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

JOHN NEWMAN

Interviewed by: Anne Cary
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[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Newman.]

Q: Okay, here we are. We are starting. It is Friday, October 26th, 2007. I am interviewing John Newman, a retired Foreign Service National (FSN) from Embassy London. I am Anne Cary, a retired FSO (Foreign Service Officer) and we are doing this interview in the north conference room of the embassy itself.

John, where were you born and when?

NEWMAN: I was born in the center of London in the part of Westminster known as Pimlico, which basically in those days was the poorer part of the center of London. It was mostly owned by the Duke of Westminster, whose successors still own lots of territory around there. It was quite a nice area and it is even better now, now that the money markets are on the upgrade.

I was born February 17th, 1924. The period between 1930 and 1939 was a very bad period for a lot of people who were out of work, including my father.

Q: What was his profession?

NEWMAN: My father was what we call a valet-butler. Although these days he would make a lot of money, in those days, he was just another out of work chap, and he had to take part-time waiting jobs and all that sort of thing.

Q: And your mum?

NEWMAN: My parents met when they were in domestic service when they were both young. They both worked for the original, I think the name was Lord and Lady Moyne, who was the founder of the Guinness Brewery Corporation. When they were about 19 and 20 years old, they used to travel to Paris or to Scotland to see the Queen Mother. My mother was a little bit more than the normal maid. I think she was a companion to some of the young daughters of what they call aristocracy.

They were very nice people I would hasten to add. There was nothing wrong with the old aristocracy: nice people.

In the 1930s period there was a lot of unemployment. They were very unrestful years, as you know. The Germans were concentrating on another war, although nobody wanted to believe that.

Q: I still want more of the early stuff. So, 1924 in London: do you have brothers and sisters?

NEWMAN: Yes, I have one older sister. There is seven years between us. Then there is my brother who is seven years younger. He is still alive. My sister, unfortunately, has passed away.

They were strange years really. Where I lived in that part of Pimlico, they used to hold political meetings very close by. I used to see what are now known as fascists. There was a man called Sir Oswald Mosley who was the leader of the fascist group. When I was only a kid, mind you, I used to listen to them spouting. On the opposite corner was a communist group. Very often, they clashed. Then the police would come in from somewhere and break it all up. It was kind of interesting for me when I was about ten years old. I used to keep my head out of the way.

Q: Were most of the people of one political party?

NEWMAN: No, they really weren't interested in politics. All they wanted was to get jobs. Sadly, when the war broke out in 1939, everybody had a job on munitions, armaments. At least they were working again. That was one good thing that came out of the war in one sense, on the economic side.

Q: How about school for you?

NEWMAN: I went to a normal, what they call elementary, school. I got good grades in my school, but not quite good enough to go to a university. Plus, my parents were in no position to support me at a university.

I got good grades. I scored about six firsts with books and medals and things. I was still on that type of score at elementary school. I never got too high. I did start going to what they called evening classes to expand what little education I had, which was very useful. When I came to join the Air Force in the 1940s, I had to have that knowledge to even be considered for aircrew. I had to learn trigonometry, algebra, and all this sort of stuff. If I didn't, I would have ended up in the army. There was nothing wrong with going into the army, but I preferred aircrew.

Q: So your earliest years were during the Depression?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what it was like?

NEWMAN: Yes, it was pretty bad. I remember in 1936 that a lot of miners came from a northern town in England called Jarrow. These chaps didn't have a lot of money, were out of work, and they did a big march which took them about two weeks to come down to London to make a protest.

Unfortunately, they didn't get much joy or comfort out of it because when they got to London they found people like my father were also out of work. These miners were getting 12 Shillings a week pay, and my father got nothing. So they didn't exactly get received with open arms.

It was sad though because a lot of these people hardly had any footwear. We used to contribute old boots and things so these poor chaps could march back. That was a miners' march from the north of England. So, things were pretty bad.

Q: Did you see the miners?

NEWMAN: Yes, I saw them. Where I was born in Pimlico, we were very close to an area called Hyde Park, which is a center, even now, where people hold political meetings, protests, and that type of thing. So these poor guys came to Hyde Park to voice their opinions. Much as we liked them, they didn't get much out of it, I am afraid to say.

Q: Do you remember King George V?

NEWMAN: Yes, I do. King George V was very much like the Edwardian-type king, like Edward VII. They were very similar, almost like twins, to look at them. They all had beards. They came over as the royalty that we knew.

The son of King George V became Edward VIII. Of course, he met a very nice, charming American lady who unfortunately was divorced. That was almost taboo for the royal circles in those circumstances. So eventually, it came to be that he gave up the throne in favor of his younger brother, who became King George VI.

When I used to work at the American Embassy, which I joined in August 1938, I used to ride on a bus down near Piccadilly where the future King George VI had a house, when he was the Duke of York. In the garden, there were two little girls playing. You could see them playing in this garden from the top of the bus that used to pass by. Of course, this was the future Queen Elizabeth II and her sister, Princess Margaret. That's quite interesting.

Q: Did you actually hear the abdication speech?

NEWMAN: Yes I did.

Q: Did your parents wake you up?

NEWMAN: King Edward VIII in his way was very popular with the local people. I don't know why he was, because afterwards a lot of stuff came out about him that he was nice on the surface but not so nice underneath the surface. But he was very popular. A lot of people were very dismayed when the abdication came. I understand that King George VI really didn't want the job. He suffered from a stammer, which made it very difficult for him to do speeches. I think the real backbone of that family was his wife, the future Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother.

Strangely enough, Elizabeth was eight or nine years younger than my mother. When my mother was in domestic service traveling around with the Lord and Lady she worked for, she used to go to the palace up in Scotland, Balmoral. They used to allow the domestic staff to watch the dancing and things there. The staff used to go up on the balcony and watched the people dancing, all the aristocracy. I always remember her telling me there was a little ten-year old, dark haired girl. That was the future Queen Mother. Her name was Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon.

Q: She was up from Glamis, or something.

During the Depression, in 1934, King George V started the annual Christmas speeches. The first was given on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation).

NEWMAN: That's correct.

Q: Was the radio an important part of your life?

NEWMAN: Yes it was. In those days, there was no such thing as television. Radio really was a lifeline. You get all the news and latest information on it. It was a cheap way of getting the news to us. It was a cheap way for us not to have to pay for papers and things. Although we did buy papers. They weren't so expensive.

Q: How about the cinema? Did you go to the cinema?

NEWMAN: Yes, I used to go to the cinema a lot. In the area where I was born, which was near Victoria, quite a big center in Central London, there used to be one of the original cinemas. It was called The Biograph. One of my Saturday treats was that my mother used to pay for me. It cost us four pence to go in and a penny for a bar of chocolate. We would stay in there for three or four hours. In fact, we would see the films twice over, if necessary, until the manager used to come and kick us out.

There is one more thing I want to add. We kids, in the cinema, used to sit in the front row so that when the MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) lion appeared at the end of the program and roar, we all used to roar back at the lion. I thought you would like to hear that.

Q: Was there anything else about playing or neighborhood kids? Where did you play? In the street?

NEWMAN: Yes. Sadly, being a street kid, there was nowhere else to play but the streets. We were within two miles of some good park areas. I was probably a little bit mad, but the street I was in was probably about 100 yards long and maybe 40 yards wide. I used to get all the local kids running with me. We used to go 50 times around this area in a kind of semi-marathon. I was sort of the ringleader of that. I don't know why, because I am a little bit on the plump side. Maybe that's why I had to do it. Anyway, I had a following there.

There used to be a little girl, I still remember her name and I might as well mention it, Maggie Smith, who used to drive me crazy. She would follow me everywhere. We were only nine or ten years old.

I have to pull my wife's leg about this and say that Maggie Smith used to chase me. I won't say anything more about that.

Q: In 1938, you started working for the embassy? Had you worked before this?

NEWMAN: I left school early in the year, around about the Easter period that year. I went to work for a company.

Q: You were 14 years old at the time?

NEWMAN: Yes I was. I actually just missed a job at the palace as an apprentice gardener. When they worked my age out, I was two months too young for their purpose. Therefore, we went into what we called the local labor exchange and I managed to get a job with a normal commercial company called The London Metal Warehouses. It was okay. The amount they were paying was ten shillings. It is a very small amount of money, even by those standards.

I wasn't very happy there. In those days, the older staff used to play tricks on the younger staff. This is a thing I have hated ever since. When I became senior with my staff, I made sure that never happened. They used to play little tricks on me. Things used to go wrong and I used to get blamed for them when the older men, who should have known better really, had done it.

I decided to look for something else. Along came the chance, in my opinion a great honor, to get a job as a messenger at the American Embassy, with a 25 percent increase in salary. I got twelve and six shillings a week. That was a big increase for me.

Q: What were your working hours?

NEWMAN: At the embassy, it was generally from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. They did extend them sometimes or, in later years, cut them a little bit. It depended on whoever was in charge of the American government.

Q: What did you do?

NEWMAN: Initially, we were really a band of messengers. They gave us each a dark blue uniform with plum colored cuffs and collar. This was a great help to save our clothes. In those days, the diplomatic officers used to have in their offices an in box and an out box of documents. Our main function initially was to go in and clear the out box and take stuff in for the in box, and to do general clerical duties like that. If the officers wanted us to do special messaging, we would do so.

Occasionally, we had to go and get them a sandwich, which was fine. They were usually very generous and would buy us one, and so on, or give us a packet of cigarettes. This was very useful on the wages we had. They were very nice to us. The old diplomatic officers were extremely nice to the youngsters.

This was entirely different from the treatment I had at my first job. So I have always been very happy with my connections with America and Americans. I found this right through my life. There are some rotten Americans. As I said, I met mostly very good Americans, especially in wartime and later on. They have been extremely good to us. Maybe I will talk about that a little later on.

Q: In 1938, Joe Kennedy is the Ambassador. The embassy is located at 1 Grosvenor Square, which we were renting. It had been there for a while.

NEWMAN: Just before I joined the embassy in August 1938, instead of everything being in the one building, they used to have the American Consulate in an office near Victoria. The embassy was situated in another part of London. They decided that it was time to get everything in one building, which was 1 Grosvenor Square. It is quite a prestigious area really. There were quite a lot of well-known people who, in those days, lived in the square. Unfortunately these days, and I am talking about 2007, there are a lot of hotels there. In those days, there was a lot of the original housing. It was quite a prestigious area for an embassy.

It was fairly close to the Italian Consulate, which was about two doors away. The Japanese Embassy was just sort of across Grosvenor Square.

I'll tell you a story about that. In 1940 I think it was, when I had become a bit of a senior messenger, I was on duty on Armistice Day (November 11th) and it became my privilege to run the Stars and Stripes up on the balcony of 1 Grosvenor Square. The strange thing was that I had a watch and I heard Big Ben, the big clock in Westminster, hit the eleventh hour. I was watching the Japanese Embassy to see when their flag went up. They didn't put it up. After about five seconds, I thought, "They are watching me." As soon as I put the Stars and Strips up, up went the Japanese flag. Isn't that strange?

Q: Were there lots of people in the embassy? How many offices? Did you work for both the political and economic sections?

NEWMAN: The order of things was that the Ambassador was first. Then we had a Minister, then a Consul General. Those were the three senior offices in the embassy at the time. Ambassador Joseph Kennedy was in the office in the corner of 1 Grosvenor Square on the first floor.

Next to him was a Minister whose name I still remember, Herschel Johnson. Quite frankly, everybody was a little bit scared of Herschel Johnson because he was the guy who ran the works. The Ambassador did the social side of it. As Ambassador, he properly should do that. Herschel Johnson though was the works. He was the chap to be careful of.

The Consul General was a nice chap named Douglas Jenkins. He was an older man.

I must say that they were all pretty nice to us kids. They really were. They never tried pulling dirty tricks on us. If they could help us, they would.

Q: The first time the U.S. Embassy actually put out an advice to tourists in 1938 that if you don't actually need to be in Europe, you should leave. What was the general atmosphere at this time when the German threat was becoming very clear?

NEWMAN: I remember this pretty well because we did have an influx of refugees coming from Germany and Austria. Strangely enough, a man called Henry Kissinger, who became the Secretary of State later on was a refugee at the side of the embassy in 1938. We didn't know him at the time. He was one of the refugees that were there.

We had all the files. Unlike how they organize things today, we had wooden benches full of files on everybody. File after file in paper folders. It really was a big wave of work. Nobody knew which way it would go. They didn't know how many people qualified for the States. The visa laws were different then. Even at that stage in 1938, you weren't quite sure that the Germans intended any harm, apart from flexing their muscles.

We were very busy there, quite busy. At that stage, us messenger boys began to get other duties to do. We became clerks and had to do more paperwork. It improved our choice a little bit, and the money too.

Q: They did give you more money for a little bit more work.

So this was a direct outgrowth of the foreshadowing of World War II as more people came?

Kennedy is not remembered for his strong desire to get into the war. How was it seen here?

NEWMAN: Just as you said Anne. I am not going to say too much about the Kennedys because on a personal basis I quite liked them. Wherever the Kennedy's were, things happened, not always for the good. Everyone knew this particular ambassador had been a bootlegger in the 1930s. Apparently, that is where he got his money from. Not everybody

was happy that he got this elevated position as the American ambassador. I was only a kid, so politics and things didn't come into it with me. The family was quite nice.

Sometimes, they used to work in the office with us. I personally sat within two yards of Jack Kennedy. The chap who was going to be President in future years was the older son, Joe, who unfortunately got killed in the war.

They were young men about town. They used to go around the West End. Well, you know what young men are at that age. Saying that, old man Joe wasn't so bad himself with the ladies.

I hope I don't cross anybody's path too much.

Q: Did everybody know it, but didn't say anything about it?

NEWMAN. Yes, but the whole thing was that they were quite nice to be around, in a way. Things changed. Instead of the old static diplomacy, you were getting more involved with younger people and younger things were going on. As I was growing into a teenager myself, this was quite interesting to me.

They were okay in a way, the Kennedys. They were a little bit selfish in a way. As I say, they were entitled to be so. Their father was the ambassador. They had a lot of money. There you go. I have no quarrel with that.

Can I go a little bit further to when the war started?

When the war started, there were a lot of Americans in England. When the German army broke through to Dunkirk, this was a black day for the all the Allied forces. Because America was neutral and not at war, the Kennedys organized a really good exit plan for the Americans in the United Kingdom.

For about a month solid, everyone had to work extra time, including the local and American staff, to get the paperwork set up and arrange for the Americans to register here. They mostly exited from a port called Weston-super-Mare by boat.

Q: Where is that?

NEWMAN: It's in Somerset on the west coast of England.

Most of them went by boat. There wasn't a lot of flying in those days.

Everybody, including the Kennedys, worked solid for about a month. That's the period I was talking about earlier where I sat right next to all the Kennedy kids. They were pulling their weight, doing their job, doing the paperwork. I think we all did a good job.

As a result of this, Ambassador Kennedy, who had been a big executive at RKO Films, to show his gratitude to the local staff, laid on about five buses and we saw the first showing of a big film called Gone With the Wind. It had never been seen in England. He shipped us all out to his residential estate at Windsor Park. We had a wonderful four or five hours there. He brought in champagne, salmon, cigarettes, chewing gum, the works. We had a wonderful afternoon.

They showed us this wonderful film in two parts. They showed us the first two hours. Then we had a nice break with eats and drinks. Then we had another two hours. That was the way he said, "Thanks. Good job."

Q: Was that for the whole staff?

NEWMAN: Yes, the whole staff: Americans, locals, everyone.

Q: Was his family residence out in Windsor Park?

NEWMAN: He had a residence out in Windsor Park. You've got one now in Regent's Park, I know. He had Windsor Park then.

Five busloads of us were shipped out from Grosvenor Square.

Q: Britain declared war on Germany on September 3rd, 1939. When the U.S. didn't, was the feeling that the U.S. just needed some more time?

NEWMAN: I don't think anybody was distressed that the Americans didn't come right out. You have got to remember that the German population in America was more than the Irish population in America. No doubt, President Roosevelt had to be careful which way things were going.

Unfortunately, it looked very much like the Allies were finished. The poor French took an awful battering and a lot of our chaps did. It was only because we had this strip of water, the English Channel, and a good navy and a will to keep going, that it really saved the day. Plus the fact that we had a wonderful chap called Winston Churchill. He had a lot of influence with Roosevelt. His mother was American. He was the right guy to have at that time.

Things were pretty desperate though. I think that Ambassador Kennedy thought that it was nearly all over because we didn't have many guns and our army lost most of their equipment at Dunkirk. We just had whatever we could scrape up. One thing we did have going was that two years before the start of the war, we got our air force going a bit better. They started making the Spitfire and other things.

Q: Can we talk a little bit about the Blitz? That happened early on. The embassy was damaged a couple of times. What was it like living through the Blitz? Were you still living in London?

NEWMAN: We lived through the Blitz. While Mr. Kennedy was Ambassador, he used to have a lot of personal people on his staff apart from State Department people. I remember that all of the staff was issued with regulation American army steel helmets, regulation American army gas masks. Everybody thought that the Germans were going to gas us. They thought that we were going to get a big lot of bombs containing gas. It didn't actually happen in the end, but everybody had to have some sort of gas mask. We had these huge American army ones. It was actually quite a nuisance carrying them around. It was nearly as big as yourself. However, it was done with good intentions.

After the Dunkirk evacuation of the British Forces in 1940, in August or September of the same year, the German Luftwaffe, there were a lot of them, was going to try to get control of the air. Our air force was about a third of the size. Luckily, they were mostly fighter planes at the time. The German bombers were no match for these Spitfire pilots.

I would like to mention the famous Eagle Squadron, which consisted of American pilots who were friends of England, including one member of the staff in the embassy. They actually formed the Eagle Squadron and fought in defence of Britain in the Battle of Britain. One of the chaps, named John Flynn, got killed unfortunately. He was a lovely chap. He used to be the Assistant Treasury Attaché. You will find his name on the Eagle Squadron plinth in Grosvenor Square, right by the present embassy in London. If you look, you will find it.

Q: I found it.

NEWMAN: We put up a hell of a battle here. The odds were 50:50 as to whether we were going to win or not. At this stage, unfortunately, Ambassador Kennedy thought that maybe the game was up, and maybe the United States shouldn't get involved. He thought the Germans had the upper hand.

There is something I am going to tell you. There was a man in the code room at the American Embassy who was a traitor. He passed on information.

Q: Tyler Kent.

NEWMAN: That's the man. I didn't know him personally. I knew the code room, because I knew all the rooms in the embassy. Nobody knew at the time that this chap was passing on information.

Sadly to say, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, not only was he not very happy about Ambassador Kennedy, and then this other guy turns up and upset the apple cart as well, to say the least.

Q: Now, this was John Winant.

NEWMAN: John Winant took over from Ambassador Kennedy. I remember him well. He looked very much like Abraham Lincoln, a younger edition of Abraham Lincoln. He was a dark haired man, very nice, very quiet, and very popular with Churchill.

There is a sad story to him. Nobody really knows what happened, but he died. A lot of people thought he committed suicide after his tour as ambassador was finished and he returned to the United States. I could never be sure, but he was an awfully nice man. He was a very good ambassador. Many, many years later, when I came back from World War II, we were invited by, I think it was the Mayor of Westminster, to go to an unveiling of one of these memorial plaques where Ambassador Winant had lived. They had one of these ceremonies where they pulled back the curtain and said a prayer. That was in memory of this nice ambassador. He was a very nice man. He was very much like Abraham Lincoln.

Q: Was he ambassador during virtually all of the U.S. involvement in World War II?

NEWMAN: Pretty well, I would say.

Q: According to what I have, he died in April 1946.

NEWMAN: The thing is that it wasn't all left to the ambassador. Eventually, once America came into the war, a lot of special people like Harry Hopkins came over. Special attachés sort of superseded the ambassador's work. They were specialized people.

Q: Averell Harriman showed up a lot.

NEWMAN: Averell Harriman was a very nice man.

Q: Now, back to living in the blitz. The embassy was hit twice.

NEWMAN: That's right. I was going to say the Kennedys and their entourage became what is known as air wardens. Whenever the air raid sirens sounded, all the staff had instructions to go down into the vaults in the basement. At the bottom of the embassy there were concrete vaults. We used to all troop down there.

The special chaps, the entourage of the Kennedys, used to put their steel hats on and go up on the roof of the embassy with their binoculars. There they kept an eye on what was going on. If one or two bombs started to whistle down, they used to disappear. We're not all brave.

The embassy got two hits. The building that I think was the Italian Embassy right next door almost, they had a hit. By then, Italy had joined the Axis in the war. For a little while, Royal Air Force personnel were stationed in that building. Strangely enough, a bomb came down – it must have been sheer coincidence – and hit this building. I remember my old boss, John J. Coyle, had a little car. I still remember the number of it

now: DUC-20. He ferried two or three of these chaps off to the hospital, some of our air force boys who had been wounded from the bomb.

Q: I thought most of the bombings were at night. Where there some bombings during the daytime?

NEWMAN: Oh yes. There were some in daytime. Initially, the Germans were bombing during the daytime because they hadn't felt the full force of what the Spitfires could do to them. Of course, if you are bombing during the daytime, it is easier to see your target than it is during nighttime. Later on in the war, when I was flying Lancaster bombers, we could bomb day or night. It was much better equipment.

To go back to the earlier part of the war, once the German Luftwaffe had taken a beating, although it was a close run thing, they started to bomb at night, just like the Royal Air Force was bombing Germany. The Royal Air Force started to bomb at night because they found their daytime losses were too heavy, whereas the night gave a certain amount of cover. This was before they got radar well organized. Later on in the war, of course it would get more technical.

The night bombing started in the blitz, but they used to still come over in the day.

The German Air Force was all stationed in France, which is not that far from England, especially London. London is a big target, a very easy target to bomb. Therefore, it really was day and night, mostly heavy at night.

Q: Was there a problem around your house? What did you do?

NEWMAN: The house that I lived in was near the River Thames, in that part of Westminster. The river was about 100 yards across the road. Facing us, every house on a corner got hit by bombs over many months. Unfortunately, we were almost opposite a power station, across the water in an area called Battersea. As the crow flies, it was only about half a mile, so that was a target.

The block of flats behind us was hit 18 times. I myself got blown out of bed one night when a bomb came down the lift shaft in this apartment block, and blew me out of bed. I hate to say it, but in those days, I used to go to bed with nothing on. From then on, it was pajamas.

Q: Was this before people were going down into the underground?

NEWMAN: Yes, people were encouraged to go down into the London Underground, which was thought to be reasonably safe. It was quite deep. My family and I only went down there one night. Really, I hate to say it, but the smell of people – we were short of hot water and all sorts of things – and I am sure people weren't washing. We decided that we couldn't put up with that, so we just took a chance and went down into the basement of our house. Despite being blown out of bed once, we survived it.

Once, in these deep underground shelters, a bomb did get down there, and there were a lot of casualties. You made your choice. Generally, you were safe in these deep shelters, but if one bomb did get down the shelter, there could be a lot of casualties.

We decided to go down to the basement of our flat and take a chance.

Q: At this point, were you still living with your parents?

NEWMAN: Yes, I was still living with my parents until I went into the air force. My younger brother was evacuated to the country. A lot of the children, because of the heavy bombing in London, were sent all over England. Some of them were very unlucky with the people they went with and didn't have a very good time. Luckily my brother went down with a relative of my mother's in the country.

I stayed here because I was very busy. I was a member of a scout troop. I taught myself how to do Morse code. Also, I joined the Air Training Corps because I really wanted to get into aircrew. And I went to night school for additional education.

My air training corps was actually stationed right behind the Ritz Hotel Piccadilly in one of these big old houses. They made us responsible for it and we always had to have four cadets on duty every night so that when the firebombs would drop on London, we used to go and put them out.

The Germans used to drop phosphorus bombs, about a foot long, and you couldn't put them out with water. You had long shovels and you had to shovel them into the side of the road, and then put sand on them. You always had buckets of sand all over. They used to just glow out, these phosphorus bombs.

My commanding officer was very friendly with the manager of the Ritz Hotel in London, so we had a little understanding that if there were any firebombs around the Ritz we would put them out as well as at our headquarters. We got a cup of coffee or a cup of hot cocoa for the honor of doing that.

Q: You read that the general atmosphere was one of "We will not let you defeat us."

NEWMAN: That's right. We had a good feeling. Everybody wanted to do what we could to defeat the Germans. We didn't think we asked for the war. We weren't going to let anybody knock us about without knocking them back. Of course, as the war went on, we began to develop better fighters and better bombers. We had more training.

I tried for two and a half years to get into the air corps. By the time I was 18, I knew quite a lot about what to do in the air force. Naturally, because I taught myself Morse code, they made me a radio operator in Lancaster bombers, and an air gunner and radio man. That was okay. Everybody wanted to do their part. We weren't all suited to be pilots.

Q: Were some people too tall to be pilots?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Going back to the blitz again. This was something, I hate to say it, but you get used to it. I mean you hear the bombs whistling down. If you are still walking at the end of it, you know you haven't been hit. You get tired and you go to sleep, even when the bombs are dropping. To be blasé, you get used to it. You don't like it, but you get used to it. You've got nowhere else to go. There is nothing else you can do.

Q: Was there much impact on local staff? Did many people lose their homes or their lives?

NEWMAN: A few did, not too many, strangely enough. The sort of area that used to get heavily bombed was the dock areas and places like that. You see, the Germans made a mistake. They should have really gone for the radar stations and the airfields, but they didn't, thank God. We were able to keep stuff flying. Then our bombers were beginning to get better as we got more technical stuff going.

We had heavy losses though. I actually reached squadron flying over Germany for the whole of 1945 until the end of war. At the time I was on it, out of 20 bombers, we lost 13, including our own plane. My crew missed that one because we went on a six-day leave. When we got back, a brand new crew on their very first trip had taken our plane, and they never made it back.

Even towards the end of the war, the Germans were doing a pretty good job. They were pretty good soldiers and airmen. There is no doubt about that.

Q: In 1941, when the U.S. entered the war, were you still working at the embassy?

NEWMAN: Yes, I was.

Q: How did things change?

NEWMAN: Early on, in 1941, we had a detachment of marines arrive here dressed in civilian clothes. They took over some duties, security at the embassy. We got on really well with these guys. They were all proper peacetime marines. What I'm trying to say is that they weren't conscripted to come into the war. They were already marines. They were a good bunch of guys. They were tough guys who knew what they were doing.

On the day that Pearl Harbor happened, they all turned up in uniform. All these guys turned up, sergeants and everything, in uniform. We knew most of them by then by their Christian names. They were really nice to the staff, both Americans and locals. They were a tough lot of boys though. Sometimes they got in a bit of trouble at night in the pubs and things. Then their captain had to go and bail them out. Generally, the local population liked them. You know, "The Yanks are in with us, at last, and are here."

Then they started to leave their American Embassy duties, which really wasn't their function. They were really fighting men. They started to train with the British commanders and became what is known in the American Army as Rangers. They had the same function as commandos, which is a sort of higher level of military soldier.

Certainly for these guys, it really was sad, but we didn't know until months after, when the Allied armada went to North Africa, these guys were on the boats, this platoon of chaps. Unfortunately, a torpedo hit the boat they were on. Sadly, the Americans had such heavy equipment that if you got hit and you were in the water, you had an awful job getting rid of this equipment. All these guys drowned, barring three. Only three of this whole platoon came out of it. They never even reached the beaches.

One of them, a big tall fellow called Wilson, I remember him well, a very nice fellow, came back to the embassy many months later to give us the bad news. I tell you, there wasn't a dry eye. We were all weeping.

Q: I can imagine.

NEWMAN: Even now, when I think of them. They were lovely chaps, but they never made it.

There you are. That's what happens in war.

As the war went on, General Eisenhower's headquarters was in Grosvenor Square in the American naval building. The whole of Grosvenor Square was like a big car park with military and other vehicles. There wasn't a blade of grass to be seen, because all the ironworks around all the big squares in London had been taken away to make munitions. All the iron surrounds had been taken away, with one exception. Bedford Square was owned by the Duke of Bedford, who was a pacifist. He would not let them take the metal to make arms. But Grosvenor Square lost its metal.

Q: In 1941, Tyler Kent was arrested for passing information to a Member of Parliament, Captain Ramsey. Did people know at the time?

NEWMAN: No, they didn't know much about it. It was only after the war that I knew about it. I might have passed the guy in the corridor, but I wouldn't have known him for what he was doing. In fact, he was pretty lucky not to be shot. He could have gone into the Tower of London, but I think they got him back to the States.

Q: The thing is it wasn't treason because we weren't at war. That's what I understood about it. I thought, "Gee, I've never heard about that one."

In October 1942, the U.S. Navy opened a recruiting station at the embassy. Who were they recruiting? I mean, were there that many Americans around?

NEWMAN: This is news to me. I don't know about this one. They did all sorts of things in the navy, but we kept out of the way because it was kind of high security over there. They did not like us snooping around. We knew Eisenhower was over there, doing what commanders have to do. We didn't know much of what was going on there, to be honest.

Q: And what were your duties at the embassy now?

NEWMAN: I was doing general clerical work.

Q: In a particular section:

NEWMAN: I still worked for John Joseph Coyle, who was a Consul and an Attaché. I think I mentioned earlier that he was a very nice, old-fashioned type of diplomat who knew everybody. He used to turn up a work every day with a carnation in his buttonhole. He would turn up a few minutes after the office opened, so that his staff had all the paperwork ready for him. He was a pretty good organizer. A delightful man, very nice to me.

Q: Was this mostly consular work?

NEWMAN: Yes. We didn't get involved with the military.

Q: Was it American Services or refugees or visas?

NEWMAN: That refugee situation disappeared. A lot of Brits went training in America. A lot of our people trained in the States, you know. We got on pretty good. We were very glad to have our American friends by our side. Let's put it like that.

Q: When did you join the air force?

NEWMAN: I joined the British Air Force in May 1943. I had done two and a half years training in their training corps. As a matter of fact, I was pretty glad to get into the main forces because I did so much work with the scouts and the air training corps, and not sleeping. It was kind of a relief to go with the regular military where you got so many hours sleep a night with good food. It was kind of a relief. That was May 1943.

Q: Where did you go?

NEWMAN: Initially, you were inducted in St. John's Wood, which is an area in London, for three days. They put you though hoops. You have to take tests. You have to see if your aptitude is good enough for aircrew. You have to add two and two and make four. All that sort of stuff, including medical and every sort of check to make sure you are fit enough for it.

Then you were posted for a week to wherever they wanted to train you. Initially, like a lot of military, you go through a rough patch for six months. They make you drill, They

make you march. They put you through it. They make you go through the mud. You have got to learn discipline. You have got to know that the sergeant is the boss.

After that, you go on to the technical training, like radio school. Most of my technical training was done in the United Kingdom. Previous to my period, lots of people went to the United States for gunnery, radar, and all sorts of stuff. I was always hoping to get there. Unfortunately, the training schools got better in England and I did all my training in England. That was for radio.

Because of the losses early in the war, where the poor army was sort of on their own, and the air force had nothing to do, they couldn't even fly, they trained us to be second line infantry. So we did gunnery and unarmed combat. In other words, if the army got into trouble and we couldn't fly, we would go in with them.

Q: I didn't realize that.

NEWMAN: The people at the end of the war were much better trained. I am not saying they were better than the fellows earlier in the war because they never had the training or the weapons. We began to get pretty good.

Q: Once you finished your technical training, where were you sent?

NEWMAN: After doing the radio, which took about six months, we then went to learn how to fly planes as a member of crew. You all had different functions. You not only did the radar, you had to undertake to do another job. I used to substitute for the navigator or for a gunner. If one of the main gunners was shot, my job was to get him out of the turret and get in.

You all had two or three functions to do. In other words, you learned to become good bomber crewmembers and help each other. It was a very close bond.

We flew twin-engine bombers for a while, and I was in one that crashed actually. We all came out of it, but were a little bit knocked about. I got knocked out actually. Within three-quarters of an hour, we were flying again.

They wouldn't let us have any rest.

Q: You crashed?

NEWMAN: Yes, we crashed in a bomber while we were under training.

Q: On take off?

NEWMAN: No, coming in, actually. There was something wrong with one of the engines. Unfortunately, the engine, which we had to what they called feather, stopped running, controlled the hydraulics on the plane. We all felt we got done okay. We were

running along the runway. Of course, the pilots had instructions never to swing the plane, because it used to do something to the body plates. So our pilot followed instructions. Unfortunately, at the end of the runway was what they called an antitank ditch, and we hit it. The whole plane collapsed. It was a write-off.

They got us out. They got cranes. Within about half a minute, we were out. Then they took us to the base. We said, "When do we get our brandy and stuff?"

They said, "You ain't. You're getting in that next plane and you're flying."

We said, "That's not fair."

They said, "No. If we don't get you flying again, you will lose your nerve."

As I say, within less than an hour of the plane crashing, we were flying a similar plane again. Waste not, want not.

Q: What kind of a plane was it?

NEWMAN: It was a Wellington bomber. It was not too bad a plane. It had two engines, whereas later the Lancaster and the Halifax bombers had four engines and could carry a big bomb load.

Q: Was it a short-range bomber?

NEWMAN: No, one of my trips was to Dresden. We were airborne for 12 hours, going zigzag. You never went straight for the target. You zigzagged.

Q: Could you go there without refueling?

NEWMAN: Yes. As a matter of fact on that particular trip, we had five minutes fuel left. Of the 700 bombers that went out that night, they thought they lost half of them. They never got back to base, including us. We had all landed on the south coast of England with about five minutes fuel left. In the morning, in the dawn, you would see 350 bombers all lined up on this big airfield.

We used to have three emergency airfields with really big runways. Our instructions were that if we were ever short on fuel or in trouble, we had to land on one of these. In fact, that was the only time I ever gave out a distress call on the radio just to let them know where we were positioned over the English Channel. But we got down.

As I say, 350 planes that night all lined up on that one airfield. That's why they thought they lost half the air force. That was a long trip to Dresden.

Q: How many missions did you fly?

NEWMAN: Twenty-four.

Q: So when you say Dresden, that wasn't the 1945 Dresden fire bombings?

NEWMAN: Yes it was. That was the one.

We had the slowest plane on the squadron at the time. When you were a new crew drafted in, you got the oldest plane. Had you known it, that was the one to be on because that bomber completed 125 missions. It was still there at the end of the war, slow though it was.

Q: Can I ask you how it felt to be a part of the bombing of Dresden?

NEWMAN: It wasn't very nice. I had a lot of sympathy for the people below because I had been in London from 1940 to 1943 under bombing all the time. My parents were still there, and the Germans, even in 1945, were sending rockets in. The V-2 rockets couldn't be stopped and they killed a lot of people.

I had mixed feelings. I wasn't happy about bombing people, but they were doing it to us, presumably because it was their job to knock us out. It was our job to knock them out. It must have been hell on earth there. Well, it was hell on earth for them.

In fact, my navigator became a Roman Catholic priest eventually. He was very upset. I was more cock-a-hoop. I was a bit more bloodthirsty. I was 20. I had been through all the blitzes. I knew what the Germans were like. So I didn't care really too much what I did to Germans.

I did have a certain amount of sympathy, because I knew what I felt like under their bombs. There is nowhere you can go. You hear these damned things coming down. You want to go somewhere, but there is nowhere to go. You are safest in the cellar or something.

In fact, I wanted to tell you a little bit of sadness. When I was in the Air Training Corps, which I mentioned earlier, my commanding officer was very friendly with the commanding officer of the guards brigades, which is in the big barracks back of the palace. Wellington Barracks it is called. We had to go on parade for King George VI. I was still a cadet. He wanted us to be the smartest group. There were the army cadets, the navy cadets, and the air force cadets. He wanted our group to get the cake.

He arranged with the colonel for these guardsmen to give us military training, drilling and all this sort of stuff, which these guys did with us for about two weeks. These guys weren't that much older than us. We were 16 or 17 years old. These chaps were probably 19 to 22, all young soldiers. Sadly about a month after that, these flying bombs, the V-1s, they used to send them over. The engine used to cut and then they used to drop haphazardly, you see? They couldn't pinpoint any target.

Sadly, one Sunday, all these guardsmen, 256 of them were in the chapel on Wellington Barracks. One of these flying bombs came over, circled around right into the chapel. All the chaps we knew were killed, just like that.

This was another sad moment in my life, just like the American marines that got lost.

When you say, "What do you feel like about Dresden?"

Well, I felt sorry, but we had to do it. The Russians, who were our allies, had asked us to do it. The German army was congregating around there. There were a lot of other people killed that shouldn't have been killed, but what do you do? How can you tell who is a good guy and who is a bad guy?

It's the same situation these days. It is very difficult with these suicide bombers and things.

Q: So, this is just about the end of the war?

NEWMAN: It was February. The end of the war came on May 8th.

Just before the end of the war, the Dutch people were starving because Holland was still occupied by the Germans. Queen Wilhelmina was over here in this country. Apparently she said to Churchill, "You have go to do something. There are 20,000 people starving."

So they thought they could use the bombers for something a bit more useful for a change. We loaded up with food. So did the American Air Force. For about eight or nine days, we did nothing else but cross into Holland. The Germans were still in occupation. The Germans had not agreed for us to do this, but we did it. And the Americans did it. We dropped food to the Dutch. Thousands of tons of food. That was a really good gesture. The Dutch were good allies and they deserved it. To this day, when we go there and see them, they make such a fuss of us. They don't like the Germans. But the Brits, the Canadians and the Americans are fine to this day.

Q: Were you under fire when you did that?

NEWMAN: No. We flew in about 50 feet over the water. Some of our planes were so low that we were making ripples in the water. The Germans had flooded the country, see? Some of our planes were actually making like the wake of a boat. We literally were about 20 feet over the water sometimes.

I remember the first trip we did. They had marked out some special squares. The Dutch were coming out, waving flags and all sorts of things. Where we were dropping food, they were running there before the food was dropped, and we were frightened of hitting them. Anyway, it was a good moment.

The German officers had what they called flak towers about 60 feet high. They could stand in them with their binoculars and look at us. We were flying so low that they were looking down at us. Of course, all of their antiaircraft guns followed us. All of our gunners' guns followed them. I think only one incident happened.

I guess the Germans knew that it was only a matter of time before the end.

Q: Maybe they needed the food too?

NEWMAN: I am sure they did.

Q: I hadn't heard about those humanitarian missions.

NEWMAN: We called ours, Manna Drop. Food from Heaven, manna. The Americans called theirs, not hamburger, but … what is an American word for food, starting with a "c?" Chow Drop. They did Chow Drops and we did Manna Drops. They were pretty happy days.

Q: We are about time wise, but I want to hear about your brother. I think it would be good if we get you out of World War II. So, you are dropping food to the Dutch and then what happens?

NEWMAN: The final bombing trip we did to Germany was to Bavaria, where Hitler's famous Eagle's Nest was. We attacked what they called the SS (Schutzstaffel, German for Protective Squadron) barracks. We had strict orders not to fly over the Eagle's Nest.

What do our pilots do? Here we go boys! The whole squadron ran about 200 feet over the top of the Eagle's Nest. Many years later, when my son worked in Germany, I went to visit it. It was wonderful to see it. You went up in the lift that Hitler used to go up in. Of course, there is no word of Hitler there now. It's in Bavaria, this place. I ought to remember. I was in a Lancaster bomber 200 feet over this place before the end of the war.

That was the very last bombing trip authorized before the end of the war.

Q: How long was it before you got out?

NEWMAN: When the war finished in Europe in May 1945, we then started to train on a much bigger bomber called the Lincoln, not the Lancaster, to go and help the Americans in the Pacific to bomb Japan. After about six or seven weeks training, they just stopped training. We didn't know why. Of course, a little while later, the atom bomb was dropped, and that was the reason why. So, we never did finish the training.

Once the war was finished, bomber crews, a lot of us became not necessary. For instance, you didn't need gunners any more. You really only needed a pilot, a navigator, an engineer, and possibly a radioman. I was part radio and part gunner, you see.

What they did then was they started to use transport planes to fly our troops back from the Middle East, Italy, or wherever they were. In the Lancaster, we used to get 22 soldiers in, not actually in the bomb bays, but in the floor above. We used to fly them back within about four hours from Italy. Some of these soldiers had been out there about four years in the Middle East. Nearly all of them were sick. Of course, I was a flight sergeant then. I never used to say anything. I just used to get the sick bags and handed them out when I saw their color go. They said, "Thanks, sarge." The poor devils. I had been airsick myself during my initial training and I knew what it was like.

Then when we finished transporting towards the end of 1945, the squadrons began to disband. They found other duties for us to do. Not any worthwhile duties generally: clerical duties, driving, or general duties, until we were told we were dismissed from the forces. Then that is when I came back just purely to see my old boss and say hello. He said, "When are you coming out?"

I told him. He said, "Well, we got on all right, didn't we?"

I said, "Yes, we did."

He said, "Would you like to come and work for me again? We are going to expand. I'll start you at a good wage."

So I said, "It couldn't be better."

Q: Okay, this is December 12th at a little after 2:00 p.m. Our interviewee is retired FSN John Newman. This is Anne Cary as the interviewer. We are at the U.S. Embassy in London in the John Adams Room. This is interview number two.

We basically got up to the end of World War II. You were coming back to work at the embassy. Would you like to talk a little bit about what London was like at that time?

NEWMAN: Unfortunately, we were still rationed for food and other commodities. Although the war was over, we were still feeling the economic effects of the war. People were a lot happier than they had been because they were coming home to their families. They were picking up on jobs. There was a lot of work to do. So, generally, it was sort of a happy situation.

Gradually, of course, the food rationing became less and less. We began to get more commodities. Buildings were being built. Jobs were getting better all the time, as there was such a demand for rebuilding and re-everything, actually. So it was quite a nice period, probably because people were so tired after six years of war. It was a relief. There wasn't much argument amongst people. Everyone was quite happy for a few years.

Q: Where were you living?

NEWMAN: I got married while the war was on and we had a daughter a year later. Unfortunately, when I tried to get somewhere to live in London with my wife, there wasn't anywhere to live. Everything was short, including buildings. We had to split up for over a year until things got a little bit better. So I had to go and live back with my parents on a temporary basis. That was very convenient for me because of my job at the American Embassy, which I came back to. My old boss was still there and he offered me a job, as we used to get on so good, as he said.

Q: Where did your wife and daughter live?

NEWMAN: My wife and daughter lived in the northern part of England, in a place called Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. That is an agricultural area, although in wartime there were some factories there, making ammunition and stuff. There were a lot of air force bases and army bases, including American bases.

Q: Is that how you met her?

NEWMAN: Yes. There was a lot of opposition to the American Air Force there. Of course, the English army was there. The girls were having a good time up there.

Q: When you came back to the embassy, was it still at Number One?

NEWMAN: Yes, the embassy was at Number One Grosvenor Square, which had opened I think in 1938. I think that's when the then ambassador, Ambassador Kennedy, took over.

Q: So when you came back in 1947, was the ambassador then Lewis Douglas? Do you remember him?

NEWMAN: I remember him well. The man that succeeded Mr. Kennedy was Mr. Winant. He had a rather mysterious end, which I don't want to go into because the man is not here to say anything about it. There was a rumor that there was a suicide connected, although we never got proof of that. He was a very nice man, very much like a younger Abraham Lincoln.

Q: I see by the dates that John Winant stopped being ambassador in April 1946. Averell Harriman served as ambassador from April 1946 to October 1946. It looks like it was just a very interim thing.

NEWMAN: Averell Harriman, to my knowledge, was a right-hand man of President Roosevelt, to do with not economics, but commercial requirements and things of the government. My memory is that he was involved a bit deeper than an ambassador. He was a very nice man.

Q: When you came back to the embassy, what was it like? Obviously, things had changed. Everything had changed. How did you see things?

NEWMAN: Things had changed inasmuch as the embassy and all the diplomatic work was beginning to expand all round. The staff was beginning to expand. Pre-war, it was a reasonably small staff for the American Embassy. Gradually, the Commercial Department began to expand. The Consular Division began to expand. The Visa Department and Immigration Department expanded. It was an expansion period for four or five years, I would say. In the end, we had quite a large staff.

These were the days when there were no computers; everything was done physically and manually. All the files had to be handled manually. The black list checking crewmembers had to be individually handled with all these little cards. There was quite a lot of physical work involved in it.

Q: What specifically were you doing?

NEWMAN: I was actually working in the Customs Division in the embassy, which used to give out Customs information, both for visitors and commercial purposes. The department was also linked to what they called the Shipping Division. That was the division where the American ships that used to come here, and their crews, had to check in. Sometimes they even paid the seamen on the counter at the embassy, and under the guidance of their captain and a cultural official. We also had to take documents from English ships that went to America, to make sure that the guys in the crew weren't black listed for any reason. On occasion, we did find one or two when we checked the list.

Q: I want to get to the black list a little bit later on in my chronology.

Was there much shipping going on?

NEWMAN: Yes, there was quite a bit. There were quite a lot of American merchant ships coming across in the aftermath of the war. All the links that they had made here. There were a lot of our ships going to America.

The British Government and the people in England really wanted to get a good export trade going to the United States, trying to earn dollars. The dollar was the currency then, as it probably is now.

Q: Lend lease became a very controversial issue. My understanding is that the U.S. required repayment sooner than many in the UK felt they had the ability to repay.

NEWMAN: My version of lend lease is just after the war finished there was a general election in England. Strangely enough, Mr. Churchill, our war hero, got voted out of office, and a socialist government was voted in. I think a lot of Americans and the American government thought that was very close to communism at the time. For some reason, soon after that, lend lease was cut off to a great extent. A lot of it went to Germany, our former enemy. So there wasn't a very good feeling in England about that. That's my view anyway.

Then of course came the cost of repayments. The British had lost a lot of their properties and their monetary investments in the United States through the war. We had to start from scratch again to build up the dollars and build up goodwill again. I am not saying that there was bad will against America. When you think of it, America twice came over to Europe to help us out of the hole. They made a good job of it, and we were very grateful for that and always will be.

Q: A bit more about the change in the government to the Labour Party coming in. National Health was set up. Did people feel this was responding to the need? How did you view the changes?

NEWMAN: Pre-war, there was a class division in England. There was the upper class and the lower class, and so on. When the socialists more or less promised was equalization. Of course, to a lot of us guys having been in the war and everything, this was like a golden handshake from the socialist government. We were promised this and promised that. Whereas with the Conservative Party pre-war, they were the top dogs and we were the underdogs, as it were. That's why they got into power.

It wasn't a bad thing, the nationalization of the medical division in the country. It meant that everybody got an equal chance to get medication. Previously, people with very low incomes sometimes couldn't afford to get the necessary medication. Under the nationalization of the medical departments, it was quite good. The only thing I personally had against it was that it was also open to anybody that came into England. We used to have Arab gentlemen coming here and getting a set of false teeth for nothing. That didn't go down too well with me. Generally, it was a good thing for nationalization.

Also, I think the railways were nationalized. They were taken over by the government, which was really good for the railways. Because of the war, most of the stock and the rail lines were all run down. So at the time, that was a pretty good thing. People thought it was a good thing to go socialist.

Q: Who was the consul general when you came back? Do you remember?

NEWMAN: The consul general when I left was a man called Jenkins. He had a son called Jenkins too. He eventually became a consul general. There was another man called Glen Abbott, who was quite a nice man, but you wouldn't want to cross him. There came a time when because of the type of work I was on, the customs work and the documentation which was connected directly with British exports, all these documents had to be cleared at our end. We had to check them out to make sure that the British shippers had listed everything correctly. Then we had to send copies off to the U.S. Customs at the various ports. I got to know a lot about America, what each port was, and where it was situated. It was quite good for geography.

Eventually, the powers that be decided that that documentation was no longer necessary. That, plus a few other things that were discontinued, meant that half of our little work

force in the little department I was in was unnecessary. To balance it, the Visa and Immigration Department was growing larger and larger all the time as more and more people wanted to immigrate to the States. And more and more people wanted to visit the States.

So two of the junior members of the staff, and I was one of them, were persuaded, sometimes rather forcibly, to transfer to the Visa Department. The reason we objected going there was it meant that we couldn't expect a promotion for about five years. We went in on jobs that were two grades lower than what we were doing. So it took five years before we got another promotion.

As I say, you shouldn't cross the consul general because he said, "Well you chaps, you are not happy about this, but you either get out of there, or you go."

So we thought, well he is bigger than us. And we went. It wasn't too bad in the end. The departments were expanding and we were learning more about that side of it. We got our promotions back. Then we became senior clerks.

Q: What year did you switch over to doing visas?

NEWMAN: Well I came back in 1947. It must have been about the middle 1950s.

I remember the name of the consul in charge. It was a man called Norman Redden. He must be about 90 now. He is still alive and living in London. He was the consul in charge of the Visa and Immigration Department. He made us kind of welcome, as long as we got on with the job. He was a good man.

Q: How many people were working in the Visa and Immigration Section then?

NEWMAN: I should think about 50 people.

Q: Wow.

NEWMAN: Quite a lot. Of course, there was a lot of clerical work to do. Then they changed some of the immigration laws under President Kennedy.

Q: Even before the Immigration Act, because this was still under the 1919 Act with the national origins quotas. Virtually at that point, if I understand, any British citizen who wanted to immigrate to the United States, basically had no problem unless they had been arrested.

NEWMAN: Yes, that's right.

Q: Were there lots of people who wanted to go?

NEWMAN: Oh yes. A lot of people did, including myself. We saw a better life out there. Without being discriminatory, the war in Europe hit the Europeans quite hard, whereas the people in America, in spite of all their good wishes and contributions, it hadn't been quite so hard for them. They didn't have the rationing that we had in Europe. Life in the States looked pretty good. People really wanted to get over there.

Q: So you considered going?

NEWMAN: Yes, I did.

Q: Why did you not go?

NEWMAN: Strangely enough, my wife is very pro-British and likes to live in England. It's as simple as that. Although at a later stage, my daughter married an American and went to live in America. It's a small world.

Q: At this point, were you and your wife back together again? You said it was about a year that you were separated.

NEWMAN: Yes, we were together in London.

Q: Where did you live then?

NEWMAN: We lived in a very good area of London, three-quarters of a mile from Buckingham Palace. The area is called Belgravia. It is the most expensive area in the whole of Great Britain. I was allocated a flat by the Local Council. Some of the houses in this lovely area had been bomb damaged. Since they didn't have room for us guys coming back from the forces, they decided to patch some of these houses up and turn one big house into five flats. I was allocated one of those. We were there for six years. It was very enjoyable. It was very central to my job and everything.

Q: Was this under the Labor Government then?

NEWMAN: What they called the Local Council is separate from the government. It was Conservative Council, which has leanings to the right. I don't know how to put it, other than that. It means that it's a wealthy council. They were rebuilding a lot of stuff there, building new flats and accommodations, but just as a stopgap they converted some of these old bombed out houses into flats. It was very nice of them really.

Q: Were they your landlord?

NEWMAN: Yes, they were our landlord. I had only been in the place a week when they doubled my rent, so I had to protest, After a lot of squawking and protesting, they put it back to what it was.

Q: Did your wife work?

NEWMAN: No. After a couple of years, we had another child. We weren't too happy about that at the time, because we had come down to London without funds, nothing. The going was pretty hard. This little baby that came along was the best thing that ever happened to us. At my job, I had started to earn a bit more money. My wife couldn't work at the time.

As the children grew up a little bit, she decided she would like to do some part-time work. She went to work in a theater very closed to Buckingham Palace, called the Westminster Theatre. She started work there as an usher. She was pretty nice looking, my wife. After about three or four months, the two men there decided she would be better running the bar. She would attract more money at the bar.

They gave her three days training and said, "Right, you're on your own now." She used to do pretty good on the tipping side. The sort of people that used to come to the Westminster Theatre were – well, one of the people who used to come was Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., a very famous American. A queen of the Pacific islands, maybe Tonga, also came. Another famous actor came who took part in a wartime film called Hells Angels. Ben Lyon and his wife was Bebe Daniels. He was quite a famous American actor and one of the meanest guys around. I know he's not here to defend himself, but he wouldn't anyway.

They got a good variety of clientele at this theater. My wife used to enjoy it because it gave her a break from the children. I used to come home from work and take over in the evening. Some of the famous actors that were there used to give her a lift home, so she didn't have to walk home at night. I suppose it was a mile and a quarter to walk to the theater from Belgravia. In those days, the area was very good, and you didn't have any trouble. Now you get the drug people and all that in the streets. Some quite famous people gave her lifts. She enjoyed it.

Q: Was there rationing of gasoline and other things?

NEWMAN: There had been initially, but that came back very quickly. Rubber tires were very short in the war, and then they very quickly began to produce more and more. We had to have transport, so I suppose that got a top priority.

Q: In 1950, there was a switch in visa policy. The United States decided they would restrict visas for communists, Nazis and fascists. This actually had a pretty interesting impact in the United Kingdom. Can you talk a little bit about that?

NEWMAN: For some reason, I think the Irish could still go reasonably easily, but the people in England couldn't. Not because they were fascists or anything. Although in retrospect, if the American government thought our government was almost communist, that may have had an influence on the decision to do it. In fact, Mr. Churchill was still around, and in the very next election he got back into power. Some of the promises made by the socialist government hadn't come through. Then again, to give them their due,

they didn't have the time to put them into effect. All of these policies, you've got to give them a few years to work.

Looking back on this period, I can't remember the exact changes, but it did affect the way the British went. It wasn't so unrestricted as before. There were a lot more restrictions, depending on your skills and what you were going to do there.

Q: There was also fingerprinting but that didn't actually start until a little bit later. I have that in 1949, there were nine men arrested for chaining themselves to the embassy gates in protest against U.S. policy. Do you have any recollection of this?

NEWMAN: There have always been protests around the embassy. I did know that in this period the men did chain themselves, but I really can't remember what the reason was. You always get people chaining themselves or climbing the building, even to this day. The embassy used to get hammered with these things.

I have been in the embassy when bullets have been sprayed into the door, when a smoke bomb was being thrown in the door. In those days, we didn't have the security that the embassy has now. I think we had some sort of security, but I don't think it was even armed security at that time. If I remember correctly, some of the chaps were ex-American servicemen, dressed in civilian clothes. They were acting as some sort of service to do with security, but it wasn't like having a platoon of fully armed Marines.

There was always some sort of protest. The embassy staff was on very good terms with the local British police. Usually, what used to happen if there was trouble sometimes people used to get into the embassy. The embassy, in my view, was very generous with their library. They used to let people come in and they used to give them books. They were very liberal with people. On occasion, we would get students who would try a sit-down strike and all this.

The usual policy was not to get our American security involved, but to get the British police in. Most of the people doing the demonstrating were British. The police used to either to talk them out or carry them out.

I remember one guy got in one day, a big colored chap actually, about six foot two. He lay down on the floor, and he wouldn't shift. Six policemen came in and he said, "Buddies, if you want me out, you've got to lift me out."

And that's what they did. They took him down to the local police station where he immediately went berserk and smashed out the cell.

Q: Do you know what he was protesting?

NEWMAN: You used to get weird people coming into the embassy. One of the weirdest things that used to happen was that on Christmas Eve every year we would get quite a few of these people recently released from mental detainment hospitals. They used to

come to the embassy. I don't know why. In those days, we didn't have any armed response. The only security was the doorman and our staff.

I remember one time I came in and there was a fellow nicknamed by our people as General Kaiser because he was about six foot five. He was quite a gentle sort of a mental case, but he always had information to give to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation). So the head doorman used to phone me when I was on reception on the visa floor and say, "You've got General Kaiser coming round to see you John."

I would say, "Thank you very much George."

General Kaiser then comes up to the counter, leans over and very confidentially says, "I have an urgent message to give to the FBI."

And I just as urgently leaned towards him and said, "Yes, what is it? I have been expecting it. Would you let me have it? I will make sure they get it right away."

So he gave me some garbled information. I shook him by the hands and said, "Thanks very much General. We'll see you again. Have a nice day."

And off he used to go. He was happy. I was happy. The embassy was happy.

Strange enough, for several years, we used to get these people in on Christmas Eve.

Q: Maybe the British let them out.

NEWMAN: Yes, they did. They weren't dangerous people, but a little bit weird. We could handle them diplomatically. We never got any roughnecks in.

Q: At this point, the embassy is still at No. 1. What was on the current site, on whatever side of the square we are on?

NEWMAN: On the site of the present embassy as a row of normal Victorian and Edwardian houses. One of them on the corner was owned by a very famous South African, I think. He had two missing legs. I think his name was Sir Abe Bailey. He was a very successful diamond merchant from South Africa and he owned this house.

I don't know who owned the other houses, but they were all sort of fairly well off people financially. Eventually, the land and everything was sold to the American government. A new embassy was built there. It was quite a large construction plan. For anybody who doesn't know it, it takes up almost a quarter of this big square here.

I think the original American government plan was to build a higher building, but because the land around here is owned by the Duke of Westminster, there is a height restriction on how high buildings should go. They like to keep them at about five stories high, to keep them all level. They applied this restriction to the embassy.

The embassy had to dig down three stores. Instead of having three more up high, they had to dig three down. It's a rough job because it was so wet down there. I remember when the pub was down there.

That's why the embassy is the height that it is now, which is the same height as the other buildings in the square.

Q: We are getting into the McCarthy Era now. From my notes, I saw that two of McCarthy's investigators, Mr. Cohn and Mr. Shine, actually came to the embassy.

NEWMAN: I knew that they were around. I was in a junior clerical position. They really hassled the American consular staff more than the locals. They were looking for trouble amongst the Americans, not amongst the locals. I don't think they were very welcomed by either the Americans or the British government. It was called McCarthyism, wasn't it? It was most peculiar. The Americans didn't like it in the end, did they? He was a senator and they voted him out.

I think in that same period, a very peculiar thing happened to me personally. I came to work one morning and the security officer called me into his office. He said, "Have you got anything to do with communism?"

I said, "Me?"

He said, "The funny thing is that on your desk, over the weekend, a brown envelope was found." Inside it, there was the life story of this man who had succeeded Stalin. It wasn't Khrushchev, it was another man.

I said, "I don't know what the heck it is. What are they talking about? If it was found on my desk, I wasn't there on the weekend. I don't work on the weekend. I don't know anything about it. You can check my background. I have been with the British Air Force. The American Air Force flew with us. I am very proud of America."

He said, "Okay, leave it with me."

This security man's name was Sinclair. He was a well-dressed, dapper man. He used to have all his shoes handmade in Bond Street. He was a very nice man.

He could see I was worried about it. I'm just an ordinary guy with two kids who worked here pre-war. I have had nothing to do with politics or anything like that.

I never heard another word about it. It was most peculiar.

Q: Were there other similar incidents?

NEWMAN: Not to my knowledge. They said they found this big envelope with this booklet. They didn't even show me the booklet. I asked if I could have a look, and they said, "No."

Q: In those days, anybody could have gone virtually anywhere in the embassy, is that right?

NEWMAN: That's right. Anybody could come in.

Q: There was one instance I was reading about where visas had been given to UK citizens and they were just cancelled. Everybody had to go back and get re-fingerprinted.

NEWMAN: If I remember right, a very famous British citizen, also a famous actor, Charlie Chaplin, was accused of being a communist by the McCarthy regime. Whether or not he was, I don't know. There was also a famous singer called Paul Robeson who was subjected to a bit of McCarthy fire, as it were.

We all thought it was a storm in a teacup. We couldn't believe it was happening.

Q: At this point, were you working on immigrant visas?

NEWMAN: No, I was still in the main building at No. 1 Grosvenor Square.

Q: So you didn't get involved with the visas?

NEWMAN: No. Many years later, I got involved with fingerprinting thousands of people. That was part of my job in the Visa Department. I must have fingerprinted at least 5,000 people under the old Henry System.

Q: Explain what that was.

NEWMAN: The Henry System was the American fingerprint system, which I understood at the time. I am going back many years. It had about 145 million fingerprints of Americans, foreigners, everybody. They decided that everybody should be fingerprinted, no matter who they were. It was quite a big job doing all these people and processing all the documents at the same time.

Q: Were these visitors, as well as immigrants?

NEWMAN: Yes, the visitors as well. They only stopped doing this at the insistence of Mr. Khrushchev to then President Eisenhower. The complaint from the Russians got the whole thing dropped.

I was sort of on the rough end of fingerprinting people. Some people took it nicely. Others objected, saying, "We are not criminals."

I said, "I know you're not. I had mine done as well, and I am not a criminal."

We used to talk around it. It was just one of those things, part of the job.

Now they are talking about bringing it back. They do it at the airports.

Q: To your knowledge, did anything ever turn up from these fingerprints? Did anyone come back and say, "Whoops, so-and-so can't go."

NEWMAN: To my knowledge, no. I never heard of any comeback on them. Most of them were for recording purposes only. They went forward with the part of the documents that were sent separately to the American government for filing. They might have been useful if the people had gone criminal after they got there. In the initial stages, I never knew of any bounce back on any of them.

Q: Did anybody tell you why we changed to do this and why we stopped doing it?

NEWMAN: No, its just part of the course. I remember a colleague of mine who was also taking fingerprints. He had to go down and fingerprint the whole of the Royal Ballet at Saddler's Wells. I made sure he went on that one. I was slightly senior at the time.

Q: So you didn't want to go?

NEWMAN: He found them very nice people. He must have printed about 60 of them. The whole ballet went to the States and he fingerprinted them.

Q: One thing I do want to ask about are Pea Soup Fogs.

NEWMAN: I know very much about that.

England used to be heated mostly by coal fires, coke fires. They were perhaps the general heating system in England before the hot water pipes took over and all that sort of stuff. Actually, it happened more before World War II than after. Things started to clean up a bit when they made new factories. You really could go out one day and it was literally about three or four yards thick. You couldn't hardly see buses coming along the road. It really was a pea souper, as it were. That's mostly because everybody had coal fires in England. Coal was the main energy source of the country.

Q: Did people have problems?

NEWMAN: Yes, people had chest problems. If you had a cold, you were very silly to go out in a pea souper. It was also a little bit dangerous at times. You couldn't always see the lights until they got about five yards from you. It really was thick.

It was a lot thicker than what they get in Los Angeles. What do they call that they get there?

Q: The inversions.

NEWMAN: They get a bit of stuff there.

Q: One of the things that people said was that huge numbers of people died.

NEWMAN: Yes, they did. What they now call a carbon footprint, which people didn't know much about, you used to get sort of steam coming off the River Thames in London. I used to live very near the River Thames at the time. It used to mix with this carbon stuff and it really made everything thick. Even the streetlights looked like dull glows along the road. It really was terrible. Thank goodness, it started to improve and they started to get rid of all this coal stuff.

They actually switched to a coal product called coke, which meant that they processed or steamed or boiled it or something, to get rid of a lot of the carbon stuff. What was left was called coke. It didn't give off so much of this carbon footprint stuff. It was pretty bad, that was.

Going back to the days of Sherlock Holmes, you often see in the films the mist and the fog swirling around. It really was like that.

Q: That's amazing. So, in 1954 was there a Clean Air Act?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Q: So the new factories had coke or whatever?

NEWMAN: That's right. They had to have these things on the top of the chimneys, which sort of took out the carbon footprint, as it were. White stuff used to come out, instead of black stuff. It used to come out like a white cloud, instead of a black cloud. It made a lot of difference.

Q: There was a lot of talk about the Marshall Plan.

NEWMAN: As far as I remember, with the goodwill of General Marshall, one of the famous American generals of World War One and World War Two, very friendly to England, he could see we needed help of some sort. By instigating the Marshall Plan, it meant that we got a flow of stuff that we needed. I didn't know at the time, but there was a monetary attachment to it, which there obviously was. I mean, you can't expect the Americans to pay for everything. There was plenty of stuff at the time. It was necessary to have it right then and there. It was very gratefully received.

As I said earlier, once we got a socialist government in, the American government's attitude changed. I am sure a lot of the American politicians thought we were close to

communism. That's why they changed until Churchill came back into power a few years later. Then, we were all buddies again.

Q: Churchill came back from 1951 to 1955.

We are getting up to the 1956 Suez Crisis, which was a turning point in a lot of aspects for British foreign policy. Was there much reaction here amongst the locals?

1956 Suez.

NEWMAN: Yes, I know a little bit about this. We had a gentleman on the staff, an American, who was part of the reserve fleet, the American 6th Fleet. His name was Dan; I can't remember his surname. We were quite good friends. We worked in the Visa Department. He was called up for the American 6th Fleet. Of course what happened was that the American 6th Fleet sailed right across the British fleet in the Mediterranean to block them off. People weren't too happy about it. Poor old Dan when he came back from his reserve duty. He had a bit of a bad time for a while with the Brits here. He was a good guy. We got on fine. It was just one of those things about policy. It was a good thing that it happened I think. It could have led to more slaughter.

It did stop the landings and everything, including my brother who was called up for it. He never reached the shores.

We all got back in one piece as it were. Diplomacy sort of took over, which I think is a good thing.

Q: Was the general feeling that the U.S. had overstepped its bounds?

NEWMAN: Not particularly, no. America had helped us in the war, so we trusted the Americans a great deal. If they thought that was the right thing to do, we weren't going to sort of go and occupy the White House like we did in 1814.

I think that blew over eventually. The sad thing was that the guy who was in charge of our government got sacked, Anthony Eden, poor chap.

Q: As we get into the late 1950s, what is going on work wise?

NEWMAN: The Visa and Immigration Department were doing big business all the time. It kept everybody busy. The building was split in two. We had the embassy at No. 1 Grosvenor Square and some of the consular work was still done there. Then, this big building over at the opposite end of Grosvenor Square became mostly Visa Department and other sections of the government in the building higher up.

I do know something about what was higher up. Without going into details, it was more security on those floors higher up. The public would come in and out quite easily on the lower floor, which was the Visa Department. Of course, nobody got access to the 3rd or

4th floor, where the other necessary work went on which they didn't want to advertise too much.

Q: It wasn't on this current site. Which building was it?

NEWMAN: It was on this site.

Q: So, the U.S. government had already bought the land?

NEWMAN: The U.S. government took this land on a 999-year lease. That's what they got, but they don't actually own the land.

It was designed by a very famous architect. I think he was Finnish originally, Saarinen. This building was air conditioned, but this architect wanted all the windows to be sealed to make it very efficient air conditioning. For some reason, someone in the government departments wanted the windows to be opened, if and when it was required. So it disappointed the architect, inasmuch as the air efficiency wasn't as good as he would have liked it.

Of course, it did use to get hot in here. It was nice to be able to get one of these big long windows open now and again. Of course, it destroyed the idea of complete air conditioning where you have to have sealed windows. I think Saarinen was a very disappointed man. I remember at the time, he said it was one of his failures.

Q: There used to be fountains in the lobby, right?

NEWMAN: Yes. Are they still there?

Q: No.

NEWMAN: There used to be a sort of a shallow fountain-type thing where water used to come out and play. You're right. There did used to be a fountain there.

In the main lobby, as you know, there are pictures of all the previous ambassadors and presidents. They are still there in the main lobby. They must have turned the water off.

I think when I retired in March, 1983, it was still running. They could turn the water on then. Since then, they have obviously got rid of it. It's expensive now, water.

Q: In terms of ambassadors now, we had Lewis Douglas. Then Walter Gifford replaced him in the 1950s. The Winthrop Aldrich goes up to 1961. Do you have any memories of these people?

NEWMAN: I think Lewis Douglas was the chap who used to like fishing. This poor chap was flicking his fly-type hook once and it hooked back in his eye, partly blinding him. I think that was Mr. Douglas.

Some of the ambassadors were what they called working ambassadors, and some were very wealthy. It doesn't mean that they didn't work just as well. For instance, Mr. Walter Annenberg in later years was a very rich man. He did a lot of good for the embassy. He put a lot of his money into refurbishing the embassy, carpets, and all sorts of things. He also refurbished the residence in Regent's Park, which saved the American government a lot of money.

As I say, some of these ambassadors were what they call career ambassadors, which meant they didn't have as much money as the other guys. They were all pretty good at their jobs.

Mr. Bruce was a working ambassador.

They were all very nice men, very worthy to represent their country.

One I liked was the only lady ambassador, Anne Armstrong from Texas. Do you want me to go on about her?

Q: Yes. She was ambassador 1976-1977.

NEWMAN: Anne Armstrong had a husband who used to fly in the American Air Force in Europe in the war. He used to fly Mustang fighters. I personally used to fly a British Lancaster bomber. When we were doing daylight raids, it was very nice to see these escorts of Mustang fighters of the American Air Force hovering just above us. That was a great comfort to us.

With this gentleman, I went to a reception once at the Regent's Park residence. We were introduced to Anne Armstrong, the Ambassador. We shook hands with her husband. A little later on, I was able to sort of corner him and said, "I understand you were a Mustang fighter pilot. Did you ever escort any British planes?"

Yes, he did. I was able to shake him by the hand and thank him from the bottom of my heart. "It was so nice to see you guys."

He was really delighted.

She was a very nice lady. There is a tradition at the embassy. Whenever the ambassador gets appointed by the American government, they have a special ceremony. I don't know if they still do it.

A horse and carriage are sent from Buckingham Palace to pick up the American ambassador. While they were waiting outside, the chap who was in charge of the canteen or restaurant there would go out with lumps of sugar to feed the horses, to keep them quiet. The ambassador and his wife, or in this case, Anne Armstrong and her husband,

got into this ceremonial carriage to go to the palace to have their credentials approved by the Queen. It was all very nice, very ceremonial.

Q: Did the staff go out and watch this?

NEWMAN: Oh yes. We were allowed to look out our windows.

One thing about working at the embassy was that you could always bend the rules a little bit, as long as you kept on doing your job. They are very diplomatically broad-minded. It has been nice working here.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say? You worked under Douglas, Gifford, Aldrich, Bruce, Annenberg, Richardson, Armstrong, Kingman Brewster, and John Louis. Did you work for Charlie Price?

NEWMAN: Who came after Ambassador Price?

Q: Henry Catto.

NEWMAN: I left in March 1983. John Louis was my last ambassador.

In the course of my service here, I met three presidents of the United States. When I say met them, not personally, but shook hands in the hallway.

Q: That counts.

NEWMAN: Nixon was one of them. I was quite impressed with him actually, in spite of what they say about him. He always came over as a very strong president to me.

Harry Truman, many years after he ceased being the president, came over on an unofficial visit. Everybody made a fuss of him. I can imagine he was a very strong president when he was in office. He was very pleasant, but you got the impression not to cross the line. I quite liked him. He was a small chunky man.

There were one or two other famous diplomats. Averell Harriman used to come over. There were one or two others I can't remember now. My memory is a little bit fogged these days.

Q: In 1961, Kennedy came.

NEWMAN: Yes, that was the other president.

Q: He actually came into the embassy. Do you remember?

NEWMAN: Jack Kennedy was on his way to Berlin at the time, to boost up the Germans because the Russians were playing a bit naughty, to say the least. On his way, he called at

the embassy and he actually came into the canteen area. They put a little box up for him, which he stood on, so he was about a foot higher than the rest of us.

When I first knew him, he was just another son of the then ambassador. The older son was obviously going to be groomed for stardom. Jack was the number two son. At the time, he wasn't the star of the family. As you know, he did become the president. His brother was killed in the war. He had a lot of charisma, Jack Kennedy, no doubt about it. He had a way with him.

He stood on this little thing for about five minutes and gave us a little speech. Then he said, "I remember some of you guys."

Then he came down and shook hands with us. Now, whether he did remember us or not, I don't know. It didn't matter anyway. It was very nice, the way he put it over.

Then he was on his way to Berlin, where he made the famous remark, "I am a Berliner."

Q: About this time, there was a lot of protest, a lot of anti-U.S. sentiment in the UK. How did working at the embassy affect your viewpoint?

NEWMAN: Did you have anything specific in mind?

Q: In news reports, it seemed that there were demonstrations pretty constantly.

NEWMAN: I think I know what you mean.

Q: They were nuclear. They were anti-Vietnam.

NEWMAN. Yes. There was quite a famous actress, whose father was a famous actor. What is her name?

(Offside: Jane Fonda?)

NEWMAN: No, the English actress.

Q: Vanessa Redgrave?

NEWMAN: Yes. I always remember Vanessa Redgrave. I think she led a 3,000 strong group in front of the embassy to protest, probably against – did you say atomic?

Q: Yes.

NEWMAN: What happened too, it was rather sad, because an English policeman was kicked to death.

You see, what used to happen to some of these crowds, the majority of the people used to come to make a protest in a peaceful sort of way. But you would get a few rabble-rousers, what they call Rent-a-Mob, who were really professional troublemakers, people they used to get from somewhere.

To give you an idea of what happened, the English policemen used to form a line and link hands in front of this crowd. Then the crowd would sort of surge forward and beat the heck out of the English policemen who were holding hands, you see?

Well, about the second time they did this, they got a different police superintendent in charge. I always remember that he formed his police boys up in two rows. The first row linked hands. When the crowd surged forward this time, he blew a whistle, and the guys in the back pulled truncheons and went straight through. They stopped the crowd in their tracks. After that, the British police got a tough policy going with these crowds surging forward and everything.

What happened was that one of the policemen was knocked down, somebody kicked his face, and he got killed. That was not Redgrave's fault personally; she was probably horrified. You see, these people at the top can't control some of the guys at the bottom. That's the trouble.

I remember when the Iranians occupied the American Embassy in Teheran. We used to get some Iranians in England trying to protest here. I remember one night that the Consul General came around to the staff and said, "You are all leaving about half an hour early tonight. Get the hell out of here. There are British police out back. There are about 200 mounted police."

I could see all these Iranians arriving with their bedrolls, to sleep in front of the embassy. Of course, it never happened. Half of the staff went home. The mounted police came round. From that moment on, they never allowed anybody to sleep opposite the American Embassy for demonstrations.

As you know, there is even more protection now, which sadly has to be, these days.

Q: This is about the time that the embassy started closing itself off. The library closed.

NEWMAN: The library closed. It was a bit sad really, because as I said previously, the library was very good to people. They used to give them all the help when people wanted to know about America. They used to give them free booklets and information. Some of these people used to do things, which well-mannered people shouldn't do. They used to scrawl on the walls, be abusive, and all that.

In the end, the library quite rightly and that section closed down, to the detriment of normal students. It's sad really. I got quite upset about that.

Q: Then, we are getting into the 1960s, the Swinging Sixties in London.

NEWMAN: People still needed visas to get to America. For instance, Mick Jagger used to come in for his visa. I also remember him coming here one day in a bit of a lather, because he had been to the airport and realized that his visa had expired. Of course, some of these chaps had to get what they called Working Visas, even though they were temporary.

He got a taxi from the airport and dashed up the stairs. He said he wanted a visa. I said to him, because I was on the section that day, "Could you fill a form in Mr. Jagger?"

Yes, he could. I said, "You do that and I'll get the wheels moving."

Much to my surprise, he completed this form absolutely perfectly, which rather surprised me, because one or two questions on the form were a bit awkward to answer. Anyway, I discovered afterwards that Mr. Jagger had a lot of school credentials to his name. So my opinion of him went up considerably.

I also had one of the famous Beatles in one day, Paul McCartney. He came in with the same sort of thing. He had gone to the airport. I said, "Hello Mr. McCartney."

I called him Paul actually. These guys didn't mind if you called them by their first names.

He said, "Can you help us?"

I said, "Yes. Can you fill a form in?"

"Yes. Sure."

We got him all going and all that.

There were other personalities coming in. They always had to come in personally to get a visa. I think the only person that we didn't ask to come up the stairs was a very titled wealthy lady who was rather rheumatic and arthritical. We let her sit in the car outside. She filled the form in and one of us brought it in.

We were kind of nice to people, as well as being U.S. government diplomatic. I was always given to understand that we were the front line, no matter what America was about. We were supposed to be nice to people generally, if we could. You know, give a good impression of the U.S.

Q: Exactly.

NEWMAN: We were all trying to do that. I hope I speak on behalf of everybody. I certainly tried. I was being paid good money to do my job. If that's the way my bosses wanted it that was fine. I had no objection to that.

Q: What about the Royal Family?

NEWMAN: Their passports used to come in through messenger. We couldn't ask the Queen and the Duke to come in. We had a very well dressed gentleman come into reception one day with his passport. He didn't hand it to me. He sat down quite quietly. He had been there maybe 20 minutes or half an hour. I was still on reception at the counter. He approached me and asked, "Could I ask you a question, old chap?"

"Yes sir, certainly you can."

He said, "Do you think my passport has been delayed? I have seen one or two other people come and go."

I said, "I'll be glad to check it out for you, if you would like to give me your name sir."

He said, "Well, I'm the Duke of Norfolk."

I said, "Hang on a minute sir."

I shot straight into the Consul in charge and said, "You've got the Queen's cousin outside."

She said, "Right, find it, pull it out and get it ready!"

Do you know, that man was so nice? He didn't thump the desk. He didn't make any protest. He just asked quietly, and we quietly took him out and fixed him up.

That's the nearest we got to the Queen.

Q: I imagine she goes with diplomatic and it's all done.

NEWMAN: We used to get another man coming in called Lord Montague. This guy is still alive. He owns a lot of the south part of the country. He's got a famous car museum at a place called Beaulieu in the New Forest in England. When he was a young man, he used to come tearing up the stairs.

With all these sort of the old-type English aristocrats, we never found them awkward. They were ever so nice. The said yes, thank you, and please. I was quite upset when the House of Lords went from people who were born into it. All the people I met were very nice to deal with. I'm not saying the new Lords are not nice, but the old boys and the old girls were very nice.

Q: We want to stop soon, is there anything else you'd like to add?

NEWMAN: I remember when the Belgian Congo started to fall apart. The African chap, I think his name was Patrice Lumumba, appeared in London. I think he was on his way to

the States. For some reason, he had to come to the embassy. In tow with him was his white lady friend, which rather surprised everybody. He wasn't out of Africa that long, so where she came from nobody knew.

I don't know whether he ever got to the States, but he had to call at the embassy for something. At the time, they thought he was the new leader of the Belgian Congo. He must have fallen afoul of somebody because he got killed later on, when he got back. I remember him coming in and this white lady with him, I was rather surprised.

Q: Did she need a visa too?

NEWMAN: We didn't know who she was at the time.

I think I've told you that Henry Kissinger came in earlier. He was a refugee from Germany. He actually came to the old visa department at No. 1 Grosvenor Square. In those days, it was a big and chaotic, because we hadn't got filing cabinets. We had trestle-type tables, and all the files were loosely spread across them. They were in some sort of order, but there were no cabinets or anything. We were a bit inundated, because a lot of people were trying to get out of Germany and Austria before Hitler actually got there.

I presume Mr. Kissinger was Jewish, I am not sure, but I think he was. He was one of the refugees over there. As you know, he became Secretary of State later on. He was a great man with the ladies, so they tell me. He had a gravel voice.

One thing I would like to mention is when the Hungarian Revolution happened; I believe it was around 1956, for a while it went well, for a few days. Then the Russians came in with their tanks. A lot of young people managed to get to England. I remember a whole bunch of them coming into the embassy for help.

Of course, we couldn't really help them. We couldn't give them a visa or anything. I felt so sorry for these young men and women. They had been under the commies. They had a rough time. I think they felt a little let down about the U.S. and probably England.

It had really come to a crunch. Could we send in tanks and things? It could start the Third World War. It was difficult.

I did feel sorry for these Hungarian people who came in. I think most of them stayed in England.

Another good thing that happened – talking about good and bad things that happened between the British and the Americans – I remember a lot of American citizens would come over to England on trips on these very cheap flights. I remember one weekend I got to work and there were about 200-300 Americans sitting on the front steps. Apparently, the company that should have flown them back had gone into liquidation. So, there were all these poor kids here.

Do you know what happened? The British government chartered a plane for them and sent them back.

Q: The U.S. didn't?

NEWMAN: The British did it. They chartered a plane for them and sent them back. I think most of the Americans later on sent a bit of money back. At the time, the British government chartered a plane for them and sent these kids back.

Q: If the airline company was British, I could see that they would have done that.

NEWMAN: I think that happened twice actually, but I am not sure. It certainly happened once. I think it did happen once again.

In other words, these Americans were pretty well penniless, because they expected to be back in the States, and they were still here three weeks later. Of course, they could get help from the embassy. We used to have a department here that would advance funds. I think the embassy used to get in touch with the parents or people that knew them in the States to see if they could advance any money. If they didn't, I think they still got help from the U.S. government, which they paid back later on. Most of them did pay back later on.

I always remember this plane that got chartered by the British to send these kids back. It was rather a nice gesture, I thought as an Englishman.

Q: I think we'll stop here.

It is March 5th, 2008. This is interview number three with former Foreign Service National John Newsman. This is Anne Cary doing the interviewing. We are in the John Adams Room at the U.S. Embassy.

I would like to go back a little bit from where we were, which was really into the 1960s. We had gone through some of the issues and some of the start of the protests that were going on. We had come up to some of the big events of the 1960s. Before we get into the embassy stuff, there was the Profumo Scandal, the Great Train Robbery. Can you talk a little bit at this point about what the mood was?

NEWMAN: The Profumo Scandal was sad, really. This man Profumo was quite a good minister in the Conservative government, with a very nice wife, an actress called Valerie – I have forgotten what her name was (Hobson). They were very nice.

Then he got involved with these call girls who were quite attractive. The whole thing was quite sad. The man was honorable enough to resign from his government post, which he should have done. The only thing in his favor was that many years afterwards, in order to

make up, he got involved with various charities helping people who needed help. He did sort of recoup his honor to a certain extent.

He was really quite a decent man. These call girls were very attractive.

Q: So, was Macmillan Prime Minister?

NEWMAN: Macmillan was Prime Minister. Macmillan was what I would call a stopgap Prime Minister. He never fluffed on answering questions, but kind of smoothed everything out. It is very difficult to describe. He was possibly like President Reagan. He was a good administrator. He delegated. He did a good job.

Q: Was there a sense that things were going pretty well in England at that point?

NEWMAN: Yes, they were pretty good. The war was over and people were beginning to work more. Food was back in the markets. People were beginning to buy property. I would say that period was ticking over nicely. It was pretty good.

Q: At the embassy, had you moved over? When did you switch from doing the customs stuff to the visa department? Was it in the early or late 1960s?

NEWMAN: Let me think. I came back in 1947. It was probably in the 1953-1954 period. U.S. Customs decided in their wisdom and glory to get rid of some consular documentation, which was involved in shipments from foreign shippers from abroad. It was quite a good idea at the time. I think when the U.S. Customs abandoned the idea of having them, the owners were supposed to provide the same sort of information without consular approval. So, at the time, I lost my job.

The other part of the embassy in consular that was expanding was the Visa and Immigration Department.

Q: Did you actually have to inspect shipments? Or did you see documents that approved what was in the shipments?

NEWMAN: I only had to help in the documentation side of it. There was a working relationship with some of the shippers. Anything we wanted to know, they were quite happy to come up with because at that time they were trying to build up dollars. England was a bit down in the dumps financially. It was good to have a country like America where they could sell their stuff and get good payment in return in the form of dollars. This was very much required in those days.

Q: Because British industry was just again becoming dynamic, what were they shipping?

NEWMAN: One thing they were always shipping was antiques. We used to get Americans coming over. If you know Americans like I do, they are always interested in

antiques and so am I. I am an antiquer. Antiques had to be over 100 years old, with authentication.

There was a lot of industry in England making materials from woolen things. Most of that market now is shipped over to the oriental side of the world. England had a very good reputation for producing quality goods. For instance, Scotland used to produce these tartans from wool on these special machines. All the Scottish workers, mostly ladies, were very skilled. In the Midlands of England, they were also producing stuff made of materials that you can only get now from India and China. It had a good quality.

Q: So this is fabrics and things like that?

NEWMAN: Yes, fabrics. The way they used to work out how much duty was due was how many threads to the square inch, and all that sort of business. I can't quite remember, but it was all laid down in the regulations.

Q: When it switched over, did the U.S. decide that they could fill out their own forms?

NEWMAN: They decided they didn't need personnel to check everything out. I presume the shippers built up a good reputation with U.S. Customs and Immigration. They just took their word. They knew what to do and what information to give. Occasionally, they would come in and ask for a little bit of help. Generally, they just carried on.

Q: So then, your position disappeared?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Q: Did you have to make a decision?

NEWMAN: There were really four male clerks, two seniors and two juniors. I was one of the juniors. I think quite rightly they should have kept the senior men on in their positions. They were very skilled chaps. They had been very helpful to us two juniors. They knew what they were doing. It was to the benefit of the consular people of the time to keep these chaps on. They weren't too old. They still had a few years left to give their best.

Therefore, the other junior clerk and myself were offered a position in the rapidly expanding Visa Department, which was in another building. It was a question of, if you don't go, you are out. So, as I say, that was okay.

The only thing we both objected to, as much as we could, was that the grade of the jobs we were going to was about two grades lower than the jobs we had. That wasn't a very good outlook. In actual fact, it worked out that it took about five years before we reached the higher grade again, by which time we had learned a lot about visa work and immigration work.

It wasn't so bad. It was interesting work in the Immigration Department.

Q: Were you paid in pounds?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Q: Were the salaries and benefits comparable to what you would have gotten if you had gone someplace else?

NEWMAN: The salaries were comparable with outside jobs. Every year, to give the embassy its due, they used to do a review with companies in the local workplaces. After the review, they brought it in line with what was being paid outside. The beauty about this was that in our later years I managed to get comparable wages with managerial positions, which really increased my salary quite a lot. Overall, as the years went by, I was pretty happy.

I worked with nice people, I must say.

Q: Now we are here in the Consular Section. What were your beginning duties?

NEWMAN: When my friend and I moved over the to the expanding Visa and Immigration branch, our first duties were heavily in the filing and records department. Really in a way it was kind of dull. In retrospect, it was a good grounding for us because we were able to look at some of these files and records and could see how the whole system worked; how some of the consular officers make their decisions; how some people were able to qualify for visas and some not. It was kind of interesting in a way. It put me many years later in good stead.

You should really learn everything about a job in the department you are in from the bottom to the top. I would say that the file room was the bottom, although there was nothing wrong with the people in there. Someone had to do the work. We weren't computerized in those days. It was purely physical work, with files, records, paperwork, everything. We got by for a few years.

Q: Who was the Consul General at the time?

NEWMAN: The Consul General at the time was a Mr. Glen Abbey. He was a chap who made it very clear that we either got on with the job or we got out. He was quite a nice man really. I think he took the right decision. He caught out two mutineers on the team, so over we went.

The man was actually in charge of the expanding Immigration and Visa Branch was Mr. Norman Redden, a very competent man. Many years later I understood he rewrote a lot of the U.S. immigration and visa policies for the State Department. He was very nice to us. I think he understood we weren't too happy about taking a job two grades lower. His hands were tied, like ours were, to a certain extent.

Q: How long did the Consul General stay?

NEWMAN: The Consul General could stay anywhere from two to four years normally.

Q: Was it about the same for the consuls?

NEWMAN: It was about the same for the consuls.

Going back a few years, my very first boss was a consul and attaché. He stayed at the post for 19 years, which was very unusual. He got very well known in very good circles in England. He knew all the right people, all the lords and ladies, all the prime ministers, all the everybody.

He was from Buffalo, New York. In his youth, he had been a boxer, and so he had a broken nose. He was a very smart man. He always wore a carnation when he came to work. He always made sure that us on the staff arrived before nine o'clock and set up all the documentation. When he arrived at 9:20, it was ready for his signature. He was a very competent gentleman, whom no one would argue with. He was very pleasant, very nice. He was a good Irish American.

Q: At this point, have you moved into the new building?

NEWMAN: Yes.

Q: So this is the 1960s. One of the things going on was the start of protests. We talked already a little bit about the anti-bomb protests. In the embassy, they switched a lot.

You had Rhodesia. I know there were issues with Rhodesia and the USA.

NEWMAN: It was a pretty sad moment about Rhodesia. The prime minister there was a man called Ian Smith, who had been a fighter pilot in World War Two, one of the best. He was very pro-British. A lot of the British forces had trained there for flying duties, etcetera. They had a really good army going in Rhodesia, mostly white personnel.

You see, the world was beginning to change. I think a lot of people got the impression that the colored population there were being oppressed, which was not quite true. A lot of the white overseers there treated their employees very well and had everything organized very well. Money was flowing into Rhodesia.

Then along come the people of the present day, occupiers of Zimbabwe as they now call it, who have completely ruined the country, in my opinion. If they had kept the original white overseers and then trained some of the colored people as managers and things, they would have a lot better system, rather than just kicking the whites into one corner and taking over. They weren't competent enough, the militants, to take over the country. In my opinion, that's why it's in such a mess now. That's only my opinion.

Q: Did you have people coming? Was this the start of the whites leaving Rhodesia? Was there a backlash against them?

NEWMAN: Everything went into suspension. I don't know how to describe it. Nobody knew how this was all going to work out.

Q: In terms of the embassy, did it have any real impact?

NEWMAN: I don't think the embassy became involved in any problems. The Americans didn't seem to give any opinion on this. They left it entirely between the British government and the government of Rhodesia at the time, and what I call the militants.

Q: Let's talk more about the visa thing.

NEWMAN: Part of the Visa Branch was in the main embassy building. That was of a time when I was working in the U.S. Shipping and Customs Departments. For a while, the Visa Department was expanding all the time, probably more than any other department in the embassy and consular. We had to move into what used to be a U.S. Navy building on a big main road up here, known as Oxford Street. We had to set up office and work there.

Q: Is that where people had to come?

NEWMAN: An interesting thing happened while we were in this building. We used to get immigration applicants coming in. The quarters there were a little bit cramped, but everybody coped. My friend and I were in our lunch period one day between one and two o'clock. We were just munching our sandwiches quietly. All of a sudden, we heard a lady in distress, shouting her head off, "My baby! My baby! Where is my baby?"

So we went out to see what we could do to help her. Apparently, this lady had gone into the ladies' toilet, which was next door to where we were, and the child had completely disappeared. We were a bit flummoxed first of all. We had a good look round in this ladies' toilet. Right in the corner, we found a very, very narrow airshaft, which nobody had realized, was there, on the floor underneath the sinks.

We knew where this shaft went. It went into a shop below, a furniture shop. As we went into this shop, the poor manager down there came out holding a little baby in his arms. He was shaking and white, this poor chap. The baby was completely unharmed. It had gone straight down this airshaft. It had shot out and landed on the sofa, instead of hitting the floor. Everything worked out. The embassy wasn't sued after all.

Q: How long were you in that building?

NEWMAN: We were in that building two to three years, until they finished completing the erection of the new U.S. Embassy at the opposite end of Grosvenor Square to the old embassy.

Q: Was this on Oxford Street?

NEWMAN: On Oxford Street, opposite Selfridges, the big store that was started by an American called Gordon Selfridge many years ago.

Q: Who wanted to go to the United States at this point? Was it increasing, decreasing, or about the same? What was going on?

NEWMAN: A lot of people wanted to go to the United States. Obviously, the wages were much better than in England. There had been a lot of rationing of food and stuff in England, even up to ten years after the war, whereas that didn't happen in the United States. There were a lot of people known as GI Brides, who had married Americans. They obviously wanted to go and join their husbands in America.

There were certain specialized people such as nurses, doctors. Some of the doctors had special categories, where they didn't even need to apply for a work permit, if they were what they called 'head and shoulders' over their contemporaries. To give you an example of that, there was one professor who produced babies from a test tube. His name eludes me for the moment, but he is very famous. Of course, this guy could walk into any job he wanted in the States.

There were other famous doctors, cancer specialists and other people of such nature, who qualified. Ministers of religion who went across. They had to prove they had been a proper minister of religion for at least two years in their faith. It was part of our job to check on this information. They didn't want the people called Gospel Bashers. They didn't qualify. They had to be proper ordained ministers who had been in practice for a while. They got special permits to go and work in America.

I would say a lot of people just wanted to better themselves. There were certain jobs going over there that were required in America. American immigration law made special provisions, from what I can remember, for certain types of people they wanted who were in short supply.

Q: So, is this pre-1968 when we still had the remnants of national origins, where if you were British, you could basically go?

NEWMAN: That's right. If you were British and English, you didn't have much trouble to go. The quota allowed was quite large. Eventually, this was changed.

Q: If I remember the law actually switched and they got rid of the national origin, which made it more difficult for the English, the Germans, the people who had been the main

immigrants to the United States, pre-1900, but it loosened it somewhat for others put in the special categories.

NEWMAN: I remember that some of the Indians who had come in, some were very professional some of them, surgeons and things. It made it a little bit easier for them to qualify for jobs in America. It was a bit tough on the English, Germans, and other people, unless they were highly skilled. All-American America.

Q: So we are talking late 1960s now, and the brain drain. There was a lot in the UK press about the fact that the UK was losing so many qualified people to the United States. Yet, the United States seemed to be doing nothing to discourage it.

NEWMAN: A lot of the people who qualified under these circumstances were English nurses. English nurses used to do a three-year course in England and they were qualified as SRNs (Senior Registered Nurses). All these girls, once they qualified, were pretty good nurses. There was a big demand for these girls to go to the States. Of course, they were happy to apply and go, because they got bigger wages, probably better hours and conditions. We lost a lot of good nurses that way.

Q: This is also the time the anti-Vietnam War stuff was happening. In 1967, shots were fired at the embassy. The embassy was machine gunned by a Latin American group.

NEWMAN: It's true. The visa arrangements were at one end of Grosvenor Square and the main embassy was still in the same building but on a different floor. We were on the ground floor. Any flak that came, we were going to get it first.

A car came past and somebody had a machine gun in it. It did pop and spatter the embassy and our door. I don't know if the marks are still there, but it came through the door. Some of the bullets left marks on the wall.

Nobody actually got hurt, because the car never stopped and went on its way.

We also had a smoke bomb thrown in our door once, but nobody got hurt.

We did have threats through the post. The British police usually took care of that. They knew who made it and went and made the arrests. Nobody actually got hurt, although we were threatened.

Once, on a Sunday duty, one of our maintenance staff was in a little public house where you could buy beer and sandwiches, just behind Grosvenor Square. The building on that end of the square was owned by the Israelis. I think a lot of the Israeli aircrew used to lunch there between flights.

One day, I presume it was Arab militants, came past, shooting a machine gun at all the buildings in that area. Unfortunately, one of our maintenance workers, just sitting quietly, minding his own business in this pub, got a bullet in his arm. It just hit through the

window. He had nothing to do with it. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. We think they were Arab militants.

Q: Do you remember people handing in draft cards?

NEWMAN: There was a period when American citizens appeared to hand in their draft cards. They obviously didn't want to get called up for Vietnam or whatever service the Americans had in those days. There was a lot of anti feeling about that then, especially by the Americans. I think there was a British contingent there as well.

I think people in England are told what to do and they do it. We don't have quite so many protests. We're not quite so democratic as we should be.

Possibly this had something to do with an incident that happened in our waiting room with the so-called Flower People, who were exclusively American. These really were delightful people, the ones that I met. They were protesters against whatever they were protesting against, but they did it without any violence or anything. They just handed people a flower and said, "We are not happy about the way things are. Please have a flower."

These people used to lie on the floor and made a bit of a nuisance. We had to carry them out. Most of them made sure they were pretty heavy, but they were quite delightful to deal with. We all went home with a flower in our hand, which wasn't too bad.

That was probably some of the protests against the drafting arrangements in America.

Q: I am sure it was. I have one incident here in October 1967 where 47 people were arrested outside here. Then following that is the Chicago Democratic convention in the United States, so there were demonstrations in front of the embassy here in August 1968. This was when Gene McCarthy and Hubert Humphrey were competing. A British MP who had been in Chicago to watch what was going on was beaten by the Chicago police. She was there with the McCarthy delegates.

NEWMAN: I don't remember much about that. Over the years, there have been lots of arrests outside of the embassy, lots of demonstrations. The trouble was that some of these demonstrators were professionally organized by people. We understand that you could have what they called Rent-A-Mob, which was about a dozen or 20 of these people who used to go on the front lawn, throw rocks, and make a real nuisance. Probably the other people behind the protest were quite peaceful.

One of the people that used to be in charge of these organizations was a very famous film star. The lady is still alive to this day.

Q: Vanessa Redgrave?

NEWMAN: Yes, she herself was making a genuine protest. Unfortunately, on this particular day, I remember well a British policeman got killed. Somebody in the crowd hit him too hard or something, and the poor chap died.

Mind you, there was a little bit of retribution soon after that. I also remember that when these people in the mob used to be on the opposite side of the road from the embassy, they used to come across en masse. All the poor police at one time formed a line and held hands. These poor chaps used to get beaten about by these protestors.

About the next time this happened, they put a new police commander in charge. This chap formed his men in two lines instead of one line. The guys in the back line had batons ready. When they had one of these charges again, he shouted his orders. The first line just disappeared. The front line went in, no questions asked, batons used, and the crowd behaved themselves. After that, it seemed to quiet down. This is hardly democracy in one sense, but it worked.

As a matter of fact, in the mews behind the embassy building, there used to be from 150 to 200 mounted police in case they were needed, in case things got out of hand. They were very seldom used, but they were there.

Q: The pound devalued, then decimalization, the Common Market even though France vetoed British entry a couple of times. There has really been a sea change. What was going on?

NEWMAN: When the pound devalued, it was four dollars to the pound once upon a time. All of a sudden, under a Labour politician in England called Sir Stafford Cripps, overnight he devalued it to USD$2.39 to the pound. People in England weren't very happy about that, because it affected shipping and everything.

What was the other thing you mentioned?

Q: The EEC, but I would like to talk about the devaluation.

Did you have this sense that people you were working with, the Americans were paid in dollars and so everything had shifted.

NEWMAN: I think for a while the local staff here was paid in dollars. Then they switched it to sterling payments.

Q: Do you remember when this happened? When you started out, you were paid in dollars?

NEWMAN: We were paid in dollar checks, which we cashed. We used to go around to the Chase National Bank in another building in the next square to change it. Eventually, the United States decided to pay us in sterling, because the pound was devalued. It was a very successful move. It saved a lot of money for the American government.

Q: How did it feel?

NEWMAN: It was okay because we got the equivalent in sterling. There were no ill feelings about it.

Q: At that point, were pensions and everything paid in dollars?

NEWMAN: I was on the State Department pension scheme. They always had to pay in dollars the equivalent of the English rates of employment. This worked very well for me personally because they had to pay more dollars in to match my sterling salary. In a way, that paid off for me personally.

Q: So, this didn't really affect you.

NEWMAN: It didn't affect too many people.

What did affect us was when the whole system became what they called computerized. Instead of us getting direct checks for payment, whether in dollars or sterling, they decided to computerize everything and put the main computer service in Paris. This meant that because of the processing, which didn't seem very efficient to me, that we were paid two weeks later than we were before. This in effect meant that instead of us receiving a fortnightly check, as each fortnightly period went by, we had to accept waiting a fortnight before we got our money. Eventually, it built up that we were a month behind with our money. That didn't go down too well, but we couldn't do much about it.

Q: So the first month you worked for the U.S. government, you didn't get paid. That was in the early 1970s if I remember.

NEWMAN: It did mean that there was always money in hand for you when you came to retirement. You had a little bit more than you would have had.

Q: In the 1970s big things are happening: the Concorde flew to the west, British troops occupying Northern Ireland, then the troubles came here. Did it have an impact for the embassy and as a Brit living in London?

NEWMAN: When the troubles in Ireland first started, the British troops were welcomed with open arms by a lot of the people there to get everything stabilized. Like a lot of these things, it got out of hand. The British troops began to be hated. What was happening was they obviously had to defend themselves against attacks, and in doing so they hurt a lot of Irish people. Some got killed. So things didn't go too well. A big divide took place.

The Protestants in Northern Ireland welcomed the British troops there. The Catholics didn't. Some of these Catholics were very militant. The result was they were putting bombs here and there, even in England. They even tried to blow up the British parliament, including Mrs. Thatcher, when she was at a conference at a town called

Brighton in southern England. Four or five people got killed there, and others were injured. They missed the prime minister, Mrs. Thatcher. So the troubles went on and on.

In my opinion, and only in my opinion, I think the troubles only really started to get better when the United States government and the British government got real friendly about all this. I think the American government looked hard at some of the Irish supporters in America as to what they were giving to the rebels in Ireland. Things started to get a little bit better. America wanted the cooperation of the British on other projects in the world, which they got. Then things started to get better.

I think America influenced a lot of the Irish people that now is the time to call it off. I think that's what they did.

Q: Were you ever affected by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) bombings in London?

NEWMAN: No, not really affected. I personally had a soft spot for the Irish. I get on well with Irish nationals. I remember during World War Two the Republic of Ireland was not involved in the war, but a lot of their people came over to join our army to help us. I found them fine people, nice people. As long as I steered clear of religion.

I am not a religious man myself. A lot of trouble in the world is caused through religion. There, you have the Catholics against the Protestants. Well I don't know. Who knows? Maybe that was it.

I personally never had any problem with Irish people, even when they were possibly suspected of being sympathizers. I could generally talk to people about things without coming to fisticuffs. The Irish could be good friends, which I was to them.

Q: This is the first major rise of terrorism. You had not only the IRA, you had this huge increase in highjackings throughout the world, which included the Israeli planes in Kampala and one that ended up coming here to Heathrow. This was in 1970. There were four planes high jacked in one day. One was in Cairo, two were in Jordan, and one came to Heathrow with hostages on board. Two of the terrorists were arrested here in the UK.

NEWMAN: I think most of the highjacking came possibly from people of Arab origin. Once again, it had something to do with religion. I don't know why people have to kill other people and highjack to make a point.

Q: Was there a change in immigration policies? This was one of the first times we started keeping a watch list.

NEWMAN: I think whenever we got visa applications from Arabs, their documentation was given a special going over, especially where they were from and everything. I think this was right. You don't know who you are dealing with. Nine out of ten are quite nice people, but you get the tenth, and you've just got to watch out. It seems that it's based on religion again. I can't understand Muslim law, because some of them are very friendly

and gentle. Other people interpret it as being vicious. It's a mystery to me, the Islamic religion.

Q: At this particular juncture, I am talking the early 1970s, you have the troubles in Ireland, the IRA, the PLO (People's Liberation Army) blowing up people. You are getting up to the oil embargo. Major changes in the way the world shifted. You've got the economic switch; the devaluation of the pound; dropping pounds, shillings and pence and going to decimalization, and a change in the UK's role in the world.

NEWMAN: The UK gradually after World War Two was sliding, not exactly into oblivion, but we had lost a lot of the countries that had been known as the Empire. We switched into what is known as the Commonwealth. We still supported those countries, and they supported us, but on a man-to-man basis. We were no longer the lord and master, as it were. Mind you, there's not too much bad about that sometimes. We were treated quite nicely. Some of the countries in the Commonwealth that got their own governments, didn't get treated so well as when the British were in charge.

As you say, a lot of things were changing in the world. We were no longer the power that we were. The Empire as such was breaking up. It was not a bad thing. People want to govern their own territories. The way they do it is what we thought we were doing on a friendly basis. I think it still is.

Take India for instance. We are very friendly with India. They are very friendly with us. They are increasing their production and have become a world power. We are still good friends with them, which is much better than hacking at each other and keep disagreeing with each other.

Definitely, the British Empire broke up. There is no doubt about it.

I remember when I was a little boy at school on what they called Empire Day in May each year, maybe May 24th, I was proud to stand up and sing songs about the empire and everything. That is no longer the case.

A lot of these people from these countries have now come to live in England. They are now citizens like the rest of us here.

Q: I want to talk about the number of immigrants coming in from Commonwealth countries had to affect the visa processing, because people would come here and might want to visit the United States and the Caribbean. Did that change the way you all did work? Was there a gradual change? Or was it all of a sudden you had lots of people you hadn't had before that you had to process?

NEWMAN: Looking back, I think it was just a gradual change. America has always welcomed foreign nationals, providing they were there for a genuine purpose. Nobody objected to them having visitor's visas. The only thing was when people in my day got a visitor's visa, they had to get proof of funds, proof of where they were going, and proof

of when they intended to come back with details of their shipping arrangements. So they just didn't want people to hand there.

Mind you, U.S. Immigration was pretty strict too, because if they got anybody that did slip in under the rules, they would be on the next plane back. They were pretty hard men and women, these U.S. Immigration officials.

I have actually been through some of the American ports myself. I was going through San Francisco once. Right in front of me was a group of four English musicians who I actually knew, because I happened to help issue their visas the day before in London. The U.S. immigration officer turned around to me, being a senior English citizen, and said, "Do you know these guys?"

I said, "Yes, I do."

He said, "Okay. Through you go boys."

So I did those talents a good turn.

There was another occasion when I was going through the States where there was a big colored immigration officer. It must have been near his tea time or going off duty. Boy, was he giving everyone a hard time on the plane I was on. The little forms had to be filled in, which I knew all about. They were a little bit tricky. I think nearly everybody in front on me in the line I was in, this immigration guy was making them go over and refill them. Then he got to me and I was okay. He grumbled a bit to me. I just said, "Look, do you mind if I go over to these guys you sent over there and give them a hand?"

He said, "No, go ahead."

So I went over and helped them fill in the form, and through we went. U.S. Immigration can be pretty hard on people. I understand and I agree to a certain extent.

If you arrive without legal documents or none at all, you should be on the next plane back home. They are quite fair.

Q: In terms of the job, did things keep getting better? You started dealing with different types of issues.

NEWMAN: Just to go back a little bit: after I did about a five-year stint in the file and records office, I began to move through the office on other duties. This still included a lot of paperwork and the study of regulations, etcetera. Then I was posted to the outside area, which was the waiting room to check documents that come in, to apply what I knew about the regulations, to help people fill their forms in, and be of general help. After all, we were the front line of America. My boss had always told me, "You are there to give a good impression of America."

I agree with that, and so we did. It became very interesting. In the days I was out there, everyone had to appear in person for a visitor's visa, including famous people: actresses, not lords and ladies or royalty, but normal people who were going up the list in the world and famous people. We treated them all the same. They were quite happy. We processed them pretty quickly. It was kind of an interesting job in that period.

I was learning more and more about people. I remember a chap came in one day and we had to ask him if he had sufficient funds. So this young man, he was going on a business trip, he pulled out of his pocket what looked like a string of credit cards. It must have been about a yard long. Me, being a bit official, I said, "That doesn't mean anything." We parted good friends. He was a genuine businessman. I had never seen so many credit cards come out of one wallet.

It was quite good fun. We gave general information about immigration. A lot of people who came in you had to give a hand. For instance, I am not picking on anyone but we had a lot of Jamaican people apply. They were not terribly well educated and were a bit bemused by the forms. I was glad to give them a hand here and there.

Sometimes you couldn't always understand what people were saying because of their dialect. Strangely enough, I learned how to lip read people. By lip reading, I could understand what they were saying. That was another thing I learned how to do. Do you believe it? It was quite an enjoyable time we had out there.

I always remember the famous singer Tom Jones coming in. He was completely unknown at the time. He came in with his agent. I didn't even know him at the time. This big tall fellow all dressed in black. They stood in the corner and looked to me like a gypsy. He never said a word. The agent did all the talking. This guy went on to become a very famous singer, playing at Las Vegas and so on.

Q: I think he still does.

NEWMAN: He is a Welshman and the Welsh have always been known for their good voices. And he still does.

Q: What was your next job?

NEWMAN: After I had been on the reception for some time, I was switched into interior work, mainly to do with the immigration documentation.

What had happened was there were two other people at a similar level to myself. One was ill, in fact he died, the poor chap. Another lady was due for retirement, so she had gone. There was a gap left at the top of the department handling immigration documentation. I had already completed a visa course by this time, which I passed without too much trouble. When this job became vacant, I thought it was time I made a move.

So I went to see the Consul General and I said, "You know, this job is going to become open over here in a couple of days when this lady goes. How about it?"

He said, "Do you think you are qualified?"

I said, "I know I am."

He got in touch with personnel, which is now known as human resources, and sure enough they confirmed my documentation. I was qualified for this and qualified for that. So I got the job.

Much to my surprise, it gave me a two-grade promotion jump. In fact, I was so surprised I rechecked it all out with human resources as they are called now to make sure they hadn't made a mistake. The jump in salary was terrific. They confirmed everything and I took on the job. I had three teams working under me. I was the senior FSN in that branch. That's where I finished up eventually.

Q: Who was the Consul General at that time, do you remember?

NEWMAN: I can't remember his name, but it was a wise man. I always remember that some of the staff got a little sloppy in their dress. That included both the males and the females. I am not talking about American citizens; they always turned up smart with ties and everything. Some of the staff that worked in the office got a little sloppy in their dress. I always remember this Consul General. He sent a memorandum around saying that very shortly the annual pay review would take place. If anyone arrived not properly dressed, they would not even be considered.

That did the trick. I wish I could remember his name.

We had another Consul General or it may have been the same man. He was well liked, this man. When it came to the embassy party each year, he would always take the lead dance on the floor. He would pick out a female member and start the whole ball rolling.

The sad thing about this man was that when he got sent back to the States when he finished his time, while he was living in Washington, he got attacked by somebody and got beaten up. We were all sad about that because he really was a nice man. I wish I could remember his name, but I can't.

He was a wise old bird. I say wise old bird: he was about the same age as me at the time. At the time, I wasn't the age I am now.

That's what he did. He was very clever about that business about dress improvement. He also got things going in a nice way. He really was a nice man.

Part of my job, although I was in charge of the three teams processing immigration, from time to time I was called into the office of the consul in charge of the immigration unit. I

had to sit by his side to listen to some of the people applying for special types of visas. I think I have already mentioned some of this before.

Some of these doctors and surgeons who were really top class people, they had to give proof in their documentation of who they were and everything. My boss liked me to sit in because of my local knowledge to make sure all the stuff was authentic. I pretty well knew what I was doing with documentation from doctors and surgeons, as I was when it came to ministers of religion.

Sometimes I had to sit in with the boss and listen to what they were saying. He used to ask me for my comments. That was quite interesting for me.

On other occasions, I got called in. I think I mentioned the oil companies with all their personnel in the Middle East had to sometimes send their personnel to America. In order to qualify for visas, they had to get special police certificates and clearance. If we went through the normal U.S. government processing, it took so long. These chaps used to say, "What do you want?"

This was in front of the consul. I was taking notes about all this. They would say, "What do you want?"

I would say, "This has to be a certain type of police blah, blah, blah."

"Right."

Two days later, it used to arrive. These oil companies had so much influence it was amazing. The people were good people. They were genuine people. They sure had some influence in the Middle East.

Q: While you were adjudicating or examining these cases, were there any obvious frauds? Were there people who were trying to pull the wool over your eyes?

NEWMAN: The only people that tried to pull the wool over our eyes were some of the religious people, some of these so-called ministers. They were not fully ordained. They were people who used to go on street corners and slap hands. They weren't really fully ordained ministers.

The only time I did have to check on a Roman Catholic minister, although I had no problem with this myself, but one of the female members of the staff working with me said, "I think there is something funny about this chap. There is something wrong about his approach."

I said, "Well I can't see any problem with him. He's got his credentials here. Nevertheless, tell you what I'll do."

Just around near the embassy was a Roman Catholic Church. I knew they had a monsignor there, who was a very high-ranking Catholic Church man. I went around with my embassy pass and details of this chap. I asked to see one of either the monsignor or one of the higher priests there. I said, "Would you do me a favor?"

I identified myself with my pass. I said, "We've got a chap called So-and-So. He is supposed to be the minister of This, That and the Other. Is there any way you can tell me if this is the chap?"

They said, "Yes, if you would like to wait just a few minutes, we'll be glad to help you."

Sure enough, they checked and this guy was completely genuine. So I went back and the chap had his visa in two days.

I pretty well knew what I was doing. Just because one member of the staff got a little bit worried about this guy's looks or something – I don't know, he looked all right to me, but then I'm not a woman.

Q: Well, there are all sorts of things that can set up.

Were things computerized yet, at this point?

NEWMAN: Let me think. I have been retired 25 years and it happened two years before that. I retired in March 1983. It must have been about 1980.

I retired from the embassy in March 1983. From memory, I think the computerization of all the embassy documents, etcetera, started to take place about 1980. A system that was involved at the time was called the Wang system. I don't think it's used now.

We had a team of experts come across from Washington. They had already started this system in the consulate in Manila. These chaps came over from Washington. They decided that it was time that London got cracking on this. They started to train the staff, including myself, which was quite interesting. We were all a little bit apprehensive on it.

Up to then, we had paper files and records. It really was a big job transferring. We had an awful lot of records and paperwork in the building. They brought in a special team of personnel. I think they were all English and they were all ladies who were very fast on computers. They had the job, with our help, of converting all our files and records onto the computer system.

From time to time, it wasn't just a question of them typing what was on the paper; they had to ask us questions about what should go on and what should be left off. We all got pretty busy with this conversion. At the same time, we had to do the regular daily load of work. So we eventually had two systems going: the old system and the computer system.

I remember we had an American lady come in one day. She had a query on visas for a relative of hers. Just at that moment, the new computer system closed down, which was something we weren't used to. I said, "Well, I am very sorry ma'am. We've got a bit of a hold up. The computer has closed down."

Well I won't tell you what word she said to that, but she used a very good old American term. I said, "Oh dear. Do you happen to be an expert on computers?"

She said, "Well yes, I am."

I said, "Would you like to come in and give us a hand?"

She declined the offer. I won't tell you the word she used, but it wasn't a very happy response. This is how it was for a while. We were switching from one system to another system. From time to time, the new computer system crashed down, which we weren't used to. Eventually, they overcame this problem by having a spare system you could switch in as a back up.

For about two or three years, it was quite hard going switching from one to another.

I myself, being in charge, it did me a favor really. While the rest of my teams who worked for me were switching and doing a lot of work on the computers, and playing games, which was part of the training program, I didn't have the time to do this. I was holding everything down. That helped me a bit, because I am sure that the computer affects people's eyes. I did bring this up with the computer chaps from Washington. I said, "What about people's eyes?"

I knew my wife had already worked on computers in her office and it began to affect her eyes. I said, "What about the staff?"

They said, "No one has ever complained."

I said, "No. They wouldn't, would they? Otherwise, they would lose their job."

The upshot of that was that they started to put shades on some of the screens. So I did a little bit of good there.

As I say, two years after all this came into effect, I thought it was time. I had intended to retire at the age of 60, after 42 or 43 years' service. I thought maybe with all the change going on that it was time to get out.

Something happened to me on a personal basis, which I wasn't very happy about. I was in charge of the immigration side of the documentation. There was another local chap in charge of the documentation on the visitor's visas application. There were two trips to Washington for a week at a time. I thought I was going to be one of the ones picked to go on this. The other chap was picked. Would you believe it that they picked a man who

worked directly for the Consul General and had nothing to do with the work whatsoever, except the Consul General. He got the trip and I didn't.

I really wanted that trip because I was getting very interested in the changeover. I was a little bit aggrieved and hurt about this. So I thought maybe I am getting a little bit long in the tooth. Maybe I ought to think about handing in my cards. That's what I did.

I supposed I shouldn't have been a little bit piqued by that, but I think if it hadn't been for that blocking me from going to Washington to pick up more information, I would have stayed on for another three years.

So you see, even a fellow can get a little bit bitchy.

Q: Unfortunately, that's one of those things. It sounds like you did have some training.

NEWMAN: I did. I could do things. There were certain things other members of the staff couldn't do. I had to put my code in before I can approve it.

I could do all the basic stuff as well. Instead of hammering away hour after hour, like a lot of staff was, I went on from time to time.

Q: That's the idea of you being a supervisor rather than a worker bee.

NEWMAN: Talking about being a supervisor, I always prided myself of being able to do any job within the department, from opening the mail and dispatching the mail, as well as the in between work. I know I was doing this one day when my teams were pretty busy. There was an awful lot of mail to get out. The young man who was almost in a messenger capacity wasn't available. There was a pile of mail there. So I just got on the machine and started pumping away, getting it all out.

My boss came in and said, "What the heck are you doing there? That's not your job."

I said, "Everybody's busy. Do you want this to go out today?"

He said, "You don't mind doing it?"

"No."

"Well, okay then."

It was always my pride that whatever work we got in in the morning, I tried to clear it and get it out the same day, the replies and everything. I did my best to be efficient, as it were. I didn't mind if helped the system, put a bit of oil on the works. I was happy to do that. I wasn't above that. It upset my boss a bit, but I said, "No, I don't mind."

Q: There were huge changes from when you started.

NEWMAN: Oh yes. If I may just go back a little bit. When I started in the embassy, the diplomatic service, how can I describe it? It was almost like a club. The people were very nice, mostly male. I can only remember two lady officers, the rest were all men. It was like an exclusive club. It was very nice. There were no colored people on the staff.

After the war it changed. They drafted in new people from America, people who were pretty well educated. Americans go to universities. A lot of these chaps and ladies and colored people were coming into diplomatic service and they weren't quite so rigid in their approach. They were more friendly, in my opinion.

There was nothing wrong with the older men. They were okay. In fact, one of the older diplomats when I was a young chap wanted to wrestle me because I used to wrestle then. I was frightened of putting him on the floor because of the sack. It was a bit difficult, that was.

It did change, especially after the war. Gradually, the salaries improved. Some of us were on fairly low wages. They decided, in their wisdom, that we should be paid what local people in England were paid for equivalent jobs. So if you were a supervisor doing a managerial job such as what happened in a newspaper office, then you were entitled to get what that guy was getting.

To be fair, the embassy did review this every year. I used to go with the personnel people occasionally out to visit all these companies to see what their rates of pay were and all that. Unfortunately, one of the firms we visited was just about to sack all their staff. So we didn't do a good report on that one. We tried to pick the one with the best salaries.

To be fair, they did review jobs and they improved the salaries.

I have always found the Americans very fair.

Q: That's good to hear.

NEWMAN: In my time, I have met some rotten Americans, but mostly, I would say 99 percent have been nice. We didn't always see eye to eye. I've had disparities and objected to things that were going on and the ways things were being conducted. Sometimes, I have won the day, but occasionally I have had to remember that these diplomatic officers were my bosses. It was their job to run the place correctly. We did our best to support them overall.

I always thought they thought I wasn't too bad.

Q: I would just like you to comment briefly on one of the big changes that are going on, particularly here at the embassy in London. There is an increase in hiring locally engaged staff in professional positions. The Consular Section and the Admin Section have always had professional level locally engaged staff. It used to be unheard of to have

somebody in the Political Section or Economic Section. Now there are more and more people, locally engaged, who are doing essentially what 20 or 30 years ago would have been done by diplomatic staff.

NEWMAN: One thing I noticed over the years, they were bringing in local staff who were highly qualified with degrees. I myself started as a young man with a basic education. Most of my stuff I have learned through the embassy. Whatever I have done in my own time to educate myself, and I took a visa course, along with one or two other things.

Over the years, I noticed that some of the branches like the Agriculture Department were bringing in specialists who had degrees and started them on a very high wage. That is okay. Sometimes they weren't as good as the old staff, the regulars.

Q: Yes, they had the experience and the other people had the qualifications.

NEWMAN: The older people had a lot of experience. The other people had these high degree educations. Most of them were okay. That's fine and the embassy was happy to pay them.

In the Commercial Department, for instance, they brought people in from outside. I also remember with that particular department, there was a man who started like me, but he was really excellent at his job. They did bring a younger guy in with higher qualifications, and I thought the older guy was the better of the two. That was just my opinion.

There was no disagreement or fisticuffs or anything like that. I think this is the way of the world. People are more educated. I only wish myself that I was able to have gone on for some degrees originally myself. I wouldn't have had to slog so hard and so long to get where I was.

I guess that is the way of the world. That is the way it is going to be.

Q: I want to thank you very much for all your time.

NEWMAN: Can I just say one more thing? Can I just read this?

Q: Absolutely.

NEWMAN: I just want to say one more thing. I have been fairly happy and proud to have been associated with the embassy and consulate over my years. I did four years war service with the Royal Air Force and had to leave the embassy and then come back to resume employment. I just wanted to say that within the time of my war service, I want to take off my hat to the U.S. military for all the help and supplies, the help they gave us and to our forces. I put in brackets there that we only argued about our girlfriends sometimes.

I finish this by saying like a lot of presidents do, God Bless America.

Q: Lovely. Thank you very much.

End of interview