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

WILLIAM HARRISON MARSH

Interviewed by: Lambert (Nick) Heyniger and Vladimir Lehovich
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INTERVIEW

[Begin Section with Nick Heyniger]

Q: I am interviewing William Harrison Marsh, Bill Marsh, about his thirty-plus years in the Foreign Service. Bill, let's start off by your telling us where and when you were born and where you grew up.

MARSH: Nick, welcome and thank you for this opportunity.

I was born in Pennsylvania and grew up there and in Michigan and found really no roots until after graduate school when I was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

MARSH: I went to high school in Detroit, Michigan to a very remarkable public high school. Four years of French, for example, were obligatory.

Q: Wonderful. That's what people want to know. And then from there you went where to college?

MARSH: I went to Cornell University from 1949 to 1953. I was a mid year entrant, which created a great deal of confusion when I took the second half of courses first, and then the first half, particularly in the case of history courses.
Q: What fields were you mainly studying?

MARSH: The government department at Cornell at that time was quite renowned. It included truly extraordinary people like Clinton Rossiter and Mario Einaudi, whose son, of course, was Ambassador Einaudi, and others, Herbert Briggs and so forth. So I graduated in 1953 with a degree in government, a bachelor of arts with honors in government.

Q: Then what?

MARSH: I then had to wait because this was my first truly bureaucratic experience. I graduated about 10 days after President Eisenhower's inauguration. In those days we had to take ROTC at Cornell, for two years and I had finished my two years about three weeks before the Korean War began. So then those of us, and I would say it was about 98 percent of us, who had decided not to go on to advanced ROTC rushed to sign up and took the additional two years and we then were commissioned and were to be called up. But President Eisenhower put a hold on the play so that instead of going in, say, in February or March of 1953, something of that sort, it was not until August of '53 that I went into the Air Force to do my two-year stint.

That meant that I spent some six months with my parents, returning home to them, and by this time they had moved to Dallas, Texas. My father was transferred frequently by his company. So I became a floorwalker at Neiman-Marcus at that time, which is quite another story and very interesting, and then went off to be sworn in and all of that near San Francisco. I was considered by having been resident, albeit temporarily, west of the Mississippi River to be Pacific oriented rather than Atlantic oriented. So most of my classmates went to Europe. I did not, I went to Japan and spent my whole two year tour in Japan, with a marvelous job as aide de camp to the Commanding General of the Far East Air Forces and an opportunity to study Japanese at the embassy under Eleanor Jorden.

Q: What was the name of the Air Force officer?

MARSH: The last one was General Earl Partridge. He was the Commander. I was a junior aide to him and a senior aide to Major General Kenneth McNaughton, who was deputy commander of Far East Air Forces. In those days Far East Air Forces extended from roughly the operational area of Thailand on the west, Australia and New Zealand on the south and everything in the Pacific north of that.

Q: And, Bill, you also mentioned that you worked with somebody in the embassy?

MARSH: Yes. Well, Eleanor Jorden taught Japanese. She was an extraordinary teacher/instructor and came later to head the Far Eastern Languages Department of FSI. It was a remarkable course of language instruction. Never before or since have I taken anything like that. I was in my early twenties and I remembered stuff in those days with relative ease. I became quite good in conversational Japanese. I never studied the writing or the reading of it, but still conversationally I was quite good. But it was an introduction to life abroad because until that time the only foreign travel that I had had was on the New York Central between Buffalo and Detroit and vice versa going to and from college via Canadalé.

Q: Okay, so now you've graduated from Cornell and you've had two and a half years in the Air Force. It's now 1955 and you are discharged from the Air Force. What happens now?

MARSH: What happens now is that I had decided that I liked living abroad very much indeed. It was fascinating and all that. The embassies were very interesting. And by the

way, Ambassador John Allison was very kind to me. We happened to meet so I was invited to a couple of stag dinners that he gave at the embassy. There I was with very, very senior officers, I'm a second lieutenant, for example at a dinner given for Senator Earl Clements of Kentucky, and that sort of thing. I don't know, I have a feeling I was regarded as something of a boy Mozart there before the crowned heads.

But in any event they were very, very kind to me and then I came to know Mrs. Allison very well, so then I was invited to dinners that were not stag. They were very kind and remarkable people and I was very much impressed with them.

I also came to know the French ambassador, whose name was Lévy and who was the epitome of the wry and skillful French ambassador. The particular question that I was working out was that of visas and passports for American military personnel who were going to the Associated States of Indochina during the time of the French conflict with the Vietnamese. I worked out a procedure whereby we could shortcut the three-month lag that it had taken to get air crews visas to help the French in Indochina. Passports were moving from Tokyo to Saigon on to Paris and then back to Tokyo again. We managed to work out some shortcuts.

Q: Actually the French received the passport at the French embassy in Tokyo and sent it along to Saigon?

MARSH: That is correct and then to Paris for counter-signature and then back. We're talking about the time of Dien Bien Phu.

Q: Amazing, absolutely amazing!

Now we are sort of at the end of your Air Force experience. You liked living and working abroad, so what did you do then?

MARSH: Actually I carried out something I had inquired about earlier, namely graduate studies in international affairs. Now while in Dallas I applied for a scholarship that was available solely to residents of Dallas, though I was hardly a very authentic Texan, to the School of Advanced International Studies and got it.

Q: This is Johns Hopkins?

MARSH: That's correct. When they said it was really for native Texans I said that I wasn't there by accident but by choice and that seemed to have some telling influence on them. The other possibility in my eyes was the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton. Thus in '54, I began preparations to go to Princeton because I'd decided that was where I wanted to go and entered in the fall of '55, with your good self.

Q: Yes. We were classmates at Princeton. Just tell me a thing or two about how you evaluated your two years at Princeton, what you thought you got out of it and how it could have been better.

MARSH: Magnificent, and in some ways very unfortunate, because in all subsequent training I compared it with the Woodrow Wilson School of those days and always found the later educational forays deficient by comparison. I thought it was remarkable. It was amazingly full of information, of course, and wisdom but also it was vast exposure to the liberal arts and to the human condition. So I found it extremely valuable.

There was a course for example in economic development that was absolutely magnificent in the why and wherefore and all that sort of thing. It stood me in good stead for many, many years.

Q: Do you remember who any of the professors were?

MARSH: You know my memory is quite a bit rusty.

Q: Marion Lévy?

MARSH: Not Marion Lévy in this course, but I remember him, of course, and so do you. Steve Bailey was the Dean, he was remarkable. Remarkable. I remember one time we had a professor from the Institute for Advanced Study who came over to give us a complete discussion on, this is in an evening lecture, the great Grand Inquisitor scene from the *Brothers Karamazov*. Perhaps you remember that?

Q: No, I was another year. Sounds like fun, though.

MARSH: That was extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. It was an examination of the philosophical implications particularly with respect to freedom and responsibility. It was absolutely amazing.

So it was a wonderful time.

Q: Now it is 1957 and you've emerged from Princeton armed with your Master of Public Affairs and what's the next step?

MARSH: Well, in December of '56 I had taken the Foreign Service exam, the written examination. I had passed it. So the question was whether to go into the Foreign Service, which was about all I had envisioned. I wasn't really considering very many options, or to humor my family that urged me to go to work for a Foundation headed by a relative. This sounds quaint these days, but at any rate I listened to my family and did what they suggested and decided I would put the Foreign Service on hold. Thus I looked to coming into the Foreign Service in '59, let's say, something of that sort. But I'd give it two years in Pittsburgh, where this Foundation was located.
Q: So the Foundation was in Pittsburgh? What was the name of it?

MARSH: It was a taxpayers' organization in a sense called the Pennsylvania Economy League. The League really was backed by the major industrialists of Pittsburgh who had

a rather unusual coalition going between themselves and the Democratic mayor of Pittsburgh, David Lawrence, who was a union man. He had come up through the unions. So you had business and unions working together to try to revive and clean up and expand the Pittsburgh area. Obviously you needed industrial leadership for that. You also needed labor peace and this was quite a remarkable concord that they had worked out to great advantage. They rebuilt the city and they did preserve its industrial base, albeit not the blue-collar one but the white-collar one.

Q: Your responsibilities in working for the Foundation included what kinds of things?

MARSH: The basic idea behind what the Foundation did was that the Foundation would quietly encourage governmental institutions to request that the League do a study for them on the feasibility of such and such, and such and such. Now this might involve something that a public official wanted to do and the way he was interested either in having it done the most economical and effective way, or it might be to put across some idea that the League was espousing at that time in order to have a more effective approach to governmental problems.

An example of the latter was that the League was very interested in having a overarching non-governmental organization that would see to hospital planning in order to prevent the tremendous duplication and the streams of multiple fundraising that were always hitting the corporations, the banks, the others in the town. So we set up something called the Hospital Planning Association of Western Pennsylvania in the 1950s. I would say it was certainly 40 years ahead of its time. It's just now catching on, this sort of idea, elsewhere. But the idea is that you should not have five million-dollar pieces of equipment every two blocks along Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, at the various hospitals, each of them used an hour a month.

Q: Sort of rationalizing…organizing the delivery of health care.

MARSH: Precisely.

Now I was also, by the way, an ex officio member of the Board of Education. I was there to pass on the school district's budget and financial planning and all of that kind of thing. That was very useful as acquisition of budgetary and financial work and also it was an exercise in practical politics that I found invaluable.

Q: Any particular personalities that you enjoyed working for or working with, or not?

MARSH: Well, I mentioned Mayor Lawrence who was an extraordinary man. Of course Lawrence later became governor of Pennsylvania. I enjoyed working with my colleagues. I worked really with an enormous number of people, one I'm thinking of is an industrialist named William Rea, who was the chairman of the school board. The interesting thing is, as chairman of the school board he didn't have any children in the public schools. He had his children in private schools, in prep schools there, but was serving strictly for the community. It was a wonderful example of public service.

I knew some judges, as well, who were very interesting men and who suffered greatly by not having very broad-based staffs. One time there was a question about the waterfront of Pittsburgh and a particular judge was going to put through certain rulings that would oblige the city to do a massive cleanup effort all along the waterfront.

Q: Is this the time, if my memory serves me right, where the river sort of flowing through Pittsburgh actually caught fire, was that then?
MARSH: You are in the right diocese but the wrong parish! That was actually Cleveland, and it was the Cuyahoga river and it was actually much later that it caught fire. But at any rate I knew another judge and we had lunch from time to time, remember there was a 40 year difference in our ages, and he asked me what I thought about this. I said I didn't understand it because all this flotsam and jetsam, steamboats and barges and whatnot and so forth that he wanted to eliminate from the Pittsburgh waterfront was the sort of thing people paid good money to go see in New Orleans and St. Louis and Louisville. He thought it over and never issued the ruling. So perhaps I had a little influence at that time, I don't know.

But at any rate, I think it was very important for one undertaking a Foreign Service career to have some domestic experience and particularly in practical politics.

Q: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MARSH: Another thing is that Tip O'Neill, of course, once said that all politics is local. I don't know whether that is the case or not, I haven't decided, but suffice it to say that a great deal of politics is local and that extends to foreign policies as well.

Incidentally there was a major theme in the Pittsburgh mayoral election in 1959, I guess it was, and that was U.S. policy toward Lebanon. Now what that had to do with being mayor of Pittsburgh was that there was an influential and articulate Lebanese-American community in Pittsburgh. They wanted the United States to pursue a certain line and the mayor though it was politic to support this and to pursue it. He needed those votes. He did follow that. I don't need to tell you that you who served in Arab countries, as have I, that the friends and opponents of Israel have always been contending at local levels and state levels and that sort of thing. It's brought foreign policy issues very much to the fore.

Q: I think we are now coming up to 1960?

MARSH: Let us not pass 1959, because something didn't happen.

Q: What was that?

MARSH: In 1958 there was no Foreign Service examination. And of course we have to go, what, more than 35 years until the next time no Foreign Service examination was held, but at any rate it derailed my train.

Q: Why was that? Why was there no Foreign Service exam in '58?

MARSH: Need I tell you? Money.

Q: No money?

MARSH: No money.

Q: No appropriation?

MARSH: Nope. Well, no, there just was not enough money to bring in some new help.

Q: I think that is very significant and I think that is something that really should be emphasized in our interview that for an entire year, not too long ago, the Department of State was unable to bring in any new people.

MARSH: That sort of brackets my own career that is from 1960 to 1996. It is sort of bracketed by these two events. But on the other hand, I do not remember any time during my career when there was not a shortage of cash. I do not remember any time when people said well, this year we can spend reasonably and carefully and intelligently. Instead it has always been yet another plea for frugality.

Q: But this occurrence in 1958 where the Department didn't feel that it could even hold the exam, as you say, was quite rare and it meant you spent another year in Pittsburgh?

MARSH: That's exactly what it meant. I began to think it was a deliberate plot directed against me because I don't think it had happened before since the great Depression. It had been years since that sort of thing happened. It's rather scandalous that they have to resort to such things but so it was. Also, I had to take the written examination again.

Q: Why?

MARSH: They would not carry over the success of 1956, so I had to take the written examination again in '59.

Q: Why not? You had talked with them in 1956 after you passed the written examination.

MARSH: That's right. But you must start all over again. So I started all over again. In December of '59 I took the written again, and took the orals in April of 1960 in Washington. And then they said they'd let me know. They said, and remember in those days we had eight grades, I would come in certainly as an FSO-7, but probably as a FSO-6 because I had a master's, military experience and government-related experience. So that seemed nice.

Anyway, in the summer sometime I received word that in two weeks I was to report for duty. I wrote them back and said that was impossible, I had to give more than two weeks

notice. The League was a relatively small organization and didn't have that many people with advanced degrees in public administration and governmental affairs and so forth. I then received word that I would come in to the class that would meet just after Thanksgiving in 1960, November 30th, I think it was, as an FSO-8.

Q: What happened to the assurances that your military experience and your graduate study, what happened to all that?

MARSH: Indeed. Indeed. I came in at the top of an FSO-8. I asked about the other and a wall of silence descended. So it was the first time of what the Declaration of Independence calls a long train of abuses in which promises, good faith, were broken and I was completely unused to this sort of thing. I had never encountered it in the private sphere, which is supposed to be the very center of inequity in the world, where because of the competitive factor people do and say anything.

Q: We have now reached sort of the end of 1960 and you have entered into the Department. Where did you go?

MARSH: Well, I went to a basement because I went to A-100 in the garage of Arlington Towers and, frankly, I found this very strange. In my Air Force days we had always had marvelous accommodations, remember, General's office, Commanding General's office, aide-de-camp, all that sort of thing. When we traveled around to Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, wherever we went, Korea very frequently, everything was very posh, very plush. Then the Foundation had beautiful offices in downtown Pittsburgh in a marvelous French renaissance building with a wonderful central atrium, a gorgeous building. It was very close to department stores, hotels and fine restaurants and so on.

Incidentally when I was in Tokyo with the Air Force I was right in downtown Tokyo. For what it's worth, I'll put this in; one of the most difficult things for me about Foggy Bottom was that it was so suburban. I didn't have the sense that I was in a central city at all. There were no bookstores to browse in during lunchtime, no good restaurants worthy of the name; there were a few places but nothing very decent.

There was no place to go for a little break.

Q: At that time there weren't even many skyscrapers.

MARSH: Oh, heavens, no.

Q: This is in Rosslyn, 1960?

MARSH: Yes. What I'm saying is I was completely unused to this sort of suburban locale, whether it be the Department of State headquarters or the Arlington Towers. At any rate I was there.

Q: You did the A-100 course?

MARSH: Did the A-100 course, which was a very good course, but was remarkably brief. As a preparation for diplomacy, four weeks didn't seem terribly long.

I was told, since I was 29 years old, I was one of the old boys really to come aboard. We had one fellow who couldn't get sworn in, Bob Ryan, because he wasn't 21. He had to wait to be sworn in. So I was one of the old boys. I talked with the advisors and said I'd really like to learn the folkways and the mores of the Department of State, so I'd like a Department assignment.

Absolutely not, they said, you need to go to a small post, perhaps a two or three man post. (That's the sort of terminology they used in those days, they didn't say a two or three person post.) They said I would learn post operation and do everything so I shouldn't even think about it, I would go overseas. Came the famous day when they read off the assignments…it was the Department. I was so amenable in those days that I was disappointed when I got the Department assignment, which was what I had sought in the first place! Remarkable. I would say I was much more other-directed, perhaps, than are the young people today. That was due to the very tight trio of family, school and church and later to military discipline and the traditional kinds of universities where you behaved yourself. You didn't question and so forth.

So they gave me my assignment that I had originally wanted and I remember this terrible letdown feeling that I had.

Q: Where did you go?

MARSH: I went to the Aviation Division in the Bureau of Economic Affairs. There was a remarkable man who was the Director of the office, Henry Taft Snowden. He was a grandson of President Taft. This fellow was about 6'5", I'd say, thin as a rail, very aristocratic. His manner was well below room temperature, is the way I'd say it. Junior officers arriving were treated pretty much as children. They should be seen but not heard, they should behave themselves, should do as they were told, keep out of the way, that sort of thing.

Q: He was the head of the Aviation Division?

MARSH: That is correct. That's right.

Q: What did he have you doing?

MARSH: What he had me doing was Latin American air transport agreements. I knew very little about Latin America and absolutely nothing about air transport agreements. He said he wanted me to revise the draft agreement with Brazil. That was that. There was no training and so forth. I had to ask a great deal of questions. It was, you know, when we reach the end of the dock I'm going to push you in and you'll either swim or not swim. It all depends.

(My wife, at the Agency, you know which agency, when she in her turn went to work there was given a Russian dictionary and a group of Soviet newspapers and they said, "learn Russian.")

Q: Let's take just a second and get up to date on that. Where and when were you married?

MARSH: We were married in May of 1962 here in Washington having met very soon after I arrived in Washington, about 18 months previous to that.

Q: And she had a job at the Agency?

MARSH: She did.

Q: Okay. So there you are in the Aviation Division revising the agreement with Brazil. How did that go?

MARSH: Well, it was sort of a trap because there hadn't been any aviation agreement with Brazil. They'd never been going to sign one. So what he was saying in effect, although I didn't know it at the time, was rewrite it, maybe I could come up with something that would be agreeable with the Brazilians. The last I checked, which was in the early '80s perhaps, or something, there still wasn't an air transport agreement with Brazil, I don't think. It had never come to pass because it was too much a restriction on the military in Brazil.

Q: I assume you had a chance both to talk with the people on the Brazil desk and did you have a chance to talk with anyone from the Brazilian embassy?

MARSH: No and no. Because these highly technical agreements, number one, had their own sort of logic. Talking about this with the Brazilian embassy or the Brazil desk there would be the feeling that it would reach, talking with one, it would reach the other and that is not what was wanted. Besides which I learned very thoroughly at that time that functional bureaus did not consider themselves in the same arena or league with geographic bureaus. Therefore we should get everything we wanted together in the functional bureau and then ambush the geographic bureau, as it were, with the *fait accompli*, here we go, here it is, sign!

Q: That is a great insight. I'm delighted that we got that down. But how were you supposed to arrive at sort of the finished draft of an aviation treaty with Brazil if you'd never had the chance to talk either with the Brazilians or with the people in the Department that were supposed to know about Brazil.

MARSH: Indeed. But I'd asked myself if perhaps this wasn't some bizarre sort of learning exercise. I really wasn't terribly sure. Actually the people with whom one talked, and this was another bit of insight that I got from it really, you were supposed to talk with the Civil Aeronautics Board, Americans. You weren't supposed to talk with the Brazil

desk or the Brazilian embassy. You are going to say wait a minute, those are Americans on the Brazil desk, but as far as the functional bureaus were concerned there was some question as to whether those on the geographic desks were really fully fledged Americans or not! But in any event I pursued my work.

Q: Did you talk with anybody on the CAB?

MARSH: CAB, which has since, of course, dissolved.
Q: Who told you what they wanted out of a treaty?

MARSH: They told me what they wanted. They, of course, were really the mouthpieces for the airlines. So what the airlines wanted the CAB wanted and what the airlines didn't want - you got it.

Q: Any other highlights of your tour in AV that we should hear about?

MARSH: Well, yes, I think there were distinct possibilities. It's interesting work; I've always been interested in transportation, particularly in the airlines. But one thing that I would mention was that at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, I was drawing pretty much to a close with my work in AV. You remember that this crisis was pretty closely held. We knew there was a problem, we knew there was friction, I mean the general public, but didn't really know how close we were to war. No sense of it until this was finally revealed.

So at the end they did announce we had reached an agreement with Khrushchev. It was maintaining the peace for the time being, and therefor the great threat of war had passed, ta-dah, ta-dah, and all that sort of thing, I said to some of my bosses that this was really a very remarkable thing. Had anybody passed the threat information to the airlines? If they hadn't passed it to me, had they alerted Panagra, Pan American, Eastern, etc., etc., etc., Braniff, all the other airlines, which of course all of which were over-flying Cuba throughout the great crisis? And so here they were with a total paranoid in charge of the Cuban State *down* below and overflights going umpteen times a day, to and fro. Their reaction was shocked because they hadn't thought of this.

Q: Nobody had thought to do this?

MARSH: No one had thought. It's extraordinary. If you took a plane from Bogota to Miami during the Cuban missile crisis you went right over central Cuba.

Q: Any by this time we were in jets, I think. So by the time you are over Cuba you are already descending in altitude to make your landing in Miami.

MARSH: Yes, which is 90 miles from Havana.

Q: So you are not that far overhead Cuba and these are like ten civilian airlines passing over every day.

MARSH: Oh, at least.

Q: And nobody is saying anything to anyone?

MARSH: Nobody thought of it.

Q: Very interesting.

MARSH: Well, this is one of the limitations, unfortunately, of White House foreign policy. We complain frequently that there are so many people in the act, there are so many people we have to deal with and so forth, but there are so many interests at stake. There are so many risks that are possible. Imagine if a couple of American jets had been shot down? Then the blockade option might not have been the preferred option but instead a military strike might well have ensued.

Q: I can take your point that the White House was in real crisis mode and wanted this thing held fairly tightly. But, I mean, surely people in Washington including the State Department and the CAB and the airlines knew that something was going on, didn't they?

MARSH: Well, of course, Secretary Rusk attended all of the meetings, or at least most of them, that were held at the White House and that sort of thing. Occasionally he was accompanied by the Under Secretary for Political Affairs or someone of that sort, but you know no individual can think of everything and particularly when you are indeed the great 'omnium gatherum' of the world, the one universal power in every way. We are so vulnerable on so many fronts. We found that out in Vietnam.

Q: That's a very good point. That was two years in the Department of State, from 1960 to 1962 and I guess you are due for reassignment?

MARSH: Well, something intervened, as a matter of fact. I was called to a rather mysterious meeting in either the summer or tail of '62. I found an awful lot of people there. All of us were junior officers and all of us with French-speaking capability. The conveners of the meeting announced there was to be a great intensification of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. All of us had been screened and were found quite eligible for special training in the Vietnamese language, both in Washington and in Saigon. And then assignment to various field posts that were to be set up in Vietnam in order to give a kind of geographic coverage to the U.S. effort there. In other words, we did not want to be restricted to Saigon, the capital.

Q: This was a meeting of junior officers being informed there was a growing and important need for people to go to Southeast Asia? How did that go?

MARSH: There were mixed reactions to it. In the first instance we were told that we had been culled before this pool not solely because of our French language capability and the appropriate rank and level and so forth, but also because we were all unmarried. And

immediately, half of the group said, "What do you mean, unmarried? We are married." It developed that the marriages that had taken place in fiscal 1962 had not been recorded and, as a matter of fact, as late as 1966 they still were carrying me as a single officer.
Q: For Heaven's sake!

MARSH: I had a hell of a time to get tickets and a passport for my wife in '63 going to Saigon and in '66 returning from Bangkok, where she was in safehaven. By that time we had a son. (Some officious person in the Department) when I telephoned from Saigon to the Department to complain that the orders had only covered me and not covered my wife and son, when I told her that she said, "But you're not married." And I said that of course we were, we had a son. Well, this functionary informed me that it was not necessary to be married to have a child. An interesting biology lesson from a total incompetent!

But in any event a number of people, for example, Jim Bishop was one who later was very active in African affairs and ambassador to several countries, said well, on balance, he'd rather not go. The rest acted according to their individual consciences, who were married. I was married but I did talk to some people about the assignment and they said it was a golden opportunity and that it would really be exciting and blah, blah, blah…and a grateful nation…blah, blah, blah…all that sort of thing. In any event I did go into Vietnamese language training.

Q: In the fall of '62?

MARSH: No, the very beginning of '63.

Q: Okay, all right, how long did that last?

MARSH: That was six months back in the basement.

Q: You are at FSI studying Vietnamese.

MARSH: I am. A little earlier I said that the course I had taken under Eleanor Jorden in Japanese, at the embassy in Tokyo in the '50s was very fine, very well done. So I was completely unprepared for the totally disorganized experience in Vietnamese at the FSI.

It was bedlam. We were put under linguists and I think we had seven linguists in six months, something of that sort. They'd change. A very few of them were Vietnamese speakers. So their approach was a wholly mechanical approach to Vietnamese, you know you hold your tongue such and such a way, do this, do that and the other kind of thing and so forth, but as far as any practical facility with Vietnamese, they didn't have it. It was an extremely unsatisfactory course.

Q: I've also had hard language training at FSI. When you say linguist… what I mean by linguist is sort of the supervisor who is supervising five or six language classes being taught by instructors.

MARSH: Precisely.

Q: The instructors are native speakers of Vietnamese but the linguists who are supervising don't really have much familiarity with the language at all.

MARSH: Almost none. They disagreed with one another. There was a great deal of tension and rivalry and all of that sort of thing. My friend Vlad Lehovich was in the class, as was Dick Holbrooke as well as quite a few other notables.

Q: How was Holbrooke as a language student?

MARSH: Fair. Holbrooke has always been a master politician. His career is his supreme artistic achievement of his life and he has devoted his life to this professional equivalent of Sistine Chapel ceiling here still being worked on. Even in those days he was in great shape because his family lived down the street from Dean Rusk in Westchester so when he arrived he happened to be on very close terms with the Secretary of State, which was nice for him.

Q: Tough. Tough.

MARSH: Right.

Q: So at any rate, six months of struggling with Vietnamese at FSI back in the basement of the Foreign Service Institute, and you emerged into the daylight in '63?

MARSH: In June of '63. Now one thing we haven't talked about, because it didn't exist, was any area training whatsoever. Occasionally those of us in the course would go over to the Department. We were supposed to have some sort of briefing or training session or something of that sort. But there were very of these, perhaps three or four of these and they were very unsatisfactory. We never had an intensive exposition, let alone a discussion, of the U.S. *desiderata*, the situation, the history of it all and all of that sort of thing. Never.

Q: Why not?

MARSH: What was supposed to have happened was that I was supposed to have been assigned to a consulate to be established at Nha Trang, on the central coast and a very nice place. Unfortunately instead of establishing that post in 1963, it was established a full 10 years later, I believe. We did not have geographic coverage of South Vietnam except from Saigon itself, with the exception of a post at Hue which was very isolated and had very little in the way of resources. It was really to be a watch post to make sure that the North Vietnamese did not cross the DMZ, the demilitarized zone, which of course they did in great numbers, but behind the consulate not in front of it so it was not visible.

Q: So you were assigned to the embassy?

MARSH: Yes. In any event because I was to have had three months of additional Vietnamese training at the embassy, full time. John Burke, who was later deputy assistant secretary and who was ambassador in Guyana at the time of the Jonestown affair, and I were the students in this class.

Now there were two problems by the time we arrived in Vietnam. First of all, the entire situation concerning the Ngo Dinh Diem regime had become very unsettled and very, very troublesome. And the second thing was that we had a change of ambassadors. I was there perhaps two weeks under Fritz Nolting, Frederick Nolting, who was ambassador, and then came Henry Cabot Lodge.

Ambassador Lodge wanted to rethink all sorts of things. He didn't want a vast establishment. There were of course no such limits on the military, so that when I arrived in Vietnam there were, I think, 17,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam. This would be the rough equivalent of, say, 250,000 Vietnamese troops in the United States with many times the money that U.S. people would have had. So not only did we have the 17,000, a considerable number in its own right, but also they were loaded. And also they were taking over housing. For example the Commanding General of the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam had moved into the former residence of the French commanding general - bad imagery.

There was simply no political control. And when I say no political control I mean, of course, no policy control. And when I say no policy control what I really mean is that to a remarkable extent there was no policy. There was a great, overarching glorious thing up in the heavens that South Vietnam shall not fall to Communist North Vietnam, but apart from that there was precious little guidance and precious little leadership. There was endless, endless concentration upon the military effort and upon this vast work it was undertaking. I am sure that to both military and civilians in Vietnam it must have dwarfed all previous enterprises.

Q: Vast work that was undertaken to do what?

MARSH: Well, to build the place, to rebuild the place, to train everybody from university professors through district water commissioners, to build schools, to build roads, to build everything you could think of, to restore the railway going all over the country. And this was in the middle of an enormous war of both a conventional and non-conventional nature. It was an extraordinary thing.

A few years later I was temporarily Consul in Hue. I'll never forget one day, it was one of the most trying days of my life, when we had virtually all of the students of the University of Hue out on strike. There were demonstrations and all of that sort of thing, and the Buddhists themselves in virtually open revolt and so forth. A great Wagnerian lady arrived from the United States to say that she was a higher education advisor and she had come to do work at the University of Hue. I said, "Madam, you have been sent here under misleading instructions, the university has been closed for two weeks and we are not at all sure we'll be able to change that." She looked over her ample bosom at me and

said, “Well, open it.” And just about that time a vast flotilla of helicopters, Hueys, bound for an air strike against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese passed overhead and I said to myself, “This is absolutely unreal!”

Q: You had two or three months of language training?

MARSH: I got my three months of language training and then was told I would be assigned to the consular section in Saigon and that they had decided that was what I would be doing. I said that that would provide very little opportunity to use the Vietnamese and without rancor of any kind, let’s just call this assignment quits. I didn’t struggle through a tonal language very badly taught, well, decently taught but under very difficult circumstances, I mean we had a coup d’etat just before we concluded the training. I didn’t do that to work in the consular section with visa applicants. That’s not what it was about. So I said to just send me home. And then my wife had had difficulty to get the proper tickets. So, just send me home.

So there was a lot of discussion. The personnel officer was a friend of mine and she was very helpful. Finally it was decided that I should be sort of over-complement in the Political Section helping with the foreign relations of South Vietnam which of course did not involve the Vietnamese army, until they found me something. So after a couple of months they found me a position in what was called the Provincial Reporting Unit. These were about seven officers within the Political Section.

Q: Seven officers, within the Political Section?

MARSH: Well, my friend, we had 25 kosher Foreign Service officers in the Political Section.

Q: “Kosher” means they actually worked for the Foreign Service?

MARSH: Right.

Q: 25?

MARSH: 25.

Q: In the Political Section?

MARSH: That’s correct.
Q: Holy mackerel! In 1963?

MARSH: Well, ’64.

Q: Wow. So what were you doing?

MARSH: The idea of a provincial reporting officer was to go out to the countryside and

to cover developments out there and in effect to make a viability assessment. How are things going, are we winning, all that kind of thing.

Q: Did you wear a flak jacket?

MARSH: No, Sir. This was the heroic period of my life because I was driving jeeps over mined roads; I was in a small provincial town when the Vietcong attacked the military headquarters, which is where I was. They handed me a weapon and I went up on the roof. Fortunately I didn't have to use it, because I wouldn't have known how, having qualified with an M-1 at ROTC training camp only because there was a sergeant who was much too smart to have me in any make-up sessions. So he passed me when all I could have done with the M-1 was to have thrown it at somebody.

At any rate, I was on the roof and saw one of the most incredible sights in my life, namely a napalm attack on a Vietcong encampment, about a mile away, by our helicopters at night. Incredible colors, explosions, all of that sort of thing. Absolutely magnificent!

Q: Wow. Wow.

MARSH: In any event, I did that work, covering first the provinces up in the central Vietnam region. Later I became chief of that unit, after Jim Rosenthal, later ambassador...

Q: Good for you, because you were still at this point…what…an FSO6 or 5?

MARSH: Well, it's interesting. That's correct. It took me 25 years in the Foreign Service to supervise as many people as I did in the early '60s in Vietnam. 25 years to supervise as many people. I had seven under me.

Q: Your responsibilities were largely sort of covering internal domestic developments?

MARSH: No, no, no…political-military and then some. The idea was how are the efforts to arm and train the Vietnamese going? How are our military training activities proceeding? How are our economic assistance programs functioning or not? What is the mood, what is the attitude of the South Vietnamese?

Q: So you are going out from the embassy frequently, touring around the countryside?

MARSH: Yes. Usually a week out and then a week back in Saigon to write up everything. You had to get the essential military clearances. A major concession was that military clearances were required on our reporting.

Q: Why?

MARSH: That was part of the great effort of the Department of State to get along with everybody.

Q: Is this what Ambassador Lodge wanted?

MARSH: No, it really was Ambassador Taylor because he believed, poor man, God rest his soul, but he believed that FSOs could not understand military affairs. And what Vietnam proved was that war is much too important a matter to be left to military people.

Q: I take your point but I had you in the embassy in Saigon with Ambassador Nolting having been recently replaced with Ambassador Lodge and then Ambassador Taylor replaces Ambassador Lodge?

MARSH: And then Lodge returns and replaces Taylor, for a second tour.

Q: I see.

MARSH: I was there with both.

Q: This is really a significant factor in the embassy's reporting that it has to be cleared with MACV.

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Wow!

MARSH: That's absolutely correct. It was a great inhibition and I'll give you what I think is the classic case.

Ambassador, now ambassador Richard Teare, one of the finest officers it has ever been my privilege to know, was working for me. He went to a province in the Upper Delta. He came back and wrote a masterly report; very balanced, very objective, very well done that pointed out how precarious the situation was. MACV blew up over this report when it came time for them to clear the final version because they held that adequate training and recruitment of the South Vietnamese militia forces had taken place, and all that sort of thing. So Phil Habib, at that time our political counselor, said, "Well, could Dick go down and take another look?" I said goodbye to Dick in the morning at the embassy, I can remember it very clearly, and I told him I supported him 100 percent but that unfortunately we were up against some power relationships here that were difficult. I wished him good luck and all the best and so forth.

I returned to my work and then towards the end of the morning Dick reappeared. I said, "What happened, that was a short trip." Dick said that his flight couldn't land at the province capital because the Vietcong had overrun it.

Therefore, as a consequence, MACV agreed with Dick's version, right?

Absolutely wrong! They would not change a word of the neutered version that they

wanted.

Q: Because the South Vietnamese Army was shortly going to recapture everything and everything would be fine?

MARSH: Who knows, who knows.

Q: That's incredible.

MARSH: So at any rate I'll skip briefly over Vietnam because in another interview I'm going to be talking about it. In any event we had the misfortune to be on home leave in the United States when the wives were directed to leave by President Johnson, the families had to leave. We sought advice of the Department of State but weren't able to obtain any; no one could give us any. We also found out that my wife was expecting our first child.

Well, we had around-the-world tickets to go back to Saigon, so we decided that we would locate Ruth, my wife, in Bangkok. We arrived there. I'm happy to put it on the record that I couldn't believe how inhospitable and how uncaring the embassy in Bangkok was to the Saigon wives.

Q: And this is an embassy in a similar part of the world with very similar conditions.

MARSH: Precisely.

It so happened that my wife went into labor suddenly. She had a Thai who drove for her with his tiny car and she tried to reach him and she failed. Her contractions were getting faster and faster. She called the embassy. It wasn't just that the embassy turned her down on a ride to the hospital, it wasn't that alone, it was that they gave her a lecture about Saigon wives not supposed to be bothering the embassy.

Q: I can't believe it!

MARSH: She managed to get a taxi and the traffic in Bangkok, as many people know, is horrendous. Even 30 years ago it was horrendous, and our son was coming. As a matter of fact he was starting his final descent as they arrived at the hospital.

Q: Unbelievable and this is the first child.

MARSH: I would like to say to you that the man who turned her down, an American, was completely exceptional, and that he was not the kind of Foreign Service officer that we seek to have, but he did later become an Assistant Secretary for Administration.

Q: I can't believe it.

MARSH: And so what I understood when I heard about that some years later was that I

was the exceptional one, in thinking that, as is the case in the military, things had to be "look out for the troops."

Q I can't believe it.

MARSH: But it was a bitter, very bitter and difficult experience.

Q: Assistant Secretary of State?

MARSH: Assistant Secretary of State for Administration.

Q: Wow. Wow.

MARSH: At any rate we were then in 1966. I was desperate to have a sort of normal diplomatic assignment because this had been such an unusual place where, of course, the embassy having been blown up in the middle of my tour, you understand, that it would be nice to see what a place was like under normal circumstances. But of course nothing would do, I had to go back to the Vietnam desk.

Q: Okay. But the normal tour, wasn't it two years?

MARSH: It was extended, without our consent.

Q: You spent an extra year?

MARSH: That is correct, it was extended from two years to three years.

Q: ...in this sort of war zone? Where the military weren't even spending more than two years?

MARSH: I have served, and those of my colleagues have served, far longer in Vietnam than 90% of the military ever did, and without weapons, of course.

Q: We are going to end this part of the interview with your finishing your tour in Saigon and now you are coming back to the Vietnam desk in the Department.

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Good afternoon, this is Lambert (Nick) Heyniger and I am interviewing William (Bill) Marsh. Today is Monday, December 8, 1997.

Bill has been talking about his service in Saigon and Hue. The story is up to 1966. So, Bill, you have now been in Vietnam for three years and it is 1966, what happens now?

MARSH: Reassignment happens now. It was a very difficult year in terms of the work that I was doing during the first half of the year in Vietnam. It was a very difficult

transfer back to the United States. It was very, very difficult taking up work on the Vietnam working group or Task Force that had been established.

Q: Is that where you were assigned?

MARSH: Yes, it was a disappointment because as I may have mentioned earlier, I wanted to work in a, shall we say, more normal sort of post to see what the standard regular workings of the Foreign Service were like. A good friend of mine, as a matter of fact a Foreign Service colleague and in fact my former roommate at graduate school, some years afterward said to me rather scornfully that I had never been in the Foreign Service. I had been in Vietnam, and that was so extraordinary that it really didn't count as experience in the Foreign Service. He may have had a point.

In any event come spring of 1966, I was dispatched from Saigon to Hue because of the Buddhist uprising and certain rumblings about the Vietnamese military, our allies in that area, and rather they were not plotting against the government. So I found myself in Hue at about the time one would be sending a lot of cables to the Department asking about the next assignment.

Q: Just before we go on, you were sort of assigned to Hue TDY?

MARSH: Yes, I was TDY up there.

Q: And what was your capacity up there?

MARSH: Consul. I was in charge of the state of the Americans there. I feared for it because there seemed to be a very, very strong anti-American sentiment among youth and the citizenry at Hue, particularly in those of the Buddhist persuasion. So I recommended to Saigon that we close the post. Well, that recommendation coming from a junior officer did not carry a great deal of weight so they sent a very senior officer, Tom Corcoran, who had managed over his career to serve in every post in Indochina to Hanoi, as well as the three other countries. Tom came up and took a look around and said yes, I actually had a point and one should close down the post, but that the Buddhists took care of the matter because they burned it down.

Q: Well, for heaven's sake. You weren't in it?

MARSH: Fortunately, once again, I used up another of my cat lives. I've used two or three by this time, haven't I? I still have a few left. But my biggest problem came in trying to persuade the Department of State I was married, had been for three years, and therefore was entitled to travel orders and a passport for my wife, and while we were at it, for my son who had been born in 1965. Some worthy in the Department told me I wasn't married and I pointed out in retort that I had a son and was informed coolly that you don't have to be married to have a child…which really sent me up the wall!

In any event, finally came orders and so forth *so* we decided we would have a little break

together, our six month old son, my wife and me, and we sailed from Hong Kong.

Q: Did they think, for example, Bill, that you had established a relationship with a Vietnamese lady?

MARSH: Well, if so, she was the only Vietnamese lady ever to have been born in Ponca City, Oklahoma. I don't know what they thought, but you are making an assumption, Nick, that they thought! I wouldn't necessarily go along with that.

At any rate, just to lighten matters a bit, we sailed on the President Cleveland from Hong Kong. You know we had shore leave in Yokohama so we went up to Tokyo and had a good time with our baby, and so forth. A classmate of mine from undergraduate days was General Manager of the Imperial Hotel, so we were going to take a taxi back down to the ship and he put a hotel car at our disposal, with a driver. Very thoughtful, except that the driver was a country bumpkin who knew nothing of Tokyo and got caught in immense traffic jam. So as we arrived at the pier in Yokohama we saw the President Cleveland sailing off.

Not to worry, they said, and they sent a lighter and we got into the lighter and it took us out into the harbor where the Cleveland dropped her pilot. A huge rope ladder was put down the side of this 25,000-ton ship. I put baby inside my suit coat jacket, tucked him in there, and up we went. And a great pair of hairy arms came out, that's all we could see were the hairy arms out of the side of the ship, and we heard "Give me the baby" so we did and then we continued on up to a deck where we could get up.

Q: My god! On a rope ladder up the side of this steamer, with your wife?

MARSH: With my wife, and with the baby.

Q: I would have been terrified.

MARSH: This was climbing up about seven stories, I would guess. Well, while this was underway we were more or less stationary, fortunately they stop when they drop the pilot, and they don't just toss him overboard.

At any event we arrived in Washington and hit a maelstrom. The problem essentially was the difficulty in obtaining policy orders, the confusion. The fact that there was tremendous concentration in the presidency of decision-making on Vietnam. You'll recall that President Johnson even had a great hand in designing and approved the embassy that was built after the closure of the old one in 1965. That's how closely everything was worked out.

Q: Let me just take a second here. Okay, now, the Secretary of State is Dean Rusk, the assistant secretary for the Far Eastern Bureau is Bill Bundy, and the deputy assistant secretary is...

MARSH: Len Unger, ambassador previously in Laos and later in Thailand. The office director is Bob Miller, who is later ambassador to Malaysia and to Côte d'Ivoire.

Q: And you're working on the Vietnam desk? What were sort of generally your responsibilities?

MARSH: I was one of the two political officers. You'll recall that at that time McNamara said that he was spending 90 percent of his time as Secretary of Defense on Vietnam. Yet President Johnson, in his memos later, said that his time was perhaps two-thirds, 70 percent devoted to Vietnam at that time. And there we are and the Department of State has named two thirtyish political officers to cover this enormous problem.

Now there were others who were there on special details. At one time, for example, there was a Peace Corps officer, though the Peace Corps never had any representatives in Vietnam. But it was come one, come all, everybody get in the act. At the same time, the essential political work was done either by the two political officers, John Helble and I, or some of the extra people assigned to deal particularly with North Vietnam affairs or with negotiations or what not and so forth. But the regular kind of deskwork that was done was performed by John Helble and by me.

So we arrived and the Buddhist uprising in Central Vietnam had become quite serious indeed. Thus John and I are told that what we need to do is to ensure continuous monitoring and coverage. Therefore we should take turns during the night, in night duty up in the Operations Center. What this meant was that we tended to work 36 hours on and 12 off. We did this for four months.

Q: Holy mackerel!

MARSH: You know, if you want an introduction to exhaustion, this is a very good way to do it.

Q: How come 36 hours on?

MARSH: Well, I think in looking back now the extraordinary thing is we didn't post any objection. We were so deferential and all of us at that time had been in the military, albeit for brief periods of time, not during the Korean War, necessarily, probably not as a matter of fact. But we had had military service to perform after graduating from college and so orders were orders, and "Yes, Sir." We should have said, and I think today's generation would say, to get some more people in.

Q: So it meant both of you worked all day and then one person worked all night.

MARSH: That is correct and this was on a seven day a week basis, and this was for four months.

Q: Before I interrupted you, you said that it was sort of a policy maelstrom with lots of

different people telling you what they wanted?

MARSH: Well, it was that. It was pandemonium, really. There were some really quite extraordinary things. For example, in the previous year, that is to say about fifteen months earlier, February of 1965, while on home leave I had been brought into a special little crisis group. This was at the time of the beginning of the air strikes occasioned by the Vietcong actions against U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam. I remember distinctly that one of the things that was made a cardinal principle of it all and I believe originated in State was that in no way were public statements or diplomatic initiatives to indicate that these strikes were retaliatory.

Well, this was just contrary to common sense. I protested feebly about this, trying to say not only that this action of attempting to cast something in a distorted way was against nature, it was actually unhelpful. If we didn't point out that this was retaliation, we couldn't get the advantage in part, at least among the South Vietnamese, for the undertaking in the first place. I lost and was regarded as something of an upstart, as a matter of fact.

This was the period, between 1966 and '68, when I'm afraid I got into trouble several times. For example, there was a Lieutenant Colonel who made a very unfortunate statement in Vietnam in 1968. He said, with respect at the time of the Tet offensive, to the retaking of the town of Ben Thuy, a town in the Delta, that it was quote " necessary to destroy it in order to save it" unquote. I suggested a strong public relations campaign to disown this statement, to dissociate us from it as much as possible.

People thought that this was extreme.

I warned that this was going to become a byword for this effort and that we should get away from it. Others said absolutely not. I think time has shown who maybe had the right diagnosis on that matter. But I got into a little trouble over that one, as a matter of fact. Later still, for example, I said that in 1968 again I had detected a lot of popular upheaval about the war and its course, even after President Johnson had indicated that he would not run again.

Q: You're talking now about popular upheaval in the United States?

MARSH: Yes, that is right. And others on the staff said no, that the President's self-sacrificial act, if you will, had completely appeased public opinion. I wrote a memo contesting this and saying in particular that I understood from talking to people throughout the country that there was going to be a particular problem at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Others did not find that and so I became considered something of a Cassandra, and something of an alarmist. I paid for that. You'll recall that there were parts of our effectiveness reports in those days that were not shown to us? Later I found that there had been some comment put in about that. It was a very trying time for me because it really was something that tried one's soul.
Q: Let's take a bit more time. In other words, the Office Director is writing your

Efficiency Report?

MARSH: Yes, never mind who that is, but in any event…this was before any dissent channel. These didn't exist then. I didn't know this. This was the back part of the report, which wasn't shown to us.

Q: That's not supposed to be part of the game.

MARSH: The part that was shown to me glowed. The part that wasn't shown to me burned, like acid, a little bit, a little bit. But at any rate, it was a very difficult time because first of all, to mix metaphors, it took the Titanic years to sink, but we knew she was going down, those of us who were paying any attention. We knew that our effort was not prevailing and moreover we were seeing the destruction of the consensus, the domestic consensus in the United States on foreign policy.

Q: Let me ask were you briefing people on a fairly regular basis? For example, did you go up and brief Ambassador Unger and Assistant Secretary Bundy and other people on day to day developments in Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes in some ways and some times. It depended. After all they had other sources. But they wanted to hear from the field directly which is one of the reasons that for four months we were supposed to call embassy Saigon every few hours throughout the night and then do a memorandum to the Secretary on the subject.

Q: So you did a daily briefing?

MARSH: I briefed all sorts of people, that was my department. For example, I went over and briefed Senator Robert Kennedy once a month. The reason was that we had a classmate who worked for Kennedy, as you will recall, and he got me in and so forth. I briefed one time the governor of Oklahoma. I was visiting my wife's parents and I had a breakfast arrangement with the governor of Oklahoma, later Senator Henry Bellman, who drove 130 miles from the state capitol to have breakfast with me in Ponca City at 6 o'clock in the morning to hear firsthand about Vietnam.

Q: Let me probe with you a little more on that and let me ask you, as you discussed the Vietnam situation and briefed some of these senior officers, what was their reaction? Were there sort of different reactions and different sort of feeling they had about the situation and the future?

MARSH: That's a good question. It seems to me that we briefed them about tactical situations and I think that was really beside the point, I think the essential point was what was the end game going to be? On that none of us had any idea what it was because there was a general supposition, from the President on down, perhaps arising from our western logical point of view that ultimately the (end of tape)

[End Section with Nick Heyniger]

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[Begin Section with Vlad Lehovich]

Q: Today is December 12, 1997. This is an interview conducted by Vladimir Lehovich. The interviewee is Mr. William Marsh.

Bill, how are you? Welcome. It's very nice that you are taking a little time to do this. Could you begin by telling us your full name?

MARSH: Certainly, Vlad, and it's a pleasure to be with you. William Harrison Marsh and you can add Senior, I'm very proud of the Senior.

Q: Bill, can you tell us a little bit. It's important to know one's background and one's interests and one's personal setting. Where were you born?

MARSH: In Pennsylvania, in Scranton, as a matter of fact, in the depths of the Depression.

Q: What year was that?

MARSH: That was 1931 and given the unemployment and the depression that afflicted that area, and still to some extent does, you can see that it would have influences on my attitudes about obtaining and holding a job, that sort of thing.

Q: Did you go to school there?

MARSH: No, never. We moved away and I went to school mainly in Detroit, Michigan, where we lived until I went off to college. Then apart from returning to Detroit for summer employment, twice, I didn't go back again at all.

Q: When you were a student in Detroit what were your personal interests at that time?

MARSH: My personal interests in Detroit were largely shaped by my family. I was an only child from a very devout, quite strict family and they saw life in terms of a triad: family, school, church and that was about it. And so those were my interests.

Q: What about college, higher education, where was that?

MARSH: I went to Cornell University simply because I met a trustee and it was one of the great serendipities of my life because the Department of Government there was superb. I switched from pre law to government in order to benefit from the presence of Clinton Rossiter and Robert Cushman and Herbert Briggs and Mario Einaudi and many others.

Q: Fascinating. Was that generally government across the board or with a focus on international affairs?

MARSH: Particularly international affairs related.

Q: Let me ask when did you get interested in international affairs?

MARSH: It was there. But you will recall that Detroit, although inland, has an exposure because a foreign country is a mile away. It is not a very foreign country, but it is a country of course that was at war two and a half years before we were and where a youngster could go over and learn something about the war and the different peoples and that sort of thing. But I think what really interested me and piqued and excited my interest was when I did my Air Force ROTC duty as a second, later a first lieutenant in Japan for two years.

Q: Was that before Cornell?

MARSH: No, it was part of their ROTC Program.

Q: So this was after you had studied government and graduated from Cornell?

MARSH: That's right.

Q: Then you were with the Air Force ROTC in Japan?

MARSH: In Japan in an unbelievable job, *aide-de-camp* to the commanding general of the Far East Air Forces. So that meant traveling around everything between Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand.

Q: Who was the Commanding General?

MARSH: There were several of them but the last one was General Earl Partridge, whose serial number was 33-A, that will tell you are how long his pedigree was in the Air Force.

Q: So you were in the Air Force. Did you fly?

MARSH: No, no, no. These eyes were not capable of that. But in those days Cornell, which is partly a land grant institution, was obliged to offer ROTC and they made that mandatory for us. Later a student, about 1968 challenged it, I think, who said they had to offer it but could not make students take it. And that was the end of known ROTC.

Q: Were you glad you did ROTC?

MARSH: On June 25th, 1950, I was extremely glad that I did ROTC.

Q: That was the Korean War?

MARSH: That's correct, because we expected to be drafted out of college. I was at that time a first term sophomore. I had just completed my first term sophomore year. I entered in mid year and graduated in mid year, another complication in an endlessly complicated life. But just the same it was very good because in those days, in the early '50s, all of us went into the military. The question was not whether we would go into the military but whether we would go as officers or enlisted men.

Q: Universal?
MARSH: It was virtually universal.

Q: Any more on Japan? That was two years in Japan as a young man?

MARSH: That was two years in Japan and there was a problem that I was chosen to address because I was the sole French speaker in the Headquarters, and that was passports and visas for U.S. airmen who would be assisting the French in Indochina.

We had an extremely complicated arrangement obliged by the French at that time whereby passports of U.S. airmen would go to Saigon. There they would be visa'd by the so-called Associated States of Indochina and then would go to Paris where they would be checked out by the French and then returned to Tokyo. This procedure took a month. I'm talking about just before and during Dien Bien Phu.

Q: That was 1954?

MARSH: 1953-54, and I went over, Senior Second Lieutenant that I was, and dealt with Ambassador Lévy, the French ambassador in Tokyo. He was a marvelous man. I think he was amused by this presumptuous youngster who came, but who did speak the French language, and we worked out a shortcut on this, which reduced it to about a week.

Q: Let me ask two things. One, where did you learn French?

MARSH: I learned French in high school, four years was obligatory.

Q: Public high school?

MARSH: In public high school.

Q: Any other languages at that time?

MARSH: At that time, no, not living languages, but Latin as well.

Q: You had French and Latin?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: And your French from high school served you in good stead working in Japan for the Air Force?

MARSH: And throughout my career. Yes, as a matter of fact. I had taken additional French in college, so I had advanced French in college.

Q: Was this experience in Japan working with the Vietnam connection something that got you interested in diplomatic work?

MARSH: Very much so because Ambassador John Allison somehow got my name from somewhere and I was invited to dinner at several stag dinners that he gave.

Q: Who was Ambassador Allison?

MARSH: U.S. ambassador to Japan at that time, later ambassador to Indonesia. I remember, for example, a dinner for Senator Earl Clements and Ambassador Allison invited me. There were about twelve people present and I think the next person in age to me was about 20 years older at that time. Perhaps I was the "brat" you show off, or something of that sort. But in any event I came to know Mrs. Allison as well, and they were very kind, very thoughtful, and they counseled me about a Foreign Service career. To them there was nothing better, nothing finer.

Q: What did you do after the Air Force and Japan?

MARSH: Returned to the States and went to the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton and was there two years. I took my Masters in Public and International Affairs.

Q: In those two years at Princeton what was the most important thing that you gained?

MARSH: I think it became clearer to me what a pluralistic process government really is and how many interests, viewpoints, constituencies are a part of any action or any decision. Particularly in the American context where we have probably the most complicated form of government in the world and that in a sense American Government is a Pirandello play. The difficulty is to draw policy and effective performance out of all of that. That is the challenge.

Q: Profitable two years? Grad school?

MARSH: Extremely.

Q: Would you recommend study in grad school for people interested in a career in the Foreign Service?

MARSH: No, no, and the reason is the Foreign Service likes to send people itself to graduate school and then say the training division people can chalk up another one, that sort of thing. I think that a Doctorate in particular is of relatively little official use. But graduate study is more than just officially beneficial, for personal reasons one should get

as much as one can, obviously. I draw a distinction between those two options.

Q: What then? How old were you at this point?

MARSH: I was 26 when I graduated from Princeton. Then I did something that was very strange, and very quaint in today's terms. Since each of us has two children we would be stunned if this sort of thing were to happen. But at any rate, I listened to my family who suggested strongly that I go and work for a Foundation in Pittsburgh presided over by a cousin of my mother's and connected with industry, but whose focus was on state and local government. And so I went out there and did a number of studies and became an *ex officio* member of the Pittsburgh school board and worked on industrial and economic development for Pennsylvania and all of that sort of thing. I did some other things, really very small little studies on landfills, for example, which are some of the most politically controversial things you can possibly do. A landfill operator threatened suit because I had said in an address one time that landfills were not terribly popular with residents of a community.

Q: How long did the experience last?

MARSH: One year longer than I had planned because I had an ulterior motive to go out there, stay a couple of years and then go into the Foreign Service. My planning became disrupted when the Foreign Service did not offer the examination in 1958. So my plan to enter the Foreign Service in 1959 was thrown off a year. Mind, I had already taken the Foreign Service examination, the written, and passed it. But they wouldn't hold the scores or give me time off so I had to take it again and I passed it again and then took the orals in the spring of 1960.

Q: Bill, when did you decide you were going to make the Foreign Service your choice?

MARSH: Perhaps when, intellectually, I found the work and the subject matter so fascinating and personally, probably when I discovered how much I enjoyed living abroad. I really was delighted living in Japan, fascinated by all the cultural differences. I took Japanese at the embassy. In those days I was not bad in spoken Japanese, but I never took the written.

Q: Did you ever follow up on that Japanese later on?

MARSH: Events precluded it. It's interesting that Mrs. Jorden was the head of the teaching.

Q: Barbara Jorden?

MARSH: No, no, no, Eleanor Jorden.

Q: Mrs. Eleanor Jorden?

MARSH: Eleanor Jorden was head of the program in the embassy in Tokyo and one of the most brilliant teachers I have ever encountered. She was an extraordinary, an inspiring person. And she later became, you are familiar with her, Vlad, she became head of Far Eastern languages at FSI.

Q: Right. Bill, when you were taking the Foreign Service exams, was that one of several options that you were going to do? To try it out or were you pretty firmly wishing to go in that direction?

MARSH: When I make up my mind, Vladimir, it is a one way street. I'm an opinionated person, frankly, and I've never been without a course of action. I don't flounder. So that was it.

Q: Good, good.

MARSH: And as I say, as a dutiful son, I did something else for three years. But that proved beneficial in its own right.

Q: When did you enter the Foreign Service?

MARSH: I came in the end of November 1960, that is to say the week after Thanksgiving and about four weeks after the election of John F. Kennedy. So Eisenhower signed my commission, January 5, 1961, only two weeks before he left office.

Q: You probably have one signed by Kennedy a little bit later.

MARSH: I do, in terms of promotions, but for promotions, not the original appointment.

Q: So what happened in November 1960? You came to Washington and what did you do at that point?

MARSH: Well, there was a certain amount of confusion. At the time of the orals the previous spring they had said - remember we had eight grades then in Foreign Service - and they had said that since I had a Masters Degree, work experience and military experience I would certainly come in as a seven, but probably as a six. I was looking forward to that. I was appointed as an eight, at the top of the eight, so the first thing that I did was to take a one-third pay cut compared with what I was receiving at the Foundation in Pittsburgh. I came into the expensive environment of Washington, high rent, high this, high that, and I found myself impoverished, as a matter of fact. Quite impoverished.

Q: Bill, do you remember what you were being paid?

MARSH: Yes. I was paid $6,165 a year. You'll recall that I told you it was January 5th when President Eisenhower signed my commission, well that was five days too late to get a step-increase in 1962, so I didn't get one until 1963, that is to say nineteen months after I had come into the Foreign Service. That was for a princely $180 a year, the standard

three percent.

Q: Fascinating. So you didn't join it for the money?

MARSH: Clearly not, clearly not. And I'd like to say, Vlad, that when I retired in 1996, as a minister counselor, that in real terms, in 1996 dollars, I was making twice what I was making in 1960 at the Foundation.

Q: Fascinating. Let me ask how did you spend your first period of time?

MARSH: Well, A-100 was remarkably short. I couldn't believe that we would go in with a four-week introductory course, particularly since….

Q: Four weeks? Was that sufficient? Was that too little?

MARSH: Much, much too little. Plus there was a certain amount of indecision. I had said that I would like to have a Washington assignment in order to learn the ways of the Department. I was told it was out of the question, that since I was 29 I had to go overseas to a small post where I would get to do everything, see everything, and I would know the post operation. That was fine. Then, of course, when the assignments officer came and read off the assignments, and I was assigned to Washington, I was disappointed!

Q: Your expectations?

MARSH: That's right. I was really the company man *par excellence*, but I was disappointed, terribly disappointed, when I had got what I had sought in the first place!

Q: Were you a bachelor at that time?

MARSH: I was a bachelor at that time. My first assignment was in the Aviation Division and something very interesting happened there. My first day, after I would say, perhaps, 15 or 20 minutes of orientation, I was handed a folder and told, "Here. Revise the proposed Air Transport Agreement with Brazil."

Q: Wow.

MARSH: Now this has happened many times later. It's a scenario where Dad walks you to the end of the pier and then gives you a swift kick into the lake and says, "Okay, now swim." That seems to be the Department's version of training in many instances.

Q: Was this done as a way to make you jump in and get oriented professionally or was it just mismanagement?

MARSH: I'll never know, I'll never know, probably both.

Q: Was this the predecessor of today's civil aviation work in the State Department?

MARSH: Yes, that's right.

Q: And it was civil aviation?

MARSH: I started in January of 1961 and it was to have been a two-year tour, and then I received orders to Santiago, Chile, which I found curious because I had no particular interest, zero experience, and no language capabilities for Santiago, Chile. But I was supposed to go down there and do something. I've forgotten what.

Instead in the early fall of 1962, I was called to a meeting in the Department. Perhaps you were there, too, Vlad, I don't know. But in any event there were, I would say, sixty officers of my age and of my inexperience. We were told that we had been summoned because we were French speakers and bachelors. And I remember Jim Bishop, who later became a deputy assistant secretary, an ambassador to several places in Africa, say, "Wait a minute. I've got a wife and a kid on the way." And so then others of us spoke up and said, "I'm married, what do you mean bachelor?" And I was among those who said that, because I had been married in May of 1962. So there was a certain amount of consternation. They said, "Well, we are considering a special program for Vietnam and the married men can be excused from that because we really would prefer bachelors."

Well, I had no idea what a profound decision I was making when I didn't make a decision to sidestep the Vietnam program.

Q: So in other words at that time you could have said, "I'm a married man" and you would not have gone to Vietnam?

MARSH: That is correct. That is correct. But I talked with some people and they said that Vietnam was a growth industry, that I ought to get with that program, that it was fascinating. It was a chance to speak French and, then, it was something else. It was not Santiago, Chile, which I'm sure is a delightful spot, but didn't interest me.

Q: Bill, in the fall of 1962, what was your image of Vietnam?

MARSH: Let me preface it by saying that I had visited Vietnam with my General, briefly, very briefly, in 1955. Well, even earlier. I had been put on orders while in Tokyo in late 1953 that would have made me, now get this, as an Air Force Second Lieutenant, would have made me port liaison officer in Haiphong.

What was going on? Well, there was to be a major mobilization for service in North Vietnam to assist the French who were in the final days of their agony there, but President Eisenhower vetoed the whole idea. You will recall that Admiral Radford, Vice President Nixon and many others, urged and advocated this, but the President was insistent that we should not become engaged in a land war.

So, it was almost in a way as if I was fated to go there. Now I visited Saigon briefly with

my General in 1955, never dreaming that I would be showing up there eight years later. The French were still very much in command and there were some obvious signs that the French had completely alienated the population.

Q: Was this the Bao Dai government at that time? Or already Diem?

MARSH: It's Bao Dai, who had his Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem.

Q: Who had Ngo Dinh Diem as his Prime Minister?

MARSH: That's right. But the French were still in charge.

Q: How long did you stay in 1955?

MARSH: Oh, just a couple of days.

Q: What was your impression?

MARSH: I was horrified.

Q: Why?

MARSH: Well, some things are not suitable for tender ears but that we were shown by the French, such as the prison and certain other things that were very depressing and very wrong. By the way I had met a number of French military up in Tokyo when they came to visit my boss. I liked them very much. I'm a great Francophile, and I liked these people very much. But when they started to talk about the war and about the civilizing mission of France and all that sort of thing, it was clear that they were ninety years out of date.

Q: Was that what you felt was wrong, basically?

MARSH: That and the sheer brutality with which the French had treated much of the population.

Q: How about any impressions about the countryside or the people in Vietnam?

MARSH: Even in those days the countryside, and, again, we were in the South, we were in present day Cochin, China, the extreme south. There were obvious signs of warfare all over the place. I can remember the railroad, following the railroad, down into Saigon. We were coming from the Philippines. I don't know, perhaps for a photo mission we followed the railroad. It had been blasted to pieces in so many parts. You know the Trans Indochina railway had been one of the French great claims of accomplishment in that area. It took them about forty years to build it and they bragged constantly about it and here it was, wrecked. While I didn't see North Vietnam, one wondered what the situation could have been like up there where there had been even more intensive fighting.

Q: So Bill, you are back in the fall of 1962 and you decide that you and your bride will be going off to Vietnam?

MARSH: To put a fine point on it, Vlad, we did not oppose a decision by the Department that that should be the case. So in January I began the study of Vietnamese with your good self.

Q: January of 1963?

MARSH: That's right.

Q: Briefly speaking. In January of 1963, how was it to learn Vietnamese? How long did it last and how much did you learn?

MARSH: Of course, I would be delighted to get your views on this subject, but mine are these. First of all, I come from a musical family and the simplest way to teach tones would have been to note them musically, so I did that. I went to our so-called supervisors there and said, "You know, anybody who can read music, look, I've marked this on the scale for you." They laughed me to derision. This just wasn't the way it was done. Later I helped other people by telling them, "Oh, well, that's a perfect fourth interval" and that sort of thing. In any event the instructors and the so-called linguists at the program conducted a very, very limited sort of instructional curriculum.

Whereas in Japan there had been regular appearances by Mrs. Jorden, who had told us something of Japanese grammar and syntax and usage and the like. And how these things related to the culture and why therefore there are the three politeness levels in Japanese and that sort of thing, we never had that kind of briefing which in Japan I had found exceedingly useful. But we never had that sort of thing. The linguists instead would concentrate on teaching us how to form certain sounds. This was not very comprehensible, the way they were doing that.

I remember one linguist was trying to explain one particular "o" sound by asking if anybody had ever been to Oklahoma. Since I was married to a native of Oklahoma I could make that sound. He said, "That is very good, will everybody else imitate that?" Well, you know you put intelligent people in a room and try to make parrots out of them. This is not exactly the best way.

Secondly, as far as substantive preparation for an assignment in Vietnam, I don't know. We were supposed to read the newspaper, I think, and we were supposed to intuit the rest. But there was no well-prepared program of briefings or something of that sort.

Q: I wanted to get to that. Let me just ask, when you finished the course were you able to speak any Vietnamese?

MARSH: Sort of. In the first place in an extremely irregular language I found regional

variations very pronounced and very strong. I would say I used French as much or more than I used Vietnamese when I was there. Incidentally, you'll recall you were supposed to have, well, my partner, John Burke, and I were supposed to have three months in Saigon following the six months we had in Washington.

The tones were never a problem for me. Vocabulary was a problem because vocabulary varied from place to place and I'll never forget that sometimes people in Vietnam, when I spoke with them, would light up with joy and other times would look completely foggy, like what is this strange person from the United States trying to say? So it was a very irregular sort of thing.

I think the program probably should have been at least one year long.

Q: One year long. A long time.

MARSH: And I would have divided it fifty-fifty between Washington and Saigon. Moreover I would have privatized the program and that would have been complete submergence somewhere. Now you and I both met those who had been to the brief program offered at Monterey by the Army. That was ludicrous, that program.

Q: That was a listening program, for listening to pilots basically, I believe.

Bill, let me skip to something you touched on and that is the substantive preparation for some area studies and briefings. Let me just ask generally, before you left what had you learned about Vietnam, what were your impressions of it, and whom had you met who was active on the Vietnam scene in Washington at that time?

MARSH: First of all it's necessary to plan. There was a great deal of turmoil about Vietnam policy at that time.

Q: We're speaking here about 1962, 1963.

MARSH: Early '63. Now when I say early '63, I am deliberately marking off the territory before the great Buddhist uprising against Ngo Diem which began in the spring of 1963. There were those at the desk, Paul Kattenburg foremost among them, who took some forthright exception to the emergent Vietnam policy of the U.S.

I learned more about that controversy far later than I did at the time, because at the time there was really no discussion of pros and cons, assets and liabilities, for those of us. We all had Top Secret security clearances, but nobody was saying these are the risks, these are the vulnerabilities, and these are the potential gains and so forth. There was never that sort of thing. Instead much of it was couched in European terms and particularly the Secretary of State brought up Munich 1938 time and time and time again.

Q: This was Dean Rusk?
MARSH: Dean Rusk. And our actions in Indochina became derivative of the global

strategic effort.

Q: You mean the Cold War effort?

MARSH: That's so.

Q: Did anybody bring up Korea in that context?

MARSH: Korea was not a very popular subject, as a matter of fact, because Korea, of course, had ended inconclusively. Nobody wanted to make that point.

Q: It had begun in ambiguity.

MARSH: The ambiguity and the pain.

Q: Not our defense perimeter.

MARSH: And the pain of it. Because those who served, the best man in my wedding, for example, had been a Marine on the retreat from the Reservoir and he had lots of things to say about the terrible suffering in that winter weather of 1950. So this was not some glorious expedition, which you would use. Instead what you would point to, you would point to such things as the restoration of the Shah in 1953, and the overthrow of Arbenz in 1954, that sort of thing. Where the United States acted decisively in the interior of a country, in internal affairs, as it were.

Q: Bill, did you have a clear, summarized policy sense of what America was doing in Vietnam as you were about to go over there and work on that program?

MARSH: There was a slogan.

Q: What was the slogan?

MARSH: The slogan was couched negatively. And the slogan was that we were to assist the South Vietnamese to prevent their takeover by the Communist North Vietnamese. So a preventive strategy, a defensive strategy, a limited strategy.

Q: Diem had been in office since 1955.

MARSH: Well, as President since '56.

Q: As President since '56. What was the policy at that time? When you were going over there did we have a sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem policy?

MARSH: Of course that policy emerged much later, once considerable differences of opinion had arisen. But President Truman began the policy of support for the French at the time of the Korean War, in 1950. There had been a continuous policy of provision of

materiel and training and political support since 1950. First for the French and then, of course, Geneva came along in 1954.

Q: By the time you were getting ready in early 1963, was there still a sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem policy?

MARSH: Clearly.

Q: Clearly.

MARSH: You'll recall that Vice President Johnson had made a trip to the Far East and had hailed Ngo Diem as the Winston Churchill of Asia. Moreover we had been providing rather considerable support since 1961, fairly early in the Kennedy Administration, that is. Then, 1961, which was a year of setbacks, what with the Berlin Wall and what with the Bay of Pigs, all sorts of things. The Laos situation turning so sour. The focus got narrower and narrower and narrower in Asia until it centered on Vietnam.

Q: It centered on Vietnam.

Bill, when did you go there?

MARSH: I arrived in July of 1963. My welcoming committee at the airport consisted of Dick Holbrooke and Tony Lake!

Q: That's interesting, what were those folks doing?

MARSH: They were….

Q: Were they friends of yours from language training?

MARSH: From language training, that's correct.

Q: So they just came out to meet you.

MARSH: They came out to meet me.

Q: Or were they your official greeters?

MARSH: They came out to meet Ruth, my wife, and me. They took us to a house. It was very dark and there was a curfew because of the Buddhist uprising. The main pagoda was four blocks away and it was surrounded by troops and we had an icebox that was stocked with a bottle of milk, a bottle of gin, and some beer.

Q: This was what they had stocked for you and Ruth?

MARSH: No, the embassy had done that, as a matter of fact.

Q: Bill, correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that a rather innovative and considerate way to greet a newly arriving couple, some milk, some gin...

MARSH: I supposed so. Incidentally, something that was consistent throughout my three years in Vietnam, I didn't have a phone.

Q: You didn't have a phone?

MARSH: Never had a phone in Vietnam at my residence, no, never had a residential phone.

Q: Let me just back up for a moment. You said that you were met at the airport by Richard Holbrooke and Anthony Lake, who continue to be very interested in government and one of whom was a national security advisor, another one of whom has done all sorts of things with both diplomacy and business. What were those fellows doing at that time?

MARSH: They were on their first tours, really, and they were doing rotational assignments, as I recall. Each of them later on became a sort of *aide-de-camp* to ambassadors and that sort of thing and at the same time traveled around the country. Incidentally, before we get to Vietnam there are a couple of things to signal.

First of all, I was told back in the Department that I was to be consul in Nha Trang on the central coast. That did not come to pass, and then when I was given passport and tickets there was nothing provided for my wife, no orders. The reason was that I wasn't married, they maintained. And here we go again, this error. Something happened to the Dependency Statements filed in 1962, they never made it. This problem lasted for a decade, trying to get tickets and passports.

Q: Bill, in other words, for a decade after you had gotten married you kept having to prove that you were married to get travel orders?

MARSH: That is correct. One time when I protested that while my wife was in safehaven in Bangkok she had had our first son and how could they say I wasn't married and a supernumerary at the Department told me by phone, "Sir, it isn't necessary to be married to have a child."

Q: Well, that is a wonderful story. I'm glad you took us back there. You just took us to before you had arrived.

MARSH: Before I had arrived. That's right. But I managed to get there somehow or other, maybe just to shut me up they gave me a passport and orders. However when it came time to leave Asia, there were no orders or passport or tickets for my wife, we had to go through that argument all over again.

In any event we arrived in Saigon and there was considerable turmoil, a very unsettled

situation for several reasons. First the local political situation with the Buddhists in open revolt and full repression practiced by the Diem government, and secondly because we had a change of ambassadors and clearly a change in policy.

Q: We've arrived in Saigon, it is July of 1963, and you were just saying that there were two things going on which added to the confusion. One was a situation involving Buddhists and another was a change in American ambassadors. Could you share a little bit of the Buddhist situation first of all at that time, as background?

MARSH: The Buddhist situation had been simmering for quite some time but really boiled over in Hue in May, I think it was, of 1963. Now Hue had special resonance because Central Vietnam was the homeland of President Ngo Dinh Diem, and Hue was the see of his brother, the Archbishop, Archbishop Thuc. There was a repression, and it was a bloody repression, of some Buddhist demonstrations and yet another brother of President Diem, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and particularly the latter's wife, Tranh Le Xuan, were hard-liners. We subsequently learned that Ngo Dinh Nhu was double-dealing. But at that time not many of us knew it, if any of us knew that, as a matter of fact because Ngo was extending his lines to the North Vietnamese by the Vietcong, the Vietnamese communists.

So international attention focused on this when there were several immolations by Buddhist bonzes, or priests. The press drawn to Vietnam by the increasing American involvement in the affairs of that country had something sensational to photograph and to report upon that could be very meaningful to the American public as a whole. After all, that you arm so many hamlets or that you prepare the defenses of so many provinces is pretty tame stuff, but martyrs were something quite different. So that was the Buddhist situation.

Now, when we arrived in July of 1963, Ambassador Nolting was already preparing his departure, in fact did so in mid July, and Ambassador Lodge had been named to the post. For the younger listeners, readers, we should point out that Lodge was, after all, the Vice Presidential candidate opposite Lyndon B. Johnson's vice presidential candidacy only three years previously. So this was quite remarkable.

Q: This was a bi-partisan gesture.

MARSH: It was a bi-partisan gesture.

Q: By a president who hated Mr. Lodge, I suspect.

MARSH: By a President who had seen in Mr. Lodge everything the President's father had had to contend with over many years in the Boston area. So that it was a case of opposites attracting. Yes, indeed, as a matter of fact.

Q: So, Bill, had you had a chance to work with Ambassador Nolting at all before he left?

MARSH: I met him. He was a very approachable man, but again I was in there in the capacity of a student, studying in Vietnamese. But a member of my FSO entering class had been his staff aide and so he took me in to meet the ambassador and we talked and all that sort of thing.

Now there was a policy shift that was imminent. Ambassador Nolting had been identified, rightly or wrongly, probably erroneously, as with Ngo Dinh Diem, sink or swim, up or down. So it was clear that a tougher line was coming in with Ambassador Lodge. Why else would the President name the man he had unseated 11 years previously in order to get to the Senate? Why would he invite him if we were going to continue with the same old thing? From the arrival of Ambassador Lodge in August of 1963 until the *coup d'etat* of November 1, 1963, there was great speculation as to what the Lodge appointment meant and what this mean in particular for President Diem.

Q: Before we get into this period, let me ask a little about the American embassy at that time. When you arrived you went and met a lot of people, can you describe what that embassy was, who was there, who was who at that time?

Who was the deputy chief of mission?
MARSH: The deputy chief of mission was Bill Truehart at that time. Mel Manfull was the political counselor. Richardson was the station chief, CIA, and was a particular target of Madam Nhu.

Q: John Richardson?

MARSH: I think so, yes, I believe so. But that wasn't, frankly Vlad, that wasn't what caught my attention.

Q: What caught your attention?

MARSH: Now the thing I want to describe for you it is necessary to hark back ten years previously when I saw a very large military presence in Japan. I saw bases with tens of thousands of people on them and so forth. But I never saw so many U.S. military relative to the civilian population as in Saigon. They seemed to be everywhere and the Vietnamese, except at rush hours, seemed to be off the street but there were hordes it appeared of military there.

Q: This was in mid 1963?

MARSH: That's so, and there were at that time about 18,000 American military in the country. Now 18,000 would be the equivalent of about 250,000 Vietnamese in the United States, something like that.

Q: Concentrated?

MARSH: Very largely concentrated. They were building an enormous headquarters staff

there.

Q: What was that? Was that the MAAG, the Military Assistance Group?

MARSH: The MACV, the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam. That's right.

Q: That was the second of the two? First there was a MAAG, than there was a MACV.

MARSH: That is so. And they were already planning a MACV.

Q: And they couldn't stand each other, as I recall.

MARSH: There were problems but very soon the MAAG was incorporated into the MACV which became a full military Command, it just had hordes of people. For example, where I worked for two and a half years was the Provincial Reporting Unit. There were seven of us provincial reporters and the military set up a unit just to process our reports, nothing else, with 58 people in it.

Q: I was in that unit with you, Bill, and I never knew that until today! You're saying that the military set up a unit to process the reports produced by provincial reporting?

MARSH: That is correct.

Q: Which had a total of...

MARSH: Seven.

Q: A total of seven persons. Amazing. Well, it certainly is attentive. Bill, you were impressed with the military presence at that time in Saigon?

MARSH: I was worried by it.
Q: You were worried by it.

MARSH: I was worried by it, to be perfectly frank with you. Let me again just recall something for the user's benefit here. I had been in local government work, albeit with a Foundation, but there was of necessity a heavy local political component of that work. So I had picked up certain sensitivities of which I really wasn't even fully aware. But what I want to say is, and many people have asked me, when did I first have a suspicion that things were not necessarily going to go according to plan. I would say it was within the first week I arrived. I had literally a physical sensation, a strange feeling in my stomach, and I didn't know what it was but just something seemed wrong, anomalous, and I wasn't quite sure what it was. That feeling didn't decline over the next few years.

Q: You were a student, you said, for the first three months in Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes, although I was pulled off to cover, if you please, for the embassy, that is

for the embassy's security section, actions by the government troops at the Xa Loi which was about four blocks from where I was living, as I said.

Q: Was that where the so-called bonze barbecues had taken place?

MARSH: No, they had always taken place in town.

Q: In Saigon.

MARSH: Thus, for example, one took place in front of the Roman Catholic cathedral.

Q: In Saigon?

MARSH: That's right. These were calculated, you know, these immolations, to attract the maximum publicity and attention.

Q: I believe, Bill, there was a list of people who had volunteered to commit suicide in this fashion?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: And the hierarchy allowed them to at that time.

MARSH: That is so.

Q: By the political Buddhist hierarchy to my understanding.

MARSH: That is so. The thing that was extraordinary is that there we are, outside the Xa Loi Pagoda and we've got representatives of the three Armed Services there, of the intelligence services, of the embassy, and all these American reporters. You almost had as many Americans as you had Vietnamese security forces at these pagodas. It was intrusion.

Q: It was a press event, wasn't it?

MARSH: It was a press event. It was a performance, is what it was, really a performance. There was a lot of shouting back and forth and occasionally there was some wielding of truncheons and that sort of thing, but on the whole I don't think that it was the cruelest thing imaginable, but then I didn't see everything.

At any rate when Ambassador Lodge arrived he decided he was going to reorganize the embassy.

Q: You were pulled out of your language training?

MARSH: No, I managed to take my language training but just before completing the

language training they said that I would not be in the Provincial Reporting Unit as I had been told, instead I would be put in the Consular Section. I like music very much and so what I said actually is, "Like Mimi in 'La Bohème,' addio sensa rancour... so long, no hard feelings." I said, just give me a ticket and send me back to the United States, I've had this training, we'll just write that off, I'm going to be in the Consular Section where I'll not be using Vietnamese. Let's just forget the whole scene, when can we leave, I'm sure Ruth will be delighted to go.

Incidentally, I did take a trip around Vietnam in October, about two weeks before the coup d'etat, with my wife. I took her to Dalat and to Hue and to Nha Trang, so I took her to three very interesting places in Vietnam. One could still travel around by air relatively easily. And so we had seen the country and there we were in Saigon but what worried me to no small extent was that, first of all, everywhere we had to travel by day. At night all bets were off and we were confined whether we traveled or whether we remained in Saigon, to the city.

Q: This was travel outside of town or travel within the town of Saigon?

MARSH: Outside of town, but outside of town was rather severely drawn. For example, suburban areas were off limits. Gia Dinh Province, which was to the northeast of Saigon, no, no, no you didn't do that. We went up to Dalat and that is where we met the head of USOM, the AID mission, and his wife, who were at the same hotel we were. He suggested a place that we would go to dinner called La Savoisiennen, run by two old French women who'd been there for donkeys years and it was a little bit out of town. To my horror, we went through a Vietcong roadblock.

Q: With the AID director?

MARSH: With the AID director.

Q: Who was the AID director?

MARSH: I don't recall, to tell you the truth, I really don't remember. But I'll never forget that. He seemed oblivious to the whole thing but I knew what it was because I did catch a few words, at that time. We are talking October of 1963. But believe me this was not very far from the center of Dalat at all, but it was at night. But we went and we had a very good dinner and we came back and the roadblock had disappeared. It had moved on someplace else.

Q: Did the roadblock stop you? Did they chat with you a little bit?

MARSH: They sort of waved us through. I think at that time the Vietcong were not particularly interested in having any contretemps with westerners.

Q: At this time you say there were about 18,000 or more American forces, but they are not combat forces?

MARSH: They are not combat forces.

Q: They were an advisory effort?

MARSH: They were strictly training, an advisory effort, plus they were cadre for an eventual massive effort. Thus I remember, for example, meeting a Major whose job it was to go over the Vietnam railway to see if it would handle tanks. I happened to meet him in the officer's club in Nha Trang one time. I said to him that of course it would not handle tanks. In the first place it is full of tunnels and this is a narrow gauge line and very lightweight rail and you would never get through it. He said, "Please, please, don't tell my superiors. This has been a very nice trip."

Q: Fascinating. So we are back after three months of language training punctuated by some work that you have described with security, and other issues, what did you then do?

MARSH: Well, I was put in the external side, external political affairs, but briefly. I was there for about a month or two and then put into the Provincial Reporting program.

Q: Bill, can you describe that program?

MARSH: The notion of the program was that officers trained in the Vietnamese language would circulate throughout the country, spending a week or so in a given provincial capital. Getting down with the U.S. military in those capitols, but working pretty largely with the Vietnamese, the province chief, district chiefs, provincial governments, local notables, Buddhist, Catholics, Cao Dai, what have you. And then spend the next week in Saigon writing up a report on that particular province as to how things were moving.

I think that initially the idea was to try to keep a finger on the pulse of the sects and the Buddhists in Vietnam. Now remember there were a number of dissident sects, Cao Dai, Binh Xuyen, and so forth, as well as the majority Buddhist population. But Buddhists varied greatly, that's a term of art. Those of Hue had little in common with those in the Delta and in the mountains.

Then in addition we were supposed to keep an eye on the various ethnic minorities in the country, the Cham, the Montagnards, etc., and my special assignment, because I had strong French, was to keep an eye on what the French were up to. Everyone was very suspicious at that time of the de Gaulle government, and in fact the French were considered hostile to us because whether due to their smarting from their wounds and their expulsion from the area and their resistance to the 'Yankification' of Indochina, I don't know. But in any event I remember there was a distinctly hostile air coming out of Washington with respect to the French.

Now incidentally a number of those who had served in the embassy in Saigon, such as Nolting, Truehart, Manfull, and others were old Paris hands. They were regarded as rather Francophile and French sympathizers and they were replaced in later years with

those of Asian experience, rather than those with European experience so that they would not be seen as doing service to the old colonial masters.

Q: Bill that is a very interesting point. Let us go back for a minute to folks like Truehart, Manfull and others. Do you think they were there because they knew French and it was at one point or another a French-speaking post? Why do you think they wound up there?

MARSH: I guess probably that was the case. But also because they were people who could appreciate the significance in Asian security of the French-speaking countries of Indochina. You'll recall that SEATO was in operation, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, and the French were members. These were people who could keep an eye on things. Later the sort of favored country became the United Kingdom, namely because of its success, or perceived success, in Malaya. But under very different terms, of course.

If we had in the '50s and early '60s, French advisors and confidential sources among the French, we later tended to have British policemen. Thompson for example, who had been the chief of police in Malaya, and so on, and others who passed through Saigon and went on to Washington. President Nixon, for example, made great use of Sir Robert Thompson from Malaya.
Q: I remember meeting him. Yes.

MARSH: But there is one strong current in our policy that probably bears mention at this time and that is that there was a fascination on the part of the President, President Kennedy, with the guerrilla mystique. This meant that Indo-China, particularly Vietnam, was to be a proving ground for America's capability to conduct anti-guerrilla operations and to counter what was seen as the spreading Chinese evangelism of guerrilla movements.

It seems to me that this was very simplistic and I thought so at the time because the Chinese Revolution was due to an awful lot more things than presumed friendliness between the peasant and the guerrilla soldier.

But this business that the people are the sea in which the fish, the guerrilla swim, all that sort of thing. We had these slogans all of the time. Now the answer to that problem perceived by President Kennedy and his brother, the Attorney General and later Senator from New York, in no small part the answer was to have been U.S. Special Forces. It was assumed that they could serve as Western guerrillas, moving through the countryside, joining forces with the people and so forth. This idea was totally erroneous.

But later on when I was briefing on a fairly regular basis Senator Kennedy, in his office, his first question was always, "How are the Special Forces doing?"

Q: This was some years later?

MARSH: Yes that's right. But it was an abiding fascination and I think it was kind of a premature Rambo syndrome that we had here, that heroic virtues were the answer to

these great revolutionary problems.

Q: Bill, at that time did you find yourself reading any of the classics of counter-insurgency or guerrilla warfare?

MARSH: I already had.

Q: I had, too. Can you elaborate on that because there was quite a cult of those books at that time?

MARSH: Well, first of all, I read "Sun Tsu," which is what, the 11th or 12th century, something of that sort, on the art of war. I read everything Bernard Fall ever wrote.

Q: This was when you were in Vietnam or before?

MARSH: Before.

Q: So in other words you had, let's just skip back for a minute, area preparation? While you said it wasn't very strong, you had basically done a lot of reading?

MARSH: Well, I tried to find out as much about the country as possible because I wasn't getting anything at the Foreign Service Institute or from the desk. I wanted to know what the place was like. Now as far as American policy was concerned that always remained foggy. As long as I was attached with Vietnam it was a foggy kind of thing and that you were largely supposed to intuit what to do.

Q: That's very interesting. So you read Bernard Fall, Street Without Joy?

MARSH: Oh, yes.

Q: Various Fall writings? Anyone else?
MARSH: Malraux. Quite a few things. Anything I could put my hands on, because it was fascinating and it was obviously a darkening, gathering storm.

Q: Yes. Yes. Bill, you mentioned that at that time for a lot of people in Washington Vietnam was among other things a proving ground for counter-guerrilla warfare, counter-insurgency. How did that fit in to what you began to do then with the Provincial Reporting Unit?

MARSH: Well, I had some advantages that others of my peers did not have. I had been in the military and had some familiarity with military processes in thinking and approaches and that sort of thing. On the other hand, one of the most impressive things throughout this whole effort was to meet those junior FSOs, Foreign Service officers, and your good name is foremost among them, who had not been in the military. But FSOs who really had tremendous sense and sensitivity to military situations, and to tactical as well as strategic considerations. I was terribly impressed.

For example, Richard Teare, who was a member of the staff, had never served in the military but could go into a Province and then write an absolutely brilliant report on the vulnerabilities of that Province in the military sense. The problem was that our American military colleagues could not accept this. Now I can recall that later, when Ambassador Taylor had arrived - Ambassador Taylor had, of course, an immense prestige, an immense reputation - we really had titans as ambassadors there in Lodge, Taylor, Lodge and Bunker, I think we had the best you could possibly provide - but it was inconceivable for Ambassador Taylor that civilians could analyze military situations. It was just totally inconceivable because he was of a priesthood that could not admit the laity to these mysteries, if you will. How do I know that? He told us so; that he couldn't understand us making military judgments. That seemed completely wrong. What we did was analyze, use our heads, sense and talk to a lot of people at a lot of different ranks, enlisted lower-field grade and senior, both Vietnamese and American.
In any event, one had to be an autodidact, one had to teach oneself here because the preparation for service in Vietnam was not very considerable.

Q: Bill, the Provincial Reporting Unit, who was in charge of that unit at that time? Were you in charge of it?

MARSH: No, later I was. The first chief was James Rosenthal.

Q: James D. Rosenthal.

MARSH: James D. Rosenthal, an extraordinary public servant in my view and a very close friend and a great man and I know you regard him very highly as well.

Q: Who else was with you, Bill, who were your colleagues?

MARSH: We had David Engel, whose efforts, I would like to put on record, whose efforts for many years went unrewarded by the Service, a self-effacing kind of man but whose contributions were colossal. We had John Negroponte, who became Assistant Secretary of State and ambassador to Mexico and the Philippines, and other places, Honduras.

So we had people who did quite well afterwards. We would have had you, but you were out of reach, you were no fool. You didn't put yourself in our clutches. You were with AID.

I want to put this on record, that when anybody disparages the Foreign Service, I don't tolerate it I point out the work that you and your peers did for another agency, in an unfamiliar situation, with great security problems and so forth, and it was brilliant. Your work was brilliant, absolutely brilliant. For example, Rob Warne, in the Delta, yourself, others, amazing what those young officers, but who were well educated and terribly devoted, accomplished - really, my hat is off to you all.

Q: Bill, in provincial reporting, which provinces did you spend time in?

MARSH: At first I was assigned to those in central Vietnam, and later I took those around the Saigon area. When I became the head of the unit, I was with those around the Saigon area because, after all, rank has its privileges, right? And I wanted to have less traveling. The traveling up to central Vietnam was pretty hairy and the Delta was never an area that interested me very much. Not because it was so infested with communist forces, which was true, but because the dustiness of the place in the dry season made my sneezing so intense that I couldn't talk to people, I was too busy using my handkerchief, so I stayed out of there. I did visit, of course, the Delta to a certain extent and went the length and breadth of the country.

The uplands, the highlands, I also had a dust problem up there. In those days I had considerable sensitivity to that sort of thing so I wanted to stay as close to salt water as I could.

Q: Right. So you were going around central Vietnam?

MARSH: Yes that is right. Remember, we had a consulate in Hue at that time, so the upper three provinces were looked after by our consulate in Hue. I came into the picture a province or two north of Nha Trang and down the coast a couple of provinces, and so forth. A center of considerable conflict between the Catholic and Buddhist populations, the place from which the later President of Vietnam had come.

Q: This was Nguyen Binh Thieu, the later president?

MARSH: Yes that's correct, he was from that area. And, moreover, Nha Trang had considerable strategic significance because of its magnificent harbor.

Q: They were also beautiful places, Bill, aren't they?

MARSH: Well…that was not…I appreciated that very much, but I gave that up in order to move down around the Saigon area.

Q: One personal question at that time, you were married and family still with you? Was Ruth, your wife, still with you?

MARSH: Well, when we arrived in Vietnam... first of all, we were told we would have a two-year tour, and we would never see Vietnam again. And so I would enjoy my two years as consul in Nha Trang and then would have a nice home leave and would never see the place again. Very soon after we arrived there was arbitrary extension of the tour to three years and of course the Nha Trang option was taken away. But for that matter the assignment was going to be completely changed to make a consular officer out of me, rather than a field officer and I didn't want that. Well, I did get the fieldwork, and we were there for three years with a home leave at 18 months. That home leave came in February of 1965. Ruth was with me. We had planned to go around the world. We were

sitting in a restaurant in Oklahoma one day and were told that the President was on television and announced the departure of the families from Vietnam.

Q: So you were okay, right? By then, Bill, you had a son already?

MARSH: No, no, no. On this home leave we had reached Oklahoma, where my wife's parents lived, and we went on to Washington. It was there she learned she was pregnant with our first child. So what we sought from the Department was advice: should we go to safehaven, should we leave her there in the United States, what exactly should we do? And we couldn't get any advice.

Q: Bill, what did you wind up doing? What did Ruth wind up doing?

MARSH: I gave Ruth the option and we continued round the world and we dropped her off in Bangkok.

Q: In March of 1965? Or February of '65?

MARSH: In April of '65.

Q: April of '65. And she was there as a dependent in safehaven?

MARSH: That is correct.

Q: Were there others from Vietnam? From Saigon, who had joined in that program?

MARSH: There were quite a few and far more than the embassy in Bangkok found comfortable.

Q: Did they get housing?

MARSH: No, they had to find it.

Q: They had to find it…they had an allowance?

MARSH: No.

Q: No. Okay. It was a self-help project.
MARSH: Yes, quite.

Q: Was it coming out of your pocket, Bill?

MARSH: That is correct, so was the fare between Saigon and Bangkok. Later on, years later, they instituted a paid fare for people to go back and forth.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think at that time Emily Lodge, Henry Cabot Lodge's

wife, also moved out of Saigon and went to Bangkok.

MARSH: She did and she was wonderful to the Saigon wives, and particularly to mine. They got along very, very well. Ambassador Lodge invited Dick Holbrooke and me and some others to go with him on the jet that was provided for him to go over to Bangkok to see his wife.

Q: Because you and Dick and others had dependents that were there. I imagine quite a lot of folks.

MARSH: That's right. But he was close to us, we were in the embassy, he knew us and that sort of thing. So he was very kind, very, very kind.

Q: That's terrific.

MARSH: But the safehaven arrangements made by the Department were woefully inadequate, more non-existent than actual and Embassy Bangkok was quite unhelpful.

Q: Were they friendly?

MARSH: No.
Q: You weren't terribly welcome, is what you are saying.

MARSH: Well, the thing that I have forgiven but can never forget was that when my wife went into labor she had tried to get in touch with the Thai who drove for her at the hotel where he usually hung out, and she couldn't reach him. She was into frequent contractions and called the embassy and asked if they could send her to get to the hospital in an embassy car. You will recall the notoriety of Bangkok traffic. It is even worse today, but it was horrible then. She didn't get transportation; she got a lecture from the general services officer that Saigon wives were not supposed to bother Embassy Bangkok and were supposed to look after their own matters. So she managed to get a taxi and she arrived at the Bangkok Nursing Home Hospital in Bangkok barely in time, and the gentleman who dealt with her in such an unthinking way later rose to very high rank in the Department.

Q: Bill, on the principle that good deeds shouldn't remain unpunished, who was this gentleman?

MARSH*: De mortuis nil nisi bonam* (of the dead, nothing but good).

Q: Okay, point taken. Shall we go back a little to the provinces?

MARSH: Yes, let's do that.

Q: We're back to the provinces, Bill.

MARSH: This was very interesting work, I must say, extremely interesting work. It was totally unstructured. We identified what was worthy of reporting or not, whom we would see, we were totally on our own with no supervision out there in the field. Now we had certain general guidelines from the embassy, to be sure, but if we decided we would see X or Y or Z, usually there were no requirement that we call back the embassy for permission. Not everything was ad referendum, we had considerable initiative and got around and it was very interesting. It was also an exposure to danger that I never had in the military.

Q: Fascinating, fascinating.

MARSH: I'm sure you as well as I have driven over mined roads. I'm sure you as well as I had been in a town encircled by Vietcong in a night attack. I'm sure you as well as I had been very, very close to a napalm retaliatory attack by U.S. forces. This was something.

Now, the gods were with me in that I was asked to delay my home leave in 1965 by a couple of weeks because John Negroponte, who was working for me, wanted to go off on a trip. I was furious because I had everything planned and I had to recast everything. Well, what it meant was that I was away when the embassy was subjected to a terrorist attack.

Q: That was March of 1965.

MARSH: That was March 30th of 1965, and I happened to be in Athens at that time.

Q: It got bombed?

MARSH: And it got bombed, that is correct.

Q: I was out of town, too. I was out of the country.

MARSH: I think you and I, as glasses wearers, were particularly lucky not to be there because a number of people lost their eyesight as a consequence of that explosion. The doctor in the CIA, you'll recall, was blinded. He was looking out to see what all the excitement was about outside.

Q: It was considered lucky at that time, Bill, if you didn't have a window view or if you were facing away from the window.

MARSH: That's right. That is correct.

Q: You would have some shards in the back of your scalp, as did Mel Levine. I remember Mel Levine had to have surgery for the back of his head to have the glass pieces taken out.

MARSH: Yes. And Jim Rosenthal, our leader of the Provincial Reporting Unit, was badly cut in the face. It was very bad. But those people all were given magnificent

treatment by the embassy. The embassy gave them one day off. One day off!

Q: Yes. Well, it sounds like a health maintenance organization these days, dealing with someone's delivery of a child.

MARSH: May I comment about that incident?

Q: Oh, of course, Bill. We have about a minute left.

MARSH: There had been a report, an intelligence report, of an impending attack. Someone suggested putting back the concrete barriers that had stood in front of the embassy to prevent traffic from coming and the decision was taken at very high level that this was nonsense, and we were not going to be cowed by this sort of thing.

Q: Amazing.

MARSH: So, the Vietcong drove right into the lobby.

Q: ...drove right into the lobby. At this point, let's take a break and we'll resume this very soon.

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This is December 30, 1997. This is a continuation of an interview with Mr. William H. Marsh.

Bill, Happy New Year. Last time we talked we had discussed work in Saigon that you were doing. We discussed provincial reporting. You had quite a lot of interesting stuff in that regard and then we came up to the very dramatic moment of March 30, 1965, when the American embassy was badly bombed. You were luckily out of the country. At that point we stopped.

Bill, what were you doing after that, what is the next sequence of events?

MARSH: First, Happy New Year to you, Vlad. It's good to be with you and is indeed like old times.

Upon returning to the embassy in early April of 1965 from a home leave which itself had been charged with emotion in that while we were in Oklahoma, President Johnson ordered out the families so that we knew that my wife could not return to Saigon. We reached Washington to find out that she was pregnant with our first child, and we had to stop at Bangkok on the way back in order to get her established. I left her pregnant in the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok with two cotton dresses and no place to live. So it's an unsung story of heroism which I think deserves to be mentioned because spouses get very little, very little appreciation from the Foreign Service and from the Department generally.

In any event, to return to the shattered embassy, where my desk was under a pile of rubble and where there were two large boxes on that desk. We had ordered some hurricane lamps from Neiman-Marcus and they had been sent. I was just going to pick them up and toss them out but I didn't hear any tinkle of glass. I opened them and they were in perfect condition. We used them for years. I wrote Stanley Marcus and said he would never believe what a packing department he had. I got back a very nice letter from him saying they get a lot of gripes, but this was the first time they had ever gotten praise like that.

In any event, we got our lives reestablished. It was really like an entirely new tour because it was now a bachelor tour; it was now obviously a wartime tour. The explosion I think had finally dispelled any pretense that we were there to look after civil action or police action, or anything of that sort. Incidentally, the powers that be in the embassy had given all of those who had experienced the explosion a day off. One day off. Which was certainly generous, wasn't it!

At any rate we then set up the work. Jim Rosenthal had been the Head of Provincial Reporting and he left in early summer. So then I became Head of Provincial Reporting and remained Head of Provincial Reporting for the next, oh, nine or 10 months, something of that sort. I had to reorganize. We had an increasingly massive American military presence and the beginnings of American military intervention, if you will, starting in the fall of 1965.

Now there was something that happened then, in the fall, that we did not assess properly, I think. That was that the American desire for a classical battlefield confrontation with the Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces was granted. This in the Ia Drang Valley, and American forces were defeated, in effect, at that time. This had a great influence on the U.S. military, I believe, but we did not have the feeling, the full assessment of that. One of the things was that we really were not accompanying U.S. military forces on military operations. Now right at this point...

Q: Which battle was this?

MARSH: Ia Drang... the Ia Drang Valley. That was a pitched battle and American forces came off second best with heavy losses. Before the military, or military historians, or whoever may be listening to this start reaching for their war-clubs, I should say I am not suggesting a system of political commissars. But I am saying that when you have a war which has mixed civilian and military elements, and in which civilians and diplomats at that are supposed to be doing reporting, providing full coverage of these sorts of things, there should be at least sampling for those civilians on military operations.

Now you, Vlad, and I, both had experience of small scale, small unit stuff out in the Provinces. I'm sure that you had the experience that I had in Ham Nghia Province, just west of Saigon. They handed me a weapon and said I would have to use it as the Vietcong surrounded us. They had called in an air strike but I might have to fight off attackers at this compound. This was in the middle of the night. I'm sure you had

experiences of that sort.

But at the level of field grade officers out in the field, we did have that opportunity to observe military situations. At more senior levels, and with larger units, we did not and that's a pity because we did not really get the full measure of what was happening in Vietnam with the American effort. Namely, that the American military power was proving inefficacious there.

So we did our reporting. I may have mentioned the work of Richard Teare, who was one of the fellows on my staff and how he had done a very honest report of the vulnerabilities of a certain province. The military wouldn't clear it. Phil Habib, the political counselor, asked him to go back and do another assessment and see if he had done everything right - and he couldn't land at the provincial capital because the Vietcong had overrun the air field and occupied it! But that didn't influence the Military Assistance Command-Vietnam at all.

Now one experience of mine, two in fact, seemed to me demonstrate the problems that we had confronting a major general staff operation. The first was, at a time that I was acting consul in Hue, I was called up to the Ben Hai River which was the boundary, you'll recall, between North and South Vietnam. U.S. Navy aircraft bombing had destroyed the bridge over that river. The Canadian members of the International Control Commission had signaled this to me. I got there at once, looked it over. The bridge was in ruins. I got on the phone, called the embassy and said they should please get in touch with MACV because U.S. Navy aircraft had destroyed the famous bridge, which had great, symbolic importance, as you will recall. MACV's response to this when informed was (A) there were no U.S. Navy aircraft anywhere in that vicinity because they had been attacking Vinh, which was something like a hundred miles to the north, and (B) I deserved a reprimand because I shouldn't have been in the demilitarized zone there. I never did understand the latter and, of course, the former point was totally fallacious.

But they insisted that the bridge was intact and that there was absolutely no problem with them.

A second incident was rather interesting, I think. I went to see an old French planter in Phuoc Long Province, which was along the Cambodian border north of Saigon. He gave me a rather full accounting of how the Vietcong were raising considerable funds from the workers on rubber plantations. As the workers came up to draw their wages in cash from the table where he and the other employers sat there was a Vietcong agent who took a percentage off this for the cause's coffers. I wrote this up and got a query, ultimately, from MACV, how did I get there, since there was no military airfield? I said that I drove and MACV responded that was impossible, I could not have driven because the only road between the provincial capital and that plantation was heavily mined. My response was, sorry, I did go and was here to prove that I had made the trip successfully. In which case, once again, MACV said I deserved a reprimand.

Q: Bill, what you are saying, if I understand it, the point of Ben Hai and this second

episode, is that when you get a very large command it doesn't know what is happening on the ground. Is that the moral of the story?

MARSH: Let me speak of a time, and there were numerous times, when I happened to participate in briefings of Secretary McNamara. As a matter of fact I accompanied Secretary McNamara, I believe earlier I mentioned how he insisted on using a Vietnamese phrase which he distorted and it became totally counterproductive. At any rate once again I was in a briefing and I happened to be sitting next to a Major Schweitzer, who later became a General and was at the White House. He was a very forthright man of very good but rather blunt reputation in speaking. He was listening at that time because provincial advisors had been brought in to brief McNamara and of course they did very little talking. It was the staff chiefs from MACV who did the talking to the Secretary of [Defense] and all these people were supposed to do was nod in agreement when things were said.

At one point Schweitzer leaned toward me and said, "Did you hear what he just said? He said the Vietcong in Binh Long Province has no mortar capability." Schweitzer said, "I've got a piece of the shell in my leg from a mortar." He went and took this up with MACV and they disallowed that it was a mortar, he was mistaken. So he didn't even know what had hit him, according to them. An interesting thing to me was that at one time field representatives of MACV were not authorized to receive combat pay, but the Saigon staff of MACV was.

These were distortions. It was difficult for us to know how to deal with them. And as a matter of fact the unprecedented nature of these sorts of problems meant that our superiors, our diplomatic superiors, didn't quite know how to deal with these matters. They found it difficult to give us guidance. Partly because they believed that we should have little guidance because if we were going to go out and report, we should not be biased in any respect by that. But it made it very difficult, frankly, to know what to look for and what was permissible and what was impermissible. Well, we soon learned.

First of all, Ambassador Taylor, Maxwell Taylor, as I mentioned before I believe, did not see a military reporting role for civilians. That was just totally unprofessional as far as he was concerned. Henry Cabot Lodge, on the other hand, who returned in 1965, believed very thoroughly in us and in our work and used and relied on us a great deal. I was there for the second tour of Henry Cabot Lodge.

We saw and learned a great deal, I think, and the difficulty came in transmitting this and then seeing it was useful to policy-makers, decision-makers. I remember, for example, the U.S. Division located west of Saigon, I think this was a little later but at any rate, I asked how many vehicles they had for the troops and was told there was a vehicle for every two. The Lieutenant General shocked me with that statement. I said, "I beg your pardon, there is a vehicle for every two men you have?" And he replied, "Yes, Americans don't walk, they drive." Well, that meant we were going to flood that country with materiel for by this time we had a quarter-million people in the country, you see. But Americans don't walk? Not even soldiers? Not even young men? No, they drive.

There were anomalies of that sort and it was very difficult to know how to put them all together. The confusions were manifest. I think one of the most important confusions that we saw was that in a war which was so inherently political in its compass and in its motivations, the U.S. military weren't quite sure how to provide guidance and to direct their own people. I remember once a conversation with General Westmoreland in which I said the troops had more money than some of them had ever seen in their lives before or were ever likely to see again. Could one not take the system used by the Peace Corps, which rather banks the volunteers' money and then gave it to them when they left? They were able to use that for school or to buy a house or make down payment on a house or an automobile or what have you.

Troops were going out with great enormous batches of money on R&R to Hong Kong and to Bangkok and buying a lot of junk and wasting money in bars and in general driving up prices all over the place. This had an inflationary impact on the economies out there that was not in accord with our war aims for that region. General Westmoreland thought that was a nifty idea and he checked with his people and they told him that it would be too demoralizing, we could not do that. I was struck by the fact that rather sadly he said, "You know, we should, but we can't."

Q: Interesting.

MARSH: Well, work was appreciated by at least one group. There were eight of us Provincial Reporters and MACV set up a Processing Unit. And the Processing Unit simply took our reports, processed them, reproduced them, sent them around the military chain of command and so forth and it was staffed with over fifty people. It had no reportorial, no editorial, functions whatsoever. It was strictly reproduction and distribution. Now that was very flattering to know that that would be done on that basis.

Now we, from '65, noticed that there was a tone of increasing desperation coming in. Foreign Service officers are pretty sophisticated people, or at least they used to be. When people are always talking about success instead of letting the events themselves proclaim the success there must be something wrong. It became a little suspicious. We heard this more and more urgently, about the supposedly growing light at the end of the tunnel, as Phil Habib heard when he went to the conference with President Johnson in Wake Island, I think it was, and so forth and so on. And we had success stories coming in all the time.

But as Henry Cabot Lodge said to some military briefers - and this was a man who had such enormous presence, such an aura about him and so forth, who could really put people in respect of him just by walking or standing nearby or that sort of thing - but at any rate he said in that wonderful Boston Brahmin accent, "General, I'm told there is significant progress made in reducing the Vietcong threat to Saigon, but I noticed that there is even more gunfire every night than there was during my first tour here. How is it then, that there has been such progress." And of course the response was a long, long, series of stutters on the part of the military briefer who could not do that."

Q: Bill, can I just go back, you said there was a tone of desperation that was noticeable by that point, in 1965, can you give some examples of that?

MARSH: The search for negotiations. I'm not sure how we got this, I think maybe we FSOs at the embassy in Saigon got it from osmosis, to tell you the truth. But we knew there was a very active search to undertake a negotiated settlement of matters. We also heard that there was a limitation on the amount of forces. We were going to put in another 50,000, another 100,000, but these would be brief and just as soon as we got things cleaned up out they'd come and that sort of thing. At the same time, oddly enough, the Secretary of State was saying, in effect, we are there for as long as it takes and to do whatever is required. So there is a little contradiction there in that kind of thing. But we had more and more and more visitors and we had an increasing confrontation with the press and you will recall that.

The press could find very little, very little, that was commendable in our effort out there, and a great deal that was condemnatory. I remember when the *New York Daily News* manufactured a story about Doug Ramsey, one of our colleagues, who was taken prisoner there and said that he was privy to the innermost secrets of the Mission Council and all of that kind of thing. We were shocked at the vindictiveness of the story and the sheer viciousness of it. And so we looked to Barry Zorthian of USIA and said, why isn't Joe Freed, the reporter, why isn't he just cut out of the pattern here. None of us would ever talk to him again. And Zorthian pleaded with us, no, no, no we had to try to keep on the good side of the press, we had to inform the public, blah, blah, blah, blah and we counter-argued that this man was not informing the public but misinforming it. He was harming our own colleagues in the process.

We got nowhere with that sort of thing and we said to ourselves there is desperation here. We were not even showing any real, masculine vigor in what we were doing here; we were kowtowing to everyone. Also we had experts running through Saigon constantly. Dr. Kissinger was there, Sir Robert Thompson came through to give us the benefit of his Malaya experience of the 1950s, although what that had to do with anything we were never quite sure. Then we had Bernard Fall and others who knew the French experience. Come one, come all! There was not a calm sense of assurance; there was a frenzy of trying every possible solution.

I remember the day that McNamara was told about the ramasseurs, these were the middlemen, mainly Chinese, who gathered the rice from individual farmers and then wholesaled it to the major urban markets in Vietnam or, in the old days, it was exported. But the ramasseurs were in a briefing and were suspected of diverting a certain amount of rice to the Vietcong. And McNamara said we would take over rice distribution, and we did! Actually it all fell back into the ramasseurs' hands, its just that you had an American seemingly directing it or distributing it or dealing with that kind of thing.

At any rate we were trying to build nationhood for South Vietnam and at the same time we're taking away one of their principal economic endeavors. I call this desperation. I think we all had this sense of unease at the way things were going, plus the fact that we

were eating, sleeping, drinking Vietnam. We talked of nothing else. You will recall, Vlad, how we used to get together for dinner, a dozen of us, something of that sort, we'd go to somebody's house and we'd have drinks and then we'd have dinner. All night long we talked about nothing but Vietnam.

I can remember one time with Dick Holbrooke. I was saying for God's sake couldn't we discuss, you know, what was at the movies, or sex, whatever, anything. He looked at me and I'll never forget Dick's expression. He looked at me, curiously, as if to say "what's wrong with him" and went on with what was probably the fourth or fifth hour of a discussion among colleagues as to what was going on in Vietnam. And here again we were so obsessed that we didn't have "a life," as the kids would put it, today. We lost a life. And everything was like that. This was desperation; this was desperation, because things simply were not going according to plan.

By the way there is a magnificent story about Lord Carrington at Dunkirk in 1940, wading out to an evacuation ship. A man turned to Carrington and said, "Somehow I have the feeling that things are not going quite according to plan." We had that feeling, too.

Q: Bill, what happened next with your own professional activities.

MARSH: In the spring of 1966, Samuel Thomsen had been consul in Hue and had a very junior officer at the time, Jim Bullington, who later became an ambassador in Africa, at the consulate with him. Because of Sam's responsibilities with the Marines there, and because General Walt of the Marine Division really needed a political advisor, I was sent to Hue temporarily.

Now I was rather frantic because I had a matter of a few months before leaving Vietnam and I was desperately trying to get orders for myself but certainly also for my wife and son, who had been born by this time. The Department had not yet recognized that I was a married man. This stuff had been going on for years; we were now in the fourth year of this. They still couldn't get it straight that I was married. They could accept, however, that I had a son, but they couldn't accept that I was married!

In any event we are up there and the scene is percolating like nobody's business because we have the usual university riots, we have the usual Buddhist demonstrations, and at the same time we have intense activity on the part of the Vietcong and certain North Vietnamese forces. Though we are not broadcasting that fact, that they are present, but we know it full well. At one point I was witnessing, observing I should say, a demonstration of the Buddhists. I was standing out of sight, trying to be an inconspicuous as somebody 6'2" tall and 6'2" wide can be and a great flotilla of U.S. helicopters went overhead and disappeared to the north. Then about an hour later it reappeared with stretchers attached to the struts. You've seen that, I'm sure, Vlad, bringing back the American casualties and so forth. And of course the demonstrators paid absolutely no mind, any attention to this whatsoever.

I said to myself at the time that this was ridiculous. Here are people who are not involved in their own salvation; instead mercenaries are doing their work for them. Mercenaries is the wrong term because they were not even being paid for it, we were paying for it, as a matter of fact, and that sort of thing. Things were very bad and I recommended that the Consulate be closed. Well, I was at that time a relatively junior officer and they weren't going to take my word for it so they sent Tom Corcoran up. Now Tom Corcoran was the number two in the Political Section. He was the deputy to Phil Habib, and had replaced Bob Miller, who had been badly hurt in the embassy explosion. He had been deputy political counselor, a wonderful guy. Tom Corcoran, God rest his soul, he was a marvelous man and had served in every post the U.S. had ever had in Indo-China, as a matter of fact.

Q: He closed most of them down.

MARSH: He closed most of them down, that's right. And he recommended that Hue be closed down. He seconded what I had found. And of course they couldn't act on the thing and so the Buddhists closed it for us, as a matter of fact, by just closing off. Well, it's very difficult from a place like Hue to try to arrange your next assignment and it is also very difficult to try to get your family...

Q: We closed Hue and we closed your job?

MARSH: That's correct, at that time. That's right. But the Buddhists had already burned down the USIS building there, their offices, in Hue.

One story I have to tell you because it exemplifies the disorganization of the American effort. I was at my desk in Hue one day, trying to write the umpteen cables that had to go every day to Saigon to describe a rapidly deteriorating situation. A great Wagnerian lady burst into the room and she said she was from the Higher Education Division of AID, or at least she had been engaged by them to work on the academic programs at the University of Hue. I said, "Madam, the university is closed." She peered over an impressive bosom at me and said, "Well, open it."

Q: Oh, ye of little faith!

MARSH: Now how this woman had ever managed to come from the United States, and to pass through the AID offices in Saigon, and get a plane and come up to Hue I will never understand. But on the other hand, I could never understand encountering at certain battles that I did attend American tourists. And no necessarily adventuresome kids, young people, sometimes rather mature people who decided to go out and see the war themselves. It reminded me a bit of what apparently happened at First Bull Run, you will remember, when all of the people from Washington went down in carriages to have a look.

This was what it was like. It was a terribly, terribly complicated thing. There was a fellow named Ed Grainger, who was an AID officer in Phu Yen Province. His wife was a good

friend of my wife in Bangkok, where they were both living in safehaven. Elizabeth Grainger, who was a very soft-spoken, lovely British woman said one time that she was having a hard time of it financially. Ruth, my wife, told me this. The reason was that when the Vietcong had taken Ed, his salary had stopped! So when on my next trip to Bangkok Ruth told me about this on my return to Saigon, I went in to see Charlie Mann, who was the director of AID. I said this was unconscionable. He was outraged and called in his principal comptroller and said that he couldn't understand why the Grainger family had not received any money and the comptroller looked him straight in the eye and said, "Because he hasn't submitted a time card." With that Charlie blew up. I was glad to see that. He said, "You will pay him. You will pay Mrs. Grainger the money due him, and you will pay it immediately." The comptroller looked at Charlie Mann again, directly in the eye, and said, "You don't have the authority to tell me to do that, Mr. Director."

Well, finally, on his personal recognizance, if you will, Charlie Mann did arrange that she got paid. What's my point? My point is that we had the conflict of outworn regulations and practices in contradiction with extraordinary circumstances of a military nature, of an emergency nature. Incidentally, Ed Grainger never did return from his imprisonment by the Vietcong. They killed him.

But in any event, dealing with all that sort of situation, it was quite a complication. Well, the orders finally came and to my great dismay I was ordered to the Vietnam Working Group in Washington.

Q: Were you unhappy about that, Bill?

MARSH: I was unhappy about it because, let's see, I was 35 years of age and had never served at a conventional, traditional, normal Foreign Service Post. Never. In future years people would cast that up to me.

Now one has omens, or they seem to be omens at the time, at least this is my experience. Before taking up a new assignment sometimes there are a succession of minor crises that precede it in one's personal life, and sure enough they foreshadow a very difficult tour and assignment and all. I had to get my wife and son on a plane in Bangkok to Hong Kong to wait for me. This involved at Bangkok running across Bangkok airport to get my Air Vietnam flight back to Saigon. Almost getting run over by about six jets in the process, returning to Saigon, finding out that the cultural revolution had erupted in Hong Kong, and then the night before my departure from Saigon there was the first time the Vietcong had shelled Saigon airport.

We then took the President Cleveland from Hong Kong to San Francisco but there was one problem on route. At shore leave at Yokohama we missed the boat and had to take a lighter out to the ship and climb up a ladder up about seven storeys up the side of the liner, with a six month old baby boy stuck inside my coat. These were harbingers of some very trying times to come.

Q: Bill, this is fascinating stuff and we have a few minutes more on this side. Should we

start with Washington or should we take a little break and have a cup of coffee?

MARSH: Let's take a cup of coffee.

Q: Wonderful idea, I think that's a good idea.

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Today is December 30, 1997. Bill, we are back in 1966. You arrived in Washington to be on the Vietnam Desk, which I think was the Vietnam Working Group.

MARSH: That is so.

Q: Could you tell us a bit about that group, Bill? How was it set up and what was it doing right and what was it doing wrong?

MARSH: It was a very ecumenical sort of assembly. As a matter of fact, for a while there was even a Peace Corps representative on it and, of course, the Peace Corps never served in Vietnam. But there were representatives of numerous agencies...

Q: International voluntary services...

MARSH: No, no, no. Not at that time. There were strictly government agency representatives.

Q: It was a very ecumenical group.

MARSH: We had them from all over and gradually there was a decline over the years, less and less and less outside representation, shall we say. It became a State show. Now in '66 there were two developments that were particularly striking.

First of all, we were now in the third year of the search for political stability in South Vietnam and it was as far away as ever. There had been a significant revival of popular dissension and demonstration against the ever-changing governmental authorities of the South. So that search seemed as illusory as ever.

Secondly there was a rapidly rising tide of dissension in the United States and very surprising things indeed were happening there. Great rallies in Washington against the war, the isolation and even confinement of the President of the United States. I remember one time when he planned to go to the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles to give a speech. President Johnson's people told him that within 24 hours of the announcement that he would talk there, California dissidents would arrange that 100,000 people would be present to protest against it, and that that number would probably increase.

You'll remember that at about that time the Secretary of State went in an unmarked vehicle into the basement of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Because in order to appear at the

United Nations and to meet with people he would have had great difficulty getting through the lines of protestors outside.

There are two factors of the times as well that I would like to mention, because the younger listeners, if there are some to this, will probably not be familiar with that sort of thing. The first was the Foreign Service had a tradition of noblesse oblige at that time. Moreover many of those in the Foreign Service had been in the military and considered the Foreign Service as a kind of para-military organization, at least as far as Vietnam was concerned.

What this meant was that we were much more accepting of authority than seems to be the case today and that we simply did not question, at that time, or argue, in any event, with decisions that were handed down to us. Thus it was that when the deputy assistant secretary of State for then Far Eastern Affairs, later East Asia and Pacific Affairs, with responsibility for Vietnam among other countries in Southeast Asia, Leonard Unger, decided that he had better have virtually continuous coverage. Thus John Helble and I, who were the political officers on the Vietnam Working Group, had to take turns covering the night duty in the Operations Center. What that meant was that we worked 36 hours on, 12 off. We did this for a number of months. We did this seven days a week. And we did this 30 or 31 days a month, depending on the month. And it didn't really occur to us to say we were exhausted because that wasn't done.

I did question that my superiors made no mention of these marathon reports in my Efficiency Report written in the spring of 1967, and it fell on totally deaf ears. Those involved could not understand what I was talking about when I said that working so many hours constantly was just taking years off my life span, and off John Helble's life span, as well, to be perfectly fair with him.

What I do remember was an example of how ill coordinated the Department was. Whereas I lived in Washington and could take a bus to and from work, John Helble lived out in what was then considered near - West Virginia, that is to say, Falls Church. Which was then about as far from the action as one could be and decidedly frowned upon as not a very classy place to be, way out there six miles away in the countryside. But he used a car. There was no metro in those days, of course. Well, don't you know, in the middle of this, they took his parking permit away and so he was spending an absolute fortune, as you can imagine, for a garage space outside that sometimes would be 36 hours in length. But we tended to work eight to eight and then, if we worked through the night, then we stayed the following day and went home at eight o'clock or some 36 hours after we arrived.

The reason was that we were supposed to call Saigon about every hour or two. Why? Because the percolation throughout South Vietnamese society of that Buddhist uprising in Central Vietnam, that I told you about, in that year, plus the uncertain role of Lieutenant General Thi, who was Corps Commander in Central Vietnam and who looked as if he had separatist ambitions there. Well, there we were.

There were those on the staff who were busily working on preparations for negotiations, which of course came to no fruition during that period of time, and the like. We had a White House constantly in search of progress reports, achievements, something that it could talk about with the public to show that things were going better than indeed they were.

We had one period in which the President had decided that, this was in 1967, in preparation for the following year's Presidential and Congressional elections, somebody had better answer the criticisms that were appearing in great number in the Congressional Record. So the President said that he wanted complete rebuttals sent to the White House the day that the Congressional Record came out. Now what that meant was that one of us had to go to the mailroom of the Department, around seven o'clock in the morning, and go through the mailbags and try to find Congressional Records. Now the Department could not do this for us; they could not put this together for us. So it was amusing because the first day that I did it, I came out of the mailroom so filthy dirty that my dress clothes that I had for the office were hopeless. So I had an old raincoat and I used to wear this old raincoat and then go diving in and go through all these mailbags in order to get them upstairs as soon as possible.

Why did we have to do that? Well, you see, there was a noon deadline on submission on the letters of rebuttal...

Q: You would put on a raincoat?

MARSH: I'd put on this old raincoat and then we proceeded to go through the Congressional Record each day and find the insertions made by members or the remarks put in by members critical of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. Then we proceeded to write rebuttals of that. We had to have all of these fully cleared and upstairs in the Staff Secretariat by noon. Then they would make their way over to the White House and would be signed off by the President that night.

This was a colossal effort because we averaged 50 rebuttals and we had a brand new young lady named Barbara White, whom you may have heard of, I believe she went to Moscow somewhat later. She had just come in from New Mexico, I think it was, and this was really her first job. She was really the most extraordinary worker that you can imagine. Remember she was using a manual typewriter, this was prior to the days of electric typewriters.

Q: Who was Ms. White?

MARSH: She was just a young civil service person, a colleague in the Vietnam working Group. And she just ground out these letters which we just started scribbling as soon as we could. Fortunately a number of them dealt with the same theme and so we were able to crib from one to the other and we didn't have to write 50 individual letters. But we certainly had to write 10 or 15 and get them cleared throughout the Bureau, through the rest of the Department, and up there by twelve o'clock noon. Well, this was not work,

this was frenzy for heaven's sake, and it was an absolutely frenzied operation.

You know the consequence of this was that the Public Correspondence Division of the Department was established. Before that time there had not been one to deal with such matters. But for several months we had to put up with this and it was incredible. The workload was extraordinary.

First of all, there was the old problem of obtaining information. What was going on in Vietnam? How to sift, how to sort in the official reporting, and then in the non-governmental reporting, particularly, of course, the press but also the television, to try to identify what actually informed us and to respond to what was simply a criticism or detraction. This was an enormous effort. I remember one evening I left at eight o'clock and I was the first person to leave the Working Group that night. Somebody made cracks like, oh, what, are you on leave? That sort of thing.

Tony Lake wanted to see a sister whom he had not seen for a number of years. Now Tony at that time was Ambassador Unger's staff aide, and he had arranged to spend a couple of hours with her on a Saturday afternoon, mid-afternoon. Tony, it turned out, could not be spared that day and did not see his sister. This was all that way.

Q: Who was Ambassador Unger, Bill?

MARSH: Ambassador Unger had been ambassador to Laos.

Q: What was his role at that time?

MARSH: Deputy assistant secretary, with responsibility for Vietnam.

There were humorous sides to the Herculean efforts we were putting in. One time Ambassador Unger asked us all to wait and we would go together with him to the Vietnam National Day celebration at its embassy. We were so late when we finally left the Department that we arrived at an absolutely empty South Vietnamese embassy and they had to go find Bui Diem, who was then the ambassador, to come down from upstairs, and say hello to us. There is nothing like going to a party when there is nobody there! So it went.

Q: So this was 1966?

MARSH: 1966 perhaps part of '67. Now 1967, it seems to me, was a year that was extremely misleading. It was misleading because in the first instance there was a considerable abatement of the internal political dissension within South Vietnam. The Central Vietnam crisis faded, waned, and not only that but there seemed to be some institution building because there were elections, Presidential elections, Parliamentary elections, and there was the election of Nguyen Van Thieu as President of Vietnam. So you had the first elected President in four years.

I went to Vietnam for the elections in the company of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who by this time had returned to the United States, who shepherded a group of prominent Americans to act as sort of unofficial election observers.

The second misleading problem was that there was a decline in military activity. By Christmas of '67 there was the possibility that perhaps we had made substantial headway militarily. The absence of enemy military activity was heartening and perhaps a sign, and it was a sign but we didn't know just exactly what it was a sign of, we learned that in '68 at Tet. The President decided that he would go out and visit the troops in December of 1967 at Cam Ranh Bay. Then go on to visit the Pope, who was a symbol of peace. The President would be able to report on to him that matters were preceding satisfactorily and that we were hoping for negotiations soon on the grounds of the improved situation within the country, as it was then seen.

In the United States, however, the public uproar still rose and the clamor continued very badly. There was not any appeasement of the public dissatisfaction. Much of it we realize now was occasioned by the Draft and in fact once the Draft was done away with, and the university students no longer had to be concerned about that, the anti-war movement declined very rapidly. But it still was in full measure.

I think that many of the FSOs were from Missouri on what the situation was like in South Vietnam, well, let's wait and see what's going on. And there was some reporting that the Vietcong and North Vietnamese were making preparations for intensified fighting and so forth, but again we'd always had reporting that varied 180 degrees. You know, it's hot, it's cold, it's up, and it's down.

Q: Let me just ask a pointed question here. You're saying that as we got to Christmas of 1967 things were quiet politically, things were quiet militarily.

MARSH: Relatively speaking.

Q: Robert McNamara has suggested that three years earlier, if I recall correctly, three years earlier he was able to see that the American effort was not likely to work and he feels a great deal of contrition that he continued to work with it. Does that make sense to you? By the time we were in 1967, what kind of a prediction could one have made? By 1967?

MARSH: The highest level statements in the latter part of '67 were very encouraging. Statements from the senior military were highly encouraging and what they were misreading was a lessening or absence of enemy military activity and taking that as a sign of constructive progress. That we had sufficiently staffed and armed the Vietnamese forces and established hamlet security and undertaken economic and social programs that were taking root and so forth and so that things were getting better. There was that.

Now as far as Secretary McNamara, I've read his book, too. I'm saddened by what I have seen in the book because every experience that I had, and there were quite a few with

Secretary McNamara during his visits to Vietnam and in terms of his statements in Washington and elsewhere, every such experience was that he was fulfilling very actively and very eagerly the role of chief cheerleader for the U.S. effort. At no time was there any suggestion that he had any misgivings or any doubts about the eventual outcome.

Q: Do you think he felt comfortable or sincere in his role of chief cheerleader?

MARSH: You know, the so-called McNamara method applied in Vietnam. That is to say the application of numerous quantifiable measures of incremental approaches in terms of arming, staffing, deploying, and so forth, both the U.S. and the South Vietnamese forces. We certainly had the impression at that time that what he had been so famed for at the Ford Motor Company, was in full application with respect to the Vietnam effort. But in terms of any strategic or shall we say global findings on his part, we had no notion of those whatsoever. And, as a matter of fact, the question arises then why George Ball and others, who had misgivings to say the least about the course of events in Vietnam and of U.S. Policy, why they were so alone. They received no support that I can tell, and I've reviewed the foreign relations of the United States for '64 and '65 and looked at other documents. I have never seen any time in which Secretary McNamara gives the slightest indication that he was having second thoughts.

Q: Bill, let me ask. I think McNamara believes what he is saying in his book, but do you think what he is saying in his book represents what he thought in the early and mid 1960s, or do you think he's reconstructed all that?

MARSH: More the latter. A friend at the time in the '60s was on the staff of Senator Robert Kennedy and I was invited over to brief Senator Kennedy a number of times on the progress of the war, or lack thereof, and so on. I found Senator Kennedy in those times, I'm talking 1966 and 1967, I found him very gung-ho as far as the military effort was concerned. He was particularly interested in what the Special Forces were or were not accomplishing. Thus I was quite surprised when we had the identification of Senator Kennedy with an anti-war position when his candidacy for President came about.

Q: We had Governor Romney, who went out to Vietnam.

MARSH: Who was, quote, brain washed, unquote.

Q: Who at the time he was in Vietnam was extraordinarily gung-ho, and was basically running around cheerleading, then when he came back said he was brain washed, and I think thought he was.

MARSH: Yes. Yes.

Q: Anyhow, I ask this Bill not because you know the answer, but because I think it is a very fair question for students of the period and students of McNamara's book. Anyhow, thank you for the insight.

MARSH: I accompanied him to Hue and elsewhere in Vietnam during his visits and sat in on a number of briefings scheduled for him. Suffice it to say that if he had doubts, he concealed them very effectively.

Q: Bill, let me move to a slightly different direction. You were working in the State Department right now, it was still the Dean Rusk period, Leonard Unger, William Bundy was Assistant Secretary, and at the White House, if I remember correctly, we had Walt Rostow and we had Robert Komer who had moved in.

MARSH: Somewhat later.

Q: Somewhat later. Well, still, back at this period can you describe a little bit what the State Department's role was? Was the State Department making policy or was it just answering congressional correspondence at that time? Who was making policy?

MARSH: Well, very clearly the President was making policy. You'll recall that the President took a direct hand to such an extent that he even designed the then new American embassy in Saigon, and went over the plans and so forth. You'll recall that later he said that he was spending, in his memoirs he said that he was spending during that time, 60 to 80 percent of his time on Vietnam. Secretary McNamara later said that he was spending about 80 percent of his time on Vietnam. So the obsession with this small country, and it was that, but as McNamara knew full well and as Lyndon Johnson said many times before, the United States had never lost a war. Moreover, as leader of the free world and the only super power - now we know it was the only super power but then it was the only super power on the side of liberty in the world - it was the bulwark against Russian and Chinese expansionism in the world. The bulwark against subversion and destruction of friendly regimes everywhere what we had to do was to reverse the stigma of the French defeat in Vietnam.

I don't know, I think that the people who expressed misgivings at that time, such as George Ball and others earlier were very heavily penalized for not being part of the effort.

Q: But Senator Kennedy you felt was a friend of the effort at that time?

MARSH: At that time, but later disassociated himself.

Q: Well, that's very interesting.

Bill, we're now sort of finished with 1967, aren't we?

MARSH: We are, and then we entered the most difficult year.

Q: The most difficult year...

MARSH: Because certainly the military had not prepared us for the Tet Offensive, which

was after all a magnificently concealed effort by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese of country-wide mass organization and preparation. You had to admire them. Their timing, the force of their attack, all of that, were extraordinary. Now, I liken sometimes 1968 to roughly, for the United States, to roughly 1958-59 for the French in Algeria when we won militarily as the French did and lost politically and psychologically.

Now in preparation for the coming elections, back to '67 for a moment, the President insisted that persons knowledgeable about Vietnam go out on speaking tours as frequently as possible. So those of us on the Vietnam Working Group were very often out doing that. An example of this was when in '66, on the way to Washington, my wife and I visited her parents in Oklahoma and the Governor, later Senator, Henry Bellman became aware that I was there. He was driven up from Oklahoma City, 135 miles, to have breakfast with me at some ungodly hour like 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning, it was still dark, I remember. There were automobiles with state troopers and everything else, and there I am sitting with the Governor of Oklahoma in a diner, for heaven's sake, having breakfast to brief him on Vietnam.

Q: Bill, what was his motivation to drive 135 miles to see you?

MARSH: Every public official, of course, who had political aspirations, wanted to try to get the facts to find out about Vietnam. Now, fewer and fewer, particularly those of the other party were visiting Vietnam because they didn't want to be associated or tainted with that, which was the difference. Even so, we were in the briefing paper publishing business in the Vietnam Working Group. There was always somebody going away on a trip and we were doing these briefing papers, or going to Europe in connection with the effort to seek negotiations and all that sort of thing.

Of course in those days, prior to the Wang, prior to word processors and all that sort of thing this was all virtually handwritten work that was then typed by the tireless Barbara White on her little typewriter. I cannot express fully my admiration for her. She was just extraordinary and grinding it all out.

It's interesting that we had two political officers on the Vietnam Working Group, something that was such an enormous part of the President's agenda. And at that time you generally had two political officers for other countries of some significance, of course, not for the smallest ones. So we had about the same staffing there for Vietnam as there was for Italy or Belgium.

Q: Wow. Bill, 1968, Tet Offensive.

MARSH: The onslaught.

Q: The onslaught. What was your role in that? Could you describe what you and the Working Group actually did, because the Tet Offensive, the outlines of it are fairly well known?

MARSH: The Tet Offensive tended to pass overhead because we now had the full attention of the principals and the seniors. The embassy was dealing directly with them. The military were dealing directly with the Joint Chiefs who were dealing directly with the White House, that kind of thing. We were at a decidedly lower level at that time. But we were considering the options, as a matter of fact.

We were considering options when we did not know what was going to come. And of course the Public Affairs side of the house was a total disaster. You'll remember General Loan executing the Vietcong in Cho Lon on television.

Q: General Kau, yes.

MARSH: Loan, Loan. I believe it was General Loan, if I'm not mistaken. Okay, General Kau, if that is who it was.

Q: Whoever it was.

MARSH: I'm not sure, but the chief of security.

Q: We all remember the photograph.

MARSH: And a bound Vietcong.

Q: It was a prize-winning photograph.

MARSH: Yes, etc. The overrunning of the embassy, and poor Hue, where some 3,000 notables of the town were done in by the Vietcong, really an eradication of the anti-communist infrastructure in the place. It was just an unmitigated disaster. Meanwhile, we were running around the country trying to speak on it and this had some very interesting developments.

I tended to take some of the farthest speaking engagements for the simple reason that I was still exhausted from the whole work and wanted to get away from the office, get a decent night's sleep. So I would take Texas and California. My parents at that time lived in California, so it was a chance to see them. I am an only child and it was a good chance and sometimes I would take my two-year-old son with me.

I remember one time at the University of Wyoming where I was speaking and they refused to help me at all. I had this two-year-old and they wouldn't find a babysitter for me to pay, so I spoke and he was on the stage, sitting on the stage behind me. Basic decencies were not observed. It was really outrageous.

Then I went to a small Presbyterian college in North Texas one time, thinking that this was a state with a strong military tradition, here I'll be on friendly ground. I come to find this huge banner on the chapel saying 'Go Home, Marsh, You War Criminal.' It was a time of insurgency in the United States.

Q: When your two-year-old son was sharing the platform with you, did you think your lack of better care from your hosts was politically motivated?

MARSH: Absolutely.

Q: Absolutely.

MARSH: They refused to tell me where I was to speak, they just said it was in something or other hall. I said, well, where was that, please, and they just said to find out for myself. There was calculated rudeness, nastiness throughout.

Q: Was this before or after the famous episode where McNamara went to the University of California, I believe at Berkeley, and was shouted down and had to leave before he could say anything?

MARSH: I believe it was after. I spoke at Scripps College, which is nearby, and a whole contingent came down from Berkeley to shout me down there.

Q: Bill, when the Tet Offensive happened, shortly afterwards, I remember for example Robert Komer, this is anecdotal information, but I remember that Robert Komer was barely able to speak coherently and indeed was giggling, most of the time, because he was so nervous. He had flown there and he had flown back afterwards, and he was so nervous that he was kept away from the press. My question is, in your observation, how were responsible officials in America, people who were responsible for the policy, how were they taking all this psychologically, the Tet Offensive? Was it a big, palpable downer for everyone?

MARSH: It varied. We had some people who were so much a part of the program that they were just impervious to what the reactions were from outside. I got into a lot of trouble, you know, because I came back and reported in the spring of ’68 that people were terribly upset about the war. That there was a great deal of upheaval out there, and that matters were going to be very, very difficult and particularly I had heard that there were plans to disrupt the Democratic Convention in Chicago. I did this in a memo and I got a rebuke and was told that I was exaggerating, that others had said that the self-sacrifice of President Johnson in declining to seek a second term in office had calmed the public.

You’ll recall that in the Efficiency Reports in those days there was the part that we did not see and in the part that I did not see there was a pretty strident criticism of me. I was called an alarmist and all that sort of thing and that my reporting was not remarkable for its accuracy and all that sort of thing. Then I was also told verbally to understand that the Democratic Convention in Chicago was in no danger whatsoever and that Mayor Daley of Chicago had all arrangements well in hand.

A few years later, by the way, just to finish the story on that one, an Inspector happened

across me in Brussels. He told me about the Secret part of that 1968 report and he took steps to issue a rebuttal and to have that put into the file. I'm very grateful to Ambassador Parsons for that.

Q: Well, I like that. Let me ask another thing. A lot of things happened in 1968. There was a Tet Offensive, there was a My Lai massacre, there was a battle of Khe Sanh, there were U.S. protests, very strong ones, and then at some point that year, if I remember, the Pentagon Papers appeared. Or am I getting ahead of myself?
MARSH: It was afterwards.

Q: It was afterwards. All right, then let's skip over that.

MARSH: The public attitude was such that it was obvious that the post-war consensus on foreign policy had now disintegrated. There was also an attitude in the public of 'do not bother me with the facts.' I want to give two examples of that for any scholars who may be listening.

I debated one time Professor Sidney Peck of Western Reserve University. Professor Peck went on and on how in 1967 if the Vietnamese had not voted the government ticket, their rice ration cards would not have been stamped. Therefore they would have been cut out of the food chain, as it were. In rebuttal I said that this was very interesting, but that there was just one problem with it, there weren't any rice rationing cards in Vietnam. This didn't stop Professor Peck, he continued on the same story and with the same thing!

Then there was another thing. There was a young man down from Berkeley who spoke at Scripps to me. He was actually rather decent. He said that he appreciated that I had my views and so forth, but on the other hand perhaps my experiences had colored my attitudes. Therefore perhaps people who had never been to Vietnam had a better understanding of what was going on there than those who had been part of it. I said to him that this was an amazing position for a student to take because it seemed to me a total eradication of the scientific method.

Q: Bill, we are in the year 1968, after the Tet Offensive. What were you folks doing at that time? What is next?

MARSH: That was, to borrow a phrase from Queen Elizabeth II, that was the annus horribilis for the Vietnam effort, I think.
In the first place, the wounded lion, Lyndon Johnson, was besieged on all sides. The strange thing is he probably would have been re-elected we see now, but in any event he felt he had no choice to do that. Of course he only lived four years after leaving the White House.

The efforts in Vietnam seemed more out of control than ever before. An example was the famous Lieutenant Colonel who in the town in the Delta, Ben Tre, which I believe you know, Vlad, said the immortal words, "It was necessary to destroy it in order to save it." And back in Washington I groaned when I read that report and said "this fatuity is going

to plague us" and I was chewed out. I was condemned on that. I'm not smirking when I say now that that still haunts us. It became a kind of a watchword, a slogan, a model of those critical of the U.S. effort in Vietnam. But I got in trouble. Why? Because there was a desperate attempt to rally all the forces in Washington in support of the President, in support of the military and in support of what came to be called as CORDS, which was the newest name for a pacification effort.

Q: And these were in particular the civilians who were going out in a pacification effort?

MARSH: Yes. It was extraordinary to me because I had had some experience in state and local government working for a foundation for three years, three and a half years, in Pittsburgh. I knew a little something about the mentalities and the capabilities and the problems of local government. But here we were relying for that work on technical expertise and the people who went out seemed to me political virgins who knew nothing at all about what it was to try to win friends and influence people at local and regional levels. But it went on and on and on.

The decision of the President not to stand for re-election, and the criticism that came, and the debate in the 1968 political campaigns... remember that until his unfortunate assassination Senator Kennedy was a very strong critic of the war and he was an insider.
Q: Bill, when did Senator Kennedy switch from being with that particular program to being against that particular program?

MARSH: I tried to look that up and document that and it's difficult, but I would say that it was some time during 1967, with more intense opposition to the war after the Tet Offensive.

Q: Yes.

MARSH: But in any event, Washington, it seemed to me, was in a state of disorganization at that time. The thrust now was really, at least as far as State was concerned, was really on launching negotiations and making something of them and the question of the war was picked up by others. Again, State is having a very difficult time coping with the public uproar within the United States. It does not know how to deal with it.

It's interesting. In those days we had far more invitations to come and speak or debate or something of that sort, with all expenses paid, than we could deal with. Today there are very, very few indeed. But I would say that I was out a hundred times in the territory between Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and California and Nevada in the course of about a year.

Q: That's very impressive.

MARSH: It was interesting because you went to school in Massachusetts and in Worcester one time a woman really accused me of practicing witchcraft, which she

intended as a left-handed compliment to my fluidity and verbosity in defense of the war. But I thought I was back in Salem in 1692.

Q: Bill, we are moving ahead in '68. When that year ended where were we?

MARSH: Well, my trials and tribulations were to end in June of 1968 because I had decided on a switch in region. Now my foreign, overseas experience between 1953 and 1968, not continuously of course but on and off had been exclusively in the Far East. And for family and personal reasons and so forth I had decided to shift into a different geographical region. I spoke with the training people and was to undertake a course called Atlantic Affairs Training.

Q: Bill, may I just butt in for a minute? In mid 1968 did you actually leave the Vietnam business forever?

MARSH: I left the Vietnam business for four years.

Q: For four years, until 1972?

MARSH: That's right.

Q: All right. Maybe for the purposes of continuity here perhaps the wisest thing to do would be to just stay with the Vietnam experience.

MARSH: Yes, right.

Q: You left it in 1968 at a period when there was a lot of gloom and disarray and a lot of repercussions within America, a very tense period. And then you went and you basically went to Brussels, as I remember. But that's another tale.

MARSH: That's another tale told elsewhere.

Q: When you left Brussels, did you come right back to Washington and to Vietnam, did you come home?

MARSH: No. But there is one thing I'd like to relate, with your permission, is that this Atlantic Affairs Training, for some ungodly reason, the Department decided that Berkeley was the place I should go to do that. I sent in a couple of applications to the University, and they claimed they never received them. I finally received an anonymous telephone call from somebody saying, "Mr. Marsh don't send any more applications in because we're going to destroy them. We don't want war criminals here at the University of California."

Q: That's an amazing story! That was a call from the University of California?

MARSH: So I of course immediately said, "Ah hah, so we have McCarthyism of the Left,

have we?" Yes, the person thought he was being helpful, it was a man, but he never revealed his name. He refused to reveal his name. So I did not go to Berkeley, which I didn't want to do anyway, frankly, I went to Brussels instead. Now Vietnam and Southeast Asia were a great tar baby. I went on leave. Having left at the end of June 1968 from the desk, I went on leave. While on leave I got a call, and you understand I had left the Vietnam Working Group and was really in transient status. I got a call that I should go to Honolulu for the state visit of President Thieu. His state visit to the United States had a rather brief itinerary. It was Honolulu, period. He didn't dare go to the U.S. mainland.

So I went up there and helped out. President Johnson came in and spent about two and a half to three hours with President Thieu and then immediately leaped on his plane. There was no state dinner, there was no anything. I was just supposed to try to keep the Vietnamese happy. But I was called back, as it were, to go out there.

While in Brussels I was approached to become political counselor in Phnom Penh. I managed to shake that off on the grounds I had two small children, although the ambassador embarrassed the devil out of me by telling me that so had he.

Q: Ambassador Manfull?

MARSH: No, no, no. The ambassador in Cambodia.

Q: Who was our ambassador in Cambodia at that time? Not Mr. Dean?

MARSH: No, he was the grand finale, it was before that time. In any event in '72 it looked as if I would be going back to the Bureau of European Affairs, and I really didn't feel like doing that. I hit upon the idea of trying to get on the Vietnam Delegation in Paris, and that worked. I went down and was there in '72. I happened to arrive at the time of the revival of the public talks, which had been suspended since the North Vietnamese offensive in April.

My job, I succeeded Jim Rosenthal there, once again, and my job was to be the senior political officer there. Translation: I wrote presentations made in the weekly meetings. Well, I wasn't there very long before it came out, it was revealed, as part of course of the 1972 presidential strategy, that Dr. Kissinger had had private talks with the North Vietnamese and that these were going to be renewed. So I then worked…the schizophrenia of the situation was incredible, you know, these sterile public weekly talks and then the really substantive talks done separately.

Q: What months was this, Bill, what months in 1972 are we talking about?

MARSH: We're talking about June of '72, I think it was, June or July of '72.

Q: Things moved very quickly in the negotiation. Were you folks in the second half of 1972 were you doing the real negotiations or were you still doing the unreal

negotiations?

MARSH: We increasingly were doing the real negotiations and we were continuing the unreal negotiations. That's right.

Q: Who was in charge of our delegation at that time?

MARSH: In charge of the delegation…darn it…oh, my….

Q: I remember it was Phil Habib earlier.

MARSH: It was Phil Habib earlier. I can't think of his name. It was Ambassador William something who later became ambassador to Canada.

Q: Yes. I can't remember his name either.

MARSH: I can't think of his name, but anyway Heyward Isham was the deputy chief of mission and the man with whom I dealt the most because the ambassador tended to stay in his residence and communicate by radio with Dr. Kissinger. So he was privy to practically everything and the rest of us were never quite sure how much we were.

Q: Who were the Vietnamese at that time that you were dealing with, anyone that was memorable?

MARSH: Well, of course, Dr. Kissinger was seeing Le Duc Tho. And there were some very funny aspects of that. One time when there was to be a special meeting between the North Vietnamese and the U.S., and somehow Madame Binh, head of the Vietcong Delegation, which was known as the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, you'll recall, but let's say Vietcong, got wind of it. She showed up and when she showed up we, of course, wanted to notify the South Vietnamese to show up as well…our friends. The North Vietnamese said don't bother to call the South Vietnamese because they were not going to talk if Binh were there. They were treating her as a complete and total non-entity in fact, but of course publicly using her as an emblem of South Vietnamese integrity and independence and so forth. It was very interesting that they would admit to us that they were doing that. But by that time they were getting pretty frank.

Q: Bill, by late January of 1973 we had a peace agreement. Now let me just ask, when you were working in Paris in the second half of 1972, did you feel that there was progress toward a peace agreement, did you feel that there were good grounds to have a peace agreement? What was your assessment at that time?

MARSH: It seemed that there was genuine progress underway. We were not privy to all of the details, particularly military details and so forth and so on. I do recall that in October Dr. Kissinger announced that peace was at hand. The sticking point, of course, was Saigon and the Thieu government was not about to subscribe to its own demise,

which is what it saw in the offing. So then the North Vietnamese began to intensify their demands and the Christmas bombing was unquestionably, in my mind and in the mind of the others there, the primary cause of the North Vietnamese readiness to resume negotiations in a genuine sense.

Q: Is it correct to say also that the Christmas bombing of 1972 was basically an unwritten footnote to the peace agreement saying, "We'll do this to you again?" Wasn't it supposed to be a show of strength that would make sense out of almost any agreement that might be signed afterwards?

MARSH: Yes, possibly…possibly. I don't think there was anything that was expressly sensed about that sort of thing, but then later Congressional actions in which we were declining to provide additional help to the South Vietnamese and that sort of thing ruled that out. The North Vietnamese then felt they had nothing to fear.

The North Vietnamese delegation returned to Hanoi after the break off of talks in December and the Christmas bombing began. They had just left their plane and were moving into the terminal when a bomb fell on the plane and demolished it. It is said that had a strong psychological impact upon the North Vietnamese negotiators. But in any event a few days later, yes, we had peace.

Q: Peace was around January 23 of 1973?

MARSH: Yes, that's so, that's right.

Q: Bill, what did you think of that agreement?

MARSH: You know, that was 1973. My interrelationship, if we want to call it that, with Vietnam had started eleven years before. We had to keep up our hopes over the years. In spite of everything we had to keep up our self-confidence and our hopes. We had to believe in the efficacy and the integrity of international agreements, particularly when we had had them seconded by the Secretary General of the United Nations and a special international conference that you'll recall was held in Paris at our urging. That was all part of the arrangement. We thought we had solemnized and formalized everything that we needed to do with respect to that.

We also did not realize to what an extent the Thieu regime was a wild card. Once again we were overestimating the capacity of a friendly government to look out for itself and to deal with its problems and all that kind of thing. You know panic set in in 1975 in the Central Highlands. There was no way to predict that that was going to happen. But in any event we had hopes, and of course we had special negotiations which received zero publicity and which I worked on for four or five months which were the economic aid negotiations with North Vietnam. I was the only State person sitting in on that.

Q: Right, right. Bill, we had at that time a publicized rift between Henry Kissinger and a bright, junior member of his operation, John Negroponte. And at that time the story that

came out was that John Negroponte thought we were concluding a bad agreement, we were operating from weakness. What do you make of that story, do you have any insights on that?

MARSH: I have talked with John about that. At the time we didn't know a great deal about it. But of course Dr. Kissinger, who was always under enormous pressure, had an agenda the likes of which few if any American diplomatic statesmen have ever had. He would flare up from time to time. I remember when a certain individual did not accept an assignment, or questioned an assignment, the Secretary became very angry. He directed that his promotion be held up and so forth. This didn't last all that long and ultimately...

Q: Ultimately he didn't go to Bordeaux, but he went somewhere else!

MARSH: You know about that?

Q: This is a friend of ours called Mr. Djerejian.

MARSH: Yes, and you know how Mr. Djerejian rose even during the Kissinger years.

Q: I would not mention names if Djerejian or Negroponte were it not now more than 25 years ago. I'm very relaxed. Bill, you've got to remember, this was over 25 years ago.

MARSH: Thanks for the reminder.

Q: It's amazing. Very soon it will be 25 years to the day that we had the Peace Accords and it is going to be 30 years very soon, in a few weeks, from the Tet Offensive.

MARSH: You're doing nothing for my morale! In any event there were these sorts of things. Secretary Kissinger, he wasn't Secretary of State yet, but at any rate he was under great tension and he had to get things out of his system, I think, as we all do from time to time. Incidentally everybody who worked with him marveled at his creativity and his ability to interrelate all sort of seemingly disparate sorts of things. This is an incredible mind it was a joy to be around. It seemed to us a genius kind of mind. What occurred to us time and time again and I heard it many times was "why didn't I think of that."

Q: Fascinating, Bill.

MARSH: What I'm trying to suggest was it wasn't necessarily the most intricate or the most involved or erudite kind of thing that he would come up with. It might be a very simple approach to a problem that made great sense and we were just off on the wrong branch line with respect to it. So it was very exciting being there with him.

He and I on personal terms got along very well because I was coming to the conclusion that at, what, 42, 43 years of age, that I probably ought to be looking elsewhere.

Q: Elsewhere than the State Department or elsewhere than the Vietnam business?

MARSH: Elsewhere than the State Department. So I was very forthright, verging on the brash with him, and he appreciated that. I remember one time when Dr. Kissinger had what I regard as a supercilious and intemperate remark about the church to which I happen to belong. I told him I didn't appreciate that at all and he was the last person I would expect to hear something about religious intolerance from and he backed away. In later years, when I was back in the Department, we got along very well together. I have spoken with him at length. The last time was three years ago. We had a very good time. I have the highest respect and regard for him.

To make a probably fairly silly metaphor but in any event, when the ship is sinking, and you think you may have buoyed it up a bit and maybe salvaged this or that, you are not going to worry about details. At that point we simply could not do that. Now whether there was really an effort, a genuine effort, and a real prospect of dealing with the North Vietnamese on the three and a quarter billion dollar five-year program that had been promised them, I really don't know. That may have just been a lure in the fishing sense of the word. In any event we did negotiate seriously with them and they went greedily and happily through order books looking at locomotives and farm machinery and this and that and the other kind of thing. Like children at Christmas making up their lists of what they wanted and so forth and so on. Then of course this was all called off in the summer of '73.

Q: By the summer of '73 we already had considerable U.S. force withdrawals?

MARSH: Yes that's right. We had total force withdrawal.

Q: We had the Congress forbidding further military activity in Indo-China.

MARSH: That's right. That's correct.

Q: In Indo-China, not just in Vietnam.

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Did that have effect on the peace agreement of January? That's an historical question, I think it did.

MARSH: It is an historical question. It is obvious, but we knew, anybody with any brains knew, that once that peace agreement was concluded, the public really didn't want to hear very much about Vietnam again. Thank you very much but they wanted it not on the back burner; they wanted it put in the cupboard, out of sight and out of mind because it was too unpleasant.

Q: Yes, cupboard in the outer building.

Bill, did you continue working for long with that venture after peace broke out?

MARSH: I stayed an additional year and the contrast between that year and 1966, '67, early '68, could not be more marked because I had almost nothing to do.

Q: You stayed until when?

MARSH: I stayed until August of '74. My tour was up in '75, but I actually curtailed. Can you believe that? Because I was in Paris and I had nothing to do. Gee. Isn't that terrible!

Q: You deserved that one, Bill.

MARSH: But, you know, professionally I think that I'm sort of like beer. If I'm not under pressure, I go flat. And there was no pressure at all. There was one thing, I had to send in a weekly telegram from Paris and that was on the talks between the North and South Vietnamese, which were nothing talks, of course.

Q: I suspect that the last place that either side is going to go, certainly the Vietnamese side, the last place the Communists were going to go, if they were up to something that violated the Accords, would be to go to Paris to talk about it. It was not something they wanted to do.

MARSH: No, but Secretary Kissinger did meet with the North Vietnamese in December of 1973, so I had a few days of frenzy then. My in-laws were coming over for Christmas and we were going to take a trip. Fortunately I managed to pack him up and get him off just in time.

Q: Let me ask, Bill, are we nearing the end of the Vietnam part of this story or is there another chapter that comes ahead of us?

MARSH: There is a postscript.

Q: Maybe we could get to the postscript.

MARSH: The postscript is very sad. It's the month of April 1975. Phil Habib, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, pulled me in to work on the Indo-China Task Force that was created to deal with the collapse. I worked on that. It was very interesting because the pulse and the drive of that were as nothing compared with a few years previously. It was a sideshow by that time. And of course the ending was tragic and everyone knew that it was going to be tragic. But I had to do a daily...

Q: Where had you been before Phil pulled you in?

MARSH: I was deputy director of Western European Affairs and French Country director.

Q: I see. I was working on the NATO desk at that time and I remember, it wasn't Phil who pulled me in, it was on a friendly basis, a late night call from Frank Wisner, who simply asked me to come and work with him and I said "of course."

MARSH: So it was temporary duty. Incidentally this mysterious check arrived afterwards and, you know you're afraid to take anything from the Department to which you were not 100 percent clearly entitled. So I called them up and said I'd gotten this check and there was a mistake, I didn't know what I had gotten this check. They said it was for my overtime. I said they don't pay people of my rank overtime and they said to shut up, that Under Secretary Habib has taken care of this. So finally I got some overtime.

Q: So that was the last chapter, professionally speaking?

MARSH: Yes, it was. By the way, while even in Brussels I had quite a lot to do with the League of Families concerning the MIAs, which was heart rending. There was a couple whose son was an MIA. They lived in Brussels at that time. She was an officer of the League so I had more than I ever would have dreamed to do with it. One was never very far from it all during those years. Never very far from it.

In 1975, with the collapse of Saigon, a number of members of the old South Vietnamese delegation in Paris wanted to come, they asked if they could come to live with us in Washington and all that sort of thing. It was a very difficult period indeed. I would say there were four members of that delegation that wanted to bring their families and come live with us temporarily. Just couldn't deal with it.

Q: There were boat people that wanted to come out.

MARSH: A little later.
Q: A little later. There were refugees beginning to show up on the high seas.

MARSH: Yes, but these were people who had been overseas, stayed overseas, and had no Vietnam to go back to.

Q: And if they were overseas when it happened had no claim to be refugees in the United States.

MARSH: That's right.

Q: I had friends like that and my advice to them was not to come illegally to America. They all could.

MARSH: I gave the same advice.

Q: Anyone with half a brain could come illegally.

MARSH: I had telephone calls from Paris, from Athens, from what not and so forth.

Some of them were former South Vietnamese diplomats assigned to embassies there.

Q: In these conversations we've dealt with a large extent on American policy and yet you speak very good Vietnamese and I believe you had a number of people you knew well over there. Have you been in touch at all, what's happened to the people you knew the best when you were in Vietnam?

MARSH: I don't know. I have not been in touch. No, I have not maintained contact. My wife was not well treated in Bangkok and I remember when our second child was born, was born in Washington, in the recovery room she kept asking if it were Bangkok. Her subconscious came to the fore on that. I had to assure her no, it was not. So I decided I would not put her through that again. But she's no sissy because actually we went to Saudi Arabia at the end of the '70s and she loved it.

Q: Didn't have to drive a car too much.

MARSH: Not at all!

Q: Bill, I think if we are at the end of the Vietnam chapters here, maybe it's time to take a pause.

MARSH: It is time to take the pause. We might then, if you wish, go into lessons learned a little bit, something of that sort but perhaps we've passed those along as we went.

Q: Let's leave that option open. I'd be delighted to do some lessons learned but at the moment we are going to break.

[End Section with Vlad Lehovich]

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[Begin Section with Nick Heyniger]

Q: This is Nick Heyniger and Bill Marsh. We are in the period 1966 to 1968.

We were talking about different perceptions of the situation and the future in Vietnam within the ranks of the Department of State.

MARSH: Nick, I have never seen this written out, but it is something that I've been thinking about over the years and came up with rather diametrically opposed approaches to policy making. It seems to me that the Foreign Service tends to regard policy making as an inductive process. That is to say, through empirical evidence and experience you put together all the factors, the assets, the liabilities and so forth and so on and you devise a policy. Whereas it seems to me that our betters and seniors have a deductive approach to it and that this was no where better demonstrated than in Vietnam. Apart from the tactical situation, there was really an appalling lack of knowledge and understanding at

senior levels about Vietnam.

The only thing that mattered was Deus le Veult, as the Pope said in launching the Crusades, "God wills it," only in this case it wasn't God, it was the President of the United States, and we were going to win and we would work out later what winning meant. The basic problem that we had was that we could never prove a negative, and therefore we could never know whether we were winning or not. What do I mean by that? Well, the whole idea was that South Vietnam should not fall to Communist domination from the North. Well, how do you prove that? And nobody had the faintest idea and still doesn't on the thing, or even if it is provable.

Q: I guess the military would have said if warlike activity ceases or declines significantly and in effect South Vietnam has become pacified we would have won.

MARSH: We fell in that trap in 1967, late 1967. There was a long period of quiet, but the mere absence of conflict is certainly not a peace or a victory. The Vietcong and North Vietnamese preparing to launch the Tet Offensive occasioned that quiet in late 1967.

The shock of the Tet Offensive was the contrast between the relative lack of hostilities in late 1967 and the storm, the tempest that broke out, in 1968.

Q: Okay, let's pursue that for a minute. What would you say was the effect of the Tet Offensive within the halls of the Department of State?

MARSH: Within the halls of the Department of State there was a mixture of chagrin and hopefulness, perhaps. Because the overrunning of the embassy in Saigon, for example, the overrunning of major parts of Saigon and all of the major cities elsewhere in the country was after the enormous sacrifices we had already made. And having more than a half million troops in the country, at that time, and having spent heaven knows how many billions of dollars, the shock was a very great one, but still there was a hopefulness in that. It was not a military success for the enemy side. The Vietcong were decimated and never, as a matter of fact, came back in numbers and in strengths and in the drive that they had prior to Tet.

But of course for the United States it was an unmitigated political disaster.

Q: But what I'm probing for is you and your job and your knowledge of the Department after the Tet Offensive. Where was Hilsman at this time, for example? Were there people who said maybe we ought to rethink this situation?

MARSH: Oh, clearly, yes, and you can see that in the archives of the Foreign Relations of the United States. For example, George Ball was an advocate of a compromise solution. But remember the general optic was that of 1938. Munich was again and again and again mentioned, and particularly by the Secretary of State, as the *raison d'être* for the great effort there. That we had failed to heed the signals and for that we paid dearly and we must not do so again. There was also the spreading effect, the domino effect, to

use President Eisenhower's phrase for it. And there was also a dread on the part of policy makers. They would not be associated with the first time the United States had lost a war.

You know in that sense they probably had some foresight because here, 22 years after the fall of Saigon, Vietnam remains the national trauma. It has a daily influence on what we do and why we do it and more particularly why we don't do a great many things. But in any event in '67 President Johnson decides, with the election coming up, that he wants people out on the hustings as frequently as possible. They are to hold meetings, explain U.S. policy, and try to clear up the rising tide of discontent and dissent and quasi-revolution in the country. So yours truly and others in the group were sent out very frequently.

Now in those days we could pick and choose, because there were so many invitations all expenses paid for groups all over the country for someone to come out and speak on Vietnam. So I looked upon that as a chance to get some sleep, after a terrible year and a third, year and a quarter, whatever it was. I could catch up a bit because I could sleep on a plane, get to bed fairly early the night before you had to speak – provided you went far enough. Now there were some people who went to West Virginia and Massachusetts. They could be back the same day. Yours truly went out to the West Coast because, first of all his parents lived in Los Angeles at that time, and that sort of thing.

But in any event this was really very exciting. Why? Well, I remember going to a small Protestant college in North Texas where I was to speak at the chapel. Here is a big banner all across the front of the chapel when I arrived that said "Go Home, Marsh, you war criminal." Then I went out to Scripps College in California and had a complete contingent of rather Left Wing students come down from Berkeley in order to boo and hiss and harass and everything else as I tried to talk to the ladies of Scripps College. I had all these men from Berkeley down there giving me a hard time. It was quite extraordinary.

Incidentally, one of the things I remember so well. I did speak in Massachusetts. I took my turn at the nearer ones, yes. And in Worcester, Massachusetts, a lady with a wonderfully broad 'A' got up and said, "Mr. Marsh, you said you are not particularly adept in public speaking. I think you are devilishly clever at public speaking. As a matter of fact, I think you are a representative of the devil." I saw the fires of Salem burning there, in my mind's eye.

Q: Why? What was her complaint?

MARSH: Well, I think that some of her ancestors had been at witchcraft trials, to tell you the truth.

Q: You were talking about the situation in Vietnam, as you saw it.

MARSH: After all, I'd had an awful lot of practice. I debated a good many leaders of the anti war movement whose disregard of the facts was so egregious that it actually helped

sustain me during a period of great doubt and self-searching and so forth that I experienced at that time. But what I'm saying is that the other side was so unreasonable that it made our side look even better.

Q: So the lady with the broad 'A' from Massachusetts, what she wanted us to do was get out of Vietnam?

MARSH: Oh, yes, and I went to a Quaker meeting in North Carolina and they handed me pieces of an U.S. airplane that had been shot down over Hanoi. It was extreme. It was a very, very tough time. Fortunately I did not go to Chicago. There was no reason that I should. I didn't happen to be at the Chicago Convention but about that time came the culmination of a very interesting thing.

Oh, there is one more anecdote I must share with you. You'll remember that in the latter days of 1967, President Johnson thought the war was being won. We were going to quote "nail that coonskin to the wall" unquote, as he put it so many times. So he decided he was going to visit quote "his" unquote troops in Vietnam in December of 1967. He would then go and call upon the Pope and talk with him about the prospects for world peace and his desire to seek a negotiated solution and then return to the United States. Well, I'm sure that there were political aspects to this whole thing.

But I remember a series of meetings in the Department to plan the trip and an aide from the White House came over, very Texan. An accent you could fry for breakfast. The President wanted to see the Pope in Rome, period, and didn't want to see anybody else. I'm looking around and the people from the Bureau of European Affairs don't have a thing to say. So, you know, I'm half Welsh and the Welsh are famous for their big mouths, and so I say, "Wait a minute, not even our ally, the Prime Minister of Italy?" No, the boss doesn't want to see him. That's very strange. All these other people are very quiet.

I'm in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, for crying out loud, but still foreign policy is a seamless web, as far as I'm concerned. So I said they'd better change that as it would be a bad thing, it would harmful to NATO, it would hurt this and that and the other sort of thing. Well, he talked to LBJ about it. We had another meeting and the fellow came back and said no, the President wants to get off his airplane once he arrives in Italy and he wants to get into a helicopter and he wants to helicopter directly into the Vatican.

At that time the Holy See did not have a helipad and we pointed our that this was the case. That all there was was this big square there. I looked around and the people from European Affairs are keeping their mouths shut. Those from Public Affairs are keeping their mouths shut and all the rest. So little William sticks up his hand again and says, "But, Sir, there is this obelisk, this sort of a monument that stands tall in the middle of St. Peter's Square." He says he'll talk to the boss about that. So we have a meeting the next day and this guy from the White House is back and says, "Well, I talked to the boss and he says to have it taken down."
Q: I can't believe it!

MARSH: I had to suppress a tendency to laugh hysterically at this point. But the better angels of our nature came to my defense and helped me out and I said, "Oh, but Sir, that is an ancient monument and if anything should happen the Catholic population of the United States would be extremely upset."

"I'll tell the boss," he says. Back he goes and next he says, "Okay, the President will take a limo. But he won't see the Italians."

Well, ultimately he did, for a matter of five or 10 minutes in the car, no less.

Q: Did you ask any of your colleagues from the European Bureau, you know, don't you think it is politic for the President to pay a courtesy call on the head of state of Italy while he's there? What did they say?

MARSH: Nick, I don't know. But it wasn't the first and it wasn't the last time that my colleagues decided that what was politic was to protect their own careers. I don't know a lot of instances of overt courage. I know a lot of instances of sort of covert courage.

Q: You're there to provide advice to the White House.

MARSH: It seems to me if it is to be a dialogue, then it is to be a dialogue of equals. But perhaps I was wrong. In any event, we did not take down Cleopatra's needle. The President was not impaled on the thing as he attempted to land in the helicopter. He did, and I am not kidding, pull the Italian Prime Minister into his limousine, speed off and dump unceremoniously, the Prime Minister a few moments later. But he did talk with the Italian Prime Minister.

So, there are ways to get things done. You have to compromise a little bit.

Q: I want to take you back to sort of the way the State Department operated at that time. Obviously from what you are saying there was not a lot of discussion within the State Department about policy toward Vietnam. I just wanted to ask, those of us who have been fortunate enough to be desk officers, for example the Bureau of Intelligence and Resource often provides a helpful role in offering a dissenting opinion about future policy, as does the Policy Planning Council. I wonder, while you were on the desk, did that happen? Did INR or the Policy Planning Council get involved in Vietnam policy?

MARSH: Two things. First of all, you may have heard of Paul Kattenburg, who was the Director of Vietnam Affairs in the bureau in 1962-63. He warned that we had a very vulnerable base on which to build a Vietnam policy as far as the country itself was concerned because there was the autocracy of Ngo Dinh Diem, there were the sects, the internal contradictions and a very strong enemy on the other side. And Paul Kattenburg never received the recognition that he deserved and deserves for great courage and farsightedness. Instead he was eased out in a most undignified fashion, out of the Foreign Service, and had to seek a career elsewhere.

So there was this and other examples where people were repaid for their selflessness with very arbitrary ouster. Secondly, when you only know, and that rather minimally, one half of an equation and nothing about the other half, that is to say North Vietnam and what was critical of course was an indication of North Vietnam leaders' capabilities and intentions. And on that score we had nothing.

Q: Well, I recall that Roger Hilsman was the Assistant Secretary earlier, but after that INR sort of got squelched as far as Vietnam was concerned. I believe that this is the time when the White House, when the President, put Ernest K. Lindley on the Policy Planning Council to see that nobody on the Policy Planning Council voiced strong ideas of rethinking our policy toward Southeast Asia. You didn't find that you were getting that from the Policy Planning Council in any event?

MARSH: No, but what was I? I was an FSO-5 at that time on a scale of eight, and I wasn't privy to lots of things. That's what deputy directors and office directors, even well above that, were undertaking.

Q: Well, okay. So now that's two years in Washington on the Vietnam desk?

MARSH: That's right. Two years that was the equivalent of eight to 10 normal years in the Foreign Service.

Q: Particularly in hours of work served!

MARSH: Well, they are just uncounted. Let me say, for a person who was a close associate and friend, Tony Lake one day asked the deputy assistant secretary if the following Saturday afternoon he could have a couple two, three hours off in order to see his sister, whom he had not seen in some years. And the deputy said that he just couldn't tell and would let him know Saturday morning. So finally Saturday, about lunchtime, the deputy told Tony that he was awfully sorry but he had to stand by, he might need him. Tony did not see his sister as she passed through town.

Now today I think this sort of thing is unthinkable because the response from the young officers in the State Department would be quite unprintable and might even come from their lawyers!

Q: Okay, so now we are in 1968 and you are due for reassignment.

MARSH: I'm due for reassignment. I'm going to spend a few moments telling you about an interesting development. There was a program at that time called Atlantic Affairs. That regional specialization died out a few years afterwards. But anyway I thought that sounded interesting because I had done time, two years in Japan in the Air Force, three plus years in Vietnam and it had been very traumatic, the years of separation from my family. I was not present when my first child was born in Bangkok, etc. So why not head for Europe?

Well, there was a program that consisted of university studies in Atlantic Affairs and the Department decided that I should go to that. So I looked around at certain colleges and universities relatively close to Washington preferably so as to avoid a move. But, no, the Department said I had gone to colleges in the East, I must go to the West. I did not quite understand the logic of that, but at any rate they came back with an extraordinary decision. It was that I should go to the University of California at Berkeley. And I said of all places where a veteran of about six years on Vietnam affairs should not go is to the University of California at Berkeley.

Q: Of course.

MARSH: Well, they wouldn't hear of it. So I told my wife and she thought it was an extraordinary sort of assignment, too, but she was prepared to go. We enjoyed the San Francisco area and all that kind of thing. So I applied. I never heard from them. So I called up and they said they didn't have my application. I thought that was very strange. So I filled out another one, and sent that in. I felt that with my BA and my MPA, I shouldn't have any difficulty getting into a one-year program doing graduate work at the University. Well, the same thing happened so I sent in yet another application. Then I got a telephone call from a person who refused to admit his name, to give me his name...

Q: Inside the State Department?

MARSH: Inside the University of California…saying to please not send any applications because they just ball them up and throw them into the wastebasket, you see, they didn't want any war criminals there, at the University of California!

So I decided, all right, the devil with that, and went down to the Training Division in State and said this was what happened and so I suggested the School of Advanced International Studies. They thought that was fine and so I applied and was accepted and went to a little sort of special course they ran at FSI at that time. It was called "How to Go to University Studies." I'm not sure for whom that was ever intended but in any event it was pretty rudimentary and so on. And then I found out by accident something deliberate had taken place, namely I had actually been assigned to Brussels, and no one had told me! So here I am, all prepared to go to SAIS and it was only because a nice, but rather blabby secretary said to me that she hoped I enjoyed Brussels. I asked her what she was talking about and she blanched and apologized and said I had better see a personnel officer right away.

Actually I had a benefactor. This was Melvin Manfull who had been the counselor for Political Affairs in Saigon, and my boss, before Phil Habib arrived to become counselor in '65. Melvin appreciated my work and was looking for an internal political affairs officer.

Q: He was himself...

MARSH: He was DCM in Brussels and he tabbed me, but nobody told me. So meanwhile I'm chasing universities all around the place. But this was a very welcome thing because it was a chance to…we didn't really want to go to Graduate School, I had been to Graduate School. Good grief. But actually I had an ulterior motive. I was going to use the year at school as a chance to look around and get out, to see what else there was.
Q: Being rather disillusioned by your Vietnam experiences with a full career in the Foreign Service?

MARSH: Yes, because I knew that everything would probably prove an anticlimax after that, at least for a very long time, and I was right. It was very heady stuff. You know we had a lot of people who left after Vietnam…Holbrooke and many others.

Q: What was Lake doing?

MARSH: Lake had been a Special Assistant to a DAS. Anyway, a lot of people left and in part it was sort of a postpartum depression, if you will, that caused them to leave the Service. They thought that it was ideological, you know a matter of principle. But I think a part of it was that their nervous systems had liked the excitement very much, and now it was the humdrum of regular life.

Q: So you are off to Brussels?

MARSH: We are off to Brussels and we were there four years.

Q: To be the internal political affairs officer in the embassy?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Four years, and your boss, the head of the Political Section?

MARSH: George Moffett, originally, who had been a Labor officer and had been in the trade union movement, as a matter of fact, before. And then later it was Bill Buell, who had been in European Affairs very widely.

Q: And your DCM was Melvin Manfull?

MARSH: First Melvin Manfull and then Lou Boochever came, because we had a succession of ambassadors, you know, who were almost always political appointees.

Q: Who were the ambassadors? This is '68 to '72.

MARSH: Well, we had six, seven months of a career man whose name escapes me right now, but he was succeeded by John Eisenhower, son of the President, and then succeeded by... isn't this awful, I'm drawing some blanks here. I can see him now...

It was the beginning, in 1968, of a very intense phase of community conflict in Belgium

between the Dutch speakers, or Flemings, and the French speakers, both those of Brussels and of Wallonia. What had happened was that it literally cut the University of Louvain in half. Every other library book was sent to the new French faculties of the university established about fifteen miles away from the original university. There was interest because there was concern that Belgium itself might split into pieces and that NATO would be harmed at a time when NATO was moving up from Paris, you'll recall, because De Gaulle had handed them their walking papers.

So there was some interest, but not a great deal. But I think when you go from Vietnam to Belgium you are going from excessive U.S. interest in a place, to virtually no interest in a place. It was really like being put on starvation rations after a banquet, as it were.

Q: What does the internal political affairs officer in an embassy do? Who were you talking with?

MARSH: I talked with political party people for the most part, and parliamentarians. Those were my contacts. After all we did have a Labor attaché and a great percentage of Belgians are members of trade unions, probably about two thirds of the working population belongs to unions. So that he would look after that sort of thing, but I would look after parliamentarians. Belgians I found very accessible. The only thing was that at 37 and a second secretary, there was a general assumption that I was like those 38-40 year old Soviet second secretaries, who were clearly KGB. Because after all, why would someone 37 be a second secretary?

Q: You were going out to see... these were not government officials, these were politicians, and you were going out of the embassy to see them at party headquarters, or to have lunch?

MARSH: That is so, but many of them were members of Parliament, as well. I knew Ministers and that sort of thing. In those days I wasn't supposed to see Ministers, but on the other hand they didn't stop me from seeing politicians when they became Ministers. Also, I was supposed to identify for the future the coming politicians of that day.

Remember 1968 was a year of incredible turmoil in Europe what with the students riots in Paris….

Q: Absolutely.

MARSH: …explosions all over the rest of Europe. When people saw 1968 on the wall calendar, somehow the numbers changed into 1848 and expected revolution to be resulting from it.

Q: Even in Belgium there was a certain amount of turmoil.

MARSH: Absolutely. A great deal, a very great deal.

Q: Did you get involved with youth movements and youth organizations?

MARSH: Well, I did, as a matter of fact. There was of course a great conference in 1969 with representatives from the Department coming out with those of us from European embassies. People like Roz Ridgway coming over and Sandy Vogelgesang and other people and we all met in Bonn for a conference on youth affairs.

Q: Roz Ridgway and Sandy Vogelgesang what were they, were they in the Department?

MARSH: No, they were in the field, in Europe.

Q: Your counterparts?

MARSH: I'm saying that people were coming from all over to be addressed by these people from the Department. They were telling us that not only were we to put a great deal of attention to the coverage of youth affairs, but by youth affairs they meant high schoolers, as well as university people. They wanted to know what to expect in coming years.

Q: How did you do that? How does a 37-year-old second secretary reach out to high school students?

MARSH: Well, we couldn't do it, of course we couldn't do it. We couldn't do it for the simple reason that we were too few in number and had too many things to do for that sort of thing. So it was just another time when we listened to people from State telling us the things they were saying because the real audience was back at home in the Department and White House and so forth, not the faces in front of them. And we listened to them…yes, right, sure…and none of us had the slightest intention of going to high school number one to go and snoop on what high schoolers were thinking about. We also thought that high schoolers weren't entitled to political opinions, you had to be older.

Q: Let me take a flyer at this in another way. You are sitting in an embassy and you are trying to be in touch with and get to know youth leaders in Belgium. For example you would read in the daily papers that there had been a rally addressed by three or four different people. Might that for example give you a lead where you felt that you could call up one of these student spokesmen and ask if you could come around and talk with them a bit more about their views?

MARSH: No, it did not. Why, because there are some phony precepts at work here. And one of them is that one can ingratiate oneself across an ocean with people far younger than one and with entirely different notions and so forth and that somehow a trusting relationship will work out between generations, as it were. No, it simply doesn't work.

In the first place the very high profile and visibility of American diplomats is such that they can't just wander among the population, speak to people as they will. Not normally. Not usually.

Q: In this case you would be wandering around a university campus.

MARSH: Well, at that time, too, the Vietnam War is still on. My wife and I had been in a Rome hotel in '65, when we were going around the world, when a huge, huge parade went down the Via Cavour, one of the main streets of Rome, and the chant is "U.S.-SS... U.S.-SS." In other words, that the United States was the equivalent of the Nazi hordes.

Q: This is a little bit analogous to the difficulty that you might have had at Berkeley. That is to say that spokesmen for youth organizations and university student organizations in Belgium didn't want to talk with you, you were the imperialist enemy.
MARSH: If they wanted to talk with us what they wanted to do was wag their heads and fingers at us. To condemn us and tell us in highly idealistic terms what we ought to do hither, thither and yon taking into account to no extent the United States' responsibility for maintaining the peace of the world at that time. So the talk of high school and university students at that time was endless because talk was cheap. They could give us a lot of it and it was founded on nothingness except rather incredible notions.

I remember once at Scripps when a young man got up from Berkeley and said to me I had a lot of experience in Vietnam and I was telling them what was based on that experience but that my experience probably blinded me to reality. And thus, they, who had never been there, were probably better able to understand what was going on than I. I said that he had just condemned the academic and scholastic method totally and disproved everything that there was to learning.

Q: Bill, let me push you a little further on this. I assume that in the embassy in Brussels, as there are in many American embassies around the world, there was a USIS office with public affairs officers, cultural affairs officers, and press officers. The cultural affairs people would of course be in touch with universities and with people who wanted to use the USIS library. Was it possible, for example, to cooperate with USIS in sort of jointly reaching out to young people in Belgium and getting a better feeling of what sort of the average, the normal young person or student in Belgium was thinking about?

MARSH: No. My experience with USIS over many, many years has been one of continual surprise, on my part, over the narrowness with which these people in USIA have designed and described their jobs. So that sort of taking the initiative, that kind of ecumenism, no, I haven't found that. I've found that instead if we wanted to get that sort of thing done we in the Political Section had to do it ourselves. There were exceptions, of course, but they were very, very rare. The Cultural Affairs people, for example, often it seemed to me, wanted to stay as far away from anything with political content to it as humanly possible. And if you couldn't hang it on a wall or listen to it perform they were not about to take it up, partly because they did not want to discourage their clientele. I can understand that.

What I have been distressed at over the years is the way we have eroded our staff within State who are to carry out these essential political tasks, not really that our brethren in

other agencies don't help us do that sort of work. One thing about contact work. It takes an enormous amount of energy and it takes an enormous amount of time and it takes a tremendous amount of probably damn-fool dedication. I say damn-fool dedication because it means going beyond. It means working weekends. It means taking on additional duties. What it does by no means mean is going home at 5 o'clock.

Q: Okay, all right, let's explore in another direction. You worked in the American embassy in Brussels for four years. What other tasks was the Department of State or the United States government giving to the country team in Brussels? What were some of the objectives that you were being asked to meet in terms of promoting U.S. policy goals in this Western European country?

MARSH: It seems to me that the instructions and the definitions were more to be found in the breach than in the promise. In many ways we were there essentially to keep a lid on things, to be of some sort of use. But Washington, preoccupied with pressing questions of national security, was not terribly concerned about what might or might not be going on in Belgium. In particular the Department was not staffed to deal with possibilities and opportunities that might arise. In other words, there was so much management of exceptions and by exceptions in the Department, and particularly crisis management, that dealing with Belgium was just not on anybody's list of priorities.

Q: What I'm probing for, what I'm asking for, what I'm pulling you towards is a description of how a relatively large American embassy like the one in Brussels, where you have an experienced deputy chief of mission and an experienced political counselor and economic counselor. These are the officers who are really running the embassy and directing and motivating the staff. In terms of you job as the internal political affairs officer, what kinds of things were they asking you to get into?

MARSH: I had become an FSO-4 on a scale of eight in 1967. They were giving me lots of CODELs to deal with. They were giving me lots of special papers, briefing papers and so forth to write. In other words the same sort of thing that I had been doing in the Vietnam Working Group, that I had been doing to a lesser extent but still doing in Saigon.

Q: Were you having fun? Were you having a good time? I would think that one of the things you would do a fair amount of as the internal political officer is to travel around the country, talk with provincial politicians, talk with municipal people.

MARSH: Yes, that's so, and it's a fascinating country to visit. There was a payoff later, when we reached 1984, I will tell you there was a payoff for the public interest in what I had been doing. At this point, frankly, what I want to deplore is that we have cut positions so rigorously all around the world that we don't have enough people who have the right talent and the right dedication to do this kind of contact work. To lay the tracks, as it were, so that the train can operate in years to come.

Q: When you went around were you using an embassy car or were you using your own

car or were you taking public transportation?

MARSH: I never had an embassy car. The only time I ever had an embassy car until I became, later, a DCM and later chief of mission and had a car was in Saigon. We had jeeps in Saigon and I noticed that over the weekend sometime 200 miles had been put on these jeeps. I found out that the Foreign Service Nationals were using them and so I said the heck with that and handed them out, the four jeeps to people, and we drove ourselves around the place.

Q: Did you get per diem?

MARSH: Sometimes, if you were going to a provincial place.

Q: Sometimes. Belgium is small enough, I guess.

MARSH: It's the size, all told, of Maryland.

Q: Yes. You could leave your home in the morning and visit one or two provinces and be back for dinner.

MARSH: That's true, but, you know, he who is absent very much from the halls of an embassy is pretty soon disregarded. You have to be around to know what's going on, and to participate in office politics is a very important thing if you are going to protect your job and, in fact, enhance it. And another thing is that the demands made by political appointees, as ambassadors, are often very great indeed in terms of personal service of all kinds.

Q: Not just CODELS.

MARSH: Oh, no. For example it so happened that a remote ancestor of mine had been Lincoln's telegrapher, and wrote a book called *Telegraphing in Battle*. John S. D. Eisenhower, was a military historian, and as soon as I happened to mention this book, why, his eyes lighted up. I became an entirely different person. He wanted to talk military history. I had read a great deal of military history and every time that I was duty officer he would always say let's jump in an embassy car and visit Verdun or something of that sort.

I had to talk him out of that all the time.

Again, one of the things the Department doesn't do with political appointees, it really doesn't give them very much of a foretaste of what their lives are going to be like. It doesn't tell people, for example, that as chief of mission they are going to have to read more than they have ever read before in their lives. Many businessmen coming in have no experience of reading fifty pages of cable a day.

Q: Isn't there an ambassador's school now?

MARSH: Pardon my laughter. Let's move on.

Q: Alright. We are now in 1972. You've been in Belgium for four years. You are due for reassignment. What happened?

MARSH: I managed to get myself assigned to the Delegation to the Vietnam Talks in Paris. It had been my dream for many, many years. I had four years of French in high school, taught by Parisians, by the way. I had always wanted to live in Paris and so I got myself that job. It was absolutely fascinating.

Q: Whom were you working for?

MARSH: Well, I was working really for the deputy chief of mission, who was Heyward Isham, of the delegation.

Q: Who was the chief of delegation? Was it Kissinger?

MARSH: The question is really which delegation because we had the public talks, the weekly talks, held at the International Conference Center in Paris and then we had the Kissinger meetings that were Secret, back channel, and held out in the suburbs. So it was a fascinating life.

Q: But you were with the official delegation?

MARSH: I was with both.

Q: You were with both. The deputy was Heyward Isham, the head of the delegation was?

MARSH: Oh, Lord. The last position was Bill...I can't think of his last name. He was ambassador to Canada. This is awful.

Q: Not Robinson?

MARSH: No…no…no.

Q: What were your duties with the delegation?

MARSH: Well, my duties with the public delegation to the public talks, is what I mean, was to write the weekly presentation. And to do such other tasks as were fitting with respect to the work, and to maintain liaison with the delegation of South Vietnam.

Q: About how many officers on the official delegation?

MARSH: On the official delegation we had a half dozen or so, I would say. We also helped one another out so I met with the weekly press conference after the meeting held

in Paris in the International Conference Center. When David Lambertson, the press attaché, was away for one reason or another, I would take that. He would do my work, if I were away.

And then on the Kissinger Delegation I was a factotum who would do all the necessary and proper things to make sure that all the information possible reached Dr. Kissinger from all over the place. At first he was the Assistant to the President and later he was that and Secretary of State. Because you see after we signed the agreement in January of 1973 he came back for some follow-up talks a couple of times.

Q: And of course he was only there from time to time.

MARSH: That is correct. He was an extraordinary man…he is an extraordinary man, I shouldn't talk about him in the past tense.

Q: In what way?

MARSH: Well, in the first place, he is the quickest and most supple thinker I have ever encountered in my life. Just amazing. Time and again he would come up with something and all of us would ask ourselves now why in heaven's name didn't I think of that? It was so appropriate, so incisive and so original. But, still, we who had so much more experience on the ground should have thought of that sort of thing. But it was just that we were Salieri and he was Mozart!

Plus he had a sense of humor. I have always appreciated a good sense of humor, particularly when it is based on certain ironies and that is the very nature of the Kissingerian humor. The man used to break me up, quite unintentionally, every once in a while. Now he could be scathing. I have seen senior ambassadors of the United States reduced to jelly by some of his cutting condemnations and admonitions, just all aquiver, I mean really, literally. Again I was relatively young, well in my early forties, but my father always taught me not to take very much from public people unless you happened to be married to them or they were wearing a clerical collar or something of that sort. Neither condition applied to Dr. Kissinger so I would speak right back to him, and he respected that. So we got along very well.

Q: So these negotiations then I gather were fairly continuous and ongoing, at least on the official side from '72 to '74?

MARSH: Well, you see what happened, after we signed the basic agreement we then held super secret negotiations on a program of economic aid for North Vietnam. Never publicized. I stayed on with a small delegation, very small, just two officers and one secretary…a fellow who worked for me and a secretary who served us both and yours truly... to act as a matrix for these economic negotiations. But at any rate in the Carter Administration, my Top-Secret NODIS cables were all declassified in one day. The amazing thing is they really didn't cause much of an uproar.

Q: I want to take you back to your work for the delegation. What can you tell us about your North Vietnamese and Vietcong counterparts? Who were they, how was their negotiating style different from yours?

MARSH: Well, in the first place, they didn't negotiate in any public forum at all, or even any closed forum. And they would never negotiate in the presence of the South Vietnamese. The interesting thing is they had contempt for the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, that is to say the Vietcong Delegation, and couldn't stand Madame Binh, who was the head of that delegation. So there were times when they refused to talk privately with us when somehow or other the Vietcong Delegation had gotten wind of the meeting and had come to the meeting. They would put it off... the North Vietnamese.
Q: Do you remember any of those meetings?

MARSH: Some of them. But the point is the basic courtesies and pleasantries were always absent. The only thing that they could talk about…very few spoke English incidentally. Some spoke French. The only thing they could talk about was the weather. I remember one time I had my two sons at the Arc de Triomphe, we were looking at the great ceremonial fire there. It was either on Armistice Day or near it, something of that sort, and I had taken the boys there and was telling them about World War I, and all of a sudden the North Vietnamese delegation shows up there! I would say a dozen had come out, all virtually in lockstep marching along. The only thing they could talk about was the weather. It was raining like the devil that day, the weather was absolutely ghastly, and the other topic of conversation was what was the weather like where you come from?

You know you don't get very far.

Q: Doesn't sound too thrilling!

MARSH: No. Now there were very few who were with that delegation, senior political leaders, and one trusted senior fellow from the Foreign Ministry and they could talk substance. But the rest of those forty staff, all aides and that sort of thing, would never engage on anything concerning substance whatsoever. Never.

Q: Did you ever have pizza brought in or chop suey and sort of have lunch together?

MARSH: Oh, yes, and those were chilly affairs and we tended to stay on our respective sides. We had bilateral talks out in the suburbs, quadrilateral talks in Paris, although we said it was two-sided talks, you remember that.

Q: It's sounding a little bit like what I imagine the talks between the two sides in the DMZ at Panmunjom are probably like. Very sort of set piece talks with statements being read but not really much sort of face to face negotiation.

MARSH: Actually there was negotiation but really it was Dr. Kissinger with a Vietnamese counterpart taking a walk and talking of things out of earshot and that kind of

thing. There was a great deal of subtlety and the real breakthrough came after the North Vietnamese had surprised us by rejecting the terms we offered and calling off the negotiations in late 1972. They went back to Hanoi and the Christmas bombing resulted. That brought about their acceptance because they were so surprised. As a matter of fact the delegation's plane was landing at Hanoi Airport and the air raid siren went off and they ran into the terminal. A bomb came down and blew their plane to pieces, in front of their eyes. This apparently had a very strong effect.

Q: A very sobering effect. Wow! Anything else that you can think of that an historian would be interested in knowing about this negotiating period, from '72 to '74?

MARSH: The thing that I would emphasize is that it is very difficult to make comparisons between this and other negotiations. You mention Panmunjom, well, of course, there really hadn't been negotiations there. Not until very recently had the North Koreans undertaken the slightest kinds of talks with us about things. For forty odd years they were really messing with negotiations. With the Soviets it took a long time but ultimately, yes, you reached an agreement on strategic arms, something of that sort. But the point is that effort by President Johnson and his successors from '65 on just came to nothing. They were up against an absolutely implacable adversary there. The irony of the situation was that our policy of military restraint against North Vietnam, when finally abandoned, in Christmas of 1972, brought about the desired result. I don't see much revisionist writing to say, well, we should have lambasted them in 1964, '65. I don't see it. But you have to admit the possibility that it might have proven very fruitful.

Q: I want to twist your arm, Bill, a little. The United States has to negotiate with a number of what have appeared over the years as fairly implacable adversaries. I am thinking either of negotiating with the Soviet Union, of negotiating with the Iranians over the release of our hostages from the embassy in Teheran; I'm thinking about the North Koreans. I'm also thinking about negotiating with terrorists and hostage-takers who have this sort of extreme position that there will be no negotiation but just you do what we want or we kill the hostages.

Now you've had experience, you've had direct experience as a State Department negotiator dealing with another side that is very, very difficult to deal with. Have you got any sort of advice or insights or suggestions?

MARSH: First of all, I don't really regard myself as much of a pundit, Nick, when it comes to these sorts of questions. I don't know what makes Saddam Hussein tick, and how you convert him into a reasonable human being. I'm prepared to believe it is an impossible task, and missions impossible are not exactly my forte. In negotiations, and I've had a lot of experience in negotiations because we have negotiated things in which I have been approached to participate in, such as keeping the PLO out of international organizations. I had lots of experience in that in Geneva and elsewhere. That involved a lot of negotiating and politicking. There is not really an awful lot of difference in my view.

But what's involved in negotiating and politicking, of course, is an exchange of interests in which both sides agree that in return for giving up something they will receive something and there will be an acceptable balance struck. When you are dealing with terrorists, these are be-all and end-all types, it seems to me, and it's our position that we don't negotiate with them. It's not their position. They'd love to negotiate with the United States because they would love the dignity of sitting down with the only super power and despite this Mutt and Jeff disparity in size and, frankly, in virtue, that they could be welcome at the same table with us.

I would want to emphasize, however, the crucial role that experience and prior knowledge play in crisis situations and in negotiations. The great thing that hurt us, it seems to me, in Vietnam more than any other thing, was that we didn't know anything about the place. We attempted to apply our leverage from outside without really understanding whether this would have the desired effect. The tragedy was, of course, the enormous cost for the utterly unacceptable ultimate results. That's the great tragedy of the thing.

Now I'm being a little hard on the Department, here, but let me just say something about the Belgium experience. I asked around, because you know we had travel grants that we could put out. We did have some cooperation from USIA, from USIS. I found the head of the youth movement in West Flanders, the Christian Democratic Youth Movement in West Flanders, simply because I asked some senior Christian Democratic politicians who, in their view, would be good people to send to the United States on leader grants. They directed me to one Wilfred Martens, who became Prime Minister many times over. I left in '72 from Belgium, and when I returned in '84, he was Prime Minister. This had some utility. I'll say no more.

Q: One final question that I just wanted to ask, get your opinion about. Some people feel that there are certain negotiating skills that some people possess and others don't and that there should be sort of a team of professional negotiators who negotiate from the Untied States no matter whether it is aviation agreements or hostages or ending a trade embargo or whatever. Now you have made the point already that you believe that people who go into negotiations should know as much as they possibly can about the context of the people you are dealing with. What do you think of this idea of sort of a small cadre of sort of permanent U.S. negotiators?

MARSH: Well, frankly, not much. And the reason is that each negotiation advances the current distinct interests of the United States, or is supposed to. Each set of negotiations has a different clientele of interests in the United States. Now State knows more about effective negotiation than anybody else does. I'm utterly convinced of that. Dr. Kissinger certainly knew how to rely on the Foreign Service for his various negotiations. Other Secretaries, I think particularly of Baker, belittled the Foreign Service and did not really make proper avail of it. But I think that was exceptional. Secretary Shultz certainly knew how to use it and did frequently.

The thing is that the Department does not, frankly, enjoy the trust of an enormous part of

the American population and particularly among some of the leaders of some of its most significant interests in the private sector. Thus I don't think that we can say we are double-jointed and will negotiate all these sorts of things. That won't wash. But on the other hand, what we can do is to chair, and usually do, chair negotiations and keep under control the various interests. I will never forget the one international conference, a United Nations conference, in which some members of the United States Delegation took the floor to attack U.S. policy. Stupefaction resulted from that, worldwide stupefaction! No one had ever seen anything like that before. A friend of mine, who was very versed in these things, said the purpose of the Department of State in international delegations is to provide adult supervision. And that is probably very much the case.

It would be very nice.

I would just like to amend what you said, Nick, to say that knowledgeable people from State should be part of each and every delegation. Besides, perhaps, having a State chairman of it there should be someone at the working level who really knows what he is talking about, who the other side is and that sort of thing. That said, we have to be prepared in State, I'm still saying "we" even though I am now retired. We have to be prepared at State to devote far more training and far more time in terms of assignments and so forth to crisis management, terrorists, negotiation, and all of these key things than we have ever shown an inclination to do before this time.

Q: Okay, well, thank you very much. Bill, we've now reached 1974 and you are finishing two years in Paris with the peace negotiations there. What happens next? Where are you going to take us next in 1974?

MARSH: I'm going to take you in 1974 to the accomplishment of something I realized was a very important necessity for me. I have now been fourteen years in the Foreign Service and I have never served in a, shall we say, normal Washington assignment. Whereas I have achieved, with a four-year tour in Belgium, I have achieved my goal of having a normal foreign assignment I had never had a normal Washington assignment before that time. So I actually curtailed in Paris. Brilliant, huh?

Q: You were only there for two years.

MARSH: I had a three-year assignment and probably could have stayed another year. But there wasn't that much to do, and I like to keep busy. And so I became the deputy director of the Office of Western European Affairs, in the Bureau of European Affairs in the Department.

Q: Okay.

MARSH: And French country director, if you will. So my Francophilia was satisfied and my desire to see normalcy, but note, this guy is 43 and he is just discovering how a normal State operation functions.

Q: Okay, well, we will look forward into getting into that next time.

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This is Nick Heyniger and today is December 16, 1997. I am interviewing Bill Marsh about his experiences in the Foreign Service. We have now reached the year 1974 and Bill is returning from the Paris Peace Mission to become deputy director of the Office of Western European Affairs in the Department. So, Bill, tell me what you were doing in WE.

MARSH: Nick, I arrived just as interesting developments were about to take place. First of all, the Bureau of European Affairs was going to deal with the Cyprus crisis. Mind you that as of July 1, 1974, the offices for Greece, Turkey and Cyprus had been transferred from Near East and South Asian Affairs to European Affairs. Not long afterwards the Cyprus crisis broke out.

The problem was a very difficult one for the European Affairs Bureau because it was really quite unfamiliar with its new territories, as it were. And also because it had not had too many instances when it was in a crisis mode. Someone is going to say what are you talking about, there was the Hungarian uprising and the Berlin War and this and that and the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1968 and so forth, and, yes, that's true, but these were shared with an awful lot of other people. That is, in Washington terms they were shared with other agencies and people and in particular with the National Security Council. But the second major development that was taking place was the decline and fall of the Nixon Government.

In August, of course, the President resigned which was a singular crisis and one we had never had before, not a resignation, not a resignation under a cloud in any event. Unfortunately, we had had assassinations and that sort of thing, but still it was very difficult.

Q: No president had ever resigned.

MARSH: No president had ever resigned. Well, in any event, here I am.

Q: And what were your duties? What were you primarily involved in?

MARSH: Allow me to say that I was forever trying to define them. That there was no set of tablets from some Moses coming down the mountain saying, Bill, we want you to do this and that and the other thing. And once again one is supposed to intuit or grasp or guess or estimate or what have you what to do. It was also a bit difficult because I was working for a very strong willed, very opinionated boss, Richard Vine. He, along with many others in the Bureau, had many, many years of European experience. I, having just come from Paris, but still having come from the Vietnam Peace Mission, was regarded as an Asiatic who had somehow made his way into the sacred halls of European Affairs.

Q: In spite of your four years in Brussels?

MARSH: In spite of my four years in Brussels.

Q: Did you talk with Dick about this?

MARSH: When I could, but of course Dick was around for about a month and then became deputy assistant secretary for Canadian Affairs. So once again there was a problem of shifts in personnel. Actually the position of deputy director of an office in the Department is a very anomalous one, because one is supposed to be an alter ego and that is combined with being a country director. So I was French country director, for French Affairs. In any event I think it was pretty interesting work. I was eager to have it, because here I was 43, and it was the first geographic desk I had ever worked on in the Department, barring Vietnam which was not a geographic desk but a maelstrom, for heaven's sakes.

I had a psychological problem, in the interest of full disclosure. I haven't gone into a great deal of detail about the Vietnam years because I was handling that in another portion. But in any event, between '66 and '68, on the Vietnam Working Group it was such a horrendous time both emotionally and physically, I always approached Department assignments with great dread thereafter. Not least because for four months my work assignment on the Vietnam Working Group had been 36 hours on, 12 hours off, seven days a week, 30 or 31 days a month, etc. This was such a crippling and completely exhausting situation that it left me with, not mingle feelings, but as I say, great dread about going back to the Department. But it is a necessity and an important thing to do.

What did I do? Well, at the time, Secretary Kissinger, Mr. Sonnenfeldt and Arthur Hartman, who was the Assistant Secretary, were all very experienced, very capable. Dealing with the Western European countries was the very linchpin and focus of their international efforts. So things were taking place well in the stratosphere up ahead of present company.

Q: You keep climbing the Foreign Service ladder and still the decision-making and policy-making always seems to be another couple of rungs up!

MARSH: Too true, too totally true.

Q: But in effect you were country director for France?

MARSH: That is correct and I did have a young fellow as my deputy, which was very helpful. You'll remember it has been eight years since I supervised seven people in Vietnam and it is going to be, as a matter of fact, another 13 years before I supervise seven people again. So there is a 20-year period there when I did not supervise as many people as I had done when I was a very junior officer in Vietnam. At any rate, long, long waits are involved here.
A couple of things in particular, I deal with. First of all, there was no money for me to go to any Western European posts during my service. It is customary one go out. So I

hitch-hiked on a military flight to Brussels, and paid my own way from Brussels to Paris and then went back a week later and took the return military flight, that sort of thing.

Q: This is another example of the Department being really strapped for funds and not able to give its officers the funds that you think are required to do an adequate job.

MARSH: You can only get money in the Department, it seems to me, if somehow you work the word "management" or "administration" into it. But for the actual conduct of the business of the nation, there is never money. But there is always money for administrative conferences. There is always money for information management. I still don't understand what that is; in fact I thought that was everybody's job, to tell you the truth, information management. I made it very clear in later years that nobody was going to manage my information but me because I was responsible for it.

In any event I spent a great deal of time trying to see what there was to do beyond the standard routine of briefing papers, briefing papers, briefing papers, trip papers for those who were going out. Because some people had money and could visit my posts, even if there wasn't any for me. But this, of course, is a tremendous routine.

There were a few funny instances. I am going to relate them because it tells you how to get a reputation within the halls of the Department of State. In one of them…I went in, as was my wont on a Saturday. So did Dick Vine, who had gone in frequently. Dick had gone in very relaxed attire, whereas I had a jacket and tie on and so forth. Dick came and told me that the Big Four meeting scheduled to be held at Camp David was going to be held in the Department because of bad weather.

Q: Excuse me. Who are the Big Four?

MARSH: The Big Four are Britain, Germany, France and the United States, a periodic consultative group, in this case of foreign ministers.

Q: Okay, it is coming up and it is supposed to be at Camp David but because of bad weather it is being held in the Department?

MARSH: That's right. And each office is supposed to supply one officer to just sit, in case, as the French say, just in case someone was needed. So there were the three of us. Obviously the whole staff secretariat was there to cover Secretary Kissinger, but only one U.S. officer for each of the other countries. And I'm sitting there and they break up their conversations and come down. The three of us from the offices are on the ground floor and Secretary Kissinger advances on us. So, of course, we all rise to our feet and he looks us over and recognizes me and comes up and says, "Mr. Marsh, I need you." So I walk off with the Secretary and he says to me, "Would you please show Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues," of France, "Would you please show him to the bathroom."

Q: Marvelous.

MARSH: This, for once in a low voice, he tells me. So I go off and next I escort Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues about, as my colleagues watch enviously, and disappear with him in a different direction. I didn't bother to tell them it was to the facilities. But at any rate for days afterwards the building buzzed. Secretary Kissinger knew Bill's name.

Another time was during something that occupied a great deal of my effort, namely the State visit of President Giscard D'Estaing of France in 1976. There was a luncheon at the Department for him, and my wife and I were among the invited. Please don't say cynically that I made up the guest lists! Any guest list that I ever prepared for Kissinger was an approximation. It was bound to change many times before it came out. Naturally I put my name on it, but I was astonished to see it remained there.
So at any rate, it came time for the toasts and the Secretary pulls a paper out of his pocket and says "Normally when I receive something from the geographic desk I don't pay any attention to it. But this was so good I thought I would use it." And he then proceeded to read my toast verbatim.

Q: Did anybody know it was your toast?

MARSH: Oh, yes, the word gets around. Because everybody was always trying to figure out what would please, satisfy and gratify the Secretary of State. No matter who he was. That was always the name of the game. And the next day I had a call from a deputy assistant secretary in another Bureau who said would I help him write a memo to go up to the Secretary, as I seemed to have some success with that sort of thing.

Q: Wonderful. Wonderful.

MARSH: So, how to get ahead in the State Department without really trying, these were a couple of the ways!

Q: Why sure. Bill, what would you say were a couple of the highlights of American relations with France. This is 1974 to 1976.

MARSH: I think we had a very, very good visit by Giscard D'Estaing. That helped a great deal. I think the French particularly appreciated that the State dinner at the White House, over which President Ford presided, happened during the Michigan Primary. President Ford was a real class act at that time, because obviously this was very much on his mind, touch and go. But finally at the end of the evening came the word that he, indeed, had won the Michigan Primary. But this, indeed, was a gentleman and you had to admire that sort of thing. I was proud to even have a small part in observing such strength of character. He was superb.
Of course relations with the French are always touchy because they don't do what we want easily or readily.

Q: Did you have a reasonably good relationship with the embassy, for example?

MARSH: Excellent. It was very good. We were frequently there. It was very interesting.

Q: Remember who the ambassador was?

MARSH: The ambassador, Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet, later became a Senator and was from a family in the Champagne Region of France.

Q: You didn't deal with him very much?

MARSH: I dealt more frequently with the DCM, the deputy chief of mission, and the political counselor.

Q: Did you get some good meals at the French embassy residence?

MARSH: You bet! My wife was invited and we met very interesting people.

Q: Any particular contretemps? Any particular rough spots?

MARSH: No, in fact we had some I think particularly congruent relationships. Once the Department was, in a rather craven fashion, going to hold a reception as requested by a Congressman whose name had very recently been touched with a scandal thanks to a 'popsie' that he had been seeing. The President of the Senate of France was to visit.

Q: Bill, you were telling us about the reception the Department had planned at the request of a congressman who had recently been in a scandal.

MARSH: Yes. The Congressman wanted the Department to pay for a reception to be hosted by the Congressman for the President of the French Senate, who was to visit the United States. I was to prepare a guest list. Frankly I was revolted by the notion that we would spend money on this loser. I mean the American, not the Frenchman.

Q: This miscreant!

MARSH: So I thought about this for awhile and then I called the French ambassador. I wanted to make sure that the ambassador knew that this was afoot so I very sweetly asked the ambassador whether he had any suggestions for a guest list, and how nice it was there was going to be such a reception, given the Congressman's recent very prominent romantic difficulties. Butter wouldn't have melted in my mouth of course, on the thing. The ambassador read me immediately and said he would get back to me. And he did a couple of days later, to say that the President of the Senate had been obliged to cancel his visit to the United States.

This I consider a certain accomplishment, as a matter of fact, in the improvement of relations because the French cannot stand to be pawns in the internal political games of the Americans.

Q: Bill, give us one or two insights about Departmental politics and the art of being a

deputy office director. You've told us a couple of interesting and amusing vignettes, but on the substantive side, do you have any experiences with how to get the job done back in Washington?

MARSH: It seems to me that the particularities of such a thing are paramount in importance. So much concerns the personalities involved. How to get the papers moved without staying there until eight or nine at night. Now, again, I'm a creature of an earlier age, when you saw lots of offices where officers were still there at seven and seven-thirty. I don't see that very much anymore. It seems to me that only up on the seventh floor so you have that sort of thing and the rest of the Bureaus come and go, as they will. There is much less time spent in the building by lots and lots of officers, particularly younger officers. I had no preparation before coming into the Foreign Service for the twelve, thirteen-hour day that was all too common in the '60s and the '70s, not so much in more recent times.

But in any event one has to be prepared to use one's time and one's efforts as aggressively as possible. Dominate your agenda, if at all possible. If there isn't an agenda, prepare one and say now these are the things that I believe that we should talk about. Wherever possible have papers prepared in advance for a meeting that people can sign off on so that you can get people pinned down on it. There are too many people who, of course, want to use up time. You know we have a lot of peers in other agencies, and even in parts of the Department, who really have the problem of filling up their days. Whereas at the geographic desks in the political bureaus we don't have that problem. Our problem is getting everything done!

So that you've got a piece of paper, and you get five-sixths of the meeting agreed on, it is the sixth person who'd really like to take it home and mess with it for a few days or weeks who will sign off because of the pressure of his peers. So in a way it's sort of like manipulating a jury, it seems to me.

It is essential to avoid behavior that can be construed by one's superiors as constituting a threat. So you have to fawn a bit and say, "Now is this what you thought? Was it your idea that we should such and such"…when they had no idea at all. It takes a certain amount of oiliness it seems to me. Sometimes, indeed, the exact reverse is possible.
I would just point to the future a little bit. When I was deputy chief of mission in Geneva and my first ambassador of two while I was there, both political appointees, the first ambassador wanted nothing to do with substance. He wanted strictly to do with representation and the administrative side of the house and left all substance to me. The next ambassador wanted the exact opposite. And so one has to be the vicar of Bray, who changes his collar to suit the regime and one has to be prepared to be infinitely adaptable. It isn't easy. On the other hand, it isn't boring either because the humdrum, steady plodding repetition of things year after year after year in the same place, in the same job with the same people would to me be the worst thing imaginable.

Q: But we all know that EUR, the Bureau of European Affairs, and the Office of Western European Affairs is one of the premier places to be in the Department. There is always

something going on there. Anything that you'd like to say about working on the fourth or fifth floor of the Department about relations with the Seventh Floor or relations with the NSC or with other agencies?

MARSH: These came really a little later. We had a unique situation in my first assignment in the Department upon coming back in 1974 in that Secretary Kissinger was also Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. So we had fusion of powers, as it were, instead of confrontation. That was remarkable. It was when Secretary Kissinger left and President Carter came in and brought a new NSC with him. I actually had different responsibilities at that time, but things were jumping.

Within the Department, you know, relations between the geographic bureau and the policy planning people can be rather tense at times. But again matters depend so much. For example, Secretary Baker, years later of course, in our times, modern times, Secretary Baker really did not care to see more than his Under Secretaries. Thus it was that a close friend of mind, an expert on Cambodia and himself a deputy assistant secretary, had to brief an assistant secretary on Cambodian developments, who in turn briefed an under secretary, who in turn was going to meet with Secretary Baker.

In the Kissinger days, I as French country director, was present as the note-taker, of course, usually, but I was present at meetings between Kissinger and key French officials. Thus when Francois Mitterand made his first visit to the United States, my memo suggested, recommended to the Secretary that he see Francois Mitterand, whereas French opposition leaders were not seen by the Secretary of State prior to that time, much less the White House. So I was duly there and Secretary Kissinger glared at me throughout the meeting for the simple reason that the meeting went very badly, in that Monsieur Mitterand chose topics that totally bored Secretary Kissinger at that time. It was a rather pointless get-together. His time was wasted.

But in any event operating within the building is a thing which it seems to me has become somewhat constricted in recent years. It used to be that a lot more people got involved in matters and now it is an ever-selected few that are involved.

Q: You touched a while ago on the advisability of trying to get the paper drafted with the sort of tactical advantage that having a paper there for people to talk about was a great advantage. Were there any instances, for example, in the interagency wars and the turf battles where having you being in the State Department, and having a paper prepared in advance of an interagency meeting or something that was going to go to the NSC, where that paid off for you?

MARSH: Oh, absolutely. My whole career long! Pre-emptive strike was always my policy with respect to policy papers. I also would take the time to go around to offices in person to get clearances on things, because they would want to get rid of me. I'm talkative and very big, I fill an office very easily and they don't have much space left. And since we have a lot of people who are rather introverted in the Department, and I have an outgoing, ebullient kind of personality they want to get rid of me so they can get

back to whatever they happened to be doing at the time and they sign off. I could get clearances on papers faster than almost anybody else you knew could. But I didn't leave it to "please look at your e-mail, where I have a thing for you," because this just invites delay.

Q: Normally I assume it would be the desk officer, the desk officer for France, who would be running around getting clearances, but sometimes you took this job on in the interest of moving things forward?

MARSH: Exactly.

Q: All right, are we through with Western Europe?

MARSH: We are, with the '74-'76 period.

Incidentally there is one point that I would like to make that does refer to Vietnam. Everybody who is at all interested in the Foreign Service should be mindful of this. In the spring of 1975 Under Secretary Habib called me up to work on a special Task Force for a month over the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon to the Communist forces. At that time we had some 200 Foreign Service officers who were occupied in Indochina affairs in one fashion or another. Either by assignment within those countries, such as in the AID business, not simply at embassies and that sort of thing, and not simply at capitals. But at any rate, there were about 200 officers. And with the fall of Phnom Penh and Saigon, a permanent glut of Foreign Service officers ensued. We had difficulties of placement from then to now, in many instances, because of that and therefore the Service was a victim of the war.

Q: This is sort of the other side of the situation. Maybe ten or fifteen years earlier when an entire incoming class of new FSOs would be assigned to Vietnam, to be pacification officers or provincial officers, now there is sort of a wave of people away from Vietnam. There are not enough job possibilities in the rest of Southeast Asia.

MARSH: That's right and frankly there is no imaginative planning on the part of the Department for using officers in various capacities.

Q: Such as for example French-speaking Africa?

MARSH: Well, of course, we are talking extremely small posts there. But what I'm saying is that with greater economy we could have used officers within the United States for various functions, as liaison or secondment to international bodies or to the Hill or what have you. Someone is going to say we had the Pearson Program, or we had this or we had that, this is pretty small potatoes. But at any rate, I was casting around for a job and hoping for a field job and became quite worked up. I was told I should really have senior training. So I said all right, that will be fine.

Q: You are now about 45?

MARSH: 45, that's right.

Q: And you are an FSO-3?

MARSH: I'm an FSO-3 that's right. And so somebody, you will be amused to hear, said that it would be very good if I would take a year at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University…my alma mater!

Q: Another one!

MARSH: I said 'been there, done that.'
Q: Didn't look at your personnel folder!

MARSH: Exactly. So off I went to the National War College.

Q: The National War College, which is a real plum. How did you like that?

MARSH: I was lukewarm about it, to tell you the truth. In the first place it was a situation where it was a holding action for a lot of potential star-ranking military and naval personnel. A holding action while they got their Master's Degrees from George Washington University. Also it was an introduction to strategy for a lot of folks who had been dealing with highly technical and technological matters for years and years and years. It was good to make the contacts, yes, and some of the material was quite worthwhile.

But you'll recall that the Armed Forces of the United States were not in the best of shape at that time. They were emerging from the shadow of Vietnam and the collapse of Indochina.

Q: It was a very difficult morale situation?

MARSH: Very difficult and much was at that time under reorganization, investigation, rethinking, retooling, what have you, in order to try to rectify the problems that had hurt us so in Southeast Asia.

Q: In your year at the National War college was there a lot of sort of introspective examination of how we had gotten into Vietnam? What we could have done differently while we were there? The military love lessons learned. Did you have a lot of that? This would seem an ideal time; this was sort of a year off at the National War College for just that kind of thing.
MARSH: That's what I anticipated but in fact that's not what I encountered. It was as if there had been a very bad divorce in the family and nobody wanted to talk about it. It was still too raw, you know, and too fresh. And of course the fall of '76 was just fourteen, fifteen months, something like that, after the fall of Saigon. It was very interesting.

The military were intensely interested in negotiation and wanted to know how to resolve conflicts through negotiation rather than through the search for military solutions, whereas the Foreign Service officers were very interested in how to resolve problems by military action. So we were exchanging personalities and professional points of view, I guess.

I gave some lectures at their request on Western European situations and developments. But I really became interested in the Middle East through Joseph Malone who was a professor there. He died just a few years afterwards, unfortunately. He had superb contacts in the Middle East.

Q: He was a professor at the National War College?

MARSH: Yes, that's right. Joe Malone, for example, knew Sadat extremely well. He knew the Saudi monarchs very well and so forth and so on. He knew the King and Crown Prince of Jordan and so forth. So he was very wise on that subject. The high point of it was a trip to Israel, Jordan and Egypt, culminating, in fact closing with, two hours spent with Sadat at his Alexandria palace in Egypt which was unforgettable. He was a truly remarkable man, extraordinary.

Q: I know the National War College sort of splits up into different teams and goes to different parts of the world. You went to sort of the Near East?

MARSH: That is right.

Q: Give us some of your recollections of what struck you about Israel, Jordan, and Egypt.

MARSH: Well, there were a couple of things that amazed me. In the first place we went in Jordan to a Palestinian refugee camp. We had a retired Major General of the Air Force as sort of our Dean who traveled with us, as our senior member, an awfully nice man. We went to a Palestinian camp and of course we were submitted to a great deal of verbal abuse from the Palestinians. The U.S. military were totally shocked, totally unprepared for this hostility, couldn't understand it. Then, back in Israel they were totally dismayed by the Israelis who showed certain reserve, suspicion and not at all outgoing gratitude, friendship and so forth for American assistance over the years. They brought up the "St. Louis" incident of 1939, the failure to bomb the railways to the death camps, all that sort of thing. In other words both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides directed reproaches towards us.

The military were shocked, just absolutely shocked. This was totally new to them. So I suppose this trip was very useful from that standpoint.

Q: Do you remember one or two points from your session with Sadat, what he seemed to have on his mind?

MARSH: Pretty much what you would expect. He responded to questions for the most part. He said a remarkable thing in response to a question about population policy in Egypt. He said, after thinking a little bit, that he didn't know the answer to the question. I don't think he was stalling in any fashion at all. I think he was just an extraordinary statesman.

We all gasped because we had never heard any leader, certainly not in Washington, ever admit he didn't know the answer to something. He said he didn't know the answer, he should know the answer, and he directed an aide to find out for him what the answer was and he would communicate it to us later. And did! A remarkable man, an absolutely remarkable man. So this was well worthwhile, I think.

Q: You had already, quite early in your career, even before joining the Foreign Service, you had been in the Air Force yourself. Certainly in your years in Vietnam had been very much involved with the military so in a sense this was a continuation for you, as an American diplomat, of sort of the political/military side of American foreign policy. You went there hoping to broaden yourself and to get some other perspectives, did that work out at all?

MARSH: It certainly did. Let me explain one thing, when I graduated from the National War College one third of the Foreign Service contingent in the class had not yet any assignment. I was one of those. So I went to see my old mentor from Vietnam days, Phil Habib. He blew up. Blew up. He said we put these people through and it cost $55,000, 1976-77 dollars, $55,000 was the bill from the military for each student.

Q: You are being groomed here to become a DCM or possibly an ambassador. You'd think people coming out of the National War College would be assigned first.

MARSH: Yes, one would think that, but that wasn't the case. So I went to him and he blew up. Yes, I did have some possibilities after that. But ultimately I became a Special Assistant to the Under Secretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology. Much of what we were doing was handling the Middle East arms sale.

Q: Let's go back now. This is 1977, you are re-assigned to the Department, and who is this gentleman?
MARSH: No, this lady.

Q: Lady?

MARSH: Lucy Wilson Benson, the first woman Under Secretary of State. She had been the President of the League of Woman Voters. She was a Democrat and she was brought in. She knew President Carter.

Q: Lots of people in Washington?

MARSH: Yes, the Secretary. I'm struggling with his name…from West Virginia…what

was his name…the lawyer?

Q: We'll get that. But in any event, what Bureau were you in?

MARSH: No, this is Seventh Floor…this is 'T.'

Q: "T?"

MARSH: That's right. "T" is supposed to oversee the Office of Politico-Military Affairs, and it is also supposed to oversee certain nuclear disarmament work that takes place, nuclear regulation control, and then it is supposed to oversee OBS, as it was called, the Bureau of Oceans, Environmental, and Scientific Affairs. But most of our time was spent with the most politically sensitive of all, Security Assistance. The preparation for the annual budget for Security Assistance alone was a totally exhausting and demanding job.

One could anticipate from each House of Congress demands for additional information, sometimes lists of 200, 250 questions from a single member. Obviously hyperactive staff aides were grinding out this stuff on the Hill. Then of course the Under Secretary would have to make many Congressional appearances in support of the budget and so forth. Then there would be extraordinary periods when we had a special program, such as the AWACS for Iran; such as the Middle East aircraft sale in support of Camp David Agreements, and that sort of thing. That was interesting, very interesting work. I'm going to skip over that a little bit more hurriedly.

Q: Give us a little bit about Mrs. Benson. You say that she had been the President of the League of Women Voters?

MARSH: Cyrus Vance was the Secretary's name I was trying to reach for.

Q: What sort of person was Mrs. Benson?

MARSH: I don't want to get into traits, to tell you the truth. But this was her first government position.

Q: There is a very significant thing right there.

MARSH: She needed a considerable amount of support, which in fact we gave her. I think she performed quite well. There was a problem in that the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs was headed by Leslie Gelb, who is a journalist and very close to Cyrus Vance and President Carter and all sorts of people for years and years, in a foreign policy related situation. So while he was supposed to process everything through "T" to the Secretary of State and the deputy secretary, Mr. Christopher, this was not always the case, as a matter of fact. So we had to police matters rather carefully.

Q: Difficult job, very difficult job.

MARSH: It was rather difficult. I got some very good trips out of it, though. You see there is money on the Seventh Floor. There is not money to go to Bethesda and lower floors, but there is money to go to Bethesda, Israel, on the Seventh Floor.

Q: Was Mrs. Benson particularly interested in political-military things, or was she more interested in sort of environmental and scientific things?

MARSH: No, she was extremely interested in the most politically sensitive matters. She, of course, had had long work in legislative affairs. As President of the League of Women Voters she had testified at State levels and met the Congress and all that sort of thing. She knew what she was doing about that.

One thing that was interesting was that she commuted from Amherst, Massachusetts. She just had a place to stay in Washington but really commuted because her husband was a professor in Amherst and was ailing. We had to prepare an awful lot of briefing books and papers and things of that sort. She used to take about thirty pounds of stuff home with her over the weekend. She never left any work behind, never lost any of it, she always brought it in and she knew her briefs and everything else. She did all right. I had great respect and admiration for her.

We made a trip together which was unforgettable because we went to a place that no senior American official had been before, although they have since. Secretary Albright has just returned from there as a matter of fact, as we speak. That was Rwanda. She (Under Secretary Benson) was the first senior American official who ever visited Rwanda. We went there in 1979. She was going to give a speech at the UN Environmental Program meeting in Nairobi. She was a great lover of animals so we climbed Mt. Visoko in Rwanda, to see gorillas. So there we were up there. Yours truly is squatting in the bush, near a family of gorillas, and all I could think of, of course, is having seen the revival of King Kong. But it was fascinating. Diane Fossey was up on top of the mountain.
Q: Did you see her?

MARSH: Of course; we were there overnight. We were her guests on top of the mountain. It was quite extraordinary. There were other trips made, it was all very good. I was to be reassigned in 1979 and managed to get myself a position as counselor for Political-Military Affairs at Embassy Jeddah, in fact the first counselor for Political-Military Affairs in Jeddah.

Q: Did Phil Habib have anything to do with that?

MARSH: No, no, he didn't, as a matter of fact.

Q: By this time, just as an insight, you have now been back in Washington since 1974, this has now been about five years. You are going off to a fairly isolated and difficult post. How about your wife and children? For example, what was your wife, Ruth, doing in Washington, and how old were your children?

MARSH: The boys were in seventh and fifth grade that summer. There was no eighth grade at the school in Jeddah so we applied several places and my son, William, Jr., whom we call Wim, was accepted at Lawrenceville. We decided that we were going to put him in Lawrenceville and we were going to leave him there. He had been shunted around from school to school. He started in Brussels, then went to Paris and was in public school in the District and then went to private school when the public school didn't pan out. He then went to St. Stephen's in Alexandria [Virginia] for the seventh grade, when the first private school ran out. We needed to find a place for him.

Q: So Lawrenceville would take him in the eighth grade?

MARSH: They certainly would, and did. He was there five years.
Q: You had by this time two children?

MARSH: Two sons, that's right. The younger one, Andrew, would go with us.

Q: Had Ruth been working here or had she been looking after the family?

MARSH: No. I was rather concerned as to whether I should go, whether life would be worth living in Saudi Arabia, for heaven's sake. I had never been there.

Q: Particularly for your family.

MARSH: And particularly for my family. So I came home rather tentatively and said, "Well, you know there is a chance I could go to Jeddah as counselor for Political-Military Affairs" and my wife immediately said, and I'll never forget it, she said that it sounded fascinating.

Q: Good for her!

MARSH: So here I had been expecting her to bail me out of this! I went ahead and went to Stuttgart several times for security assistance conferences but you know Saudi Arabia was in the EURCOM realm of responsibility. And I stopped at Stuttgart and then went on to Jeddah. They had a place all fixed up for us and frankly it was the best quarters made ready for us that we had ever had in all of the Foreign Service.

It just shows what can happen.

Q: So tell us the name of the administrative officer and the general services officer.

MARSH: Oh, I always repress names of administrators and general services officers. But the ambassador and deputy chief of mission were terrific.

Q: Unlike your experiences, or your wife's experiences in Thailand, you seemed to do fairly alright in Saudi Arabia.

MARSH: Well, you know what the exception proves.

Q: Okay, so here you are in the burning sands of Arabia. Who was your ambassador and who was your DCM?

MARSH: Our ambassador was John West who was named by Jimmy Carter, as a neighbor, as he was governor of South Carolina while Jimmy Carter was governor of Georgia.

Q: Why did John West want to go to Jeddah?

MARSH: Well, I don't know but I'm glad he did because this was one man, and I haven't met many in 36 years in the Foreign Service, where everything was for the troops. Now Phil Habib had had touches of that. For example, I got overtime pay for a month in the spring of '75 and everyone on the Indochina Task Force then got overtime pay. I tried to turn it back because this was contrary to regulations and I was told to shut up and cash it, that Mr. Habib had gotten it for everyone.

Which is interesting because it shows when someone does want to do something, to get something done, they find ways to do it.

Similarly, all my wife had to do when she wanted to go somewhere in Jeddah was to call the embassy and a car was dispatched. John West had gotten enough cars that all the wives could be accommodated since they could not drive. They never had to wait more than a few minutes.

Q: Even American embassy wives were not permitted to drive?

MARSH: No women drive in Saudi Arabia. There is nothing which says they may not drive, but none has ever received a driver's license, and John West just came right in and picked that all up.

Q: But the job of handling U.S. relations with this important Arab country in the area of things like arms sales, bases, etc., very important, what were you doing and how did you enjoy it?

MARSH: I enjoyed it very much. I used to tease our commercial officer who was trying to push American products and by my count the total foreign military sales contracts we signed during my two years in Saudi Arabia, totaled 31 billion dollars. A young commercial officer said, "I'm trying to sell eggbeaters here, and you are selling these AWACS systems!" But as a matter of fact we did sell that.

Q: I assume there was either a number of military attaches at the embassy, as well as perhaps a MAAG or MIL Group. Could you sort of help us to understand how you defined your job in relation to the American military that might be there?

MARSH: It wasn't easy. But there was a very remarkable Major General who was the head of the Military Assistance Organization, Chuck Donnelly, amazing guy. Now we were all widely dispersed. Jeddah is not the capital of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh is the capital. But all embassies, at that time, were confined to Jeddah, which is the traditional port of arrival for pilgrims on the Hadj. So they wanted to keep the contamination of foreign influences confined to post, I suppose. Later on, in the '80s, there was the completion of construction of diplomatic quarters in Riyadh.
Similarly, the Military Assistance Headquarters were located not in Riyadh, but up on the Gulf in Dhahran. Now Chuck Donnelly and I used to get together very regularly in Riyadh. He would fly down in a military plane, I'd fly up from Jeddah on Saudia Airlines. As a matter of fact I was going from Jeddah to Riyadh at least twice a week. That would be getting up and being at the airport at 6:30 in the morning for a 7:30 flight and arriving in Riyadh about 10:00. Spending time with the military and seeing the Saudi officers (or ministers, as the case may be, if I was with the ambassador), who generally saw people about 11 or 12 in the morning, but very rarely after that, and never beforehand.

Then I would spend time with the military assistance people at the lower levels. You don't just want to do it with the Generals. First of all he's got things to do, and second of all you want to hear, as I learned in Vietnam, you want to hear what the Majors and the Captains and Lieutenant Colonels think and are doing and how things are going. Then I'd get a flight back and if I were lucky I could be back in Jeddah by seven o'clock and if I weren't so lucky I might be back in Jeddah at ten o'clock at night and get home at 11. So that would be a very long day and was tiring. You never knew how to dress because in the middle of the desert Riyadh could be a hundred-plus at midday and it could get down to pretty chilly at night. You probably remember that from your North African experiences. So you needed extra clothing and that sort of thing.

But we did have a Liaison Office in Riyadh and that was very helpful. If you needed to stay over you could stay over at that place.

Q: That was an American military office not a State Department...

MARSH: No, it was a State Department office. It was called USLO, the U.S. Liaison Office. It was done away with, of course, when the embassy moved there.

We had a huge compound for the embassy in Jeddah, now the consulate general in Jeddah, and a wonderful swimming pool. It was a very strange place, living there. It was very, very strange because there were no public places to speak of. There were no movies, on the Saudi side, that is. Occasionally we'd see a movie at the embassy or we'd rent a tape and play it in a machine. There were no movies in English in a theater; no theatrical presentations of any kind.

It was risky, as a matter of fact, to go out to dinner. Major General Donnelly later…by the way he died a few years ago…but he became a full General and served as head of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, after having served as head of U.S. Air Forces in East Asia. At any rate, Chuck Donnelly and a number of his staff and their wives...

Q: We are talking about getting out of the office and having some recreation in Dhahran and Jeddah.

MARSH: I was saying that General Donnelly, his wife, and a number of other senior staff from the military and their wives were having dinner at a recently opened Chinese restaurant in Dhahran when in burst a group of the religious police. These are laymen who volunteer to do all this sort of enforcement of the strict Wahhabi Muslim rules and they smashed up the place royally with clubs as the U.S. military tried to eat their dinner!

Q: Why?

MARSH: Because there were some representations of the Buddha about as decoration.

Q: Sure, it's a Chinese restaurant.

MARSH: In a Chinese restaurant, and that was idolatry as far as these people were concerned. They really smashed it to smithereens according to what Chuck wrote. That was the way it was.

You know, if you were in a supermarket and prayer call was called, the doors were locked, the shades pulled down and the cash registers stopped working. So we would have to stand there and wait and sometimes we would be there fifteen, twenty minutes, standing and waiting until the end of the prayer period. And then up would go the shades and the lights were turned on and the cash registers resumed ringing up our purchases.

Q: There wasn't much sort of downtown in Jeddah for either movies or cultural events?

MARSH: Nothing. No auditoriums of any kind, no theaters of any kind. As a matter of fact, there was an amusement park and certain nights of the week were for fathers and sons, and other nights of the week were for mothers and daughters, but never for mingled families to go out. As a matter of fact, there was great pressure placed by the Wahhabi religious that men and women should not be allowed to dine in hotels together. The hotels said they simply could not operate having split dining rooms. However, the swimming pools at the hotels had set hours for men and set hours for women. Husband and wife could never swim together.

Q: Part of the definition of a hotel is that it is for people who don't live there, so most of the hotels would be full of people who were not Saudis.

MARSH: Very sorry, but it did not work that way.

Q: Bill, one thing I have in my notes on this period is that in 1980 while you were in Jeddah, along came the Iran-Iraq War and the question of the use of U.S. AWACS planes. Did you get involved in that?

MARSH: Let's go back a bit, there is something even more significant in 1979. You'll recall that for many years journalists have been saying that the Saudi monarchy and the whole system of the country is about to collapse. It has not undergone modernization, democratization, representative and responsible government, etc. Well, the Saudis had been listening to this, by the time we were there, for a quarter of a century. They always maintained that their generous system of allowances and social welfare benefits to the population managed to keep everything in place. And then of course came the shock of the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca.

It so happened I had been there about a month. It was during the Hadj, followed by the Id. A good many of the embassy had gone off with the ambassador's blessing on a flight to the States that had brought pilgrims, hadji, over. It was returning to the States empty and then was going to come back and fetch the hadji later. So for the two empty segments of it, the airline responded to the ambassador's generosity and shrewdness in having them over for a party, and offered that anyone who would like to was welcome to go on the plane.

I was too new, I mean it was unthinkable that I would go anywhere, I had been there about a month. Many embassy personnel were away on that trip when I got the word in the embassy from the U.S. military that the Grand Mosque had been seized. This was a terrible time for the Saudis, very difficult.

Q: Islamic militants seized it, I believe.

MARSH: That is correct.

Q: These are sort of conservative...

MARSH: Ultra, ultra, ultra...

Q: Ultra conservative, nationalistic.

MARSH: You'll recall that the disinformation went around the world that the United States had had a hand in the seizure of the Grand Mosque. Therefore, in Islamabad, our embassy was burned. Rioting mobs killed some of our people. It was a very bad time.

Yes, at the time of the Iran-Iraq War, we did not have U.S. AWACS at that time. They were brought in a little later, to tell you the truth. They were based in Riyadh, because there would not be very much warning time if the Saudis were to be attacked by Iranian forces. Remember Iran is the enemy at that time, not Iraq. The threat was from Iran.

The strategic lifeline, particularly vital for Japan and the East Asian economies was through the Iranian Gulf straits, a very, very long lifeline. With a super tanker leaving every hour for the Far East, every hour. I've been in the air and I've seen this. It used to be called the string of pearls, laying out all of these super tankers which are great, wallowing whales. It takes twelve miles for them to come to a stop!

Q: All heading for Japan, Hong Kong?

MARSH: Japan, Hong Kong and so forth, oh, yes. That's right. But in any event we did get the AWACS in. The Saudis were very impressed with the AWACS. They wanted an AWACS. Our military presence there did not cause a great deal of dissension among the populace. All of these things were very useful come the Gulf War... come Desert Storm.

Q: Is there anything that you would like to tell us about the Saudi balancing act between on the one hand being a proud, independent Arab country, one of the leading Arab countries of the world. And on the other hand having a fairly close and reasonably friendly relationship with the United States, particularly in military terms.

MARSH: Well, I don't purport to be a Middle Eastern expert. I've read everything I possibly could and tried to follow developments. Over the years I've talked with all sides, as a matter of fact later in Geneva I was in touch with the Iraqis at the Department's instruction to see how the negotiations with the Iranians, presided over by the UN Secretary General, were going. So I dealt with various sides of approach. I dealt for many years with the Israelis, with Israeli diplomats and all that sort of thing. I consider myself a strong friend of both sides, if you will. I will not be characterized, and people have tried to do it, characterize me as an Israeli sympathizer or an Arab sympathizer. I want reconciliation, progress and peace worked out by both sides working together and this has been the name of the game for years and years and years, there is nothing new about that.

At the same time, one has to strike a balance, and it isn't easy, between the strong interest and importance to the United States and to the country itself of human rights matters and of stable, representative government. You have to balance that with the particularities of the region. They have ways of doing things which may not be according to our ticket, and each of the countries has certain, shall we say, anomalies of either religious inspiration or of their political system or their social structures, that sort of thing. We have to be very careful and very discriminating in our approach to it. It is too easy to say 'X' is not negotiating now or 'Y' is not controlling terrorism, or 'Z' is not practicing the rule of law and justice and so forth. There are so many interests at work there.

Q: This is one of the things that the FBI, perhaps, is running in to in trying to get to the bottom of the bombing of the Air Force apartment building a year or two ago. The FBI still doesn't feel that the Saudis have been forthcoming enough about their investigation, but this is an aspect of Saudi sovereignty and culture.

MARSH: Yes, that is very true and furthermore there are an awful lot of things that probably will not come out into the light of day for years and years to come because the Saudis have done things very, very quietly in many respects. And sometimes they've done things quietly which seem contradictory in order to be of use to both sides. But there have always been certain things very difficult to understand in the Middle East. It is a set of paradoxes, no doubt about that. For example, from day one Israel had had an assured oil supply from Iran. This was interrupted to a certain extent, and I say to a

certain extent, at the Iranian Revolution. But however arranged, though the former supplier or vendor was out of operation, Israel has had a continued oil supply vital to its economy.

In Saudi Arabia we used to eat lettuce that purported to come from the Gaza Strip. I don't believe it came from the Gaza Strip at all. I think it came from Israel. So one day I put this to certain Saudi officials and they became extremely uncomfortable, then coughed, so I knew I had hit on something!

Q: Talking about Saudi officials, any quick perceptions that you'd like to give us about some of the Saudis that you dealt with?

MARSH: I found them very impressive people, most of them I dealt with to any extent. You know, the Kingdom has concentrated upon good education for its princes and for as many of its people as it could.

Now this tends to run counter to the extreme conservative Wahhabi trend and so occasionally they have a period of re-evaluation, reconsideration, but still thousands and thousands of the people have become quite well educated.

Q: I would imagine that a number of the people you dealt with, for example in the Foreign Ministry, would be people who had a Western education. How are they managing on the one hand they've been exposed to Western culture and yet they are living in this very strict and conservative environment. How are they dealing with that?
MARSH: They travel a great deal and what they do, when in Rome... So there has been very little problem with that. Occasionally there is some argument from the government about their foreign exposure.

Q: Okay, so now we are in 1981. You are up for transfer from a hardship post, where did you want to go?

MARSH: Well, I was very eager to find... to get a chief of mission position or something of that sort. I did not want to go back to Washington after only two years out. I was asked to go to Morocco. That was not my first choice but then I thought, well, alright. It would be interesting.

Q: You would be going there as what?

MARSH: Counselor for Political Affairs. I had had senior level jobs, so I was still a Three, which is not technically a senior officer. I had had senior level jobs for years. I had served above my pay grade for a long, long time. I knew I was going to be promoted to the senior ranks that fall and the job of counselor for Political Affairs was graded at the Three level. So for the first time I was going to be working below senior levels.

Now I'm going to have to be careful, very, very careful, in dealing with the time I was in Morocco because it was very difficult.

Q: Why?

MARSH: It was very difficult because there was a political ambassador who tended to consume the whole mission, the whole embassy, the whole staff.

Q: Name, please?
MARSH: No.

Q: Consume in what sense?

MARSH: He had to monopolize every activity, every talent all the time in every person. I'll give you certain examples.

I could get a telephone call from the Marine Guard who would say that the deputy chief of mission...

Q: Who was that?

MARSH: That was Ted Curran, who was a man about whom this very garrulous person speaking to you now will say absolutely nothing, which is my way of indicating that the gentleman deserves nothing but total silence on my part. In any event the deputy chief of mission told the Marine Guard that the ambassador wanted everybody in on Sunday afternoon for an urgent meeting within fifteen minutes. The ambassador was a very dapper dresser all the time. So that meant coat, tie, and full regalia, you see, to go over there to the residence.

Q: Sunday afternoon?

MARSH: Sunday afternoon. And so we would get over there and there would be a meeting that would be eight to twelve minutes long. The ambassador would say that the purpose of it was to discuss whether the ambassador from the Republic of Banana in Central America should be invited to a reception two weeks afterwards, because that ambassador "had not been very nice" to our ambassador.

Q: And the whole staff? On a Sunday afternoon?
MARSH: The whole senior staff…on Sunday afternoon at the residence.

Q: You are talking manic compulsive-ness here!

MARSH: Yes, yes we are! We're also talking about a person who simply has to have everybody's attention all the time and has to be the center of everything all the time, and who spent most of the time alone in Rabat. His wife came out very rarely. I can well understand why. And so he had to have somebody dancing attendance.

Q: This is a Reagan appointee?

MARSH: That's correct. Just for curiosity afterwards I counted the number of times I had been to the residence for official events during the first six months of 1982. January 1 to June 30, 1982, I had been there 203 times for an official event or meeting or what have you in half a year!

And another time, for example, my wife, and my children (Both of the boys were back from school in the States.), and I were planning to go to Fez at Christmas time. At the last minute the ambassador instructed us to take along the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and his wife, who were going to be visiting.

Q: And this is a private family Christmas vacation? And here you have got the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and his wife coming along with you?

MARSH: That's right, and the Senator from Illinois, Charles Percy, and his wife, Lorraine! Absolutely marvelous people, wonderful people, but the ambassador would lean on anybody for anything!

Q: Why did they want to go to Fez in the first place?

MARSH: Well, they were en route to Tunisia where they had a daughter in the Peace Corps, or something, I've forgotten what exactly, something like that. But at any rate, incidentally, I was never paid back. I was told to pick up the bills for them and be reimbursed. I was never reimbursed for that.

Q: Wow!

MARSH: Another time I was given about three hours notice in Rabat that I was to fly up to London, meet the ambassador, fly back with him to Fez from London.

Q: Why?

MARSH: Because there were papers he wanted translated into French and he just loved my French. Well, it was the only effective French, except for the administrative officer, John Garon, who was a very good administrative officer, by the way, another exception. He was Corsican in origin, so he had French, but he wasn't a writer of diplomatic French, but I could write French and put everything before the King.

Q: But you had to speak French to serve in Morocco, in theory.

MARSH: Hah! Hah!

Q: Every position in the embassy would have to be language designated, I would think.

MARSH: This is terribly funny. Language requirements were largely a thing of the past. Only for certain hard languages was there was somebody on hand who has been

especially trained for that.
Q: Okay, Bill, you have been a counselor of embassy before, in Jeddah, you are now serving sort of your second post as counselor of embassy. You have made your promotion to Class Two. Give us some of the contrast between a political-military counselor in one Arab country and a straight political counselor in another.

MARSH: But you are missing the point. The point is not the dictates of the job; the point is the dictates of the dictator.

Q: Okay.

MARSH: So I wrote speeches by the carload.

Q: For the ambassador?

MARSH: That's right, and all that sort of thing.

Q: It does sound like sort of a one man band and everybody is dancing to his tune, which is strange because I would assume he didn't know that much either about diplomacy or about Morocco.

MARSH: He had disdain for diplomacy and had the weirdest view of Morocco that there ever was. He had a certain disregard for facts in situations. Thus he maintained in his remarks at his swearing-in that when he was a child at their family estate in Florida, that his nurse had said to him, "One day, you are going to be ambassador to Morocco" pointing East. Well, in that case, she was pointing at Senegal, not at Morocco. But in any event these things really challenged one's credibility!

Q: Is there anything that you would like to add about Morocco, your impressions of Morocco? What life was like there?
MARSH: Not really, I think I'd just as soon pass over it because finally things became unbearable so I curtailed, I cut a three year tour to two years. So I went back to the Department and in effect was overcomplement for most of the year, but did manage to find a Special Planning assignment, and then in '84 I was asked if I would go to Belgium again, this time as political counselor. The name of the game was to persuade the Belgian government to permit the installation of cruise missiles.

Q: Okay, well, why don't we take that up next time? We have now been at this for about two hours. So in our next session it will be 1984, and you will be counselor of embassy in Brussels, okay?

MARSH: Very good, thank you.

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Q: Good afternoon. It is now the afternoon of January 16th. This is Nick Heyniger. I am

interviewing William (Bill) Harrison Marsh, and we are now in 1984. Bill has accepted an assignment as counselor in Brussels.

Bill, you had been in Brussels before, right?

MARSH: For four years.

Q: So what were you coming back to do this time?

MARSH: Well, as we said at the time, I returned to Brussels after an absence of twelve years. In the course of that time I moved 12 feet from office to office, and one slot, that is to say from political officer up to political counselor. This describes for me, in any event, the glacial pace at which things take place in the personnel system of the Department of State.

At any rate, I remember distinctly when John Heyman, my predecessor, met me at the airport in 1984 and we drove into Brussels, it was as if I had never left! Everything just looked exactly the same, and sure enough the political counselor's house I was given, was one I had helped the previous political counselor find, and it was located about a half mile from where my place had been the first tour. So there was a sort of sameness about it. But the Department here upgraded very intelligently in my view. They wanted to build on my knowledge of Belgian internal politics, and particularly of Belgian politicians in order to obtain Belgian government assent to the deployment of cruise missiles in Belgium.

What was the importance of this? Well, the importance of it was, of course, that the SS-20 threat from the Soviets in the early '80s was a very serious challenge to meet. That the countries where we were go put the missiles in Europe were Germany and Belgium and the Netherlands. Also Denmark, as I recall now. But the Netherlands was very unready to do so. Had Belgium not assented, I think that it would have been impossible for the Netherlands to say yes. In Belgium there had been mammoth demonstrations against cruise missiles. At one point, for example, there were about half a million demonstrators in Brussels against deployment. That is a rather considerable proportion of a country of nine million people. So there was a lot of work to be done.

I took up the job very happily. The ambassador was a very fine man, God rest his soul. He died just a matter of a few months ago, Geoffrey Swaebe.

Q: Career or political appointee?

MARSH: President of the May Company. He was a retailer. He was actually a man born in Britain.
Q: Did they make Maytag appliances?

MARSH: No, no…retail…the May Company. They own Hechts, among others; the May Company is in California. He had been connected with the California operations and later

became the CEO of the May Company. He and his wife were very, very close friends of the Reagans so that every New Year's eve the Reagans had dinner with the Swaebe, the Wicks…Charlie Wick was the head of USIA at that time, and the six of them had dinner.

Q: Back in Washington?

MARSH: Back in Washington or in California or wherever. That meant that the embassy had access to the White House, but the thing of course that President Reagan wanted from Belgium was agreement to deploy those cruise missiles. You couldn't make up a nice package of other concessions and agreements and so forth and say, well, we couldn't get the cruise missiles but, look here, we got increased trade and we got this and we got that. Sorry, no interest in those sorts of things. So we were gambling for very high stakes and we devised a strategy and a campaign and we involved President Reagan himself in it. We arranged for Prime Minister Wilfred Martens to call at the White House in Washington. President Reagan did a really great job on him, no question about it.

Q: It sounds like you were sort of the point man on this particular effort.

MARSH: It is fair to say that I was, as a matter of fact.

Q: Who were your principal contacts in the Belgian government?

MARSH: First let me explain that Prime Minister Martens, Wilfred Martens who served as Prime Minister eight times, if I'm not mistaken, was the contact I had made in the early '70s, a dozen years before. It had been my practice to ask the Secretary General of the Christian Democratic Party who he might suggest receive a Leader Grant to the United States. At one point he mentioned this fellow from West Flanders who was the head of the Christian Democratic Youth in that province. West Flanders is pretty much an agricultural province. He said this would help his career, if he could get a Leader Grant. So I arranged for Wilfrid Martens to go to the United States. Frank Swaelen, the Secretary General, who later became Minister of Defense in Belgium by the way, and a long time member of the Chamber and later of the Senate in Belgium, Frank Swaelen said the cachet of this visit helped make his, Martens', career. So I knew Party officials. I knew a number of Ministers

Of course we had a little problem here and that is that it is the ambassador who is supposed to see the Prime Minister.

Q: Yes, political counselors don't usually hobnob with ministers and prime ministers.

MARSH: That is absolutely true. But I was doing a little bit of Geppetto…just call me Geppetto, the marionette master; I was doing a little string pulling there and so forth.

Q: How about your DCM? How did he or she feel about this?

MARSH: My DCM was Charlie Thomas, later ambassador to Hungary, was a wonderful,

wonderful man, a great boss. I really enjoyed working with him. But at any rate through the two of them we managed to do things. My principal work was with political parties. I helped them on their work with the ministers.

Q: When you say you helped 'them' you mean the DCM and the ambassador in their contacts with the Belgians?

MARSH: That's correct. But I worked on political parties, the trade unions and so forth directly. I had a good Labor attaché. I had him all programmed. I had a good man for internal politics. I had him all programmed. We just started up a relentless campaign on our Belgian counterparts.

Well, I made a big mistake. I got this done too soon! Within a year we had Belgian assent. Some had thought it would take several years. Then the question is what do you do for the balance of the three-year assignment? I'm afraid the answer was not much.

Q: Again, this is sort of the question that you faced before both in the field and in Washington as a deputy office director of sort of what exactly is your niche? What exactly are your responsibilities?

MARSH: Yes. This is one of the problems of the rising Foreign Service officer, but more particularly it is the problem of officers in the political cone. At this point I would like to digress briefly in order to say that I think the political cone is the essential cone of American diplomacy and in fact what distinguishes diplomacy from other fields. For a long time I think we deluded ourselves that we were really going to develop an economic cadre which would rival the domestic agencies of the United States. To wield an economic expertise, that would give us a great deal of prestige and power. I think that this has largely failed to come about.

Why? It is because we simply cannot rival Treasury or Agriculture or others in their economic pursuits. But when it comes to the political function the problem is that we have more expertise in that than any of the technical ministries in the U.S. government. In our democracy, in any event, everyone imagines himself a political expert. So that political appointees who come in from some where, who knows, out in the provinces, never having worked in government before, believe that they are uniquely endowed to attack and approach the political questions involved, and the policy questions of course, involved in a relationship with a foreign power. Time and again these people see the matter as one of personal relationships. They imagine a personal relationship with the President of the United States, which simply isn't there.

After all, the President has very, very limited time, indeed, for foreign affairs at all. It is very hard to imagine that he has very much time at all for dealing with a lesser bilateral question of some sort. I have not seen many instances when political appointees are able to work a policy turn-around or a policy change, even those very close to the President.

Q: Bill, did I also sort of sense that you were saying perhaps that sort of the

preponderant expertise in the Department and in the Career Foreign Service, at least when you or I were in it, was in sort of in the political cone. We had really sort of more political officers, particularly senior political officers, than we really could use. Therefore one thing to do might be to sort of sub-divide that cone up with perhaps some political officers having sort of global responsibilities, things like disarmament or drugs or the environment. Did I get that correctly?

MARSH: Frankly, I don't know whether there is a way that we can meet the requirements by fitting applicants for a particular job assignment, whether you can develop an expertise and then wield it or not. I think we have, as a matter of fact, balkanized the political cone entirely too much. We have specialization galore. Then these people set up their own bureaucracies. Take the labor function, for example. In a country like Belgium where two-thirds of the labor force is unionized, the Labor attaché serves a certain function. There is no question about that.

In France the Labor attaché has a distinct meaning because there you have definite contention between communist, socialist, conservative trade unions, and so forth. In certain Third World countries, the same. But we keep carving more and more little icebergs off the main mass. I think this is a very unhealthy thing. At the same time, a political counselor who really should be *primus inter pares* at the ambassador's conference table has to contend with the economic, information, military, and what not specializations. I think we have had some success and a lot of failures and disappointments in any event with that sort of thing.

I remember one time I was considering applying to become DCM in Budapest and found out that there was something like five persons with Hungarian language qualifications, in the right grade, who were interested in the job. I think there is a limit to what we can do and so what we need to do is have some people double and triple jointed, or else we are going to trip over ourselves in that kind of thing.

Q: So in sort of the middle and upper grades there are more good officers than really interesting positions?

MARSH: Very clearly.

Q: Plus the fact that doesn't the Department of Labor itself nominate a good number of labor officers? They used to.

MARSH: I think that sometimes it does. But all the Labor attaches I have met have been FSOs, career FSOs.

Q: The Labor attaché in Brussels was an FSO?

MARSH: Oh, yes.

Q: Just to digress for a second, but the reverse happened to us while I was serving at the

American embassy in The Hague. We had an excellent team but we kind of overlooked labor reporting. We didn't do enough of it and we didn't cultivate enough contacts. I was the most junior officer in the Political Section. This is back in 1960. We didn't have enough knowledge of what was going on in the Dutch Labor Movement, and the result of that was that shortly after I left the Labor Department stepped in. They said they needed their own reporting officer in The Hague and sent over a Labor Department officer to be the Labor attaché a position- (end of tape)

This is the continuation of an interview with Bill Marsh. Bill is political counselor in Brussels. Go ahead. What did you do for the next two years?

MARSH: We had a little homily there about the role of a political officer and all that sort of thing. I would like to tie it back in by saying that apart from the Political Section, the political cone, the political people, there are very few people who have to deal with crises.

In the Economic Cone there are just not that many crises, that many critical developments abroad that occur. I mean, in Hong Kong today, for example, you wouldn't be rushing around to figure which bank was going to collapse, you'd wait until it came out in the newspaper. And then it probably would have been reported home in any event.

Apart from the crises that every embassy had, namely of escorting a myriad of visitors around and seeing they got to their appointments and that sort of thing, but even that falls heaviest upon a Political Section.

Well, first of all we had bare bones staffing. So the political counselor, from 1984 to 1987, had to act as substitute teacher a tremendous amount of time. When ever anybody got sick, or went on home leave or went on annual leave, why, the political counselor had to fall right in and deal with it. So it went. But the point is that we had had a prime national security concern about the cruise missiles. When that question was resolved very satisfactorily and congratulations had been passed out all around and so forth, what then did Washington want from us?

The answer to that was a very hard thing to find out.

Q: Nothing in particular?

MARSH: Nothing in particular.

Q: Bill, you are an intelligent and reasonably ambitious FSO. Maybe you'd like to say something here about the next stage, which is sort of becoming a deputy chief of mission. I wonder if you'd like to say anything here about the quest to become a DCM. Would you have been willing to go to Africa, let's say, or a small post in Latin America, to be DCM? How does that work? What was your experience?

MARSH: Before that time I had tried very hard to find a DCMship. I think it might be

appropriate to move back just a little bit in time and make an explanation here. As one who had spent many years in Vietnam affairs, and had stayed in the Foreign Service, I felt I was somewhat stigmatized during the Carter Administration. The Department had a number of key figures who had been in Vietnam with me and who had left the government. Some who were in open disagreement on Vietnam policy and others for other reasons. But they had certainly become associated with what was clearly a revisionist administration concerning Vietnam. It was not going to take the old policy attitudes and standpoints and accept them. Particularly in staffing of the NSC and at senior levels of the Department, there were revisionists about Vietnam. So I was regarded as a Loyalist in that tribe. I inquired about certain jobs and did not get them, but had the distinct feeling that my credentials were considered shadowy to a certain extent.

The search to get a DCM-ship was a very tough one. Another thing we should remember is that the Department's own research indicates that about 65 percent of DCM-ships fail.
Q: Is that right?

MARSH: Yes that is right. It is an intensely personal relationship between an FSO and either another FSO, and God knows FSOs can be very difficult to work for, or a political appointee. This research that was done, to my best recollection, in sort of the late '80s and it was that 65 percent of DCM-ships were considered to be failures.

I know there was one ambassador to a Scandinavian country who had four DCMs during his two or three years tour in that post. I know there was another political appointee who decided that he would have a rotating DCM-ship. So he had a DCM of the month program! He was allowed to do these sorts of things. I remember when there was an ambassador who was very much taken with his political counselor. This is some years ago, lest some people decide to do a little detective work here. This is some years ago. But the two used to travel around together, sharing hotel rooms and all that sort of thing. I wonder how the DCM would have dealt with that little problem, for goodness sakes! But since DCM-ships are generally regarded as the way to chiefs of mission jobs, it is very difficult to get the right one. And to have a DCM-ship at a small African or Latin American post doesn't seem that much ice, these days. You still have to work the Washington scene.

If I had my entire career to recast, I believe I would have taken fewer overseas posts and would have worked harder not to take assignments in Washington that the Department wanted, only to get myself up against personalities who could have dealt me out. I think that is the way that it is done. I think I was a bit naïve in saying, "You run that flag up the flagpole, sir, and I'll salute it wherever it leads" and where the services are needed, Marsh will be found to help fill them. That's not really the way that it is done.

Now how did I get the DCM-ship in Geneva? I would like to say that apart from routine *demarches*, for example the annual one concerning General Assembly issues, etc., for the two remaining years that I had in Brussels I don't remember a unique, specific instruction coming from the Department on which the Political Section had to act. Everything else was routine *demarches*. In short what I'm saying is that we had an exciting first year and

quite ho-hum for the two years to follow.

Q: Okay. So now we are in 1987 and you are coming up for reassignment.

MARSH: I'm coming up for reassignment. I've been in Brussels for three years. So that means seven years in all that I've spent in Brussels.

Q: It's a little bit out of cycle, but maybe it's in cycle with your coming in from Rabat? What I'm saying is that normally a Western European tour is four years.

MARSH: No, that had changed, that had changed. One of the little tricks of the trade here that are going by us very quietly is that in its constant attempt to save money…. By the way nobody spends more money trying to find ways to save money than the Department of State. It is absolutely incredible. I remember when a number of Western European ambassadors were called in by Secretary Shultz to discuss ways to achieve greater economy and so forth, some of these chiefs of mission decided to save time and everything by taking the Concorde into Washington from London. That is first class plus one-third! These souls, bless them, just didn't understand, and just didn't grasp it.

I remember an ambassador, a political appointee for whom I worked, who wanted a ten thousand-dollar laser copier. When I told him we really couldn't spend more than a hundred dollars, one hundred dollars, without referring it to Washington, I'll never forget the blank stare and the open mouth with which he received this information!

So I sought a DCM-ship. Now I want to point out at this time that having come into the Foreign Service at 29, I was aware I was getting a bit long in the tooth at never having had a DCM-ship. But fortunately at 56, I did manage to get one, and with the help of Ambassador Swain. He had been permanent representative in Geneva before going to Brussels and he knew that the new ambassador in Geneva was looking for a DCM. He very kindly put in a good word for me and I credit his intervention, bless him, with my getting that job. Plus the fact that my wife and the new ambassador's wife were both Smith alumnae, so the old girl network here, if I may be so bold as to say, helped out.

Q: This is the new ambassador in Geneva?

MARSH: That's right, yes.

Q: Okay, okay. So here you are now in Geneva. I guess this is one of your first experiences with multilateral diplomacy?

MARSH: Not exactly because while serving in the Paris quadrilateral talks on Vietnam, I had been in Geneva in 1974 in a Vietnam effort, a humanitarian law conference, and I handled the credentials fight concerning which South Vietnamese party to admit to the conference, the government of Vietnam or the Vietcong. I won that by what became known as Marsh's landslide, 38 to 37, in favor of the Government of Vietnam. There was general rejoicing over this outcome.

Just before going to Geneva, in 1987, however, I got somewhat involved in the crossfire between the then ambassador to Switzerland and the then Assistant Secretary for European Affairs together with the then Director General of the Foreign Service. The then Ambassador to Switzerland was looking for a deputy chief of mission, and wanted a certain person who had worked for the ambassador before. The Department would not allow it. There was a feud between the Department and the ambassador on certain other matters. I went to Bern and received very, very cold treatment from the ambassador who told me that the recommendation of me by the Assistant Secretary and the Director General was hardly something in my favor. So I wasn't quite sure what to make of that.

But the previous January, again serendipity plays a great role in things, I was awhile in Washington briefly due to a family emergency, I had stopped in and talked with Ambassador Joseph Carlton Petrone, the newly appointed permanent representative in Geneva, and his wife. I was the first person out of 24 that Petrone interviewed.

Q: That Petrone had seen?

MARSH: That's correct. Let me digress here, I am informed that a score or two dozen applicants for a DCM-ship is not an unusual thing. What one can do, of course, is waste an awful lot of one's time in races in which you really have no horse and that there should be a much better arrangement for the selection process.

I would like to bring this up to the present, by the way, because in 1994, early 1994, to my astonishment I saw that in Rome, where I was permanent representative at that time, there were over 50 officers who had bid for the job as my deputy. Now obviously my incredible personality and great reputation would make every Foreign Service officer want to work for me, but I think Rome may have had something to do with it, too.

Q: I think so, too.

MARSH: But when you've got an army of people applying for something of that sort, this is really just not very fair. It is not very efficient. I think the Department needs to establish more criteria, marked guidelines and so forth and I don't just mean language proficiency but certain kinds of experience and this and that and the other thing for these jobs. It would cut down on the waste of time for the individuals and the system for all these applicants, nine-tenths of whom have no chance whatever of getting the job.

I noticed that there were perhaps a dozen or two dozen people who just wanted to get a European tour. Had no service in Europe and multilateral organizations, what have you, anything to do with it. So, to return to 1987, I go to Geneva and had two very fine years with Ambassador and Mrs. Petrone. She was very active, shared fully with her husband. My wife and I worked very, very hard.

Q: Active in what way?

MARSH: Well, in the first place the ambassador wanted to improve relations between the diplomatic corps at Geneva and the leadership of the international organizations in Geneva and the U.S. mission. The ambassador's predecessor had been a person who had had an extremely unsuccessful stay there and matters had deteriorated greatly. So he wanted to work to repair things. And in particular the ambassador wanted to use the function of representation at his residence. My wife and I attended every function that he gave.

Q: That's quite a load.

MARSH: It was quite a load. But it was nothing compared with the Rabat experience where I think I mentioned we had 203 engagements at the residence in 180 days. It wasn't mere quantity and mere volume but it was qualitative and in the service of the many, many delegations we had come through. We did have, I think, four visits by Secretary Shultz.

Then I had a second ambassador who wanted to deal with substance and representation was nothing he found particularly friendly. In particular he wanted to deal with the human rights questions.

Q: Who was that?
MARSH: That was Ambassador Morris Abram who was a noted New York Attorney. He had been President of the Council of Presidents of Major Jewish organizations in the States. So two very different approaches these people had. But my wife and I worked extremely hard. It is fair to say that ninety plus percent of the time we were out every night Monday through Thursday, or we were hosts ourselves. We had thousands, literally thousands, of people to our house.

Q: Wow. Wow.

MARSH: I have to give you one little anecdote because it tells you something of the approach that we had. Through various complications and shenanigans, the DCM residence had been lost and it was necessary to find a place for us to reside in Geneva. Now my predecessor had had an interesting apartment, not terribly far from the mission, but hopelessly small. To such an extent that General Services had to come over every time he gave a reception to move the furniture from his living room and dining room and put it in the back and so forth. And there was no way to let anybody in at the door below on the street because there was no buzzer system or something of that sort. So there had to be somebody stationed there. We found this terribly inconvenient.

We came in advance, in April, for a look-see. We stayed with my predecessor and his wife in the apartment and they were very kind. They had a wonderful outdoor terrace that faced the lake and the Alps. It was just out of this world. But in the wintertime you wouldn't get a great deal of use out of the outdoor terrace, I don't think. So we had General Services look around and find us a place.

They found us this glorious apartment. This apartment was on the other side of the lake and therefore was facing West, facing the mountains, but it was overlooking the lake and the little sailboat basin that was there in Geneva. It was marvelous so we were thrilled to death. Well, Washington turned it down and the reason was that it was too big. We didn't know what too big meant, but some guidelines had just come in very recently which would allow a certain amount of square feet. Now I told you we had thousands, literally thousands, of people in over the three years at our place on official business. Well, they found us a very nice place and it was considerably smaller and considerably more expensive, and six miles out of town, not on the West Side, not overlooking the lake. So this was approved.

Q: Even though it was more expensive? Doesn't make sense.

MARSH: Of course it doesn't make sense but these sorts of people…wait, I'm not through. ACDA had given a sum of money, $50,000 to be exact. They had not looked properly after the furniture that had been in the DCM's residence. ACDA had taken over that DCM's residence, and its furniture and they had all but frittered it away and couldn't account for it and so forth. So they paid an indemnity to the embassy of $50,000 to buy furniture for the new DCM's place.

I had wind of this when I came back to go to the DCM course in June of 1987. It is held in West Virginia and at FSI. At that time I went in to see the interior decorators of FBO. I arranged to talk with this lovely lady and we went out for coffee or something of that sort and we talked. I said my wife was very interested in helping and had done a wonderful job with the GSO in Rabat when they completely redecorated and refurbished the political counselor's residence there. They had done it very economically and beautifully and it was stunning. At any rate we come to Geneva and find out that the dear lady, the interior decorator, has already come and has gone to the most expensive antiquarian on the lake there in Geneva and has bought Louis Philippe originals and Napoleonic originals, all of that kind of thing. The one I particularly liked very much was the $3,000 chandelier for the dining room.

Q: This is in a rented apartment?
MARSH: A rented house. That's right. So she has bought all these lovely, nifty things for us and there is no money left. So we had no beds, no dressers; we have nothing for the family quarters. And we have a room on the ground floor, just off the living room, a library, with no furniture for it. So we have to send for our stuff, which has been put in storage in Antwerp and they send that to us. We pick out of it the things that we need for our house, we put it back in, and it is shipped back to Antwerp. Considerably later we find how much breakage has been involved in our things due to this packing, shipping, unpacking, re-packing, shipping and then ultimately shipping back to Washington and so on.

I'm suggesting that there are procedures and policies and people who need a lot of careful scrutiny because screwy things happen. Now my administrative counselor in Geneva who had been privy to all of this I fired, by persuading him that I was going to make him an

offer that he could not resist, namely early retirement. And he took it, sensibly enough.

At any rate it was very difficult getting established. One thing that a DCM believes is that he is going to move into a fully furnished place.

Q: Sure…a DCM in Western Europe.

MARSH: And you know about two days after arriving he is going to give his first dinner party and that sort of thing and so forth. Well, we arrived in July and our house was completely set up in November, by November. So we did do some entertaining in the meantime because we did have that little tiny apartment that I told you about.

I want to say that one of the strange things to me about the way we structure things in the Foreign Service and the Department is this. Whereas we make a specialty of trade negotiations or labor relations or scientific affairs and so forth we have no specialization whatsoever for multilateral diplomacy. So very few people have had any experience with it at all. You really need it because first of all it is physically exhausting…the representation, the *demarches* to be made, just keeping tabs on things, just programming your people appropriately, and so forth. For example, we had a major conference every month, except December. We had eleven major conferences going on, minimum, and sometimes we had even more than one a month. We would have delegations sent and each such delegation thought that it was unique, that its requirements superseded all other matters, and so forth. It was really and truly extraordinary.

I want to say that I arrive in July, about the 7th, in 1987, and about three weeks later Ambassador Petrone and his wife went to England for a month. And so I was chargé after having been there only three weeks. The first thing to deal with was an Air Afrique airliner that was hijacked to Geneva, and we had our hands full. The next thing I know is that I'm told by Washington that I am to follow the Iraq-Iran Peace Talks that are being held under the aegis of the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Bureau of International Organizations called me up and said I should give this top priority. I said to wait a minute, I was chargé d'affaires and was running the place. All of these instructions that came in said to go see the head of the World Health Organization, go see to this, go see to that, what am I supposed to do about all these? They mumbled in effect don't bother us.

So I sent in a daily cable that was based on seeing Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and seeing the British, because the British could see the Iranians, whom they recognized and we didn't. So the British DCM and I would compare notes and I would learn what they'd find out from the Iranians, pass on what I had found out from Tariq Aziz and so forth and also deal with the Secretary General's special representative for the negotiations.

Q: It wasn't Suk Moon by any chance?

MARSH: No, it was an Italian, Giandomenico Pico. He got an award from the U.S. government, a northern Italian of about 6' 5" tall, a very slim guy who ran about six

miles a day and worked about twenty hours a day, amazing.

At any rate, there was all this work, an enormous amount of work. Plus I got new people arriving who have to be oriented, I'm trying to make all my introductory calls and so forth. What I want to say is that, given a workload like that, it is amazing to me that we don't make more of an effort to develop people with multilateral proficiency who know how to work an entire hall full of delegations. I'm talking about keeping in touch with, rather close touch, with between thirty and fifty delegations at a time.

Q: You mean sort of an occupational cone?

MARSH: Something of that sort. They give a very short course over at FSI, about a week long, on multilateral diplomacy and really you need people to be studying UN affairs and other matters at a university for a year, is what I'm saying.

Q: I was just at a luncheon where the new director general of the Foreign Service, Gnehm, this is one of the things he talked about. Of course now we have a Secretary of State and a director general of the Foreign Service, both whose immediate previous experiences have been at the UN. Gnehm was Secretary Albright's deputy. So hopefully we may see more emphasis now on these sort of multilateral needs.

MARSH: I would submit something else as well, and that is that people in the field of multilateral diplomacy also need very strong grounding and practice in congressional relations. Because if you don't have the money for the dues, you are not going to be effective in the club! It is as simple as that and everybody knows it.

Q: Okay.

MARSH: Now, what did we spend a lot of our time doing? We frustrated the PLO because we kept them from full membership in a number of organizations of the UN. I think that helped to frustrate a diversionary effort by the PLO, kidding itself it could pretend to statehood, develop it by degrees as it were rather than through negotiation with Israel. So I think this was useful.

Q: They were what…an NGO?

MARSH: No, they actually had certain observer status in Geneva.

Q: Then what were you out to defeat or to frustrate?

MARSH: Their accession to full membership as a state.

We had many visits from the Secretary of State, that is, from Mr. Shultz, who was a wonderful man. I was very deeply impressed by him. He had so much decency and humanity in spite of the crushing burdens of his office. It was really extraordinary.

Then we had the job of interagency relations.

Q: Now that is another whole can of worms!

MARSH: That's right.

Q: How many agencies had people in Geneva?

MARSH: Well, we had a problem every year because we had a rather large delegation come in for the UN Human Rights Commission. The name of the game was to obtain a Resolution condemning Cuba for its violations of human rights. We had a Cuban poet who had been a prisoner for many years and who had been freed at the behest of President Mitterrand of France.

Q: Do you remember his name?

MARSH: His name was Ramon Valadares. He spoke no English, but we are something of a bilingual country, I guess, at any rate it wasn't a particular problem, as you know, and the draft resolution had been given very high, very, very high importance by the White House.

Well, we had a number of delegations reporting to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, ACDA, coming through. At the time ACDA had two thirds of the space in the U.S. mission and used it episodically, not continuously. So I conferred with Ambassador Abram and said we had a problem because we needed a certain number of offices.

We always had problems getting space for human rights delegations, which meant for six to seven weeks, including preparatory time. I recommended to the ambassador that we advise ACDA well in advance that we needed 'X' number of offices for the Human Rights Delegation between such and such a dates. So he said that that made sense. I warned him, however, that this would not be a cost-free exercise, for there would be a great deal of opposition because of the very proprietary attitude of ACDA, having been handed over two thirds of the mission…that is not a guess, two thirds, we measured. They had been given two thirds of the total mission building there in Geneva. They felt they had a right forever and a day to such terms. The ambassador, good for him, bless his heart, said to go ahead.

So we sent word to please schedule their delegations so that they would not need 'X' number of offices on the fifth floor at such and such a time, between the dates of such and such, and we did this, as I recall in August. We were talking about the following January. Next thing I know I have the director of ACDA on the phone asking me why I am trying to sabotage the President's arms control policy! I said I was not trying to do any such thing.

I said I knew that one particular delegation of ACDA that had been occasionally using these offices scheduled them to be used by agreement with its Soviet counterparts. I

asked if they could just arrange to have this done before or done after the human rights session because that particular arms control delegation only came three or four times a year, maybe for a couple of weeks each time. These offices normally stood empty.

Well, next thing we know, Under Secretary Eagleburger is sending a group of inspectors out to find out what this is all about! Talk about an *El Nino* in a teacup! But it just tells you how difficult it is for State to assume even a very reasonable management of foreign relations, in such a fragmented and balkanized policy context. I think it was ridiculous and it ended up costing a lot of money. You send three people out for five days or so.

Q: So ACDA wanted its space whenever it wanted it.

MARSH: That's right, and nobody else was to touch that space even though it lay unused for something like three quarters of the time. They lost on that one, incidentally, Valadares and company did come out, and we did get the Resolution on Cuba. So that was very fine. That worked out very well.

Of course, Cuba was a matter that had much more domestic political resonance in 1990 than did arms control because the Soviet Union was in full disintegration by then.

Q: So you found that a lot of your tour in Geneva as deputy permrep [permanent representative] really was dealing with either administrative or sort of representational duties?

MARSH: I would just say that it was a very big point and there were very ample servings of all sorts of things on that very big plate. I did mention the numerous consultations. For one thing, the American deputy permrep [permanent representative] is co-chairman of the Geneva Group, which is the 13 principal Western members, the industrial members or OECD Group it is called in some places, of the United Nations. Russia later became a member. This work of consultation was very demanding.

Q: Did you feel you had adequate staff?

MARSH: No, certainly not.

Q: Again you were sort of filling in behind people?

MARSH: Yes. For one thing I was astonished to find out that yet one more time that proficiency in French is a great rarity in the Foreign Service. Even if people could speak it, they clam up completely when it comes to writing it. And if you have to write something, you had to deal with that sort of thing. Certainly there was not anyone who could take a distinguished visitor and interpret for that person with a French speaker in Geneva. There are still plenty of people who don't speak English in Geneva.

I had a political counselor who came, the Department's choice, not mine. This person did not meet the language requirement, but pledged to learn French and never took lesson

one. That's not all of it. I handled all the representation funds from the beginning, because I had a very active first ambassador who was spending money at a good clip and I wanted to know how much we had left on a current basis. So everything was channeled through me, with his agreement, and then we just kept that arrangement when this second ambassador arrived. To my astonishment I realized one day that this new political counselor had not spent cent one on representation. I called the person in and at that point the counselor said that no, there had been no representation done.
Q: Why not?

MARSH: As a matter of fact in the whole course of the year there was no representation performed by that political counselor.

Q: He just didn't feel like it?

MARSH: The person just really offered no explanation whatsoever.

Q: Well, you are the deputy permrep [permanent representative], what did you tell him?

MARSH: I told the person what you would expect. I always had periodic reviews with my officers, usually quarterly. I would give them a written piece of paper with the key things that I found concerning their performance and so forth and so on. In this way it helped me prepare for writing efficiency reports.

Q: Anything else, Bill, that you'd like to add about Geneva?

MARSH: It was a fascinating assignment, but again, exhausting. I did take the minimum home leave and no other leave in three years, no annual leave.

Q: Good grief! Your ambassador is going off to New England for a month? No climbing, no hiking in the Bernese Oberland?

MARSH: My friend, let me tell you something. My ambassador goes off for a month, comes back, and is in every single day thereafter! He needed me. Not Sundays. He didn't come in Sundays. But he was in there every day of the week and he needed me. I wanted to be available to him.

Q: That was hard on your family, hard on your wife and children.

MARSH: Yes.

Q: That's really too bad in a place like Geneva where you would think so much of the work, petty as it is, is sort of programmable and recognizable so that you could sort of organize and staff for it.

MARSH: There is a problem here in that people are often reluctant to take assignments in multilateral diplomacy because they do not want to leave the jurisdiction of a geographic

bureau. They want, in other words, to maintain their ties and connections with a given geographic bureau with the hopes of getting assignments within that bureau's competence later on.

Q: Despite Henry Kissinger, who wanted everybody to go somewhere else than they had been before!

MARSH: Oh, yes. Well, of course, that was probably in an effort to create the maximum chaos for which he alone could create...

Q: ...his own Kissingeresque orders! Okay so now you are reassigned back to Washington to be Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of IO…different pew but same church?

MARSH: Yes, something like that. Also, I am waiting out the time until I can succeed Jerry Monroe as Permanent Representative in Rome.

Q: That was what you wanted?

MARSH: It was understood.

Q: Let's go back, I pushed you much too fast. You had an idea, an interest while you were still in Geneva in going over to Rome?

MARSH: Yes, I did. Partly because it was Rome and partly because of the subject matter and partly because the Food and Agricultural Organization had the worst reputation of any specialized agency in the United Nations. Because I had helped the reform movement in the Geneva Group I mentioned there in Geneva, in which we tried to achieve budgetary sanity and transparency and accountability in all of the UN agencies there and elsewhere I returned and was assisting the Assistant Secretary. It was John Bolton, who was a remarkable fellow. Many considered him very acerbic. I considered him as very purposeful and very effective. He was always very decent to me so I had no complaints at all.

I was thrown immediately into work at Rome on a TDY basis to work a divorce between the World Food Program and the Food and Agricultural Organization. So I went to Rome I think seven times in two years. I went to London twice, because I went to the International Maritime Organization to try to work the way out of some thickets there that had developed. Then in addition I was given the job of obtaining success for the candidacy of Catherine Bertini to head the World Food Program, to become its Executive Director.

The World Food Program has been something of a sleeper in the UN system. It hasn't had very high visibility, but there have been years in which we've given it more than a billion dollars altogether for its emergency feeding, for its developmental programs, for its refugee assistance programs and all that sort of thing. So it is very important to the

United States both in terms of humanitarian affairs and its high political objectives.

I was told that I was to work single-handedly to get endorsements from UN member countries, particularly those associated with the World Food Program, so that Catherine Bertini would be named to head it. She had had no international experience but had been Assistant Secretary of Agriculture for Food and Nutrition, and in particular for food stamps in the United States, where she had run, incidentally, something like a 26 billion-dollar program. So it was a great deal of work. I sent out 175 telegrams, made innumerable phone calls and finally ended up getting 75, 76 endorsements which prevailed therefore on a very reluctant Director General of the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization], and a sometimes ambivalent Secretary General of the UN, to name her. There is not an election. The head of the World Food Organization is named by the UN and the FAO acting together.

Q: So there is a lot of sort of behind the scenes diplomacy?

MARSH: Oh, yes. I went to conferences at Copenhagen, Nairobi, and a number of other places. It was very exciting. I did a lot of traveling that time and then in 1992 went to Rome, this time as Permanent Rep.

Q: Tell us a little bit about why you wanted to go to Rome. Had you now sort of developed a really keen interest in multilateral affairs? Or was there something particular that you wanted to accomplish in Rome?

MARSH: Well, there was the effort to revitalize and reform the FAO. I had that in Rome and I had already worked at that and achieved a certain reputation for what I was able to do with it. And, yes, I did like multilateral diplomacy though it was a lot of work, a lot of work. Then I wanted to be a chief of mission and whereas in the '83-'84 period good friends had sort of wafted the notion of an African embassy past me, I didn't want it. I didn't want it for family reasons, I didn't want it for substantive reasons and I didn't want it for tombstone reasons.

Tombstone reasons…I know too many people who have had an African embassy and zip afterwards. Therefore I didn't want to be out and defacto dead at that time. I wanted to work right up until age 65, when I would retire.

Q: Sometime after I retired did the Department increase the retirement age from 60 to 65?

MARSH: Well, the Act of 1980 increased it from 60 to 65.

Q: Okay. So, you were chief of mission?

MARSH: That's correct.

Q: Did you get the title or rank of ambassador?

MARSH: No, they had taken that away when my predecessor was named at the post.

Q: That's a disappointment.

MARSH: They apparently saved something like $900,000 a year by doing away with an ambassador's residence, a DCM-ship and the ORE that goes along with those. They saved that money. But, again, everything has been driven in recent years by money, money, and money…the lack of it and that sort of thing.

But at any rate I had two years in Rome, not three. John Bolton was succeeded by a new Assistant Secretary whom I found entirely unsympathetic and who found me entirely unsympathetic, and one who had no interest whatsoever in reforming the FAO, then headed by perhaps the biggest scoundrel in the history of United Nations organizations.

Q: Who was that?

MARSH: That was Edouard Saouma, the director general of the FAO. He was a man who was corrupt in every sense of the word but whom the assistant secretary decided needed to be befriended. So I served my time, having been elected to the Finance Committee of the FAO, having served as co-chairman of the Geneva Group again, having been elected as head of the OECD Group there, and having been considered a very effective and well-liked American permanent representative. I am happy to say that when I visited Rome again, after having left in September of 1994, when I visited Rome in October of 1997, they did everything but spread their coats in the streets for me, and greet me with hosannas and applause! I knew that I had been very successful. I had received 27 letters in 1994 from foreign colleagues expressing regrets at my departure and so forth, which I have carefully saved.

Changes of administration can be very difficult things. Occasionally you will get people who are completely unsuited to the job. One of them was my ambassador to Morocco and I curtailed. The second and final one was the Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs and I curtailed.

I came back to the Historical Division and spent a very pleasant year and three quarters, largely working at the CIA and at the Eisenhower and Truman Libraries. Largely compiling documents for the Foreign Relations of the United States series that dealt with extraordinary operations and clandestine operations of the United States. That is to say the overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and the restoration of the Shah in 1953.

Q: Wow. Not, interestingly enough, Vietnam?

MARSH: No. It's very interesting. I reviewed the volumes for 1964 and 1965, four volumes in all, two each for each year, on Vietnam. I made a number of suggestions and they just sank like a stone. Everybody's mind is made up on Vietnam. Nobody is of an open mind concerning it. Even when you suggest such a simple thing as putting maps in

the first volumes and putting some bit of military information there to discuss the buildup and the fortunes of major U.S. military operations within Vietnam. Historians are not prepared to listen to that. Their minds are made up.

Q: Okay, now with your agreement I would like to ask you two things. Number one, I would like to take you back to Rome when you were the perm rep [permanent representative] there and ask you if you could give us perhaps just two or three of the highlights of your two year tour there. Sort of important things that you thought were going on and you were working on there.

MARSH: For one thing is the extension of the World Food Program's activities to cover humanitarian crises such as Somalia, Rwanda, Central Africa and that sort of thing. I think matters of extreme human urgency. Secondly as I mentioned, the very uphill Himalayan struggle to reform the FAO itself which is an organization very largely out of tune and out of pace with the crisis of agriculture throughout the world.

Q: Is it one of these UN organizations that some people say are over-staffed and have too many people who have been there too long?

MARSH: Over-staffed, too many people there too long, and located in a very bad work climate. That of Rome is very, very bad. The bureaucracy of Rome is beyond belief. The stupor and the arrogance of the Italian bureaucracy astonish me. I had no idea of such a thing. All I can say is that it is quite a change to go from Geneva to Rome. Everyone should do it the other way around so as to end up with the efficiency of Geneva!

Q: This is a UN organization which after all does not deal so much with the problems of the developed world, that is to say North America or Western Europe, but it deals with the problems of the developing world. Would it be better therefore, for example, to have the FAO in a country like the Philippines or some place like Nairobi or even a country that really has food problems, like India?

MARSH: You mean to situate the FAO there where the need is great?

Q: Yes.

MARSH: Well, you know, the FAO was located in Washington until 1957 and then as a sop to the Italians, to give them prestige in their new post-war identity, it was moved to Rome. Rome is not an important intellectual center, particularly in the field of agriculture.

Q: Someplace that you think about when you think about food.

MARSH: That's right and so it is very difficult for people to keep up their expertise in a place like that. Plus the fact that most people coming to the FAO don't even speak Italian. What I'm trying to say is that if the FAO were still here in Washington it would be a piece of cake for people at the FAO to keep up with the state of the art. The great state

universities, and Cornell University, are so close to deal with exigencies of all kinds.

Q: You have large non-profit organizations for example, like the FORD Foundation, which are very active in certain parts of the world in trying to improve agriculture and better strains of wheat and things like that in the Philippines. I think it would be easier to follow that kind of stuff. Are you familiar with, for example, a French agronomist named Rene Dumont?

MARSH: Yes.
Q: Where would Rene Dumont think that the FAO should be?

MARSH: You may have one guess, and that would be fine.

Q: Paris?

MARSH: That would be fine because at least you would have access to everything in the French language, whereas having access to that in the universities in Italy in Italian…thank you very much! Not much help!

The practices of the FAO… for example the Legal Advisor at the FAO went from Rome to Geneva of the same plane I did. I was going from Rome up to Geneva for a high level meeting on the Geneva Group. I stayed in a third class hotel, having flown coach; he stayed at the Inter-Continental having flown first class. Now first class for a one hour flight in Europe just doesn't make any sense at all.

Q: Nonsense.

MARSH: It's ridiculous. So the principal contributor of approximately one fourth of the budget of the FAO is in steerage shall we say, and staying at the flophouse shall we say, and an FAO functionary is in glory!

Q: So when Madeline Albright, our Secretary of State, is trying very hard to persuade the American Congress to pay up our arrears to the UN, you think it would be helpful if the UN for its part showed more effort to economize?

MARSH: No…not necessarily. Well, I think it should economize for other reasons, let's put it that way. But point of fact is that I take a very orthodox position with respect to payment of dues. These are Treaty obligations of the United States… pay up and shut-up about the past! But talk a lot and act a lot for the future. Pay it. Besides which, I don't want members of the Congress complaining about the 'perquisites' of foreign officials because I may laugh myself to death!

Q: We still all fly in and out of National rather than Dulles!

MARSH: That's right. That's right.

Q: Okay, Bill, one final question. You have had an unusually, in my opinion, an unusually long and, if I may also say so, a distinguished career in the Foreign Service. I think it is 36 years. Most of the rest of us have served considerably shorter time, at least these days. I wonder if you could take five minutes and give us some of your thoughts of what the Foreign Service should be doing and what the United States Government should be doing now, that we are not. In other words an overview of the lessons learned in your career.

MARSH: When I first came into the Service there was a gentlemanly code in effect, *noblesse oblige*, if you will, and one wasn't supposed to complain about salary or about 'perquisites' or something of that sort. So we did without or we paid ourselves for things in the public interest. Times have changed and today's young people demand gratification and reimbursement. They also want to budget their time themselves, rather than having some old DCM or Department official tell them to do this or that. I found for example that the notion of a forty-hour week was very well installed in my people in Geneva. If I asked them to take, perhaps, two hours on a Sunday to go and meet a Delegation, see them to their hotels and then work with them throughout the rest of the week, some people were very, very begrudging, openly begrudging, of even two hours on Sunday. I think we need to take these realities into account. Times have changed.

I think we have to understand that there are great costs to the three-year career.
Q: The three-year career?

MARSH: That's right, which is now becoming people who want to come in for a single tour. I think there are too many people in the Department who say this is great because then we can use lower paid junior officers all the time and not have to have these high-paid old fogeys like Marsh, who has been around for 36 years. There is a cost. There is a terrific cost in that sort of thing.

I think that we also in the Department are suffering from a terrible complacency, ever since 1991, and that complacency is the wolf is dead, hurray, what with the evaporation, the collapse of the Soviet Union. There are plenty of crises that have taken place and will be taking place, actually we have been very lucky, much too lucky. How well wired in are we with the decision-makers?

Q: The decision-makers overseas?

MARSH: Overseas, yes. For example, it has taken two efforts by the IMF apparently to bring President Suharto of Indonesia around to accepting the austerity that his situation has imposed on the country.

Q: This goes back to something that you were talking about earlier, that political reporting from overseas posts is pretty good. But oftentimes economic reporting, particularly macro economics in terms of let's say South Korea's overall economy or Thailand's overall economy or Indonesia's overall economy and the concerns about possible collapse…we don't do a good enough job on that?

MARSH: I think we worry ourselves to death with respect to that. What we need to think about is much more pragmatic, namely to what use can a given set of reporting be? Tailor our reporting so that content and subject matter and timing and so forth correspond to policy-makers' needs, that kind of thing. We have got perhaps too much of an academic focus. Saying what a given political or religious minority is thinking about at a particular time in a particular country is going to be of interest, even though we are talking about Western Europe, for example, rather than some fomenting Eastern society.

Also we need a sense of proportion about things. I remember one time when there was a cable from New Delhi on Indian reaction to a given policy move. This is some time ago, a decade or so ago. It was 24 pages long! Now did they really expect Washington to read 24 pages on that sort of thing? Besides which times have changed and we have got to change with them.

For example, with respect to a hijacking in Geneva soon after I arrived there, CNN had found a way to get its people on the airfield. My Security officer was unable to get on it. Washington was having simultaneous filming and stories from the airport, real time work. The mission couldn't possibly compete with that.

The wire services, television services all of that kind of thing plus the fact that you've got now electronic mail moving at incredible rates. That means that you are going to get narrative reporting, not very analytical but that is going to be taken care of. What we are going to have to deal with then is to get the interpretation of the news analysis in as quickly as possible. Our processes where you go through supervisory layer after layer even at a small embassy overseas just make that ridiculous.

I admit to being something of a Luddite here, but we have become idol worshipers, we worship the computer now. All I want to say is that I have my reservations about it. You know, with his quill pen Thomas Jefferson didn't do a bad job, so stop knocking those of us who still rely on handwriting. I incidentally found out my nickname from Rome. It was 'Mr. Fountain Pen' because my staff thought it was so archaic and unusual that I had an ink fountain pen, as a matter of fact.

But in any event, is it cost effective? Is it truly cost effective to spend all this money on computers, to be training people in computers, to be having officers do all their own secretarial work? Maybe you should set up steno pools and maybe you should set up secretarial pools…note the difference between those two…and all that kind of thing rather than having substantive officers do it.

Another thing, too, is that once you put a computer in front of an individual, remember, he has got direct access to the world…or she does. No DCM is going to be able to guarantee that a disgruntlement is not going to reach a Senate office, or that an ultimatum is not going to go to a local critic of the United States. This is a different world because you are putting a huge communications tool in the hands of everybody. And, also, let us fact it…they haven't found out a way yet to make these free from penetration by adversaries.

Some nerd in Columbus, Ohio is even now reading what you are writing on your machine.

Q: Yes. In terms of running an embassy and presenting a sort of united policy front. With the proliferation of American government agencies abroad now the ambassador and the DCM are having a much more difficult time sort of keeping track of what is sent back to Washington from their post with or without their permission.

MARSH: That is true, but, Nick, there is something else as well. It is that for a lot of people the difficulty of the job is in leaving the mission or the embassy and going out and seeing the local contact and having a discussion in Heaven knows what language, then making notes on it and then coming back and writing it all up and reporting to one's superiors about it. How much simpler it is just to stay in front of that machine.

Q: Forever!

MARSH: And have a lovely dialogue with the desk back in Washington. That kind of thing. So we need to put the spur to our people to get them out as never before.

Q: Bill, is the Foreign Service still an interesting and worthwhile career for young people to consider?

MARSH: For some.

Q: Which ones?

MARSH: Well, it is an interesting career for people…I want to say this, Nick, it used to be said in a semi-jocular sort of way that private income was very helpful as a supplement to the Foreign Service salary. I don't think it is a joke anymore, I think it's a necessity and I'll tell you why. The entry levels today of salaries are less in real terms than they were in 1960. At least in my case, this is true.

Q: They are not competitive with private companies?

MARSH: Oh, I'm not even talking about that aspect of it. I'm saying they have not even kept pace with inflation here. I got $6,200 and they are starting today at 31, 33 thousand, something of that sort. Work it out for yourself.

The Department loves to say that it wants to have a Foreign Service that looks like America. On the other hand it doesn't want to pay them like America and it doesn't want to take into account that today's young people are very, very dollar-minded and perk-minded and comfort-minded and everything else.

Q: Just like everybody else in America!

MARSH: Just like everybody else in America, that's correct! Let me put it in another way. There are people coming into the Foreign Service at ages that were beyond the pale when you and I came in. There are people coming in who have big school loans to pay off. There are people who are paying alimony.

Q: Looking after their parents.

MARSH: Looking after their parents. All sorts of things and all these cost money and need money and they are going to have to develop a rationale and an argument that says we have to have money. That is going to require the President to lend his weight to the effort because the exceptional circumstances under which the Foreign Service necessarily operates mean that exceptional steps have to be taken and it has to be an exceptional group of people to deal with these things, whether you like it or not. Otherwise only the rich can possibly come in and do a job in the Foreign Service and we are back to where we were in 1900.

Q: It is not representative of the country.

MARSH: That's right.

Q: Bill, thank you very kindly. It has been a great pleasure for me to listen to you.

MARSH: Well, you are very kind. I've only known you coming on 43 years, believe it or not. It is sort of extraordinary. How can this be when both of us are obviously only 30! But at any rate I say that for some people today, and I'm thinking particularly of the young people and again I'm thinking essentially in terms of entry level people because I still believe you should work your way up in the Foreign Service. But you know, psychologically why don't we go over to 18 or 24 grades? So then every other year a man would be able to go home and tell his wife, or a wife be able to go home and tell her husband, "Dear, guess what, I've been promoted from FS-19 to FS-18." Because going and talking about a promotion every eight years just won't hack it!

Q: Right, right.

MARSH: Do you know that I made it from FSO-8 to FSO-4 faster than I did any other promotion? From one level to a single level. I mean those were the days, right? I think the up or out system is very influential. I think it is unfortunate because it is particularly working a hardship on the able people. I know instances where it was the dullard who had the longest career! As one who had a long career, I can prove that, right?

Q: Hardly.

MARSH: But in any event I think we have to revisit that.

Q: Let's say the threshold from two to one or three to two?

MARSH: Well, the whole notion. It is really a trickery to say that one has so many years to be promoted to Career Minister when you are promoting one or two persons a year to Career Minister. That is just trickery. It sounds like a competition and you have better odds, I think, with Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes!

Q: Okay, Bill Marsh, that's it. Thank you very kindly.

MARSH: And thank you, Nick.

End of interview