

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

**SHELDON KREBS**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

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**INTERVIEW**

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

*Q: This is an interview with Sheldon Krebs. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Shel?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?*

KREBS: I was born in New York City in 1942 to a rather lower middle class, working class family. My parents were not college educated. My dad was a printer. My mom was just a housewife. I went through public education.

*Q: Do you know where your mother and father's families came from?*

KREBS: Yes. Both my parents are American born. On my mother's side, her mother came as a child from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They were Eastern European Jews. My grandmother spoke some Polish, Yiddish. But they were English speaking on that side. My grandfather was born here, but his parents were immigrants from Minsk. They came in the 1870s, 1880s. My grandfather came to Washington, DC. His family is from here. My grandmother's family was in New York.

*Q: Your father was a printer.*

KREBS: Yes. He had his own business in New York.

*Q: So he wasn't part of a union movement.*

KREBS: He was a union member until he went into his own business.

*Q: What kind of printing was he doing?*

KREBS: Commercial printing. They moved out to Phoenix in the '40s. I spent my early childhood there. My mother had allergies or something.

*Q: When did you go out there?*

KREBS: Right after I was born.

*Q: So really you grew up in Phoenix?*

KREBS: No, we came back to New York after the war. My father started a business here. I grew up in New York essentially.

*Q: You went through the New York public school system.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Do you recall elementary school? How did you find it?*

KREBS: I was a good kid. I was one of the better students in my school class. I did fine through elementary school and junior high.

*Q: How about reading?*

KREBS: I was an early reader.

*Q: Can you remember any books that grabbed you when you were a kid?*

KREBS: My mother used to take me to the library regularly. I loved reading books written for young people about other countries. Maybe that's the seed that led to the Foreign Service. I remember various books. Hans Brinker intrigued me. I remember Heidi and things about Switzerland, some cultures that I got to know quite well in my Foreign Service career. I was always interested in the exotic as a kid.

*Q: How about at home? Did you have brothers and sisters?*

KREBS: I had a younger brother.

*Q: Were there conversations around the dinner table particularly on matters of politics?*

KREBS: My parents were interested in politics. Especially my mother discussed politics. I remember the McCarthy hearings on television and people watching that and being very intrigued. I was born in '42 and one of my earliest memories was the 1948 election. I remember my parents voting. They were dyed in the wool Democrats and voted for Truman. I remember the Eisenhower-Stevenson elections. There was a lot of talk about domestic politics but not on a highly intellectual level because they weren't college grads, but they were interested. They discussed politics.

*Q: From home, were you getting much of a feel about the world beyond the United States?*

KREBS: My parents and family weren't worldly people. I think they were interested. They read the newspapers. But they weren't overly involved in matters outside. When I was a young child,

we had some relatives -- my grandmother had some relatives who she sponsored coming to the US after the Holocaust, survivors. It wasn't really discussed, but you knew something terrible had happened in Europe and people came who survived.

*Q: Did Israel play a role?*

KREBS: Yes. Israel was a topic of conversation always. A strong feeling for, in those early days, especially for its survival.

*Q: Was your family strongly religious?*

KREBS: No, they were secular.

*Q: In school, what sort of an area did you live in? In New York City, you have these various sections of New York and the schools reflect that.*

KREBS: Early on, it was a lower middle class section of Brooklyn. We moved out to Queens, Long Island, a middle class area. There was a large Jewish population, but also other ethnic groups. New York played an important part in growing up. We went into Manhattan a lot, went to the theater. You had all the cultural attractions of New York that made a very strong impact on the color of the things that I got interested in later on. There were always the New York Yankees, of course.

*Q: Yes. Babe Ruth had left by the time you were there.*

KREBS: I remember going to Ebbets Field as a kid. It was a little bit more convenient to get out there, but I was one of the few who would stand up at the seventh inning stretch for the other team. The big treat was when Dad would take us out to Yankee Stadium.

*Q: By the time you got to junior high, were there any particular areas in school that you were interested in?*

KREBS: At that stage, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I always had a feeling and interest in politics. I was interested in what was going on on the political front. I knew that I was interested in that. I was a good student. My son, the doctor, but I don't think I was very good in math. I was an "A" student in math, but I never really had a gift for the sciences. As a good student, I did well enough, but the core feeling for the sciences I think wasn't there.

*Q: What was the name of the school in Brooklyn for the sciences?*

KREBS: Brooklyn Technical High School. I was accepted there and I went there for a couple of weeks. I remember, my dad had to drive me out there every morning. It was a long commute. I just found that it wasn't for me. I wanted to go back into a regular school.

*Q: It was a good thing to catch it early.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Where did you go to regular high school?*

KREBS: In Queens, Andrew Jackson High School. It was a regular school. My graduating class was about 800. These were big schools. We had a strong honors program there that I was part of.

*Q: What sort of subjects were you working on?*

KREBS: You took the whole range. You had to take your Regents examinations in New York in every field. It was everything from your English and literature courses, your social studies, your math, and your languages. It was just the regular academic program. It was college preparatory. I was very good in my Spanish class then. There was a gift for languages that you could see early on.

*Q: Was there much of a mix in your class? Was there a Hispanic element in your school?*

KREBS: Not much Hispanic. There was a solid African-American element.

*Q: How did the class mix?*

KREBS: Not terribly well. You saw certain entrances in the school where the black kids hung out. But we had a couple of very solid African-American kids. The African-American community that went to the school was from St. Alban's, which had a solid middle class. It wasn't a rough school.

*Q: How about extracurricular activities?*

KREBS: I got involved in yearbook and student government.

*Q: You graduated in 1960?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: My son, the doctor, had paled?*

KREBS: At that point, I just didn't know. I wound up at a state university.

*Q: Which one did you go to?*

KREBS: The State University of New York. It was called Harper College. It's now called Binghamton University. At that point, Nelson Rockefeller was Governor of New York. It was decided that New York needed a small liberal arts school with good academics, to compete with the very strong, solid, small liberal arts schools that were private. Harper was established. When I started, we were 900 students. By the time I graduated, we were 1200. So it was very small. Every class was conducted by a professor, a Ph.D. Classes were 12 to 15 people. It was a wonderful academic environment with no fraternities, mostly middle class kids from various corners of New York. It had a very strong academic orientation, very little emphasis on sports, or

fraternities, or partying, but kids who were very ambitious, striving academically. It was a very instructive place to get a good, solid liberal arts education. Eventually, they discovered they couldn't afford to keep something like that going and the Rockefeller plan was done for a couple of major universities, one in Buffalo, one in Stonybrook, and one in Albany, and then the other one at Binghamton. Harper was then made the liberal arts core of that. I don't know where it stands today.

*Q: While you were at Harper, did you major in anything?*

KREBS: Yes. I majored in political science. At that point, I was able to see what my focus would be. Political science/international relations was where my focus was. I also loved the other thing: literature, American and English literature. That's where my academic interests really flowered. I could suddenly see direction.

*Q: Were you looking towards the international field at all?*

KREBS: At that point, I didn't know what I was looking for. There was really no academic or career guidance. I didn't get it from my family and I wasn't really getting it from the school itself either. There, the focus was on academics. If you were in political science, you were supposed to be a political scientist. If you were an English major, you were supposed to be a professor of English. If you were an art major, etc. It was all directed towards academics. I didn't know where I was going. Finally, not knowing which direction to go, I applied to law school. I went that direction just to take another three years to see which way I was going to go.

*Q: Where did you go to law school?*

KREBS: Cornell. But it was all sort of chancy. You just sort of went with the flow. There was no sense of direction or guidance or a helping hand along the way. You just did it on your own.

*Q: When I look at what I did, there was a lot of plain inertia. You went here and something opened up.*

KREBS: And you didn't know where it was leading to or where you were going or nobody was there to really tell you how it was going to evolve.

*Q: And I'm not even sure that it would have been very helpful.*

KREBS: I don't know. The glory of America is that you had these opportunities that opened up for you even if you didn't have the push and it wasn't a George Bush family that guided you into Yale. You just sort of drifted and found your way and made it through. If you saw an opportunity, even if you weren't pushy or ambitious, you still found an opening. There were a lot of opportunities for young people in this country in those days. The '60s were prosperous times. I never remember wondering whether I'd make a living or not. You felt that if you wound up teaching or whatever, this was a country of tremendous prosperity and promise and you followed your interests. You didn't have to worry. I think kids today have to worry a lot more about "Will I be able to pay off my college loans and make it through and have a good job at the end?" The conventional wisdom for our generation at that time was, "Don't even think about being a

businessman or worrying about where the next penny is going to come from. It's just going to come."

*Q: I think you hit it right on the head.*

KREBS: The '60s were good times.

*Q: In '66, you went to Cornell.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: How did you find law and Cornell?*

KREBS: I loved being at Cornell. There was a certain element of class. I liked the umbrella of the Ivy League and being around people who were successful. It was a broader background of students from various sectors of society, including a higher element that I wasn't exposed to up until that point, people from more professional backgrounds. I thrived on that. I wasn't enamored by the study of law. I think I realized somewhere along the way that if I was going to be a lawyer, I was going to be a lawyer, but it would never arouse the juices.

*Q: Often, law is taken as a place to gain a little time. A law degree is always helpful. It was also a time to get something under your belt but at the same time hope for something other than law.*

KREBS: Yes. You were going to kill three years and find you had matured. The study of law, having come out of the four years of liberal arts, where your education was wonderful but you were thinking in philosophic terms and in ways that were fuzzy and very broad, it wasn't a disciplined kind of mindset. The study of law perfected the analytical function and taught me to think much more clearly, much more practically, to look at the world differently. These are problems and this is how they need to be solved. It gave me direction. I think it was a wonderful preparation for almost anything, including the Foreign Service. At that point, I hadn't heard of the Foreign Service. I didn't know what it was.

*Q: Was there any international side to your law training?*

KREBS: I had never been even to Canada. I had never been out of the country. I knew that there was a wider world out there and I was interested in it, such as travels to Europe. But it was a dream, you had to have some money behind you in order to do it (but it was a dream). At one point, I applied to the Experiment in International Living in Vermont. They would provide family homestays overseas. That was a real turning point in my life. They gave me a scholarship. My studies at Cornell were on scholarship also. My family did not have the money to send me to an Ivy League school, that was clear. At Harper, it was \$400 a year tuition and it was paid for by a state scholarship. So I had to cover my living expenses basically. At Cornell, I was given a grant which was half expenses and scholarship and the other half a loan. So when I applied to the Experiment in International Living, they also gave me a grant.

*Q: Was this a summer thing?*

KREBS: Yes, it was 10 weeks or so. I went off to Poland and Russia. This was in the '60s. Never having been to Canada, I wind up in Gdynia, Poland on the Baltic coast. There were 10 American kids from all over the country living with 10 Polish families each with a so-called "brother" or "sister." We did lots of things together as a group and just within your own family. We traveled around Poland. At one point, we took a two week trip. At the end, we went off for 10 days or two weeks to Russia, Moscow and Leningrad. My Polish brother (this is 35 years later) was just in town. He left yesterday. He's been in London for the last 20 years or so. It was a lasting relationship between the families. It opened the world to me. After that, I really had an idea of where I wanted to go with the rest of my life.

*Q: While you were there, how did you relate? This was in the middle of the Cold War and all of a sudden you're in a communist country. Was this a problem? Was it eye opening?*

KREBS: One is so innocent at that stage of life. My parents were not worldly. My mother had this wonderfully open, friendly approach to other people, never doubting their essential goodness, always seeing the good side. I guess I was that kind of innocent abroad also, just eyes open, ready to learn. I was put into a terrific family. The father was an elderly man who had been one of the most prominent people. He came from a poor family and worked himself up to be a very prosperous businessman. He had a string of bakeries before World War II and was considered a capitalist. During the war, the family was on the run. The Poles were hunted down by the Germans as well as others. (I don't know the whole story.) After the war, the communists took over and they nationalized his businesses and he wound up being a night watchmen. They would come for him in the middle of the night. But he knew how to operate bakeries and that was an essential skill, so he would get released and what have you. He never called me by name. He just called me "Capitalist." The mother was very loving. Two sisters and a brother. My Polish brother learned English. We used to sit up and talk politics right into the middle of the night regularly. To me, I was just fresh, open, absorbing, seeing another system, another world for what it was, learning to appreciate my own all the more. The brother got a doctorate out of England in computer engineering. He has his own business now and is a millionaire. He was here on business twice in the last month developing telecommunications equipment.

*Q: So there was a capitalistic germ in that family.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: How about your trip to the Soviet Union? What were your observations?*

KREBS: It was grim in those days. The contrast between Poland and the Soviet Union was very stark because you could carry on open, interesting, lively conversations with young Poles who were open minded and much more aware of what the world in the West was like, who could defend their own culture and their own way of life, if not the system. The young Poles had a remarkable ability to look at their history. This was only 20 years after the war. Things were still fresh. But the Poles were able to look at themselves proudly as Poles and to look at their church and their nation and their survival in a way divorced from the communist or socialist system. In Russia, I had the feeling you were dealing with young, programmed robots. I didn't live in a Russian family. We stayed at hostels. And you got a chance to meet young Soviets, but you couldn't carry on... I guess they were handpicked and were not open. It was a lot more difficult



to communicate. You sensed that they were much farther removed from Europe proper and the western world than the Poles were. At the same time, they were quite materialistic. Young people were coming over to me, "Will you sell us your sweater or your shoes?" But it was all done very slyly. I remember two of the girls of the group went off to arrange to meet some people on the side and trade some clothing for some Russian icons or something. The whole thing had a sense of mystery.

*Q: This would be the summer of what?*

KREBS: '65.

*Q: When you came back, you got out of law school in '66?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: What were you thinking of doing?*

KREBS: You were interviewing with recruiters that came onto campus. At that point, I had gone from first grade to law school with nary a break except for that summer. I worked every summer.

*Q: What sort of work were you doing?*

KREBS: Everything from messenger boy on the streets of Manhattan to driving a parcel post truck to mailman to office work. I took orders in a beverage company. Whatever summer job I could get. I needed the money for the next year. I worked in a mortgage company once. They were all just jobs to make some money for the next year, nothing that was career oriented or prepared me for anything I wanted to do. It was just to see where you could get a job and make some money. But by the time I was in my last year of law school, it was hard getting through that last year. Money was scarce. My thought was Peace Corps at that time. I wanted a couple of years away from it all. On the bulletin board for job prospects, there was this announcement for the Foreign Service exam. I didn't even know what it was. When I was in Poland, we made a visit to the American embassy and I was impressed. So, I took the exam. Lo and behold, my Peace Corps acceptance to go to Tanzania and my Foreign Service acceptance all came in the same week. I took the Foreign Service route because it paid a little bit more and I had to pay off some student loans.

*Q: You took the oral exam?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Do you recall any of the questions?*

KREBS: I don't remember the questions. I remember a panel of three at a table and I was sitting there with a glass of water. I could feel it going very well. A lot of the questions were "What would you do if?" There were questions in literature and music and things like, Foreigners might say that Americans are not culturally advanced in art or music. My broad background prepared me well for that. My own basic interests growing up in New York in theater and going to art

museums and in American cultural life, and having discussed a lot of these in Poland that summer, these were issues of America's strength in various fields. Plus, I had a good analytical ability by then to handle any questions on specific problem areas. I think I was well prepared for it and I felt confident. They came out right after the interview and said, "Congratulations, you passed this exam."

*Q: Did you have a choice of USIA or the Foreign Service in those days?*

KREBS: You made your selection afterwards. It was a general Foreign Service exam. I think everybody took the same one and then you specified whether you wanted State or USIA.

*Q: So you came in in '66?*

KREBS: I came in in October '66.

*Q: Do you recall the composition of your A100 course?*

KREBS: Yes. We had a little reunion a couple of years ago, maybe 40-45 people, certainly more men than women, maybe six or a bit more for USIA.

*Q: Were there many women then?*

KREBS: There were maybe 15%.

*Q: When you were there, did you have any idea where you wanted to go or what to do?*

KREBS: At that point, I wanted to go to Europe. But I was amenable to anything. I think I would have gone wherever they designated. You have that ceremony at the end where they hand out the appointments. I was assigned to Stockholm, something I hadn't thought of. But I remember walking back to my seat with a big grin of my face and visions of Swedish blonds dancing around in my head. It was the ideal assignment for a young bachelor. But I got a call within a week or two saying that that assignment was a mistake, that it was actually for a commercial officer. They asked me if I would be amenable to going to Berlin instead. So, that was much more politically interesting. I was told the crème de la crème were in Berlin at the time, staff for Kreis. I had my first assignment in Berlin.

*Q: So you were in Berlin from '67 to when?*

KREBS: To '69.

*Q: Just to get an idea, by the time you were in law school, were you reading the New York Times or keeping up with international affairs?*

KREBS: Oh, yes. The New York Times has been part of my life for as long as can remember. The New York Times is in my car right now.

*Q: By this point, you were following foreign affairs.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: When you got to Berlin in '67, what was the situation in Germany and particularly in Berlin?*

KREBS: I think the memories of President Kennedy's visit were very vivid still. Ich Bin ein Berliner. It was a very comfortable place for an American to be. There was no crisis at the time, but they were always prepared for one. The wall was up. The wall was very much a factor in the life of the city- (end of tape)

A friend was involved in an escapade involving digging a very complex tunnel under the wall and bringing people out. I remember him describing that whole situation to me. It was an interesting time. My first job was as a consular officer. We were the only ones anywhere who had contact with East Germans through the mission in Berlin. We would have particularly East German pensioners who would come across. They were the only ones who were legally allowed out, except for officials, and they would come right to the mission and apply for visas to the States to go visit, usually their grandchildren.

*Q: Who was the head of our mission there?*

KREBS: It was an old German hand named Brewster Morris, an upper crust kind of San Franciscan with a house on the Bay, a career Foreign Service officer of the old school.

*Q: Do you remember some of the other people who were there?*

KREBS: Oh, yes indeed. There were some wonderful people there. I saw probably some of the best of the Foreign Service in those couple of years. I remember David Anderson, who is since deceased, who was a young fellow who eventually became ambassador to Yugoslavia.

*Q: In his first job overseas, I was his supervisor.*

KREBS: I really liked him and his wife, very open, outgoing. Brandon Grove, who did very well, was there also. Alice Clement was my boss. Her father had been president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. She was a wonderful woman who had been a WAC during the war. I was exposed in Berlin to a wonderful group of people who were very open, hospitable, and wonderful to me. Alice is since deceased. I ran into a real estate agent in town a couple of weeks ago, who was trying to sell me a house, named Jeanne Livingston. Her husband was Gerry Livingston, who was there. Marten Van Heuven was there. His wife, Ruth, had been a Foreign Service officer and was made to resign in those days, having married an FSO. Eventually she lateral entered back in. We served together as SWOs (Senior Watch Officers) in the Ops Center and became good friends again.

*Q: In Berlin, things always... During that period, there was concern. A crisis could develop. During your time, were there any particular crises over entry?*

KREBS: No, not during those years. There was nothing in the form of a crisis. President Nixon came. I remember his visit. We had a lot of major visits coming and going. But there was never a

real crisis, no threats of closure of the wall. By that point, things had stabilized into a settled kind of existence. They were there, we were here. Nobody really pushed or pulled to get the other moving. The wall was there. It was a fact of life. We accepted it. They accepted the American presence in Berlin by that point. Walter Ulbricht was the communist chief of East Berlin. Klaus Schutz was the mayor, kind of a Social Democrat in the Willy Brandt mode in West Berlin. People tried to keep the lid on actual crises developing. Kurt Kiesinger was elected the chancellor of East Germany. He had a Nazi past. That was rather controversial.

*Q: You were a bachelor at this point?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Did you have much of... Did this allow you to get involved with...*

KREBS: I had a German girlfriend, very serious. We were expected to marry. She was a student at the Kennedy Institute finishing her studies there. She eventually joined the German foreign service and she's now posted in New York. I saw her a couple of months ago. We got together a couple of times. She's at the German consulate.

*Q: As a bachelor dating a German girl, did you get involved with German groups?*

KREBS: Oh, yes. My best friends were German. And English. I had a lot of very good friends at the British mission. It was a wonderful first posting. It was a very international atmosphere. I had good friends. The Americans at the mission were very open and social. We had a wonderful group within the mission but I had great friends, some of my best friends were at the British mission there. I socialized a lot with them. And then I had a couple of great friends in the German community. I was very open minded and eager to meet and practice and I had gotten quite good at German. I was in the consular section, a visa officer, a small section. In those days everybody had to come in for an interview to get their visa. It was pre-747 days. I used to keep my eyes open in the waiting room for people who I wanted to talk to I would find interesting. If I saw somebody going on an F visa to a good school, I'd like to talk to them. And I made a lot of friends just through visa interviews. We'd chat and go through it and I'd say, "Let's continue the conversation over a beer afterwards." I made some of my best friends and contacts in that way. I don't know if that's possible in this mass production age.

*Q: It's much more difficult now.*

KREBS: But I had people like Gunther Grass come through and Belina McCorie, all sorts of interesting people. "Let's talk about what you're going to be doing."

*Q: As a consular officer, were there many American tourists there? Were they getting in trouble? Were you having to get them out?*

KREBS: Oh, yes. This was Berlin during the Cold War. You had a bunch of people, would be James Bonds, come through.

*Q: Trying to do something over in East Germany?*

KREBS: Yes, or come through with illusions. They had secret whatever, missions to work on.

*Q: These were self-generated missions?*

KREBS: Some people with psychological problems.

*Q: How did you deal with this? Was the main idea to get them the hell out of Berlin?*

KREBS: Get them out of your office or out of Berlin. If you suspected anything was serious, you just put them in touch with other elements of the mission to let them dispose in any way they thought appropriate. There were some seriously delusional people who would come through. One woman would come in who was convinced that she was the daughter of Abraham Lincoln and she was some European royalty, some affair that Abraham Lincoln had with the daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm II. She would come in on a weekly basis. When she stopped coming in, I was worried. I had my staff find out where she was. Sure enough, she had been picked up and locked up somewhere. To us, she was no threat. She was more an amusement.

*Q: Did you get involved with Americans who were trying to help people escape? Coming over, feeling they were Sir Galahad or something like that?*

KREBS: You came across so many different kinds of funny stories. People trying to get people out, yes. Helping them escape. They would have trouble getting across to the other side themselves, let alone getting people out. You wound up hearing stories of people getting people out in specially contrived cars with little compartments. There were always little stories about tricky escapes. But they were always done outside of official channels, needless to say.

*Q: Did you go over to East Berlin?*

KREBS: Yes, we were encouraged to go. I went quite a bit, mostly for cultural events. You had the Deutsche opera there. And they had a Komische opera under the direction of quite a well-known cultural personality. They had some very interesting performances there. I used to collect posters from the operas that were some of the most beautiful I've ever seen done. Then you had the Brecht Ensemble in East Berlin, a theater that was also extraordinary. So, yes, we would go over. It was usually in groups. We once went over to the opera with my British friends. We were three or four couples that went over. We were all wearing tuxedos, except one of the fellows was from the Scottish guard and he went in his kilt and Scottish outfit. The girls had long dresses. We were quite the sight in the lobby there. You'd just go over and wander in the parks and the museums. The old museum quarter, the island, was on the east side. The Egyptian collection was there. We would go over, but not on a weekly basis.

*Q: Did you have any contact in your job with the Soviets?*

KREBS: No. One of my best friends at the time was a Canadian fellow who was the only western correspondent in East Berlin. He was the Reuters correspondent. We would meet regularly. He'd come over to the West and when I'd go there I knew the woman, an East German, who was his associate there. He was replaced by an Australian fellow. I'd talk with

them about the situation there.

*Q: During this '67-'69 period, were you rotated at all?*

KREBS: No. I had a law degree, so I was hired as an 07. In those days, 08s got rotational jobs. 07s were put into fixed two-year positions and it was a consular position. At one point, the fellow who did passports and citizens services died, a fellow in his 30s. At the apartment that he had there was a fire, and he died of smoke inhalation or something. I was moved into his job. At that point, he was more senior than I was. I moved into that job and had that for a good while. I had the visa officer job. There was just really one visa officer. You had a head of section, Alice Clement, and a secretary, and then you had one visa officer and one American citizens services.

*Q: I think Alice Clement was a visa officer in Frankfurt during my time. I came in in '55.*

KREBS: What a great lady, what a sense of humor, very classy but without any affectation at all. It was extraordinarily fun with her. I still see a couple of Berlin friends, the younger ones. Bruce Klausson, who I think is going to come over for lunch today. Alan Thompson, I run into him.

*Q: By '69, where did they send you?*

KREBS: I fell through the sewer. I wound up as every young officer did in those days -- Vietnam beckoned. I went from Heaven to Hell.

*Q: You were a bachelor and a young officer. You were prime meat.*

KREBS: You bet. And I had indicated all along an interest in Asia also, which I never should have. I went from being with the best of the Foreign Service to some of the worst.

*Q: You went to Vietnam when?*

KREBS: I went through the full Vietnamese language training program. I got there in late '70.

*Q: And you were there until when?*

KREBS: Until early '72, about 15 months later.

*Q: Where did they assign you first?*

KREBS: That's a long story. I was perhaps in the anti-war segment of the Foreign Service. Vietnam, the whole history of it was a nightmare. I had no desire to go. I thought once I got that assignment to Vietnam, that was the end of my career. I was assigned to language training and I thought I would use the language training, that period back in Washington, perhaps to go back to law or look for something else. I was interested in seeing an East Asian culture, so I started the language and was getting into that, made some wonderful friends at the Vietnam training center, although that was probably the worst year of my career. The training to go to Vietnam was so incredibly awful.

*Q: Also, the site for it was in the garage.*

KREBS: Yes. The administration was heavily military at that point. But some of the civilians in it, a lot of them were hired by USAID. They were making a career out of Vietnam, pocketing money. The culture was to have girlfriends as young as possible. After coming from Berlin and seeing the best of the Foreign Service, it struck me as being very seedy and very unpleasant. Some of my fellow students were wonderful. The Vietnamese were part of it on the teaching staff, exotic, beautiful, and very nice. It was my first exposure to an Asian culture. I really appreciated that aspect. But during the course of that year, we started in the fall, I went off skiing for a week and I broke my leg very, very badly. I thought that was going to save me from Vietnam. Instead of that, they kept on putting it off. I thought I wasn't going to get medical clearance for that. So I hung on. Personnel having to fill quotas for Vietnam was just getting people in and out of there as quickly as possible, filling those jobs. And they were all USAID jobs. But I wasn't ready to go when my time came. I was still in a cast. So they offered me French language training for six months. I always wanted to learn French. I got my 3 in French. Then I was given a ticket to Vietnam. I remember saying, "Okay, let's go and see what it is."

*Q: Before we leave that, this was your first time in the Department, although there was some separation. Had you decided that Vietnam wasn't a cause that you could subscribe to?*

KREBS: No. In fact, to be honest, during that year, Kent State happened. It was an awful time. I was one of those who signed a petition. We marched at the White House. I remember being traumatized by the Kent State incident, the whole march into Cambodia, and figuring that was it, I'm never going to make it over there.

*Q: Were there others going through the same thing?*

KREBS: Yes. Some people got out shortly thereafter. Others were being pushed out. I don't remember being even approached. Maybe I was. By that point, there were people who were quitting. By the time I got to Vietnam in November '70, people were quitting in at least a significant enough number to be a concern to the higher ups. I got to Vietnam and I was sent to a town called Phan Thiet. I was to be a deputy district advisor.

*Q: Where was that?*

KREBS: It was a city famous for its nuoc mam, the Vietnamese fish sauce that has a very pungent aroma.

*Q: It's the residue of decayed fish.*

KREBS: Yes, and it smells worse than rotting fish. At that point, I knew I wasn't going to stay, I wasn't going to last. That's where the law degree was a very comforting thing to have. I knew there were alternatives. I was sent out to Phan Thiet. To prove that I was an Ivy League lawyer, I put on a suit and tie in the plane that was taking me out there. Of course, nobody wore suits and ties in Vietnam then, but I was going to be a professional. In the airplane, you could smell in the air that stench as you were landing. I was met at the airport and escorted back to the province headquarters, taken to a room that was going to be my room. It was painted in peeling green

bureaucratic paint. A string was holding a lightbulb over the bed. This is what I went to Ivy League law school for. This was after two years in Berlin, the best of the best of the Foreign Service. I was taken then to the headquarters. There was going to be a staff meeting. People were seated. I took my seat there. Then a lackey was standing by the door in a private's military uniform and at some point he said, "Gentlemen, the PSA." Everybody had to stand up at attention. In walks this fat man, a USAID character in a safari suit, grossly overweight, sloppy. People saluted and sat down. I just sat there bewildered. The whole atmosphere was so unprofessional in Foreign Service terms. Maybe it wasn't that way in military or USAID terms. But the whole thing was so out of my expectations and wishes that I knew right from there I wasn't going to stay. I gave it a couple of days, and I let them know I was leaving, I was handing in my resignation, and I wasn't going to do this job. This was well after meeting people and talking to people and finding out what the job was.

*Q: What were you supposed to be doing?*

KREBS: It was going out in the district. It was never really terribly clear. It was just to be there and give out handouts, talk to Vietnamese military people. There was no clarity at all to the job description or what your goals were. Your job basically was to be there, make an American presence felt, and keep your people above you happy, but without any clarity as to what you were supposed to be doing. That week, there had been a couple of resignations from elsewhere and Saigon was very disturbed. I was told, "You can't come directly back to Saigon. You have to go up to Binh Thuan," the regional headquarters.

*Q: You were in IICORPS then.*

KREBS: Yes. I left within a short time for Binh Thuan. I was brought in to see the Foreign Service officer, Ted Long, a nice man, career Foreign Service, probably the regional director, DEPCORDS. He showed me into his office and was very sympathetic, very helpful. His advice was, "Don't give up your career for this. It's not worth it." He understood where I was coming from but pressures were on him not to let anybody else resign, "Do what you can to hold on to who you've got there." He was wonderful. He said, "Hang around here. You learned the language. You can hang around the beach." Binh Thuan was a lovely place actually.

Were you in Vietnam?

*Q: Yes, from '69 to '70.*

KREBS: Did you know Ted Long?

*Q: No.*

KREBS: He said, "Just hang around the beach, talk to people, enjoy the food, the atmosphere, come into headquarters here, talk to people, see if there is anything that you'd like to do. We'll talk in a couple of weeks or so." Okay, I was going to be flexible about it and see what the country was like. So I hung around Nhu Trang for a month. He called me in one day and said, "I think I've got an interesting job for you. There is a military major who is leaving and I think you'd do well taking his job." You had 50-60 young Vietnamese working for you. They were



forming survey teams, going out and doing surveys throughout the region. Once a month, they'd do a basic survey that was done all over the country. In between, we designed surveys of how various programs were working, where they'd go out and talk to people. My job was to design the surveys, send them out, and then get the results into a report and send it in. So, I said, "Okay, let's try it." For me, it was more suitable because I was dealing by and large with Vietnamese contemporaries, same age group. They were an interesting, well informed group of people. We were able to turn out information that was useful, constructive, and not always toeing the party line. I wound up being in charge of that program. Ted Long was eventually replaced by a very sharp man, an African-American fellow named Chuck James, who eventually became an ambassador in Africa. I think he was Harvard Law School. I became very fond of him and his approach. I found a couple of sympathetic people around to work with and to relate to. Eventually I got an assistant who was a friend of mine back in Washington who had gone out into the field, but then was marrying a Vietnamese. They brought him back to Nhu Trang and he became my deputy. So, I had my own little group of people there.

*Q: You were there in '71 and '72. What was your impression of how the war was going and the people?*

KREBS: I came in with a bias against the American involvement there. I never thought it was a useful endeavor. I was not impressed with the way things were being run by and large. I didn't feel that the military was committed by that point, the American side. They were there for career enhancement reasons. I wasn't impressed by the USAID people out there who were making money hand over fist, and just cavorting around in ways that were not constructive. This is generalizing. I'm sure there were very dedicated people there as well. But the overall impression you got was of an American involvement in a losing enterprise, nobody really being believers anymore at that stage of the game. People were in it for their own reasons, and the reasons weren't always healthy reasons. There were still some committed people who thought that it was the right cause. I don't want to be overly critical of everybody. But my being there was not something I was particularly impressed with, or proud of, or enthusiastic about. On the Vietnamese side, it was an interesting transition period. When I got there in '71, the American military was still there. It was Vietnamization time and the Nixon administration was in a winddown. Perhaps that had something to do with why people thought they weren't in a winning enterprise anymore. We were pulling out in a gradually accelerated way. By 1971, we saw the last of the American military out of there. We had an air base in Binh Thuan and we waved goodbye to the last of the American military there.

After that, you saw things begin to almost turn around. There was only a civilian element left. The Vietnamese at that point were still largely on the fence. I think they wanted stability and peace more than anything else at that stage regardless. But I was there for the elections in South Vietnam when Thieu was elected. We had to suspend our operation during the course of the elections. I remember taking a month off and just getting a Pan Am around the world ticket and doing some traveling. The Vietnamese were still on the fence and hoping that things would go in a peaceful direction, that the war would end, and that they could survive on their own. I sensed a gradual slipping off the fence onto the side of the South Vietnamese way of looking at the world -- if not a full hearted commitment, then at least more than was there when I had first arrived. I left in early '72. Sometime in the spring of '72 there was a big North Vietnamese offensive in South Vietnam. I gather it was quite brutal.

*Q: It was the Easter offensive.*

KREBS: Yes. I was back here by that point. Then later in January of '73, the Paris Peace Treaty came to fruition.

*Q: While you were there, what was your impression of the government in Saigon? Was it corrupt? Was it efficient?*

KREBS: Binh Thuan was peaceful... It was good living. It was known as the Riviera of Indochina. (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying that you felt that the South Vietnamese were gaining some confidence in their government. As you did these surveys, were you seeing this change?*

KREBS: Yes. Of course, it depended on the province. Certain provinces were more secure. Certain provinces were a bit more government oriented. In others, the security situation was a little bit more touchy. The farmers and the peasants were doing less well. The Viet Cong might have been stronger in certain provinces than others. But by and large, my recollection is that things seemed to be progressing in a favorable direction as you went from '71 on into '72. Then I left in March of '72. By May there was the offensive from North Vietnam. It was evidently very devastating. My impression that I was hearing here and that I was reading about, and that was confirmed when I got back to Vietnam in January of '73, was that the North Vietnamese did not make very many friends in the South. Quite the contrary, they were brutal. They offended the sensibilities of even those who were on the fence. More and more, people were committing themselves to the cause of the South Vietnamese government. This was done without the American military. Perhaps the Vietnamese had developed a little bit more confidence in themselves and their own abilities to handle their situation without having big brother America standing over their shoulder. Of course, the American military equipment and the aid was vital as history would prove. When the Paris Peace Treaty was signed, 44 American Foreign Service officers with Vietnamese experience were rounded up here in Washington and asked to go back. I was one of them.

*Q: This might be a good place to stop. What did you do when you immediately came back?*

KREBS: I went into IO, International Organizations. I was first put temporarily in a holding pattern in an office that dealt with international drug control but with the promise that I would be put into the UN Political Affairs Office, which was more the prestigious office for political officers in the IO Bureau.

*Q: But you were rounded up before you got there?*

KREBS: I was there and then I started at UN/P and then I was volunteered to go back. At that point, I had a very different approach to going back. There were four consulates and I was going to be back in a traditional State Department kind of function. We were establishing four consulates general. Do you want me to go into the details of that?

*Q: Why don't we save that for next time? We'll pick this up when you're going back to a consulate general but being an observer of how the peace treaty was working. This would be in '73.*

KREBS: My job was even more than being the observer, although that was part of my job. I was sent back to Kan Hua province, to Nhu Trang. I was the reporting officer but I was also the person who was putting together the daily SITREP for the whole region.

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*Q: Today is May 16, 2002. 1973. Before you went out there, what was the word in the corridor about whither South Vietnam?*

KREBS: By that point, you had the North Vietnamese offensive of the spring of 1972. The South Vietnamese army seems to have withstood that. The government seems to have survived. By January of '73, Secretary Kissinger was in Paris negotiating and succeeding in bringing about the Paris Peace Treaty which essentially called for peace and the introduction of an international commission that was composed of Poland, Hungary, Canada, Indonesia, and Iran. That left some North Vietnamese troops in place in South Vietnam. The feeling then was, let's see how it works out. I don't know that there was a feeling that this was going to succeed or fail. It was an opportunity for peace that was seized upon. It was supported fairly widely within the halls of the State Department. The call then came for a monitoring system. That's where we in the State Department fit in. The 44 of us were rounded up and packed our bags and went out very quickly and were functioning from day one out there.

*Q: You were there from 1973 to when?*

KREBS: It was for six months. That was from January/February '73 until the end of summer of '73.

*Q: What was the situation in Binh Thuan?*

KREBS: It was fairly peaceful. Phan Thiet was peaceful. We really didn't see any military activity. It had really wound down. I came back with a totally different feeling and attitude than the attitude I had when I went at the end of 1970. It was peaceful throughout Vietnam at that period in the aftermath of the signing of the treaty. For the first time, I had the strong feeling that this could work, that we were on the road to a peaceful resolution of this nightmarish escapade that we had embarked on years before, and that it was going to somehow come to a successful end. The feeling I got from the Vietnamese I dealt with - the man on the street, as well as the officials - was that this could work, that we are now much more committed to making it work. It was a feeling that somehow the Vietnamese had come off the fence and onto the side of the South Vietnamese government and system and that there was going to be a workable division.

*Q: In the area that your consulate general was dealing with, were there North Vietnamese troops somewhere off on the horizon?*

KREBS: Yes, I think they were up there in the highlands, Plefka/Can Tho provinces. The Viet

Cong infrastructure was still intact. But it was a quiet period, a period for the South Vietnamese to try and consolidate their hold and for the communists to gather strength for what was yet to come. That didn't come until after, 1974 or '75.

*Q: Who was the consul general where you were?*

KREBS: It was a very dedicated and active and alert man named Jim Engel. He was very good to work for. We were his boys. I don't remember how many we were in Binh Thuan province. The 44 were spread out throughout the country. We must have been about 12. He really became a kind of patron, and a very devoted, dedicated, hardworking, and aggressive man in charge there. He was also determined to make it work. He had a deputy who I've seen a number of times thereafter, named Dick Teare, who eventually became an ambassador in Papua New Guinea. Last I saw him, he was in Hawaii as the political advisor to CINCPAC. He was the deputy to Jim Engel and also very capable. The bunch of us young fellows who were out there, each was working a province-

*Q: You had which province?*

KREBS: I handled Binh Thuan province, which was a province in which Nhu Trang was located. Nhu Trang was the regional headquarters, and where the consulate general was, as well as the capital of the province. So, I operated out of the consulate general, covered the province but also was given responsibility of assimilating the various SITREPs that were coming in from the various provinces and every day, turning out a regionwide situation report. I had a kind of dual responsibility there.

*Q: Did you see a difference in the type of people the central government of Saigon was sending out to be provincial governors? Were they better or worse?*

KREBS: No, I didn't see any major change in that regard. There was a bit more confidence when I went back. People were a bit more committed and determined to try and make it work, and a little more confident that it would work. To me, the whole irony was that just as the South Vietnamese were so uncommitted, the American government was there in the most aggressive manner possible, just pouring resources in. When the South Vietnamese finally jumped off the fence and committed themselves, it was once our troops were out and there was a sense of exhaustion on the part of the Americans. You had an administration that was bogged down in Watergate and less of a commitment from Congress to stay the course and see this through. I personally would have supported pulling out at a much earlier stage, but by that point, once we had committed so much of our energy and our resources, the whole enterprise seemed to be going in a positive direction. Suddenly we cut off funds, cut off aid, cut off whatever, and walked away. It's ancient history now. We have relations with the Vietnamese. It was an episode in my career and my life that taught me a lot about foreign affairs and our role in it.

*Q: There must have been in IICORPS quite a few refugees who had fled. Were they returning home? Was there much movement of that sort?*

KREBS: I can't really comment on that. There wasn't much where I was in Phan Thiet. A good friend of mine at the time, Rich Muller, was up in Pleiku. Parker Borg was in Phan Thiet. Up

there in the highlands was where things remained fairly hairy throughout. You had the Montagnard people there. There might have been more refugee movement. But Phan Thiet, even when I was there during the early '70s, there wasn't that much refugee activity going on. It was comparatively a fairly peaceful province.

*Q: Did internal travel open up?*

KREBS: Yes, you could move on the roads and on the highways. You could drive out into the countryside much more easily, cross provinces. People were driving up from Saigon to Nhu Trang, which you wouldn't have done back then. The national highway( There was movement.

*Q: How about the South Vietnamese military? Were they settling in? Were they much of a presence?*

KREBS: I think they felt more in control of the situation. They weren't being terribly threatened. They were becoming more professional. There was a bit less corruption in the ranks than there was before. They were settling in to be a strong force.

*Q: How about the sway of the embassy? Did you have much to do with the embassy? Did people from there come out much?*

KREBS: I don't remember what the contact with the embassy was at that point. But, certainly, given the interest in how the peace treaty was being implemented and working, the embassy had a major role.

*Q: By this time within the Foreign Service, we had been reporting on villages and unrest or peacefulness. We had been reporting to a fair-thee-well on South Vietnam. Had techniques changed much? How did you report what was happening if nothing was happening?*

KREBS: You went out and reported. You didn't have as many resources as we had during the height of the operation. But, yes, you went out to various villages. You talked to various officials in provincial and regional headquarters. I remember spending a lot of time with the International Commission people and trying to get readouts from them, as well as what they were observing and how they saw the situation.

*Q: Did you find that they were playing the game fairly straightforwardly or were the people on the Soviet Bloc side doing their thing and the others were being more objective?*

KREBS: They had their little biases, but I found that you could deal with the Poles and Hungarians and you could get some information. You quickly found out who were the ones who were not ready to deal with you as an American. They had some younger people there who were a little bit more western-oriented and open and communicative. I recall enjoying my contacts with the Poles and the Hungarians as well as with the Canadians and others.

*Q: Then you left in the summer of '73. I take it you left what seemed to be a working system?*

KREBS: Things had really quieted down during that period. I guess it was a period for people to

catch their breath, although we didn't realize it at the time. We just thought, hey, this is gaining traction. There was promise that there would be peace in our time.

*Q: Where did you go then?*

KREBS: I came back with a bad case of hepatitis, which I guess I contracted in my last week or so. I stopped off in the hospital in Saigon and said, I think I have the flu or something. They saw the yellow all over me and sent me to the hospital in Saigon and kept me there for about two weeks and then sent me home. But that was on my way out. So, I came back. I had recuperated, and went back to IO (International Organizations). I did my stint of a year or so in UN Political Affairs.

*Q: Let's talk about that. This would be '73-'74. What were you specifically doing?*

KREBS: My portfolio included the Khmer credentials issue, which was hot stuff at the time, who was going to represent Cambodia at the UN. I had the UN presence in Cyprus that was basically a funding issue. There were other issues. I should have grabbed my EERs (employee evaluation reports) before coming in here.

*Q: Who was running IO at that time?*

KREBS: Sam De Palma and Martin Hertz. They were the biggies. My immediate boss, head of IO/UNP, was Jack Armitage.

*Q: Did you get up to UN sessions at all?*

KREBS: Minimally. Very little. We had people up there. We were mainly dealing over the phone. I got up there, but didn't spend nearly as much time up there as I would have liked.

*Q: How did you find IO? You operated within the State Department. Were you tripping over the geographic bureaus?*

KREBS: I was junior at the time. It was my first experience within the Department in any kind of substantive role. If there were problems between the bureau and the regional bureaus, they were above my pay grade at the time. I got along fine with the people I dealt with on the desk level.

*Q: Was it mainly clearing papers and that sort of thing?*

KREBS: There was also drafting positions, working out issues. With Cyprus, it was a lot of funding. There were letters to draft, correspondence. It was a junior political officer job. That gave me access to a multitude of issues.

*Q: You probably got out of there just when the Cyprus thing blew up? Did you get out in the summer of '74?*

KREBS: I was out of there by summer of '74, yes.

*Q: That blew up in July of '74. Where did you go?*

KREBS: Japanese language training.

*Q: Was this your choice?*

KREBS: Yes. It was on my wish list.

*Q: You took Japanese having not too long after going through Vietnamese training... Language training is not the most fun thing in the world.*

KREBS: To some people it isn't, and some people thrive on it. FSI was my main bureau. I did an awful lot of language training. I don't think anybody could duplicate my career anymore today. I liked the idea of getting language training and going off to post and getting another language and going off to another post. To me, it was an ideal way to structure a career though it wasn't intentional. I have no regrets. I had about six languages at FSI.

*Q: East Asia was your main bureau then, wasn't it?*

KREBS: No, I moved back and forth between East Asia and EUR. I started in Berlin. I went to Vietnam. I went to Japan. Then I came back and went back to Europe.

*Q: How did you find Japanese? This was a two year course?*

KREBS: I was programmed in for a two year course and a slot in the political section but towards the middle or end of my first year of language training, I was doing quite well at it. I took to it very easily. I loved learning the reading system, the Kanji. It was like working crossword puzzles trying to figure out the meaning of these strange figures. But I wasn't necessarily committed to doing two years. I was a bit nervous about that. Then I was called in by the head of the desk for an interview with the ambassador out there who was looking for a new executive assistant.

*Q: Who was that?*

KREBS: It was Jim Hodgson, who had been Secretary of Labor in the Nixon cabinet. There was some retiring female Army officer who had that slot in the embassy for quite a number of years. She was leaving. He interviewed me. I was enthusiastic about taking that job. I figured then I could see whether I had a commitment to Japan or not.

*Q: So essentially you went out there in '75?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: And how long were you there?*

KREBS: Two years.

*Q: Were you the ambassador's executive assistant the whole time?*

KREBS: Yes. I was assistant to Ambassador Hodgson for his remaining time there. Then Mike Mansfield came out. I was his executive assistant for his first six months or so.

*Q: How did Hodgson work? What was his operational style?*

KREBS: He loved golf. He was committed to golf and he thought a lot of work could be accomplished with the Japanese on the golf course. I think he was right. He connected and bonded very nicely with the Japanese on the golf course. But that was the period also that the Lockheed scandal broke. Hodgson came to government via Lockheed. He was the vice president in charge of human resources at Lockheed. The Lockheed scandal affected Japan, so it was a very sensitive time for him and his role out there. But he managed to skirt that and play it fairly well. I don't think it really impacted his effectiveness there. He communicated well with the Japanese with genuine affection for them.

*Q: It's interesting how golf is such a unifier. I was in Korea about the same time and golf in Korea was extremely important. The Koreans took their golf very seriously.*

*How did you find the embassy? Did Hodgson turn the administration of the embassy over to the DCM?*

KREBS: Largely. The DCM was Tom Shoesmith. He was an old Japan hand. On the Washington side, Bill Sherman was head of the desk. These were the people who came into the Japan game out of World War II, fluent in Japanese, trained through the military, and had devoted their careers to understanding Japan and developing the relationship between the US and Japan.

*Q: Somebody like yourself coming in, being somewhat ambivalent that you wanted to devote your whole time to this, if you really went full into the Japanese thing, that was going to be your life.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: As you were watching this, what were you thinking?*

KREBS: I don't know that I ever worked as hard at anything in terms of language or understanding a culture as I did with my involvement in Japan and the Japanese language. I worked at it every day. I only did the 10 months of basic Japanese here, and never went to Yokohama, but came out with an ability. I read four newspapers a day out there. My conversational Japanese got to be very good. I developed a great love of the Japanese culture. To this day, I regret not having stayed the course with it, but I just didn't.

*Q: What did you do as executive assistant?*

KREBS: Oh, gosh, everything from appointments to going through the cables, making sure the ambassador saw what he had to see, was where he had to be. I was the ambassador's right hand



on a daily basis, attended every meeting, refreshed his memory, wrote notes, memos, communicated with the various sections of the embassy for him, did some drafting, did virtually all his correspondence for his signature, some speechwriting, a variety of things. I got to know the whole operation of the embassy as well as anybody.

*Q: How would you describe relations with the Japanese at that time? What were the issues?*

KREBS: Relations were good. We had a political counselor named Dick Petree who was also one of these old Japan hands. His line was that, "We are only beginning to learn to communicate with the Japanese, developing communication with the Japanese." There was still a fundamental stiffness and lack of ease in communication but it was beginning to develop and gel. What were the issues? They were always trade and economic issues at that time and I guess today, too. One of the major issues was on the science side, nuclear reprocessing, which was a particularly sensitive issue at the time. Especially when the Carter administration came in, it got even more touchy and sensitive.

*Q: The Japanese didn't use nuclear energy, did they?*

KREBS: Oh, yes, they did. Whether they should have the ability to reprocess the spent fuel... There was a processing plant called Tokaimura. What to allow and to what extent... You'd have to talk to the science people. My memory isn't fresh on this. The science counselor was very capable, a wonderful person, Justin Bloom. He was a superb, wise, smart, personable individual who could go into great depth with you on the topic. My job was to float on the surface of all of this, know about the issues, and know how to follow up for the ambassador.

*Q: Did the ambassador use his people well?*

KREBS: I thought so.

*Q: Some ambassadors fight the experts and some use them and some are so overwhelmed by them.*

KREBS: Jim Hodgson was a very confident kind of guy in that he knew his own abilities, but not in an aggressive "I'm the only one who knows anything" way. He knew his people. He knew what they knew. He knew how to get the most of them. We had daily staff meetings. Every morning there was a meeting. There was as good a professional staff as any I've worked with anywhere at any time in my career. We would go around the table in a relaxed way, but boy was it substantive. Hodgson was very good at what he did. He also had Tom Shoesmith there, who knew the Japanese as well as anybody.

*Q: I remember, I was going out to Korea and he was still there. I spent two days with the consul general there. I sat in the staff meeting. It impressed me. Normally, you wouldn't have that. But obviously it was a professional thing and it was a way for me to sound out what they were doing. I thought that was well done.*

KREBS: It was a very comfortable group of professionals who seemed to all respect one another. You didn't sense the internal competition from one section to another. Everybody contributed.

Everybody was on top of their issues. It was a very well-staffed embassy, the best I've ever seen. Then came Mike Mansfield, who lent his own prestige and grandeur to the whole operation. He was just wonderful to be around.

*Q: I would think it would be hard to figure out whom to talk to within the Japanese government. The political leadership is almost amorphous. It's the LDP, but the names continue to be changed. Was this the period when Tanaka was on top?*

KREBS: No. Fukuda was the prime minister. Then Miki was the prime minister who succeeded him. It was also a period of the Emperor's visit to the US.

*Q: You must have been very busy on that.*

KREBS: Yes. But it was a busy time. It was a very busy embassy. Dealing with the foreign ministry and the government personnel wasn't my job. I didn't get to make calls on the foreign ministry and work an issue through. I facilitated anybody coming in to see the ambassador, or if the ambassador had to go. It was more the political section that would handle the give and take with the various Japanese officials. I got to know some of the younger people in the ministry. You had by that period a more westernized group of people who you could communicate with more easily.

*Q: Did the ambassador have a problem of avoiding getting overwhelmed by social events and protocol- (end of tape)*

KREBS: I learned a lot from Jim Hodgson. He led a very balanced lifestyle. He was a role model in terms of how to organize your day, your week, your life, in a very healthy way. He came to work at a decent hour. He paced himself through the day very well. Meals. Social life. Golf. Whatever, it was all done in a very balanced, healthy way. I respected him and admired him for the way in which he was able to operate. I never saw him lose his cool, his calm, his focus, going through what could be a rigorous schedule. He didn't overdo. He didn't underdo. He balanced things and was more effective for it.

*Q: Did you get any feel for his relationship with the Department of State? It would be Kissinger at that time.*

KREBS: He was a political appointee, and recognized his role as such. I remember Nixon came through post-Watergate and the issue was whether to go to the plane to meet him or not. He was on his way to China. We drafted a very nice long letter to the plane and decided not to go out under those circumstances. Kissinger wasn't a great fan of Japan. I don't recall Kissinger ever coming through in those two years. What his relationship with Kissinger was I don't know, or if there was one.

*Q: It wasn't something that came up on your radar at all?*

KREBS: No. I remember Julie Nixon Eisenhower and her husband coming through on their way to China. I was designated to meet them and spend the weekend with them. They had dinner at the ambassador's residence, which was very warm. You could tell there was a comfortable

relationship.

*Q: I remember somewhat earlier when I was consul general in Athens, Julie Nixon made a point of coming through and meeting everybody in the embassy and made quite an impression, not being a spoiled kid or something, but being quite warmhearted and going out and seeing everything.*

KREBS: They were terrific. I recall the dinner at the residence and the wife of the former prime minister who was there. Both Julie and David were wonderful. A lot of talk about Watergate at the dinner table and Julie was very defensive of her dad. One incident I remember quite well was on their way back from China, where they had been for New Year's. At midnight, they were awakened and ushered in to meet Mao. This was shortly before he died. They were presented with a birthday cake for their father which they carried back on the plane. I met them at the airport on their way back to the residence. Julie gave me the cake and said, "Why don't you share it with people at the embassy?" It was a happy birthday, President Nixon cake. I said, "Julie, don't do this. This is going to be a very special thing for your dad. You take it home with you." I held on to it and gave it to her to take back on the plane with her when she left. Sure enough, during the next week in the International Herald Tribune was a big photo of former President Nixon with the cake, a gift from Mao, so I was very pleased that I had a role in that.

*Q: How about Mrs. Hodgson? Sometimes it's difficult for a wife, Foreign Service or not, to get involved. How did this work out?*

KREBS: She was very gracious. I liked her very much. I think she was a bit shy about the whole thing. I don't know how comfortable she was in the role. But he was very devoted to her. Part of my job as well as everybody else's was to make sure she was made to feel comfortable in any situation that she was going to go through, that she was well briefed and well informed. We had a very capable Japanese woman who was a kind of social secretary. I found Mrs. Hodgson to be warm and wonderful to deal with. I had no problems with her whatsoever.

*Q: When Mike Mansfield came in, he had the prestige of being a majority leader in the Senate but also in himself he was considered to be a scholar and carried a great deal of personal prestige. How did he arrive and how did he fit in?*

KREBS: He fit in immediately. I remember his first news conference. He got up. He had his pipe in his hand. He said to the assembled reporters, I'm the new kid on the block. Shoot. I think that is verbatim. That was his style, a man of few words, often a staunch sense of humor. My instructions were, any visitor was to be given 15 minutes. Schedule appointments 15 minutes apart. At the end of 15 minutes, knock on the door and say somebody is waiting. Except if they're from Montana, and then you don't interrupt. He'd do his brief. He was terrific at staff meetings. At one early on staff meeting, maybe his first, we went around the table and everybody passed. Everybody was afraid to speak out. It came back to him and he said, meeting adjourned. That's it. Then the DCM got to everybody and said, you'd better speak your piece. This is no way to do things. I think he soon made everybody comfortable. People relaxed and gave their all. He was terrific to work with. He was very respectful of his people and loved dealing with the Japanese and he stayed longer on the job than anybody ever in history as ambassador to Japan.

*Q: How were his initial meetings with the Japanese? Were they trying to understand him?*

KREBS: I think they held him not only in tremendous respect but in great awe. He was exactly the kind of figure to send. It was considered a great honor to the Japanese. They admired, respected, and came to really love him.

*Q: How about both ambassadors as far as entertaining? Did you get very much involved in guests lists?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: How did these things work?*

KREBS: Hodgson kept a very strong personal interest in these things. He'd go over the guest list very carefully. He was very comfortable. There was a beautiful residence and he was very comfortable in the role of playing the host at these kinds of diplomatic functions. Both he and Maria, his wife, were very gracious hosts. The residence was open a lot. Any section could recommend a function and it was generally adhered to. He was a social person, comfortable in that role. He did it very well.

I didn't spend enough time with Mike Mansfield to see how that evolved. I would think from the nature of his personality that he did it well. His wife, Maureen, was terrific. She was the social one of them. He was more retiring.

*Q: You were there two years. Having taken the language, I take it you were casting a hard eye on whether you wanted to join the Japanese priesthood or not.*

KREBS: Yes, but the job that I would have had in the political section if I had gone directly into Yokohama was by that point gone. It would have been a job doing external political affairs. There just wasn't the right job for me to move into, so I decided to come back. There were times when I tried getting back and somehow there wasn't the right job at the right time. So much in the Foreign Service is timing. It just never seemed to happen. I really burned my bridges when I took this job as executive assistant instead of going into Yokohama and then going into the political section. That happened without my really realizing what kind of decision I was making. At that point, it was a shot in the dark anyway because I didn't know what kind of commitment I would have to Japan. I had no preparation for it. I had never been there.

*Q: So in '77 you came back.*

KREBS: I went direct transfer to Stockholm.

*Q: You were there from '77 to when?*

KREBS: Through '81. I was a political officer.

*Q: What did you do about Swedish?*

KREBS: I learned it on my own. I didn't get FSI training for that. When I knew I was going to Stockholm, I found somebody in the Swedish embassy in Tokyo who had a wife who came over and gave me some Swedish lessons. I spoke German, so I had it a little bit easy to pick it up. I got to know Sweden and worked at my Swedish through the embassy language program. During that period, embassy language programs were much more extensive than they are today. There were more resources for that. I could go in on a daily basis on my lunch hour a couple of times a week and work on my Swedish. It got to be good enough to read the papers and listen to the news and what have you. But don't forget, Sweden is one of those European countries where your average taxi driver or bus driver speaks better English than any of our taxi or bus drivers here in Washington do.

*Q: What was your job?*

KREBS: I was political officer. It was a two man political section. I was junior. At times, there were long periods where the political counselor moved to become the acting DCM and I was left in charge of the section for quite a long time.

*Q: When you arrived there in '77, this was the beginning of the Carter administration.*

KREBS: I got there the end of '77.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

KREBS: The ambassador was a Carter appointee, political, Rodney Kennedy-Minott. He came out of California. He was a history professor involved in Amnesty International, California, who helped organize the Carter campaign when Carter was a peanut farmer from Georgia and nobody had heard of him. He was early on a devotee to Carter and that was his payoff.

*Q: Did you find it was an adjustment to go from Japan to Sweden?*

KREBS: Coming out of the Japan of the Ginza and the bright lights of Tokyo. The professionalism of the embassy. Glitter. Being in the forefront of the American political and economic concerns. I remember landing in Stockholm on a dreary November day, and asking somebody where the downtown was, getting on the subway and going downtown. They gave me the name of the main street, Koensallee. I walked from one end of it to the other and saw three people in the drizzle, two of them that looked like they were stumbling from too much vodka. I went back to my room and cried. I said, to myself I'm not going to make it for three years here. But, the sun came out and I felt more at home in Stockholm than any other place I've ever served.

*Q: How did the ambassador relate? How did he operate?*

KREBS: Somewhat unstructured. He was a nice man but I don't think he had any government experience before that. And so he was kind of relaxed. Your prototypical history professor kind of guy, casual, laid back. I don't think he quite understood the whole role. It took him a while to figure out what his role was and how to play it. I don't know that he ever got particularly comfortable or adept at it. I related well to him. It took a bit of professional handholding to get

the job done. He was the kind of person who liked to deal with the Swedes in a way that he felt the Swedes wanted to be dealt with. I don't think he could bear to convey a message that he didn't think the Swedes wanted to hear. I remember sometimes having to call back after a meeting and explain to the Swedes what the purpose of the demarche really was.

*Q: How were relations with Sweden?*

KREBS: Very interesting. During the heart of the Vietnam War, during the Nixon administration and beyond, the Swedes were relegated to lower floors of the State Department. They had no access above the desk level. At one point, Olaf Palme, who had been prime minister during the tough period, marched in North Vietnamese parades in Stockholm. Relations were almost cut off. It was very sour. During this period, Carter was in. The Swedes had about as professional a foreign office as any I've ever dealt with. We had NATO experts come through Stockholm and say they had better bilateral consultations with the Swedes than they'd had with any NATO partner. They were very well informed, very much on top of things. And their embassy here even during the bad period was very impressively staffed with some of their best people. When I got to Stockholm, a lot of the people who were known as the Washington mafia in the Swedish foreign ministry were in charge back in Stockholm and they were fiercely determined that relations would never sink back to the level that they were during that Vietnam period. They thought it was a terrible mistake for Sweden, for Swedish foreign policy. Their prime effort was to get the Swedish-American relationship back on track. The man who was the second in command of the foreign ministry was the one who was in charge of their Washington office. He was the head of the North American desk. Our prime contact was Larshuka Nielsen, who was also considered their best up and coming officer who was in Washington. People from Washington pretty much took over the foreign ministry then. When I got there, dealing with people like that, I had full run of the foreign ministry. I've never experienced quite as much openness as I did then. I could walk into the foreign ministry on a daily basis and go from office to office and sit and talk with whomever. I had access right up to the very top, second to the foreign minister. It was a superb learning experience for somebody in my position at the time.

*Q: Within the professional Swedish foreign service, was the feeling that this whole confrontational relationship that had developed during Vietnam and the Nixon administration was politically driven? Was this the Swedish people responding or was it a political centered policy based on Olaf Palme?*

KREBS: It was political. Professional foreign office people would not have considered it in Sweden's strategic interest to come to a near break with the U.S.

*Q: One had the feeling during the Vietnam time when the Swedes were having a wonderful time sending their camera crews into the depths of the worst places of the United States and trying to show how awful the U.S. was.*

KREBS: Yes, but no matter who you dealt with in Sweden, there was an undercurrent of pro-American feeling. They might not have liked the Vietnam War( And you had a very strong leftist element. But the center of the Swedish body politic was very friendly to America. Everybody had relatives somewhere there, in Minnesota or wherever. They loved traveling there. One of the clichés was that Sweden is the most American of all countries in Europe. In a way, it

was. I felt more comfortable there, sometimes you'd wake up and you'd feel you were in the heartland of America. But then suddenly something would rock you and you'd say, Oh, these people are certainly not Americans. I think that the average Swede always saw America as a country that they identified closely with.

*Q: The Carter administration came in and was doing a certain amount of cleaning up after the turmoil within the U.S. of the Vietnam War. Was there a significant body of American defectors, people who had either avoided the draft or plain deserted from the military?*

KREBS: There were a few. It wasn't a big thing. I guess they would have melted into the woodwork there. Things had moved on by then. It was the end of the '70s, beginning of the '80s. Carter was following policies with which the Swedes were very sympathetic, although the Swedes were interested in certain American military equipment that Carter didn't want to sell to the Swedes. Technology transfer became an issue. I remember sitting in the sauna with one guy from the foreign ministry who had to deal with this issue and we were going over what the best approach would be to approach the Defense Department and the others on getting permission. It was not a purchase of American equipment. It was transferring the Viggen Swedish aircraft which had American components to India, and whether they were going to be allowed to sell it or not. Carter was saying, No, we're not going to allow you to do it, and it was an important sale for the Swedes. That was a major issue. We dealt with other very interesting issues where we cooperated very closely, including, and this was one where I remember Laif Laiflan, the number two in the ministry, calling to get the ambassador to come down. They were making a proposal on Cambodian refugees and starting the UN operation in Cambodia, a very major move. The ambassador wasn't in the office and he said, Okay, Shel, you come down, and I went down and they made their presentation. We worked very closely on that for months. Sweden and America became the main partners in dealing with the issue. Then came the Iran hostage crisis. The Swedes had some of the Americans who had escaped into the Swedish embassy quietly. Working at getting them out became a very sensitive topic of conversation. But the Swedes were wonderful to deal with on that. They were worth their weight in gold in the kind of cooperation we had. They became our eyes and ears in Teheran during that whole hostage crisis.

*Q: I would imagine that we would be sending all sorts of messages to the Swedes to do this and that.*

KREBS: Yes. And that was my issue. There was a woman in charge of the office who became a terrific friend. I worked with the Swedish foreign office people as if they were the closest of colleagues. It was a wonderful relationship that was never to be repeated in quite those terms. Professionally, it was the best...

*Q: What type of government was in when you were there?*

KREBS: It was the first non-socialist government that they had had. Maybe that made it easier also between Carter on the American side and a non-socialist government on the Swedish side. It was a coalition between the Center Party, a rural oriented party whose main focus was no nuclear power, anti-nuclear energy, and the Liberals, which were in the European sense liberal/pro-business but socially liberal.

*Q: Was Sweden at that time beginning to look at the costs of its social program? The taxes are extremely high.*

KREBS: Taxes were enormously high. It was always an issue. But they were still in a position at that stage where they were very confident of their own system, that the Swedish model had worked and was a model for the rest of the world. They were prosperous, doing extraordinarily well, very successful, and it hadn't yet broken down, although you could see from the perspective of an impartial observer that the work ethic was beginning to collapse. Indeed later on in the '80s the system wasn't functioning as well as it had in the past. Their ability to compete on the world economic stage was faltering.

*Q: What about the attitude towards the Soviet Union?*

KREBS: It was suspicious. Swedes valued what they called their non-aligned role. The first thing you had to learn in dealing with Swedes was this concept of Nordic balance whereby Denmark and Norway were members of NATO but without U.S. bases on their soil or nuclear weapons stored on their soil. Finland had a special connection towards the Soviet Union. They were non-aligned but had to weigh very carefully the interests of their neighbor to the east. And Sweden regarded itself as the fulcrum of this system. The Swedes were always very sensitive to the Finnish interests, but knew that they understood full well where the threat to their security was coming from. They were determined to keep a very strong, solid defense structure and in that sense cooperation with NATO, and especially the U.S., was key.

*Q: Were there incidents of the Soviets sending submarines?*

KREBS: Yes, it was starting.

*Q: I've never quite understood why the Soviets did this, but there were a lot of probes, weren't there?*

KREBS: Yes. It unnerved the Swedish sense of security and if anything pushed them a bit more towards cooperation with... They always cooperated well with NATO and they always considered themselves, their security directly affected by NATO and the US and they somehow fit into a Western European defense structure and model. They were part of the frontline of western defenses. I think the US and NATO counted very strongly on Sweden keeping its defenses up. If there were ever any signs of a slowdown or a weakening of their defenses, we reacted.

*Q: Did Sweden have an unspoken or spoken military tie to Norway?*

KREBS: There was a Nordic council and the leaders of the four countries were very close. Most of their relations were conducted by telephone. The embassies were there, but the leaders met so often and were in such close contact that they operated very closely, very solidly.

*Q: How about the universities? So often, the professors are avowed Marxists and they get to the student body there. It always makes it difficult for Americans.*



KREBS: It didn't work that way in Sweden. It was very solid, very sensible. It wasn't a period of major student unrest anywhere in Europe. But the Swedes are less emotional in their politics than some of the other continental Europeans are.

*Q: Did you get involved in looking at the Swedish policy towards Africa? They had had quite a hand in Tanzania.*

KREBS: Tanzania very strongly, probably more than anyplace else. But also in Kenya and other places. There was what they called SEDA, the Swedish foreign aid organization, their equivalent of AID, and the Swedes gave a bigger proportion of their GNP to foreign aid than any other country. They always aimed towards one percent of GNP and they hit it. They were proud of it. The Swedish taxpayer never questioned that. We give such a small percentage and yet it's still so controversial as to whether to give foreign aid or not. Maybe it fits in with their traditional Lutheran values. But they felt that it was their duty and obligation to support the poor of the world. A lot of it probably was misused, in the sense that it was very generous and it wasn't monitored as closely as it could be, and a lot of it went for political reasons, although there was more of a left-wing tendency in SEDA than there was in the foreign ministry.

*Q: Did you hear anybody begin to question what was happening in Tanzania? Nyerere was the darling of the left, but he really was not the greatest country leader.*

KREBS: No, but that never seemed to matter. It was the fact that there were socialist experiments going on and using money to do some of it never became much of a political issue in Sweden. Your left-wing Social Democrats more or less controlled that aspect of Swedish policy.

*Q: Were there any important visits to Sweden while you were there?*

KREBS: Yes, Vice President Mondale came. He was of Scandinavian ancestry. He had a very successful, warm welcome. A lot of work went into that visit and it was appreciated.

And we had a couple of CODELS. Congressman Rostenkowski had a huge delegation, a planeload of 30-some odd people, and wives and staff and what have you. The Swedes were always overwhelmed by the size and scope of these visits. I remember my Swedish counterpart saying, "My God, you make us feel so small."

*Q: How did you find things socially with the Swedes? I've always understood that they're quite formal.*

KREBS: I socialized mostly with my generation. I was 30ish. No, I found them quite informal. My best friends were Swedes during that period. They were terrific. You partied, you went to restaurants. They all had what they called "stugas," which were their summer cottages and you got invited out to those. There was always wonderful food presented in a beautiful fashion, lots of good wine. It was always very relaxed and not stiff at all, at least by contemporary terms. It was good living.

*Q: The Carter administration came down heavily on human rights, which must have struck quite*

*a responsive chord in Sweden.*

KREBS: Oh, yes, indeed. Of course, the ambassador came out of Amnesty International. Joan Baez came for a concert. I once hosted her in Vietnam. This was later. We haven't gotten to that yet. But I went back to Southeast Asia while I was in Stockholm on a refugee TDY when the boat people crisis hit. I had met Joan Baez there in Southeast Asia and hosted her for a weekend. She came to Stockholm for a concert and through the ambassador we invited her to the residence. (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying Joan Baez came and you were all at the residence-*

KREBS: Sitting on the floor, talking human rights and what have you. She mentioned that she had never been in an ambassador's residence before and never would have considered it before, but given this ambassador and his Amnesty International credentials, she accepted it. We had a tremendous session on human rights. That was very much a matching of interests between the Swedes and the Americans and the Carter administration on that particular issue.

*Q: You left there when?*

KREBS: Just around Christmas of '80.

*Q: The next time, we'll talk about your leaving Stockholm. Also, you said you were called back to deal with the boat people crisis coming out of Vietnam. We'll pick that up.*

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*Today is June 26, 2003. We're talking about 1980. You had been in Stockholm. Then you went back to the Department in 1980?*

KREBS: In 1981, back to the Department. I somehow got hoodwinked into a job in ACDA.

*Q: Before we get into that, did you get involved with the refugees?*

KREBS: While I was in Stockholm... We've gone over my Vietnam experience. I had learned Vietnamese and I had been back twice, once on the first tour and then to Vietnam when the Paris Peace Treaty was finalized. I went back yet again from Stockholm. When the boat people crisis hit in 1979, I got a cable in from the Department asking me if I would be willing to go back to East Asia on a TDY (temporary duty). Actually, it was more of an order to go back and help out with the boat people crisis. Thousands of people were just getting on boats and taking their fate in their hands. If they didn't drown, they wound up in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines.

*Q: The North Vietnamese communists had taken over Vietnam in '75. What had prompted this all of a sudden in '79?*

KREBS: I wish I knew. As the North Vietnamese took over, I guess the economic situation steadily worsened. In '75 there was a massive escape out of Vietnam. That was the first real

strong wave of Vietnamese refugees into this country. There must have been a slow but steady flow between '75 and '79. But over that period, new economic policies had devastating effects on the Vietnamese economy. People were going hungry. The harvests were failing. I guess people also discovered that there was a good business in getting people out. What had initially been acquiescence to the North Vietnamese victory in the South became steady disillusionment as the economy worsened, as the political system hardened, crackdowns... People felt there was no hope and no future and they got themselves out... Some paid their way. It started with fisherman, who loaded their boats, and they took off to the high seas.

*Q: You came back to Washington to work with this?*

KREBS: No, I was sent directly from Stockholm to Singapore. Singapore became a focal point to deal with the refugees. There were some in Singapore, but Singapore had a very hardline approach of not accepting people for the most part. The islands of northern Indonesia were handled out of the office in Singapore. There was a ferry that went from Singapore to an island called Bin Than, where we had large camps. Then there were these Natuna Islands out in the middle of the South China Sea, where 40-50,000 refugees had landed.

*Q: What were you doing?*

KREBS: We had a couple people out there. We would rotate in and out of the office in Singapore to the various camps that were spread out. My job was twofold, first of all, discover where these camps were and finding the refugees. And second, we set up an interview program. We had INS people come out. We would interview the refugees and a system was set up which indicated who would go where. You were given different categories. I think there were five grades: if you worked for the U.S. government, if you had relatives in the States... The lowest category had no connection and no relations with the U.S. But the idea was to keep a pipeline of people going through. The Refugee and Migration Office of the UN was also involved. There were any number of different countries who were out there – Canada, Australia was very active, the French and others, the Swedes and the Swiss. It was a very lively, effective, and humanitarian kind of program. So I was working in helping to set up the program for the refugees, mostly in Indonesia. As part of that, I flew to Jakarta, met with the embassy people, and then people of the Indonesian government, and we negotiated. I helped negotiate a plan in which we had leased a helibarge, one of these huge barges that was used in the oil industry there, and that you could land a helicopter on board. We leased a helicopter and also bought a boat. This was a special thing to get to the 40-50,000 refugees in the Natuna Islands. There was no landing strip there. It was in the middle of nowhere. So what we had to do was fly by helicopter from Singapore and land on the barge in the middle of the South China Sea and then put our staff on the barge. We lived on the barge for a couple of weeks at a time. Then we had a boat we called the Ivan Cat IV, which we had purchased. We would use that to go from the barge offshore of the islands and then get on a little motor boat that would take us right onto the shore. We'd interview the people there and do the work.

*Q: What was your impression of the people you were seeing?*

KREBS: Oh, what a mixed bag. Everything from generals and colonels and sergeants in the military who were escaping to peasant families and illiterate fisherman. Some people were

sending their minor children out unaccompanied, just putting them on the boat, saying, “You go. You get to the States first and then you can send for us.” Then they would have a base to escape to. You saw people who you thought were going to be just incredibly successful, very highly motivated, and you saw illiterate young tattooed men who you said, “Oh, God, these guys are going to wind up in street gangs on the streets of LA in trouble.” They’d never get a job because they had no skills. It covered the whole range of Vietnamese society.

*Q: Were you able to sort through them fairly well?*

KREBS: I think we did, although in the early days, the philosophy was to just accept as many as possible. In our agreements with the host countries, in order to encourage them to accept people and not turn them away we had to agree to keep a pipeline, a steady flow, out. If they were turned away, often the boats were not terribly seaworthy and they would sink and people would drown, so for humanitarian reasons we encouraged the host governments to accept them. Of course, the Americans weren’t in the lead on this, and there was significant help from other recipient countries.

*Q: By this time, I assume there were NGOs.*

KREBS: Oh, yes.

*Q: Had the NGOs learned to work together pretty well?*

KREBS: Oh, I think so. The ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) was very active, and various UN groups. There were at times points of conflict, but for the most part I thought it was fairly effective. The other aspect of my particular job was to oversee a small operation within Singapore. They called it the Hawkins Road Camp. They had several hundred people coming in that had somehow been admitted there. Each camp had an NGO organization. Often it was a religious outfit that helped provide the humanitarian aspects of it. In Singapore it was Catholic Relief Services [CRS]. In some of the others it was the Lutherans or some other outfit that took responsibility for running the camp. In that Singapore camp there was a young fellow there who was the CRS representative and who is now a Foreign Service officer and remains a close friend. The idea was to get those people resettled as soon as possible.

*Q: How about the immigration service? Way back, I worked in refugees when I was in West Germany. We were dealing with refugees in Germany. The immigration service tended to be a little more the policemen then. How did you find them?*

KREBS: It varied with the person you were working with. Some were a little more sensitive, some a bit less sensitive. Often they came with no real feel for the Vietnamese and their history and culture. I considered that my job was to sit with them and, as people came through to work with them, to help them understand the situation and these people. The INS made the final decision but one was able to exert a good deal of influence on how they saw individual cases. You learned to work together and make it work. I think it was a cooperative effort.

*Q: I would imagine that at a certain point you’d be talking about people that nobody wanted.*

KREBS: There were a certain number of people in each camp who had been there for an extraordinarily long period of time that nobody wanted. Some must have stayed on for years until the end when these camps were finally abolished. I don't know what the ultimate outcome of some of these cases were. I remember reading years later about the Hong Kong camp, where some people were involuntarily returned, forced onto planes and sent back to Vietnam. This was years after the initial crisis, when the whole Vietnamese attitude had softened somewhat.

*Q: You came back for regular duty to Washington for ACDA.*

KREBS: I was recruited to the job while the Carter administration was still in place and told what an active, lively outfit it was going to be and the travel I would be doing. Of course, in Stockholm, the Swedes were so active in arms control issues. As a political officer there, I had gotten involved in arms control issues. With the onset of the Reagan administration I got back and found a rudderless, leaderless office with literally nothing to do. ACDA was completely on hold and a whole new approach to arms control was underway under the new administration. I was miserable. I was told, "Just read the files." I started making a pest of myself in Personnel. "Look, I want out. This is not the position I bargained for." I was more or less told to, "Take your medicine, little boy, and go sit in the corner and do what you're told." It was not a happy time. That was the closest I came to resigning.

*Q: How long did you...*

KREBS: This is where my connections in the Refugee Bureau served me well. I had some good friends there. I had done well by them and I think they appreciated my service to them. I had really helped with the organization and setting things in train. By early '81 there was a major problem. It was still flooded with refugees. So, friends there pulled some strings and got me more TDYs out in southeast Asia. I packed my bags and went off to first Malaysia and then Thailand to work some more on the whole refugee issue. The Thailand one was particularly interesting because there we were dealing with not so much boat people but people who came across Cambodia by land and who were heavily Khmer refugees from the Khmer Rouge who were operating on the other side of the border still. Plus you'd get Vietnamese who were coming across Cambodia and you had to keep those two groups very much apart. They hated each other. There would be a major conflict if the two were ever brought together.

*Q: You were working in Thailand on temporary duty-*

KREBS: I had an apartment in Bangkok and a cottage that we had on the Khmer border. I'd be going back and forth spending maybe two weeks on the border and then another 10 days or so back in Bangkok. It was kind of an interesting job. I was very close then with Ambassador John Gunther Dean, who took a very profound interest in Cambodia. I worked tightly with the political section.

*Q: When were you doing this?*

KREBS: This was '81 to '82. At a certain point we had to break the assignment with ACDA.

*Q: While you were in Thailand, this was a confused period wasn't it? There was a series of wars*

*going on. The Khmer Rouge were doing things.*

KREBS: There was insurgency. By that point the Khmer Rouge had been thrown out of power in Phnom Penh, but those hills and mountains in rural areas around the border were still very much under the control of the Khmer Rouge. I got to meet with some of the Khmer Rouge. At one point we went into a Khmer Rouge camp with the UN. There the UN was very much in the lead. We had accompanied them across a couple of times and met informally and unofficially. These were some of the strangest people I've ever come across in my life. It seemed like another species of human being. You could see the cruelty in the eyes, the undercurrent of a whole different set of rules and ways of behaving and conducting oneself than I had ever seen in any group of people ever in my life, or ever would again. It was a horror show.

*Q: What were you doing with them?*

KREBS: These camps were basically Khmer Rouge refugee camps. These were Khmer refugees there. It was basically humanitarian and they were getting a certain amount of supplies from the UN. It was to oversee the distribution and the use of the supplies, to make sure civilians in the camps, who were literally imprisoned there, were being fed and getting what they needed at least to survive.

*Q: Were you under any instructions of how to deal with these unofficial Khmer Rouge?*

KREBS: No. It was all done unofficially. When I went, it was only one or two times.

*Q: Were we concerned that the Khmer Rouge as an organization and a military force was using these camps as an R&R place where they could get away from the fighting and rest up and take some supplies and go in and fight again?*

KREBS: Of course there was always that. And then there was also the fear that the supplies being given would go to their soldiers, rather than to the civilians for whom they were intended. It was not the mission of the UN to feed and supply Khmer Rouge military.

*Q: Were you monitoring this?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: I'm told one of the things that groups that deal with refugees learn in time of civil war is, do not have small packages of food, because these can be taken for military supplies and getting out. You want to have big rice bowls, or the equivalent thereof, so the people have to eat there and they can't pack this stuff up and go away. Were we looking at how supplies were being used?*

KREBS: That was the UN's role, yes. The amount of control you could have in a Khmer Rouge camp going in was very difficult.

*Q: How about the Vietnamese? This must have been a very difficult thing for somebody from Vietnam to get all the way to Thailand.*

KREBS: It was difficult, and the Vietnamese who made it were remarkably industrious. If you went into the Vietnamese side of the camps, you just saw energy, always working, studying. The Khmer took life at a much more leisurely pace in these camps.

*Q: I'm told the Vietnamese, as compared to the Cambodians or the Laotians, are a different breed of cat.*

KREBS: If you have to generalize and stereotype, which I hate to do, there is more than a small element of truth to that. They're much more aggressive in a good way in the sense of high energy, high motivation, high activity.

*Q: Were you involved in getting the Vietnamese out and into the immigration process?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: I take it with the Cambodians it was more a waiting thing.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: Wait until things clear up. But with Vietnamese, it was, "Let's move them on."*

KREBS: "Let's move the Vietnamese out, get them out of harm's way." With the Cambodians, they were on Cambodian territory. It was border territory, questionable. They were not really refugees. They were still on their home turf.

*Q: How did you find Thai officials?*

KREBS: Helpful but tough. It depended on the official. They were protective of their own sovereignty, as well they should be. I've always loved working with the Thais generally. Some were less helpful. But for the most part the Thais have this wonderful attitude towards life. Even the military, who were more disciplined and who were protective of their own rights, sovereignty, etc., and able to put their foot down on what you could do and what the limits are, were still wonderful people to work with.

*Q: You were there doing this for how long?*

KREBS: It was a kind of limbo period, once the assignment to ACDA was finally broken. Personnel was not happy with me for walking out on ACDA and doing this. At that point, I was not terribly pleased with the direction in which things were going for me in the Foreign Service. I thought "What am I going to do? Am I going to stay, or use my law degree?" I was still young enough, in my 30s, to go out and start another career. I didn't know which way things were going to turn and I determined that I was going to wait it out. "You offer me the right job and I'll take it. I can hang in here as long as can be and when it's time to go, it's time to go." At one point I had taken the business board exams and the grades that I came out with were high enough to get to a top program like Harvard. Maybe I should have done that in the long run. I already had my law degree, but I waited it out. Personnel came with one, two, three different job offers,

none of which I was enamored with. I thought I needed a good job back in the Department to learn what the State Department was all about and how it operated. I didn't feel that confident of how to play the game within the State Department yet, and I waited it out. Suddenly you had a fellow from my A-100 class who was in a good position on the China desk and saw my name on a list of available officers. We had been good friends in the early stages of our careers. He said, "Let's get Shel onto the China desk. There's a good job there." I was offered the job to handle political work on the China desk and that was a job offer I couldn't refuse. I came back, and that was the beginning of the turnaround for my career. I got back on track and stayed on track from thereon. I had almost fallen off the whole career train.

*Q: Going back a little to ACDA, here you are in a new administration, which is always a rough time anyway, which wasn't paying much attention to arms control. Disinterest is probably the term.*

KREBS: Disinterest, politicizing, bringing in people from outside and not really bringing in the career Foreign Service people or anyone not identified with the administration.

*Q: I can understand your dissatisfaction, but what about the other people around you?*

KREBS: I shared an office with a fellow who just was very interested in the stock market. Then there was Ambassador Buffum, who had been in Geneva as ambassador and was brought back. He came in and got a third desk in the office. We discussed the stock market. I had never had any interest in that. I began learning. If I got anything out of the job, it was that. I started investing and it was a good time to do that. But this one fellow, I don't know whether he retired or quit, but he wound up a stockbroker in town somewhere. But there was really nothing to do. When you took somebody with his credentials and background and substance, and Ambassador Buffum was just sitting there with nothing to do also. It was shameful.

*Q: You went on the China desk about '82?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: How long were you there?*

KREBS: Two years.

*Q: What was your piece of the action?*

KREBS: I was considered immodestly the best drafter on the desk. One of my main jobs there was to be the official speechwriter. Anything that the President or the Secretary had to say about China came out of my Wang machine. The beginning of the Reagan administration was a period of distrust of China. We were going to support Taiwan and stay away, and the relationship sunk quickly to a low. Suddenly the realization hit that we weren't going to be able to station forces and prepare for war against a country like China at the same time as we were geared up for the Cold War against the Soviets. The push came to improve relations with China, that it was in our interests to do so. A series of high level visits ensued. First Secretary Shultz to China and then the foreign minister of China to the U.S. Then the prime minister, Zhao Ziyang, came to



Washington. Then it culminated with the Reagan trip to China. I did all the drafting of every major address by all the principals on all of those visits. My portfolio also included domestic internal Chinese politics. There was another fellow who did external Chinese foreign relations. So I had to monitor all internal developments in China, do all the papers and what have you.

*Q: We'd spent decades developing a Sovietologist corps, learning to read between the lines in Pravda and other papers, and Kremlinology and that whole thing. Here you are, the new boy on the block and you're supposed to be looking at internal affairs when it's not a very open society. Did you find yourself up against the China experts? How did you learn to be able to know what was going on in China?*

KREBS: You're a good political officer and you read. People at the highest levels weren't interested in all the little details. We had wonderful China experts in the embassy and all the consulates in China. The game was expanding. There was a voluminous amount of really detailed reporting coming in, excellent reporting. I just saw my job as distilling the information from that so that the non-China experts at the top and others would be interested in it. As a non-expert myself, you develop in the game quickly. That's the role of a good Foreign Service political officer. You learn quickly. If you're a quick learner and you're interested, you can do the job. So, yes, it was a challenge, but it wasn't something that was beyond the realm of possibility. You just took the stuff and you read it and you absorbed and you figured out what was a minor detail that's of interest mainly to the INR types or the China folks. Maybe they can read that themselves and get all the detail. My job was to distill the essence out of the reporting and make sure people above me knew what it is that they should know, that if there was going to be a high level visit or an exchange visit, that the people going or coming who were engaging in the dialogue knew what was essential to know, without having to know what was going on in some small province somewhere – just as it's not essential for a Chinese diplomat maybe to know about the state of the legislature in Nevada.

*Q: You were saying you got very much involved in drafting statements and things of this nature. Did somebody come to you and say, "I want a statement that will say this or so" or was somebody giving you the thrust of what you were going to say?*

KREBS: No. You learn quickly. I had a good way with words in that sense. People began to look at me as the principal drafter of statements. Whenever there was a visit, the head of the desk or the front office would say, "Okay, Shel, prepare the welcoming statement, the banquet address," whatever. One of the highlights for me was I drafted the Reagan speech in China for the banquet. That was given front page coverage in the major Chinese newspapers. But then before that, when the Chinese prime minister came to Washington, I was invited on the White House lawn for the welcoming ceremony and there was President Reagan on the platform reciting my words verbatim. For me that was a great moment of pride.

*Q: Who was Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs?*

KREBS: It was Paul Wolfowitz.

*Q: He's now the number two in the Pentagon, a very powerful figure.*

*Was there a feeling that we've got to make this new administration aware of the importance of China and get them involved? Did you feel there was a push?*

KREBS: We had a very strong office director, Bill Rope, who I think pushed that point. I don't know that some of the front office people were as enthused about the whole thing or as aggressive in getting this point across as he was, but he pushed and persevered. He was a terrific bureaucratic infighter.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the role of the National Security Council?*

KREBS: I wasn't at that level.

*Q: How did Taiwan factor in from your perspective?*

KREBS: You had to be sensitive to the Taiwanese. We had just negotiated the Shanghai Agreement and Taiwan arms sales. The White House, of course, would have been even more sensitive than the State Department to the Taiwan factor. The State Department had its sensitivities, but within the East Asia and Pacific Bureau, there was all of the Taiwan desk, which had joined our office. It was more of a minor player. The action was on getting the China relationship on track and made to work in a way that would be useful to counterbalance our relationship with the Soviets at the time, and whatever action or activity was transpiring on that front.

*Q: How was China perceived – as benign, a potential enemy, a potential ally? The Cold War was red hot at that point.*

KREBS: Yes, at that point, it was a transition stage, at least within the context of the Reagan administration, where at the beginning they were considered a potentially hostile force, to the realization that friendship and cooperation with China would serve our national security interests and let's make it work that way. We were expanding, opening up consulates, and suddenly the number of Chinese students coming to the States multiplied by leaps and bounds. The realization was dawning of how important that relationship could be, and how useful it could be to us in our greater global strategies.

*Q: So we weren't treating China... saying, "Right now, it's handy, but we'd better be ready to back away from this at any point?"*

KREBS: No, the idea was "Let's move forward carefully. This relationship has incredible significance." Then it became over time an extremely important commercial and economic relationship. We had pressures coming from the economic community, the business community, to expand and to keep this healthy and growing.

*Q: Although you were dealing in internal affairs, on the borders, did you feel that China was an expansionist power or had it pretty well reached its limits?*

KREBS: I don't know that we ever saw China as an expansionist power, unless you take into account Tibet and the threat against Taiwan. I don't think we ever saw China looking to expand

its territory or its control elsewhere in Southeast Asia. You had the issue that may still be dragging on over some islands in the South China Sea where there is conflict with Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia over who controls the Paracels and the Spratlys. But in terms of China about to invade Thailand or India or Burma, that just didn't factor in.

*Q: Looking internally, were you seeing the divide between the coastal areas of China and the interior, where the coastal places were beginning to really benefit by the economic changes and the interior was not.*

KREBS: You didn't see it in political terms. It didn't really have any political significance at that point. The role of the coastal states was more of being the economic and commercial vanguard.

*Q: Things didn't translate that way. Did you see any deterioration of the party per se, the real discipline of the party?*

KREBS: You saw a transition from the leadership being more or less designated by Deng Xiaoping to Hu Yaobang, who was groomed as the lead party leader, and Zhao Ziyang, who was the prime minister and in control of the government machinery, with Deng Xiaoping on top of the heap and the military. That all came long after I was gone to a total collapse with the Tiananmen Square issue in 1989. Some of it was the replacement of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. We presumed that they were inevitably going to be the next generation of leadership and suddenly hardliners began to think of them as much too liberal and moving too fast. But this was already after I had left the China game.

*Q: You left by '84. Whither?*

KREBS: I moved upstairs to the seventh floor. I was taken on as a senior watch officer in the Operations Center.

*Q: Did you do that the usual year and a half?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: So that would be '84 to '86.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: What sort of things were you... I guess your drafting ability was one of the things they enjoyed.*

KREBS: Less drafting and more operational skills. You're turning out a product every day. We were doing the morning report for the Secretary and cable summaries. Part of my job was - these were often drafted by junior officers - to make sure that the final product was in good shape and I took pride in turning out what I wanted to be the best of the summaries and written product for the Secretary. For me the benefit of that job was not so much the drafting opportunities, but learning the operational skills and how the Department works, who's who, who does what, who has respect in the Department, who has a little less respect, which bureaus operate how. It took

me until then to really learn the ropes of what the Department was about and how it worked. I envied the junior officers who got that view early on. I wished I had not wandered aimlessly, but knew what the ropes were early on like that.

*Q: Did you get any feel for who was on top? Each administration, it depends on the Secretary of State. How did you feel the system operated?*

KREBS: You had a very strong Secretary in George Shultz at the time. You saw the elements of conflict, you saw the cooperation and the lack thereof, between the Department and the White House. Robert McFarlane was the head of the NSC. You had a certain view of the relationship between State and Defense. You saw the personal relationships and how they impacted. And then the varying bureaus. This was still a time of “plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose.” The Middle East was hot and the NEA bureau was a major player, but it was also the time of the Iran Contra issue. Ollie North was calling us regularly from the White House wanting information on this, that, or the other thing.

*Q: Were you under any instructions about Ollie North? Were any warning signals going off?*

KREBS: I think we were careful.

*Q: Did you sense a certain tension between the State Department and the NSC at that point?*

KREBS: Yes, a certain amount of going it alone, of playing outside the rules and outside the game. When I got those calls, my staff automatically gave them to me and I would try and refer them to the bureau and let them handle it, but really not give anything away.

*Q: Did you get any feel between the personal relationship between George Shultz and Casper Weinberger as Secretary of Defense?*

KREBS: You felt some of the tensions between State and Defense.

*Q: Did you get any feel that the President was calling the shots or did it seem to be more like a court fighting over things?*

KREBS: The President’s involvement was hard to gauge. You dealt with subordinates. You had words and whispers and rumors and what have you about what the President’s approach was on this, that, or the other. One issue that came to the fore during that time, and which we were constant intermediaries on, was the President’s visit to Bitburg in Germany, and a cemetery with old SS officers buried there. There were very strong pressures from people like Elie Wiesel and others here and elsewhere saying, “Don’t go. It’s not your place.” Constant back and forth between our ambassador in Germany, Arthur Burns, and the Secretary’s office, if not the Secretary himself, with the President being torn, wanting to be supportive of Helmut Kohl but at the same time being pushed and pulled in every which direction. That was one in which the President was involved. But on most issues you were dealing with staffers, maybe high level staffers, from the NSC as well as from within the Department.

*Q: Did you go on any trips?*

KREBS: Yes, at the end of my stay, I accompanied Secretary Shultz on this trip to Helsinki to the anniversary meeting of the Helsinki Accords. That was a trip in which he met the president of Georgia, Shevardnadze, for the first time. We helped set that up.

*Q: Were you picking up any emanations that things were beginning to change with the Soviets?*

KREBS: During that period of time, the year and a half or so I was in the Ops Center, it was constantly like a death watch. There was a period where one after another died. I think we went through four. And we were always waiting for Hafez Assad to kick the bucket also in Syria. INR or the CIA or whatever was putting out word that Hafez Assad was on his death bed and was going to kick the bucket any day now. You had to discount that after a while because the old guy hung on. But in the case of the Soviets, it was true.

*Q: It was during a press conference or something where President Reagan was asked, "Why don't you work for closer ties with the Soviet leaders" and he said, "Well, they're always dying on me."*

KREBS: He wasn't off the mark on that one.

*Q: In '86, whither?*

KREBS: From there I went to Congressional Relations. I went up to the H Bureau. I felt that was another piece of the Washington pie I didn't understand, so that would make a good basket of experience. This was going to be my major Washington period. I did a desk job on an important desk. Then the Ops Center to see how the State Department really functioned. And then to see what Congress was all about and how State interacted with the Hill, with the Legislative Branch. So I spent two years.

*Q: From '86 to '88 in the H Bureau. Who was the head of the bureau?*

KREBS: It was a guy named Ed Fox, a Reagan appointee.

*Q: How did he operate?*

KREBS: He was a very congenial, jovial guy. He knew his way around the Hill meeting with people and what have you. It was actually a good bureau during that period. He was replaced by someone, I don't remember who it was. It was just as I was leaving. It was a woman. I know the morale of the bureau sunk dramatically after that. Ed paid good attention to the Foreign Service professionals. He was good with the State Department staff. The bureau was organized with a political assistant secretary. You had a couple of DASs, one in charge of the Senate and one for the House, both political appointees. Then you had a career DAS who sort of supervised the whole operation of the bureau. It was a guy named Mark Johnson who subsequently became an ambassador and is now retired. He was wonderful, very good with the staff, very hard working. I thought the bureau operated superbly well. There's always going to be a certain amount of resentment in the State Department against the Hill for intruding on our operations and a lack of understanding of the Hill culture and vice versa where the Hill says, "Hey, we're paying the bills

and you guys just don't want to include us." I conceived of our job as trying to bridge that gap as best as possible, and to a large extent I think we did. We tried to build confidence in the bureaus and in the Department that we're doing the job and helping get the State Department's interests across to important players on the Hill, and helping the players on the Hill appreciate the work that the State Department was doing.

*Q: It was an interesting period that we had learned to live with for some time, and that is with a Republican President and a Democratic Congress.*

KREBS: And it worked well. I went back again for a couple of weeks when it was the reverse. It was during the Clinton period when it was a Democratic President and a Republican Hill and they were far less tolerant than the old people of what the administration was doing. It was a very different ball game up there. But it was a wonderful chapter for me in my own personal development.

*Q: Did you have any piece of the action?*

KREBS: Yes, a big piece of the action. My main bureau was EAP, East Asia. We developed a wonderful working relationship with Steve Solarz on the House side. He was chairman of the Subcommittee. We had a breakfast meeting every month that the Assistant Secretary was in, Gaston Sigur. We always did a monthly breakfast meeting for people from the Hill and they met people from the bureau. We kept the communication ongoing. Then there was a very cooperative relationship with us on China or whatever, any piece of the Asian action. Mark Johnson, the career DAS, did major work on the authorization bill for the State Department. He used me as his right hand man to work with the Hill on doing State Department's authorization. That was interesting.

Then I covered a couple of other bureaus. I worked with Jerry Bremer on counterterrorism, which was a little less high profile than it is today, but it was still important. I worked with the IO bureau. Alan Keyes had been Assistant Secretary at the time. He really burned bridges on the Hill fast and furious.

*Q: Alan Keyes is perpetually running for President. How did he strike you at that time?*

KREBS: How do you want me to answer that diplomatically?

*Q: He's a public figure.*

KREBS: Yes. He's the only one who I ever saw get thrown out of a congressman's office. The chairman of the subcommittee on the House side that dealt with the UN issues said that unless there was an apology or something like that, he was going to only authorize one dollar to the IO bureau. Keyes came across in his relations with the Hill and people there almost the same way as in his political career: tough, strong, articulate, ideological and convinced of his approach, and he didn't have much room for tolerating any contrary opinions. One time where he was testifying in the Senate Pat Moynihan said, "Either you leave or I leave." He was confrontational. Let's put it as diplomatically as possible. He took a very confrontational approach to the Hill. There was not much one could do about that.

*Q: From the H bureau, what were you doing, sort of cleaning up behind him, going back and talking to people and saying...*

KREBS: Playing the super behind the elephant.

*Q: Saying, "This, too, shall pass. For God's sake, we've got to keep the government going?" Was there any attempt, obviously not by you, but at the top of the H bureau to say, "For God's sake, get rid of this guy. He's counterproductive?"*

KREBS: It wasn't my job. I don't recall how long he lasted. I don't think he was there all that long.

*Q: I've talked to people who served with him and they said they spent an awful lot of time listening to lectures.*

KREBS: Yes. That is exactly the approach that a congressman won't tolerate. They don't like being lectured to. That was Alan Keyes' approach, so that caused certain confrontations.

*Q: How did you see the staff? I imagine that the Foreign Relations Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee were places that you dealt with.*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: The staffs are often terribly important.*

KREBS: Staffs are extraordinarily important. Those were my main contacts. You dealt basically with the staff, not with the congressmen directly, although on occasion you did, especially if you went on trips with them. But the staffs were human beings. You connect with some and you don't with others. Some are very protective and very controlling and very secretive. Others are very helpful and very outgoing and the chemistry works. It's human relations. I always play this game of diplomacy in a way of trying to be outgoing and open and communicative and often found that that worked well for me to gain the information and the connections that I needed to do my job.

*Q: You mentioned Stephen Solarz. He was sort of unique. He used to travel around the world and work 18 hours a day just absorbing information.*

KREBS: Planning his travel and his trips was sometimes a full-time job. When he was going, boy, it was full-time. A lot of embassies hate when CODELs (Congressional Delegations) come. It's a burden. When Stephen Solarz went someplace, embassies in East Asia really appreciated it. He opened doors. His instructions, more or less, in planning his trips was: he wanted three appointments in the morning, a game of tennis in the day, and three appointments in the afternoon. He knew exactly who he wanted to see. He didn't travel with a big entourage. Cables with real substantive, interesting, elucidating information would come out of each post that he visited. There were certain bureaus or people in the State Department that didn't appreciate him, but I think most people who were serious about their job really welcomed when he went

somewhere, what he produced, and what the embassies were able to produce as a result of his trips. He really moved events and promoted good contacts in the various places he visited.

*Q: Were there any major developments in relationships that you got involved with at this time?*

KREBS: There was so much going on because you had so many different bureaus in play. But a highlight was when I went with Senator Leahy, Senator Daschle, and Senator Stafford from Vermont to China. I accompanied them. It was the first Senate trip ever to go into Tibet.

*Q: How did that work?*

KREBS: I guess Leahy was considered a friend of China by the Chinese at the time. He was head of the Agriculture Committee and so that was important, but he was also taking over the job as the chairman of the Subcommittee on International Appropriations. This was very important, the appropriators for the State Department budget. The embassy in Beijing put the agricultural attaché in charge as his control officer. It took my getting on line with the DCM and the ambassador saying, "Look, this is not an agricultural visit. Mr. Leahy is going to be in charge of the State Department's budget. He's very serious. He wants to go to Tibet. He's going all over. This is going to be a very serious, substantive visit." I was able to push the embassy to take it more seriously. There were some very nice cables that came back from the ambassador after that about the work that I did with that. But I took him to Tibet. It was a very, very interesting trip. We met dissidents. I pointed out to the embassy that Daschle was a very up and coming young senator, still in his first term, and that they should take this CODEL very, very seriously. The Chinese had put a private plane on for us.

*Q: The Chinese authorities must have been kind of concerned about a bunch of senators going to Tibet.*

KREBS: They were. It was the first time. They had them well herded. But through friends who were in the consulate in Chung Doo I had gotten the names of some people who were outside, some Australians and others who were working in Tibet doing things. They put me on to these people. I was able to grab Leahy's chief foreign policy guy and we went off and met in hidden areas, didn't follow the organized part of the tour, and went off and met with monks and dissidents and others.

*Q: What impression were you getting about Chinese rule in Tibet?*

KREBS: Of course, it's clear that Tibet was an entity unto itself, a separate culture and a separate people, and very had a very engaged dissident movement going on and yet being very tightly controlled by the Chinese. All you could do was observe and talk and listen and hear the unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and get some glimpse of what the difficulty was.

*Q: There are lots of congressional visits, both Senate and House, and staff visits, too. You mentioned Solarz and this group of senators who went to Tibet. These were serious ones. But you must have gotten involved with other ones which were "junkets," just getting out and wanting to see things. I imagine China would be on the list of getting out there and looking at the antiquities of China and all that.*



KREBS: Less so in those early days in China. I've been on junkets, too, where you get your plane from the military and wives are coming along and doing lots of shopping and the plane is loaded down with stuff. Senators Daschle and Leahy were extraordinarily serious people and this was a very substantive and serious trip. My feeling about CODELs is that they're important. If you take people who don't know anything about a country, who have legislative responsibilities, and expose them, you take their visit seriously, you have to take it for granted or assume that these are serious people, even if sometimes you go into the control room and have a totally different feeling. Embassies make mistakes in underappreciating and underutilizing congressional visits. It seems to me incumbent on an embassy and an ambassador to take every CODEL exceedingly seriously and use the visit, even if it's against the will of the CODEL, to impose as much information, as much knowledge, as much exposure to the various issues as you can possibly dump on them. A "junket" is an easy term to use, but an embassy could take what otherwise could be regarded as a junket and turn it into something in the long run that could be very useful to the State Department, just by educating. The problem today is that we have so few legislators who are traveling, who are exposed to international events, who are familiar with the issues that we deal with in the State Department. It's not helpful to the nation or to the Department, for our parochial interests or to our overall national security and economic interests. So, the more we work well, work constructively and seriously, taking even the least serious congressman more seriously than he might otherwise deserve, the better it is. I was the control officer in Sweden for Dan Rostenkowski, who was a very powerful guy, a congressman from Chicago. He was chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the House. He came out with a planeload of people. We had to put a driver and a control officer on his wife and secretary just for shopping. People got to drinking a little too much maybe and what have you. It was everyone's definition of a junket, although Rostenkowski is an extraordinarily serious guy. We had a great trip in Sweden. I took him to the legislature. It was Easter weekend and the Swedes take their holidays very seriously, but everybody stayed in and did the visit and did their work. It was a good visit and they got an appreciation for what the embassy and Sweden was about. The Swedes were able to get their message across to an important group of legislators. While I was there, a cable came from the next stop of this CODEL. The essence of the cable was, "We understand you'll want a light program and don't want things too much involved, so we're programming you lightly." Well, Rostenkowski was in the control room, and when he saw that cable, he went ballistic. A cable like that falls into the hands of, at that time, the Jack Andersons... saying, "Here's another big junket not wanting to do anything serious, just be able to shop and what have you." I learned a lesson. I saw his reaction as not very good for my onward tour in H later on. At the State Department, we err in not taking Congress seriously.

*Q: Well, it's been pointed out to me in many of these interviews and in my own experience that here is a chance that few civil servants ever get to have the complete attention of a congressman or a senator to explain what you're doing and to win them over to whatever you want. Sometimes you've got them for a couple of days on rather intimate terms.*

KREBS: That's precisely it. You could be sitting on the bus touring the Great Wall of China or something, but you have that hour's bus ride and you've got their ear and full attention before you take that walk and do the sightseeing to get your substantive message across. That's exceedingly important.

*Q: This is a good place to stop. We're going to pick this up in 1988. Where did you go?*

KREBS: I went into Dutch language training and then out as consul general in Antwerp.

*Q: Alright, we'll pick this up then.*

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*Today is June 30, 2003. You were in Antwerp from '89 to when?*

KREBS: '92. Three years. The last consul general.

*Q: How would you describe Belgian-American relations?*

KREBS: Belgian-American relations couldn't have been better at the time. I gather there are problems now because of the Belgian opposition to the war in Iraq, but while I was there we went through Desert Storm, the first of the Gulf wars, and America took on heroic proportions in the eyes and minds of the Belgians and there was an incredible welcome at virtually every event, and "Congratulations on the liberation of Kuwait." The port of Antwerp was also used for what was known as Reforger. That was an important element of my job there. All the elements of all the war materiel coming from the States went through the port of Antwerp on its way to Germany.

*Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?*

KREBS: First we had a career ambassador, which was unusual - Mike Glitman, who had negotiated one of the main arms control agreements with the Soviets. I guess that was his reward for it. He was pretty much an arms control/pol-mil expert. He was very much a professional, a very good ambassador, was very much into the substance and the detail, calling on the foreign office and Belgian leaders and talking real NATO issues, arms control, and serious substance with his Belgian counterparts.

He was followed by a political ambassador, Bruce Gelb, who had gone to school with George Bush, Senior, and was vice president or something of Bristol-Myers Squibb. You have the contrast between a political ambassador and a career ambassador, but both did what they did very, very well. Bruce Gelb was a terrifically personable fellow and got along great with the Belgians and was very, very supportive of me in my work in Antwerp. I could count on him to come by. He was very good at cementing relationships.

*Q: In the three years you were there, what was the main job and some of the secondary jobs that the consulate general did?*

KREBS: I'm a political officer and I got involved in my own kind of substance. Antwerp was the major city in Flanders, the Dutch speaking part. The Dutch speaking part of Belgium had become the economic engine of the country. It has about 60% of the population but even more of the economic clout. At one point, they were the underdogs in the country and the French speakers, the Walloons, were dominant. But by this particular period and since then the Flemish

spoke more languages, had a very good work ethic, and they were involved in more of the high tech as well as the auto industry and technological sector. Wallonia was more the center of what we would call the old rust belt industries, and Flanders was the more dynamic part of the country. I not only had the economic development part, but to me there were also a bunch of very interesting political issues which I followed very closely. I think we've gone on the map in Antwerp because of that. Number one was the fact that, as Europe was evolving, United Europe, and developing the European Union, places like Flanders took center stage in trying to carve out a role for the regions in the development of Europe, that it should not only be a union of national states but regions like Flanders that has its own identity and should also play a major role. That was a phenomenon known as Europe of the regions. The Flemish were in the lead along with Barcelona (the Catalans wanted a role), and then of course the Bavarians in Germany. But the Flemish took the lead on that. They had their own regional government. According to the Belgian constitution, Flanders, Wallonia, and the capital region each had its own government that had specific responsibilities. So I was the main liaison with the Flemish government and reported extensively on Europe of the regions. That caught the attention of our ambassador to the EU at the time, Tom Niles. I dealt extensively with him and his staff on that issue, as well as with my own embassy. There was a series of cables that caught attention in Washington, as well as in Brussels. Then there was another important issue developing at the time. In various parts of Europe, we found a rise of neo-Nazi parties, ultra-right-wing parties based on anti-immigration, hostility to farmers, etc. You had Le Pen's group in France. In Flanders, you had a group called the Vlaams Blok. They were centered in Antwerp. They were progressing steadily in the amount of support they were getting from the local population in election returns. They wound up getting upwards of a third of the vote at one point. It was a worrisome phenomenon and remains a worrisome phenomenon. I did a lot of reporting on that.

*Q: The engine that seems to be driving most of these right-wing parties has been the phenomenon of considerable migration both from Africa and from some other parts.*

KREBS: Yes. It was by and large the Turks who were a bit better assimilated, but also there was a large Moroccan immigrant community that there was some growing hostility towards. And there was also at that point a large Yugoslav population and some of them were involved in criminal activity.

*Q: Was the immigrant impact on your area a target of your interest?*

KREBS: Oh, yes, particularly as it affected the politics of the region, which had the potential for distorting the politics of the country.

*Q: As you saw it, were the immigrants coming in needed for the economic engine? I'm talking about the European population growing older and not reproducing itself. Did you see that? Or were these people coming in not because they were needed but just coming in?*

KREBS: I suppose there was a certain need, but for the most part, the Flemish population was a hardworking, work oriented group of people. I don't know that the population was on any particular decline at the time. It might well be now. But I think the issue had more to do with crime and just the general nature of the society, more than taking jobs or the need for them there. I suppose they had an economic function in the community.

*Q: How did you find relations between the Flemish and the Walloons?*

KREBS: It was rather strange for an American. There is a saying that the Flemish are born with a brick in their belly. The first thing they do is build a house. They live near Mom and Pop and family roots and what have you in their home villages. I remember talking to people in the southwest of Flanders around Kortrijk and that area close to the Walloon area. Kortrijk had a labor shortage. They couldn't get enough people to do the work that they needed done. The area about 20 kilometers away had major unemployment problems and yet they couldn't recruit the French speakers to come across. It was within Belgium, within what we would call easy commuting distance, almost like Washington and Arlington, but to cross over and take work on the other side... I think it all has historical roots, of course. The Walloons are reputed to have treated the Flemings with contempt in recent history. In the military traditionally the Walloons were the officers and the Flemish were the gun fodder. That's how they saw each other, in certain stereotypes. I remember one rather old fashioned lady at a major function I went to in Brussels hearing that I worked in Antwerp among the Flemish and her remark to me was, "Oh, those are the kitchen help." There is that attitude. The Flemish today are riding the high ground, not feeling very generous or benevolent towards their now poorer Walloonian brothers.

*Q: Were you seeing a look beyond the Belgian government by your population, towards the European Union where they could look towards that as being really their representative as opposed to the government in Brussels?*

KREBS: Yes, the Flemish clearly saw the region first... They looked at their home town and at the region and then beyond Brussels towards Europe. They were very good Europeans. The national government counted a lot less to them than their local and their supernational institutions.

*Q: Belgium's quite recent. Was it 1830 or something like that?*

KREBS: Yes.

*Q: It hasn't taken as well as some of the other places.*

KREBS: Yes. I must say, it's a wonderful country to live in. Now it's the capital of Europe, very expensive, the headquarters of the European Union, of NATO, of the European parliament.

*Q: How about with the Netherlands? Was there a tie to the Netherlands by the Flemish?*

KREBS: Culturally, but no more than that. My house was a 20 minute drive. I lived not in Antwerp itself but in a northern suburb. It was a 20 minute drive from the Dutch border. I loved hiking around the canals and the beaches of the Netherlands and I rather enjoyed going up there. But there's a difference in personality in many respects. My staff never understand why I would want to go up to the Netherlands. They associated it with drugs. It's funny: they looked culturally to the Netherlands. The Dutch speaking and civilization was very important to them. But if they were going to go drive someplace, they went to a French speaking area. Their lifestyle seemed to be more Mediterranean cafe life and sitting outside enjoying the wine or the beer. Very much a

southern orientation with a northern work ethic, which made it a wonderful place to be. Plus, I guess there's also the religious tradition. They were both part of an overall Spanish sphere of influence at one point. When the 17<sup>th</sup> century wars came and the line was drawn, there was revolt against the Spanish and the Spanish were able to hold the line. The Dutch won their independence and the Belgians didn't. The line was drawn essentially between Catholic and Protestant Europe. Antwerp had been the major commercial city of northern Europe and the international trading center through the 1600s. Then many of the wealthy commercial people from Antwerp moved up north to Amsterdam. That was just the beginning of Amsterdam replacing Antwerp as the premier commercial center of northern Europe.

*Q: Did you have any particular issues that you had to deal with?*

KREBS: As a consul general, you're the chief there, you do an incredible amount of representation work. The Belgians were allies in World War I and World War II. There are always wreath laying ceremonies and then various things to do. But the two major political issues I dealt with were the ones I described to you. Plus, you did everything that a principal officer would do from representation to consular work there that needed to be done. It was a very busy consulate post.

[Interruption]

*Q: The thing stopped, so we want to fill in. We'll do a quick review of what we've talked about in Antwerp. Then we will fill in the rest. We picked it up when you're off to Malaysia, so we're going to cover that particular thing next time.*

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*You were in Malaysia from '92 to when?*

KREBS: '93.

*Q: What was the situation there?*

KREBS: It was an important country in Southeast Asia with one of the fastest developing economies in Asia, so from an economic standpoint it was important.

Politically, the relationship was cordial but not intimate. We had no long historical ties, no alliances with Malaysia. It was a hard political culture to penetrate as a political officer. Of course, the fact that I knew from the start I was only going to be there a year weighed heavily. There were going to be limitations to what I could learn and what I could do. Policy was controlled very strictly from the top. Prime Minister Mahathir wasn't particularly friendly towards the U.S., and would not see the American ambassador. He was interested in the relationship from a purely commercial standpoint. Relations with the foreign office was my bag. People in the foreign office, even with the office director, were not particularly well informed or often well briefed. Or perhaps they were and their directions were to just listen and send the demarche on up. People were cordial, friendly in their own way. It was hard to really get information. People below on my staff were just not able to do anything. They wouldn't be seen

at the foreign office. It was at my job and above that we had direct relations with the Malaysian government officials, foreign ministry officials. To be there for only a year, I had by and large a new staff as well. We were four political officers, two secretaries, and a local (an FSN), a wonderful staff. I saw my job as one to mold them together to be a good, productive working section of the embassy. In many respects, I think we wound up being the top section of the embassy during the course of that year, certainly the most popular socially, and the most balanced, and the ones who got along best with one another. I think we put out some very good product. One of the most important things was the political-military relationship. The Malaysians were in the market for fighter aircraft. We were the underdogs in that race.

*Q: Who were the other competitors?*

KREBS: The Russians and the Brits, especially the Russians. We wound up getting our toe in the door at least. We got a handful of our aircraft. McDonnell Douglas was getting out. The ambassador put a heavy emphasis on that.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

KREBS: John Wolfe.

*Q: What was his background?*

KREBS: Not Southeast Asia. He was coming from IO at the time. Now he was just designated by the administration to go out to the Middle East - he has a Middle East background - to work on this road map with the Israelis and Palestinians. He was an economic officer. He looked at the military sales relationship as being probably his most important function at the time.

[Note: Interview was not completed.]

*End of interview*