderful. She was a joy to work for. I worked with her for just a year. Because after the time in Kolkata, I completed my year of JO training and was ready for my final, permanent assignment, which in the meantime had been determined to be Madras.

Calcutta

Q: Wow. Quite a tour of India for a first-time junior officer.

KORFF: It was. You'll find this interesting: In those days, there was a branch post in Delhi as well. So, in addition to the headquarters for ICA, there was an ICA office for this branch post just for North India. And then there was one in Bombay, with four officers, and in Madras with four officers, but Kolkata because we weren't allowed to go into Assam and all those other states that are over there in the Northeast, they only had three officers. But in those days, Kolkata had two American centers to run. One was called the American University Center located up at the university, and one was located downtown in a dilapidated building owned by the Life Insurance Corporation of India. And since they only had three officers, they really needed a new junior officer. So, I got to do a lot. They were very happy to have me.

Along comes the U.S. national elections. Ronald Reagan is running against Jimmy Carter. When they were preparing us for our overseas assignments, they kept telling us, you're really going to need a good shortwave radio, otherwise, you won't know what's going on in the world. Well, I ended up having the best shortwave radio at post. And so, for our election night program, they ended up using my shortwave radio and broadcasting VOA reports to the assembled guests. And furthermore, we had an all-night election watch. It's kind of a tradition. And I ended up being on the stage the entire night reporting what's on the shortwave, because we didn't have CNN [Cable News Network] or anything like that. But this is a junior officer standing up there on the stage, wandering around answering questions as though he knew what was going on. And reporting what's on the shortwave. So, it was quite an introduction.

Q: This, in terms of the year you, you arrived there in spring 1980. And then now this is the election in November of '80. But, but you're still in Kolkata you don't move from Kolkata until after the election.

KORFF: Didn't move until May 1981. In those days, we had to do a whole year as a JO. Now remember, India is a very wealthy post in terms of public diplomacy budget. So, it gets lots of American speakers. But I will never forget how, under Carter, we kept talking about human rights. A lot of our programming dealt with human rights and things like that. On January 21, suddenly, we started talking about terrorism and autocrats versus Communists. (The argument was that pro-U.S. autocrats were better than anti-U.S. Communists.) It really impressed me how disciplined the Foreign Service was to be able to change the topics of emphasis and outreach on a dime. In spite of the long-time prejudice that the Foreign Service is some kind of "deep state" that carries out its own views rather than those of the Administration, I was impressed that no one groused, they just methodically went about preparing new materials that fit with the goals of the Reagan Administration.

Q: Yes. Weren't there other major cultural events in Kolkata that the U.S. public diplomacy center took part in? I remember a book festival example?

KORFF: I didn't have anything to do with the book festival, but it is a big deal. And USIS usually has a booth of some sort. Because you may know, with all this money, we could reprint books, so we would be able to reprint American bestsellers even. Usually they were more academic, but we could reprint bestsellers sometimes—in English. Much later, I was in Dhaka. And in Dhaka, we used to translate books and have them printed in Bangla (Bengali). And while still in Calcutta, I went to the chief FSN [Foreign Service National] and said, you know, there are all these books that are being offered to us from Dhaka. Can't we use some of them, send them to our contacts? And the response was, well, their Bengali is a little different. And besides, our target audience all speaks English. But there's a real sort of snobbery between the FSNs of Kolkata and the FSNs of Dhaka, and that never changed. I'm sure it's still there today. I didn't know all of the politics of it, but for a lot of the FSNs at Kolkata, their parents had emigrated to West Bengal during the partition. And so, you know, there's bad feelings: their property is still over there in the East.

Q: How about hosting speakers, experts from the U.S.?

KORFF: Yes, regarding speakers, I hosted two at my home. But what I wanted to point out was that the FSNs could easily run the post. They were so good in Kolkata that they needed little supervision. I remember once, early in the Reagan Administration, I was hosting one of our speakers and a few invitees at my apartment, and the phone rings. One of my servants answered the phone and said, "There's somebody on the phone from Washington. Could you talk to her?" I pick up the receiver and I hear, “Hi, this is Jeanne Kirkpatrick. I'm going to be the new ambassador to the UN [United Nations]. I understand that you’ve got a speaker whom I’d like to talk to.” This speaker was another professor from Georgetown whose name I now forget. I turned over the phone to him and he went into my godown (pantry) for privacy, and Kirkpatrick offered him the job of deputy chief of mission at the UN.

So those were the kind of speakers we would get, and it helped create a fascinating time for a first-tour officer. Another thing that happened that was really fascinating: I never had to hire a house staff before. But in Kolkata, I had to hire my own. And, after talking to a few people, they told me that I could hire a cook who would assume all I wanted to eat was Anglo food. But I wanted Indian food. So, I’m in an area of India with a large Muslim population – bordering Bangladesh – and everyone recommends I hire a Muslim cook. I did. Later, I sent him for a physical exam as recommended by the Regional Medical Officer in Delhi, and we learned that he had syphilis and tuberculosis. But he was a good cook! He spoke adequate English. And so, I was really happy with him.

Something many people don’t know about eastern India is that there are a few very large communist parties. West Bengal had a Marxist government, and the FSNs, because they were so well connected, they had arranged for a minister, a Muslim minister in the Marxist government, to come to my house for dinner, and have a discussion with the speaker. So, we were really excited about it. And as I had done for all of the other events, I simply told the chef to cook. You know, “On Tuesday, we're going to have a group of ten people over for dinner. Please make something nice.” And that was the end of it. I

never asked about the menu. I had no idea what to ask for. I just said make something. So, we're having cocktails before the dinner, and the chief FSN decided to go check to make sure dinner was almost ready: What are we having, everything's okay, etc.

And he goes into the kitchen. Now he was a Hindu Brahmin. But he went in and talked to the chef and discovered that my Muslim chef had prepared pork fried rice for my Muslim minister. Well, that was a scene! So, they quickly delayed the dinner a bit, and they made some white rice. And I don't know what else we ate, and I have no idea what the topping was. But it just shows you what can happen if you don't really pay attention to what's going on and don't make it your business to oversee everything in detail. In my case, it reflected the fact that I didn't, I may not have known at the time, and I must not have told him that there was a minister coming and that he was a Muslim. But at the very least, I should have at some point gone over the menu with him to make sure it's going to be okay.

Q: Were there other notable programs or activities you undertook in Calcutta?

KORFF: A few things were notable. Early on, I accompanied the Consul General on his regular visit to the State of Orissa (today spelled "Odisha"). It was a long road trip and included a visit to a university where we had an American Fulbright professor. I thought it was interesting that the CG would call on a Fulbrighter. The CG was a great professional and clearly knew all about his consular district.

Also, in Calcutta, I finally did my rotation through the consular section. Much of Northeast India was off-limits to American diplomats, so we had limited information on what was going up there. There was a first-rate Consular Officer who personally interviewed anyone who came into the Consulate General from the Northeast requesting a visa: It was a unique way of gleaning information about what was happening in the Northeast. I'm sure he then had to sit down and prepare a cable reporting on the information. While I was doing my rotation in the consular section, I accompanied the Consular Officer on a visit to a prison west of Calcutta where an American was imprisoned. It was my introduction to that aspect of consular responsibilities. And while we were at the prison, I discovered that prisons hold the children of the female inmates as well. I had just assumed that they were kept in orphanages, so that was a revelation to me. My time in the consular section introduced me to the fraud that is committed in the adoption racket. Even the Missionaries of Charity—the order founded by Mother Teresa—were accused of falsifying records in order to facilitate the adoption by Americans of babies born in their Shishu Bhavan orphanage.

Although we couldn't go to the Northeast, we still had responsibilities in the other states in Eastern India, including Bihar and Orissa. So, I went on a weeklong program tour in Bihar with a group of FSNs. It focused mainly on visiting newspapers and presenting video programs dealing with economic issues. Bihar had huge iron and steel factories and coal mines, and we tried to explain the benefits of free trade and market economies. (India was still a pretty closed economy, and the Indian Rupee was not convertible.) As I mentioned, the FSNs were quite competent and could easily have presented the programs

without me, but it helped to have an American present. I learned a lot from the FSNs on how best to run programs and interact with host-country nationals.

Another program that was really quite exciting was a program in Orissa where we chartered an entire train "bogie" to take the elite of East India's fiction writers and poets to a weeklong program on the Bay of Bengal. We had the Fulbrighter (a professor of literature) make some of the presentations and the Indians made their own presentations. It was a highly successful effort. (One interesting sidelight of that trip was that in addition to our guests, also at the hotel were a large number of Soviet tourists. We learned that their trip to seaside India was a reward for outstanding work and loyalty in the Soviet Union. All their expenses were paid by the USSR, but they had no spending money. If they wanted to buy souvenirs or eat outside the hotel, they needed Rupees. So, they brought all kinds of items that they could sell to Indians in order to raise funds.)

Q: It's so good that you learned, early on, how to manage events so that everyone feels comfortable. Moving on, at that time, was Mother Teresa active? Did you have any interactions with her work?

KORFF: Yes, she was, but I never met her. And I'll just digress here for a minute. You may know that I met my wife in Kolkata. She went to the same church as Mother Teresa. So, she had that connection. And then later on, we worked at the Mother Teresa-founded Missionaries of Charity at our postings, in Washington, Manila, and in Jamaica, always at soup kitchens run by the Missionaries of Charity. (In addition, we facilitated Mother Teresa's successor as she arrived and departed from Ninoy Aquino Airport in Manila.)

Q: I didn't realize how broadly the mission had expanded. That's very interesting.

KORFF: They're always in the poorest countries; you're not going to find them in West Germany.

Q: You've had a good introduction to work in eastern India. How did Madras come up?

KORFF: I think they were trying to reward me, because the director of NEA when he called me up says, "and for your follow-on assignment, we'll get you Madras, which has the best housing." And it's true. In those days, everybody got their own house, unlike in Kolkata, where we had to live in an apartment. But in Madras, everybody had their own house with their own yard. In order to complete my first tour, I had to put in three years at some post. The first year was partly in Delhi and partly in Kolkata and then two years in Madras, starting in May of 1981.

Madras

Q: India has many states, ethnic groups, and languages. How did the Madras consular district and your responsibilities differ from Kolkata?

KORFF: Well, a couple of things. First of all, there are you could say five southern states.

The fifth one mostly we would not count, but Pondicherry ("Puducherry" today) is a separate "union territory" -- it's like a state. So, I was given responsibility for all USIS programming in Tamil Nadu (that's the state where Madras is), Kerala, which is the other Southernmost state, and Puducherry. So those three places, plus I was head of all audio-visual programming in Madras. The other JO—in those days we were four FSOs—was responsible for the library, the International Visitor Program, and the DRS system. In addition, she oversaw programs in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, which are the two states further north of mine. And it was a busy area. We had lots to do. Like Kolkata, we had lots of speakers coming through. India has its own Fulbright Commission. In the case of Kolkata and Delhi, the commission is not located at the USIS building. In Madras, however, it was located right in our building with us. What was really unfortunate was that the branch PAO [Public Affairs Officer] outranked the CG [Consul General], because in those days, he didn't report to the CG. Now, under the current setup, a PAO reports to the head of the consulate. Anyway, we had very little to do with the consular officers. But what was really bad is we were trying to get students to go study in the United States. So, they would come to the office that dealt with student advising, we would help them take their TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] exam and their GRE [Graduate Record Exam] and LSAT [Law School Admission Test], MCAT [Medical School Admissions Test], or GMAT [Graduate Management Admission Test] exams, and then they would go to the very next door and get turned down for a student visa. At least in Delhi, Bombay, and Kolkata, they're, not in the same building: There's an arm's-length, at least, that separates us. So that was a big change.

Q: Now, when you say get turned down? You mean they did not get a visa?

KORFF: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, that's painful. Yeah, okay. That meant either losing the slots altogether or starting a quick review of the alternate list.

KORFF: I don't think we ever had an International Visitor turned down. Those were the shorter, professional tours, and participants were escorted throughout the visit, so it was harder to overstay. I think it was only students who had come in, who wanted to be undergraduates or maybe graduate students, who were refused visas. And then the Fulbright Program, as you are hinting at, wasn't run by us directly. It was run by the Fulbright Commission. So that was a little different than it would be at a post where you run your own Fulbright program.

Q: But even on the Fulbright Commission, an American or a number of Americans were members of it.

KORFF: Yes, because it was a Binational Commission. And so half of the members of the commission were Americans, usually appointed by the ambassador or Country PAO in those days.

Q: And did the country PAO come down for it? Or were you in any way responsible for?

KORFF: The meetings of the commission were almost always held in Delhi. The staff who did the student advising reported to Delhi, not to us, but since they were next door to us, and because we were trying to help students as best we could, we had a lot of interaction. And, in fact, the woman that ran the program in Madras was from Mangalore. Mangalore is a town over on the West Coast that my wife's family comes from. So that was a very interesting connection.

Q: What were your responsibilities?

KORFF: As I recall, there were nine FSNs who reported to me. Half of them worked on programs that we would do in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Half would work on audio-visual stuff.

Q: Now, the audio-visual stuff, was that for presentation in your cultural center? Or where were you planning to have it shown?

KORFF: Most of it, well, maybe fifty-fifty, was held at the American Center: we had a large auditorium. And we had film festivals there. All kinds of stuff. When I got there, for example, when we had film festivals, you know, an FSN, would take the guests' invitations, admit them into the auditorium, they would sit down, and the show would come on: they never saw an American officer at any of those showings. I just thought that was wrong. Here's an opportunity. So, I changed that: it meant that I had to come back at night and on weekends, but at that time my wife was in the U.S. And so, I didn't have much to do with my free time anyway. A driver would come pick me up, drive me back to the consulate. And I could welcome people in the lobby and then introduce the film from the stage.

I learned all about a lot of movies that I previously knew nothing about. Because I would then give some background; otherwise, the guests are just coming in for the entertainment. That's not serving our purpose. I didn't think so: I wanted to get a little more out of it. If I were to do it today, I would then have discussion groups afterwards. I would ask, you know, how does this compare with a Bollywood movie (or in the case of Madras, "Kollywood," as the Tamil film industry is called)? You may or may not know this, but there are more South Indian films made each year than there are Bollywood (Hindi) films made each year. Everybody knows about Bombay and Bollywood, but they don't know much about Tamil cinema.

Q: Interesting. I am curious, just for a moment, or are there major differences between Bollywood movies and Tamil?

KORFF: I don't see the difference. Other than language, it's the same. They are difficult to sit through because they last so long, right. And there's so much dancing and singing. A film may be filmed in Bombay one year in Hindi and in Madras the next year in Tamil.

KORFF: In addition to those videotapes and movies that we presented in the auditorium,

I would say one week per month I had to be outside of Madras, either other places within Tamil Nadu or places in Kerala. We took big videotape players and big monitors in the back of our trucks, and we would drive all over South India, set those up, and play them. Now, of course the stuff that we got that was policy-oriented was always going to be in English. So, you had to choose your audience based on whether or not they're going to know what's going on so that you can then answer questions after the program or whatever.

But we also would have one night, usually with the Vice Chancellor – often an alumnus of an American or Soviet university – of the local university, where we would play recordings of Western symphonic music, and this was a big hit, especially among the returned Fulbrighters and those who had gone to the East-West Center in Hawaii. They craved Western classical music in a way that was really surprising. And so, we would have an evening that was not very policy-oriented, but it was a big hit among our audiences, it was a way of letting them know, we care about you. We also want to talk to you about our policy interests. But we also want to do this for you.

The other aspect of our programming outside of Madras involved some creativity. I told you that I had a relatively big staff to help plan these programs into the *mofussil*, the Outback. They learned to be very creative in finding speakers. When we would have an American Fulbrighter at one of the universities in the south, we would get that guy to come with us on our trips. Who would have thought that somebody who was a sociologist would suddenly be able to give these brilliant lectures on intellectual property? In those days, people were stealing a lot of our intellectual property. And the sociologist could give firsthand reports on what it means to have his intellectual property stolen. And you know, things like that really resonated. We had really successful programs all across South India.

Q: And that brings me to the question of how did you evaluate your programs? And did you conduct public opinion polling?

KORFF: No polling, but the evaluation usually was based on how many P's and R's showed up at programs. (A 'P' is a participant in programs and an 'R' is a recipient of materials.) Any comments the P's and R's might have made were also included in the reporting cable. The quality of the discussion afterwards was included. It was more attendance than whether or not we were able to actually change hearts and minds.

Q: And was any of your evaluation related to how many influencers you were able to have to help amplify messages or anything like that?

KORFF: Absolutely! We certainly knew how many influencers had been there. Whether or not they then went on to influence others, which is what you're getting at, we don't know. But at least we could count how many people participated in the event, whether or not any Marxists showed up, etc. (Kerala at the time had a Marxist government. So, when you get a Marxist to come to one of your programs, you really cheer: you know you've done a big thing. And if they asked a question, that's even better.)

Q: You had mentioned the Marxist government in Kolkata. I don't think that a lot of Americans know how many places there are communist parties in India, and how divided they are and how much they fight amongst themselves.

KORFF: Yeah, that's right. And Kolkata was a Communist Party Marxist government (CPM). And it seems to me that Kerala had a more left-leaning government than in Kolkata, although I may be wrong. What you might find interesting is that the first Marxist government in India was in Kerala, and Kerala has the highest literacy rate, the lowest birth rate, and the highest women's literacy rate in India.

Q: To what extent did you evaluate your success with the press and media?

KORFF: When you're going outside of Madras, you are responsible for meeting all the regional press, and so, you learn, for example, to go from office to office to office, and in those days, India had a really vibrant press, very free. Back then, it was a Congress government, an Indian National Congress government, so they weren't closing journalists down like they are right now. So, we would go from office to office to office talking about whatever your topic is: if right now we're talking about terrorism, that's what you end up talking about. But you must have tea at every office you go to, they have to be hospitable, that's in their culture. And so, you have to drink tea. Well, one of my predecessors was a Mormon, and would not drink tea. And so, they would then say, "Look, let me give you a Thumbs-Up (the Indian version of Coca-Cola)." "No, I don't want that either," was the response. They were very happy with me, because I was willing to drink whatever they wanted to offer. If it was a really hot afternoon, and they offered me a Thumbs-Up, that's fine, too. (I think it made life easier for the FSNs, since they didn't have to spend time explaining American idiosyncrasies and religious preferences.)

Q: But did you have to go there and scold them for misrepresenting something about the United States

KORFF: We tended not to scream at them. That wouldn't get you very far. But sometimes, we would do our best to tell them, "You know, we did read that editorial that you wrote about us. And we just want to make sure that, you know, that's not really an accurate reflection of what our position is, or of our society or whatever." So, you do try to set the record straight in that regard. And I also point out that, even in Madras because I did all of the local A/V programming [Audio Visual], I wasn't responsible for the press in Madras, the PAO kept that for himself. However, those people wanted to come to my movies. Often I had to do speaker programs in Madras as well. And so, if we wanted them to come to see this speaker who's going to talk about the freedom of the press, or whatever, they would have to come into my house, not to the PAO's house. So that was another entry point. But in terms of going to a press office in Madras to make a presentation, or to set the editorial board right, that was usually done by the PAO.

Q: Now, at this point, you said your wife is in the U.S., does she join you at any point in

Madras?

KORFF: No.

Q: Okay. Because since she's of Indian ancestry, sometimes a spouse who's, you know, connected to the local culture can be enormously helpful, in a lot of ways in just everyday work, but in this case, of course, since she's not there.

KORFF: Yeah. When we get to Dhaka, we can talk about that as well, because my wife speaks Bengali, being from Kolkata, and so she ended up being a very positive force in her Public Diplomacy.

Q: Right. At this point, based on your good evaluations, were you tenured?

KORFF: We were tenured before we left the U.S.

Q: That's quite fast.

KORFF: I'm not sure if all fifteen of us in the orientation class were tenured that quickly. Two of the fifteen dropped out and never went overseas at all. But this raises an interesting point. I entered before the Foreign Service Act of 1980 as an FSIO-7. After the new Foreign Service Act, suddenly I was an FS-5 because it was two digits off. And that was when the Senior Foreign Service was also created. So, we were no longer foreign service information officers as we had been, we became just FSOs. And our numbering system shifted by two. So, before I went overseas, I was grandfathered into the new Foreign Service as an FS-5.

Q: That's one of the technical or bureaucratic aspects. Were there other things that changed dramatically, once the Foreign Service Act of 1980 went into effect?

KORFF: I'm sure there were others that I didn't know about. Until about 1986, when they suddenly said, you must now make a decision about whether you're going to stay in the old Foreign Service pension plan, or you're going to switch to FSPS [Foreign Service Pension System]. So that came later and did have some impact on me. But while I was overseas, you know, this was all happening while I was away. One change was in nomenclature: Soon after Reagan became president, we became USIA again.

Q: Were there other consequential events you remember from Madras that had a beneficial effect in the rest of your career? Other skills or talents that you learned?

KORFF: No, I think I was still learning a lot. And there you cannot beat the quality of FSNs. In India, they're just among the best. So, I learned a lot just by being around them. There were some difficult people to deal with at times and you learn from that experience as well. At one point, the inspectors came down to our post. And when they found out about the difficulties we were all having with the PAO, he was told that he needed to retire. And so that had a positive outcome.

There are a couple of other interesting events from my assignment to Madras that point to the foibles of having high- ranking Washington officials decide on programming at posts abroad.

First, you'll recall that I was responsible for audio-visual programming in Madras. In 1982, the Director of USIA, Charles Z. Wick decided that we should broadcast a film entitled *Let Poland Be Poland* narrated by Charlton Heston at every USIS post abroad. The Government of India (GOI) was vigorously non-aligned, which meant that any propaganda effort that might offend the Soviet Union was to be avoided. The GOI prohibited USIS India from presenting the film at any of the four American Centers. We were, however, able to skirt the prohibition by presenting the film at diplomats' homes. I was the designated diplomat for Madras. So, we invited people to my residence, provided snacks and an ample supply of liquor, and dutifully sat through the film. We were then able to report to Delhi, and Delhi could report to Washington that influential Indians had seen Charlie Wick's film.

The other Washington-directed event was a "gift" to the post. Washington offered New Delhi, and New Delhi offered to the posts, the opportunity to present a performance of the National Theatre of the Deaf. My staff, which knew little about programming the deaf, found a venue for the performance and invited every deaf person or organization focused on people with disabilities to the performance. My admiration for the local staff is profound: We presented a successful performance and found an audience. At a time when we were focused on the DRS audiences, we reached out to a general audience. It was quite a feat.

Another bright idea from Washington was that we program a dance troupe that wanted to perform a free concert at Mahabalipuram, one of the great archeological sites in South India, located right on the Indian Ocean. It's about 90 minutes south of Madras. The Deputy Director of USIA floated the idea that we arrange a free evening performance. (Daytime temperatures in South India are such that dancers would melt.) We explained that there was no electricity, no lights, no seating, no way to control access, etc. We tried to get across that finding an audience in a land of a billion people was not a problem. Ultimately, we prevailed and we were not saddled with supporting a visit.

One set of programs may be of interest to you: We had several Arts America programs that we offered in Madras and Bangalore. These included dance troupes, jazz musicians, and drama groups. USIS posts had independent authority to contract with local groups to co-present the various acts. By co-sponsoring, we were able to use any revenue that might be raised at the presentations to help fund the cost of renting venues, print tickets, etc. The cosponsor benefited by being associated with us – and it kept a modest honorarium.

It was at this time that I began bidding on my next assignment, and my number one choice was Cologne. Now you may know there is no consulate in Cologne, so the Amerika Haus in Cologne is a very important institution. I thought that would be just a

great assignment. I don't remember the other places that I bid on. But as you already suggested, I had a pretty good reputation. By then I was an FS-04, and things were going pretty well. I got a phone call at 2 a.m. India time. It was from my Career Counselor (what the State Department calls Career Development Officer). He says, "I see where your first choice is Cologne. Unfortunately, you're not going to go to Cologne. But we have the identical position open in Frankfurt." I had been a student in Stuttgart, and everybody said how awful Frankfurt was. They compared it to Manhattan ("Frankfurt am Mainhattan"). And I had actually visited Frankfurt, and so I said, Frankfurt? And then I said, Well, it's Germany. I can use the language. Yeah —I'll take it. So it was, it was relatively easy bidding with regard to the next assignment.

Frankfurt, West Germany

Q: At that point, was Frankfurt already a regional hub for the Foreign Service? Or was it still developing?

KORFF: Yes, it was a regional hub. In fact, Frankfurt was supposed to be the capital. And so, embassy housing had been built. And then Conrad Adenauer said, nope, it's not going to be Frankfurt, it's going to be Bonn. And so, we were living in what should have been embassy housing. In the same apartment building as us on the ground floor was a guy that did the diplomatic pouch, and on the top floor was the guy from FAA [U.S. Federal Aviation Administration]. And there were others that were in the General Accounting Office [now Government Accountability Office], so it was quite a variety of people from different agencies and different parts of agencies.

Q: Alright, when do you arrive?

KORFF: I arrived, maybe in July or August of '83.

Q: And you finally got a 3-3 in German language?

KORFF: Yes.

Q: Was three-three enough when you arrived there?

KORFF: I would say well, yes, in Frankfurt it is, because everybody speaks English. But I never reached the four level until I went to Bern, because in Switzerland you don't have that level of English, but also because I had these ambassadors, you'll see later, who had no language skills. As a result, I quickly got much better in speaking, reading, and understanding German.

Q: Okay, so now you get to Frankfurt, but in what position?

KORFF: It was called Information Center Director, which really meant Director of the

Amerika Haus.

Q: There are essentially no America houses left in the world. Take a moment to just describe what the purpose and goals were of an America house.

KORFF: At least in the case of the Frankfurt America House, it was owned by the City of Frankfurt. It was a library and auditorium and exhibition space and offices for the American and local staff. We didn't have to pay rent on the building, the Frankfurters were happy to have us. Now some people would say it was sort of war reparations, but that's not true. I mean, they — especially the Frankfurters — really like Americans. They had lots of American soldiers living there, although they're all gone now. But it was a very positive place. Close by was Frankfurt University and there were other universities within the consular district. Some of them were hotbeds of unrest and a lot of anti-American and leftist thinking.

I happened to be there in the mid-1980s which was a very interesting time. The United States, with the support of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the government in Bonn, wanted to install intermediate nuclear (INF) weapons in order to counter the ones coming from either the Soviet Union or from East Germany. They were our main friction with the local population, because by having those sorts of missiles, in some ways makes you become the target. Our biggest difficulty was to explain why INF, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces, were a good idea.

At the same time, we had a brilliant country PAO [Public Affairs Officer] in Bonn. Hans "Tom" Tuch took a look at the calendar, and he said, "You know, we're coming up on the 300th anniversary of German emigration to North America." And so, to counterbalance the negativity of the reaction to the stationing of the Pershing missiles, we were going to celebrate that auspicious occasion. Even a conservative estimate of the number of Germans who migrated to the U.S. is huge. It was perfect.

FIG. 2 Michael Korff arrived in Frankfurt in 1983. USIA's Country PAO in Bonn, Career Minister Hans "Tom" Tuch, conceived of a celebration of the 300th anniversary of German emigration to North America.

In addition, the Amerika Haus was bigger than what the Brits had, so it was a great drawing card for us. We had lots of good things to offer. At the same time, we had to be somewhat careful, given the existence of a domestic terrorist group called the Baader-Meinhof Gang. One of our defense attachés had been killed by terrorists. So, it was a very interesting time to be there. The official vehicle that we had for work was armored. So that was, in fact, my first experience with an armored vehicle.

Q: At that point your wife joins you in Frankfurt?

KORFF: Yes.

Q: Okay. As head of the Amerika Haus, what were your responsibilities?

KORFF: Well, in some ways, it was similar to what we had done in India. In India, I don't recall sitting on Fulbright interview panels, but in Germany, I sat on all these panels to interview candidates for Fulbright grants. But the most fascinating part about my job was I was also the managing director of the German-American Institute in Saarbrücken. Saarbrücken is down on the border with France. The Saarland had established this German-American institute, very similar to the America House, and they wanted the American government to send down an American to be director of it just like the folks in Frankfurt had a director: why can't we have a director? So, the tradeoff was that I would be the non-resident director. That meant that once every four or five weeks, I would go down there and usually I drove —I hated driving that far on the Autobahn. You know, it's a long trip, I guess it may be four hours each way. It's a long, long trip, but you know, it was okay. And then the local guy, who ran things when I wasn't there, was quite competent. His only drawback from the perspective of the Government of the Saarland was that he was German: They wanted an American. His other problem was he was active in the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), while the Saarland had an SPD (Social Democrat) government. And so that's not a good idea. But you know, we couldn't very well tell him he couldn't have his own opinions and he couldn't be involved in his own party. But that was a drawback.

Q: What did your work entail for the Saarland institute?

KORFF: Essentially going around saying hello to people, presiding over meetings. One big function that you'll find funny: Over the years, we had gotten into the habit of always hosting a Thanksgiving dinner in Saarland. And so, my job dealt with the menu: they were able to get turkeys. (There'll be several other postings where I went where turkeys were not available, and I had to get them at the commissary. But in Saarland they were able to get the turkeys for dinner.) But they could not get pumpkin or mincemeat pies! They could get *Strüdel* and things like that, but they couldn't get pumpkin pies. So, my job was to go to the commissary, buy all the pumpkin pies they had, and drive them down to the Saarland to be baked for the Thanksgiving dinners. And of course, I always had to go to the Thanksgiving dinners. It was an opportunity to make a speech, show the flag, or whatever.

Q: Okay, then. Now back in Frankfurt, what was the size of the staff in the Amerika Haus?

KORFF: That's a good point. There were a total of nine FSNs. Remember, I had nine working for me just on my staff in Madras. In Frankfurt, there were two in the library, two conducting programming. One was the press section. One was the combination DRS (embassy contacts database) and Admin Assistant, one was the A/V and exhibits guy, one

was the Finance Manager, and one was the Custodian. So, it was a very small staff. And, of course, their salaries were four times higher than what we paid in India.

Q: Yeah. And they pretty much insisted on not stepping out of their lane.

KORFF: I think that's true. I can't imagine that happening, because it would have led to conflict, I think, and nobody wanted that. So that press person never bothered the program staff and so on. I was fascinated by the fact that none of them called the other by his or her first name.

Q: Okay. The reason I asked again is because as time goes on it is necessary for local staff to be able to back each other up, especially as we move into the age of social media.

KORFF: Yeah, although there was one interesting thing, because West Germany was such a rich and important ally. The USIS DRS system was as robust as the system in India, and the CPAO in Bonn even had a terminal at his residence (this was in the day before PCs could be networked). The CPAO thought he should be able to pull up all the DRS people. There were limitations, however. Whenever we did a program in Frankfurt, for example, we would write to Bonn, we would tell them, "We're going to have a program, please pull up all of the people in our consular district who are interested in non- proliferation," for example. And they would then be able to send it to us by modem. I don't think they had to send us the names and labels by mail. That would have taken, I think, too long. But anyway, we, of course, didn't have computers. So, any cable that I wrote, I either typed it myself and then the secretary retyped it, or I wrote it up by hand.

Q: What kind of audience were you trying to attract to the Amerika Haus to influence public opinion?

KORFF: Most of the people who came to us were students, and students really weren't the target audience. By that time, they weren't the ones who were going to decide whether or not we were going to install Intermediate Nuclear Forces. The good thing was that our librarians knew that we needed to reach out to the DRS audience through other means. So even though we may not have seen them at our facility, we could send them articles that we thought might be of interest to them, we could otherwise engage them without having them necessarily come in to use the library. Now, if we had a reception for the opening of an exhibit, or we had a particularly interesting speaker, they would come to those sorts of events. And we still went out to see them, even if it was the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, we would still go to see them. Those sorts of things still happened. And we took speakers to universities throughout the consular district.

Q: Now, how did you interact with the branch PAO in Frankfurt?

KORFF: We were in the same office. Same floor. He was the first PAO I had to interact with on a direct basis. He was a fascinating guy. He had been the country CAO [Cultural Affairs Officer] in Bonn. He couldn't get along with the CPAO. And so, he came down to Frankfurt and the Frankfurt BPAO went up to Bonn, so he was there for the first year and

a half or so that I was there. And we got along famously. He was succeeded by a guy who had been the director of some sort of Deutsch-Amerikanisches Institut or something like that, in Heidelberg, to which I've never seen other references. But he had lots of ideas. For example, when he was in Heidelberg, he did not have a wine-tasting evening, but he had a Bourbon tasting evening! And, you know, he had lots of interesting ideas like that. But he was content, especially, as he might admit, to leave all the cultural stuff to me and the program staff. So that was not a problem. He preferred to deal with the media, as many PAOs do. He didn't travel as much as I did, mainly because I had speakers to go to these different universities in the consular district, and I had to go down to Saarbrücken so often. But if you want to move on to another element, in our experience, you might be interested to know about Ronald Reagan's visit to Bitburg.

Q: Absolutely.

KORFF: So Bitburg is in the far western reach of our consular district. We were assigned to worry about the President's visit to the cemetery at Bitburg. Reagan had been sort of coerced by Helmut Kohl into going to Bitburg to place flowers at the cemetery, where some American soldiers were interred. Reagan hadn't really given any thought to what else might be at the Bitburg cemetery. After the visit got put on the agenda, word spread that there were Nazis buried in the cemetery, and that you would be honoring Nazis as well as other people. That's when things got sort of rough. It would have been hard for Reagan to get out of it. Nevertheless, we had to staff the visit, because this only made the media interest even greater: The fact that he was going to be doing this controversial thing. And so, we had to set up a press center in Bitburg, and I was in charge of it. And I got to meet a lot of big-name media, whereas the PAO was the site officer at the cemetery itself. And you'll be surprised to learn, perhaps, that from start to finish, the whole visit to Bitburg lasted fifteen minutes. He zoomed past the location of the press center, went straight to the cemetery, with a scowl on his face, put the flowers down, got back in his car, and left. It was a very painful event both for Reagan and for us. The BPAO and I then had to break down the press center that same afternoon and get down to Ramstein AFB because Helmut Kohl was hosting the president at his house nearby, followed by wheels-up from Ramstein. So, we had to staff another press center down at Ramstein. And I'll never forget Sam Donaldson: he apparently hated Reagan. And so, we're there with the press corps. We're trying to make everybody happy--doing what we do at press centers. Can I get you anything? Do you need a typewriter? You know: what do you want? Here, Donaldson is watching all this take place on the TV screen. (We had a TV screen set up in front of the press.) And Donaldson is throwing wads of paper at Reagan on the screen. You know, he was really a nasty man! That forever had an impact on me, the fact that these journalists who really should be unbiased, should be, you know, able to present both sides or whatever. He certainly wasn't that way.

Q: Well, that, of course, leads me to the question of to what extent did you deal with the German press and how effective were you? Or how effective did you feel you were?

KORFF: In general, I didn't have much to do, especially with the Frankfurt press. There are two main serious newspapers in Frankfurt, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. The PAO did almost all of that interaction. But for example, when I made the front page of the newspaper in Darmstadt, when I went down there to open an exhibit about the 300th anniversary. Of course, I met all of the press when I was down there. I knew some of the press in Saarbrücken, but I don't remember much more. Some came to our lectures and seminars, but it's likely that at best, we got reporters and not editors.

FIG. 3 Lord Mayor of Darmstadt with Michael Korff at opening of exhibit of German emigration to North America. Korff suggested that the emigrants faced tough conditions, that the streets were not paved with gold. (See article)

Q: As head of the Amerika Haus, were you also involved in International Visitor Grants and Fulbright exchanges?

KORFF: Yes, we had to send in the IV nominations from our consular district to Bonn. So, I did that. But I had more to do with selecting students to go on Fulbright grants to the U.S. in the Frankfurt posting than I did in the Madras posting, and it may be because in Madras, all of those decisions must have been made in Delhi. I don't remember ever sitting on a selection committee in Madras.

Q: Many people don't realize how time-consuming the application process for Fulbright Exchanges is. The applications themselves are very long and often include demonstrations of scholarship as appendices that – depending on your expertise – may be very difficult to evaluate.

KORFF: Yeah. And of course, because it is a binational commission, it's a little different because they're the counterparts. And you may know, in the case of Germany, they give a lot more money to the Fulbright program than we give. That's an embarrassment.

Q: Eventually, America Houses would – in the eyes of Washington – become obsolete. Did you have any sense that the one you ran was going to be reduced?

KORFF: I had no sense of that whatsoever. It wasn't until I got to Manila, in fact, when I was told that we weren't doing culture anymore. Just to jump ahead, briefly: In Manila, I was director of the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center. And I was told that we didn't do

culture anymore. So, I had to change the name of TJCC. That didn't occur until I was in Manila, '96 to '98.

We began to get closer to the merger of USIA into the State Department only after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the breakup of the Warsaw Pact, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. That was when we had to show a "peace dividend" and it was generally believed that we no longer needed the large public diplomacy presence we once had. The private sector of American culture productions could do a better job of representing America and for a far lower cost to the federal budget. And so, we were shrinking, and the number of American officers overseas was declining since that time, but that wasn't the case in Frankfurt during my time.

Straßen waren nicht mit Gold gepflastert

Eine Ausstellung über deutsche Auswanderer

Langen (al) - Eine Wanderausstellung des Amerika-Hauses Frankfurt wurde am Donnerstagabend im Alten Rathaus in Langen eröffnet. Anlaß, Einblick in die Geschichte Amerikas zu bieten, liefert der Jahrestag der ersten Besiedlung des neuen Kontinents durch deutsche Auswanderer.

Dieses denkwürdige Ereignis jährte sich im vergangneen Jahr zum dreihundertsten Male. Zahlreiche Bildtafeln und Reproduktionen historischer Dokumente veranschaulichen vor allem die Schwierigkeiten, mit denen die Einwanderer in der Neuen Welt konfrontiert wurden.

Dr. J. Michael Korff, stellvertretender Direktor des Amerika-Hauses Frankfurt, hob in seiner Eröffnungsrede hervor, der dreihundertste Jahrestag der Einwanderung Deutscher in den Vereinigten Staaten solle Anlaß sein, nicht die Meinungsverschiedenheiten der beiden Länder in den Vordergrund zu stellen, sondern die Gemeinsamkeiten und die Freundschaft zueinander zu pflegen.

Schurz und Einstein, Levi Straus, Henry Kissinger und viele andere, so Korff, seien Persönlichkeiten gewesen, die zum Werden Amerikas nicht unwesentlich beigetragen haben. „Wie aber diese Ausstellung zeigt, wurde Amerika gestaltet von Namenlosen, von denen viele aus Deutschland kamen." Energie und Unternehmungsgeist, Geist und Humanität dieser Leute seien es gewesen, die die Grundlagen für Demokratie und Menschenrechte schafften.

Wo heute Namen wie Rockefeller oder Astor fallen, assoziiert wohl jeder sogleich Amerika, amerikanischen Reichtum, amerikanische Wirtschaftsmacht, wobei man nur allzu leicht vergißt, daß die Vorväter dieser Männer zu jenen 200 000 deutschen Auswanderern gehörten, die im 18. Jahrhundert nach Amerika aufbrachen, um in der Neuen Welt ihr Glück zu suchen.

Die Ausstellung im Alten Rathaus ist bis zum 26. Februar an den Sonntagen jeweils von 10 bis 12 Uhr und von 15 bis 17 Uhr zu sehen.

FIG.4 The newspaper report on Michael Korff's remarks in Darmstadt noted that the emigrants to America didn't find things easy: The streets were not paved with gold.

Q: Were there other noticeable changes about the emphases other than the question of the INF missiles but other noticeable changes in the Reagan administration?

KORFF: I don't think so. I think the old officers were happy to be USIA again. We thought we had an important job to do selling INF for example, or whatever. It was a busy time, but also, you know, a fulfilling time.

Q: Now as you're looking ahead to your career, is anyone mentoring you about where you should work or what you should focus on or the broadening experiences anything like that?

KORFF: Not really, No one was asking me, where do you want to be in ten years? That never came up. It was up to me to plot my own course. And because of my own experiences, I had such robust experiences especially in India and because of my experience in the agency as a Desk Officer, I began to be a little antsy. That was why I ultimately went to Bern. If things had gone otherwise, I would have stayed longer in Frankfurt, but instead I went off to Bern. How I got there was an interesting turn of events.

I had begun looking, I suppose, because I'd never served three years in one place before. I had begun looking around for options and the assistant CAO [Cultural Affairs Officer] in Bonn opened up. I think Tom Tuch**,** the country PAO, knew that I was at least looking around for options. And I had done a pretty good job. When the opening came up in Bern, it was very sudden: the ambassador had gotten rid of both the PAO and the assistant PAO. Tom suggested that I consider going to Bern, I didn't even know that it was open because I wasn't bidding officially, I just knew about the job in Bonn, and I certainly had not thought about becoming a PAO. So, when Tom suggested I consider Bern, I said, "Sure, that sounds like fun." I didn't realize quite what I was getting myself into, but it ended up being a very interesting assignment.

FIG. 5 Michael Korff (second from right) speaking in Bad Hersfeld, which had a U.S. military presence.

FIG. 6 Michael Korff on a NATO tour for German journalists in 1985. Secretary General Joseph Luns is on the right.

Q: How was it advertised to you? Did you know what the responsibilities would be before you arrived there?

KORFF: No, I was told that I would be the only USIS [United States Information Service] officer there, that the ambassador, Faith Ryan Whittlesey, had not been satisfied

with the career officers that had been assigned, and that she was quite demanding. But you know, I was prepared to do what I could.

Q: So, you didn't really have a chance to interview with her before you were assigned or so on?

KORFF: No

Q: I imagine coming in after two other officers were curtailed, because they did not have the ambassador's confidence, can be challenging.

KORFF: Yes, that is true. But, you know, I guess my self-confidence was pretty high. And to be very honest with you, I had learned so much about public diplomacy, because India was a real center for a lot of really great things going on. And you couldn't beat Germany: it was a huge post, a very important post. So, I think between those assignments, I felt pretty confident that I could do the job.

I arrived in January 1986. That was a time in Germany when we were more concerned about Intermediate Nuclear Forces and about the Tricentennial. We had a range of issues that were central to our portfolio. Things were very different in Switzerland. When I got to Bern, the ambassador first of all said that I had to be a sort of a spokesman for efforts to introduce the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Q: SDI, also known as Star Wars.

KORFF: Correct. She said that I was to be the advocate for it. Just to be very honest with you, I knew nothing about it, and it was a big issue in the Ambassador's mind. Then the other issue that I was to focus on was on U.S. policy in Central America. Now, the reason why these issues were close to the ambassador's heart was that she had been Assistant to the President for public outreach in the White House. As you know, assistants to the president are a very high-level rank. It's not like a special assistant or a staff assistant. I think there must be only five or six people that have the Assistant to the President title, one of whom is, of course, the Chief of Staff and another is the National Security Adviser. The ambassador had been a chair of the Republican convention's foreign policy committee for the Republican Platform, the ones that had put together what the party was going to be advocating. She felt that she understood more about what President Reagan wanted than what any of the people in the State Department understood, and certainly anybody at USIA. On the other hand, she was a strong advocate for public diplomacy: you could not have found anybody who had higher regard for the possibilities of public diplomacy. So, in that sense, she was a cheerleader.

Q: What size of staff did you have?

KORFF: Yes, when I got there, we had three FSNs [Foreign Service National], none of whom were Swiss.

Q: Oh, that's interesting.

KORFF: Yes. I was sort of taken aback, because while it is true that third-country nationals could do many of the jobs at an embassy (the ambassador's driver, for example, was German—and had a salary, including overtime, that was higher than the ambassador's), public diplomacy really relies on a good sense of what the host country wants and understands. I came in with, I hope, an open mind. The chief FSN was British, but she was fluent in Swiss German, she had lived there for maybe 10 years, and she had a good sense of what was going on in the country. She was our sort of German expert. You must know that 70% of the country speaks Swiss German. Our central focus is going to be on the German-speaking part. But we also had a cultural affairs assistant, who was from Colombia, and he spoke Italian; he also spoke Swiss German, I don't deny that, and he also spoke French. And so, the three of us could divide up the newspapers because we had newspapers to go over in Italian, in French, and in German. So, between the three of us, we were able to cover all of that. And then initially we had an office assistant--the third FSN--who was from Austria.

Q: You mentioned two key areas for public diplomacy: Central America and SDI. Could we start with Central America? I have a bit of experience in that area. I was working in Costa Rica when the Iran-Contra scandal blew up. How did that affect your public diplomacy work?

KORFF: Well, two things. First of all, one Friday evening, late, I would guess seven o'clock, Post One got a phone call. "Hi, this is Colonel Oliver North. Could I please speak to Ambassador Whittlesey?" Post One didn't know what to do. They didn't know who Ollie North was. So, they ended up calling the RSO [Regional Security Officer]. The RSO said, "Yes, put him through to the Residence right away." So, we did have that connection. As you can imagine, there was a lot of diplomacy behind the scenes, trying to not just persuade the Swiss to support us, which never happened, but at least we could explain our policy. There were also efforts to facilitate some of the shenanigans that were going on in Central America. For my part, it was a matter of making sure we reported on any media reaction dealing with Central America. But also, in any of our public speaking, whether I was writing a speech for the ambassador, or we were going out across the country, always including something about the importance of supporting democratic forces in Central America. It was an important part of our work, not the exclusive part of our work, but it was an important part of our work.

Q: Did you have to go yourself and speak on this topic?

KORFF: I remember speaking on SDI, I remember we had a lot of groups come into the chancery to just get a briefing on foreign policy. We always brought it up. I don't remember actually giving a speech per se on Central America. I do remember writing responses to editorials that might have been against the intervention by the United States

in Central America. Whenever there was something in the Wireless File about Central America, we made sure that we translated that into all the languages and distributed it..

Q: Take a moment to explain what the Wireless File was. It's gone now, but for you, at least in the 80s, it was an important part of your sources of information.

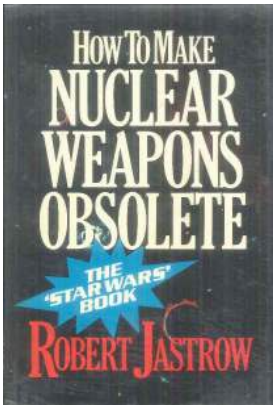
KORFF: When I first entered the Foreign Service, the Wireless File came by telex; later, it came by modem. There were two parts of the Wireless File, the more important part was official statements about various topics. The Wireless File was broken up according to regions. For Europe, Central America and U.S. policy there was a key part of it. Any statements that came out of the White House or out of the State Department about Central America were included; also editorials that we were asked to try to get placed. In those days, the Voice of America used to have a lot of editorials about Central America. We would try to place those. So those were all included in the Wireless File: it was our main policy source and the official statement source that we had. (It helped that the Wireless File was unclassified and well formatted, whereas much of the telegram traffic was classified.) There was a second part of the Washington File (remember, this is in the days before CNN, before you had any way of following what was going on in the United States). We did get the *International Herald Tribune*, but it would come two or three days late, and by then it was sort of stale. So, the second part of the Wireless File that was important for us was that it had important articles that might appear that day in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* or other sources that would let us know what's going on in the United States, so that when interlocutors would ask us something about it, we at least knew what they were talking about.

Q: Yeah. Now, once again, just to stay with Central America for a moment. Did you notice any measurable changes in opinions in Switzerland, about the policy there?

KORFF: I wish I could say yes. I think it was a matter of responding, doing our best to respond to any misperceptions or misconceptions, but whether or not we changed any hearts and minds, I'm not sure we did. It was a difficult situation to try to counter. On the other hand, many Swiss are very conservative, and they support the U.S. Surprisingly in a country where the 26 Cantons have so much responsibility, I spent a lot of my time responding to people upset about capital punishment, part of a campaign sponsored by Amnesty International. I tried to explain the notion of federalism in the U.S., that capital punishment was carried out primarily by states, etc., but we were flooded with letters objecting to capital punishment.

Q: Turning to SDI, which as you said, was a very difficult subject for a non-expert. How did you make yourself smart on this subject?

KORFF: Well, the ambassador had bought hundreds of copies of a book on SDI by Robert Jastrow *(SDI: The "Star Wars" Project,* alternately titled in some editions as *How to Make Nuclear Weapons Obsolete)*, and she also was able to get it translated into German *(SDI: So Werden Atomwaffen Űberflüssig)*. I don't know if it was ever in French. We were able to flog that book a lot. That was my principal source. Now, it was a very



biased approach, because it was very pro-SDI, there was no doubt about it whatsoever. It might have been better, just from a strategic point of view, for us to have been able to talk about the pros and cons. But that was not an option for us. That was one of the topics that I did always have an audience for. I must tell you that Switzerland was very pro-defense, unlike Germany, where INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] was the major topic. As you know, every Swiss male had to serve in the military. Every male had a rifle at his home. They're really big on national defense. So, I think there was a less negative attitude toward our position when it came to SDI than it did with regards to Central America.

Q: Although Switzerland is a small country, it does have a relatively well developed scientific community. Were you able to get speakers to talk to influencers in that community to talk about SDI?

KORFF: No, I don't think we had any speakers that came in on SDI. We had lots of speakers, often on economic subjects, or about American Studies, and many other topics. Switzerland is the host for a lot of important organizations. One of our goals was always to try to influence the Swiss position on various topics and multilateral organizations. As you may know, in addition to the bilateral embassy in Bern, there's a huge US presence in Geneva. We worked together with the folks in Geneva, and the officers there speak French, so that was helpful for us. But on the other hand, there are some organizations that you wouldn't expect that are not in Geneva. Two examples come to mind. The Universal Postal Union is in Bern, it's not in Geneva. So, we had to do the multilateral démarches with the UPU in Bern. And the International Olympic Committee is in Lausanne, about half-way between Bern and Geneva.

FIG. 7 Michael Korff (second from left) when the Anchorage Olympic Committee met with Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the International Olympic Committee (far right).

Speaking of the IOO, one really hilarious thing happened. Anchorage was trying to get the Olympics, the Summer Games. We always think of Alaska as being a cold place, but they wanted the Summer Games. Suddenly, we got a cable saying that a delegation was coming, they were going to be going down to Lausanne to talk to the International

Olympic Committee. And suddenly, the ambassador said, "I hereby make you the sports attaché." We had a counselor for Commercial Affairs from the Department of Commerce there. I think I might have successfully argued with others that that office might have been better. Anyway, I got chosen because I guess she wanted me to do it. I suddenly became the host for this delegation from Anchorage that was trying to get the Olympic Games. The day before they arrive, they wrote: "Oh, and by the way, we're bringing a lot of salmon that is going to be a gift to Samaranch." He was the president of the Olympic Committee. "So, the control officer needs to find a place to store all of this salmon, and to keep it fresh, as we take it down to Lausanne." That proved to be an interesting conundrum for me. In the end, we were able to use the refrigerators at the ambassador's residence in order to be able to store the salmon, so that worked out in the end, but it was just one of those funny things. I then had to escort the delegation down to Lausanne to make the pitch. It was a fascinating experience.

Q: Wow. That's really remarkable. At any time, while you were there, did you get a second officer?

KORFF: Never. In fact, for all four years I was there, I had to have my OERs (what the State Department calls EERs) written in Washington. Usually, either the deputy director or the director of the European Area Office would come through to see me. On one occasion, the director said, "Why don't you come down to Vienna, and we'll have our end of your conference in Vienna." So, I made it down there, and I noticed how robust the American staffing at USIS Vienna was. So, I made the pitch that we really need some help, because it's a real issue in one officer posts like that, when it's a small post, I mean, every section is small. What happens when I go on vacation? Who's going to look after what's going on in the section? So, I did make that pitch, but I never succeeded.

Q: I understand. With SDI was there ever a sort of a Swiss reply? There were a great deal of scientific grants and contracts, all sorts of potential for countries with expertise to take part in it. Were they ever that interested?

KORFF: Because of neutrality, I'm sure they would have never done it. There were some editorials, certainly not as passionate as the editorials about Central America. Some of them considered it a joke. They didn't think it was realistic, especially the left-wingers. I think some of the more conservative saw it as a potential model for Switzerland. But in the end, the ambassador moved on and we got new ambassadors who were concerned about other things, not necessarily SDI.

Q: How did you and Ambassador Whittlesey get along?

KORFF: Well, although I wasn't part of the group that she herself chose, I think she was pretty happy with my performance. I had a strong work ethic, and I had some good ideas. Years later, I got to see the oral history she did for ADST in 1988. I was a little surprised by one statement in the oral history:

Then we got Michael Korff who's still there and who's great, who jumped in to the job with the students, with the papers, and traveled all over the country. He worked hard. I loved to take him with me because we always had a lively discussion with bankers, media people, or whomever. Sometimes I would have a foreign service officer there who would sit like a lump, would never enter into the discussion with the Swiss or would never find ways in the conversation to defend the United States. Michael Korff was super. He would enter into the conversation, he would know how to handle matters tactfully. [Ambassador Faith Ryan Whittlesey, ADST, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Interviewed by Ann Miller Morin, Initial Interview Date December 7, 1988]

Q: You were in Switzerland from 1986 to 1990. As the first ambassador leaves, and those two topics kind of begin to fade, what becomes the new focus for you?

KORFF: Well, you're pointing to an important point. The new ambassadors, unlike Ambassador Whittlesey, who knew what public diplomacy was and knew what she wanted in her public diplomacy section, the ambassadors who followed knew nothing about our work. They were rich Republicans who didn't have as much experience as Ambassador Whittlesey. The DCM's main job was to keep the ambassadors happy. So, no one was looking over my shoulder. That gives you a lot of opportunity to fashion a program. And in both India and in Frankfurt, I had had lots of experience with American Studies. And so, one of the things that I was able to focus on a lot after Ambassador Whittlesey left was on American Studies, because American Studies can be quite broad: For example, it can include women's studies, and there are many different opportunities you have with American Studies. (Some Cantons still didn't allow women to vote, and the first woman to be a member of the Federal Council had only recently taken office.) And you know, this is very funny, in Switzerland, there was a Canadian Studies organization. In most posts, it was always the British Council that was our major competitor in the academic arena. But at least in Switzerland, we also had the Canadians to contend with, which is quite funny. We supported the American Studies Association and we had an academic conference. In the end, it was held at the Embassy itself. Although we had a relatively small budget, we tried to make it stretch. I'll give you an example. They were going to have this American Studies conference, and the U.S. had purchased a hotel next door to the Chancery to give us greater security. So, we had space for the American Studies conference to be held there. Everybody had written their papers, they're making their presentations, and so on. But we agreed to supply lunch. We did not have a kitchen, to be able to prepare the lunch. Our budget was small, we were small posts, and costs are so high in Switzerland, so we decided to treat them to a United States lunch. Now, what is a United States lunch? Well, we ended up going to the military commissary in Germany and getting hotdogs and peanut butter and jelly and baloney, and you name it, we had it. On the on the day of the event, which I suppose began at nine or 10, all of the FSNs and my wife and I and anybody else — I'll say a bit a bit about how we augmented the staff — we all got together, beginning probably at seven in the morning making these sandwiches and sorting potato chips and you name it. We had it all put together--the drinks, everything-- so that we could accommodate them.

While we're on the topic. Let me just tell you about our staff. I told you that we began with these three FSNs, none of whom were Swiss. Within a year, I began trying to figure out ways that we could increase the staff. How are you going to stuff the envelopes, for example, if you're going to send out press releases? In those days, we didn't have email and all that.

I figured out that there were all of these spouses at the post, with nothing to do. This was long before all of the current opportunities for spouses overseas. But they were happy to work. You pay them $15 an hour, or whatever it was. They were happy to do it. One example: We had no library, and I said, this is crazy. I've never heard of a USIS post that doesn't have a library, so we developed a library. We got the spouses to put it together, because all of our books, as I recall, were in English. They could, you know, read them, they could help us as we cataloged them and so on. Ultimately, by the time I left, I think we had three or four spouses working for us, equivalent of at least one full-time, maybe one and a half full- time, doing a lot of clerical work primarily, but helping with the phones and so on, doing lots of stuff. That really worked out well for us, and I think we could not have done so much without all of those spouses: They were really important to our program.

Q: Interesting. You had the foresight, and initiative to be able to hire them as well.

KORFF: I was lucky because I had a cooperative Budget and Fiscal officer. We didn't have our own budget officer, like many USIS posts. So, I relied on that State B&F guy, and I asked, could we do this? His attitude was, if it's not a not forbidden, you can do it. So, we did it.

Q: What about all of the exchange programs? Fulbright, international visitor, and so on? How were they significant in the time you were there?

KORFF: Yes. I was excited to have Fulbright under our auspices and not under a bilateral commission like in India and Germany. I thought it was a good opportunity for us. We maybe got two or three students and one or two scholars coming to the country, and we would send the same number the other way. So that was a really good opportunity for us. One surprising thing: I had never heard of the Fulbright teacher program where they have these teachers exchange homes, exchange cars, exchange jobs. And so, we had this community college teacher who had, by the way, been born in Germany. We had him come to Basel to a Gymnasium — a Gymnasium is sort of like a junior college you could almost say: it's an advanced secondary school. He came thinking that with his German language skills, he was going to be able to teach whatever he was going to teach. And the Swiss students would not let up: there was constant complaining about him because he wanted them to speak High German. He didn't know any Swiss German. He ended up curtailing after only six months. I had to dig us out of that mess, and I have a feeling that that relationship at least with that Gymnasium has never recovered because to suddenly find yourself without a teacher midway through the year is not a pleasant experience. As I said, they exchange houses and cars and everything else: at least that part went okay. And to their credit, Fulbright did not send the Swiss guy back home. He got to finish the year

in the U.S. Fulbright was a small program--but a nice one. The interesting thing about the IV [International Visitor] program, which I guess is now IVLP, was that it had always been a USIS show. My predecessors had always just picked people out that he or she had met on a trip, with the help of the FSN, and that was that, but that's not the way it's supposed to be. It's a mission-wide program. We want input from all the sections, we want them to take ownership of it to give us recommendations on who they would like to go to the United States.

I did try my best, and with some success, to get other sections, the commercial section, for example, and the counselor for agriculture, to participate. We had DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration], we had FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], we had lots of different agencies, usually very understaffed, but at least they were represented in Bern. We were able to expand the participation in selecting IVs.

Q: That's very post-specific, sometimes a post just doesn't care, other times it's the war of all against all to see who can get the most.

KORFF: Yeah, and I've had an ambassador, who said, I want Joe Schmo to go to the United States, it will be done. What am I to say, "You know, there is a committee that's supposed to make these decisions?"

Q: It can get really quite detailed and difficult. It's great that you had so much control in Switzerland. Were there VIP visits you had to handle?

KORFF: Most VIPs would go to Geneva, because we don't have many frictions with Switzerland. You know, we didn't have the Secretary of State coming down to talk to the Swiss government—in fact, the Swiss would go up to Geneva if they wanted ten minutes of the Secretary's time. But there was a really surprising visit that suddenly came up: Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci. I have to tell you a bit about Frank Carlucci. Most people don't realize that Frank Carlucci had been a Foreign Service officer. So, he was coming to meet with his Soviet counterpart. The logical place where all of the summits are held is Geneva. It goes without saying they have a bigger staff, they have the facilities, they have hotels that can accommodate everybody. But nope, it turns out Frank Carlucci's grandmother had come from a village in the Canton of Bern. So, he decided that he wanted to meet the Soviet defense minister in Bern. This presented a real challenge for us. We didn't have the staff to be able to accommodate that. I didn't have relations, personal relations, with my Soviet counterpart. In fact, in the end, I never even got inside the Soviet embassy.
Carlucci got there and he wanted to go to this village from which his grandmother had emigrated, and of course, the Swiss were only too happy to accommodate that. My wife and I had to go over to that village to scout out where we're going to hold a lunch for Carlucci while he's in the grandmother's town and look at the menu, all that sort of stuff. So, we did all that, and on the day of the event, the Swiss pulled out all the stops, they got a horse-drawn carriage for him to ride through the village. It really came off well.

FIG. 8 Michael Korff (center) between Secretary Frank Carlucci (right) and Assistant Secretary Dan Howard.

For the bilateral, the way we worked it out was that in the morning, they would meet at the U.S. Embassy. In the afternoon, they'd go to the Soviet. For a press center, I told you where we ended up holding the American Studies conference: we used that same space as the press center. And the Americans wanted their own press center, whereas the Swiss, were setting up this International Press Center, downtown. I don't know why we couldn't agree on that, but that was what I was told. The DoD [Department of Defense] did send someone to work with me to make sure that we met all of the requirements for the Secretary, and the PAO in Geneva came down to help out. I'm sure there were others that were there worrying about the secure communications and other aspects of the visit. You can imagine what a cabinet person's going to have, especially the Secretary of Defense.

Then the afternoon meeting was to be held over at the Soviet embassy. Well, the Soviets didn't want anything to do with the press, I mean, that's not what they do! So, I had to go over and set up a corral for the journalists outside of the Soviet embassy. I didn't have a driver, so I had to drive myself over there, find a place to park, and then corral all of the journalists that were there. Now, “all” is an exaggeration: there were probably seven or eight United States journalists who came on the plane with the secretary. Then there were some Swiss journalists I knew, most of them were going to be over at the International Press Center anyway, but some of them wanted to come to the Soviet embassy. They met there, and it came off without a hitch. Everybody, you know, was happy, and the Secretary went home.

FIG. 9 Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci riding in a carriage on his visit to the community from which his grandmother emigrated.

It was all a boondoggle. I don't think anything really was decided, you know, but that's true of many summits: It is just the appearance of having met--that we're being reasonable. We are keeping these conversations going. They could have done it by telephone, but he wouldn't have had the ride on the carriage through his grandmother's village.

Q: Did you travel much?

KORFF: There was some. Most of my work, at least under Ambassador Whittlesey, had been to go to newspapers, especially the bigger ones, and to try to deal with them. But under the next two ambassadors, the goal was to get the ambassador to visit — In those days, there were 26 cantons, full and half cantons — and the goal was to get the ambassador into each of those cantons. The public diplomacy section – USIS – was the section that ended up making all of these arrangements. I ended up traveling with the ambassadors all over the country to some cantons that may only have a population of 20,000. We went all over. That was true, especially under Ambassador Philip Winn, who was there the last year of the Reagan Administration. When Reagan left office, even though he was succeeded by Bush, another Republican, nevertheless, Bush wanted to choose his own ambassador. My last year there we got yet another ambassador, Joseph Gildenhorn. And so, we had to start the whole rigmarole over again.

Q: Wow.

KORFF: And just so you know, the one big difference with Gildenhorn, the final ambassador, he was very well connected in Washington, and his wife, Alma Gildenhorn, had been chair of the Kennedy Center Board. He brought in all of this artwork. First of all, stuff that he was able to organize himself, but also stuff from the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Art and all. They wanted not just a vernissage, not just an opening to show off everything, but also, they wanted a four-color pamphlet with all of the artwork. In those days, I don't know if it still exists, but in those days USIA had a print center in Manila. So, I had to work with Manila, all of this was coming out of my budget, not out of the State Department budget, to print the four-color pamphlet of all the artwork. It was quite an ordeal, but I must say that the Gildenhorns were really appreciative. I was the Scoutmaster of the local Boy Scout Troop, and the Gildenhorns had a special reception at the Chief of Mission's Residence for the scouts and their families so the scouts could see the artwork. Years later, I ran into the Gildenhorns at a speech by Vice President Mike Pence, and they recalled fondly the work we had done together.

Q: Yes, we made similar efforts in my posts, and I can certainly agree, they require endless review, especially at a time when information technology was not very good. This is the last question for your time in Switzerland: Were there any unusual things you had to do as duty officer?

KORFF: In Bern, I don't think so. You know, you have people who lose passports or die on the ski slopes, things like that. It's such a sleepy post that we could always say, wait till Monday. That was inevitably the response. There were some posts that I was at where you couldn't do that. But in Bern, I don't recall anything particularly unusual other than the Ollie North call. At that time, my wife was working in the Consular Section. She would have to catalog the stuff that was in the pockets of the guy that died, for example, on the ski slope or whatever. So, she had more direct relations, you know, experience with that sort of stuff than I did. (She met very interesting people in her work: Audrey Hepburn, Roger Moore, and David Bowie all had to get their work visas and she dealt with them.)

Q: She was working: did she get training for any of the American Citizen Services?

KORFF: Nope. I'm going to recommend to you that, if you can persuade her, you ought to interview her. The experience of spouses has become more important in general, but Meena has some particularly valuable insights. Remember, she was born in India. That presented some security issues, but also, every post we went to, starting in Frankfurt, she sought work. In Frankfurt it was with the U.S. Army. In Switzerland, she went to work for the embassy. This happened at every single assignment we had, that she had to put together employment opportunities for herself. It was with very little help from the department.

Q: We are conducting spouse interviews for that very reason, so I would definitely be interested. Before we move on, is there anything else about your tour in Switzerland you want to recount?

KORFF: Four items might interest you.

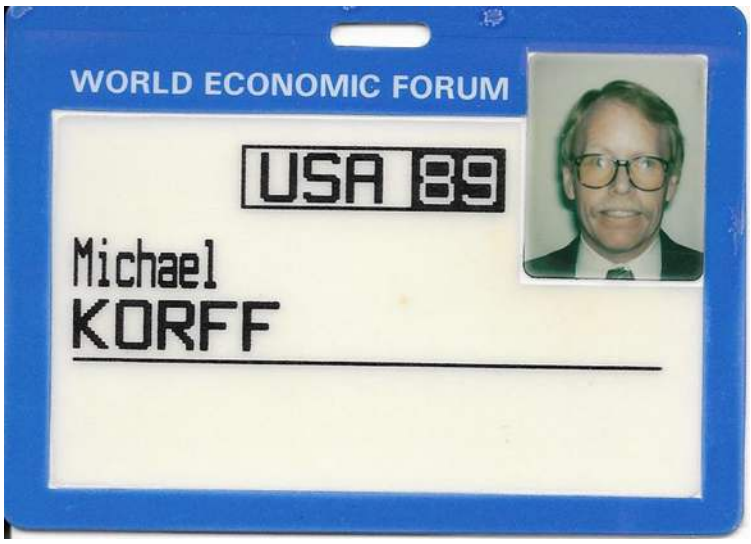


FIG. 10 Michael Korff was the U.S representative to the World Economic Forum conferences in 1989 and 1990.

First, you may have heard that there's a big conference held in Davos every January. Ambassador Whittlesey used to go to the World Economic Forum every year, and she was able to get cabinet officers to come to the Conference. She was a skier, and so she enjoyed the conference. When big names come to Davos, they require some Embassy support, and Ambassador Whittlesey would personally take that on. After she left, it was up to me. Fortunately, we didn't have really big USG representatives come during the period when I was the representative in Davos, but there were many private-sector people who came. And since I didn't ski, on the day when everyone would go off to ski, I would hike around the village and try to ice skate.

The second item that may interest you concerns Andrew Carnegie. You may know that Carnegie set up a series of funds to honor heroes. Apparently, this was done in several countries around the world. The heroes fund exists in Switzerland, originally funded by Carnegie. It was to honor heroes, and I was the embassy's representative on the committee, which was chaired by one of the ministers. Switzerland has a funny collective executive. It's not a parliamentary system with a prime minister, like you would expect in England or Germany, but they have a collective executive. One of the members of this Bundesrat, it's called, the collective Council, chaired it. I would have to go to those meetings. The years that I went, the fellow that was the chair was from Ticino, which is the Italian part in the south of the country. In deference to me, the meetings were held in English or German even though we met in Ticino. It was a challenge for the poor guy, but I think that he did a good job. And I learned a lot about heroes in Switzerland. So that was a very interesting experience for me.

Q: Well, now that you mentioned Swiss heroes, let me bring one up one who ended up getting a memorial paid for by the US Embassy in Hungary. This is Carl Lutz, who was

the Swiss consul in Hungary during World War Two. Switzerland was the U.S. protecting power and he used our current embassy building to help 1000s of Jews out of Hungary during the Holocaust, was anything done for him in Switzerland?

KORFF: Not for him that I remember. Ambassador Whittlesey did have a special relationship with the Jewish community in Switzerland. We did do events with the Jewish community, which was basically based in Zurich.

The third item I wanted to mention was the *Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.* In March of 1989, the Embassy suddenly got a cable from Washington informing us about the U.S. delegation to the UN Environmental Program's conference in Basel to finalize a convention on hazardous waste. It was in response to a public outcry following the discovery, in the 1980s, in Africa and other parts of the developing world of deposits of toxic wastes imported from abroad. Well, the delegation suddenly realized that there would be press interest in the Convention, and thus the delegation needed someone to deal with the press. I was made a member of the U.S. delegation and told that I would be spending a few days in Basel!

The final item that might interest you concerns President George H.W. Bush's State Visit to the Netherlands in 1989. The European Area Office asked if I would be willing to go to The Hague to help staff the President's visit, which was the first by a sitting U.S. President! I ended up driving there and helped staff the press center and serve as a site officer at a church that the President visited in Leiden where the Pilgrims lived before sailing to the New World.

Q: Anyway, we can move on to your preparations for an onward assignment.

Washington, D.C.

KORFF: In those days, USIA had instituted this requirement that we could not stay abroad more than 10 years. By then I had been out my 10 years. So, there

was no way that I was going to get to stay overseas any longer. (I ended up staying in Switzerland 4-1/2 years.) So, I had to begin bidding on assignments in Washington. Now, my dream assignment was to be the India desk officer. I had done that work, you recall, just for a couple of months at the very start of my career. I had friends in Personnel, and the head of NEA [Near East Affairs] still remembered me. One day, I got a call from the director of EU, European affairs, saying, "You know, you've done a lot of good work for us." I had gotten some awards along the way from EU. “Are you sure you want to switch to NEA? You know, you've been in EU for seven years; are you sure you don't want a job here?” And I said, “No. My dream assignment is India, that's where I want to go.” And that's what I did.

I arrived in Washington two days after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. It was a madhouse. All of NEA--India was part of NEA in those days-- and all of NEA was focused on what to do in Kuwait, and what to do about Saddam, and no one cared about South Asia. They didn't want to hear about South Asia. In a way, it left the post, especially a huge post like India, but also Pakistan, on their own. We only had a part-time person even looking after Afghanistan by then. So, I ended up being responsible for India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. And it was a very interesting time. Sometimes I had to take on Pakistan as well, Pakistan and Bangladesh, because there were just two officers covering all of South Asia, and if one of us went away, the other had to look after that portfolio as well. But, you know, it was hard to get any attention anywhere else in the office for that part of the world. They were more concerned about what was going on in Iraq and Kuwait.

Q: Wow, even with the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan happening almost at the same time, and the tensions between India and Pakistan, only Kuwait and Saddam were the attention. So, what were your immediate responsibilities? I mean, was India at all involved with this?

KORFF: Not really, there's a lot of disinformation in any war, this fog everybody talks about. There were assertions that the United States had bombed Karbala, for example, which is a Shiite center. And there are some Shias in India and Pakistan. Discrimination against Shias in those days wasn't as bad as it is today. In those days, people did at least listen to the Muslims. Today, I would hate to be a Muslim in India and try to get anything before the current government. There was some concern about that, but it wasn’t the big issue.

The thing that was really exciting for me was this new technology they were introducing that involved computers. Now, these weren't things that sat on your desk, they were standalone systems that you went over and used. Because our post in India had a large budget, mostly due to PL 480 money, they had a lot of systems and a lot of interest in reports on India. It was my job to satisfy that interest. For example, if the Brookings Institution was issuing a report about India, what I would do is take my diskette over to either Carnegie or Brookings, or you name it, and say, “Would you mind giving me an electronic copy of the report?” It probably was in WordPerfect in those days. They would put it on my diskette, I would then go back to the office, stick it into the computer, and

send it off to Delhi. I don't know what they did with the report, but they were always grateful. (They may have been earning points with the Ambassador by being the first with the report.) The minute they heard about a new report coming out, or something the least bit controversial that involved India, they would want a copy of it. And so that gave me a chance to go to all of these foundations around the city, and it ended up being an interesting experience for me.

Q: The power of information technology. That was one of the big draws for US libraries or USIA offices in the early 1990s. They could finally get a lot of us data onto discs and have it available for people on a screen. There was no real Internet connection yet, but there were encyclopedias, and all sorts of things that they could access. That was one way we sold, so to speak, the benefit of having those USIA centers. Anyway, were there crises or problems with India, or India and Pakistan, that you had to deal with while you were on the desk?

KORFF: Absolutely. One of the things that we were concerned about was there had been a major crisis at the end of 1989. One of our goals was to try to get Pakistan and India to talk to each other. The State Department was, of course, worrying about formal negotiations, or at least face-to-face talks. But our approach was very different: we wanted to begin to create an atmosphere where those sorts of things could take place without having a lot of domestic opposition. We were putting together all kinds of international visitor programs, where you would have Pakistanis and Indians in the same group. You know, they could learn that those people over there don't have two heads, they're just like us. It depends a lot on goodwill, but I think we were pretty successful. This was before the US Institute of Peace. Nevertheless, we did a lot of programs trying to get at this idea that it's better to talk than to wage war. It was real Track Two Diplomacy.

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TOP OF THE WEEK
Washington's India-Watchers

The Role That USIA Plays in India

By ELA DUTT

WASHINGTON

The rumor among activists, journalists and academics in South Asia is that "if you want a trip to the United States, be belligerently anti-U.S." The rumor is well founded, said a desk officer with the U.S. Information Agency.

"Anyone opposing excessively does get a chance to get across, that is definitely a factor," Mike Korff, India desk officer at USIA, said in an interview with *India Abroad*.

Established in 1961 through an act of Congress, the agency has the nebulous mandate "to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange."

Organizations like the Peace Corps, USIA and others formed at the height of the cold war had the clear, if unarticulated, agenda of spreading the American philosophy and countering the Communist threat.

A Two-Sided Job

Korff said his job was basically to implement and administer policy laid down by Congress and the Administration, but he conceded that desk officers played a big role in communicating views and information back and forth between New Delhi and Washington. Not only that — desk officers have their fingers on the pulse of public opinion in the country they are specialists on.

Towards this end, USIA is aided by an "office of research," which commissions opinion polls in India to gauge attitudes towards the U.S.

A June 26 research memorandum from the office asserts that the "Indian elite reports increased respect for U.S." Two August studies found that most such Indians expected no improvement in Indian-Pakistani relations and and that they rated the U.S., the Soviet Union and Japan equally high.

"In the case of India we have very good data because the country has very sophisticated research mechanisms," Korff said. The USIA commissioned the Indian Institute of Public Opinion to conduct the surveys based on interviews with hundreds of Indian college graduates in major cities.

"Sometimes we are able to ask that certain research questions be inserted into surveys," Korff said. These reports are presented to policy makers at the State Department, the Pentagon, Congress and elsewhere. They are mostly unclassified information, he said.

"Public diplomacy" is the term used to describe USIA's work. Korff has two missions — to represent his country abroad and to channel Indian public opinion to policy makers here.

But Congress questions the need for the agency and why so much money has to be spent on polls and surveys, Korff said.

"Congress members ask, 'Does it matter what Fiji thinks of us?' Our answer is yes," though in the case of India it is difficult to explain to legislators why India does not vote with the U.S. in the United Nations.

David Good, deputy director for the Near East and South Asia region, who was posted to India in 1971-76, said: "Despite what the political climate might be, the educational and cultural area of exchange has always gone well," and he added: "The interesting thing about India is that the relationship is on the upswing. We hope the program will expand."

Housed in a building covering two blocks near Capitol Hill, USIA makes sure that policy makers are made aware of what is being said. Good said: "We help explain if a journal is new, if a particular interpretation is new or an old line, or is left leaning, or if these are new middle-class thinkers."

Korff said: "We deal less with the government and more with the public, journalists and think-tanks in India and the U.S." During the war in the Persian Gulf, he said, "we always had them over and were in constant dialogue with Indian journalists and think-tank people."

Reducing the Negative Image

He said that the USIA — with its international-visitor program that brings about 40 Indians to the U.S. in a year, and with the other cultural and educational programs — has "succeeded in reducing the negative image of U.S. among Indians. Whether it gets translated into U.N. votes is irrelevant."

It is important, he added, that Indians understand "that even if America is not always right, it is not always wrong."

Korff said he had asked for and would probably get a posting to New Delhi next year. When he was there before it was as a junior officer, but if he went back he might be the cultural counselor or information officer.

The USIA is headed by a director, with deputy directors of various regions and desk officers for each country.

Using the 'Rupee Fund'

Several programs USIA handles are financed out of the "rupee fund" or the "U.S.-India fund" created in 1987 with rupees accumulated in India, from which American food grains under the P.L. 480 program were purchased.

The amount owed to the U.S. was so large that the check Ambassador Daniel Patrick Moynihan handed to Delhi in the mid-1980s for $1 billion, to reduce part of the debt, was mentioned in the "Guinness Book of World Records" as the largest check ever written.

Of the remaining amount, $110 million in Indian rupees owned by the U.S. government was appropriated by Congress for grants and assistance for educational, cultural and scientific activities to be conducted by USIA over a 10-year period ending in 1997.

Participants from South Asian and other countries in the United States Information Agency visitor program of 1990 who came to study "The U.S. Political System: Congressional Elections — 1990."

FIG. 11 While serving as India desk officer, Michael Korff was interviewed about the role of USIA in India.

Q: Did you travel to the area?

KORFF: Yes. You remember that at the start of my career, I suddenly had to worry about the Indo-US Sub-commission on Education and Culture. Well, every other year, it's held in India, and in alternating years, it's held in the US. So, I had to go out to India to attend those meetings. While I was there, I also got to go to Sri Lanka. I never made it to Bhutan, and I never made it to the Maldives. But I did visit the other two. In fact, I visited both twice. Usually, it was in connection with some other meeting. I think one year when I went to India, it might have been in connection with something to do with Fulbright, although I'm not sure. Anyway, I visited all of the posts, all four of the posts in India, and also Sri Lanka.

Q: What did they want at the time?

KORFF: For me as the desk officer? Well, for Sri Lanka it was very easy. It was a smaller post, they didn't have as many resources, and they were less demanding. India, however, was very demanding. They wanted a speaker here, a speaker there, they wanted this AID program, they wanted that Fulbrighter, whatever. There were lots of things that you would chase after. In those days, VOA [Voice of America] was right across the street from us. They came to all of our meetings, so we could make sure what VOA was going to say about Indo-US bilateral relations and so on. That was a very busy time. It was the sort of experience that I like: you are busy, you have lots to do, you aren't sitting around waiting for something to come along. It's going to be there.

Q: Had you begun to see a large number of Indian students coming to study in the U.S.?

KORFF: I don't remember anything, either positive or negative about it. Because my wife is Indian, we have noticed an increasing number of Indians in the US, whether in IT [Information Technology] or whatever, but I don't think that it had really any real impact on USIA in those days. Similarly, I don’t recall that U.S. universities were looking at creating satellite campuses.

Q: Are there other aspects of the job that were unique?

KORFF: One unusual aspect about India, especially at this time, we soon learned that I was attending all of these events around the city, both during the day as well as in the evening, a lot of social events. The reason why was because the State officers never accepted those invitations. Because the hosts wanted somebody there from the US government, I ended up getting invited to all of these events. If there's going to be something at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace about Indo-Pakistan relations, they wanted someone from the Government there. I would usually end up being the only diplomat, United States diplomat, present at these things. So that was a real surprise. Then a lot of Indian newspapers have correspondents based in Washington, and they would seek us out because my wife was Indian and I was an American, and I was a diplomat. We would be invited to their homes; we would get invited to the Indian

Ambassador's Residence and to the homes of the press attaché or cultural attaché. It was a very busy time for us.

Q: Interesting, did that help develop a network that would help you in the future?

KORFF: I think there was some of that. I had never known anybody at VOA really. So that was something different for me, getting to know the people over there. Within the agency, you get to meet the program officers in ECA or what in those days was called the Program Bureau. You do end up making these contacts that can be helpful when you go overseas. You know, when you need something urgently, you need a name to call. First of all, I've got a better understanding of how the bureaucracy works, but also the people that fill those positions. Sort of like at State, I would guess, in those offices maybe half of the jobs are civil service and half are foreign service. It's really helpful to know the civil service, because they're still going to be there.

Q: What about training or mentoring? Did any of that take place?

KORFF: At that time, when I was in Washington, I do not think so. One thing you will find of interest is, though, how to allocate and spend PL 480 money when you have oodles and oodles of money. It turned out that the Department of State, the Department of Treasury, the Department of Education, and USIA had worked out an arrangement on how the PL 480 money was to be spent each year and they had decided how much could be spent in order to exhaust the fund in 20 years or some end date. But they knew X amount had to be spent. Now who gets it? The money was divvied up by formula, and 1/3 if I remember correctly had to go for education and culture, another third might have gone to science and technology. And I don't remember what the last third would have been. USIA had to approve the education and culture money. I don't know if you knew we had an American Studies Centre in Hyderabad. And so, in order to fund that, to get new books, to fund the director's salary, and so on, we used P.L. 480 money. The director, by the way, was always a Fulbrighter. Part of the money was for Fulbright teachers and scholars in the country, not coming to the US. Anyway, there was all this money, and now that responsibility falls on the India desk officer. So, I had to then write all kinds of memos to the Treasury on where to transfer the money. They had to transfer X amount to the Department of Education, they had to transfer X amount to, it could have been EPA or the Smithonian, I don't know. There were lots of different organizations that got small amounts of money from this fund.

Q: Interesting. Our relations really hadn't yet warmed as much as they would with India later. Did you have to deal with irritants in the relationship?

KORFF: Not with any of the Indians I dealt with in Washington. They liked being in Washington. I got to go to the ambassador's residence many times, it was just a real lovefest. I of course got the media reaction, and so I knew that things weren't so good back in India, but you know, at least in Washington, it was really a lovefest between the Indian diplomats and official Washington.

Q: Well, it's only two years or so on the desk. So relatively quickly, you're already thinking about where you're going to go next. What were your considerations back then?

KORFF: Well, I thought I wanted to go to India. And the CAO [Cultural Affairs Officer] job was opening in India; I had been running at least the rupee side of the Indo-US Sub-commission. So, I thought that was an opportunity for me. The DCM had other ideas, though: he wanted someone else. So that didn't work out. In the end, we decided to go off to Bangladesh. I got the PAO position. It was also a good choice for my wife, since she speaks Bengali, and we assumed there would be possibilities for her to work once we arrived in 1992.

Bangladesh

By then, everybody was very happy that the relationship between the U.S. and Bangladesh had changed. There was a time when the U.S. supported Pakistan in the war over Bangladesh independence. So, there was some negative, residual negative feeling about the United States. But by the time I was getting ready to go out there, the U.S. had come to the rescue of Bangladesh after some cyclones, we had a very good relationship. I think, from the Bangladeshi point of view, they wanted someone who liked them, that wasn't going to let this big neighbor India bully them. I think they were happy that the United States was willing to play that role.

Q: When you arrived, what were the embassy and USIA buildings like? Were they as up to date as you needed?

KORFF: It was a new embassy, a beautiful building. The same architect that built the new embassy had also built the new parliament. And so, there was a lot of similarity between the two. It was a beautiful building, but of course, we weren't in it.

Q: Oh, why was that?

KORFF: Because traditionally USIS had a separate building from the embassy. It wasn't until after 9/11, that we always had to be at the chancery. So that meant that there was a lot of traveling back and forth for meetings, especially if you're the PAO. You have to travel into the chancery to read the classified traffic and attend various meetings and so on. Anyway, our office was downtown, where no one could drive; it was just chaotic. So, we had our own motor pool, because we were still a separate agency. The facilities were okay. We had an auditorium. We had a library. I mean, they were decent facilities.

Q: How large is your staff? What sort of organization did you have?

KORFF: Maybe 40 FSNs. Plus, a lot of contract employees: somebody to make tea, somebody to screen visitors, there were lots of contract people that were not FSNs but that worked there around us in our orbit.

Q: And as PAO were you in a large house, where you were expected to have representational events?

KORFF: Yes. It had always been painted white. And so, it was called the White House.

Q: In your discussions with the ambassador, what were you focusing on?

KORFF: I don't recall that he had any specific bilateral concerns. Our relationship was me telling him what we were doing, and that was about it. I don't think he ever really had any specific requests. He was a career officer and knew the roles of the officers. I don't think he had any real issues that he wanted us to take up. He wasn't afraid to go see the Prime Minister directly and tell her what he thought. He had a good handle, I think, on the country.

Q: Okay. How much of your work and materials were in Bengali versus English?

KORFF: A fair amount, and that was a real problem, since none of the American staff was language-qualified in Bengali. One interesting element in Bangladesh is that the Voice of America has always been a key source of information, at least as important as the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation], which is surprising because in most former British colonies, the BBC is looked upon as the more important element, but that wasn't necessarily the case in Bangladesh. Throughout the country, everywhere in the country, there are "VOA Fan Clubs." It's just an amazing thing: they get together, they'll listen to the VOA, they'll talk about it — and of course, in those days, at least, still broadcasting in Bangla. So, it was a real positive force in our bilateral relations or public diplomacy relationship, and we appreciated it. Sometimes the State Department didn't appreciate it because the Bangla translation, at least, would somehow miss some of the nuances of our position. But at least from our perspective, it helped to reinforce a positive relationship between us and the Bangladesh people. That was a really big thing. And for example, I had to address some of those meetings of the VOA fan clubs, especially outside of Dhaka. And, you know, despite my efforts to say something in Bangla, even if I had the right words, my pronunciation would just mangle it. And so, my wife would often have to translate my Bengali into real Bengali, in order to be heard, but you know, they just loved it, the fact that you're trying, you know, goes a long way.

Q: So, what were the most important aspects of engagement in Bangladesh at this time? Who were you trying to reach? How did you measure whether you were reaching the populations you wanted to reach?

KORFF: I would say academics on the one hand, at the university, and on the other hand, the media, those were the two primary targets. In the case of Bangladesh, we did have a mission-wide committee to look at the International Visitor Program. And so, we did

have a fair number of politicians and civil society people whom we engaged with who ultimately would go on an IV trip. You were asking about whether or not we had to entertain: I made it a practice of always having a farewell reception for the person who was about to leave for the U.S. That way you cement in the grantee's mind that this is an important experience; you're also able to send her or him off for a great experience. And you ask, "Who would you like me to invite to this reception for you?" So, we got to meet people that way, meeting people that may never have been in a United States diplomat's home before. That ended up being a real positive thing to hold these events. And very often, the ambassador would come. He was single, so he didn't have a spouse to keep him home at night. He had time to visit those events: he wouldn't stay long, but at least he would come — and I could always say, "Here, would you mind giving the airplane tickets to the grantee?" that sort of thing. So, you have some ceremony that you can use.

Q: Now, you mentioned the media, what were the most important types of media at this moment in Bangladesh?

KORFF: We were lucky. At that time, the local newspapers and magazines were so desperate for content to put out to the public that almost anything we sent them from the Wireless File would find its way into at least one newspaper. And there were so many newspapers what they had learned to be able to simultaneously publish editions of newspapers in several cities. It was a big deal, a very active media environment. There were, I would say, five English language newspapers, and 10 or 15 vernacular.

Q: I imagine radio was widespread, was television widespread at this point?

KORFF: Radio was, of course, government-controlled, but things were loosening, and people who had studied in the U.S. began to dream of private stations. I was there in the fall of 1992 when one station began rebroadcasting, CNN. It began at 11 o'clock at night. So, this inauguration was at 11 o'clock at night. We all trooped down there to the event. I had prepared a nice speech about freedom of the press, and why it was important to have various sources of media, but I never got a chance to deliver the speech. I think by then they realized people were getting a little tired. Just so you know, the next day, we issued it as a press release, sort of "on the occasion of," and so it made its way into print, and served the same purpose. We did begin having CNN. That continued until the Babri Mosque incident inAyodhya, India. It was this Muslim mosque that Hindu fanatics went in and destroyed in a matter of two hours. It was because there is this sort of myth that the Hindu god Ram was born there in that location and that it had originally been a Hindu temple, but that one of the invaders had turned into a Muslim mosque. Anyway, before we knew it, the government took CNN off the air. They said that the constant images on the screen of these Hindus destroying this mosque was inflaming opinion. So, I guess for two weeks, there was no CNN. That was an issue for us because we would never, well hopefully, we wouldn't do that in the U.S. We were disappointed that they did it there. But, you know, passions were passions, they went around looting the Hindu shops, the airport was shut down, and it was a difficult time.

Q: Did you get out of Dhaka and go to the countryside?

KORFF: Not often, but sometimes, and often it was for personal trips, because we would want to see various parts of the country, or, you know, cross this river, go to that event or whatever. So, there were sometimes when we got out, and Chittagong is an exception. Chittagong is the biggest city in the east. And there you would go for programs, you would have speakers, you would visit the University there and so on, but that's not the same as going out into these little villages.

Q: All of this is interesting to set the scene for a potential big change. You arrive in 1992 and Bill Clinton wins the election. Did that change the direction of your work?

KORFF: The IO [Information Officer] mentioned upon my arrival that they had begun thinking about having an election night watch party. I thought that was a great idea. I had done that at my other posts. So, we went down and we began looking at the ballroom where we might hold the event. It turns out that the plan had been to have balloons all over the ballroom filled with hydrogen. Now, you remember why the Hindenburg blew up. It was full of hydrogen, right? So, we immediately said, no, that's not going to work. So, one of the things we had to do at the watch party was to blow up all of these balloons ourselves.

FIG. 12 A visiting Assistant Professor at North-South University in Dhaka meets with PAO Michael Korff. Of special interest are the banners from supporters of Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush.

The Bangladeshis are wonderful people. They're among the friendliest we've ever met, but they're looking for a way of bringing themselves to the fore, their love for Americans to the fore, whether it's the VOA fan club, or whatever. Well, one day I'm on my way to the Chancery, and in English, there's this big banner above the road. In English, “Bill Clinton Fan Club Felicitates Future President Bill Clinton.” And then under it was the same in Bengali. But it was clear why they had put it in English. They wanted to draw our attention. So, I invited them to come to the American Center to just chat with them about this Bill Clinton fan club. This is before the election, remember, he hadn’t been elected yet.

Q: Right.

KORFF: So, it's sort of an interesting event, but then we get on to the actual event. You know, it would have been nice if the prime minister or some of the people in the prime minister's camp had come, but instead, the leader of the opposition, Sheik Hasina, showed up. She's now, by the way, the Prime Minister, so it worked out: you have to have a long memory to remember these things. Anyway, she came, and there are these wonderful photos, first of me explaining the election to her and I'm sure she didn't

FIG. 13 Above: Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina Wazed with Michael Korff at the 1992 Election Watch program. Right: Meena Korff-Rodrigues explains the U.S. election to Sheikh Hasina.

understand what was going on. Then photos of my wife, telling her in Bengali, what this means, and so on. Now, I should point out that because of the time difference, the watch party ends up being on Wednesday morning. And we're still waiting for the results to come in, but it was a big affair. Lots of people showed up. All wanted to be there to be seen and to see. You know, for us, it was a good opportunity to try to push our ideas about democracy and the importance of peaceful change in administrations and so on. But in terms of an immediate change in emphasis and language, like the one that occurred between Carter and Reagan, no. I do not remember big changes when Bill Clinton took over.

Q: One thing that does happen at this point, once newspapers become widespread, and people are able to read and, there's just, in general, in a country more communication, are urban myths, and often the urban myths are bad for the United States. Did you have to deal with those?

KORFF: I don't remember any. I can tell you an urban myth story when we get to the Philippines. In Bangladesh, I do not remember anything like that. But we did have a persistent problem that might interest you.

You've heard of the Diversity Visa Lottery program, I'm sure. It permits citizens of countries that are under-represented in the usual visa categories to apply to participate in

a lottery to receive an immigrant visa. There's always a caveat that those chosen must otherwise qualify for the visa. And even if you do qualify, you are warned that there are a limited number of visas available, and thus you should not sell your property and begin making plans to move: You are specifically told to wait until you actually have the visa in hand.

Well, despite the warnings, some Bangladeshis sold their property and began making plans for moving. When they ended up being unqualified or the quota had been reached, these Bangladeshis were very, very disappointed, of course. So, some of them went on a hunger strike. It was a public diplomacy problem for us.

Q: Were there other problems with media that you had to deal with?

KORFF: There was some of that, especially the academics. They, as a group, tend to be a little more critical and often left-wing. So, there was some of that, and we did our best, we did have speakers. The advantage of academics as the target for speakers is that most academics can speak English. So, if we had a speaker who spoke--all of our speakers spoke only English as I recall--then it's helpful to take them to the university or have an audience of academics.

Q: Now you had a relatively large number of FSNs, did you send them out with their various projects and programs?

KORFF: No. When the post was still, East Pakistan, they used to send people out, FSNs out, not with a United States officer necessarily, to show 16-millimeter films in the villages. We no longer did that by the time I was there, partly because it might not have been terribly safe. But also, just because our resources had been reduced over the years, probably half of what they had been when it was still East Pakistan. And I think the technology had changed, there was TV now; in those days, we were very popular because we were the only way to spend your evening.

Q: As PAO, how were your relations with the embassy?

KORFF: We had a very good relationship with the embassy sections there. And it was an example where we did have a mission-wide committee to look at IVs, for example. That was a very important feature. I was becoming more and more interested in foreign policy theory and issues. And so, at that time, the end of history, that was that is what it was called--

Q: Francis Fukuyama: The End of History and the Last Man.

KORFF: Yes. So, I put together a book discussion-- not a book, it was a very thick article--an article discussion—at the chancery about the end of history. And everybody came, including the Regional Medical Officer. He just thought it was the best thing that ever came along. Later, he became head of State/Med, so I was really happy he was included in the invitations—and that he participated in the discussion. Everybody showed

up, they all read it, they all found it to be an interesting discussion. So, we did that a couple of times, where I would arrange for this sort of roundtable discussion about an article that brought us all together. I thought that was a neat thing to do at such a big embassy. So often, we're talking about “Where do I get pork, if I want pork?” or “where's a good place to go swim?” You know, instead of talking about these messy details of life we talked about professional topics. I was really glad that we did that there.

Q: Did you initiate things for programs that were impactful at the time or sustainable?

KORFF: Not that I can think of. Most of what we did had been done in some form before I got there and continued after I left. So, I can't say that I've made that big an influence. There was one thing: We had a speaker coming during Ramadan. Normally, we had not held programs on evenings during Ramadan, but the chief FSN in the press section said there was no reason why we couldn’t host an Iftar (breaking of the fast) while the speaker was there. That was something new, and I’m glad we did it.

Q: Were the changes in information technology – internet, satellite TV, etc. – reaching you in Bangladesh?

KORFF: I don't think so. I don't remember us having world net programs there, for example, whereas in Switzerland and Frankfurt we had Worldnet because the director of USIA was a big fan of Worldnet, thought we ought to be doing more of it, but I don't think we did any of that in Bangladesh. There's a tension. Sometimes, governments won't clearly state that you may not do something, but it’s pretty clear that if you were to do it, you might alienate the government. So having a foreign program could be an issue. Of course, we weren't at the Chancery, but even if it's at a diplomatic establishment, it might upset the authorities.

Q: Was there censorship?

KORFF: No official censorship. I'm sure there were a lot of conversations between the ministry of information and the newspapers, but not as far as we were concerned, and I don't recall that we ever had to get permission for our visitors to leave the country to go on a visit to the U.S..

*Q: Did your wife find opportunities to work? *

KORFF: She had a great assignment: she was a consular officer. And because she was able to interview in Bangla, she was able to move people through the visa process much faster than others. There was only one Consul and one Vice Consul. And then there was also a part-time Vice Consul in a different section who could come down to help. My wife was very busy. You know, for those who got their visa, she was very popular. For those who didn't, she wasn’t so popular.

Q: Yes, a fact true throughout the world of U.S. consular affairs.

KORFF: One thing I could mention about Bangladesh, which was something I had not seen in other posts, that I then replicated elsewhere, was a student advisor. There's no Fulbright Commission there. So, it was on us to offer advising to Bangladeshi students who wanted to study in the U.S. Our student advisor had created this videotape, and no one could get an individual appointment with her unless the prospective student first watched the videotape. I think the videotape was always in English. I don't think she had a Bengali version. So, you know, it's pretty clear, if you go in for your visa interview, and you cannot speak English, it's doubtful that you're going to do well in college in the United States. Well, the same thing is true when you're getting this information about applying to go to school: if you don't speak any English, it's doubtful you're going to get a visa. I know there are lots of programs where they make people come early and try to learn English in six weeks before the beginning of the semester, but it's hard to learn English in six weeks.

Q: Yeah.

KORFF: So, the student advisor had this program where she made people watch it, you know, giving them a basic understanding of United States education, because it's very different from Bangladesh, which is based on a British system, more or less. And then she would do the interviews and respond to questions, try to be helpful and so on. I thought that was a neat system. Her program was also available on videotape in the lines of people waiting to apply for visas at the chancery. She became quite well known.

Q: That's great. As we approach the conclusion of this tour, I also wonder if you had to deal with VIP visits

KORFF: Unfortunately, no, I'm afraid that in the overall hierarchy of things, we didn't merit that sort of a visit. But, you know, the good news was that we, I think, did some good work. We were able to talk, for example, about intellectual property, about all of these issues that can come up in any developing country. You know, you're looking for some way that you can find a niche for yourself, but if it means selling illegal videotapes or building knockoffs of this or that, you're going to do it and I think that at least we got across our position on intellectual property.

Q: Alright, let's begin with the preparations for your next post.

Q: All right. Today is September 15, 2021. And we are resuming our interview with Michael Korff. Michael, you had just completed your tour in Bangladesh. But what was your thinking about where you were going next?

Washington, D.C.

KORFF: Well, because I had had such a positive experience as a desk officer with the India desk, I wanted to do that again. And I don't know exactly how she found out, but the Deputy

Director for WHA [Western Hemisphere Affairs], an area where I had no experience, called me up, and asked me if I wanted to work there. And I said, Sure, that sounds like a new experience for me. And that ended up being a really good experience in several ways. First of all, up until then--this was 1994--up until then, USIA still relied on paper cables. And I guess they knew that I had an interest in technology. You recall that when I was the India desk officer, I had learned how to be able to go to the Heritage Foundation, get a Word version or a text version of reports, and send them electronically to Delhi. They decided that I would be the guinea pig for WHA for using Cable Express or whatever you're now calling it in the Department.

Q: And, for one second, describe what Cable Express is.

KORFF: It meant that for all unclassified cables, we could gain access to the cables using a computer on a desktop. I was the one that was the first in WHA (and by the way, just so you know, in those days, it was still called AR, American Republics, but it then became WHA, Western Hemisphere Affairs, later). So that was an exciting element. Originally when I got to WHA, I was supposed to be the desk officer for the non-Spanish world, which meant Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname, and, most important, Brazil. And in those days, USIA had five posts in Brazil. It was as important to South America as India was to NEA.

Q: Oh, let me just ask a question here. So, you didn't get the entire English-speaking Caribbean?

KORFF: Yeah, you're right. I did not have Barbados or Jamaica.

A month after I arrived, they came to me and said, in addition to doing those countries, would you become the Cuba desk officer?

Q: Holy cow.

KORFF: And there was another boatlift going on. We didn't actually have a full-time officer at the time assigned to Cuba, but we did have problems with public diplomacy, vis-à-vis Cuba. We had a PAO at the U.S. interest section in Havana. So, I said sure. A lot of it involved liaising with the Broadcasting Bureau, which was both VOA as well as the Radio and TV Martí people. So that ended up being very interesting because whenever I wanted to talk to the PAO, I had, for the first time in my life, to go up to the op center and use a STU phone in order to be able to talk to the PAO. So that was a new experience. And of course, we were worried about the boat lift. There was at that time another exodus of people trying to use boats to get to Florida.

Q: Now, once again, just a very quick question. VOA and Radio Martí were beaming content at Cuba but the Cubans were also jamming—or trying to jam the

broadcasts. Based on your recollection how much in percentage wise got through?

KORFF: I don't know. You know, the people at Martí had an agenda. Both a U.S. domestic political agenda, but also, of course, they wanted to transform the government in Cuba. So, they are going to overestimate their influence from the very beginning. VOA was more open about it. But you know, VOA wasn't quite as antagonistic as Martí could be. I think there were some differences there between the two services. And, of course, Martí broadcast only in Spanish, whereas VOA was broadcasting in English as well as Spanish. And so there might have been times when the Cuban government was trying to block some of the VOA frequencies, but they might have been focusing on the Spanish-language broadcasts and not necessarily all of the broadcasts, so you never know. But I think it's fair to say that some of the broadcasts did get through. And that is something that's worth celebrating, I guess. And we had an active program in an effort to reach out to civil society such that it was—I mean, it's not a robust civil society, but there was a civil society in Cuba.

So, I ended up taking on all of these different assignments. And it was a really interesting time, for me at least, to be able to learn all about these new countries. At that point, I had not visited any of them, and so that was fun. And in addition, USIA didn't actually have an officer in either Guyana or Suriname. We relied on a vice consul, somebody who was supposed to be stamping visas, but who—in at least the case of Guyana—had an FSN [Foreign Service National] that we funded. But the FSN reported to the State officer who oversaw that section. I don't know if he ever switched cones, but the guy who was in Guyana, at least, was really outstanding. He took his job seriously. I suspect he did it at the expense of his consular responsibilities. But, at any rate, I did get to travel down there. And at the time, the ambassador in Trinidad and Tobago was a USIA officer. That was very unusual. In those days, most ambassadors were State officers, of course. And she had strong feelings about the way the post was being run. I was expected to liaise with her as well, to take back to Washington any of her concerns. I don't think we should go into what those concerns were now because they involve personalities.

I got to know Trinidad and Tobago, then I went on to Guyana and Suriname, and then I did a very unusual thing. I had to somehow get to Brazil. And the easiest way to get to Brazil probably would have been to fly to Caracas and then from Caracas to Brazil. But instead, since I already was in Suriname, I decided to fly to French Guiana. And I rented a car and drove myself over to Devil's Island, and spent a day in French Guiana at my own expense. This was all cost-constructed and on a weekend and all that. And then I had to get to Brasília. Well, there are no flights directly from French Guiana to Brasília so what I did was I flew from French Guiana to Manaus. Manaus is up there, the very top of Brazil on the Amazon River. And you know, when you're flying over the river at that point to get to Manaus, you think you're over an ocean. You cannot see land anywhere.

The river at that point is huge. Just so wide. Anyway, I got to Manaus, and USIA in those days had these things called binational centers. These were institutions we helped fund but were not the sole funder of. Often, they generated revenue through English-language classes and memberships and so on. We did help out with their libraries. I went to the binational center in Manaus, whose director met me at the airport, took me around, introduced me to Manaus, and all the sights and explained their operation. It was my first BNC, by the way. I had headed the Amerika Haus in Frankfurt, and I was the titular head of the German- American Institute in Saarbrucken. But they weren't really BNCs in the sense that we had in South America. So that was really great. And then I flew from Manaus down to Brasília, where they just had a sterling country team or USIA team, both in the capital and in the various consular districts.

Q: I just have a very quick question. To go back to Devil's Island for one second, what is there now?

KORFF: Well, the most important thing is the European Space Center. That's where they launch all of their rockets. So that's a very sort of touchy area, but they do all the launches from there. I mean, it was so nice to be on their highways. Remember I was driving myself, but it's very European, you know, just like you would see in Europe. It was really a very different place than what you would see in Guyana or Suriname.

Q: Interesting. Okay. And nothing left from the old Dreyfus case?

KORFF: I don't think so. No one mentioned it anyway. But I was there mainly just sightseeing. I didn't hear that. And we don't have a presence there, you know— it reports to Paris. If we were to do anything there, it would not be a WHA program, it would be an EUR program.

Q: Interesting. Interesting, because it is considered overseas territory for France.

KORFF: Yeah, that's right.

Q: Interesting. Okay, so I'll let you get on with the story.

KORFF: I spent a few days—not long but a few days—in Brasília, then I went down to Rio and São Paulo, and then up to the north—I may have gone to Porto Alegre, which is a little further south, I think I did go there—and then I flew all the way back up. I had begun in Manaus, but then I went back to Recife, which is again in the north but on the Atlantic coast. So, you know, they were trying to make sure that I had a good introduction to the country so that I could represent their interests in Washington. That's essentially what a desk officer does. So that was my introduction to that part of the word. I never made it to Havana. And my tenure as the Cuba desk officer only lasted six months, because they then were

able to find somebody to be a regular desk officer that wasn't just taking it on as an extra assignment.

Q: Now in visiting all of these places, what were their needs as you heard them at the time? What did they want you to give them from Washington?

KORFF: It was very similar to what I had done when I was India and Sri Lanka desk officer: they wanted somebody who would make sure that Washington answered them. You know, any bureaucracy has its own priorities at any one time. If suddenly, the folks in Rio need a speaker on freedom of speech, or whatever, they hope that somebody is paying attention to them, and is looking for a speaker and is responding to them and so on. It's a little bit easier in the Western Hemisphere, because the time difference isn't so drastic. It's 11 hours for South Asia. In the case of WHA, at least, you know, they could always pick up the phone themselves if they really wanted to bug a program officer. But on the other hand, they were hoping that I would be monitoring their requests. In those days, every post had to do a country plan. You have to go over the country plan, help them make sure that it's going to meet the needs of what Washington wants. So anyway, it was a fun time learning about these countries, looking at them through a different eye than perhaps my predecessor might have. It was fun.

Q: Okay, and you mentioned the latest wave of boat people. How did that affect you? How did that affect your work?

KORFF: Well, actually, this is one area where you want Radio Martí and VOA to come in. You want them to be telling people “Don’t try it.” You know, "we're not going to be able to save you necessarily." "Hopefully, better days are coming. But we don't want you to die in the process." So, there was that element to it. That was especially important at the very beginning, trying to make sure that we were dissuading people from making the journey. But also, helping the PAO in Havana get whatever he needed, in order to be able to generate whatever he was going to generate, what he could get out to his contacts. Our problem overseas is that we often deal with a leader, or in the Cuban case, we were dealing with civil society and people like that who may not be in direct contact with the people up there on the north coast that are about to get in a boat and try to make it to Miami. Our Havana audience may not necessarily be the right one, whereas Radio Martí and VOA are more likely to reach that mass audience that we need in that case.

Q: Interesting. Okay. Yeah. Then turning to the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean, were there particular things that you were doing with them, particular themes?

KORFF: Not that I recall. The issues that I was dealing with there were personnel issues. And just so you know, I had never tried to write an evaluation for a State Department officer before. And one of the things that we did for the State officer who was serving as the acting PAO in Guyana, at least, was to write an

evaluation. It was given to the promotion boards as a separate evaluation—separate from what the officer might have gotten from either the consular chief or the DCM. Because we were a different agency, we were doing that for the officer. For the first time, I saw that EER form. I had never seen State's EER form. Fortunately, I had a great deputy director at the time in WHA. I had her look at it, and she said, you know, this is very fine. It's very factual, but it's not going to grab any attention. You're not going to, you know, pop off of the page, so that the board that's evaluating this guy is going to want to move this guy along in his career. I remember, she went through it, and every time I would talk about something that he had done or something extraordinary that I thought merited a reference, she would say, "let's color that one hot pink." And then later on she would add, when I was talking about another trait, "let's color that one bright blue." And she did this throughout the EER, just so that it would stand out to whoever probably had just read 30 EERs that day, and they're getting all mixed up. I really appreciated that help, because it's not something that I would have thought to do. I was very legalistic, just this is what he did. This is its result and so on, but it's not going to make it really pop out. So that was fun. Learning how to handle that element in the whole personnel process.

Q: Fascinating. Yeah, and also helpful for you in, you know, writing your own, or editing your own evaluation.

KORFF: I'm not sure I did such a great job, but it's a good lesson.

Q: These are the important things, you know, as you go through your career. But, you know, Brazil being the largest client that you had then, what was going on in that portfolio?

KORFF: Good question. So, the lineup of countries that I just described for you lasted for only one year. Only one year, then a new director came in. And he decided, you know, "the most important things happening—" Of course, USIA was having its own internal discussions about its future by then anyway. But he said, "We really have to demonstrate to the people who give us money that we are furthering America's national interests. And the easiest way to do that is to focus on economics." They reorganized, and I lost all of my English-speaking countries—English and Dutch—and instead became the MERCOSUR desk officer. I suddenly got Southern Cone countries that were so important economically as a bloc, and about which I knew nothing. So, it was at this point that I had to go to Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, and find out about their needs. As luck would have it, late into the year that I was looking after those countries, as well as Brazil, there's a coup in Paraguay. And we had a PAO, just a fantastic PAO. He went on radio, speaking in both Spanish and Guarani. It has a large indigenous population that does not necessarily speak Spanish. He had been a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, and he was able to give interviews in both Spanish and in the local language, talking about why we did not support a coup, why democracy was important, and so on. He was fantastic. And I will always

marvel at his ability to do that. It gave me confidence later in my career, to want to do similar things, to not be intimidated by having to give interviews. The second thing he did, he was anxious to reach out to the indigenous population and was trying to figure out ways that he could bring America's message to people who may not know where we are. And so, he had put in a cultural preservation proposal that involved preserving feathers.

Q: Oh, interesting.

KORFF: And when that got to Washington, people laughed, they did not believe it. "He wants us to send an expert on preserving feathers? What does this have to do with economics or with defeating bad guys or you name it?" And fortunately, this is an example of where an area office—you would call it a bureau—and a desk officer can really help because the PAO explained to me that feathers are an important part of the culture of the indigenous population.

I was able then to go down to the ECA, the educational and cultural affairs bureau, to try to explain to them why we supported this rather unusual request, and try to get the ball rolling on that. I'm very happy that our office was able to help out in that regard.

Q: Now when you say feathers, you mean literally just feathers? Or, you know, costumes or headdresses and so on made of feathers?

KORFF: I think you got it. It's the way they're used. They're the outfits, the headdresses, and so on that may be deteriorating over time, and that they're about to lose. You want to be able to save those, preserve those.

Q: Okay. And eventually, they did get the funding for it?

KORFF: Yeah. I'm glad that we were able to do that. Not sure that that would happen in the State Department today.

Q: Yeah, yeah. There's a fascinating book by Mario Vargas Llosa called "The Storyteller" that involves the Guarani because the language group, and the ethnic group, does extend into the Amazon, including bits of Peru and, I imagine, Brazil and so on. It's a separate language and ethnic group from the Inca.

KORFF: Yeah.

Q: But anyway, I digress. Please continue.

KORFF: Well, you know, it did entail a new emphasis on economic issues that had not been as important earlier. Even though Brazil is an important partner of the United States, nevertheless, our program became even more weighted in that area after we added Argentina to the portfolio. (Argentina is another big partner of

the United States, and it gave me a chance to learn about yet more countries.) It ended up being a fascinating assignment for me to learn about all these countries that I knew relatively little about.

Q: Interest you enough that you began thinking about a tour in Latin America?

KORFF: Well, let me just say that at this time, my wife and I both decided to take early morning Spanish. We live relatively close to FSI. So, we would walk to FSI in the morning. I think the classes began at seven, either 6:30 or 7:00, really very early. We would then take the shuttle, first to Rosslyn and then from Rosslyn, in my case, to USIA. And then do a full day's work at USIA. Anyway, with regard to my next assignment, well, I was looking around at various options for me. I like to be able to run my own programs. So, you're looking for a place where that matches my grade—by then I was an FS-01. So, I had to look for postings that would be appropriate for me. The director of the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center in Manila was opening. I thought that would be a great opportunity for me: you're not at the Embassy. In Manila, the IO and the PAO were at the chancery, whereas the CAO was at the cultural center. So that opened up and I went to Manila.

Q: I don't want to rush you out of the desk officer job in ARA in the Latin America bureau, was there anything else that sticks in your mind that is consequential in that job?

KORFF: Mainly that I learned a lot. For example, later on we had a deputy director who had been a professor of Spanish at Yale, and who really understood Mexico more than anything else. So even though my portfolio had nothing to do with Mexico, he made sure that we went to the Mexican Cultural Center in Washington to see a big exhibit about the Day of the Dead. We went there for November 1, and so just by being around people who had served—most of the others who were in that area had served somewhere in Latin America—I learned a lot from them. I think it was a good experience for me learning about that. And you will see later on, I ended up going back to WHA after Manila.

Q: Okay. Well, the Philippines had a long history with Spanish. So, you know, having some knowledge of Spanish was probably not a bad thing in the Philippines.

KORFF: Yep. You're right.

Q: Now you go to the Philippines in '96.

KORFF: Yes.

Q: Okay. And this is once again, to a separate building, separate set of responsibilities, even though you are under the country PAO?

KORFF: That's correct.

Q: Okay. Well, Manila has a lot of reputations for various things. congestion, is the one that sticks most, in my mind, what was it like, upon arrival and settling in?

KORFF: Well, I was very lucky, in a way, I could actually walk to my office if I had to. It wasn't considered safe, necessarily, but I could. I had it much easier than everybody else. The IO lived in the same building as I did, but he had to commute, along with my wife, all the way over to the Chancery. So that was a very long commute, about an hour each way. And if it rained it could be a three- or four-hour commute. They had it much rougher than I did in that regard. But it was another interesting assignment for me. We were invited out almost every night for one cultural event or another. It was our first post without our son, so the invitations were a nice element: I was either going out to the university or I was going to the Cultural Center of the Philippines, one way or the other. But we were kept very busy. Lots of people wanted to see the cultural attaché.

I had a PAO that supported me when I proposed we get a direct internet connection for the library. As you know, by that time, most libraries were moving away from books, and moving more toward online resources. When I got there, you had to dial up in order to be able to access the internet. That was really a real step backwards. I did all the research to figure out how we could get a T-1 line, a dedicated line from the telephone company. And the PAO supported me, and we got our T-1 line. They didn't have one anywhere in the Chancery, but I had one. So that worked out really nice for me to be able to have that.

Although we no longer had consulates around the Philippines, we still had some American centers that we supported, mainly with books and efforts to try to keep the flame alive, so to speak. We invited all of the heads to come to Manila for a conference and taught them how to use the internet. The regional librarian—USIA had these regional librarians around—the regional librarian came in and taught the course. It was a three- or four-day event. We were lucky the T-1 line held up. We were able to get lots of computers that we could connect to it. We taught them all of these resources: what is the worldwide web, things like that. So that was a really fantastic opportunity for them, and I think it probably helped us out a lot.

The biggest deal of my whole stay there, 1996 to 1998, was the celebration of Philippine independence in 1998, the centennial of its independence from Spain. Now, you might remember that it got its independence from the United States in the late 1940s. Fortunately, we had managed to change the narrative slightly, and they were celebrating their independence from Spain. The centennial of their

independence was going to be celebrated at an expo grounds, located at the former Clark Air Base before we were thrown out. Mount Pinatubo had something to do with that, but still, we were not welcome. We had to put together the American Pavilion at this expo in 1998, and that was quite a big deal. First of all, we had no money for it. We had to rely on donations, trying to get the private sector to support us. And trying to get ideas together. It wasn't an international Expo, so no USG funding was available. I know the State Department today has a very small office that tries to support expos in Dubai or whatever, but those are international events. This was just for the Philippines. So, trying to get support for that was not easy, but we did put something together. I think we did okay. It could have been better but, you know, for the size of the event and so on, I think we did alright. And I got the ambassador to come there. It was a good deal.

Q: The things that I think people need to know also about Clark Air Force Base. Yes, we had left. And Mount Pinatubo, you're right, was part of it, because it didn't quite explode but it was giving off a lot of gas, a lot of particulates. And that was landing on the area of Clark Air Force base as we were leaving. And then after we left, or as we were leaving, the whole question of cleaning up the base from the motor oil and the gasoline and all of the debris that was created by an Air Force base all those years, kind of stuck in the craw of the Filipinos, because we didn't do it. And as of now, as far as I know, the Chinese are doing it under some kind of contract or were doing it under some kind of contract with the Philippine government.

KORFF: I wouldn't doubt it. The Chinese have been very industrious as they go around the entire region, winning friends and influencing people with their money. You know, it often leaves the countries in debt. But let's just take the example that you gave of the Chinese. You know, the Filipinos were very close to the United States. They had a lot of the same ideas we did with regard to defense policy, security policy, and so on. Well, the Chinese were trying to take over some of the islands that were off the coast of the Philippines that were within the territorial waters of the Philippines. And this was something that was in our interest, the American security interests, at least, as well as the Filipinos'. And so for the Chinese to come along and try to occupy them was outrageous. The Chinese had periodically occupied islands that the Philippines claimed, atolls really. They're trying to figure out a way to win friends, and so helping to clean up a mess left behind by the Americans certainly sounds like a good option to me, so I'm sure they did win some friends that way, but I don't know how far that's going to go.

I was going to just mention to you, I don't know if you were aware, that for the early years after independence—which as I hinted was really from the United States—they sang their national anthem in English. Now it's sung only in Tagalog or in Filipino, depending on what you want to call it. But there are older people, the ones that are sometimes our closest friends, who still remember the days when they sang their national anthem in English.

Q: The reason I mentioned all that stuff about Clark Air Force Base was I was curious how you manage to create an expo on grounds that still we're not quite altogether cleaned up.

KORFF: By then, this dust, or I don't know what you want to call it, that had come out of the volcano had been brushed away, and the area around the actual Expo Center had been cleaned up. So that was pretty well cleaned up.

The other thing that happened while we were there was APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. The Philippines hosted it early on while I was there, and Bill Clinton and lots of people, including Madeleine Albright, were coming. We had to staff all of these things, all of these meetings that the administration was going to have. We had countdown meetings with Secret Service and the Advance Team every morning at 8am. It was a real Tamasha, as the Indians would say. I ended up being the control officer for the meeting of President Clinton with Fidel Ramos, President of the Philippines. I'll tell you more about Fidel Ramos later, but that ended up being a very interesting event. It wasn't held in the President's palace in Malacañang, but rather, it was held closer to the location of where all the events were taking place for APEC. And my wife, who was working as a Consular Officer, ended up being Charlene Barshefsky's control officer. Charlene Barshefsky was the US Trade Representative in those days. And at any other time, her control officer would have been a counselor of the embassy for this or that, but because we were stretched so thin by this huge event, and there were so many people coming for it, they ended up having to go to my wife to be Barshefsky's control officer.

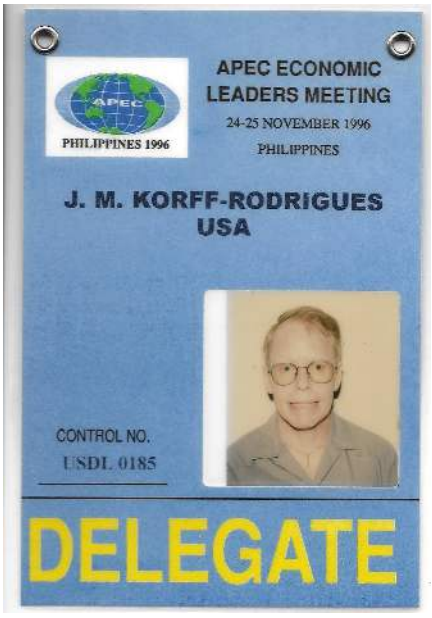


FIG. 14 Michael Korff was control officer for Bill Clinton's bilateral meeting with Philippine President Fidel Ramos.

On the last day of APEC, traditionally, there is an event, supposedly off the record, where the delegates entertain one another.

Q: Yes. And yeah, there's the famous photo of Clinton in the Filipino Barong Tagalog shirt.

KORFF: Yeah, they always have that “class photo.” That one didn't look as silly as some of the other outfits that were worn over the years. I've seen the one with Trump, when he was at a summit, and he looked ridiculous.

But so that event, where they're going to entertain one another, was going to be at the Manila Hotel where the President was staying, I think in the MacArthur suite where Douglas MacArthur had lived after the war when he was sort of like the regent as they were returning to democracy. And so that was where we had our press center. Who's gonna run the press center? The CAO, of course! And they said, "Since traffic is going to be a mess, you have to stay at the Manila Hotel." So here I am, staying at the Manila Hotel, and there was almost no one in the press center on the evening of the entertainment, and I wasn't allowed to go to watch the entertainment. But you may know that Madeleine Albright did a soft shoe act with the Russian Foreign Minister: it was quite something. Supposedly the entertainment is off the record, but people, you know, smuggle out video of it. It was quite entertaining, I would say. But those are my two memories of the APEC summit. One was being the control for the meeting between the two presidents, and then being at the press center on the night that they had the entertainment. Clinton, to his credit, came to the embassy to greet everybody. You know, some presidents don't do that anymore, but it was nice that he did. I had been close enough to him at the bilateral, so I didn't need to be up close at the embassy, but my wife got to go up and shake his hand and all that sort of stuff while we were there. Anyway, Manila was a nice assignment. It's a very difficult environment, as you suggested at the beginning, because of traffic and congestion and smog and everything else. It's considered a greater hardship post. And an American, a military attaché, had been killed, had been assassinated, and one had been kidnapped, in fact, so we had to ride around in bulletproof cars in that terrible congestion. And if, by any chance, your air conditioning is not working, those windows don't go up and down. You're stuck in an oven. I only was stuck once with no air conditioning, but you do spend a lot of time in traffic. It's a very congested city.

Q: Yeah. The other thing about Manila is that the USIA printing office, at least, had been there. Was it still operating?

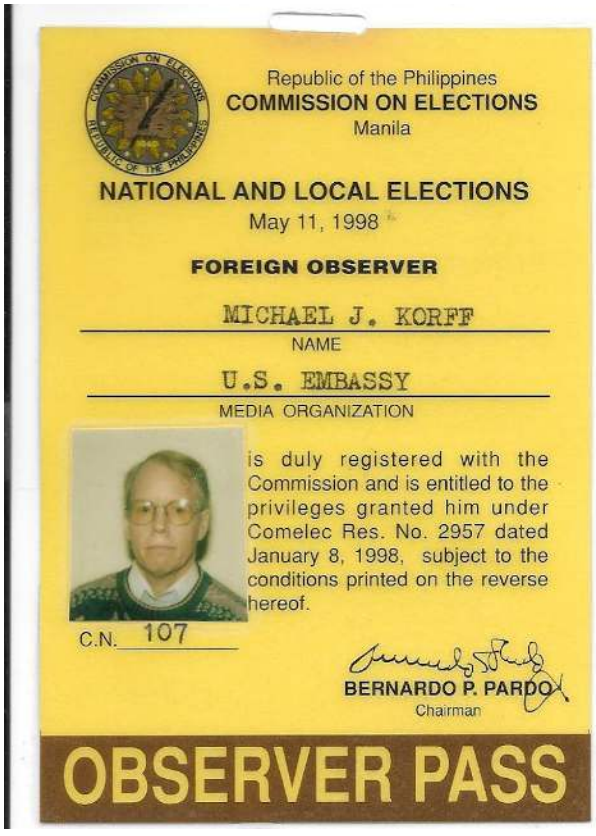
KORFF: It still was, and in fact, the USIA representative on the housing board was from the Regional Printing Office, for example, and that became an important issue for me, which I'll tell you about in a minute if you want, So he was the one that represented all people from USIA at the time.

Q: Did you benefit from being in the same city as the printing office?

KORFF: As you have probably noticed from other elements in my career, I've always been big on American Studies. And so, we did, six times a year, an American Studies newsletter, and we got that printed in a four-color pamphlet. I would guess it was eight pages. I had an FSN (Foreign Service National) that I worked with in order to be able to publish that. But it was a way of just getting stories out, reminding people about what American Studies was, it was a way also of calling attention to what they could get out of a library or what the internet had available, things like that. That was I think the only time, that I remember at least, that we benefited from being near RPO.

Q: The other thing, I'm curious about and I failed to ask you when you were on the Brazil and non-Spanish desk, were we doing public opinion polling and what were we finding in those public opinion polls?

KORFF: As CAO, I wasn't involved. So, I really don't know. But I suppose you sort of alluded to it: In light of our military departure from the Philippines, I suppose things probably got better because soldiers are not necessarily the friend of public relations. They do things that sometimes get them into trouble and can hurt the view of us. At any rate, I think things were pretty good.


Republic of the Philippines
COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS
Manila

NATIONAL AND LOCAL ELECTIONS
May 11, 1998

FOREIGN OBSERVER

MICHAEL J. KORFF
NAME

U.S. EMBASSY
MEDIA ORGANIZATION

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C.N. 107

BERNARDO P. PARDO
Chairman

OBSERVER PASS

I must tell you about the President. Fidel Ramos was the president; he had been a general and was just a stellar president. He knew me--he would come up to me at events. And I really liked him. And it wasn't just because he liked me. But it was because he was in favor of good government. There was no hint of scandal around him. I'll get back to Corazon Aquino in a minute, but his predecessor was Mrs. Aquino. He carried on the tradition of a clean government and was just a stellar guy. Then, at the same time that they were having the centennial of independence, they also had their election, and I was getting ready to leave the country. The call went out at the embassy, we need election observers. I had never been an election observer, so this was my chance. It ended up being a very

interesting experience, I went to three different polling sites to watch the voting. And because it's a very densely populated country—and I was in Manila, which is even more densely populated—the celebration of democracy there is quite extraordinary. Everything Filipinos do is large, but even with their elections they are. You would go into the areas around polling sites, and you would have to wade through papers and propaganda six inches deep, just to get inside, because there was so much campaigning going on. It was really quite a good representation of democracy at work. I think it was, in many ways, very good. Unfortunately, Joseph Estrada, a former actor, won and he was just a disaster for the country. He ended up leaving office early. And I was really disappointed because they had had such a good president in Fidel Ramos and then they got Estrada. I was sorry about that.

And let me just quickly go back to Mrs. Aquino. The Fulbright Association every year names its international peace fellow, or Peace laureate, and Mrs. Aquino had just been named the winner of that when I got there. She was no longer president, but she had been named the winner of the award. When I got there, we had a lunch to celebrate her for being made the laureate, and she was just the nicest lady possible, really positive. I think you probably know she went to a Catholic College in the U.S. And what I did not know, there is some ethnic tension in the Philippines, between the Chinese and the others. I didn't realize that she was a Chinese Filipino. And so that was something new to me. I had not realized that until I got there. But she was a very good, very positive force. A great friend of the

FIG. 15 Fulbright Prize for International Understanding laureate Corazon Aquino with Meena Korff-Rodrigues and Manila Cultural Affairs Officer Michael Korff.

United States, I think. (Following my retirement, I became the Senior Fellow at the Fulbright Association, where its most recent laureate was Bono; other laureates have included Angela Merkel and Bill Gates.)

Q: At this point, it's only about two years away before USIA is integrated into State Department. Is that beginning to, you know, have an effect on anything you were doing? Or, you know, to what extent were you aware of that coming down?

KORFF: Yeah. That's an excellent question. I went there to be the director of the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center. It was an institution well known in the Philippines: it had been around for a long time, a lot of respect for it, it had helped in the process of the democratization, the independence, and so on of the Philippines. We were well liked. Unfortunately, by the time I was there, culture was out the window. That was considered to be fluff. USIA was no longer sending out these big theatrical groups. I was told that we had to change our name, we could no longer be the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center, because we didn't do culture. As a result, we became the Thomas Jefferson American Center. And that's just illustrative of what was happening throughout the agency, that culture was out the window, libraries were closing down, and by the time I left, they were moving us. We gave up the lease, we were moving over to the Chancery, which was difficult to get inside. It is true that at the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center, we had a guard at the front desk, who would give a cursory glance to make sure you weren't bringing in a bomb, but that was about it. But they were closing that all down and moving into the Chancery. And, you know, things were really beginning their downward spiral.

Let me tell you about one program that was very interesting. Every June, on June 21, the French celebrate a festival of the arts—the *Fête de la Musique*. And it's sort of the beginning of summer and they have these big occasions when the embassies put something on. Well, you never want to have the American ambassador go to lunch with the French ambassador. The American ambassador--great guy, really nice guy--goes to lunch, and the French ambassador turns to the American ambassador and says, "You know, the day of culture is coming up and we have decided to bring a jazz group from France. Since jazz originated in the United States, wouldn't it be a great idea if at our event, the Americans brought in a group that would also play jazz? We'd have the Americans on the stage playing jazz, and then the French showing them how to really do it right?" They didn't put it that way, but that was the implication. I think we had all of the six weeks to bring this together. So here I am on the phone calling Washington, can you please send this jazz group, and it has to arrive in four weeks or whatever. It's not in our budget, and we aren't doing culture. But please, we need this for our ambassador's sake anyway. Washington laughed; they thought this the funniest thing they had ever heard. In the end, I had a great cultural specialist on my staff. And she managed a couple of bands. She knew all of the great musicians, and I'm sure you know Filipino means musicians are the most talented, among the most talented, in the world, they can do anything. They're just really great. We go on a lot of cruises these days, and the Filipino musicians are always just top notch. Anyway, the FSN says, "If you can get me some CDs of jazz music, I will have these Filipinos listen to it and they will perform American jazz. And even though they're not Americans, you can at least say the American Embassy is helping to

present it." And so again, the PAO came up with the money to help fund their honorarium or stipend or whatever you want to call it. But that was quite an amazing event. It was held outdoors at the National Bank. A stage was put up in this big plaza right in front of the bank. You would have the French musicians playing for one half, and then you'd have the Filipinos performing on behalf of the American Embassy on the other. So that ended up being quite an event.

One other thing I should just mention, before I forget, where Washington did come through for us. During APEC, the Filipinos, of course, wanted to make a really big impression on the guests that were coming in. They decided to have a film festival. They wanted each of the participating countries to present feature films at the film festival. So, of course as CAO, as the cultural affairs officer, I had to work with Washington to try to get them to get us some films. Well, fortunately, the private sector office in USIA had good relations with the MPAA, the Motion Picture Association of America. They got us two films to show at the film festival. One of them was *Giant,* a re-release starring James Dean, Rock Hudson, and Elizabeth Taylor that was 3½ hours long. So that was okay, we were happy to get that. We had heard of it. But then they got a movie called *Picture Bride,* a 1964 film about a Japanese migrant laborer in Hawaii who chooses a bride based on her photo. What we didn't know until we showed the picture was there's a scene in the movie where the bride, who is miserable, hears Filipino migrant laborers singing or talking in Tagalog. The audience went crazy!

But MPAA has very strict rules to prevent piracy. First of all, the films had to be sent through the diplomatic pouch. Now regarding 35-millimeter films: I had always assumed that maybe a couple of reels made up a film, but a feature film on 35-millimeter reels of film, I think, must be six reels or something. It's some huge number of reels per feature film, and they are heavy. They're sent through the pouch, and they have to be kept locked up in the vault when they're not being used. When they are being used, the CAO has to be in the room where they are being projected to make sure that no one is trying to copy them for piracy. I had to go—this is the midst of all this APEC stuff going on, the traffic is jammed and everything else—I had to go to the embassy, go to the pouch room or to the vault, get the films out. One night, I had to take them to my own residence. It was really quite an event. At one point, they wanted to hold a film showing outdoors, in addition to having it inside, and I said, "No, I'm not going to be able to keep track of them as it is. If you're going to take them outdoors, I lose total control over it." We made them show them only indoors. That's quite an adventure.

Q: It reminds me of the era when 35-millimeter was shown in theaters across the country. And there was a little bit of an art. You had the film projector guy upstairs in the projector room changing reels just in time so that, you know there was continuity throughout the film. And every once in a while, he'd either fall asleep or put on the wrong reel. And you would hear these boos and whistles and everything. And then you know very quickly he would fix the problem. And that has all gone now historically into digitization. So that issue is now gone. But

yeah, what a little responsibility you had in overseeing that whole thing. It was more than just being sure that somebody didn't come in and illicitly snap photos or turn on a video recorder or something. Yeah. That at a festival could be a disaster.

KORFF: Yep.

Q: Wow, the history of culture. Okay. Yes. And of course, you're right, that those changes and the elimination of the American cultural centers or American Libraries went on a pace throughout the world, and certainly by 2000, there were only one or two left.

KORFF: Yeah, it's really sad.

Q: Yeah. And what happens is, you have many people who say, "Oh, but, you know, this was where I always went. I mean, I really missed this." And well—

KORFF: Of course, that was true of the older generation. But there were also younger people that still came in, you know: they wanted resources that we had, and especially in Manila, where we were about the only show in town where people would get access to the internet. It was a shame to close down.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

KORFF: Well, I can't end any discussion about the Philippines without remarking on how extraordinary the people are. They are talented, loving and friendly. They are also very intelligent and curious. As my departure became known, there were numerous farewell receptions and events in my honor. One of the most memorable was at De La Salle University, which had hosted many of our speakers and discussions. The university's International Studies Department invited me to deliver a lecture on *Insights on Filipino-American Relations* on October 1, 1998—my birthday. I decided to build on the lessons that I had learned from my time in the country and describe the sources of frictions in our relationship. The university had invited a large audience from the diplomatic community as well as the academic. I really enjoyed preparing my remarks and delivering them—and the back-and-forth with the audience. The university was generous in its recognition of my work over the course of my stay in the country.

Other farewells were hosted by the various groups with which we had worked, and the Indian Ambassador had a dinner at his residence that was quite nice: I had served as the Acting PAO after the PAO left, and the incoming PAO arrived in time for the Indian Ambassador's farewell for me. It was especially appropriate because the new PAO, Michael Anderson, had been Press Attaché in Delhi when I was the desk officer. It was a wonderful evening, full of toasts and other reminders of our stay in Manila.

Q: Yeah. Well, alright. But overall, you enjoyed the tour in the Philippines. Why was it only two years, though?

KORFF: USIA's tours—all of our tours of duty in greater hardship posts—were two years. But you're getting at an interesting point. I was beginning to bid. You bid maybe six months before your tour ends. And there was an opening as the CAO in Lagos. And I thought that might be interesting. I could be CAO again, in a big post. Nigeria is a huge country. And, as you probably know, the embassy today is in Abuja, but in those days, at least the USIS part, was still in Lagos. We had a lady—in fact, my wife's boss—who had served in Lagos and told us how it had been such a wonderful assignment. She just loved all the people there. She made it attractive. And the opening came up, so I ranked it maybe 10th on my list. The next day, the very next day, after I sent in my list, it was announced that I was going to be the new CAO in Lagos! The more I read about it, the more I realized, maybe I had made a mistake. I was the only one who had bid on it, obviously, and they were so anxious to handle it that I was immediately chosen. We began learning more, whatever we could, about living in Africa, living in Nigeria, those sorts of things. It sounded like it was going to be an adventure. But remember I would have been the CAO, again, I wouldn't have been the PAO. Then there's a cable that goes out for an immediate opening in Jamaica for PAO. And so, I decided to apply for that. And before I knew it—I guess I might have been the only person who bid on that one as well because I got that one. So that broke the assignment to Nigeria. I should have mentioned that if I had stayed with the Nigeria assignment, I would have had to extend in the Philippines for a third year. Everybody else, the PAO and the IO, both had stuck with their two years. I would have been the only continuity from that group when the new group came in. But by accepting the job in Jamaica, I then broke that assignment. That left them with no CAO, in Manila. So that was really bad, because apparently, they went eight months without a CAO. Fortunately, I had an American ACAO--an assistant CAO-- who could take over, but he had been a civil service employee, and so didn't have quite the background that a regular foreign service person would have had.

Q: Okay, now, alright. You've never been to the Caribbean. You've never served in Latin America, other than as the desk officer. Wow, this is kind of a big change from Manila, very large. And, you know, a huge responsibility, to a country of 3 million people about the size of Connecticut.

KORFF: Yeah

KORFF: It was a big change. There were certain security risks. As you know, the Chancery is not even in Kingston. It's in St. Andrew. And, you know, there you have to drive yourself. Because of the traffic, the Chancery opened at 7:30 in the morning in order to avoid the congestion. You

have to get up quite early in order to be at the office by 7:30. And we had a political appointee as ambassador, who wasn't interested in being ambassador. He spent his weekends on the north coast. And just to show you how ridiculous it was when I first got there, I was meeting the DCM, I said, "Well, I guess I should set up weekly appointments with the ambassador to go over what I'm doing." He said, "He doesn't care. This is a political appointee. He does not want to see you. You know, that's just the way it is." And he was right. You know, it was a very different kind of embassy where the chief of mission doesn't care about the mission.

KORFF: As in most places, AID was not in the Chancery, and it was headed by a former ambassador, former career Ambassador.

Q: Interesting. Yeah.

KORFF: And she said—she made it clear, "You're not to call me Ambassador Jordan, you're to just call me Mosina or call me Miss Jordan or whatever, we have only one ambassador here." She ended up being my great ally: she would give me money to put on programs. She was a terrific friend of what we could do with their money. So that worked out nice.

The PAO residence was great, just a fantastic place. Five mango trees—huge mango trees—avocado trees, passion fruit trees, you name it, we had everything. In that sense, it was great. Unfortunately, because of the security situation, it was our first and only assignment where we had an armed guard. You have this armed guard out in front to let you and anybody else in and out. (One evening, we heard a gunshot in our driveway. We turned off all the lights, tried to look through the louvers to determine what was going on. Fifteen minutes later, the security supervisor came to the door to tell us that at the change of shift, while one guard was handing his weapon over to the other guard, it discharged. Fortunately, the bullet went into the ground.) The other thing that was a little unusual is our house did not have glass windows. All the windows had these wooden louvers, which opened and closed. This is all because they didn't want glass to break whenever they had any kind of a hurricane. So that was something new for us, the idea that if you want natural light, you had to open the windows. I think there may have been screens to keep the mosquitoes out, but you didn't need curtains because you had these wooden louvers to open and close. As you know, there's relatively little need for air conditioning in Jamaica. It's pretty comfortable year-round. At night, you can get away with a fan. The climate was great for us. The program was okay. Most of our activities took place in the Kingston area, although there were sometimes that we would go outside of Kingston, but relatively seldom. There was a lot of liaison with the university and with NGOs. So that was an interesting part of it.

The biggest change, for me at least, was that we put on a Black History Month event that could not be beat. It involved lots of live entertainment. But what I

hadn't thought was going to happen was I had to raise the money. It wasn't built into our budget. We had to solicit money from various donors, but because it was so prestigious to be associated with us and our Black History Month event, and to get your name in the program as having donated money, we never had trouble raising money to do all these events. Quite amazing. But one of the things that I came to realize is that when you and I think of Black History Month, we're talking about Black American History Month, right? In Jamaica, when you talk about Black History Month, they're talking about the heroes of Jamaica, they don't care about the United States per se. I insisted that we start calling it African American History Month because I was not going to have this stolen from us. They were really successful events every February, to put on the Black History Month, the concerts and lots of lectures and you name it. We did it during February, but that was a big step for me because I had never served in a post where we celebrated it quite that vigorously.

Q: Of course, the other interesting thing about Jamaica is although the population is majority African origin, the mixed-race people are very numerous as well.

KORFF: Yes. And as you know, in America we don't make that distinction. To us, Barack Obama was an African American, he wasn't mixed race. People have tried to make that argument, but to us, we don't make that distinction. Whereas, in Jamaica the coloreds are distinguished—and there's a lot of intermixing with Indians as well. It's a very interesting social dynamic. And when I was there, Edward Seaga was still Leader of the Opposition, and he's white. You do have these anomalies. I had very good relations while I was there with two ministers: one was the Minister of Education; the other was—she initially was the head of the cabinet, but later, she became Minister for Communication. I did get to know those people quite well. I was there for three years.

I ended up being hospitalized while there. It was 1999 and we were getting ready for Y2K. We all had our assignments: we were to go look at traffic lights at midnight to see if they stopped working. Did the computers all reset to zero? I mean, there were all kinds of things we were to do on December 31st of 1999. And on December 30, my fever kept getting worse and worse. I finally went to see an M.D. — there, you don't have an American or regional medical officer, you have a nurse that works with us. Anyway, she had arranged for me to go see a doctor and the doctor said, "Well, now you have the flu. You'll get well. Stay home, drink liquids, and take aspirin." I'm getting sicker and sicker and sicker. And finally, my wife calls the nurse and says, "He's not getting any better. He wants to go out and watch the traffic lights at midnight, but this is not going to happen." They arranged for me to be admitted to the University Hospital of the West Indies—the UWI Medical Center. So, a driver comes and drives me out there and they take X-rays and everything else and they discover I have atypical pneumonia caused by tuberculosis!

Q: Oh my god. Lung tuberculosis or bone tuberculosis?

KORFF: Lung, but lower lobe. What's called atypical pneumonia. They discovered that the lower lobes were infected as opposed to the upper lobes. So, then they had to figure out why I had this atypical pneumonia. And they said, "Well, there are two primary possibilities. One is that you have AIDS and the other is that you have TB." They did the necessary testing. I didn't have AIDS, thank goodness. But it turned out I did have TB. I ended up being in the hospital for 10 days. They got me a private room in an air-conditioned wing of the hospital. And you know, it worked out all right. I learned to walk around pushing my drip with me. I got better and better, but every FSN [Foreign Service National] that I'd ever come in contact with had to be tested to make sure I hadn't infected them. And of course, my wife had to be tested, and I was then on this prophylaxis for six months to cure me. It made for a very interesting tour. You know, no one's going to know how I got the TB. It could have been from Manila, it could have been from Calcutta. Who knows how long I had been carrying it? But I had to keep going back to the pulmonologist to have various tests to make sure I was okay. Some of the FSNs were not very happy that I may have infected them, and that they had to be tested, but fortunately, none of them was infected.

It's kind of surprising that it wasn't caught before Jamaica. When I had physical exams or when I had the various required vaccinations over the course of my tours in Dhaka and Manila: there were quite a number of vaccinations for Jamaica, but the TB wasn’t caught in the medical clearance process.

Q: I did want to ask you. You had to drive to the office, of course, Jamaica, being part of the old British Commonwealth, you have to drive on the wrong side of the street? Were you able to adapt to that?

KORFF: Well, I had begun in New Delhi. So New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, and Dhaka are all the same. I had gotten used to that. And then, you're right, in Jamaica as well. I took my American car. The steering wheel was in effect on the wrong side, for that kind of environment. Almost all roads in Jamaica were still just two lanes and so that's why we had to go to work so early, because the snaking of the cars on those roads to get into anywhere, can be formidable. We had to get to work early.

Q: And that is also worrisome for crime, because once you're locked in bumper-to-bumper traffic, there are carjackers or thieves or other, you know, bad-doers who can just run up to a car and do things.

KORFF: Yeah. And we were there for two major civil unrest periods. As in many developing countries, we all had radios, and we had to have our radio checks. But the first set of unrest, we could not get out of the area where we lived, because the rioters were burning tires. The guy on the radio—the Regional Security Officer—told us that instead, we should drive a longer way around in order to be

able to get to the Chancery. That was quite an amazing event. And we had to tell everybody that they could not fly there. Because in order to get out to the airport, you had to go through one of the areas that had been taken over by the Labour Party, the opposition party at the time. So that was a real scary time. And then on the day we left, it happened again: We were worried that we would not be able to leave Jamaica! Fortunately, when you're leaving, the embassy sends a driver to drive you to the airport. The driver knew innovative ways. This is before GPS and all that. The driver knew innovative ways to get us to the airport so that we didn't have any trouble, but it can be a difficult time.

FIG. 16 Missionaries of Charity visit the PAO Residence in Kingston on their rest day. Meena Korff is on left.

In Washington, we had begun working for the Missionaries of Charity. I think I mentioned this to you earlier working at soup kitchens. We began in Washington and then in Manila we continued. In Manila, we went on Sundays. So we went to mass, the Catholic mass, on Saturday night. And there, things are much sadder. The vegetables they get to try to create a broth or a soup or something are really third rate or fourth rate. But the nuns were so happy: they were not used to having volunteers. We were able to relieve them of some really tiresome chores: it gives them some free time to do other things. Whereas in Washington, the soup kitchen involves people coming in, passing through a cafeteria line, and sitting down; we would then wash the dishes and pots and pans after the meal finished. In Manila, there's no place for them to eat. So, there is a window that they bring their containers to, and we then put the food into the container, and they take it back to their home. So that was different.

In Kingston, the RSO, the security officer, said that we couldn't go into the downtown area— where the soup kitchen was! Nevertheless, we continued volunteering every Saturday. We would drive to their location, the nuns would open the gate, we would drive our car in, and thus it wasn't out on the street, at least, but it was a dangerous part of downtown Kingston. There, people packed the meals into packets, and then the nuns go out to different locations around downtown Kingston and hand out the food. Initially, I would go with them to hand out the food or help in any way I could. The color of my skin would sometimes arouse some of the people coming to get their food, and it proved to be

a distraction. My wife is Indian—like most of the nuns—and she was okay. They were happy to have her, but this white guy was problematic. Let's say it would arouse some unhappiness. It turned out that the nuns had this arrangement with the Kentucky Fried Chicken vendor to give us all of the leftovers from the day before. And so on Saturday mornings, instead of going to hand out the food, I would help for a while with getting the food ready, but then I would drive out—it wasn't Spanish Town, but it was some place some distance away — to get the food from the KFC and bring it back to the soup kitchen. I'm sure the RSO would have been appalled. So that way at least I wasn't angering anybody by my presence. That was what Jamaica was like. There's a lot of animosity, still, I think, to the way the colonial powers had treated people.

Q: And of course, Spanish Town—outsiders to Jamaica might not know it is not a safe place. It wasn't safe in the mid-80s and I can't imagine it got any safer by the time you were there.

KORFF: No.

Q: Yeah, so all of the activities you were doing could have ended up—? Well, you could have ended up with some trouble.

KORFF: Could have.

Q: But there are two perennials in our relations with Jamaica. One is immigration. The other is drugs. To what extent did your programming address either of those?

KORFF: Well, visas are a real problem. That was one of the places where there is a form A and a Form B for referring people to the Consular Section for visas. In India, we didn't have that. This was all something new where you could actually support a visa application, help somebody by saying, "This person is going to come back, you should give them the visa." That's Form A, I think. Sometimes, you'd use the other form, when you're just making sure they get an appointment. You're not really vouching for them. That was a problem, but we never had any of our grantees get turned down for visas. Whereas in my next post Tanzania, where we're going in a minute, I actually had a grantee refused a visa. So that was sort of a sad state of affairs, that an American government grantee would be denied a visa. Near the end of my stay in Jamaica, I became a State Department officer. By the time I was in Tanzania, I'm dealing with a fellow State Department officer, and she turns down the visa for our grantees. So that was really a sad, sad state of affairs.

Anyway, in Jamaica, we would try to explain what the visa requirements were. We did all of the student advising that any USIS office did. But I can't say that we were very successful. To most Jamaicans, the student visa process seemed very opaque. Even if it weren't opaque, they're still hoping against hope that they're

going to get their visa, their ticket out. And I don't know that we could have done any better. But it is an issue. Just remember, I was a one-officer post there, so I was doing everything. I had lots of balls in the air. But we had some good programs. We did just a wonderful program on civic education that the Minister of Education came and opened for us. And I was telling you about the USAID programs, where they gave us money to bring in people to talk about entrepreneurship. You know this, I'm sure, but most of the educated people in Jamaica are women. Eighty percent of the graduates each year at the University of the West Indies are women. Whereas in the United States at the time, we were still trying to make sure we had 50-50. Here in Jamaica, though, the ones with the gumption, the ones that are gonna go out and run the world, are women. It's a really interesting situation.

Anyway, on the drugs issue—I should tell you my wife was the INL [International Narcotics and Law Enforcement] representative in Jamaica.

Q: So she was not doing visas, she was actually full-time with INL. That's fascinating.

KORFF: That's why I was thinking that she would be a good candidate for you to interview. She had a much bigger budget than I did.

Q: Oh, always.

KORFF: And she got to fly around in helicopters and in planes around the country. I had sort of an inside knowledge of what was going on with regard to drugs. One of the good things with the Internet was that my counterparts in Barbados and in T&T, Trinidad and Tobago, they copied me on all of their weekly reports. I got program ideas that I knew had been successful in those posts. And the woman who was the PAO in Barbados, in Bridgetown, had invited somebody to come talk about drug courts in the United States. And, you know, the problem with the drug situation in Jamaica is that you end up putting everybody in jail, if you catch them—if you are willing to arrest them. And that's not a solution to the problem, and especially the small petty sellers or whatever. I got this idea that we ought to have at least someone come talk about drug courts. Well, then I was on home leave for my son's wedding in Washington. I went over to the national drug court office, which is in Alexandria, and I got in the front door. I got to talk to the guy that was executive director of the national association of drug courts. And he said, "Sure, if I'm asked, I'll come," and he did. So that was a great program to be able to do—and I think, ultimately, Jamaica did establish a drug court system. So that was, I think, a successful thing.

I would try to share the wireless file stories about drugs and anything we got from INL. But the ambassador, who wasn't interested in our work or in Jamaica, was interested in making sure that the Jamaicans liked him as a person. He didn't want us to release the annual INL report on drugs and thugs in Jamaica. And I said,

"You can't keep this secret." First of all, by then the Internet was more and more available, so the Jamaicans could look it up themselves, if necessary. And the fact that the embassy had at some point approved the report. Often it's written by INL in Washington, but it's sent to us for correction and approval. We knew what was going to come out—I wasn't involved in this; it was all done in the political section or in the econ section. But INL had put Jamaica on its red list, so the ambassador didn't think that we should let anybody know that this had happened. And that is just not a good thing.

On the other hand, he did a couple of interesting things. Do you know what ackee is? It was illegal to import ackee into the United States because it can be poisonous if it's not done ripening. And the ban on imports of ackee into the U.S. was an irritant. The Jamaicans wanted their ackee exported to the U.S. I suppose there were Jamaican-Americans who wanted to be able to import it. The ambassador was able to get the APHIS, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the people who worry about these things, to look at how ackee is canned, make sure that it's the right conditions, that people aren't going to die if they open it and eat it. Ultimately, he was able to get ackee taken off the do not import list.

And the other thing was either yams or sweet potatoes were grown in Jamaica but couldn't be exported to the U.S either. The Ambassador made it his mission to get those imported into the U.S.—and as with ackee, he succeeded! We were able to flog that.

I had really good relations with the DEA and FBI representatives. There were extraditions, and the Jamaicans cooperated with us on the extraditions. When an extradition happened, DEA or FBI would give me a heads up, this is coming. I would write the press release. We would issue the release and say, "Great cooperation with the Jamaicans. They are wonderful people." Sometimes they would drag their feet, but we would not include that. So, we accomplished some things there.

When I finally left, it was one event after another as people would thank us for what we had done. The Minister of Education took my wife and me to lunch. I mean, it was nice. It was a really positive experience.

Q: Yeah, once again, just comparing it from the mid-80s to the end of the 90s, when I was there in the mid-80s, there was a small drug problem, small transshipment and small local use, it was not even a major issue yet. And in those brief 15 years, Jamaica was a major transshipment point and there were already drug gangs. Incredible in such a short amount of time.

KORFF: And of course, there is a relationship between the political parties and some of those drug gangs, so that's something to keep in mind.

Q: I was so impressed that the USAID mission director knew to give you money to do civic responsibility, civic action programs. Were there others that you recall that were useful or sustainable?

KORFF: Well, these entrepreneurship programs were important. For example, the AID Mission Director read the book of one guy. She came to me and said, "If you can get him to come speak, I'll pay for him." I was able to get USIA to help us out. The speaker (Michael Fairbanks) pointed out that mass tourism is going to degrade your environment and isn't going to bring you the wealth that you need, that you want. You need to go into a sort of an upper middle-class target for your tourism. He pointed to the experiences that some countries had had, for example, going into growing roses and exotic flowers as a way of being able to appeal to the American market. He had lots of ideas, very good ideas. If you get a chance to read any of his books, Michael Fairbanks is excellent—a really good guy. Very happy to have him. When I get to Tanzania, you'll hear more about him because I was able to get him on a satellite feed to Tanzania. The first such feed, so that was quite an experience. Anyway, it was good to use USAID's money. Even after we became part of the State Department, I still had the authority to issue grants and so on that we had under USIA, so USAID could transfer money into my account.

Q: Okay, so in other words, his entrepreneur theory was, especially for small countries, more boutique sized answers rather than huge scale ups of even state-run companies?

KORFF: Yeah.

Q: Interesting. Okay. I think, unless you've got other recollections, I think we'll end here in Jamaica.

KORFF: May I just add one more that might be worth talking about? We had an American go missing at a beach resort. She had flown into Jamaica. As you know, most of the FSNs working for the U.S. military in Guantanamo are Jamaicans, and there are flights between Jamaica and Cuba.

Q: I did not know that. That's interesting.

KORFF: In 2000, it was still hard for Americans to get to Cuba. This American travel writer flew to Jamaica and was supposed to then fly on to Cuba. At the last minute, she didn't have the right visa or somehow she wasn't allowed on the plane or her invitation was canceled. So, she found herself with time in Jamaica, so she went to Negril and disappeared.

Q: Wow.

KORFF: And the parents marshaled every congressman they ever knew, and everybody else, to put pressure on the Jamaicans and therefore on us at the

embassy. We were doing our best. Unfortunately, she was staying at Sandals in Negril, and we had funded an IV program for the head of PR while he was still working as a journalist. Anyway, he was telling everybody, "Oh, no, we're innocent in all this. We know nothing about it. She must have gone off with some Rasta man on the beach." Anyway, we were getting all this pressure to do more and more. And the family was coming down and having press conferences, and I would have to attend those press conferences and report on what was being said back to Washington and to the front office. Well, her parents then decided that what we needed was a sniffer dog to come down and sniff around for this missing woman. Well, you know, Jamaica, UK, Ireland, they all have these rules about importing animals. And, the congressmen were saying, "We're going to cut off every cent we ever give Jamaica unless they let our dog in," and so on. So the Jamaicans ultimately caved, they let the dog in, and of course it didn't find anything, but that episode, during my stay there was one that was really trying, because I was going to all of these press conferences, reporting on them, and meeting with anybody who wanted to come down. I would try to explain that, first of all, this wasn't our country, it's Jamaica. And secondly, we have talked to them, we are confident they're doing everything they can, it's not in their interest to have American tourists go missing. So, anyway, that was one thing that really stands out during my stay there, because they were so interested in us, and trying to make us happy, that they would even, you know, break their own rules to let the dog in.

Q: Wow. And she was never found.

KORFF: Yeah, never. So really really sad. I mean, this happens all around the world, but it happened in my backyard.

Q: Was there anything else you wanted to mention?

KORFF: I wanted to mention that we had a really successful program involving the Maroons. They were a group that had escaped bondage and isolated in Jamaica. Well, I found out that the Smithsonian Institution had mounted an exhibit about the Maroons. So, I went to the Smithsonian on one of my visits to Washington, and I convinced them to let us show the exhibit in Kingston. We had a very successful program.

Smithsonian's Maroon exhibit opens here on Monday

"CREATIVITY AND Resistance: Maroon Cultures in the Americas," a travelling exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, opens on Monday at the Institute of Jamaica, East Street, downtown Kingston.

The exhibition focuses on a fascinating chapter in the history of the African Diaspora, and was developed by the Smithsonian Institution's Travelling Exhibition Service (SITES) and the Smithsonian Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage in Washington, DC. It has been brought to Jamaica by the United States Embassy, Kingston.

Dr. J. Michael Korff-Rodrigues, the embassy's Counsellor for Public Affairs, said he first heard of the exhibition in a brief news item. During a visit to Washington, DC, in May 1999, he asked about the possibility of bringing it to Jamaica.

At his request, SITES agreed to send the exhibition abroad for the first time. It had previously travelled to 16 cities within the United States.

"I quickly realised that this was a remarkable exhibit of immense cultural, historical and social value to Jamaica," Dr. Korff-Rodrigues said. "It seemed to me a unique opportunity for people from all walks of life to study aspects of the Maroon culture not only from the Jamaican perspective, but also to learn more of the links between contemporary Maroon communities in the Americas.

"These include the Maroons of Surinam, French Guiana, and those of the Seminole communities along the United States/Mexico border, as well as the four leading Maroon communities in Jamaica: the Leeward Maroons of Accompong, the Charles Town Maroons, the Moore Town Maroons, and the Scott's Hall Maroons."

The opening ceremony takes place at 3 p.m. at the Institute, 10-16 East Street, Kingston. Professor Rupert Lewis of the Department of Government, University of the West Indies, Mona, a member of the Institute's Council and chairman of the African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica/Jamaica Memory Bank's Advisory Board, will be the guest speaker.

The exhibition runs until mid-January.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Well, alright. It sounds like this is a good place to break, end of a tour, and we'll look forward to Tanzania next. So let me go ahead and pause.

Q: Okay, today is September 21, 2021, and we're resuming our interview with Michael Korff. Michael, we're going to follow you into Tanzania, what year is that?

KORFF: 2001

Q: How did it end up that you went to Tanzania?

KORFF: Well, I was in Jamaica, as you recall at the time, and I was looking for a next assignment. I don't quite remember all of the details, but the Tanzania assignment was available. I was the right grade. The PAO [Public Affairs Officer] in Tanzania, wrote to me saying that I would be ideal because they needed to have somebody who could write speeches, and I had been doing a fair amount of that. They thought that I might be a good candidate, and so I was happy to go there.

Q: Okay. At this point the personnel system has now shifted over to State completely.

KORFF: Correct

Q: The adjustment, as far as you recall, was as smooth as could be imagined?

KORFF: There weren't any hiccups in personnel, but there was some push-back from some individuals. On September 30, 1999, the day before we officially were abolished as a separate agency, the admin officer in Jamaica ordered me to take the office car down to the USAID parking lot and leave it there. He said that we would not be allowed to retain "ownership." It was a self-drive situation, we didn't have a chauffeur in USIS [United States Information Service], but the Admin Officer said no, we could not keep the car, it had to be turned over to the motor pool. It was a little unusual, because the car was a right-hand drive Japanese-made car, and there were no other Japanese cars in the motor pool set of autos, but they were absolutely adamant that we could not retain the car. I had to take it down. I remember going down there, I turned the keys over to the guy at the booth, and said, "This is the USIS car, I was told to leave it here." And that was the end of that.

Q: One last thing in Jamaica, you had a large house, you were able to do entertaining representational activities. As you were still officially the head of an organization there until you know the end of 1999. You had your own china?

KORFF: Yes

Q: What happened to it?

KORFF: That was all left behind for GSO [General Service Officer], so that wasn't an issue. But it's interesting that you raised that subject because my predecessor in Tanzania had hidden all of the china, everything that had belonged to us as a separate agency, even though by then it was 2001, we were two years into the merger. He had saved all of the china and had hidden it so that no one could take it. There were other things in the house: he had made sure that the TV, the VCR, all of that stuff that had originally belonged to USIA [United States Information Agency], he made sure that that was still there when he left. Just jumping ahead, by the time I left in 2004. My successor was a political cone officer, not a PD [Public Diplomacy] cone officer. He wasn't, first of all, used to representational events of that scale, and wasn't interested in the china or anything else, but I still sent it over to him. I don't know what ultimately happened, but it was quite a transition there for the FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals] and everybody else when they suddenly got this political cone guy as the new PAO.

Q: The reason I mentioned such a relatively small thing is that it was going on all over the world. Oddly enough, being able to have your own set of entertainment china, and keeping hold of it had great symbolic value to a lot of USIS officers. And many, not just one, hid the china so that it couldn't be taken back.

KORFF: Yeah. That sounds right.

Q: Anyway,

KORFF: I wish we could have done that with the car: hide the car.

Q: Right, exactly. Anyway, let's go ahead and join you in Tanzania. What was the size and shape of the public diplomacy section, now part of state?

KORFF: Well, as you know, up until 1998, USIS had an American center downtown in Dar es Salaam. But in 1998, the United States Embassy was blown up by Al-Qaeda operatives. We weren't in the building at the time, although, as unfortunate as it is, one of the people killed in Dar es Salaam, at the time of the bombing was the spouse of a United States Fulbrighter. We only had nine people killed in Dar es Salaam, whereas in Kenya, they had 100 or something: it was a much more significant bombing there. Part of the reason is, we occupied the former chancery of the Israeli embassy. When Israel builds something, they build it to withstand these sorts of things. So, it was a very strong embassy. And when they left Tanzania, when they no longer had relations, or at least diplomatic relations, the Americans bought the embassy. The bombing was a traumatic experience. A lot of our lot of the FSNs, for example that I worked with, State FSNs, were traumatized by the experience.

So, by the time I got there, the old embassy no longer existed. I should just tell you something that you might find interesting. After the embassy was blown up, all operations were transferred to the PAO residence. The ambassador's office was put in the PAO bedroom. They brought in all of these cargo containers and put them around the PAO compound, so that there were offices for everybody. And so, the PAO who had just arrived when all this was happening, suddenly had to go find someplace else to live. But by the time I got there, we were all in the interim office building, which had originally been designed as a series of houses on a condominium-type of compound, so that was where we were. The public diplomacy section had two buildings, in fact, two of these homes, one of which had an auditorium in it, and a library and the other building where my office was, was in another building, it was sort of ironic. We all had private bathrooms attached to our offices: it was quite a place. I got there in late August of 2001, and I'm in my second week, and I did not have a television in my office, but the assistant PAO had one in his and all of the staff had gone home by then. It must have been 5:30pm or so in the afternoon, local time. The assistant PAO came running into my office and said, "One of the towers at the World Trade Center is on fire, there's been an accident." I went into his office to watch it on TV. We were watching when the second plane hit the second tower. You know, at first you couldn't believe that it was happening. It was such an unexpected event.

We had a tie-line to Washington, so I immediately called my wife who had stayed behind in Washington for some surgery. She was fine, but our son was on a train from Washington to Manhattan at the time, and everybody's phone started going off, right? You know, there's been this bombing in Manhattan, and so everybody wanted to get off the train. Nobody wanted to go into Manhattan, and Amtrak did not let them get off! They had to continue all the way into Penn Station.

Q: Wow

KORFF: Ultimately, he, of course, turned around and came back home the next day, but it was quite a trauma. I drove home to the PAO residence and was glued to CNN. (Thanks to my predecessor I had CNN in the house.) I was sort of glued to it, something that most people don't remember is that, of course, there were a lot of rumors around that day. One of the rumors was that a bomb had gone off in a car next to the State Department, and so that made it sound even worse. So, I'm getting more and more panicked: Is there going to be any world left after all this? We didn't know how extensive it was going to be. Later that night, about 7:30 pm, I would guess, or eight o'clock, the Chargé called, and she told me that I was to get a hold of all of my FSNs. (Oh, you had asked how big the section was, there were two Americans, and I would guess twenty FSNs.) She told me I should contact all FSNs, tell them not to come in the next day, and that we would have a meeting of the Emergency Action Committee, the EAC, to think about next steps. We did have that meeting. But driving in on the twelfth, our embassy, our chancery, was next to the Russian Embassy, and driving in that morning, the Russian flag was at half-staff. That was so meaningful to me—that finally the world was united, having fought the Soviet Union for so long, having seen the fall of the Berlin Wall, and everything else, for the Russians to actually be sympathizing with the Americans was a really nice gesture. The EAC met, we decided that we would have no more than half of our staff come in on alternate days, and so on. That initial period after the bombing was quite dramatic, and we arranged to have a sort of a memorial service at the Ambassador's residence. Mind you, we didn't have an ambassador, but we held it at the Ambassador's residence. The Marines carried both the United States flag and the Tanzanian flag (that became an issue much later, which I can tell you about: Just so you know, normally the Marines refused to hold the embassy the flag of another country).

Q: Yes

KORFF: The Foreign Minister came, and it was a solemn event, but it was a way of showing solidarity with the Americans. There was some concern that the American School, which catered to expatriates, relatively well-off expatriates, had a very large number of expatriate South Asians, and some of them distributed sweets after the event and that was very upsetting to us, because that's a way of celebrating something that you're happy about. We decided that the RSO's office [Regional Security Officer] should escort any buses with our children on them, and we took some other steps. We had an excellent RSO at the time, who I think later became a DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary] in DS [Diplomatic Security]. It was a difficult time. By the end of the week, the Chargé approached me and said, "You know, I have to have a DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], I can't do all the work myself. So would you become the acting DCM?" And I said, "Sure." I was lucky, I had a very good assistant PAO, who could help with the running of the section. For about six weeks or so, I served as DCM at that time, and then the incoming DCM arrived, so I then became head of the political section, believe it or not, because we only had one junior officer left in the political section. So, I became the head of the political section, but after two or three weeks, I was able to finally go back to my own section after the new section head arrived.

Q: Oh, wow. So, this is quite a set of new experiences for you.

KORFF: It was

Q: Fascinating. Okay. Well, you know, I wouldn't typically ask you a lot of detailed questions for a relatively short period of time. I mean, certainly, it's important to be DCM, even for a short time. But this is an emergency moment, where, you know, basically, you're probably concentrating almost exclusively on the security of the embassy and the people.

KORFF: It was, and as I said, we had an excellent RSO. He may not yet have been Senior Foreign Service, but shortly thereafter, I'm sure as a result of this experience if nothing else, our RSO was promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. We were lucky to have somebody who was that good. He'll play a role in a few months, when we continue on, but at that point, it was just a matter of trying to keep our heads above water, reporting as much as we could, to Washington, and that sort of thing. We continued on, and remember, we're still at the interim embassy, we hadn't moved over to the new building, yet, so it was a difficult time for all of us.

Q: Yeah. Everybody remembers where they were on 9/11. And the subsequent activities, but from your recollection, you had mentioned there were some people giving out candy. What was the general reaction in Tanzania? As a public affairs officer, how did you handle the public affairs in the initial weeks and months after the event?

KORFF: There was a lot of sympathy for us. Remember, we had been blown up in 1998 by Al-Qaeda, so to have another Al-Qaeda terrorist attack wasn't necessarily anything new for us. I would say most Tanzanians, regardless of whether they were Christian or Muslim, were sympathetic.

Q: At that time, also, did the Tanzanian government in any way offer assistance? Were there changes in the nature of the relationship?

KORFF: Not that I recall. We've always had a very civilized relationship with the government. Especially in light of 1998, I think they were pretty positive toward the United States. They were moving away from a socialist outlook toward a more free-market outlook. They were opening up, they were allowing outside capital to come in, so the country was moving quickly. You may know it began as a socialist country at the time of independence, but it was moving away from that.

Q: Yeah. Now, also, of course, you have the Chargé for a while. When did the ambassador arrive?

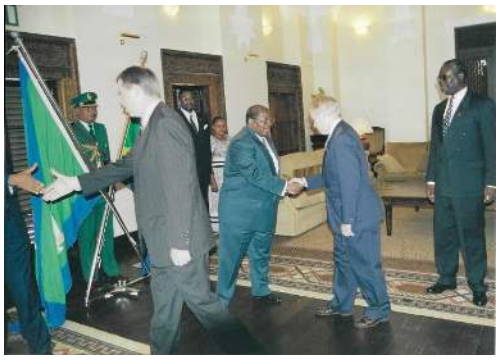

FIG. 17 Michael Korff shakes hands with Benjamin Mkapa, President of Tanzania, at the presentation of the Ambassador's letters of credence.

KORFF: Good point. He didn't arrive until the end of November. At one point, the Chargé had to go back to Washington for her own confirmation hearing to become Ambassador to Madagascar, so that made it even more interesting to be in that DCM chair. I did not become Chargé at that point. Instead, the DCM from Nairobi came down and served as Chargé. He was Senior Foreign Service, but it was less than a week that he was there, and I stayed on as DCM. He didn't know much about the country. He was more used to Kenya. Our Chargé then came back and by early November, the new DCM arrived, and not long thereafter, he became Chargé. Then by mid-November, maybe, the new ambassador arrived. I had met him in Washington when I was at FSI taking the African area studies course. We had that initial meeting, and we had good chemistry. Just so you know, Robert V. Royall was a political appointee, and had earlier been the Secretary of Commerce of the state of South Carolina. We got along well, and so by mid-November, I would guess, he became the ambassador. I was by that time one of the senior officers of the embassy: he only got to take three of us with him for the presentation of his credentials. So, I was one of those.

FIG. 18 Dame Jane Goodall and Michael Korff at the American Club in Dar es Salaam in 2001 when he introduced her to the American community.

I was arranging a lot of his events when he originally arrived. So, for example, Jane Goodall has a lot of cachet in Tanzania, because of her work in Gombe Stream, Tanzania, where she has one of her chimpanzee refuges. She wanted to meet the ambassador. When I took her over to the residence to meet him, I just happened to mention, would you like to meet the American community here? And she agreed. I arranged it for a Friday night at the American Club. I asked the DCM if he wanted to introduce her to the community. And he said, No, you made the arrangements, you introduce her yourself. The evening was a big success. They really felt, I think, very privileged to get to have her come and talk to them briefly about her work. Many of their children were involved in the Roots & Shoots program that the Jane Goodall Institute runs.

Q: Lovely, but now once the new ambassador arrives, was there also a USAID mission?

KORFF: Yes. At that time, they had their own compound. There were separate compounds well before 1998. USIS had its own building, AID, Peace Corps, State Department. We all had buildings. CDC was down at a hospital, so they weren't actually on a U.S. compound at that time.

Q: Okay. And the reason I ask is of course, because as the new ambassador arrives, there are a lot of things going on in Tanzania from the U.S. point of view. How is the new ambassador? You know, setting the goals, what are the goals that the new ambassador has set? And, you know, what, what are you trying to accomplish at this initial point?

KORFF: I Would say like many political appointees, the goal of the ambassador is to have good relations with the host country. No real policy efforts, per se, depending on the DCM and the country team to advise him, and so on. So, at that point, there was no dramatic change in what we were doing. And we were still recovering from 1998. The trauma of 1998 and then from 9/11.

Q: I see, okay. Now, Zanzibar is part of your area of responsibility as well.

KORFF: Yeah. Although it is an independent country with its own President, Zanzibar is part of Tanzania.

Q: Okay, yeah, I didn't know the exact relationship. But I did that mean that you went out there as well as part of your work?

FIG. 19 Michael Korff and Ambassador Robert V. Royall at the Ramadan Iftar in Zanzibar in 2002. The President of Zanzibar, the Anglican Bishop, and other guests attended.

KORFF: Not often, but sometimes. And the PAO residence looked on the Indian Ocean. We saw all of the ferries going back and forth between Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. We got to see all of that taking place. And in fact, as you're suggesting, the ambassador did have to make his initial call in Zanzibar, as luck would have it. Following 9/11, the Public Diplomacy section of the State Department began stressing that we needed to do more, in order to demonstrate that there was no inherent animosity between the United States and Islam. I should mention what went on with Ramadan that year after 9/11. In 2001, before the Ambassador arrived, we held an Iftar at a downtown hotel. The following year, after the new ambassador arrived, we went to him and said, "We would like to have an *iftar* hosted by you, for government officials" He offered to hold the event at his own residence, which was a much nicer approach. I had a section that had several Muslim FSNs, and they helped me through all the protocol, how to organize it, how to have a special room where you could do the ritual preparations for the prayers, and so on. We did all that early on.

Anyway, we did take the ambassador over to Zanzibar, I think that's what you're getting at. Zanzibar has a president, and Tanzania has a president. So, there are two presidents at the same time. We took the Ambassador over to meet the Zanzibar president. It was very cordial; they were all very sympathetic with us.

Q: Okay, okay. You're certainly right that part of the Bush administration early in this period after 9/11 wanted to make sure that it was understood the administration made a clear difference between relations with Islam and relations with jihad. They also were beginning to ask the public diplomacy to reach out to youth. There had been a feeling that this was a group that we were not adequately addressing. Was that also going on in Tanzania? Were you asked to, you know, particularly address outreach to youth?

FIG. 20 Michael Korff at the opening of the 2003 Drum Major for Justice ceremony. As a result of the 9/11 attacks, a major effort was made to include prominent Muslims in all events. Here an imam offers an opening prayer.

KORFF: Yes, especially Muslim youth. Washington suddenly found lots of money. All kinds of exchanges became possible, we doubled the normal number of international visitors who went to the U.S. from Tanzania. It was just an amazing period. Lots of opportunities to build up our program. Up until then, we hadn't had a translator to translate anything into Swahili. When I asked for money to hire an FSN to do the translating, no problem. No matter what I asked for, somehow, they found the money. They were happy to give it to us. They were glad that we were willing to do something about it. And it worked out very positively.

Q: Was it relatively easy to fill the slots? In other words, were there enough people who had enough background or education or interest and so on to ramp up the program?

KORFF: Yeah, I would say that whereas in India, there were areas where to be associated with the United States could be a detriment, Calcutta especially because it had a Marxist government, but by the time I was in Tanzania, there was no strong animus toward us. It was not hard to find competent, talented people who were willing to work for the United States.

Q: Okay. Other than the usual exchanges and the Fulbright, as you were talking about, were there any new initiatives or innovations that you made?

KORFF: We had a special initiative on Engaging Islam. We would go out to meet the people who ran the various mosques, we would invite them in for events where we had discussions, we went out of our way to try to be clear that we were not the enemy of Islam. Especially after the war in Afghanistan began. I began holding almost daily press briefings for anybody who wanted to come, and at the beginning you would get a lot, you would have five to ten journalists show up who would come mainly just to hear what I had to say. Later on, some of them were really smart, they saw this as an opportunity to get to an American spokesperson who, you know, could answer their questions about a

variety of topics. That, to me, was especially rewarding. After a couple of months, we ended the daily briefings, but there was a positive attitude toward the U.S.

Then the U.S. invaded Iraq and Abu Ghraib happened. That really soured the relations between us, or at least with some host country nationals, because that was so clearly contrary to what the United States had always said it stood for. That made the front-page of the local press every day. It was a terrible time for us. The new ambassador was especially upset about it. You know, we need to do something about this, we need to counter this. Of course, we were doing all we could, trying to explain why things happened the way they did. The wireless file, we sent out in both English and in Swahili, but it was a really difficult time for us as we went ahead. The Ambassador could read the English press, but one day, when all the atrocities were on the front pages of the Swahili press, I took all the papers up to the Ambassador's office and laid them out for him to see. He realized we had a problem.

Q: Well, now Abu Ghraib is in Iraq and it's now a few years after you arrive there. That turns out to be I guess for you one of the biggest difficulties that you had to face. Other than Abu Ghraib, were there other significant activities that were going on for you in Tanzania?

FIG. 21 The Public Affairs staff that put together the 2003 College Fair. Since recruiters do not visit Dar es Salaam, the staff asked alumni of American colleges and universities to represent their colleges at the fair.

KORFF: Well, I mean, we had a lot of innovative programming. For example, I had a young FSN, who had studied at the College of Charleston. She ended up working very closely with our cultural specialist who normally would have done all of the student advising, but we had never had a college fair, an American-style college fair. Maybe even in Nairobi, you might get representatives of American colleges, universities, but they don't come to a place like Tanzania. It was hard to organize such an event. We had this

idea that proved to be really incredible. With her help, we went to all of the American officers at the American Embassy and said, would you represent your alma mater at a college fair? We wrote to all of their alma maters, got the flyers and materials for them sent in through the pouch, and were able to put it together as a way of trying to show that we were open, and it was a way to open up the front door to the embassy. To get people

from outside who might not otherwise have come, or who might only have come to get a visa but had no real relations. They don't normally see an Econ Officer or any of the other officers there, they might see a Vice Consul, but that's about it, so here was a chance for us to do something that was really innovative. That was a big success, doing things like that.

About six months or seven months into his stay, the ambassador did something that was unpredicted. He fired the DCM. The DCM had only been there six months at the time, and they had not gotten along very well, so he announced to Washington that he had lost confidence. He needed another DCM, and since I had done the job before, I again became Acting DCM. It was a difficult time, I think, for the embassy, for everybody because it's hard when you lose a DCM who has only been there six months. I certainly would never have bad mouthed the DCM. He had lots of ideas. For example, we didn't have a Commercial Officer, so he had the idea that the commercial library should be made part of the PAO's responsibility and that the Commercial FSN, who then reported to the econ officer, a State officer, should work for the PAO. The DCM had a vision for how he was going to do things, managing at least the State side of things. We had gotten along well, there were no problems whatsoever.

But I became the DCM again, and the Ambassador asked me, and then Washington called and said, "Well, we need a permanent DCM. You've done it. Are you willing to do it on a permanent basis?" I couldn't, because by that time, my wife was the ambassador's secretary, so I couldn't very well be the permanent DCM. That was out of the question, but then the ambassador had to go start interviewing people to be the new DCM, so I became the Chargé. For a couple of weeks, the only time in my career, I was actually the Chargé. It came at sort of a sad time, because we had lost the DCM.

When you're Chargé, people look at you very differently: The Marines at Post One salute you, for example, and the very week after the ambassador left to go to Washington, I had to represent the U.S. at the Tanzanian National Day and we had a crisis management exercise planned. In such an exercise, you have a variety of scenarios, and the Country Team has to meet and deal with it, acting as the EAC [Emergency Action Committee]. This really great RSO comes up to me and says, "Well, you know, we're going to have this crisis management exercise, and either the ambassador or the DCM has to chair the exercise, and since you're the Chargé you're it." We had this all-day exercise, where we looked at a variety of scenarios and tried to respond. In the end, it worked out fine. We had a good country team that was very responsive. It was all pretend, of course, but we were able to get through it without much difficulty.

One interesting story from my CDA experience: I had never delivered a real démarche. I had written lots of white papers, diplomatic notes, and non-papers that we would present, but I had never actually had to go into the foreign minister and make a démarche. I won't tell you what the subject was because it's classified. The political officer comes to me and says, "We've got this request from Washington that we immediately present this démarche. I have an appointment with the foreign minister, we're going at ten." "We are? Okay, and what am I going to do while you present this démarche?" "Oh, no, no, no, no,

no, the Chargé has to present this démarche." We went into see Jakaya Kikwete, he was the foreign minister at the time, he later became president, by the way. He was very kind, he could see I was sweating as I was going through the demarche, because I had to sort of memorize the talking points. We said, "By the way, we have a non-paper we can leave with you, so you don't have to take notes." That was quite an experience. He was a Muslim; at the time I was there. Benjamin Mkapa was the president, he was a Christian. Julius Nyerere, the original president, was also a Catholic. They try to alternate between Muslim and Christian presidents, they don't always do that, but they try to. Now, for example, this woman [Samia Hassan] who's now the president of Tanzania, she's a Muslim, and of course, the president of Zanzibar is a Muslim. They have two Muslims as presidents right now.

After a couple of weeks as Chargé, the Ambassador returned, and then the fellow whom the Ambassador finally chose to be the DCM came by just to say hello to all of us, but he then had to go back to DCM school, and he had to go on his home leave and all the other things. So that prolonged my time as the DCM, and I had to prepare the Mission Program Plan.

I had no idea how to write one of those, I had never done it. For USIA, we had our country plan, but I had never done an MPP. I suddenly had to put together an MPP for Tanzania. And there were just so many things that were thrown at me that I really was sort of learning on the job as we went along.

Another interesting thing that happened while I was Acting DCM was a terrible tragedy where a train accident occurred near Dodoma (the official capital), with significant loss of life. We were able to take advantage of a provision in the Foreign Affairs Manual that lets the Chief of Mission make an on-the-spot contribution to help with relief measures. We had an Office Management Specialist who helped us find the provision in the FAM and we were the first foreign mission to make a contribution to the Government of Tanzania. We were rewarded for our efforts with lots of positive publicity.

US donates $ 50,000 for victims

By Guardian Reporter

US Ambassador to Tanzania Robert V. Royall announced yesterday that the United States is making available 50,000 US dollars worth of emergency assistance to help with the treatment and care of the victims of Monday's train disaster near Dodoma.

Royall informed Health Minister Anna Abdallah of the special grant in a telephone call to the Minister in Dodoma. The Ambassador also expressed the deep condolences of the American people to the victims and survivors of the train crash.

The 50,000 US dollars was made available to the government under a special authority to declare a disaster and access funds for emergency use that Ambassador Royall exercises. The money is administered by the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

USAID Director Ray Kirkland noted that disaster assistance was provided as an expression of the U.S. tradition of humanitarian concern. The 50,000 US dollars is in addition to the regular development assistance programme that the United States maintains with the Government of Tanzania.

Based on consultations with the Ministry of Health, the U.S. anticipates that the funds will be used to purchase high-priority medical supplies needed to assist the survivors to the crash.

Meanwhile, the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Tanzania, Wanq Yongqiu has grant 10m/- to the government assist in the recove operations in the accident.

The envoy has al directed the Chinese Medi team in Dodoma to join effo with their Tanzania colleagu and try their best to save many lives as possible.

In a condolence messag

Continues on page

Ultimately, after a couple of months, the new DCM arrived, and again, I went back to being PAO.

Q: With probably a sigh of relief

KORFF: Yeah, at that point.

Q: Yeah, the sad thing about the mission program plan is that it's treated with great seriousness, it takes forever to write and then is totally ignored, or mostly ignored, because the ambassador will decide what he or she wants to do anyway. Yeah, oh, well. travel. Tanzania is a pretty big country. Did your programming include a fair amount of travel? And what effect did that have?

FIG. 22 Michael Korff opening the 2003 Martin Luther King Drum Major for Justice ceremony.

KORFF: I would say, on the mainland, it didn't involve very much official travel. There was some personal travel to see the country because it is a great place to visit. The exception was this effort to Engage Islam, which was our big project. For example, we had iftars during Ramadan both in Dar es Salaam and in Zanzibar. When we first began putting together the invitation list, let's take the example of Zanzibar, which is 99% Muslim. I was the one that said no, we have to invite the Anglican bishop, this has to be sort of an ecumenical evening. The President of Zanzibar came: that was what was really a wonderful thing for us. In Dar es Salaam, the foreign minister came. He was a Muslim. But in Zanzibar, the President himself came. Those events became sort of a hallmark of a lot of our activities. We had a few speakers that we could take both to Zanzibar as well as in Tanzania. I don't think we ever took a speaker outside of Dar however, I think all of our seminars and speakers, and even Worldnet in those days, were done in Dar es Salaam.

There was one thing that we did that was a little innovative. My predecessor and his ambassador, also a political appointee, but a Democrat, an African American Democrat, had begun a series of Martin Luther King Day events where they gave out an award called the Drum Major for Justice Award. It's based on a speech that Martin Luther King

had given. What it involves is that you invite people to an event either at the embassy or at the residence, and you give the award to somebody. Now, when it was originally created by my predecessor and his ambassador, they would give it to the president of the country or to some high-ranking person as sort of an effort to get that person to come to the embassy for an event. We turned it around, and because I had this experience with the MPP, I had a better understanding about what our overall mission objectives were or should be in Tanzania. I would take it to the country team meetings, this idea, well, who are we going to honor at this year's Martin Luther King Day event? We got to the point where, let's say that we needed to honor somebody who was working on issues related to female empowerment. We would find somebody who had been an outstanding exemplar of efforts in this area, and honor her as a way of holding up as an example for the whole country, this idea that we, you know, want to honor people who do this kind of work, this is important to us. We did that each year. We would honor people who were strong in the cultural arena, or somebody who had done something on democracy or different issues. Anti-corruption, that was a big one. These were issues that we were able to honor each year. These laureates we called them. It was really a successful event. What we did was we took various speeches from Martin Luther King, and we had different prominent Tanzanians read sections from those speeches to the whole group. For example, there was this one left-of-center newspaper editor/publisher, who often was very critical of the United States. Each year, he would come, and he says, "I'm always going to accept your invitations when you ask me to come to participate in this." It was that important, and of course, Martin Luther King is a good example for all of us, because he stands for a lot of the values that we really want to espouse overseas. It was really nice. That was a real positive thing.

Other things that were unusual during my stay there were, first of all, the American government rebuilt the blown-up United States embassy from 1998. It was done by USAID. Then I had to organize the ceremony at which we turned it over to the Government of Tanzania, and that ended up being a big deal. I had to identify the appropriate people to invite, who was going to speak, write the ambassador's speech, for example, honor the people who had been FSNs in the building when it blew up. Things like that. That was quite an event. Then, after I had been there, maybe two years, we moved to the new embassy. The new embassy was built on the site of a former drive-in theater.

It wasn't downtown. It was somewhat out into the suburbs. It really was exactly what we don't want, at least from a public diplomacy perspective. It had a high wall around it, no one could get in unless they were screened and invited. In those days, they were just beginning to have these cell phones with cameras in them. No one could bring in a cell phone because you were afraid that they would take photos inside the chancery as though that was going to be a big secret. Anyway, we had to move everybody to the new embassy, we had to have a ceremony to inaugurate the new embassy, had to get the foreign minister there, and everybody else to be there. That was quite an accomplishment for us, to move everything that we needed to move to the new embassy.

Q: You mentioned rebuilding the old one and giving it to the Tanzanians. Was there also an Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation activity?

KORFF: Absolutely. I'm glad you raised that. I didn't have a background in either Africa, or in Tanzanian culture, so I'm not a good one to be able to submit a proposal for this. But we had a good set of FSNs, and the assistant PAO, this same guy that had taken over so many times in my absence. He put together this brilliant proposal about preserving Taarab music. Taarab music is authentic Swahili music. It's known best in Zanzibar, but it's also on the mainland. We were able to submit a proposal that was funded by Washington. We were able to really play that up: we first of all had a ceremony in Zanzibar, but we also had a ceremony in Dar to celebrate this grant, to try to preserve Taarab music. It was really a first-rate effort. I should really give praise to that assistant PAO. Unfortunately, he left suddenly when he and his wife had a baby. Under State Department rules, he was allowed to take twelve weeks of paternity leave, leaving me and the FSNs on our own. We no longer had him to depend on, and then a job opened up in PD [Public Diplomacy] in Santiago. I said, "You know, it's to your advantage to take it, but we will really miss you." He took it. I then got a civil service replacement who arrived after two or three months of language training. However, by the time I was getting ready to leave, so this would have been maybe April of 2004, *his* wife got pregnant, and they too, went on twelve weeks of leave. I think that paternity leave and these sorts of leaves are important, I support them, but I think we should get TDY [Temporary Duty] support in their place. It's very hard when you're suddenly left with no one there to help out.

Q: That's a larger question of personnel planning and management, which, sadly, has no champion. This is part of what happens when no one in Congress cares. In other words, there's not enough of a personnel float in the entire State Department, for any of these, and your example in Tanzania is just one. There are many, many others similar all over the world, where there is just no one to move in and take a job temporarily or come and fill the slot permanently. It just doesn't exist.

KORFF: We survived. Before he left, the civil service guy put together a fascinating program, well two interesting programs that ended up taking place after he left. One was, he worked very closely with the ambassador to put together an art auction at the new embassy. The ambassador was concerned that there was no champion for local artists. He and his assistant—my wife—got all the artists to donate art, various kinds of art, either paintings or plastic art, or you name it. We decided to have this event, this auction, in a tent. It became our job to go out to different hotels to find out if they had a tent. This was a real circus tent. I mean, as big as you would have at a circus, so that we could have the auction at the new office building, or on the grounds. That was a big success, they raised lots of money to support this art. It was a combination Live Auction and Silent Auction. That was one thing that this assistant PAO did. The other thing was for my last Fourth of July there, he had been in contact with Step Afrika! It's based here in Washington.

It's mainly African Americans who do this. I'm sure they wrote to every mission in Africa. This assistant PAO was able to get one of the hotels to give them free rooms if

they put on a paid performance in their building. Then they agreed to perform at our Fourth of July. It really was tremendous. First of all, with most Fourth of July events, you have something that's official, you have other diplomats there, you have the government there, and so on. Then later on, usually there's something for the American community. They performed at both events, both at the official event as well as at the American event later on.

Q: Then the other question, which is sort of a follow up to this in previous posts, you've mentioned that sometimes USAID will transfer funds because they see opportunities for small scale grants, or small-scale programs that they can't do themselves. Did that happen again in Tanzania?

KORFF: I don't think so. I don't recall any anyway. Just so you know, after the bombing and after the construction of the chancery, USAID was forced to move on to the same compound as the State Department. A later ambassador also tried to force Peace Corps to move on to the compound as well. That ended up being a real terrible experience. I wasn't there when that happened. At one point, the Senate refused to confirm one of the ambassador candidates until a negative statement in the personnel file of the Peace Corps director in whom the Ambassador lost confidence was removed. The PC Director was ejected from the country because he refused to allow the Peace Corps headquarters to move on to the compound.

Q: Holy cow. Okay. Wow.

KORFF: You wouldn't expect such things to happen in Tanzania. It's normally such a quiet place, but it has been more active in recent years.

Q: I wondered about that because obviously, you know, USAID has all sorts of programs going on there, and sometimes they overlap with goals that public diplomacy has.

KORFF: Yeah, and certainly, this idea of entrepreneurship is one where we collaborated a lot. I would have speakers come to talk about entrepreneurship. I personally would go speak about it--I did a lot of public speaking there. I would go out to the university, and if there had been one of these NGOs, that AID funded, presenting a course on entrepreneurship, desperate to have a speaker come to their graduation ceremony, and no one wants to go out there. It doesn't make sense to me, if you're funding it, you would think you'd have some ownership of it and want to help out at the graduation ceremony. I would go out there and be the speaker: I'm happy to speak and they're happy to have me. That would work out. If the Press Association needs someone to come talk about press freedom, I'm happy to do it. There are lots of opportunities, if you're only willing to grab them. You get publicity out of it, it'll be reported in the paper the next day, it's more than just the audience that you're actually talking to: it ends up being more widely heard.

Q: Sure. Was there a democracy grant commission?

KORFF: No. I think that was all done by state department offices, I don't think USAID had anything to do with it. It was in the political/econ section where all of those programs were run. We did have a girls empowerment program that's a little unique to Africa. There is an effort to try to illustrate what girls can do, that they don't need to sit back and be docile. There's a lot of opportunities for them. There was a fair amount of that. At one point, although it was part of the political/economics section, the Chargé, the original Chargé, had pushed me to try to do more in that area to try to really focus on that. I did some speeches on that and, and so on, but really you needed somebody of a different gender to lead that.

Q: Were there any VIP visits that made a significant splash?

KORFF: Actually, not so much, although we did have a White House Press Secretary come. I was his control officer. The head of OBO [Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations] came for the inauguration of the new embassy. And just after the new ambassador had arrived, a senator from Wisconsin, Russ Feingold, came on a one-person Codel. (He's now head of the American Constitution Society.) He was on a fact finding trip. He began in Nairobi, and our DAO [Defense Attaché Office] did not have a plane. He was able to get the defense attaché plane from Nairobi to fly him not to Dar es Salaam, but rather to Arusha. Arusha is in the northern part of the country. It is very important because it's the seat of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

FIG. 24 The President of Zanzibar, Amani Abeid Karume (center) welcomed Senator Russ Feingold (to the left of Karume) in 2001. Michael Korff (far right) was control officer for the Feingold visit.

So, the ambassador, the assistant RSO, and I, flew up to Arusha to prepare for the arrival of this senator. Feingold arrives in Arusha the next day. The night before, we met with the Chief Justice of the tribunal over dinner to get to know her. She was from South Africa. We had a very nice evening. She's of South Asian ancestry, and my wife is South Asian, and the assistant RSO's wife is also South Asian. It was a really nice evening with the ambassador there. Then we called on various people the next day, with Feingold, to meet different people, the prosecution, the judges, the whole ball of wax. Then, we didn't fly to Dar es Salaam. Instead, we flew to Zanzibar, because Feingold wanted to stress that the United States believed first of all in the territorial integrity of Tanzania, including Zanzibar, but also in democracy, and in pluralistic democracy. At that time, both Zanzibar and Tanzania, were more or less single-party states. It was a lesson he wanted to get across.

The week before he's arriving, the wife of the president of Zanzibar shows up at the American Embassy, and no one knows what to do with her. But she says, "I need some American flags, because Russ Feingold is coming to Zanzibar, and we want to be able to have flags when he arrives." Well, all I have are these little paper flags that we give out to anybody who asks for them. So, she took all of our paper flags. I assumed that was going to be the end of it, but as we flew from Arusha to Zanzibar on the tarmac everybody's out there with these paper flags on the end of popsicle sticks, waving them madly at Russ Feingold as he arrives to this joyous crowd. She had gotten every kid, every school kid, in Zanzibar, I think, to show up to welcome Russ Feingold to Zanzibar. We then have our meetings with the president, we have a steak dinner, the whole works. It was a fabulous affair. That took place that night, and then the next day, we finally flew to Dar es Salaam, so we could meet the president of the country. Feingold was the most interesting of the visitors. We had some other senators come later, but it was pretty clear they were more interested in going on safari. They didn't make much of a splash compared to Feingold.

One thing that may interest you is when Ronald Reagan died. Whenever the Chargé was out of town, I became Acting DCM. When Reagan died, the Chargé was out in the country preparing to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, as I recall. Instead of rushing back to Dar es Salaam, he said I would have to deal with the aftermath. So, we opened a condolence book, and before you knew it, the country's Vice President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister all came by to sign the condolence book. I ended up escorting all these VIP's as they visited the Embassy. Fortunately, my wife was special assistant and she helped coordinate the timing of the visits.

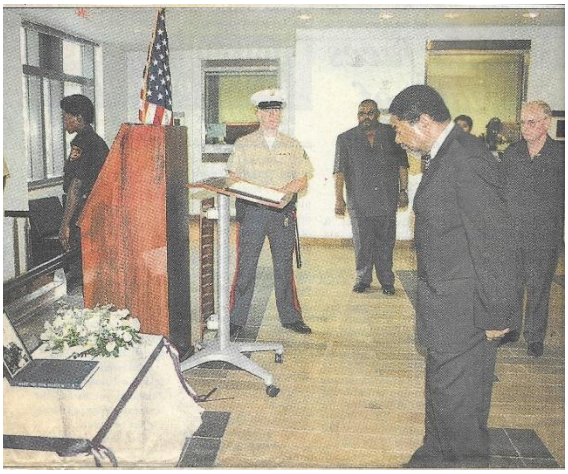


FIG. 25 LEFT: Tanzanian VP Ali Mohamed Shein contemplates photo of Ronald Reagan; Acting DCM Michael Korff is on right; RIGHT: Tanzanian Prime Minister Frederick Sumaye is directed to condolence book by Michael Korff; Meena Korff is to the right.

Q: Yeah. I understand. So, your tour there is three years from 2001-2003

KORFF: 2004

Q: 2004, sorry, and during that time, looking back, did Tanzania change significantly? Were you beginning to see trends of more pluralistic democracy or more market economy?

KORFF: Certainly, the market economy was coming in. They had opened up. So, for example, by the time I left, the national airline had been taken over by South Africans, believe it or not. It's now reverted, but at the time, it was taken over by South Africans. There were South African grocery stores. Every imported good you want, you could buy. South African wine was no problem in Tanzania. That part had gone well, we kept pushing on this idea of pluralism and democracy and a market economy. They were making some progress, I would say, but it's like the United States, who would have predicted that we would have a Trump come along, and really sort of set us back in terms of our comity, or our ability to get along with one another. Most recently they had that same problem there. John Magufuli was their most recently elected president, and he died in office. They are lucky, and we are lucky that he died. He was the one who claimed there was no such thing as Covid, that if we all just prayed, we were going to get rid of it, and so on.

Q: Is there any value in asking you about human rights questions, especially, you know, censorship, freedom of expression?

KORFF: You know, there wasn't much of a problem at that time. For example, we were trying to push Voice of America broadcasting over FM and AM stations in Tanzania. There was no censorship. You remember I told you earlier that in Bangladesh after the Babri mosque was torn down, they took CNN off the air in Bangladesh. We never had that issue in Tanzania. The only time I ever got to go to Rwanda was to meet the VOA

[Voice of America] director because he was going to visit a radio station that was broadcasting VOA, and it was in the far western part of Tanzania, so it was easier for him to fly to Rwanda and drive overland into Tanzania. I had to fly there and accompany him to the radio station. There was never any effort to censor us. There was a lot of self-censorship I'm sure: no one's going to try to get in bed with the government, but it wasn't like under Magufuli, this guy who died. However, I'm sure there was a lot more arm twisting and jailing and awful things. It was not a good time for Tanzania while he was president.

Q: Other minorities or other human rights issues that we focused on?

KORFF: Well, we didn't. We wrote about it. You know, it's absolutely anti-gay. There is still female genital mutilation. If you're an albino, you're in bad luck. It isn't government oppression, but it's social oppression, and the government doesn't do enough to try to tell people these are our brothers and sisters. Just because they have this condition doesn't mean that they're devils or whatever else is often thought.

Q: Wow, stunning. My goodness, that kind of puts a wet blanket on things. You mentioned that your wife worked as the ambassador's Secretary: did that also continue through?

KORFF: The ambassador left, six or eight months before I left. That was an interesting story by the way. I knew, I was one of the few people who knew, that he was leaving. He had to inform both governments that he was leaving. I had to go over to Zanzibar and make arrangements for the ambassador to be able to get in to see the president because he wasn't on the schedule. I had the assistant PAO with me at the time. We were going over there for something else, and I couldn't tell him why we had to get in, why the ambassador needed to get in to see the President that very afternoon. It worked out in the end. Anyway, there was this long period, six or eight months, when the DCM again became the Chargé.

Q: Wow

KORFF: Anyway, my wife did a great job. She continued working: her title changed after the ambassador left. She became special assistant to the chargé.

Q: Were there any other activities that you wanted to tell us about?

KORFF: Well, two things come to mind. When I first went to work in the International Communication Agency in 1979, we were told that we should be using research to help guide our programs and activities. In fact, all PAOs were told that they should prepare an analysis of key institutions and the "atmosphere" of the society to help guide the request for resources and the targeting of activities. A key to success was an understanding of how successful you were in your activities, whether you were able to "move the needle" and make real change using the resources at your disposal.

In order to do that, you need data about attitudes toward the United States and its policies and its society and values. That information often comes from surveys and public opinion polling. In the case of Tanzania and many other developing countries, polling is difficult, and the survey data is usually not available. But the Pew Research Center released data for the first time in the early 2000s that included data from Tanzania. I was elated to get the data, especially as it related to Tanzanian attitudes toward the United States and its policies, its reliability, whether it was an appropriate role model for Tanzania, etc. As one might imagine, there was quite a gulf between the U.S. and Tanzanian opinion, a holdover from Tanzania's non-aligned and socialist roots. I got permission from the ambassador to make a presentation to the Country Team about the data. Most people weren't quite sure about how to use the data and whether the data would make any difference in how we went about our business. But at least I felt that we had a baseline that we could use as we proceeded with our interactions with Tanzanians and their government.

Secondly, as you've noticed throughout my career, I've had an interest in strengthening American Studies at universities in the countries where I served. In Tanzania, we wanted to help establish American Studies as a legitimate field of study. Near the end of my stay in the country, our office helped put on an American Studies conference at the University of Dar es Salaam, with papers presented by various scholars. I gave the keynote address, and I entitled it ***Americans are from Venus, Tanzanians are from Mars.*** I based it on the Pew Research data on the differences in attitudes between Americans and Tanzanians on such things as individualism, the state's responsibility for social welfare, belief in the motives of the United States, etc. I really enjoyed writing the speech. I wrote the speech using my first use of PowerPoint software. I thought that by contrasting the attitudes of the people of the two countries, we could help better understand one another. I received polite applause at the conclusion, but I hope I helped stimulate some areas of future research and study.

Q: Well, okay. Then the question always becomes, as you're approaching the end, what are you thinking about for your next assignment?

KORFF: I had decided to retire. In fact, I retired at post. I didn't come back to Washington to retire. Although I did want to take the retirement course, because I had not taken it. A lot of people take it earlier in their careers, but I had not taken it. I read about all these people that have problems with their per diem or with their retirement papers, but I did not have any problems at all. Everything went the way it was supposed to go. It ended up being, I think, eight weeks because I had the actual course at the time, and then I had this job search program to help you find a job. At the time, I didn't think I wanted to work: I thought I was going to finally be at leisure and not have to work, but it didn't work out that way.

Q: All right, this does sound like a place where we can pause and then we can have a quick discussion about where to next.

KORFF: Okay

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Q: Today is October 6, 2021. And we are recording our last session with Michael Korff. Michael, you had decided in Tanzania to retire from there and what year was it?

KORFF: 2004.

Q: Okay. What transpires as you make that decision from post?

KORFF: Things weren't done at post. We had talked last time about the problem of having the assistant PAO [Public Affairs Officer]—I had two— going on paternity leave. So, I was all alone at the time. But my successor was already at post: he and his spouse were part of a tandem. And so, he had been there for a year, at least a year, I think. And so, he was able to take over even though the assistant PAO wasn't there. So that worked out. And you know, it's always a whirl of farewells and so on at the end of any assignment. But it was a very nice time. And it just happened that at the very end, I had organized two sets of programs going on simultaneously.

One set involved the issue of ethics and government. I had people who were in town who had also come to Jamaica earlier. They were there to meet with the various government officials, to put on a roundtable seminar, sit for interviews, and so on. They were able to come to my farewell. The Regional English Language Officer was also there for programs for teachers teaching English. And the British Council showed up, our neighbors who were the Canadian High Commissioner and her spouse came.. People were there to enjoy the evening. It was a grand affair.

FIG. 26 Michael and Meena Korff with the Public Affairs Office staff at the farewell reception at the PAO Residence in 2004. The Korffs are wearing outfits presented to them by the staff.

But we weren't done yet. The team that put on the college fair that I mentioned earlier put on an orientation session for Tanzanians who had actually gotten admission to college and who had gotten visas, including our Fulbrighters. It was my last day in the country. I gave the keynote address, so I talked about the impact of studying abroad on the lives of the people who go abroad and return. I gave as examples my own experience studying in Germany and the experience of Barack Obama, Sr., who studied in the United States and returned to Kenya. His son had given the keynote speech the night before at the Democratic National Convention in Boston. I hope I gave them a good reason for returning to Tanzania after their studies.

Q: Lovely. And then you packed out and returned. Where was your home at this point?

KORFF: Well, we had bought a home in Arlington several years earlier. It had been occupied by tenants, but we had arranged to have them leave. We came back. Even though I retired from post, I had the retirement seminar to go through at FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. We didn't have any furniture--it was in transit or storage—so we stayed with our son, who lived in Vienna, Virginia, for a while. And then, I began the course, which as you know, focuses on our next act, what are we going to do next? And a lot of it assumes that we're going to get to jobs. But at that time, I wasn't interested in employment: I thought I was just going to enjoy retirement. But things didn't quite work out that way.

Q: So just one quick question. Was your wife of the same mind since she had worked on several posts? Was she also essentially deciding to retire?

FIG. 27 Secretary Powell and Michael Korff at the latter's retirement ceremony. Korff received the Secretary's Career Achievement Award.

KORFF: No. And, you know, one thing that the State Department and the Foreign Service do well is that they do give a leg up to spouses when they're in Washington: they don't have to go through some of the competitive civil service regulations, and so she was picked up immediately because of all of her experience. And because they knew her—she had twice worked in CA [Consular Affairs] here in the U.S.—they immediately hired her. Within a week after our return, she had secured a job.

Q: Wonderful okay, but let's continue then with your retirement. The retirement you know, the retirement course over time changes a bit and, you know, responds as well as you can to existing conditions. What did you think of the course when you took it?

KORFF: It was a good course. I enjoyed talking to my colleagues, they were very supportive. We were all supportive of one another as we began looking at what we were going to do next. And I thought the topics that were covered in the course were good. The people who ran it did a good job.

Q: Great. Okay. So, and throughout, you continue to have your intention just to retire and think about what your next moves would be, but no, strong desire to work.

KORFF: No, none whatsoever.

Q: Okay, well you get through it, and something else happens?

KORFF: Well, as you just mentioned, my wife went to work right away. I found myself home alone. And, you know, you can spend the whole day reading the newspaper, and having done press work overseas, you're tempted to want to do that. But after a while, you begin to realize there are other things to do. I did a lot of exercise; I would go on bike rides. I did a lot of stuff around the house. There's so much to decorate and unpack boxes, and so on. That kept me busy for a while. But then I began to ask, what am I going to do with all my time, especially since my wife wasn't around? We couldn't very well go on vacation because she didn't have leave. So that was when by January of 2005, I happened to see in a local newspaper here in Arlington an advertisement for an executive assistant to the superintendent of the Arlington Public Schools. I applied, and the assistant superintendent for personnel [Betty Hobbs] called me in for an interview. She was really great. And, you know, we got along well, and she then said, "You should come back for

an interview with the superintendent." And within two weeks, I was hired and on board. It was, you know, quite a surprise. It was bold of the superintendent and the assistant superintendent to hire me, because here I was, in my late '50s, I hadn't had any recent experience in public education. And I have a PhD. So, you know, I don't think I had quite the background that they would have been looking for. But they took the chance on me. And, you know, over time, my job responsibilities kept growing and growing and growing, taking on more and more work. You may recall, the same thing happened when I was working at a college in New Jersey early in my professional life. Once people get to know you and realize what your skill set is, they decide how they can best use your talents and skills.

Q: Okay, what ended so then what ended up being the principal areas of responsibility for you? How did you handle the job?

KORFF: Well, initially, it was just learning about the school district and handling any correspondence that came in there. There wasn't really that much to worry about. It was a new position. But as time went on, I got more and more involved in the policies and procedures, which were written documents in the school district. I began taking on that responsibility, which then led me to work with the school board. And you know, I got to know all of the principals. In those days, we had twenty-six schools, elementary and secondary. My responsibilities and understanding of the district continued to grow, and then that superintendent, the one that hired me, left. He stayed four years and then retired. You may recall when I was working at a college in New Jersey, when the President left, he warned me that the new president might want to have his own assistant. None of us on the Senior Staff really knew what the new superintendent was going to want. But to his credit, he wanted me (and the other senior staff members) to stay on. The job evolved: in fact, it changed considerably. Whereas the first superintendent had me writing speeches and preparing formal remarks, the new superintendent preferred to work from PowerPoints.

KORFF: I will tell you one thing that's very interesting. I knew almost nothing about PowerPoint, when I retired. I had struggled to use the PowerPoint software when I prepared my *Americans are from Mars, Tanzanians are from Venus* speech, but at FSI, they let you take elective courses: they give you a variety of options. And one of those options that I did take was on how to do professional PowerPoints. That had prepared me in effect for this new role preparing PowerPoint Presentations for the superintendent. I attended all of the senior staff meetings, helped create the agendas for them, and so on. The new superintendent decided that executive assistant wasn't a good title. So, he reclassified the position as Chief of Staff. He had previously served in the Fairfax County Public Schools, which had a chief of staff. He decided that that would be the role that I would take on. And so that went on for four years until 2013. Then in 2013, my wife got an assignment to the consular section in Guangzhou. It was only two months, but still, it was more than I felt was reasonable to ask of the district to give me a leave of absence. And so, it was an opportunity for me. Always before, she had come as my spouse as we went from post to post. This time, I was going as hers. And so, I decided it was time to leave that job. And it was a very nice farewell. First, the superintendent held an event for

me with the Assistant Superintendents, and then the board had a special ceremony for me where they gave me a Nook reader, and it was a nice time to leave.

Q: Alright, what now so from beginning to end, how many years did that cover?

KORFF: Eight years.

Q: Oh my. Okay, so from 2005 we're now in 2013.

KORFF: We got back by August in Arlington. I again faced the same phenomenon that I had experienced when we first came back from overseas. And that is, I tried to stay active, but I needed something else to do since my wife was still working. And then I happened to notice that the Alexandria City Public Schools, which is right next to Arlington, had hired our former assistant superintendent here in Arlington as the new superintendent. I asked him, did he have any role he wanted me to play? And so, I then went over to Alexandria, as the head of policies and strategic planning because they were just about to start a process to write a new strategic plan for Alexandra.

Q: For those outside of the education arena, what does strategic planning compass?

KORFF: Well, the better ones are going to create some goals for the district that are achievable, and that are going to help move the district toward some long-term goal. You develop key indicators that you use to measure your progress toward those goals. In the case of Alexandria, although it's within the beltway, it has had a variety of challenges over the years, all the way from desegregation to dealing with a diverse population. (One of the biggest challenges results from its original effort to deal with desegregation, when it decided to have one central high school for the entire city.) Alexandria was poised, I think, and is still poised to move to advance to be as good as Arlington is, or to really fulfill some of its own aspirations, the aspirations of its taxpayers. It is a smaller system than Arlington, but nevertheless, one that plays a really important role in the lives of the children. Unlike Arlington, where there are very few private schools, in Alexandria, in the past, at least, many parents have turned to private schools for their children. And in a way, it's a failure when parents decide that the public schools don't provide the options for their children that they feel their children need. That's almost a failure of public education. So, I think one of the things that I was conscious of at least was, "What can we do with this strategic plan to move us ahead to improve the overall performance of the school system and how we meet the needs of our students?"

Q: Now, that's okay, that's perfectly understandable. But could you give an example for someone who isn't familiar with the system. So, you know, most Americans who went to public high schools had opportunities, let's say, for trade learning trades, there were separate trade schools that would focus on perhaps like, you know, plumbing, or electrical work or cosmetology, and so on, was that part of the strategic plan, and on the other side was advanced placement test, teaching to advanced placement and teaching to tests to raise test scores also part of it.

KORFF: In general, all students in Alexandria attend the one high school, even though it's a pretty big city, because of the legacy of segregation. They chose to create just one high school for all students. So, they don't have the variety of secondary education that Arlington has. But they do have a wide span of opportunities like you're describing. There are a couple of independent programs that the school district has that move beyond just vocational or whatever. And they do have a vigorous program of advanced placement. They recognize the importance of that for their students.

One of the things that we got involved in that was really strange was they had worked out a grading system that in effect meant that no one could get worse than a D in any class. Especially if you got B's for the first couple of quarters of the year, kids could then take off the rest of the year off and never worry about it because they were going to pass regardless. And this was frustrating to the teachers. We started looking at alternatives to that free pass sort of system that frustrated some of the teachers at the school district. In general, the teachers work very hard. I learned a lot. It's a very different system than Arlington. And they have two middle schools for the whole city. They're really big: All of their schools are bigger in general than in Arlington.

KORFF: But it gave me a chance to learn about a new system and note the differences. I'm sure you may have found this in your career: I would go from one post to another, and inevitably see the differences between them. And you have to really catch yourself so that you don't say, well, in Frankfurt, we did it this way or whatever: You can never do that, because it's a totally different system, different culture, different set of people. Well, the same thing is true of school systems, they have evolved in different ways. You have to take them as they are and learn about their culture, their differences, their way of doing things. I always found that a very interesting part of all of my jobs.

Q: Just this one small example, I went from Hungary as a cultural officer to Costa Rica as the public affairs officer. And in Hungary, the ambassador loved using little awards as a tool to get out and meet and otherwise get access to people she might not otherwise have been able to meet. When I suggested that in Costa Rica as the public affairs officer, the new ambassador that I was working with laughed, she said, I am not going to print fake awards. Everybody knows what that is. You know, it's silly. I'm, you know, I'm going to meet people as the U.S. ambassador, and so on and so on. Wow. I mean, just on that one issue alone, I realized very quickly, the intelligence, the wisdom of what you just said, about not talking about how you do things that other posts.

KORFF: Yeah, although I think your proposal was a good one. I applaud it.

Q: Well, we did find other ways of doing things. But yeah, that was an early burn, that I had to sell for some time. Because, you know, the ambassador in Costa Rica then thought I was just, you know, not serious. Yeah, I was proposing unserious things to her. Anyway.

KORFF: To finish the story about Alexandria. The main goal at the beginning of my tenure was to worry about the strategic plan. But about six months in, the school board—their school board has nine people all elected at the same time, whereas in

Arlington's, it's five—the Alexandria school board decided that it wanted to look at all policies and procedures that the school system had. And it's not a bad goal. In fact, you should probably review all of your policies on some sort of a schedule so that nothing that was adopted ten years ago, has never been even questioned, is reviewed. The superintendent asked me, "Would you take on the policies as well?" And I said, "Sure, that'll be fun, because I had done them in Arlington, and he knew this because he had worked with me in Arlington. And so that became an important part of my job as well.

KORFF: Now the problem is I lived in Arlington, and it was the middle of the winter. The board meetings were every other week, and they often lasted until 11:30 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. I would usually work a full day; I would run home and have dinner. Then drive back for the 7:30 p.m. meeting (Arlington Board meetings begin at 7:00 p.m., but Alexandria meetings begin at 7:30 p.m.). And so that kept me out at least once a week because I would have to attend meetings of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee, which were also at night, and then return another night for the board meeting: it kept me hopping. But finally, by the end of August or early September of 2015, the work was done, and my wife was getting ready to go to Beijing this time. And so, I was able to go with her to Beijing for a month. It was very different from Guangzhou. But I was glad to have that chance. As a result, I retired once again.

Q: In revising all of the ways of doing business that Alexandria was considering, I think people, even parents from the outside, don't always realize how deep this goes, because you're considering grading systems, the use of homework, or the non-use of homework, the way you penalize students for inappropriate behavior or failure to meet standards, you know, and so on. And there are so many theories out there, about the best way to do it. And even the question of professional development for teachers and so on. Did you complete the task? Were all of the procedures, you know, looked at and revised?

KORFF: By the time I left, I would say about 80% or 85% of the policies and procedures were done. Alexandria uses model policies and model procedures that were created by the Virginia School Boards Association. Arlington creates its own out of whole cloth. Now, the way we did it in Arlington often was to Google and find out what other school districts are doing. But we would write them from scratch. Both systems work, because even when we took the models from the Virginia School Boards Association, we had to modify them to meet our needs and our situation. And there are nine disparate views with a nine-member School Board. But I think the board was pretty happy with the way that the process worked. I received a standing ovation from the Board at my final meeting.

Q: And just one last question: the reason I'm asking you all these is because I actually took the career changer course, to become a high school teacher in Virginia. And during that time, I focused on Fairfax, because that's where I lived. But I was aware of what the other nearby counties were doing. Did you have a major challenge from the increase of immigrant students and the need for additional help with English?

KORFF: Alexandria has a huge non-English speaking population. Whereas I told you that some of the traditional students attend private schools, I would say all of these

non-traditional students attend public school. And the students have been integrated because there's just one high school and, for the most part, all of those second language-learners are at that same high school. They have developed a school within a school, so to speak, because it's more difficult to mainstream them immediately anyway, they need to have some advanced language skills before they can begin being mainstreamed.

KORFF: But they do a fairly good job. I think you know, Alexandria has a lot of experience with that. So does Arlington, which has a large Mongolian population. That's a very different population from what it traditionally had. I would guess that most of Arlington's English language learners were Vietnamese. Then it switched to a large population of Mongolians, and today it's Hispanics. But there are still others. You know I served in India. When I went to the very first meeting of the English as a Second Language Program, I was shocked that the student who got the award for being the best student in the ESL [English as a Second Language] program, was a Sikh child. I'm so accustomed to the Indians who move to the United States speak English well, since English is widely taught in India, and most of the people who would normally qualify for immigration probably have a strong English-speaking background. But this showed that there are exceptions to that rule. And so, I was really surprised that even in Arlington, there were Indian students learning English for the first time.

Q: Okay, and having seen a number of school districts and boards, looking back on it, how would you describe overall the changes in education?

KORFF: I had taught at a middle school when I was still in California. And so I did notice that the biggest change was that education today is based on standards, where teachers are more focused on making sure their students can pass the end of term exams, standardized exams that are taught throughout the state and that are administered throughout the state: It leads to a different kind of pressure than we had when I was teaching in California. One of the advantages in my case was that Arlington and Alexandria had the same responsibilities vis-a-vis the curriculum, because of this standards-based system. Virginia was one of the very first states in the country to standardize its curriculum through the Standards of Learning. And it has meant a big change, I think, in terms of the topics that can be taught. When I was teaching, if I wanted to suddenly talk about the meaning of Yom Kippur, or Rosh Hashanah, or things like that, I could do it because I didn't have to teach every chapter in the book. But it's really hard in Virginia, to introduce something that's not already in the curriculum, to bring up a different topic, because you are so concerned about making sure your students are prepared to pass those tests at the end of the term.

Q: Right. It's both the advantage of standards of learning in that Virginia wants to be certain all the students get at least this much, but on the other hand, it kind of ties the hands of teachers who want to be a little more creative.

KORFF: I agree.

Q: Yeah, the Virginia standards of learning are on the internet. And I spent a very long time with them in the career changer course and comparing them to other states and looking at what was not there. Because you could not create lesson plans for things that are not there, teachers don't want them to know. In fact, don't confuse my students with things that Virginia does not list as being required for them to learn. That's one of the reasons why I decided not to become a teacher. I learned as I went along how restricted your class day is like, and it just wasn't my cup of tea.

KORFF: Well, this feeds into my next role. After I retired from the Alexandria City Public Schools, I began attending the meetings of the Public Diplomacy Association of America, and they had an ad in one of their newsletters. The Fulbright Association was looking for an unpaid Senior Fellow who would help them. I thought, "Oh, that's nice, I helped run Fulbright programs overseas, I can try to help them out." I went to talk to the executive director. And, you know, he was intrigued by my background, the fact that I had been working at public schools. And he says, "You know, I had this idea that we should try to get more Fulbrighters, returned Fulbrighters, involved in elementary and secondary schools." Most Fulbrighters come from post-secondary education, and they return to post- secondary education. And there is no real opportunity to introduce international topics into elementary and secondary schools.

KORFF: So, beginning in January 2017, I became the Senior Fellow at the Fulbright Association. The responsibility was to create some sort of a program where we would take advantage of the knowledge of the returned Fulbrighters, many of them with advanced degrees, who were by then working at colleges and universities, trying to get them to share some of their experiences at both the secondary level, which is easier, but also even at the elementary level. And hopefully, to try to use it in a way that helps the teacher in the classroom meet those standards of learning that we were talking about. It's hard, because if you're a math teacher, you may have studied math, or taught math at a university in Hungary. The areas where you're going to be most useful to the students, whether at the elementary level or at the secondary level, is in talking about daily life in Hungary, or the political system in Hungary or the language of Hungary. It's not going to be the mathematics of Hungary. And if you've never taught at an elementary or secondary level, you may think that you're going to be able to walk in and give a fifty-minute lecture.

Q: Right.

KORFF: But that's not the way it works. If you're able to hold their attention for fifteen minutes, you're doing good. You have to change activities and topics often during a one-hour class. We put together this *Fulbright in the Classroom* program, and I tried to lay out the idea that you should talk to the homeroom teacher, you should find out what the standards of learning are, and how you can help with that. I visited different curricular groups, I talked to the World Affairs Council in Washington —Washington is a great place to do this, because most of the headquarters are there. So, I tried to get endorsements and offers of help. The good thing was the National Council for Social Studies endorsed it. I had been an NCSS [National Council for the Social Studies]

member. And they endorsed it. And in fact, they said, "Well, you know, if you're trying to figure out how to teach these eggheads, who normally work at a university, how to design a curriculum, how to move the school along and manage classroom discipline, how to change topics every ten or fifteen minutes so that you engage the students, we can do this." And we were lucky because California has very strict rules about allowing outsiders into the classroom. It's not simply a matter of a teacher saying all right, Joe Schmoe is going to be the teacher today, I'm going off to the teacher's lounge. That's not going to happen. And I built in all kinds of requirements, for example, you're going to need to have some way of checking the backgrounds of these people to ensure they aren't predators. They may be nice Fulbright scholars, but there may be something that you want to know about. So, we put all that together. The first year we were able to get six schools involved in Iowa and California. That doesn't sound like very much, but it was a start.

KORFF: But the bottom line was, it turned out that instead of a recurring relationship with the students, which was my idea, that you might begin at the beginning of a semester by giving them an introduction to Hungary, and then tell them over the next six weeks, I would like for you to put together something on Hungary, and I'm going to be available to you, to help you. And then at the end of the semester, you're going to turn in your project on Hungary. It didn't work out that way. Nobody wanted to have more than that one initial, introductory meeting. So that was a little bit of a disappointment, but it did at least add some international flavor to the classroom. And of course, it's easier if it's a social studies class than if it's a science class or another discipline. But that's still the goal. It continues to this day, and I continued from 2017 until the pandemic hit. And I went to the 2019 National Convention of all these returned Fulbrighters and talked about it, and got other chapters interested in doing this. (The Fulbright Association is an association of chapters.) The goal is to try to get each chapter to take this project on. You have to find individuals, and you're going to find some chapters that are more enthusiastic than others. And, of course, some are more active than others, but it's a way to try to get it accepted, where it's moderately successful.

Q: Okay. I mean, every school system is somewhat different. And they have different tolerances for anything outside of their required course. Goals and so on. Yeah.

KORFF: Yeah! So that was going on. And then simultaneously, at the beginning of 2018, the Public Diplomacy Association of America advertised for an editor. So, I became a member of the Board of PDAA [Public Diplomacy Association of America] and also its editor. That means publishing a newsletter four times a year. For me, the print medium was easy. But I also had to do the website, and I had never done a website. So, I faced that with some trepidation, but it turns out that the platform that their website is built on is pretty easy to deal with. So, there's no worry about having to use code and all that, it's all done for you. I was lucky there. During the pandemic we stopped all of our public meetings and did everything online. And so that has created additional challenges for us, but I've enjoyed doing that work.

Q: What, how large an audience or how diverse an audience is your newsletter? Who does it go to?

KORFF: PDAA [Public Diplomacy Association of America] was founded originally as the USIA [U.S. Information Agency] Alumni Association--retired USIA people. After the number of USIA alumni began plummeting because they were either dying off or whatever, there was no longer a USIA. It became the Public Diplomacy Alumni Association. And then in 2018, they dropped the word alumni completely and began trying to also reach out to anybody who was interested in public diplomacy. Today, most PDAA members continue to be people who were associated either with USIA, or as public diplomacy officers in the State Department. Its most important role in recent years has been the annual awards. The undersecretary at the Department of State cooperates with us so that we can have these awards for both American officers as well as for locally employed staff, who have creative ideas on PD programming overseas.

Q: Okay. So roughly what's the size of the organization now?

KORFF: About 400 people, and our goal was always 500 but we're not going to reach that. And this year, we decided to merge with another organization called the Public Diplomacy Council, PDC. PDC was originally created as a way to focus exclusively on professional issues and advocacy, whereas PDAA was more social and continuing education programs. They decided this year that the memberships of the two overlapped so much that they should be combined. The new organization is the Public Diplomacy Council of America [PDCA].

Q: Does it also reach out to the universities that teach public diplomacy and also, you know, the use of public affairs in foreign policy?

KORFF: Yes, we do have ties with the academic programs around the country that teach Public Diplomacy. And in recent years, we've had a First Monday program every month that traditionally met at George Washington University.

Q: Having been in this area of work, association work related to public diplomacy, how have you seen the craft change or the tool of public diplomacy in international relations change?

KORFF: I don't think I've seen that much. You hear a lot today about bean-counting. How do we find out if we have been successful? And of course, a lot of us remember the days when the ECA [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs] programs were longer term, and therefore you couldn't really document your success of the Fulbrighter experience, how it changes somebody or what an international visitor did—did he or she ultimately become Prime Minister of the UK (as was the case with Margaret Thatcher)? And those sorts of things are harder to document. Some speaker programs were a little easier to document because you could say, “We know we saw three editorials come out of this. The X number of pieces of legislation ultimately were passed.” Those were a little easier. Not always, but sometimes it's easier. But I think in general, what you see is that

there's a lot of creativity in the field, a lot of commitment to the task. I recently helped put on a program where we looked at the number of Fulbrighters. It was the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright Program. We had five alumni of the Fulbright Program who became Foreign Service officers. And that's just a thrilling experience to see that take place. And earlier we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps. We had all of these people who were alumni of the Peace Corps, who then became public diplomacy officers, talk about their experiences. There's a lot of creativity going on. I think we have a lot to be proud of.

Q: The reason, I asked this is because my sense was for Foreign Service Officers or anyone going into public diplomacy these days, you really need to have a very strong ability to work with social media, that means in your case, learning how to run a small website, including not just you know, the tools of presentation, but actually a website that's going to change that's going to have photos and, you know, be eye-catching and get landings and visits and views and so on it. If I were advising someone who's going to plan to be a Foreign Service Officer in public diplomacy, I would tell them to go in with those skills.

KORFF: You know, I was very lucky. I had creative FSNs, locally employed staff, at my last few posts where we had our own websites. And then along came the State Department and decided that there would be just one template that we all had to use. It was soul crushing to these creative FSNs, to suddenly have to put everything into this one template that the State Department dictated that all posts had to use. That was too bad. It took away a lot of our opportunity to be creative. On the other hand, you can create a story and put it into the template, it's going to appear on your page. And then you can try to get people to come to that page. You can tweet it out or whatever. When I was still working, we didn't have Twitter or Facebook. We did have websites.

Q: Yeah. What haven't I asked you about the changes in public diplomacy that you've seen? What have I left out?

KORFF: No, I think you've asked all the right questions. The one difference is that very few of us even after we became part of State would have thought about applying for an out of cone job. And now you don't find that anymore. A lot of people have done stuff outside even if they're in the PD cone, they take jobs in other areas. So that is one change that I've noticed. I hope that those out-of-cone experiences enrich the things that a PD officer is going to do in his or her next assignment. You know, the field changes a lot. A lot of things are possible, but it's still this person-to-person interaction that's going to be really important in any assignment. And I will say this, I told you early on about the ambassador I had in Switzerland who thought that every single FSO, whether or not he or she was the GSO [General Services Officer] or the Financial Management Officer, that all of them have a role to play in public diplomacy. And there is an element of that. And you're representing the United States abroad. And it's my job as the chief of the PD section to give you the tools so you can do that and to take advantage. I told you, in Dar Salaam, we had this terrific idea of having a college fair, where we got the consular officer to come in and talk about what it was like at the University of Wisconsin when he

was an undergraduate, or all of these different American officers who were so pleased to be able to share their pride in their alma maters. I think that it's up to the PD officer to figure out a way to take advantage of those resources.

Q: Yeah, okay. So, this does bring us to the end of our interview. The only other thing I generally ask at the end is our is there any other advice you would give the department in general, having seen, you know, from both inside and outside, on how it operates, what you think might be a better way to either recruit and retain personnel, or run processes or make its work better known to the public, any, anything you think you would advise.

KORFF: I am concerned about the morale of the PD officers and of all Foreign Service Officers. The department is really mind-numbing when it comes to its bureaucratic ways and the way it stifles creativity. I don't think people should have to turn to a dissent channel in order to be able to voice creative ideas, different ideas. And we shouldn't punish people so much if they say something that maybe the ambassador doesn't agree with or that someone in the Department says, “This wasn't cleared by my bureau.” I think we need to figure out a way that we can let people be creative, not stifle their imaginations. I know any bureaucracy is going to have a problem, but it just seems like the State Department is worse than some of the others.

Q: Okay, well, alright. Then in that case, as we conclude, I want to thank you on behalf of ADST [Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training] for sharing your legacy of service, both inside the department and as you brought your skills outside to maintain connection with public diplomacy and try to make people aware of the benefits that they can get from it. At this point, then we'll end the interview, and I'll explain the next steps.

End of interview