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

JONATHAN B. RICKERT

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INTERVIEW

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

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs oral history interview with Jonathan B. Rickert. My name is Raymond Ewing. It's the 17th of December, 2002. This interview is being produced under the auspices of the oral history program of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and

Training. So, it's good to have this conversation with you and I'm looking forward to talking with you today.

RICKERT: So am I, thank you.

Q: Jonathan, I see that you entered the Foreign Service in 1963 after your undergraduate education at Princeton University and it looks like maybe some military service. I'm curious how – what – got in you interested in the foreign service in the first place and what else did you do before you came into the Foreign Service?

RICKERT: Oh, thank you. I was born shortly before WWII and grew up in Washington, DC, so I have an early recollection of involvement in international affairs through seeing it in the evening papers for example that would come with the Liebestrom through Europe where the current battle front was and those types of things. Also, my parents: my father was a high school teacher in the District and my mother was a housewife as was common in those years. They had a number of foreign friends who would come to the house, particularly British, but also others who spoke about the war and what was going on in other parts of Europe. I remember an early fascination with maps which I think is common amongst foreign service officers and also foreign stamps and coins. Another thing that I recalled and found in many cases is that the people who were attracted to foreign service are people who are with one another, with somebody on the other side of the hill. There's a certain curiosity involved with beyond the horizon that is common among people who end up in this career. As I was growing up, I was a choirboy at the Washington Cathedral and had the occasion to see various foreign visiting dignitaries. I remember the visitors Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip in the early '50s, shortly after she became queen. And the visit of Haile Selassie of Ethiopia who presented a Coptic processional cross that is still in use at the cathedral as far as I know.

One of the most memorable things that happened in the '40s, late '40s, was about 1948. It was a time when as a choirboy I was there in the evening for a special service which was to publicize and promote the European recovery program. Secretary of State Marshall and John Foster Dulles were speakers of that service and pictures were being taken of them down in the crypt area below the main level of the cathedral of the full service. And I had heard of Marshall of course. I had not heard of Dulles. I pushed my way forward to get a glimpse of the man who was our top general during WWII. I was grabbed by the photographers and placed in the photograph which was sent around the country by AP wire. My father laughingly called it: "three great Americans." I still have a letter that I received from Secretary Marshall. I wrote to him afterwards and received a very nice letter in response: a signed photograph and also ... I sent him a copy of the newspaper photograph as well, which he signed in pencil because pencil of course wouldn't run. I have those at home as memorabilia.

Q: I've done quite a few interviews, I don't think I've ever remember anybody saying they were a choirboy and had an encounter like that with the Secretary of State.

RICKERT: Well, it's been downhill since then. [laugh]

Q: [laugh] Well, it's good to start at the top.

RICKERT: But ... in high school there were – in Washington – there were several foreign diplomats' sons as well as FSO's [Foreign Service Officer] sons whom I came to know. I roomed with one in college for three years. In fact, two of my roommates became foreign service officers as it turned out. In college I wasn't really focused on foreign service as a career but I was interested in foreign affairs. I majored in American and European history and paid attention to things that were going on in the international arena to the extent that I could. I wrote my thesis on post-war German history: my undergraduate thesis. I had an opportunity to meet with Dean Acheson who was there on a speaking engagement and they set up meetings with people who had thesis topics that were relevant to his particular experience. So I had a half an hour alone with him which was set up by the university which was very nice. Also I remember attending a session that was sort of a career-type of session chaired by Livingston Merchant. I don't know his exact title but he was very high up in the State Department hierarchy. So I graduated from college and I worked for about a year and a half in the U.S. for an internationally oriented private military organization and went in to the military in a reserve's program.

The program that I was in involved a year of studying Russian at Monterrey at the old Army language school. Two of my friends had already passed the foreign service exam and had been told that they would be welcome to join the foreign service but they should do their military obligations first. After talking with them, it just came about eventually that I decided to take the exam which I did in San Francisco; it would have been 1961 or 1962. I took the written exam and passed, went back to San Francisco for Russian, took the oral exam the first time and was interviewed by what seemed to be a panel of economics officers which I definitely was not and I did not pass. I took the written again and passed again ... in those days, if you could pass Russian or another language, you got five extra points which in the second time I took the exam I had enough Russian so I got the extra points on the written. And then at the end of my 16 months and 24 days in the Army, I returned to Washington where my mother was living and after a couple of months, took the oral exam, passed it. So that maybe is a long way of saying how I came to enter the foreign service.

Q: Well, growing up in Washington and the kind of experiences that you had, of course also Princeton University, you probably were heading toward the foreign service before you even realized it, in a way many others of us only have the haziest idea of what it was all about in the same point of our career. So you entered in 1963 then, after you have the necessary clearances and so forth?

RICKERT: That's correct. I had clearance in the military, I was in military intelligence which required a lower level of clearance but sped up the clearance process so that I was able to come in rather quickly. I actually started at State in March of 1963 as a GS3 [General Schedule Rank, Civil Service Job] clerk because I was just waiting for my

appointment. I was not otherwise employed and a friend of the family was working at State as a civil servant and said: "we're hiring clerks why don't you apply?" – which I did. So I had several months of clerical work. I started in an office – I don't even remember the name of it – but it was processing new hires and the main thing that I recalled during that office where I was for six weeks or so, was taking finger prints of people. I became rather adept at that and it was a skill that I never used since.

Then I moved to the passport office which was at that point, or the part that I was involved in, was where the credit union later was, sort of underneath the escalators. It was a factory-like operation where a lot of people, typists, typed out names and data on a typewriter which produced a tape and then the tape was put in to a machine called a flexiwriter and the flexiwriter and the passport was inserted; it was like an over sized typewriter and then you pressed the button and it printed out what was on the tape. This was not exactly intellectually stimulating work but it did have its moments and I kept my sanity by reading what was in these passports. One that I recall was a gentleman who had immigrated to the states in the 1920s and for naturalized citizens they had to have their naturalization certification along as part of that application. At the time he became a citizen, he was five feet ten, but by the time he became or was applying for his passport to go visit family in Italy 30 years later he was six feet ten. [chuckle] So I had to check that out and found that it was at typo.

The other thing that was amusing was to see what women did about hair color because the applications that you would see would say things like "blonde, really brown" and other things indicating ... they didn't know whether they were required to write how they looked or what nature it was given. So it was those things that kept us on our toes a little bit. The other amusing thing, I've never been in an office like that before but the doors were locked while we were there and we had a coffee break in the morning for 15 minutes and a coffee break in the afternoon and no one was allowed to come or go except during those times. It was a real factory environment.

Q: You really could find ... [cough]

RICKERT: After a few weeks of doing that, I was brought on board in May of 1963 as an FSR-8 and was put temporarily in the part of personnel headed by Don Liddell who I crossed paths with many times afterwards and _____ Ester Rice. They were looking at training. They had me look at evaluations that FSOs had done of their long term training to try to determine what the value had been to the employee and to the foreign service. I wrote up a little report on that and that was my morning activity in that particular office. Maybe it presaged a later assignment in PER. Don and Ester were delightful people to work with.

Q: Meanwhile you were still waiting for a junior officer class or an A100 class to be formed?

RICKERT: That's correct and I ended up going in to a class in July 1963. The program

was two months in the old Arlington Towers in Rosslyn. We had a class of about 50 half of whom were USIA [United States Information Agency]. Mostly men and all white. So the foreign service has changed very much since then and I think pretty much for the better.

Q: That was fairly typical of entry classes in that period, certainly it was true of mine. When you finished the junior officer training, did you do some language training or did you go abroad right away or what happened to you next? Or is there anything you want to say about the training itself?

RICKERT: No, I don't think there is anything particular about the training. The one notable thing that I can recall. One of the few women officers in our class was living in a house in Georgetown where one of her house mates was Mary Jo Kopechne. She later came to a sad end in Nantucket – Martha's Vineyard with a car accident with Ted Kennedy. But I met her on a couple of occasions before that accident. Well, actually, not that far before.

Q: She had no connections with the State Department or foreign services herself?

RICKERT: No. In those days, group houses were very common in a neighborhood. It tended to always be unisex so it would be a house full of young women and a house full of young men and a lot of them were in Georgetown. The lead officer in my class, Janet Ansorge was her name, was in the house with about five other women from different parts of the government and the private sector. Mary Jo Kopechne was one of the residents of the house.

When I ended the foreign service, I took the language exam in Russian and I got a 3/3+ which meant that I was immediately off language probation. It meant that I wouldn't be assigned overseas because they wanted to send junior officers who were still on language-probation to language training and then to posts where they could polish their language and get off language probation. So I ended up being assigned as my first assignment in the operations center. It was a new office that had been set up under President Kennedy a year or so before in response, as I understood, to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the inability to respond as properly and as fully and correctly as everyone would have liked for the State Department to respond at that time. As a result, the op-center was set up and was in full swing by the time I came on board.

Q: When you say full swing; 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

RICKERT: That's correct. It was well staffed and there were foreign service officers and there were civil servants who worked mostly in the day time and there were officers on loan from military who provided that kind of support for meeting State Department staff. I spent – it was called a rotational assignment – so the two years I was in Washington as a junior officer before going overseas, was divided in to six month chunks. The first chunk was called – when I arrived at the op-center – a "junior watch officer" but they very

quickly changed that title to "associate watch officer." I did that for six months and worked with FSO named Leojean Marvin who was my boss during that time. I learned a lot of foreign service lore from him. Then I spent six months working in the editor shop, which was part of the op-center. It was one senior officer and junior officer who prepared the daily top secret summary that went to the seventh floor principals. It was kind of a early-warning system for the top people on the seventh floor. The most important – aside from substance relevance – was brevity. It was the most important thing that we had to strive for. I worked with a fellow named John Gwen there, who I also crossed paths with later on. The op-center had some interesting things, of course. I was there at the time of Kennedy's assassination. I wasn't actually on duty at that time.

I had finished a night shift. I was sleeping at home and woke up in the afternoon. We lived in Cleveland Park near the Washington Cathedral and the central tower had just been completed and the bells installed. And it was the first time I ever heard the bell from the cathedral. It rang in a long, slow, mournful tone and I didn't know where it was. I woke up and went down stairs and my mother and grandmother were downstairs and I said: "What's the cathedral bell ringing for?" And they told me what had happened.

So we set up one of the early task forces to deal with the very large number of top-level foreign dignitaries who came, including de Gaulle. Everybody who was anyone who came to Washington for that, for the Kennedy funeral in 1963.

Q: You were part of one of the task forces or ... you were involved ... ?

RICKERT: There were masses of people who were trying to sort out the protocol and the arrivals and I was part of one of these task forces. They were set up to work 24 hours a day during the peak periods because the logistics of the whole thing was so difficult. Those of us, like yourself, who have had extensive foreign service experience know that just planning for a senior U.S. government minister, visitor, vice president, president, secretary of state, is a very time consuming thing when you're in an embassy abroad. Well here we had tens of heads of state and government protocol concerns, housing, security, the whole works. Remember that it wasn't known if the assassination was part of a broader plot. There was a lot of concern about the safety of the foreign dignitaries who would be coming. So it was a very, very complex operation. I don't recall anything except for a lot of scurrying and worrying that was going on before this happened and a huge sign of relief when it was all over. There were a couple of other things that happened in the op-center that were of interest.

Dean Rusk used to drop by from time to time because the best communications on the seventh floor were there at the time. He would come to see things. I remember one case when a fellow officer had just started eating an egg salad sandwich and Dean Rusk came in. The officer got up and put the sandwich down on the desk. Rusk sat down on the desk right on the sandwich and the officer was a little reluctant to tell the Secretary that he had egg salad all over his backside, but that's what had happened.

Sometimes at night when the bars closed in California, we'd start getting calls from people who were either inebriated or not mentally all there or both. I remember one colleague, a fellow named Hugh Lobit who was senior to me but a mid-level officer, would record, probably illegally, but record these talks. He was a Texan with a very lively sense of humor. He'd string these people along and he would get all sorts of crazy stuff out of them. Hugh incidentally was later killed in Vietnam under the CORDS [Civil Operations and Rural Development Support Program] program and he's on the plaque of our entrance. One of them was a call from a man who said he had a way to solve the Berlin Crisis. Hugh had this all on tape. The man said we should use special gas on the Soviet troops, put them to sleep in the Berlin area, scoop them all up, fly them to the States and wine them and dine them, give them a good time and take them back. Then they would be our friends.

Q: [laughter] It'll never be the same.

RICKERT: Hugh would draw them out on this type of nonsense.

Q: When you were working on the morning brief and writing that, what sort of hours would that mean for you? Would you come in at 5:00 in the morning?

RICKERT: No, that was the mid-shift. I can't recall if it was midnight or 1:00 but it was midnight to 8:00 or 1:00 to 9:00. There usually wasn't much to do in the first four hours and then things start to come in toward the latter half. So there were periods of boredom and nothing to do and then you had to work like crazy to get it collected, evaluated and written and then approved before it could go forward. During the one year I was there – some very clever fellow did a special one on the 1st of April. It was outlandish but was all done in the proper jargon and it fooled one of the top aides on the seventh floor who was not amused, running in to Under Secretary Ball or some arrangement and saying, "have you seen what's happening?" and showing him that it was an April Fool's joke. We were all sternly admonished not to practice our sense of humor on the top secret report from that point on.

Q: [chuckle]

RICKERT: One other thing I recall was one of my bosses was a fellow named Doyle Martin who told me something that I've never forgotten. Very nice fellow, a little bit of a cynic, but he told me about foreign service assignments and he said, "you have to remember that there are three aspects to every foreign service assignment: the job, the place and the people." He said: "If you got one out of three, you should be satisfied, if you got two out of three, you should be delighted, if you got three out of three, don't believe it because it isn't true."

Q: That won't last for long, Tom.

RICKERT: [laughter] I had a couple that were three for three but it was a good

introduction to the vagaries ... I think a lot of people coming in, think mostly about where they're going rather than the people that we are working with, both Americans and foreigners which is an essential element for any assignment and also what the job will be when you come in. It's all really exciting and you just want to go and do things. But Doyle helped me to focus on the fact that there's more to it than just another place that you'd really like to be.

Q: Absolutely. You said this was a rotational arrangement and you mentioned that you rotated after six months in to the editing function, still in the operation center. Did you rotate again or did you ... How long were you actually in the op-center?

RICKERT: I was a year in the op-center and then I had two further rotations. The third rotation was the old office of munitions control which at that point was somehow bureaucratically under the seventh floor, so it counted as part of that seventh floor rotation. I worked there for six months. John Darby was the director. Then I worked for a Greek American named Steve Cumonellis who was a very interesting fellow, a philosophy major who had a very philosophical view on life. That was mostly paperwork but it was good introduction. Then I moved on for the last six months to actually working in the front office of the executive secretary. Emory was the executive secretary at that time. I succeeded Ted Russell who had a junior officer position there. It was mostly screening their cables. There were two deputies. Emory and then Herb Thompson, who now lives a block away from me, and a man named John Walsh. I did cable screening and it wasn't terribly taxing from a work point of view, but I got to read a lot of stuff that was very interesting: Overwhelmingly about Vietnam. Vietnam was the issue at that time and I'd say 90% of the cables we got were about Vietnam. EXDIS cables of course, were much more controlled medium of communication in those days then it has become since.

Q: Okay. So all of this took about two years and so about 1965 you were ready to go abroad and use your Russian?

RICKERT: That's correct.

Q: [whispers]

RICKERT: That's fine. In October '65, I went on my first assignment to London. In those days, you'd express interest in a geographic area, and then the system in its wisdom, decided where to send you. I had put down as my geographic areas, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Africa. I had not mentioned the Soviet Union which was a separate geographic area because I was single and I'd never been abroad. Those were two strikes – actually, that was three strikes – for an assignment for the Soviet Union at that time for security reasons.

So I was assigned. Actually, they asked me if I like to go to Moscow as staff aide to the Ambassador. I replied, of course, that I'd be delighted to do so and they said, "fine." Flec Horn selected me for that job based on files. He never interviewed me but I guess he was

given a bunch of files and my history and my Russian or something, and selected me.

Q: Well the other thing, of course, was that you had seventh floor, op-center experience. You had certainly learned about the State Department but about the way the government and the national security system was operating in those days.

RICKERT: I hadn't thought of that but it probably was a factor. But what they did was they sent me on a two year assignment to London as a consular officer with the understanding that after the first year, if – well, there was probably going to be a change in ambassadors and then the new ambassador could say whether you or me or someone else who was a staff aide –

Q: In Moscow.

RICKERT: – in Moscow. If he had wanted someone else, then I would have stayed on in London and finished the two year consular assignment. In the event I ended up going to Moscow after a year. But I did spend a year doing consular work, mostly consular work in London. David Kirkpatrick Bruce was the ambassador and Phil Kaiser was the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]. Stanley Burns was the admin counselor. I worked for about three months in a unit there that was called A-vis. It was a visitor's unit setup under the admin counselor.

I might mention the living arrangements I had in London. Because I expected to be there for a year, I was told that I could go out on the economy and find an apartment and that I had to rent from insured and so forth and so on. For a year, it didn't seem like a very appetizing prospect. Stanley had another aide named Tom Tracy who was also single. There was a new apartment building that the embassy just rented. Stanley had actually rented it at what was considered at Washington the exorbitant rent. But he had straight-lined the rent for ten years. So the embassy was paying a lot for the first couple of years but for the last eight years, it made out like a bandit.

Anyway, Tom and I were offered a 3 bedroom apartment and it saved the embassy two housing allowances in this new building and it worked out very well. Unusual in the modern foreign service where FSOs would be sharing space in any place other than places like Moscow, the Middle-East or some other very difficult places but it was an arrangement that worked very nicely and was advantageous for both of us.

Q: Of course, a lot of people did that in Washington and Georgetown, Arlington.

RICKERT: Right, but overseas it was unusual, certainly. It was a very interesting experience for me because I've never been abroad before going. I chose deliberately to travel from the United States in second class although we were entitled to first class in those days because I thought I'd meet more interesting people. The anticipation of crossing the Atlantic – it was a five day trip – and getting closer everyday was something that made it that much more enjoyable because it wasn't just getting on a plane and then

arriving and getting off the plane and …

Q: ... going to work

RICKERT: Going to work! [laugh] Then I was in a temporary apartment for a while and that's when I was with Tom in the embassy apartment and then we shared this apartment on Abbey Road ... Which was ... right next to the EMI studio which is where the Beatles were doing their recording in those days and anyone who see the Beatles album called Abbey Road, has the Beatles walking across what the Brit call a "zebra crossing." That was right in front of our apartment. I never saw the Beatles but stay-at-home housewives would see them come and go and in their Volvos, pull up to the EMI studio, get out, go in, make a record and then come out late.

Q: But they didn't cross the street very often?

RICKERT: I never saw them ...

Q: They had to have done it once.

RICKERT: I think that was staged for the record jacket.

Q: You mentioned that you had worked for a period of time in the visitor's unit. How long was that?

RICKERT: I don't recall exactly, I think it was about three months. Then I think it was decided that since I've been assigned as a consular officer, I ought to do some consular work. I recall Stanley saying, if I really wanted to stay I could do so but, frankly, I wanted to do consular work. I thought that it was something that every FSO should do and I didn't necessarily want to do it for a career but I wanted to have a good introduction to it which I did there in London.

Q: Mostly visas?

RICKERT: Mostly visas. I did some IVs [Immigration Visa] and a number of NIVs [Non-Immigration Visa]. I remember at that time Glasgow had closed and a lot of consulates were closing during that time. And Edinburgh was still open but did not issue IVs so Scots who wanted IVs had to come to London. At that time, young women who were going to the States, those nannies, had to get IVs. There weren't other non-immigrant alternatives for them. I remember one Glaswegian who must have been about 18 who came in for an interview. I don't think she'd ever been out of Scotland before; was obviously terrified. I met a number of Scots, educated Scots before and actually quite liked the accent. I asked her questions which she understood, but I couldn't understand a word of what she said back. It was such a Glaswegian dialect or accent that it was incomprehensible so she may have well been a super spy; I finally, in frustration, just gave her the visa. The more I asked her to repeat herself, the more frustrated and ill at

ease and nervous she became and obviously it wasn't getting anywhere. I didn't think she was likely to have been a super spy. So I gave her a visa.

Q: Let me just get back to the visitor's unit for a moment. When I went to London in the late '70s, there was a foreign service national deployed running that unit. I think, certainly by then it was an institution and pretty much, as I recall, running it by herself. I'm not sure there were any Americans ...

RICKERT: Joan Walton?

Q: Joan Auton.

RICKERT: Auton. Joan Auton. She was there. There was another woman, a British woman, I don't remember her last name. But Joan was already an institution in the early '60s. Indeed, she was what made the visitor's unit work. Many congressmen would come to town that weren't in hotels and she would arrange their hotels and everything that they needed that would make their stay pleasant. She was widely known on the Hill for her ability to get people into hotels and the theater and other events that supposedly had no seats. It was legendary. And she was a very nice and charming person as well.

Q: Okay, anything else further about your serve in London. Did it turn out being longer than a year?

RICKERT: No, it ended up being a year. There are a couple of other things that might be worth mentioning. One of the things that the embassy did for me which was very helpful and much appreciated was they paid for me to have a Russian tutor a couple of times a week in anticipation of going to Moscow. The woman's name was Lydia North. She was a fascinating woman. She was from St. Petersburg which became Leningrad and had married a Russian officer in what was, more or less, an arranged marriage. She was from a well-to-do family and her parents had told her that they had decided that she should marry this Russian officer. It was already the Soviet period then, but, as you know, the Soviet army kept a lot of the officer corps for a time after the revolution – she met him. She wasn't forced to marry this guy but she met him and was told that if she didn't want to she didn't have to but she agreed and she said that she had only one condition. And that was that the wedding take place in church. The officer said, "that's fine I can agree to that. But the ceremony has to be at a time and a place of my choosing" because as a Soviet officer, he was not free to walk in to the nearest parish church and have a church wedding.

Sometime thereafter one night, he came in the winter to her parents' home and said, "please get in to the sleigh we're getting married." She got in, it was a horse-drawn sleigh, he covered her eyes with a scarf once they got down to the city limits and went some place in to a forest and there was a wooden chapel in the forest, a priest and a witness and they did the ceremony. She then had her eyes covered again and was taken out, so that even if she were tortured, she could not say where she'd been or who was

there or anything of that sort. She was happily married to this officer until he was purged in the '30s and then Lydia herself was sent to prison. She had scars on her arms from cigarette burns that had been put to her as part of her interrogation. When things looked very bad during WWII and all hands were needed she was a nurse by training and she was sent to the front, captured by Germans and sent to Germany and never went back. But – a very understandably anti-communist person. She told me before I left for Moscow and she said that she was suffering from some illness and she didn't think she had that long to live but she said, "Jonathan, please bring me some soil from Russia when you come back next time so that it can be put in my coffin."

The first time I went to London, I did take some soil and gave it to her in the hospital and she died a few months after that. But she was a very, very interesting person.

Q: And she helped you keep your Russian up there.

RICKERT: She was very helpful for that because I studied but I had never really used it. I'd only been trained. And as we all know from language training, if you don't get into a situation where you start using it right a way you'll lose it very quickly.

Q: Let me just back up on that topic for a second. How long were you in Monterrey for Russian language training?

RICKERT: It was ten and a half months or something like that.

Q: So a full course.

RICKERT: It is a full course and then a month of leave. They called it an academic year.

Q: And had you had some Russian at Princeton?

RICKERT: No. I had a little German in high school and college and a little Latin but I had not had any Slovak language before.

Q: And you definitely not had any chance to use the Russian then until you finally went to Moscow.

RICKERT: So it was lying dormant but Lydia helped keep it alive.

A couple of other things I mentioned about London; the World Cup took place in 1966 which England won. I had not been a fan of soccer before but one of my colleagues in the embassy who grew up in Latin America was a great fan of soccer and educated me and we saw one of the matches. It was great excitement for England to win at that time.

I traveled a lot in England; on the weekends I'd go to places and see things. My mother actually had been to school in England for about three years and two of her old school

friends were married to people who were high up in their different fields. They were very kind to receive me and look after me. In one case, one of them was married to the Bishop of Saint Albans which was north of London. He had the position of Lord High Almoner which meant that he was responsible for the Maundy (or Holy) Thursday service at Westminster Abbey the year I was there. The Queen attended where she washed the feet of parishioners and gave out what's called "Maundy money;" small purses of silver coins, very small silver coins that are minted especially for this occasion. The Brits are nothing but wedded to their traditions and Bishop Jones gave me a couple of the coins that he got as part of his cut for being the master of ceremonies for this occasion.

I was control officer – that's a misnomer if there ever was one – for a visit by Ted Kennedy and also one by John Tunney the senator from California who borrowed money from me to pay for a black tie outfit that he needed. He did pay it back. Kennedy was there for the week. I was responsible for keeping him in cars which I had to sign the time sheets for the drivers. [End tape 1, side A]

Q: Okay. You were talking about some of the visitors to London and such things.

RICKERT: Yeah. Another one; I was sent out to the airport to meet John Kenneth Galbraith who was passing through on his way back to Boston. He was no longer Ambassador to India by that time but he had been sent when Prime Minister Shastri died unexpectedly. Galbraith headed the American delegation. He had a stack of exams with him that he had been grading and he left them with me to pouch back because – I don't remember why – but he couldn't take them with him. That was the easiest meet and greet I've ever done because he's about 6'10 ...

Q: No trouble finding him.

RICKERT: The plane from India; these people got off, a lot of them were medium sized or less and he stuck out, it was not a problem to pick him up at the airport. A lot of us tend to complain from time to time about our salaries. My salary when I came in to the foreign service was $6,000 American dollars and I was making about $7,000 when I was in London. I recall reading in a parish newspaper that they broke out the salary structure for Brits at that time. My seven thousand a year put me in the top five percent of the British wages. I didn't take into account free housing and other benefits. So we had it pretty good considering everything people can find reasons to complain wherever they are. I say that some people, if they ever get to have any more fun, somebody would complain about it. But even as a very junior officer, I was much better paid than the vast majority of British wages.

Q: Okay, anything else about London then?

RICKERT: The consular work was interesting. Most of what we did was on British subjects although there was no visa waiver program at that point, a lot of the British people to be issued without review, they were done through travel agencies and other

ways. I recall the very first interview I had which was with a single, unemployed, young Englishmen who was going to the United States for an indefinite stay on a visit to stay with a New York antiques dealer, male. I refused but was later overruled by my boss. There were others, a man who was involved in the Profumo scandal at that time was married to an Israeli El Al pilot. She came in for a visa, I had to get it waivered. I didn't handle the case but I saw her sitting there. What was her name? She's a famous woman mystery writer ... Agatha Christie's husband came in for a visa, I remember seeing him. Sir Alec Douglas-Hume came in. I didn't do these visas but I saw these people as they came into the embassy. I was always amused at the British passports at least at that time had "profession." He still had his passport from the time he had been prime minister and under "profession" it said, "Her Majesty's first minister." Because the Brits didn't have diplomatic passports at that time.

I did travel to the Continent, which I never visited before; visiting friends, twice to Paris and twice to Geneva and once to Sweden where a friend of mine was serving in the embassy. Oh, another thing I should mention. As a former Washington Cathedral choir boy, the Washington Cathedral choir came and performed at Westminster Abbey while I was there and I had the great pleasure to see people I knew and attend the service and hear them sing and they did very well. They were up to the proper standard.

Q: They didn't ask you to sit in?

RICKERT: No, they didn't. [chuckle] I had been a soprano and was no longer a soprano. So I think those are the ...

Q: Well you had mentioned before that Ambassador Foy Kohler had selected you to be staff aide in Moscow in the Department. The assumption was that he would still be there. Was he there when you finished your tour in London and did you go to that position or did you do something else in Moscow?

RICKERT: He was still there but his departure was already scheduled. So in October of '66. I transferred to Moscow and I had about two weeks with the Kohlers and my predecessor, Richard McCormick and then there was a fairly brief interregnum – a couple of months, six weeks or so – over the Christmas holidays and then Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson came in January of '67.

Q: And you were then his staff aide?

RICKERT: So I was his staff aide as you probably know, at that time, and *still* in one form or another, the Ambassador's staff aide lives in the Ambassador's residence, Spaso House. I lived in what was a two-room apartment on the ground floor where it had previously been the billiard room and an attached bedroom that's been expanded and other facilities had been added since then. But I was very much a member of the family. I had two meals a day with the Ambassador and his wife and three daughters – not breakfast, but the other two meals. If they were out, obviously not, but in principle two

meals a day for which I paid. We had an arranged schedule, a payment, and I was, in effect, the live-in GSO [General Services Officer] at Spaso House as well as I was responsible for the staff of 17 which included three Italians, two Chinese Communists and a bunch of Russians. The Chinese are interesting. They were technically Chinese Communists. These are two gentlemen named Tang and Chin who were brought by journalists as house boys to Moscow – an American journalist – around 1940 or so. Then the journalist left and they couldn't go back to China for one reason or another. They both married Russian women and they got employment with the embassy.

Q: In the early post-war period or ... ?

RICKERT: Well, I think during the war. I'm not sure exactly when. They're mentioned by George Kennan. He devotes a page to them in one of the volumes of his memoirs. They were both there when I arrived. But Chin was suffering from terminal cancer and died shortly thereafter. I was responsible for arranging for a burial in the local cemetery. His widow didn't want him to have an autopsy, for reasons which I didn't know, which was standard procedure in Moscow at that time. And it was difficult for the American embassy to request the Soviets not to perform an autopsy on him – an officially Chinese Communist. But we did do a diplomatic note, which was the first diplomatic note I ever wrote, which asked on behalf of the former American embassy employee that they not do an autopsy and they didn't require the autopsy.

The funeral – Russian style – the coffin was placed on a flat bed truck and driven to the cemetery. It was in the winter, it was snowing, it was like something out of a Russian movie. In a very dignified but unceremonious way it was placed in the ground and covered over with no ceremony at all. Near by, I remember there was a Soviet burial taking place with an off-key brass band and long speeches about the comrade and all that he had done for the cause. It wasn't the way I would want it, but that's the way it was done in those days.

Q: Now, in addition to basically being the manager of this household staff and taking care of problems in residences that had occurred, you had other duties too in the chancellery, the embassy, in the ambassador's office or did somebody else do much of that?

RICKERT: Well, I did have other duties but Ambassador Thompson didn't use a staff aide the way some other people would. I did a lot of protocol stuff, guest lists and arrangements for events and served as a form of communication with the embassy staff. But on substance, he did not use me directly. As time went on – I was there for two years – I kind of latched onto the clerical section and was able to get some additional duties which in those days in Moscow was a lot of reading of the press and reporting of what was in the press and I did some of that. But I didn't do a great deal for Ambassador Thompson other than the things we already mentioned.

Q: It seems to me that in this period there was often a rotation program. I know of

officers about this time who went to Oberammergau and then came to Moscow and often they would start in the GSO section and then go in to the political section. So there'd be a rule, sort of an organized rotation. You really didn't do that.

RICKERT: No. I know exactly what you're speaking of and many of my friends and colleagues did that. Usually many of the tours were two years – well they were virtually all two year tours – but one spent in one section and one in another. There were jobs in admin that were often were the first year. There were jobs in consular that often were the first year. There were two jobs in an unusual section. It's known through all of Moscow – it was the publication procuring office. Two FSOs who did that would do it for a year. It was a lot of traveling and somewhat difficult, wearing, work and then move on to the political section or the econ section or some other part of the embassy. So, many of my colleagues and friends did do that. I did not. My job was unusual in almost every respect in comparison to the other jobs that existed at the embassy at that time.

Q: Did you get involved with visitors much?

RICKERT: Yes. That was actually one of the most enjoyable things about the job because there were a lot of very interesting people who used to come and many of them stayed in the Spaso House. The most interesting was, of course, Richard Nixon who came and stayed for about five, six days at Spaso House. I had a chance to meet and talk with him which was very interesting.

Q: At this time he was out of … ?

RICKERT: He was gearing up for his successful run for the presidency.

Q: In '68?

RICKERT: In '67. Well, this was in '67 but he ran in the '68 election.

There are some interesting things that happened there internationally that are worthy of note. The Soviets decided – by everything I could tell – that he was a "has-been" and they did not pay any attention to him. He had no official appointments although he asked for them. He asked to meet with his old nemesis Khrushchev of course, that I understand, but that was not permitted. No Soviet official of any standing saw him. As a result, Ambassador Thompson had to try to keep him occupied and he did two things that I recall. One was a reception for the foreign and American press corps at Spaso House which was sort of a press conference. There was a lot of skepticism among the press as to whether Nixon was going to be there.

After he lost the election for governor in California, then they sent him out to Central Asia for sight seeing. On the trip to various places to raise his profile as an international expert. The Russians were doing nothing to help him. From Moscow, he went to Bucharest. In Bucharest, Nicolae Ceausescu treated him as if he were sitting president. As

we'll see later on, that paid off because the first visit that President Nixon made to a Warsaw-Pact country was not to Poland, not to the Soviet Union but to Bucharest, Romania, with consequences that in various ways are still being felt. But I think that the Soviets missed that treating him as an important political figure. They wouldn't have had to give him – not royal treatment but – he was still a significant person and they must have calculated that whatever intention he gave them, whatever they gave him, might assist him in his bid to become president which they didn't want to do. The Romanians bet on a long shot and cashed in big. So that was one.

Other people who came during that time were McGeorge Bundy and his wife came and stayed at Spaso House.

Q: He was still ... no longer national security advisor ...

RICKERT: No. He was ... out. The McNamaras came. Robert and Laura McNamara came and I ended up being his tour guide in Moscow for a couple of days. The Thompsons were away at that time and he had the courtesy of staying and he knew that he was allowed to stay at the residence. George Romney came ... kind of a feeler-bit for his presidential attempt. On the diplomatic side Chip Bohlen came for a visit.

Q: Former ambassador?

RICKERT: He was former ambassador. I think he was in Paris as ambassador. Of course, Ford Collins was there when I arrived. And Opportune came on a visit. He was the office director. Charles Faire a former diplomat who had lived in Spaso House had been a colleague of Ambassador Thompson's during WWII. Katherine Graham came, Susan Mary Althaus, Martha Schlesinger, Robert Ellsworth he came with Nixon and was later to be ambassador to Brussels and was sort of an aide to Nixon. Carl Kaysen who had been at Kennedy's white house who was then director of the institute for advanced study in Princeton. Sol Hurok came. Lillian Hellman, Dinah Shore and of course, Anatoly Dobrynin came for meals occasionally. Gunnar Jarring, he was the Swedish Ambassador and you probably know from his ... He was one of the early Cyprus mediators under the UN, perhaps the first.

Q: ... and very much involved in the Middle-East also, with the United Nations.

RICKERT: Yes. He was a very distinguished Swedish Ambassador to Washington. My about-to-become-wife worked for his embassy so I got to know him and his colleagues but that comes a little bit later.

So there were a lot of interesting people who showed up. In many cases I was involved with taking them sightseeing and showing them around. I spoke Russian and I usually spoke reasonably well and that was one of the little perks of the job. There's one little Sol Hurok story I'd like to tell. He came to lunch one day. He gave his definition of U.S.-Soviet cultural exchanges. It's not a correct one but it's amusing anyway and in his

definition was the following, he said: "They send us their Jewish violinists from Odessa, we send them *our* Jewish violinists from Odessa." He had a nice sense of humor.

Q: What would you say about the general state of U.S.-Soviet relations in this period that you were there?

RICKERT: It was difficult because of primarily Vietnam. Llewellyn Thompson had been sent to Moscow, I would have to say by all appearances, somewhat against his will by President Johnson to negotiate an _____ treaty. Thompson was extraordinarily closed-mouthed on that. I knew nothing of what was going on with those negotiations as was appropriate. I had no need to know. But that's what he spent his time doing on those afternoons when he was away from the office. But the cloud of Vietnam hung over everything. And then of course, in August 1968, there was another event in Prague which complicated things from our side. So I wouldn't say that relations were openly hostile, but there was a considerable reserve. I would speculate that the fairly new Soviet leadership which was Kosygin and Brezhnev at that time also was still consolidating itself. There was still some movement and jockeying and being a leader in the Soviet Union was not a job with a guaranteed tenure. So there may be that there was some absorption and seeing where the chips would fall there as well. Eventually Brezhnev ended up being the unchallenged leader and remained so for a number of years but in the late 60s it wasn't quite so clear yet.

Q: Who was the DCM there?

RICKERT: The first DCM was John Guthrie, a very interesting fellow. He was there for the first year. He had been teaching in Japan when WWII broke and spent WWII digging Japanese coal mines and learned Japanese. He was requested by Emory Swank who was there for the second year. They're both very nice and good professionals.

Q: Okay, anything else we should say about your assignment to Moscow from 1966 to 1968. When in '68 did you leave?

RICKERT: I left in ... oh that would have been in summer of '68.

Q: So you were there during the Prague ... difficulties? Prague spring and what followed.

RICKERT: Yes. That summer was of course a very uneasy one. In the earlier part of that summer there was great speculation that the Soviets would invade. I remember we had one USIA officer at post of Czech origin named Jaroslav Verner, Jerry Verner who followed all this with great interest and anxiety. Because he had a personal stake, it seemed, in the good things that were happening under Dubcek and was obviously dismayed when things went bad.

But, later in the summer it seemed as though the situation had stabilized so the attack on August 21st of '68, came as a surprise. In fact, the evening before, I had met a Swedish

diplomat friend and spent the evening playing tennis at the Czechoslovak Embassy – they have their own court – with two Czech diplomats and a Swedish friend, Loserich Greendale. Somebody invited me to play doubles and then we went in to the embassy and drank some Czech beer and the two diplomats gave no indication at all that anything untoward was about to happen. But the next morning, or during that night, the tanks rolled and the next morning it was in the press.

There are a lot of incidents that happened in Russia that were of interest to me at least. Some of them had to do with Ambassador Thompson and I recorded those in a separate memo which I can provide. One of Thompson's daughters told me that she wants to write a book about her father and I collected several pages of recollections of my days with him. I could provide them.

Q: Well I'd suggest that we'd append this to your oral history transcript. I don't think we necessarily need to repeat all of that here if you have it recorded.

RICKERT: I have it written down and I've even added to it occasionally as I recall other things. Memory's a tricky thing and sometimes out of nowhere an incident or an event will pop up; one I've forgotten for a long time. So, it's in my computer and I just added something the other day that I thought of.

There are a lot of interesting things that happened that didn't involve Ambassador Thompson. I travel a lot in the country, which was a fascinating experience. In those days, you have to get permission from the government organ that was responsible for the caring, feeding and oversight of foreigners.

Q: Foreigners in general or foreign diplomats?

RICKERT: I suspect ... well, certainly foreign diplomats. Probably there were other branches of the KGB that took care of other foreigners. But in order to travel anywhere: One must recall that from Moscow, there was a 25 mile radius beyond which one couldn't go without permission, except for certain designated routes. One could drive to Leningrad. There was a route south that one could go on for a certain distance, but any other travel had to be approved. The travel plan had to be submitted 48 hours in advance, and they issued the tickets and made the hotel reservations so you could always be sure that you got a room that had electronics. This made a lot of trips impossible. I was in demand for travel because a lot of people did travel and we had to travel in pairs for security reasons. I was single so people often asked me to join in on consular trips and I made a consular trip to Kursk with Bill Farrand. He and I went to Kursk, the site of the greatest tank battle of all time. When two American women were injured in a car accident, this consular officer at the time, went down to provide consular support but he had to have someone to go with him and I was selected. I visited, one way or another, a lot of places.

There was a lot of concern about attempts to compromise American diplomats by the

KGB. The honey-trap was the most famous and much talked about – the only time that I had an experience with that particular approach. It was in the metropolis of Ufah and there was a publications procurement trip with, probably Bill Price, a very nice fellow …

Q: I know him.

RICKERT: ... and a wonderful traveling companion. He was the Publications Procurement Officer and I was shot-gun with him. We went to Ufah and we went around and we went to the bookstores and bought things and then we went to the only hotel that was fit for foreigners I suppose; only barely so, and had dinner. We sat down in a big empty dining room with a rather pathetic combo, nothing in front, playing music badly. As we sat there and ordered our dinner, two young Russian guys came over and said, which is common in the Soviet – was common in the Soviet Union – anyway, they said, "you mind if we join you?" There were a lot of empty tables. We said no and they sat there and spoke to each other in Russian and we spoke to each other in English and one of them said, "Do you speak Russian?" And we said yes, then the conversation started.

I think they were legit. They were recent university graduates who had been sent to Ufah – they're engineers – to do some form of national service. They were bored to tears and very curious about the outside world. We talked about all sorts of things: the Kennedy assassination, they were convinced that it was the work of Lyndon Johnson because he was the one who benefited from it so who else could it have been ... and other things of that sort. They wanted to know about the United States. But we were sitting there and talking very amiably and drinking vodka and two young ladies came over and one of them said to me and Bill, they said, "My friend and I have been listening to you and you speak such excellent Russian but we can't tell ... are you Czech or are you Polish?" And we said no, we're Americans. "Oh, _____ _____ [unintelligible Russian]" They went on and on and we tried to ignore then but they didn't go away. So eventually they said, "could we sit down with you?" One sat next to me and the other next to Bill. We really kind of ignored them in the conversation but one of them sitting next to me, finally leaned over and started whispering and said, "this is such a fascinating conversation, why don't we go to my room and continue it?" I pretended that I didn't understand or hear and then she tried it again and it became impossible not to respond. I had a stroke of vodka-fueled genius and I said to her in terms that she would certainly understand that Bill, who looked a little older than I did, I said: "Do you see that man over there? He's my boss and I can't do anything without his permission." She made a half-hearted attempt on Bill which got nowhere and that was the end of that.

Q: [chuckle]

RICKERT: [chuckle] But, there were things like that which happened.

Q: The requirement to travel with another officer, another American was an embassy requirement?

RICKERT: That's correct. That's correct. While we were there, one of our military attachés who was traveling with his British colleague was drugged and put in a compromising position for photographs and that sort of thing. These things did happen, so it wasn't just some fairy tale. These kinds of things did happen. People did have approaches of varying degrees of seriousness.

Q: Okay, anything else we should say about your assignment in Moscow?

RICKERT: One of the things I had to do as staff aide was keep track of the provisions in liquid and solid. When I took over the job, the store room in Spaso House I had to make an inventory. Everything in it was sold by Ambassador Kohler to Ambassador Thompson. I found that there were five bottles of rye whiskey there and I didn't know what they were for. Eventually I found out that they had been bought for John Foster Dulles, who drank rye whiskey, when he was Secretary of State. It was expected before the Gary Powers incident, the U2 incident, that they'd be coming to Moscow. Someone had gotten the whiskey for him. Why he needed five bottles, I don't know, but I suppose that was just being cautious. But they were still on the inventory and being sold from one ambassador to the other, untouched.

Q: Six years after or so. [laugh]

RICKERT: Yes, that's right. They may still be there for all I know. Russia was fascinating. The Seven Day War took place while I was there. I recall walking down the street in Moscow, just as that was going on and hearing someone blasting from a window in June, I think, so it was warm and sunny. They were blasting out the window on the biggest loud speakers that person could muster, it was the theme song from Exodus. Russians that I spoke to at the time said, "Why is it that we always end up backing the scum bags." Or Russian words to that effect. They were not very fond of Arabs and Muslims and other people that they found themselves aligned with.

Q: Did you know of Russian Jews of that period during your ... ?

RICKERT: No I didn't. This was before. Of course in the '60s embassy people kept very close. They had good relations with the outstanding Russian Jewish dissidents. There were a few old friends of the Thompsons who may have been Jewish but that was incidental. They were Russians first, Jewish second, and some of the later ones became Zionists and more open to being willing to declare their Jewish background.

Q: Now Llewellyn Thompson had served in Moscow once before?

RICKERT: Twice.

Q: Twice before.

RICKERT: He'd been there in WWII. Then he'd been ambassador in the late '50s.

Q: Oh this was his second time as ambassador?

RICKERT: Second tour as ambassador which I think, in part, accounts for the lack of overwhelming enthusiasm in which approached the job. I don't even imply for a moment that he wasn't totally and completely dedicated, but I think if he had his choice he might have been in some place else at that particular stage in his life.

A couple of other things: Going to Easter services and Christmas services in Zagorsk which was then the head of the Orthodox Church, the name has changed to something else. The cathedrals in Moscow was always very interesting in an officially Atheist country. There was a lot more attachment at least to the outward signs of religion than I would have expected. People said it's only old women but on those occasions you would see quite a range of ages and even of social classes. You saw some people who were clearly not peasants or workers. That struck me. Of course, since 1989, there has been something of a revival of the Orthodox Church in Russia, not to mention the appearance of other churches which existed like Baptist and others but were extremely carefully monitored.

Going back to the household staff at Moscow for a moment ... The elderly Chinese gentlemen who didn't die who was named Tang had difficulties seeing. When he was outside of Spaso House he wore glasses but he refused to wear them in the house. We asked him why and we said he should wear glasses and he said, "No, only the master can wear glasses in the house." He knew how to serve and all the things that he needed to do – although he had been superceded as the senior butler by an Italian named Clemente. One of the best pieces of advice that Dick McCormick gave me before he left was, "Never allow Tang to serve white wine by candle light." Because he'll miss the glass and I did see that on occasion. The other thing that Tang did was to keep water for mixing in drinks like whiskey and water in gin bottles. But on at least one occasion he mixed up the gin bottle with water and poured a mixture of gin and scotch which wasn't quite well received.

Q: Okay, I think we probably ought to stop at this point, Jonathan. It's about the time that we had agreed on. We'll pick up next time with any last words about Moscow and go on to your next assignment okay?

RICKERT: Okay, sounds fine.

Q: Thank you.

We're picking up the oral history interview with Jonathan Rickert at the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Raymond Ewing. It's the 26th of September, 2003. Now when we stopped last time, we were just about finished with the assignment – it was your second overseas assignment to the embassy in Moscow – you may not remember exactly everything you said nine months ago but is there everything

particularly important that you would want to mention and we'll go on to the following assignment.

RICKERT: Well thank you, I'm glad to be back and to be picking up where we left off. I don't recall exactly how far we got in to Moscow but the one thing that I need to mention and I believe I did not mention back in December was the fact that I met my wife-to-be in Moscow in January of 1968. We became engaged that summer and married eventually. It's important because the personal aspect of foreign service life is of equal importance to the professional and also because since my wife is from Sweden and was working at the Swedish embassy at the time we met. It's one we'll see through the ensuing chapters of this great saga. I have been to Sweden many times without knowing enough that would make some sense but in any case, we're still married after 35 years which is unfortunately not the case with all of our contemporaries.

Q: Your next assignment I see was not to Stockholm but back to Washington in the State Department.

RICKERT: At that time when I married my Swedish wife, an "alien" as she was labeled at that point, first of all I had to submit my resignation to the foreign service and I had to apply for permission to marry her. I was told that process would take about a year. The SY (Security Office) at that time did what, in effect, was a full investigation of my wife in Sweden. The security officer told me it would take a year. He said with a leer, "If you have to get married, we can speed it up." Which didn't strike me as being particularly constructive or a fair way to go about it, but that was what I was told. In any case I left Moscow in December '68. She completed her tour with the Swedish embassy a couple of weeks later in December '68 and returned to Sweden. We spent Christmas with her family in southern Sweden and she went to her foreign ministry to complete her contract that she had signed up for and did not want to break for the opportunity to marry me. I returned to Washington for my next assignment which was the old EURSES – which was the Soviet and Eastern European exchanges staff. This is an office that has long since disappeared. But during a certain period of the cold war, it was responsible for overseeing, and to some extent controlling, the flow of exchanges back mostly from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

The major concern in those days and it was a correct concern, was the purposes for which Soviet and Eastern European scholars – who were overwhelmingly scientists and people who were involved in technology in various areas – the purposes for which they were coming. The office was headed at first by Art Wortzel and then by Charles Stefan. The deputy was Burgess – Ted Burgess – . Throughout the two years I was there the office was focused on trying to ensure that the exchanges went smoothly but through an inter-agency group conducting necessary checks and balances to make sure that people that were getting here were not KGB or other sorts of agents and were not posing a threat to national security through their field of interest. Some people were rejected just because of their field, others were rejected because of what the agencies had on their background and many others of course came.

I covered Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It was a fairly bureaucratic type of activity. Part of the interest was dealing with the Czechs because this was not long after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union in the Warsaw Pact. There were a number of Czech scholars in the United States – Czechoslovak scholars, I should say – who wanted to stay at least temporarily because they were not sure what kind of a welcome would await them if they were to return. So I got involved in some of those issues. During my time in that office where my direct boss was Ted Hartry a USIA [United States International Affairs] officer on loan to State, he's also Eastern European ... During that time I was recruited by Mort Abramowitz to go work on the staff of Elliot Richardson. Mort was a little bit surprised upon hearing what the hours would be. Having a nine to five because I was newly married, I wasn't excited with the prospect of working 12 hours a day, six days a week and turned him down. I don't think he's been turned down very often. So I stayed home for the full two years. In my spare time, such as it was, I worked the course work at GW [George Washington University] toward an MA in international relations which in those days the Department paid for; one or two courses a semester, which was a good way to spend my free time.

My wife and I were married in Sweden on June 20th 1969 and finished out the tour in Washington with assignment being made to Bucharest in the old way, not the FCA way but essentially by EUR. Olaf Grobel was the assignments officer and he asked me if I expressed an interest in Eastern Europe and he said: "How would you like to go to Romania?" And I said, "Don't know much about it, but yeah, sure." So I ended up being assigned to Romania as a consular officer.

Q: Before we get out to Romania, let me ask just a couple of quick questions about the exchanges – the Soviet and Eastern European exchanges office in the European bureau – where there also people in the cultural affairs bureau that were actually involved in programming these exchangees? You were basically sort of a monitor to make sure that the wrong people didn't come and so on?

RICKERT: There was, at that time as there is again, a bureau of educational and cultural affairs. They were involved in the programming that functioned that USIA later took over. We coordinate with them about programs and with the various security agencies about background and other things of a security nature.

Q: Did you have any contact or much contact with the exchangees themselves?

RICKERT: Usually not. The main contact was when there was a problem. We would sometimes have contact with them. Well, the example I gave I think is that there were a number of Czechoslovaks here who didn't want to defect but they didn't want to go back at that particular time. They were seeking to prolong their stays so that they could see how things shook out back home before committing themselves. We were involved with dealing with them and with INS [Immigration and Naturalization Services] and with CA and with others to enable them to extend their stays.

Q: How much contact did you have with embassies here in Washington? The Czechoslovak or the Bulgarian embassy?

RICKERT: We did have a fair amount. We were on their guest list for receptions and so forth. They were hunkered-down embassies, both because it was Cold War and Vietnam era and all the rest, also because – and I don't remember the exact timing – there were a number of officials who defected during the lat '60s and early '70s so no one knew quite who could be counted on in the embassies. My observation was that when an embassy was hit by two or three defections they really did hunker down and pull in their horns and limited their contact with outsiders to the bare minimum necessary for getting their work done. We did deal with the geographic desks because we were almost next door to them and we had close coordination with them. They needed to know who was coming in and why and what the problems were. We also dealt, to some extent, with the foreign-student advisors at the universities. Well, they were usually foreign-student offices but they handled the graduate students. Many of these people came on exchange or J-Visas which meant that they had their two year foreign residency requirement after they completed their tour before they could come back as immigrants.

Q: Anything else about that assignment or should we go on to ... you did language training and then you went to Bucharest.

RICKERT: That's right. I went through language training at FSI [Foreign Services Institute] with the famous Nicholai Kiakov who taught generations of Romanian language students. It was a good experience in the sense that I went through with my future DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] Bob Martins, the econ officer Don DeManti, with admin officer Del Shray and with the consular officer who was my immediate supervisor or boss – although we were the same grade he was a step above me – Frank Tumminia. So we got to know each other and those experiences can sometimes lead to unhappy beginnings but in this case everyone got on very well and it was a good beginning.

Q: So you went as a consular officer in Bucharest?

RICKERT: That's correct. After the course, I went to Sweden where my wife had gone a little bit earlier. We picked up a Volvo and drove to Romania which was more of an adventure in those days than it would be today. And we arrived shortly after independence day in July, '71. That was the beginning of the really fascinating chapter. If I add it all up, as it turns out later in my career, I ended up spending seven years in all in Romania and nine years dealing exclusively with Romania and subsequently as a desk officer, then as director for the office which covered Romania another three years, where I spent most of my time in Romania because it was the problem child in that office. So without any design or forethought I ended up spending 12 years of my career doing solely or largely Romania. So starting in July '71 it was the beginning of something that couldn't be foreseen at that time.

Q: Well, it certainly sounds like the Department's investment in you in terms of the Romanian language instruction was very well returned over the years. So what was happening as far as consular work in Romania was concerned when you first got there in July of '71?

RICKERT: Well, the section at that time was made up of two full time FSOs and one half-time Vice-Consul who had other duties. We were doing about 2,000 NIVs a year of which a number were chicken feed by today's standards. But a number of them were done on the basis of diplomatic notes which accompanied the passport; either a diplomatic passport or what they called a service passport in Romania, the equivalent of an official passport. Those weren't interviewed but everybody else was interviewed. Then we did a couple of hundred – I don't remember exact number – of immigrant visas a year, mostly immediate family members. It was a good situation for me in that because there weren't that many applicants, one could really interview them. My normal interviews lasted 15 minutes, instead of 15 seconds today. They ranged much beyond what was specifically necessary for the visa. Many people came from provinces, places that we could go to but where we weren't likely to spend much time. One could ask about living conditions and availability of food and other things. So it was very useful from that standpoint. Also, linguistically it was very helpful because I barely scraped by with a 3-3 coming out of FSI. But by the end of my tour in Romania I had a 4-4 in Romanian and it was largely due to the two years out of the three that I spent doing consular work where I used it all the time.

Q: Were you encouraged to do some political reporting based on some these conversations you had?

RICKERT: Yes, we did some reporting and since I hoped and did eventually move to the political section, I picked up odds and ends that the political officer couldn't handle for one reason or another. In those days for those who remember that period, a lot of the reporting done at these Eastern European posts was based on press and media. So some of it involved taking articles and translating them and evaluating them and taking them in context with a comment and I did some of that. I also did ... since immigration was a growing issue and became an even bigger issue with the OSCE Treaty and Helsinki Treaty eventually in 1975, there was a lot of congressional interest and other interest by ethnic groups in the States and so forth. So I did reporting on conditions for applicants for visas. I remember one airgram about difficulties that people told me about in even applying for passports. From the Romanian point of view, the first line of defense was to deny people a passport. Many of the people we spoke to would come in and complain that they couldn't get a passport and wanted our help with that and we had to say as politely as we could that we're in the business of issuing visas and that we don't issue passports. While we feel their pain and understand your frustration, there's not a whole lot that we can do to get your passport.

I remember doing one report on the excuses that were given to people and the ways in which people bought places in line ... all the things that anyone who has lived in an

economy of shortages know. It's the same tricks, same problems and it was a real eye opening for someone coming from a country where if you wanted a passport, you went to the post office or elsewhere and got a form, filled it in and got it as a matter of course. It was a right: there, it was a matter of chicanery and bribery and good luck and a whole bunch of other things that over which the applicant himself or herself really had very little control.

Q: Did you do some control in the country?

RICKERT: Fortunately, yes. Our ambassador, the first ambassador there was Len Meeker the former legal advisor in the Department of State who was a career civil servant and was really an excellent ambassador. He worked very hard on his Romanian; used it extensively and was a man of high intellect and very high standards in general. He encouraged everyone to travel for any reason or no reason. As a consequence, one way or another, I visited every city in Romania of a 100,000 people or more, except for one, which I still haven't visited after all these years. Bucharest had, if I recall correctly at that time, a million and a half people. Due to the Communist policy of spreading industry around the country, there were a dozen or more cities with somewhere in the range of 100,000 people. This was planned growth. I was able to visit virtually all of them. Of course, most of the travel was done by car, so you got to see a lot in between.

Q: How open was the country for a diplomat, an American diplomat, at this point? Did you feel under surveillance all the time, to what extent could you have – socially or otherwise – have contact with the Romanians?

RICKERT: It was about as most open during the post-WWII period because Richard Nixon had visited in 1969 and that had been a major event for Romania and for U.S.-Romania relations. There's one little anecdote that if I didn't say it in the Soviet part, I ought to say here because it's important historically.

Nixon came to Moscow in the spring of 1968 as part of his effort to raise his profile as an international statesmen as he prepared to run for the presidency. When he got there, the Soviets ... in effect, he was in the Soviet Union for a week. Virtually no one saw him. He was completely frozen out. He tried to see Khrushchev which of course was turned down. He tried to see luminaries in the current government. Nobody saw him. Ambassador Thompson had to be very creative to find things for a high-powered American former vice president to do. I remember he held a reception for the American and foreign journalists. He held representational dinners with diplomats. He sent him off to central Asia to visit that area. Nixon, by all appearances, bore this very ... well, he didn't complain in my hearing. He stayed at the residence and I was living at the residence. I had several meals with him so I heard him speak. He was very correct about this, but I looked in his memoirs and he hasn't said – I haven't been able to find anything much about it – the fact is, when he became President ... Oh! After he left the Soviet Union he went to Bucharest and he was treated as a – and this is in 1968 – he was treated like a sitting president. They pulled out all stops, everything the best. Huge crowds, warm reception,

everything else. Then when he became president and had a chance to decide where to start his official traveling, it wasn't to Moscow which would have been the logical place, it wasn't to Warsaw, which politically might have been an appropriate place to go. It was to Bucharest: first U.S. president ever to visit. The Romanians never forgot that and always had a very high regard for Nixon because they felt he, in effect, put them on the map and gave them a chance to demonstrate what they wished were true, that they were not under the Soviet thumb.

Q: Okay, you mentioned that in your third year, you became a political officer in Bucharest, is there anything else that you want to say about the consular two years before we move on?

RICKERT: Well, there were a lot of interesting things that happened. Although access to the consulate was controlled, it was amazing who got through. I think sometimes by design, people who were mentally unstable were allowed to come through. We ended up interviewing people who at first looked to be normal and sensible but the more you talk with them the more you found that they were from other planets. I remember one guy who came in who told me very confidentially that he had a method of launching rockets with psychic power. I said, oh that's very interesting, can you give me any information on it? He said, "Well, I have all of the information and I'm willing to demonstrate it once I reach the United States." So he wasn't completely crazy. There were others who were being attacked by rays of various sorts who had the authorities putting substances in their bread ... a whole range of these folks. I assumed the consulate was bugged so I can only imagine the *securitante* there ... the local KBG folks sitting back, listening to the tapes of the poor consulate officers dealing with these well-known local unbalanced people and seeing how we handled them for better or for worse.

There were also people who wanted help in defecting, in help getting out of the country. I remember one guy who came through who claimed he walked from Russia, he was Russian. He crossed the Prut by swimming and had walked to Bucharest and was going to keep walking until he could cross the Danube in to Yugoslavia and go west. He was a rather Rasputin-like character. I immediately informed the DCM Bob Martins about him and Bob, who had spent time in the Soviet Union and had great sympathy for Russians informally – and I'm sure contrary to regulations – passed the hat in the embassy, people put in some money which we gave to this gentleman for his onward journey. He was definitely Russian, how much of the rest of the story was true, no one knows. There were those types of things that were very interesting.

One of the most interesting things I did as a consulate officer was interviewing the small number of people who, because of U.S. political pressure or because of family ties or because of successful bribing of the appropriate person were able to get passports and exit visas to immigrate to the States. These people usually had relatives in the States and we would interview them and one question would always be, obviously, are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? Many of them, I'm sure, lied through their teeth and there was no way that we could check it, but a surprising number said, "Yes, I

was a member." There was a system in place for those cases to be referred to Washington for adjudication as to whether or not they – within the meaning of the law – had been involuntary members. Washington at that time was very liberal with these cases and most of the people who applied – actually, all of them – were judged to be involuntary. They claimed that they needed to be party members in order to maintain their job or for education or whatever ... One must remember that the Romanian party was a mass party of about three million in numbers out of the population of 22, 23 million people. There was an open door policy, a lot of people entered voluntarily and a lot of people were sort of swept in.

The most trying case for me, the only one where I knowingly, probably broke the law was a Jewish gentleman. We talked about his background and I asked him if he had been a party member and he told me yes. I asked, why did you join? And he said, "Because I believed." The *only* wrong answer. I said, how is that? And he said that his family was from northern Transylvania, which was under Hungarian control during WWII. They had all been sent off to the camps and killed and he was about 18 at the end of the war. He said to him it looked as though there were only two alternatives politically: Communism or Fascism. Fascism had killed his family. Communism promised a better future so he joined the party. He was in the party for two or three years, went to a university and he said he quickly found out that it wasn't what he thought it was. He couldn't fulfill the requirement under the law that he had resigned ... he would have had to have resigned and worked actively against the party in order to qualify as an involuntary member. But he just stopped paying his dues. In Romania and other countries in those days they periodically checked the list of members and those who didn't pay their dues were dropped from the roles and that was that. That was what happened to him. He had never been a party member afterwards. But I was very moved by his story which, if I followed the law precisely and exactly, would have meant that he could not get a visa. I told him that as far as I was concerned he was an involuntary member and I hoped on reaching the United States he would never say anything to the contrary. I concluded that it would be a moral injustice if not a legal one for somebody who told, or appeared to be telling a 100% truth to be kept out, while scores of people who lied through their teeth were allowed in.

There were others. I remember a woman who was a very simple woman; worked in a sewing factory, a clothing factory. She told me that she was told by her boss, "you're one of the best workers, you have to join." "But I don't want to join." "You have to join." "But I go to church every Sunday." "It doesn't matter, you can be a church goer and be a party member." This was out in the provinces some place, so she joined. It seemed to me that she was very clearly an involuntary member. There was another fellow from northern Romania who said he joined. He was married with two kids who all lived in one room. He said that the party recruiter told him that he could get two rooms if he joined the party. He joined, he said, "I'm still in one room." So there were a lot of things that went on. I think U.S. law at the time might have made very good sense for former Communists from the UK or France or Britain. But it didn't make a lot of sense for former members who are living in totalitarian environments.

Q: What extent, did you as consular officer, get involved with American citizens, travelers, residents, or anyone else?

RICKERT: I did visas and my colleague did American citizen services. When he was gone I covered for him so I did a few of those cases. But I would say that more than 95% of my work was tied up in visas. We had roughly, if I recall correctly, around 500 dual nationals living in Romania whose parents had immigrated to the States after WWI who were born in the States. Then when the depression came, their parents usually lost their jobs and then returned to Romania in order to survive, really. So they were American-born. We consider them to be U.S. citizens, the Romanians consider them to be Romanian citizens. One of our bi-lateral issues was pursuing the interest of these people in returning to the United States. We did this on periodic lists that we forwarded to the foreign ministry. Usually there was no movement on our list. But occasionally there would be a high level American visitor coming. In Romanian fashion there would be an effort by the Romanians to please the visitor and some names would be approved and they would go off to the States. Unfortunately many of these people didn't speak English. They were American in name and passport, but they had come back as small children or infants so they really knew nothing about the United States and sometimes, I'm afraid, went with really unrealistic expectations as to what they would find when they arrived here.

Q: They were given American passports, of course?

RICKERT: Right.

Q: Did the Romanians – you consider them Romanian citizens – recognize that?

RICKERT: No. In many cases it wasn't a requirement. Many of those who left as immigrants from Romanian either wanted to or were forced to or felt they ought to renounce their Romanian citizenship. There was a method whereby they could pay what was a large fee in those days for such poor people and apply to divest themselves of their Romanian citizenship. They were given a passport document that looked like a regular passport except it had a brown cover and it said: "*f_r_ cet__enie"* – for those without citizenship – it's stateless, in other words. Many people who came in for immigrant visas, came in with the brown passport. Others, when they got to the States, would apply to renounce their citizenship, even though we explained that as far as the U.S. was concerned, what citizenship the Romanians considered them to have was irrelevant, particularly once they got to the United States. It could only be relevant if they were ever to return to Romania as a visitor or something like that. That was a little quirk in the work that we had there.

Q: Well, I think in 1973 you went to the political section. What did you do there, maybe we can talk now a little bit more about the general state of Romanian-American relations and Romania's place in Eastern Europe and also as it relates, I suppose, to the Middle East. This was about the time of a major Middle East war.

RICKERT: I mentioned that I arrived in July, 1971. At the time President Ceausescu was traveling in the far east. He went to Beijing and Pyongyang and maybe some other places. By all accounts, since the revolution, people have determined that it was the real turning point in his political development. With hindsight, people have concluded that he was very impressed, especially with what he saw in Pyongyang, North Korea, which was a country on a much closer scale to that of Romania than that of China. He was reputed to have liked the hero-worship of the Korean people, the discipline, the order, the way things worked: I don't know what he was shown, it probably had a turnout of dancers and singers and marchers and ... demonstrators of the controlled Communist variety, not of the uncontrolled American variety. With hindsight we can see that Romania's long slide into more of a repressive internal situation probably did begin after that visit. So it was an important time. We did not see that at that time. There were a few measures taken when he got back. He banned Western rock and roll from the radios and people were a little bit more nervous about contacts for a bit but it kind of blew over and people thought, "well it was just a temporary aberration." There really was a lot of optimism in the early '70s that things were going to get better and Romania would move more in a Yugoslav direction that anything else. Romania had good relations with Yugoslavia. Tito and Ceausescu got on well; they had similar aspirations in certain ways and similar concerns. So it was disappointing to see over the subsequent years that there was a long slide towards what was probably, after Albania, the most repressive regime in central Eastern Europe.

As you mentioned, I moved to the political section in the summer of '73. Ed Mainland was the supervisory political officer over me. A lot of what we did was working with the press and media to try to discern what was going on inside the country. There was a lot of the Romanian version of Kremlinology, tea leaf reading. Romanian officials were largely available, but not terribly open. You could get meetings and you could talk with them but they really kept very closely to the party line in those respects and who can blame them? One false step and they could find themselves in the outer provinces some place. It's interesting to note that the present President of Romania, Ion Iliescu was a member at the time I arrived, of the political executive bureau, which was the Romanian equivalent of the politburo. He was not, by all accounts, in favor of the Ceausescu line. In Romanian fashion, he wasn't sent off to a prison camp or anything like that, but he was steadily demoted through the '70s and '80s until at the time of the revolution he was heading a publishing house in Bucharest, a scientific publishing house. But he went through provincial party leadership posts and then was dropped from the central committee and gradually got by until he was – he wasn't kicked out of the party – he was, I guess from Ceausescu's point of view, de-fanged as a potential rival. That was another sign in retrospect of the way in which things were going.

Q: As the junior political officer, were you doing mostly internal domestic things, as you say, particularly, reading the tea leaves and the newspapers?

RICKERT: Did that and also a lot of sharing of information with our diplomatic colleagues. Everyone had access to little pieces of the picture. In Communist times, I'm

sure not only in Romania but in all of those countries, there were much closer relationships with the friendly embassies, NATO in particular, but also neutrals like Sweden and Switzerland. Often you would find on a particular issue, perhaps the Egyptians or the Japanese or somebody else would be particularly well-informed. One spent a lot of time exchanging information with colleagues. In the case of NATO colleagues, there were regular meetings which we pooled our ignorance and try to turn it in to something that was less than ignorant. Whenever there were visits, and the Romanians did promote visits as part of their effort to increase their independence in foreign policy independence. If anyone came at a high level from any country, it was quite possible that one would pick up tidbits from talking to official dinners or other things with ministers with party officials and so forth. But not at my level. The ambassadors and the senior people would. Those tidbits were shared extensively within these semi-official circles that we had and contributed to the overall analysis.

So what we were trying to do was to figure out in what way Romania was going. That was done through the press and through these personal contacts of one sort or another and also, of course, to influence it. One of the main influences that we had was visits, and there were a number of visits to Romania during my time there. Congress found Romania to be somewhat sexy. Hugh Scott came. he was the Republican Senate leader of the time. Ted Kennedy came. I was his "control officer," if that misnomer can be used: no one controlled Ted Kennedy. He was accompanied by his foreign policy advisor at the time, Bob Hunter, who eventually became Ambassador to NATO and a fascinating character named Jim King. He was head of personnel in the Carter administration and one of the most interesting political operatives I had ever come across ... There were many others who came. There was a delegation of governors with Dale Bumpers and Marvin Mandel for example. I remember. David Rockefeller came. There were hopes that Romania would open up economically and provide a venue for American investment and Rockefeller came for that purpose. Secretary of State William Rogers came at one point. We had been working on a bi-lateral consular convention with Romanians for a long time. Frank Tumminia, the other consular officer, and I were negotiating this with the head of Romania's consular division, a Mr. Bodesco who was a particularly dour and inflexible gentleman. All the negotiating, by the way, we did in Romania. But we weren't getting very far very fast and we heard one day that Rogers would be coming and he wanted something to sign. So it was determined that the consular convention would be the thing to sign. So State's Legal Bureau, "L", sent out a lawyer, Phil Shamwell to help us with the negotiations. All of the issues on which we had been told to say "no, no, no" suddenly became "yes, yes, yes" and we quickly came to an agreement on a consular convention which was duly signed during Secretary Rogers' visit. One little aside: I won't toot my horn on this but it was negotiated in Romania and then translated into English. I got the Romanian text the night before it was to be signed and my Romanian was far from perfect, but after it was signed I did find a couple of little mistakes in it which I pointed out to the Romanians and they were embarrassed. Phil said "no, there isn't a mistake" and I insisted, then he said, "well, we accept that the text could be interpreted in the way in which you interpreted it." So we had to go through the whole ring-a-roll of mending the treaty which involved exchanges of notes and a lot of other things which was a lot of

work. It taught me a lesson about reading: not only the large print, but also the fine print. These were not points that would have caused problems in U.S.-Romanian relations but they were in effect, typos – slightly worse than typos – but they shouldn't have been in a treaty that was going to be considered by a Senate of the United States.

Q: Were the same mistakes in the English version or the Romanian?

RICKERT: Oh, no, no. It was in the Romanian.

Q: You talked some about the independent foreign policy line Romania was trying to follow at that time. Why don't you talk a little bit more about that, how did that manifest, what did you see of Soviet pressures, the Soviet role in Romania as far as foreign policy was concerned, or anything else?

RICKERT: Yes. The Soviet's had the largest embassy by far and had very good access through Romania. But through a number of means, including those about which we don't discuss, it was clear to the leadership of the embassy at the time that the desire of Romania was to strike an independent direction in foreign policy – a reasonably independent direction. They weren't trying to get out of the Warsaw Pact or anything like that – but to create for themselves some room for maneuver was genuine. For example, during the 1973 war, the Arab-Israeli war, all of the Eastern Europeans except Romania broke relations with Israel. Romania was the first country and for a long time the only Warsaw-Pact country to have diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. The relations with the United States were conducted in a way which was very different from the way Czechoslovakia or Hungary or even Poland conducted their relations. How much of this was symbolic and superficial and how much was genuine? Scholars of the future will have to say. But it seemed to me even at my low level that this was a possible crack in the Warsaw Pact that the United States government decided that it was worth trying to exploit. Therefore a lot more attention was given to Romania as a country then it would otherwise have garnered as a medium-sized, not terribly important, satellite of the Soviet Union.

The Soviets, to my mind, were smart enough to apply their pressure for the most part privately. We'd see the indirect signs of it, but we wouldn't see terribly direct signs. I had a theory, which I can't prove, that among the satellites, the Soviets were willing to allow a certain degree of independence in domestic policy, as happened in Hungary with the various loosening up of socialist orthodoxy on the economic side, or foreign policy as happened in Romania, but never both in the same country. Romania, while it was doing a number a things in the foreign policy area, allowing ethnic Germans to immigrate to West Germany, allowing Jews to immigrate to Israel, both done for a price by the way ... these people were in effect bought out. But allowing them to go: which wasn't happening in the other countries. Romania was allowed to get away with these things, while at the same time it was pursuing a very tough and orthodox internal policy. There was no danger of parties arising that would be contrary to the Communist party, or solidarity movements rising, or Charter '77 movements or any of the other kinds of manifestations that

eventually occurred in the more western of the central European countries. So, I think – and this is purely opinion – that the Soviets were willing to tolerate a certain amount of independence in the foreign policy field as long as they kept their lid on very tightly domestically which they certainly did.

Q: Would you say that our approach then, in that context, was to perhaps follow a different policy towards Romania than towards other Eastern European countries to encourage more independence to try to take advantage of it, to try to have more visits ... perhaps to treat Romania differently on the one hand, but on the other, really not take very much interest in their internal situation. The repressive internal: that was not a major issue for us at that time until sometime later, I thought.

RICKERT: That's right, not in the early '70s. I think, from my perspective, our focus was on the foreign policy side. Human rights, to my recollection, became a really important matter in U.S. foreign policy with the advent of President Carter. Not that it was missing before then, but Carter was the one who raised it to the top of the agenda in our relations with many countries, including those of Central and Eastern Europe. Before then, of course we talked about our values and we talked about the need for greater freedom and independence and of course, greater movement of people and so forth. But we didn't apply the same pressures on Romania, which is the one that I can speak of from direct experience, as we did later. Part of that was due to of course, to the Helsinki Agreement. We talked about the freedom of movement and that was something that became very important post '75 but it was really, from my perspective, it was Carter who kind of gave that whole basket of issues the prominence that it eventually had. Internally, we watched and we of course raised issues, particularly issues that we learned of: Persecution for religious beliefs or other such things in individual cases. But it was a smaller part of our effort at that time than it became subsequently.

Q: Okay, anything else you want to say about this first tour in Bucharest, '71 to '74?

RICKERT: Romanians are cautious but their innate friendliness really overcame a lot of their inhibitions. They wouldn't flaunt it, but they wanted to be friendly with United States and with Americans and with other foreigners. We were able to develop friendships with people in the '70s which have persisted to this time, not with official or government people but with cultural people. We became good friends with Romania's leading painter, a man named Cornelia Bobba who died a few years ago in his '90s and whose widow is still alive in Bucharest and whom I see every time I go there. Another painter who we got to know, he did a portrait of my wife, which we treasure, another painter was ... a man named Yardges Billedon who was not of the same level of painter but was a wonderful human being whom we resumed contact with again after returning later in this saga. They invited us to their homes, which didn't happen in the Soviet Union and was not to happen in Bulgaria when we went there. We developed close relations with a number of the FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals] on a personal level. There were others that we were able to associate with and these people always behaved correctly on political matters. They told us later when we returned later, with a great grin, that they

had to report on our meetings, which we knew. But they apologized for doing this and it was the only way that they could maintain contact, which was to provide information on our not very political conversations.

Another thing was the closeness of the diplomatic corps in Bucharest. Not only did we share information together and help each other out professionally in a lot of different ways, but also we socialized to a great extent. There was a lot of creativity that went in to the parties that were given. One, I remember, was held in a cabana up in the mountains. It was a farewell for a very popular British diplomat. About 50 people gathered up there. He was hiking with some friends which led to this place and half of the younger to younger-middle aged diplomatic corps was waiting in the cabana for him and we had a great party there. There were other parties with themes and events; scavenger hunts, which drove the Romanian secret police mad. In fact, we were told after one, we should not engage in such activity because it was disrupting them. People chasing around Bucharest in cars at high speeds at all times of the day and night trying to get ... I don't know what but ...

Q: Following clues ...

RICKERT: Following clues! So, that was certainly one of the happy memories. Another thing that was really typical of Romania at that time, which was also typical of other countries in the region was the political jokes. The Romanians were very adept at circulating these jokes, even people who probably shouldn't have. But it was one of their outlets. I still remember some of them. In fact, you asked what I did in the political section. One of our periodic airgrams was a collection of political jokes collected from all sections at the embassy and put together in an airgram about once a quarter and sent in. I thought sometimes that I really ought to go to the declassification center and fish these out, I mean, because I know Moscow and other posts did the same and put them in to a publication of some sort because there were little gems there.

In 1972, Romania and United States ended up as the finalists to the Davis Cup which was played in Bucharest. The match was played on clay which was nothing sinister there. Romanians learn on clay. Americans prefer hard courses. Our Davis Cup team was not delighted with the prospect of playing the Romanians on clay in Bucharest. But we went to a number of the matches and it was an extremely exciting Davis Cup.

Another thing I remember: A journalist used to show up from time to time. In one case, my boss was out, the head of the political section. A rather, not terribly well known, Time magazine reporter named Strobe Talbott appeared. I took him home for lunch to my apartment. We lived in a all-Romanian building on the fifth floor in a one bedroom apartment. It was a nice apartment but the elevator didn't work most of the time which was a bit of a hindrance. But the first thing that Strobe did when he came in was look at my bookcase. I had then, the two volumes of Khrushchev Remembers, which he had translated from the Russian. I remember he remarked on my excellent taste in books. He was based in Belgrade at that time and used to cover the region and came to Bucharest on occasion. Romanians never forget. I remember going with a group of embassy colleagues

to Snagov Monastery which was about 30 miles north of Bucharest. It was where the remains of Vlad Tepes: Vlad the Impaler is buried. He is, of course, the model for Dracula, the extensive literature that has ensued from Vlad Tepes. There was a monk at this monastery who was showing us around. It was a ruin but it was looked after by a monk. He showed us a grave or a reputed grave, with great awe and dignity. Someone asked him, "well didn't he impale a lot of people, why do you consider him to be such a hero?" "Oh, he only impaled Turks."

So that was good enough for him.

Q: [Chuckle] You mentioned that Leonard Meeker was the ambassador when you were in the consular section in the early period. Was he there throughout your time or did somebody come in?

RICKERT: He was there for two years or a better part of two years. And then Bob Martins became chargé for an extended period close to a year. Then Harry Barnes came, by my recollection, February '74. By his recollection, March '74. But in any case, in the early part of '74. We were together then for three or four months. Harry of course, had been DCM at an earlier time before Meeker. When Nixon had come to Romania and had in fact ended up being Nixon's interpreter because the U.S. government interpreter turned out not to be able to handle the job. So Harry got some well-deserved prominence from that particular incident at that time and still spoke excellent Romanian which he still speaks today.

Q: Okay, anything else about Bucharest?

RICKERT: Well, Romania is a beautiful country – with wonderful mountain landscapes, attractive seashores, rural areas that are still very much 19th century in many respects ... One of the unique treasures of Romania are the monasteries in Moldova which are Orthodox monasteries. They are famous for their frescos. Well, most Orthodox monasteries are famous for their frescos one way or another, but the ones in Moldova – and there are many of them – are famous because the frescos are not only painted on the inside of the church but also on the external walls. They have been maintained quite well. They used colors, apparently, no one knows exactly ... The blues are supposed to be made from ground-up lapis lazuli and other mineral colors that don't fade. So visiting the monasteries was one of the memorable experiences. My wife and I drove up once with a Swedish DCM and his wife and we, as one could, stayed at the monasteries and ate meals there and then drove around. Although the Romanians had an official anti-religion policy as in any other areas, it was not enforced because the orthodox church was so much a part of their national history and their national culture. Even party members told me in many cases ... I was married in a registry office in Bucharest, but of course I went back to my village for a church wedding. Of course, my children was baptized in the village, never in Bucharest, always in the village. That part of Romanian culture was still very much alive.

Easter in Romania was something fantastic in the '70s. Church going was discouraged

and churches in Bucharest were mainly attended by older people and very young people, children, grandparents and others who didn't have official positions. But at Easter, my wife and I would usually go around, the services start at ten and it would be over after midnight. We would drive around and visit three or four churches and the churches would be packed. One custom that I didn't see in Bulgaria or Russia, it may be a common custom but ... in Romania, at the end of the Easter service, the congregation each member, takes a candle and goes up to the Pascal Candle at the front of the church and lights it. The tradition, in Romania at least, is that if you get home with it, if the candle is still lit it's good luck for the next year. So after the services were over we would be driving around in Bucharest, we'd see trams with people with their candles, people in taxis with their candles. We even saw couples necking on park benches with their candles. As I had written elsewhere, it's impossible to say how religious any country is. But of the Communist countries that I had any association with, and one way or another it was many of them, Romania was more open with its maintenance of Orthodox traditions. Including people crossing themselves when they passed a church on the street and so forth. Probably in Roman Catholic Poland it was on the same level or a higher level. Of the Orthodox countries, there was none other that I saw that degree of maintenance. Or at least many of the outer signs of their Orthodox past.

Q: Could you say anything about in this period, the early '70s, Romania's relationships with its immediate neighbors; Hungary, Bulgaria?

RICKERT: Yeah. I was struck by the degree to which Romanians were totally ignorant of Bulgaria. I served later in Bulgaria so I had the chance to see the same phenomenon from the same perspective. I often remarked that Romanians knew a lot more about the U.S. than they knew about Bulgaria and I found out later that the Bulgarians knew a lot more about say, the Federal Republic of Germany than they knew about Romania despite the fact that they were members of the same comicon, Warsaw Pact. The Romanians knew a lot about Hungary and didn't like what they knew. Hungary occupied northern Transylvania during WWII. There was a fear of irredentism. Although Hungarians and Romanians got on perfectly well on a human level, there was always a feeling of unease. Romanians did like the Yugoslavs. They felt they were rather a maverick brethren. In a sense, perhaps, somewhat of an insurance policy for their own maverick tendencies. Then, for the rest of their neighbors, it was the Soviet Union. The longest border was the Soviet Union. I heard in the '90s, when people have asked senior Romanian officials who their best neighbor was, I heard the comment which could equally apply probably to the '70s when I was there the first time. This was the then foreign minister speaking in the early '90s. He thought for a moment and said: "Our best neighbor is the Black Sea."

Q: Okay. Well, what happened when you left Bucharest in '74?

RICKERT: Spring of '74 I got my next assignment which was to Saigon. I was not happy with the assignment. Not because I was unwilling to go to Vietnam, but my wife's father had just died and my own brother had died and my grandmother had died and there were family issues that meant that anything that far away from either Europe or the United

States was going to cause personal hardship. But I returned to Washington with the Saigon assignment still on and took the shots and got the visa and made the preparations prior to going on home leave. The person who was in charge of Vietnam assignments at that time was one Frederick Z. Brown whom I had served with in Moscow. I saw him at the beginning of my time and I saw him just before I left, talking about the assignment he said, "Jonathan, clearly you're not very happy about this assignment." I said, "you're right, the reasons are personal, not professional. I'd be equally unhappy about going to Hong Kong or Bangkok or Canberra at this particular stage, it's just the wrong place to be this time in my life." He said – as you'll appreciate he's an old personnelist – he said, "Jonathan, there's no assignment that can't be broken." He said, "I know you well enough to know that you're no shirker and you're not just trying to get out of going to Vietnam and if you feel strongly about it, I will break the assignment. I can't say what you're going to get instead of it, but you won't have to go to Vietnam." I said, "I'm willing to take that chance." So he broke the assignment and I ended up going off to home leave with no assignment.

Q: This was towards the end of Saigon ...

RICKERT: That's right. It wouldn't have been a full assignment anyway but I didn't know that at the time, nor did he. So we went on home-leave and while I was on home-leave I was contacted by personnel about the possibility of going off to Vienna to MBFR [Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions] as sort of a staff assistant. To the MBFR delegation, Stan Resor a political appointee, former Secretary of the Army, was the U.S. rep. John Dean was the *de facto* DCM who made MBFR the latter part of his career. The opening occurred because the incumbent resigned from the foreign service, which to me, less than totally diplomatic, might have been a clue to me as to what was waiting. It was a good place geographically. It was dealing with East-West issues which I was interested in so I happily accepted the assignment and went to Vienna. The U.S. delegation there was a strange bird. It was made up of people from a number of different agencies including several different parts of the Defense Department plus State. There was a PAO [Public Affairs Office] operation. I would guess about two-thirds of the people on the delegation were TDYers [Temporary Duty]. The negotiations took place in sessions in three months or what have you, depending on when Easter, Christmas and summer vacation fell. Then the TDYers would go home, those of us who were assigned permanently would mostly stay on. So it was unlike any other diplomatic organization that I ever had anything to do with.

Q: It was a big operation?

RICKERT: It was a big operation. As I mentioned, I was called Secretary of the Delegation which meant that we had weekly meetings and sometimes more often, of the *ad hoc* group which was the NATO representatives, some of them ... a couple had separate delegations, most of them had their bi-lateral ambassador. The Danes were going to have a separate delegation for MBFR. They would meet at least once a week. There would be punnaries with the "other side." What the U.S. would do would be scripted at

these *ad hoc* group meetings where the U.S. was very much not in control, but took the lead. Anyone reading or hearing this, who knows John Dean will know that they were dealing with a whirlwind of activity and creativity and tactical guile and everything else. He was a hard man to keep up with.

I performed normal staff assistant duties and had thrilling tasks like making up the duty roster which may be one of the popular or unpopular people in the mission depending on how the duty fell. I did a lot of xeroxing, a lot of carrying of these documents. We would take the talking points over in advance of the *ad hoc* group meetings so that a small representation from the NATO secretariat there would look after them and distribute them. I spent a lot of time in cars going back and forth. The one good thing that came out of it was that I had a little bit of high school and college German but was not at all fluent in the language. I used those long trips back and forth in Vienna to work on my very bad German and make it somewhat less bad and the drivers were more than happy to accommodate me. As time went on, I was able to pick up the really routine and boring tasks that nobody else wanted to do. By the time I left after two years I assumed a fairly large portfolio of very routine reporting but it didn't make life more interesting than it would have been otherwise.

Q: Were you the note-taker and the minute-writer for some of these meetings?

RICKERT: I did some of that. In addition to the *ad hoc* group meetings, there were what were called "informals" which were also highly scripted meetings between essentially the U.S. and the Soviets but on the U.S. side, on the NATO side, there would be two other NATO members, perhaps the Canadian and the ____ or something like that. And on the Soviet side it might be a Romanian and then a ____. The *ad hoc* group approved the talking points that were used for those meetings. So it was very much a scripted event. John Dean personally composed the initial draft of much of that. One of the tasks that I had was to take, after the meeting, Dean would do a reporting cable which was routinely 20 to 30 pages long. I often wondered ... his hope was that it would be so long that nobody would read it and he would get things through that might not get through otherwise. One of the ways we did this cable, he dictated much of it. No note taker would go to these meetings of the ... what did I call them ...

Q: Informals?

RICKERT: Informals, to the informals. He would have ten pages of talking points, double-spaced and he gave them to me and he said, "put them in indirect discourse." So I had to change the tenses on all the verbs so that they can then go in to the cable: "he said that ..." and so forth. Which wasn't really challenging but it was one of the things I did.

Q: Were these talking points in the various formats _____ actually handed over or were they actually talked?

RICKERT: No, they were talked. Now, since I was never at the meetings with the "other

sides," it was called. I don't know what exactly happened but they were for oral use. I suppose that there were some non-papers exchanged in the course of this because ... Non-paper, I'm a great believer in non-papers. I think it's a wonderful way to make sure the exact words get to the people who need to have them with complete deniability should it ever be necessary to do so. I've never seen a case where it's been necessary but I made extensive use of non-papers in Romania when I went back as DCM. I'm assuming that this was done but I don't know from personal experience.

Q: Is it fair to say, looking back on this period in the mid-'70s that the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks were serving a purpose? A larger purpose and there was lots of detail and perhaps it helped understanding between the two sides of what was going on but it didn't amount to much?

RICKERT: Oh, I think you're being generous. [laugh] I wasn't privy to all the ins and outs. I know that there were prolonged – or I understood that they were prolonged – by both sides in order to avoid facing certain other issues that would be inescapable had the talks not been on going and had both sides not been able to point to them and say, "we don't need to deal with this because we're talking about force reduction in central Europe at Vienna." There was a lot of play acting on both sides, but as an optimistic person I tend to look at the brighter side. One thing, in those days, whenever you're talking with your opponents in a constructive way, even when you're not making progress, I can't see that as entirely a lost effort. This is all the return on the investment but a lot of people from Eastern Europe, including the Soviets, were exposed to what we wanted and why we wanted it and why we thought it was justified and they weren't getting it filtered through Prov Eresdetaire or Abel Agescodelo or some other party paper. That was good. It was an intense atmosphere because, in a way, as it was in Bucharest, as you got to know your diplomatic colleagues very well as in ways that you might not have in many other posts, these were often up and coming people. They're arms control experts from the different countries, they're people who ended up in prominent positions later even when they were relatively junior in the Warsaw Pact delegations at the time. I think that U.S. and the Soviet Union were in the process of figuring out how to make a long term relationship work even when the agreement wasn't possible. In that sense, I think that MBFR talks contributed positively to that. Although I used to comment on if anyone were really serious about getting a result out of these delegations they should have been held in Godthab, Greenland rather than Vienna because in Greenland, there would be a quick agreement or we would have gone all home. Vienna was like being in heaven for many of the Eastern Europeans and they had zero incentive to get the negotiations over successfully or otherwise.

Q: It wasn't so bad for the Americans and the British?

RICKERT: We didn't suffer so much either. But for the Eastern Europeans, many of them, it was their only chance to spend an extended time in a Western environments and for Americans, Brits and Germans they had other chances.

[END TAPE]

Q: ... still talking about your assignment to Vienna, to the MBFR U.S. delegation from 1974 to '76. You were telling an anecdote, or story.

RICKERT: Yes, about Hubert Humphrey. One year, Gerd – my wife – and I were invited to the marine ball. One of the marine guards in Vienna had been with us in Romania on a previous tour and was kind enough to invite us. As it turned out, Senator Hubert Humphrey was in town at the time of the ball and was invited to attend and was the guest of honor. A very nervous marine gunnery sergeant had the task of introducing him which he did extremely well, except he introduced him as the former president of the United States and there was a gasp and chitters, but Humphrey, I don't remember exactly how he did it but he defused that with such grace and such humanity and such kindness that what could have been a great embarrassment for the gunny, ended up being a plus. He complimented the gunny on his perspicacity and said, "You and my mother are the only two people who really saw it as it should have been" or something along those lines. It was very nice, he put the pressure on himself and took it off the gunny, which I thought showed great humanity.

Another thing out of Vienna that was a sideline but very enjoyable for me was ... I was called back to Bucharest twice on TDYs because they had a shortage in the consular section. I was a Romanian-speaking consular officer an hour and a half away so I went back for a week one time and two weeks another time which was a great pleasure. The second time, as a bonus for having done the consular work, I was allowed to stay for the visit of President Ford which was the first time I've ever seen a presidential and it was a fascinating experience. Ford had just come from Helsinki where he had signed the Helsinki accords. I wasn't involved much in the substance of his visit but I got very much involved in the logistics and was an event officer for a stop at the military academy. I got to see the whole machinery of presidential visits. Henry Kissinger was there, and they went off to Sinaia, which is the summer palace of the former royal family which is one of the architectural delights and curiosities of Romania: late 19th century Bavarian palace, a big castle, in the tradition of Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria. Of course the Romanian royal family was German and it was recreated there and the Carpathians took right in.

I also learned to ski while we were in Vienna, which was a great delight. Another minor Romanian connection was all three consular FSNs came to Vienna during the time that I was there. One by one they were let out for "hoped up trainings" ... it was a little benefit that we had for them. One of them, who was single, asked my wife if she should defect while she was out which was one that my wife very carefully sidestepped. There was obviously a strong temptation not to go back. The woman did eventually go back, marry the Pan-Am rep and now is living in Connecticut. The other two came out and it was a delight to see them outside of their Romanian environment and to be able to do something for them. Each one, we took to a concert or the opera or a ballet or something and took them out to dinner and did things with them which was a great pleasure.

Towards the end of my tour there, I would have ended up being three years doing the same thing, which was too much of a good thing. We love Vienna, it's a delightful place to live. Gerd, my wife, had gotten herself a job at UNIDO [United Nations Industrial Development Organization] as a secretary and was very happy with her work. But we both agreed it was time to move on, so I asked to curtail. I was told that I couldn't curtail unless I was willing to accept to go someplace where there was a service need and I asked where that might be and was told that there was a shortage of labor officers. If I would agree to undergo labor training, which meant the terrible suffering of a year at Harvard at that time, then go to some place unknown, personnel could curtail my tour. So I did accept that offer. Harvard sounded wonderful and I wasn't going to worry about what happened beyond that. So we left after two years.

Q: And you had a year at Cambridge?

RICKERT: ... and had a year at Cambridge, which was a wonderful experience. The labor training program was a year at Harvard. Fall semester was spent at the Kennedy school, essentially doing whatever you wanted. The Spring semester was in something called the Harvard Trade Union Program which was sponsored by the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. It was linked unofficially with the Harvard Business School. It wasn't part of the business school but it was for trade unionists, American trade unionists and some foreign trade unionists. It was a much less academic program but a good introduction to a history of labor, concerns of training and movement, how it's organized, issues and all that kind of thing.

Q: The semester at the county school of government allowed you to take courses there but also elsewhere in the University?

RICKERT: That's right. Anything at Harvard University was fair game. I ended up taking four courses. The first was ethnicity and politics taught by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in his last semester at Harvard. He was running for Senate at the time. But he did show up for every class. He wasn't terribly concerned about his opposition in New York. The next was called "U.S. Diplomacy Since WWII" taught by Stanley Hoffman, also a well known name. I took a course called "European Diplomatic History Since 1815," taught by Earnest May, another star of the Harvard faculty. Those were all outside the Kennedy School and then there was one seminar that was done in the Kennedy School, which Graham Alison chaired called "Ethical Problems in Public Careers." At that time there was a large number of U.S. government people sent to Harvard for mostly MPAs, a master in public administration. There were folks from Capitol Hill, there were folks from many different U.S. government agencies and that was one of the courses that they could take, an excellent course.

The one I enjoyed the most was Moynihan's. The main task was to write a seminar paper, 40-50 pages. We had to submit to him our proposals and I had two or three proposals on minority issues in the Soviet Union and then I said, "or I could do something on minorities in Romania." When I met with him he said, "oh everybody's writing on

minorities in the Soviet Union, I hadn't seen anything on Romania recently." Then he asked me a little bit on my background and I told him. He said, "oh, that'll make a good topic." So, I did write on Romania. He gave me an A+ on the paper which I'm proud of. It was hard work but it was a great deal of enjoyment pulling it together. I wrote on the policy of the Romanian government towards ethnic minorities from the onset of Communism until 1976 when I was there, with a focus on ethnic Hungarians, Roma-Gypsies, Jews and Germans. It was a very interesting and enjoyable project. The hardest part of it was the Roma-Gypsies because there was almost nothing in writing in the Harvard library or in the Library of Congress that I could find. The Romanians made no mention of this ethnic group in any public statements and there was very little available. But for a seminar paper, there was enough and I knew enough myself to be able to cover it.

Q: Now, did you get a master's degree?

RICKERT: No. We had to do both semesters and I couldn't do the second semester. By the time we had arrived ... well, before we arrived in Cambridge we found that Gerd was pregnant with our first child who was born in Boston in February of 1977. That was one big event in our lives. The other was buying our first house in Washington: our first and last house in Washington which we bought during the Summer just before going down there and did the closing in the Fall. I flew down from Boston to close. I mention it because it has a little bit of an interesting history. The house that we bought, the seller was George F. Will. It was his starter house. It was our starter and finisher house. It was the house that he bought and lived in before he was rich and famous. He moved to a house in Chevy Chase that cost, I know, three and half times what we paid for ours. Then he put in another good chunk of change before moving in, so he really moved up. Two interesting tidbits about the house – of course we weren't going to be living in it at least at first – so we put it on the rental market. Our first tenant ended up being Stuart Eisenstadt. He was just arriving from Georgia to take up his position as Domestic Policy Advisor to President Carter and he rented it for two years obviously, while we had the intention of looking for a more permanent and probably more appropriate conditions. He broke the lease after a year and found somebody else to take it at slightly higher rent so we were entirely pleased with him as a tenant and it was no problem. What's interesting is the people who have lived in it in terms of prominence have gone downhill substantially since Stu moved out.

The other little tidbit about the house that we learned from neighbors was that while George Will lived there and before he became President, Ronald Reagan had been there for dinner. There's no plaque on the dinning room any place but I don't know when exactly that took place. We sit in the dining room sometimes and wonder what Ronald Reagan had for dinner.

Q: Okay, anything else about the year in Cambridge and if not maybe we should stop pretty soon.

RICKERT: A couple of other little things. In addition to the four courses that I took in the Fall Semester, I audited the beginning Swedish which has turned out to be a great help in my personal family life with relatives who don't speak English in some cases. One of the shocking events that occurred was – our ritual in the evenings was to watch the seven o'clock news before I would get down to work – I remember in March of 1977 seeing the lead story being the giant earthquake in Bucharest with scenes of Boulevard of Magero two blocks from the embassy of the main drag, with many of the wings collapsed and over a thousand people known dead. It was totally unexpected and one always knows in Romania, in any geographic area you could have an earthquake at any time, but there hadn't been a big one for many years. Seeing familiar haunts as rubble was a shock and wondering what had happened to people, no one that I knew personally was killed in the quake, but a number of prominent actors and artists and others were because their apartments were in that area.

As a small after thought to that or moving ahead to that earthquake: a good friend and colleague of mine who was at the embassy at the time, Clark Rogers, was the admin officer. After the earthquake he was surveying embassy grounds and some of the bits of the facade of the embassy had fallen off although the building itself had not been structurally damaged. One of the bits was a cement head of a ram which had been a decorative piece. It's an old building 1890s or so. A workman was scooping this up to throw it in to a dump truck and Clark said, "What are you doing with that?" and they said, "We're taking it to the dump" and he said "Can I have it?" and they said, "Sure, it's going to the dump, there's no reason you shouldn't have it." He lugged it around for the rest of his career. After he retired, Clark and Gussy were neighbors of ours two, three houses down, they finally moved from Washington to Atlanta, before going, Clark, possibly under urging from Gussy, asked if we would like to have the ram. We ended up with it, not knowing what to do with it, two years ago when we built a little addition to our house, we found a nice spot in our new brick wall where the ram now proudly sits as a permanent reminder of Romania and our time there.

Q: Okay. Well, why don't we stop now. Your next assignment was to Trinidad and we'll talk about that next time we get together.

RICKERT: I'd be happy to do so.

Q: ... 24th of November, 2003 and we're picking up this interview after an interval of about two months. Jonathan, I think we're about ready to get you assigned to the embassy in Trinidad, Embassy Port of Spain as political labor officer. It seems to nicely follow your year of labor training at Harvard. Is that a correct assessment, assumption? Tell me about that assignment.

RICKERT: Yes, in fact, under that program it was a requirement when we go in to a labor designated position, following that year of labor training at Harvard. Among the list of countries that were available to be bid on, Trinidad was my second choice but one that I was very happy to get. My wife and daughter and I transferred there in July of 1977. It

was a small embassy which if I recall correctly had under 15 Americans, it had State element and had a two person USIA element. The ambassador was Richard Fox, a career fellow who was followed by Irving Cheslaw, also a career officer. I was the sole political officer. There was a one person, Econ-Commercial section and we were located right next to each other and when she was on leave I covered for her and vice versa so it was a very cozy arrangement. Obviously, as it could be expected, the biggest section by far was the consular section with a number of junior officers earning their spurs in Port of Spain for their first tour as consular officers.

Trinidad was a small but unusual country. It's the only tour I had in my career outside of the EUR and it's one that I'm very grateful for because it brought a different perspective to my work and to my experience from anything I have had elsewhere or would have subsequently. The country was about 60 miles long and 30 miles wide, that is Trinidad itself and Tobago was smaller, 18 miles away if I recall correctly. It was a country that in the 70s was enjoying a bit of a boom due to the presence of oil and gas in not huge quantities but for a small country, you didn't need all that much to make a real impact on the economy. 1.2 million people: a very interesting ethnic mix of Indians from India and black people and black people mixed with other races, fairly evenly divided and then a fairly small white and what they call Lebanese-Syrians and some Asians there. It was quite an interesting microcosm for inter-ethnic relations in a country that celebrated Hindu, Muslim and Christian holidays. One of the things that I noted about the Christian section of the population was that it ranged from very high church traditional Anglo and Roman Catholic to what one could call "voodoo-Baptist" with heavy doses of African influence and everything in between. So it was much more variety and a lot more surprises that one wouldn't expect in such a small country. The prime minister, when I got there, was Eric Williams who was the leader of the Trinidad independence movement, a very brilliant man who had been a professor at Howard University but a very strange man. He, shortly after I arrived and I don't think there's any connection, declined to meet with American officials for the rest of his life actually.

Q: Why was that?

RICKERT: Well, he had some problems in the United States: Legal problems, the exact nature of which I no longer recall. He was somebody who never forgot a slight or an insult and that's the best explanation that I can give. I'm sure since he was an extremely complex person it was a lot more complex that. He had a daughter who was living in Miami but the fact is that he avoided all Americans. Interestingly, I was there for three years and we had zero CODELs in three years. We had one Democratic congressman from California, a man named Mervyn Dymally who was born in Trinidad. He used to come down from time to time, ask for no service at all from the embassy and he would meet with Eric Williams but the Ambassador of the United States did not.

Q: Mr. Williams asked that his minister and others in the ... also?

RICKERT: No, no.

Q: It was a personal thing?

RICKERT: It apparently was a personal thing. Other ministers would call me directly. It's a small country so you got to know most people very quickly even as a second secretary. You were on a first name basis with a lot people in a small place like that. Ministers would call and ask for help with visas and things: some of them do-able, some of them not. It wasn't a situation where the rest of the government was inhibited from meeting and contacting anybody in the embassy. But the Ambassador of course had much broader contacts. I covered the trade unions and the opposition which was mostly Indian although there was one small Tobago-based party headed by Arthur Raymond Napoleon Robinson, "A.N.R." as he was known, who was very black. Tobago is not mixed, really. It is essentially a black island and when you go there the people show very little evidence of having mixed with other races and there are very few non-blacks living on that island so it really is kind of a distinct unit compared with Trinidad which is much more cosmopolitan.

A couple of observations about Trinidad: As it was a small embassy, one thing I learned is small embassies can either be wonderful experiences or quite the opposite. When I arrived there had been an ambassador, a political appointee, who apparently didn't like people of color. His DCM, who was a very able fellow who later became an ambassador, didn't have enough to do, so he did everybody else's jobs for them which was not exactly a morale builder. This was the way it was related to me.

Q: That was before your time?

RICKERT: Before my time. I arrived about two weeks after both of them had left and found an unhappy and demoralized group of people by and large. Within a period of a relatively few weeks with a new ambassador and new DCM it changed very quickly and was, I would say, a relatively happy and productive embassy.

Q: Richard Fox was the new ambassador? Who came about the same time you did?

RICKERT: That's correct.

Q: And the new DCM was?

RICKERT: A fellow named Michael Yohn who had served in the Office of Caribbean Affairs previously and had a fair amount of ARA experience. The rest of the embassy, I don't remember the names but John Adams was consul-general and that was a big job in Trinidad. A fellow named Reese Louise was admin officer. A lot of very good officers got their start in Trinidad. Lou Dent was a junior officer there when I got there; he's one of the top folks in admin these days. I've come across a number of others over the years. Kathy Stephens who is now the EUR ambassador for the Balkans who came while I was there. A young woman, Denise Mathieu who was an ambassador in Africa someplace was

a junior officer there. It was a ... I wouldn't say breeding ground, but it was kind of a preparing ground for people who had gone on to have very good careers.

Q: Were U.S. interests primarily related to the consular field, immigration, terrorism and so on?

RICKERT: Immigration and visitor visas because although Trinidad-born population or origin population in the United States isn't very big but there's a lot of travel back and forth. Especially to Miami but also to New York. There's a Trinidad group or enclave in Brooklyn.

I'd say that the main interest was economics because Amoco and a joint-venture called Trinidad Tesoro which was an oil company and a number of other companies had links or operations with Trinidad. Texaco had a big refinery there, Amoco was doing offshore drilling. That was the main economic interest.

A couple of little anecdotes about it: The leader of the opposition was an Indian. When I say Indian here I'm speaking of people of Indian origin whose ancestors came from India after the freeing of the slaves in the mid-1800s. The black-African origin slaves left the land and the land owners had sugar plantations. That was the main form of economic activity at that time. They had to have workers, so they brought indentured workers from India. From what I understand, they took mainly untouchables ... they took the bottom of the social ladder there and brought them to Trinidad. They had ten or 15 years to pay off their passage, so they were virtual slaves. Basdeo Panday who was leader of the opposition, was head of the sugar workers' trade union and later became prime minister, I became quite friendly with him. He took me around the island one day. We just got in his car and we drove all around the island. He showed me many different things. I remember two things that he said because they were interesting.

Basdeo had studied in England and had been an actor earlier so he was very expressive and volatile and lively. He had been accused by people in the American trade union movement of being leftist and Marxist and so forth. He said to me: "Karl Marx was a cold weather philosopher. His philosophy was thought up in countries that had cold dark winters and where people go hungry. Marxism will never thrive in places like this, where no one ever froze to death and no one ever starved to death." Obviously, Marxism has thrived in a way in Cuba, but it was an interesting perspective that he linked Marxism with: with Marx's physical environment among other things. The other thing I remember from that trip was that we went past a bird sanctuary and just to make conversation, I asked if people did hunting in Trinidad. He said, "oh yes, a lot of hunting." I said, well what kind of hunting do they do? And he said, "well mostly birds." And I said, well, it's fairly built up and occupied, where do they hunt? And he said, "oh, in the bird sanctuary, of course." I raised my eyebrows and he patted me on the arm and he said, "Jonathan you have a lot to learn about Trinidad."

Q: They didn't hunt for the ... what do they call it?

RICKERT: Scarlet Ibis.

Q: Ibis?

RICKERT: I don't know what they hunted for but that was an interesting situation.

Going back to the ethnic business: I remember the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was an Indian with the wonderful name of Sir Isaac Hyatali. He was a Presbyterian. He kind of encapsulated the Trinidad experience. The Anglican Archbishop was named Clyde Abdullah and he was half Indian and half black and Anglican with a Muslim name. There was a lot of interesting mixture in Trinidad which made life interesting. Culturally the most important event in Trinidad is Carnival. The Indian part of the population isn't deeply involved in it and many of them are not involved in it at all. The African origin part lives for Carnival. Half of the year they prepare for the next Carnival and the other half they talk about the last Carnival. It really is a big deal.

In connection with Carnival you also have the steel bands which I found delightful. This is a music form that – legends don't have to be ancient, no one really knows how it started – but the commonly accepted wisdom was that it came about during the time the U.S. took over the base in Chaguaramas which is on the north of the Island of Trinidad. It was one of the bases when the destroyer deal was worked out between Churchill and Roosevelt. Oil was brought in these oil drums and the drums were discarded. The local folks found that by beating on the tops of them they could make a noise. Then with some refinement they found that by, as they call it, tuning the tops, heating it and hammering it in certain ways, they could actually get different notes. You cut off the oil drum so that they were only six or eight inches and you'd have a soprano pan, it was called. If it was 12 or more inches than it might be an alto, tenor and then bass. None of the musicians could read music, it was all done by memory and they trained in outdoor hen yards. I heard bands do very complicated classical music out of these instruments in fantastic ways. The 1812 overture was the most impressive.

So it was Carnival, the steel drums and with competitions, concerts during the Carnival season. The third element was calypso. When most Americans think of calypso we think of Harry Bellefonte and a Jamaica girl and that type of thing. But calypso in Trinidad is very topical, very current and sometime gaudy, but the music is not the most important part. The lyrics are the most important part. They have calypso competitions and wonderfully named calypsonians are national heroes like the Mighty Sparrow and Lord Kitchener and various other names. Attending a calypso tent, which was the place where the bands would perform before carnival and listening to the music was one of the very nice things about being in Trinidad.

Q: You mentioned the U.S. military base going back to the second world war, does that still exist?

RICKERT: No, that was a major part of the independence struggle, to get the base back. It formed kind of an extraterritoriality. I think even more important to Eric Williams, despite the employment that it provided to Trinidad residents, natives, he was very big on not having Trinidadians do things that created what he thought was the colonial mentality: poor black people serving rich white people. It was why Trinidad, of all the islands in the Caribbean, had virtually an anti-tourism policy; whereas all the others, one way or another, had used tourism as a labor-intensive activity that doesn't require huge investment, a way to reduce unemployment, to keep people employed and so forth. There are a lot of _____ from tourism. Eric Williams didn't do anything, really, to encourage tourism for the same reason. I'm not sure I agree with what he did, but I understand what was behind it and I think that anyone ... that's the only post-colonial country that I lived in. But I imagine others who have lived in such countries have found what could be referred to as a colonial mentality which has led to less initiative and aggressiveness than one would find in North America or Europe.

Q: When was independence?

RICKERT: It was 1962.

Q: And in terms of Trinidad's foreign policy and our interest in that? Did that occupy a lot of your time or are you doing mostly internal recording on the labor or opposition?

RICKERT: I did a lot of recording on labor and the opposition. But the Trinidad foreign policy was interesting. They were, as a people, I don't know if pro-American is the right term, but they were very friendly towards Americans. But their government and their policy was strictly going along with third world positions so they voted against us on practically everything at the UN.

One of the things that I did besides the reporting I just mentioned was demarches. This led to an interesting situation. We used to get these circular tables going to speak to the foreign ministry at the highest appropriate level, urging them to support this or to oppose that. A lot of them were IBRD loans and that sort of thing. This was during the Carter administration and there was a lot of focus as using loans as a means of rewarding or punishing those who had good human rights or bad human rights records. I did this quite often. I remember one time I was called in by one of the senior people in the foreign ministry. The foreign ministry was housed in a building probably about twice the size of this and they had a third secretary who was responsible for R.O. which was "rest of the world" and that was after North America, UK and a couple of key countries. He had most of Africa, most of Asia, all of the middle east and he was ...

Q: United Nations?

RICKERT: He's like a J.O. Anyway, I can't remember the fellow's last name. Trevor was his first name. He called me. We were on friendly terms and he had a woman on either side with a notepad and I said, "uh oh, this is not a good sign." Then he gave me a

prepared lecture very politely and correctly and so forth. He said, "we're a sovereign country and you keep coming in and telling us what to do and we can figure out what to do without being told by the United States. We'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't do this." I was taken aback at first and I said, "Trevor, we know each other very well, first of all, I don't tell you what to do. I express to you what the views of my government are on a whole range of issues that we hope you'll take in to account. I hope that your embassy in Washington is doing the same with us on issues that are of importance to you. We see this as a basic element in bilateral relations, talking about these things. If you agree, that's fine; if you don't, that's your business but we talk about them. I just don't get this." He had a script from which he could not deviate and he just repeated what he had to say. I told the Ambassador. Of course, he couldn't tell Washington to stop sending his demarches but I didn't look forward to the next one because there was obviously a matter of pride and some element of misunderstanding there as to what was involved in normal diplomatic exchange in this young country.

I was there in the late '70s. They had been independent for less than 20 years. They lacked a well-developed foreign service and traditions and I didn't take offense at this. It was a good lesson as to how things work in countries that don't have the long traditions that some others do.

Q: Well you mentioned the years of the Prime Minister Eric Williams and this experience with the foreign ministry. Did you run in to that sort of thing in the labor movement or with the opposition at all?

RICKERT: No. They were very open, very friendly. George Weeks was the head of the oil-field workers trade union. Another Trinidad ... I can't think of the right word, not dilemma but ... you know what I mean, almost a contradiction. He was considered to be the biggest leftist by the AF of L, CIO. He didn't even want me seeing him because he was so leftist. He had two sons in the U.S. Army, living in the U.S. of course. He was always most cordial, most unideological. He used to invite me down to the trade union headquarters which was south of Port of Spain, the capital, where the Texaco refinery was. We'd go always to a Chinese restaurant and we'd have some of his people with him and we'd talk. He told me about his experience going to Moscow and Warsaw one time. He said he had been invited as a Communist-equivalent ... an IVP I suppose. He talked of Moscow and he said, very sour people. No sense of life, no sense of laughter. When they drank they got drunk. It was cold and it was dark and he didn't like it. Then he went to Warsaw and it was much the same. On the way back he passed through Cuba. He said, now that's another story. They're Communist but they know how to have a good time. Obviously he could relate to them even through the language barrier. So we didn't really have much trouble with ... I didn't have any difficulty of the sort I mentioned with the foreign ministry, which wasn't a problem, it was a little blip on the screen with any of the others I dealt with.

When I left, the trade union federation held a lunch for me. There were 18 or 20 unions there from among all the other unions. They gave me a tray with Trinidad and Tobago

inscribed on it. One of them said very proudly and happily: "Jonathan we enjoyed knowing you here, you worked very well with us, you've always been very straight forward and not for one moment have we always suspected you of being a CIA agent." Because at some point in the past, one of my predecessors either had been or had been suspected of being CIA. So they were very sensitive to that, but I apparently passed the test on that.

Q: How often did you go to Tobago, were there different things you were interested in there or did somebody else in the embassy pay any special interest in that island?

RICKERT: Tobago, if I recall correctly, had about 40,000 people out of the whole country's 1.2 million. Tobago did not figure very big in anything that we did. I went over as a tourist on a couple of occasions. There was a trip, if I recall correctly, in connection with some economic council or conference. In the first two weeks I was in Trinidad, Eric Williams did attend that. I met the President and the Prime Minister, Ms. Universe, who was a Trinidadian at the time, a woman named Janelle Commissiong and it was downhill from there on [laughter]. Tobago, rightly or wrongly, was fairly significantly rural. It wasn't easy to get to and there wasn't much there. The main political reason was the party headed by A.N.R. Robinson. He was so often in Port of Spain and I could see him there.

Q: Was there a parliament?

RICKERT: Yes.

Q: This was opposition within the parliament? Elected opposition?

RICKERT: That's correct. There was a two-house parliament, with an appointed senate and an elected lower house. The senate appointments were based on different segments of society. There were always trade unions, there were always educators, there were always different business people. It was done in that way. It could not like the House of Lords. It could not stop legislation, but it did consider legislation passed by the Lower House. Sometimes it was able to get amendments accepted.

Our son, our second child, was born in Trinidad which was a cultural experience in and of itself. We looked into the possibility of my wife leaving and giving birth elsewhere but she would have had to leave early and we had a small daughter. In the end we decided, what would we do with the small daughter? So we decided to have the baby there and it worked out well. But it may not have been the smartest thing we ever did, because the conditions, had there been any significant problem, were not good. But towards the end of our time there, there was a film they made in Chaguaramas for television, an eminently forgettable film called "Gold of the Amazon Women." The only thing about it that was notable particularly for somebody with Swedish influence in the family or element or family, my wife, it was that the chief Amazon was Anita Ekberg who was well past her prime. We took the kids out to watch the filming and she and her other Amazonians were panning down a path through the jungle which was supposed to be Amazon jungle. She

looked over and we thought she looked at this extremely blonde, blue-eyed, young boy and was a little surprised because he did not look like any of the natives of Trinidad. She went on her way to wherever it was she was going.

Q: She didn't remark further on it?

RICKERT: No, we didn't talk to her about it. It was curious. One thing that didn't have a direct effect on Trinidad or wasn't directly related to Trinidad but it had happened during out time there was Jonestown: The 25th anniversary of which had just occurred. A friend of ours from a previous assignment was the Trinidad desk officer and he covered Trinidad and Guyana. He went to Guyana at the request of people in Congress. He actually went out to Jonestown, met with Jim Jones and took residents from Jonestown community out in the field some distance from the town to question them at the request of their family members who claimed that they had been brainwashed. They agreed to talk to him but he said that each one he spoke to gave a planned answer. He said at that time, I remember talking with him and my wife on our terrace outside the house, he said, "You know, they look drugged to me." He said, "It's not good and it's not right, but what can you say when you talk freely to people who are not under any immediate intimidation or anything like that and they tell you that they're happy and that everything's fine and they don't want to leave and so forth." It was not long after that, the Jonestown incident took place. Our consular officer, John Adams, was on the first plane that went in to Jonestown and could see the bodies from the air. We've all seen the photographs: a horrendous scene. Later as duty officer, a couple of weeks later, I met Jonestown people who had been ... they had a boat that they used to buy supplies around the Caribbean, they stopped in Trinidad. Trinidadians didn't want to let them land. Jonestown was not a name held in high esteem or anything to do with Jim Jones at that point. They lost all their family and friends. They just happened to be out on one of these buying trips when the mass suicide took place. That was really quite a shocking experience to go through.

Trinidad to me, in some ways, is one of the best examples of what freedom, even relative freedom, can do for people who start with nothing. When you look at the people who came from India as indentured servants: These were considered the scum of Indian society, they had no education, no money, no background. They were mostly Hindus, some are Muslim but, interestingly, Hinduism in Trinidad has no caste system because everyone who came was at the bottom. So they just ignored it. They also eat beef and drink scotch but that's another matter. They consider themselves to be good Hindus.

Within the space of one to two generations, living in a country where there was relative freedom and a decent education system, these folks have produced a large numbers of doctors, lawyers, architects, dentists, professionals and very successful business people: V. S. Naipaul was from that group. In fact there are two Trinidadian players in literature. Derek Walcott who is black or of African origin, and V.S. Naipaul which is quite something for such a small place. It struck me that Trinidad is a very good example of what freedom of opportunity makes possible for people who are motivated and willing to work hard. Not all of them of course had been successful but an amazingly high

percentage and a much higher percentage than ever would have happened had they stayed in India, I am convinced of that.

Q: The time that you were there, people worked for you had liberties of the press and ...?

RICKERT: There was freedom of the press. Eric Williams ran a rather autocratic country, he behaved in a rather autocratic way, but he was democratically elected in free and fair elections and between elections he kind of ran the show as he saw fit. At the same time, there were the basic freedoms of religion and expression and assembly and so forth. They were observed very well, I would say, on the whole. In a country that small, there's always somebody who knows somebody and undoubtedly there were pressures to not print certain things, to friendships and personal contacts and so forth. But there was no systematic suppression of human rights. In fact, I wrote in the first human rights report for Trinidad because when those reports first came out, they were done for the countries that were deemed to have human rights problems and then were gradually expanded to cover everyone. I won't say that the arrestees and prisoners were always treated with the utmost delicacy and interrogations were not necessarily in accord with the highest standards but I think if you go in a country, you can tell whether a people are afraid or not. Are they intimidated? Are they unwilling to maintain contact? Having spent so much time in Communist countries, I have something of a feel for that. There was none of that in Trinidad. I suspect that to people who were mistreated, the large majority of the population would probably say they deserved it. That was kind of the attitude. If you were criminal and the police are there, then they'll slap you around a bit. I don't recall any cases of overt torture or gross mistreatment, but they certainly didn't live up to the highest standards in every case.

Q: I noticed that you were nominated for the Director General's Reporting Award in 1980. It must have been near the end of your tour in Port of Spain. Was that for a pattern of reporting over the three years or were there some special reports that you did?

RICKERT: There were two main reports, plus the spot and other general reporting. We did a very long report on whether Trinidad – which, I think, I was not the sole author but I did a large part of it and kind of put it together – taking a look at all aspects of Trinidad society, economy, politics, culture and all the rest and trying to figure out where it was going, what would happen when Eric Williams left the scene ... Which was to happen actually not that much after my departure from Trinidad. The Ambassador was very pleased with that.

The other thing that I did, that I remember particularly, was Trinidad had a lot of small, wack-o, extremist groups. Sometimes two or three people. As far as I knew, no one had ever tried to figure out what they all were and which ones meant anything and which ones didn't. The political section had very good newspaper archives. The FSN secretary and her predecessors for years had been clipping things out. I pulled everything together. It was 18 different groups that had appeared in that press. I got hold of everything that I could find in open sources and went and discussed it with the counter-intelligence folks

who were actually very reticent. They said that there were only a couple of them that we needed to be concerned with. It provided, perhaps in one place, the first real compilation of information on these various groups. Some of them were black power; some of them were crypto-Marxists. Some of them were just wack-o, but there were a lot of them for such a small place. I felt, and the Ambassador and DCM felt, that it was a situation where we ought to know more about who they were.

Trinidad had a black power uprising in the early '70s before I got there. It was a minor military revolt. That was always in people's minds because that had showed that there was some tinder there for this kind of thing if people felt dissatisfaction to a significant degree or if rabble rousers were successful enough in stirring things up.

Q: Did you do the political military work of the embassy such as it was? Ship visits?

RICKERT: Yes. We had no resident military or defense attaché. We were covered out of Caracas. The main activity we had was an occasional ship visit. Those were fun and always well received. I don't remember the exact ships that came, but we didn't have any battleships. We had some cruisers or some destroyers. They held open houses and invited people on board. There were so many people who remembered the old days, with mixed feelings, but a lot of people had good feelings about Chaguaramas because it had provided employment and it was in fact, the symbol that Trinidad mattered. Of course there's always Coca Cola too.

Q: It was a Navy base?

RICKERT: It was a Navy base, yes. The base was still there, but most of the buildings had just been allowed to deteriorate. Some warehouses were still being used, this going back to Bush.

Q: Trinidad had a military establishment that went on some of our training programs?

RICKERT: Yes they did.

Q: You had arranged that?

RICKERT: The visiting we were covered as I said, out of Caracas, some of that was done by the visiting defense attachés who would come twice a year, something like that. I did some of the set-up work on that. But they had a coast guard and a Trinidad defense force. My recollection was that it was 500 people, something like that. They took advantage of IMET and also, if I recall correctly, they used FMF to get some upgraded patrol boats. Drugs had not become a major problem when I was there, but I think most of us could see the handwriting on the wall that any of those islands had the potential of being a transit for drugs headed north from Columbia or Bolivia or wherever. Trinidad being bigger than any of the other islands except for Jamaica and Hispaniola of course ... but of the English islands, it was a tempting target. My understanding is that subsequently there has been

considerable amount of concern about drugs transiting through Trinidad.

Q: Did you have a lot to do with the British High Commission at the time that you were there?

RICKERT: Yes.

Q: I assume they played a significant role?

RICKERT: Mostly socially, because there really wasn't that much going on politically. We compared notes on how Eric Williams was and tried to figure out what was going on. Their interests, essentially, were commercial as ours were. There were a number of British banks and other Brit-Insurance Companies and others there. Politically, Trinidad was more aligned to Africa than to Europe and North America.

There was one little incident that was perhaps the most bizarre incident that I've had or I observed in my foreign service career, but it says a lot about Trinidad at the time. The Argentine Ambassador was living in a house that was rented. The house was sold by the owner to the Nigerian Embassy. At the time of the sale there were about three months left on the lease. I'm no real estate expert, but as I understand it, if you sell a house that has a legal lease, you can't throw the people out until the lease expires, that's the contract that goes with the sale.

But the Nigerian High Commissioner was impatient and tried to get the Argentine to leave and the Argentine refused. One night, in the middle of the night, a bunch of goons came and raided the house, threw the Argentine Ambassador and all of his belongings out on the street, ripped the flag down, ripped the shield down, and occupied the house. The Argentines complained to the foreign ministry and the foreign ministry said, "We understand your concern, but this is a bilateral problem between you and Nigeria." It was a huge scandal obviously. What eventually happened was the foreign minister at least had the decency to tell the Nigerian High Commissioner and said – I don't know what exactly he said but he did say, he'd never speak to him again. This message was conveyed in Lagos and the Nigerian government had the sense and decency to recall the High Commissioner so the approximate cause of all of this unpleasantness was removed. But the Trinidadians never took any steps to resolve the issue. Since the period of time was relatively short, it ended before the Nigerians had legal control of the house within a relatively short time. They withdrew their Ambassador and had a chargé there for an extended period but it was quite an odd performance.

Q: Unusual. I see you also received a Meritorious Honor Award in Port of Spain. Is that for reporting?

RICKERT: That was for reporting, yes. The embassy was much more proactive on rewards than some others I've been in.

Q: Anything else about your assignment in Trinidad?

RICKERT: No, I think that pretty well covers it.

Q: It looks like in 1980 you came back to Washington and what was your assignment in the Department?

RICKERT: One last footnote which isn't about Trinidad. Before I left, I did a TDY in Surinam because when I was coming back to Washington I was going to be in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, ARACAR, with responsibility for Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname. Suriname was an even smaller embassy. Nancy Ostrander was the ambassador there. The DCM had to leave or his political officer, the DCM, had to leave on short notice for personal reasons not permanently but for a period of time. They just had a military coup there. So ARA agreed to my going down and filling in as a TDY political officer. So I had a good introduction to Suriname before taking over the Suriname desk. It was a lot of fun, it was a much more open society in terms of willingness to be able to talk to people. In Trinidad you can meet with anybody but they wouldn't say much. In Suriname, they would not only meet with you but they were very open. In the three weeks I was there I met the President, the Prime Minister, about half the cabinet, the trade union leaders, Alcoa had a big operation there and the union worker Frank Darby was later murdered ... and also Desire Bouterse or the corporal who had staged the coup and a number of his thugs and others.

Nancy and I went one time to meet with the Prime Minister, Chin A. Sen. He was of Chinese origin and he was very despondent about the way things were going. Nancy and I convinced him not to resign which I thought was because he was viewed in Washington and by the embassy as a stabilizing force. You don't think as a mid-level officer that you were going to be involved in trying to convince prime ministers not to resign. The scale of these countries, there is only, roughly, 350,000 people in Suriname. There are more Surinamese in Holland than there are in Suriname.

In any case, then when I left, I came back to Washington, took over as desk officer and had responsibility for those three countries to start with.

Q: Now, did you spend any time in Guyana?

RICKERT: Only one visit on the way back from Suriname. I stayed with Dick Dwyer who had been shot at Jonestown. He was DCM there. That was kind of a scary place, I have to say; much poorer and much more lawless than either Trinidad or Suriname but part of the same Caribbean culture with the same tradition of colonialism and sugar and other tropical products and exploitation of slave labor and all the rest. So one could feel at home culturally in Guyana very easily if one had lived in Trinidad or other parts of the British West-Indian empire.

Q: So as the desk officer for Trinidad or Guyana or Suriname you did the usual desk

officer things, you liaised with the embassies in Washington and went in the field, made recommendations up the line ... Anything particular about this period which was at the end of the Carter Administration and the beginning of the Reagan administration?

RICKERT: Well, I don't know where you were at that time but our assistant secretary was Bill Bowdler. One of the lessons that I learned very quickly when the Reagan Administration came in was what happened to people who were on the wrong side of the new administration because Bowdler was there one day and he was gone the next. There were no farewells or anything else. He was out the door because, I gathered, of the position that he had taken legally, correctly, honorably, on behalf of the previous administration on Central America. So he was an immediate casualty who was eventually succeeded by Tom Enders.

Rob Warren was our office director when I got there. Richard Howard was the deputy. We had a number of good desk officers. Marsha Barnes who took over Guyana at a certain point is now Ambassador of Suriname and later was director of Caribbean affairs. Her first tour in the foreign service was in Guyana. She spent a fairly significant chunk of her career down there. When Tom Enders came in, as I understand it, there were pressures to have a bunch of DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary] including political ones. He insisted on having two DAS's for ARA. One was Steve Bosworth and the other was Ted Briggs. They really had their hands full because, I've forgotten the exact number of countries, but it was in the range of 25 or so countries in ARA. Just with reasonable travel, that meant that there was usually one DAS. The assistant secretary was gone and the two DAS's were there or one of the DAS's were traveling. So it was tough, but that's the way Enders apparently wanted to do it.

Q: I assume his main focus was on Central America and things other than the three countries that you were responsible for?

RICKERT: Right. Steve Bosworth was our DAS. The main concerns in the Caribbean were the Reagan Administration's Caribbean Base Initiative which was an effort to increase trade and investment and help raise the standard of living in the region and then to prevent further spread of Communism. There was a lot of concern about Suriname. Steve Bosworth was very much involved on Suriname because no one knew where this Corporal Desire Bouterse was going to take the country. There was concern that he might have Marxist links or leanings. The U.S. had been caught by surprise in the Western Hemisphere before and the Reagan Administration, I think quite rightly, didn't want to see that again even in a very small place.

Q: As I understand the situation in Suriname there was presumably a debate between those who thought that we'd try to work with him, work around him, have contact with him, as I guess, Ambassador Ostrander did and you mentioned the visit you had made with her ... and those who thought maybe the best thing was to maybe try to oppose him, isolate him, boycott him. I did an interview in this program with Ambassador Denis Hayes who was there much later than the time we're talking about but as I understood

from him, he decided not to have any contact with Bouterse.

RICKERT: Bouterse there and the military.

Q: ... feeling that anything he did would be misinterpreted, it was better to shun him and then I'm not sure I pushed him hard enough on the success of that approach which I kind of wondered about. I wish I had debated it a little bit more. But anyway, is that the kind of thing that you had to deal with at the time?

RICKERT: My recollection is that we didn't want to do anything that would raise him in the estimation of the population. But we needed a key contact with him in order to know what he was up to. I don't recall any efforts to isolate him during this time. I don't recall the exact date of the military coup but it was early in 1980, February, something like that. So Bouterse was unknown to the outside word. People were still trying to figure out who he was, what he wanted, why he had done this, where he was headed, all these other things ... I remember I sent, I don't remember his name but the Army found a fellow, a Major if I recall, who was sent as defense attaché. We haven't had a defense attaché before, but he was an American of Indonesian origin and therefore spoke Dutch. Bouterse did not speak English as I recall, or spoke very poor English. The hope was that through this defense attaché we could get a closer contact with Bouterse, not to glorify him or to get him attaché but know what he was up to and why.

When Nancy Ostrander left, a very good career officer, Jack Crowley, who had been DCM in a number of places and sort of a career ARA hand, took over. He was there for a while. I think, from what I could tell, did a very solid job. He was replaced after a couple of years at the request of Tom Enders actually.

Q: I'm very interested in hearing what you're about to say given that build up.

RICKERT: Well, Enders called Rob Warren and me and our deputy director, Dick Howard up to his office one day and said, "How are things going in Suriname?" We said, "going well." Well, "How's Jack Crowley doing there?" We said, "Fine professionally, he's doing a good job so forth." "How does he get on with Bouterse?"

Rob Warren actually carried the conversation and said that he talked to him from time to time but there is a cultural difference and generational difference between the two. Enders, I'm sorry I have to quote this but he said: "Well, I think we should have somebody down there who can really get in with Bouterse and his people." "Somebody who'd go drinking and whoring with him" – was the term he used. Enders didn't think Crowley was the man so Crowley was recalled. The person who was supposed to have replaced him ran into problems. He had been in Afghanistan just prior or was it after, I don't know if I've got the chronology exactly right but Spike Dubbs had been assassinated there. Then we had a series of chargés maintaining relations on a very reduced level. This officer had been there as chargé. He had, according to what everybody said, I can't say this from personal knowledge, but apparently a girlfriend, an Australian

girl who came and stayed with him there for extended periods. Others didn't have local girlfriends or spouses and some complaints were made. This got to the undersecretary for management. When the undersecretary heard about this, he blocked the appointment. I can't vouch for anything except the quote from Tom Enders for which I was personally present, but I heard the rest of this from enough sources so that I think in outlines at least it is an accurate picture of what happened.

Q: Somebody went to Suriname?

RICKERT: Frankly ... I don't know.

Q: That was perhaps after your time?

RICKERT: It may have been after my time because I honestly don't remember who ended up going. As time went on, Rob moved on. Enders was told he was going to get a DAS he didn't want, a political gentleman named John Upston. He refused to accept Upston. To make a long story short, Upston agreed to take a political appointment. He was made the coordinator for Caribbean affairs and he took over Rob Warren's office and he had his own secretary but because he had a, shall we say, less than sterling reputation, Rob and Dick Howard and all of us went to see Enders and asked that we not be put under his direct direction. Enders, to his credit, created a special position that supervised no one but went around, made speeches and visited the region. Upston was a perfectly amiable fellow. He wasn't nasty. He accepted this arrangement. He didn't make anyone feel that they had stabbed him in the back or anything like that. The tradeoff was that we didn't get a director because the slot was taken. So Dick Howard, who was really a career ARA person and a very good and decent fellow and very good officer, became the acting director. And I, as the senior most desk officer, became the acting Deputy Director. So I gave up Guyana to Marsha Barnes who was delighted to get it back and did the deputy stuff in the office.

Q: And continued to do Suriname and Trinidad.

RICKERT: Right.

A couple of interesting things that happened. What happened during the Reagan administration? I remember they were very concerned, as I mentioned, about Communism possibly in Surinam. The Surinamese foreign minister was due to come to have a meeting with Secretary Haig. I was told to write very tough talking points which I did, which were cleared up through the chain and went to Haig. I was the note taker at this meeting. The Surinamese foreign minister came in. Haig put his arm around him and didn't use one of the talking points. He achieved the same end through different means. I'm not saying he just rolled over but he figured that in this case, I'm assuming, that talking tough to a person representing 350,000 people was less likely to get the desired end than showing some concern and interest and friendliness ... So that was one little lesson there.

One bizarre Trinidad thing happened while I was there. After I left Trinidad, the second DCM, I mentioned the first was Mike Yohn, the second was Joe O'Mahony who had spent time in India and Latin America: a fine person who had been very badly shot up in WWII and was in a lot of pain a lot of the time. Joe was a decent person and a good DCM. He was chargé after I left because the next ambassador who was a politico had not yet come. There was a delay in his getting there. I came back from lunch one day and I was told by my secretary, "you have a flash message from Trinidad." That's almost a contradiction in terms. I had never seen a flash any time in a place except during my time in the OP center. The flash dealt with the following: Prime Minister Williams had died suddenly. Well, you don't need a flash message for that, but the decision had been made to cremate him in Trinidad. They needed a crematorium, because the only cremating that was done in Trinidad was done on the banks of the streams, Indian style. That was not considered sufficiently respectful for a person who came from an African and Christian background. So I had about three or four days to get a crematorium ... a portable crematorium to Trinidad so that Eric Williams could be cremated. Where do you start?

At first I called DoD [Department of Defense]. They were extremely pleasant but they said they had no such thing. They didn't know of such a thing and they couldn't give any help. I scratched my head and I finally though, well, let me call Gawler's Funeral Home out on Wisconsin Avenue. They had handled the arrangements for Abraham Lincoln's funeral. I figured they had long experience when they handled the arrangements for my father's funeral in 1950. I got ahold of the cremations guy there and explained the dilemma and he said to me, he was very polite and understanding and helpful and said: "You know, I hope you don't mind my asking but, most of the time, it's found more efficient to take the body to the crematorium than the crematorium to the body." I hadn't told him who this was for, I said I couldn't, because it was all very hush-hush. I said, "I understand, but in this case it doesn't work." I said it was for someone outside the country. So he said, there's a company in Orlando that makes crematoria. He gave me the name and the phone number and everything else and he said, "Why don't you call them and see what you can find out." So I got hold of someone there and they said that they had a crematorium that had just come off the assembly line and was test fired and was ready to go for use in Michigan but that it could be diverted. We got the dimensions and found that it would fit in a 747 cargo plane, big enough to take it. They of course wanted to see the color of the money, which I don't blame them. The payer for this operation was TRINTOC (Trinidad and Tobago Oil Company Limited) which was the Trinidad oil company which had an office in New York. I put them in touch with TRINTOC and TRINTOC took care of the money. The crematorium was trucked down to Miami. We had to hold the plane a bit but it got on the plane and got there by the deadline.

It was one of the more bizarre things that I did in foreign service.

Q: So the Trinidad government came to the embassy for help and it was told that this would be a nice gesture?

RICKERT: I guess. I could only surmise. As I recall, the cable was a request. They certainly didn't cook it up themselves. It may be that the Deputy Prime Minister or someone mentioned it to the chargé and he said, well, we'll see what we can do. Whether it was request or demand or just something that they heard about, I no longer recall. The chargé took it on and was "charged" to get hold of this crematorium. It was a gas-fired crematorium. They had plenty of gas in Trinidad so that's what happened.

Q: And it worked?

RICKERT: Well, that, I've heard mixed stories about that. There were problems with it but I think it eventually worked. There's a little footnote in this. I'm jumping ahead in this story and I won't go in to all the gory details but some years later in the late '80s I was in Bulgaria and we had a CODEL [Congressional Delegation] a large CODEL there. I ended up chatting with the military aide that normally accompany these CODELs. He asked where I served and so forth, I mentioned Trinidad and he said, "Oh, Trinidad. I worked for BWIA, the British West-India Airways, for many years." To make a long story short, he said, he knew that it must have been me there who made the arrangements, but he picked it up from the point where there was a crematorium and all the rest and he got it taken care of. So here was an American diplomat and an American military officer; He was a Reserve officer; He did this in his free time, so to speak, standing in the garden of a Bulgarian government villa in Sofia talking about the cremation of the Trinidad prime minister. It was really kind of macabre. It was very enjoyable to both of us to meet the other half of this process.

Q: It helps about your assignment in Caribbean affairs.

RICKERT: There are a couple of other things I might mention. The way things worked back then. Of course, the Caribbean countries were very small. When Rob Warren was Office Director, a foreign minister would come to town. There were no representational funds. So Rob would ask, "Anybody from the office want to have lunch with the prime minister of Grenada or the foreign minister of some other island like Barbados?", and we'd all trundle off to the Foreign Service Club and split the bill. That was our representation and entertainment. It was nice for meeting some of these guys, but I thought a little bit from the skimpy side.

Q: It reminds me of the time I took Javier Perez de Cuellar to have a bite to eat at the Kennedy Center way before he became Secretary General of the United Nations.

RICKERT: Another thing I ended up doing in Caribbean Affairs... There were a couple of people that were not really *persona non grata* with the State Department but whom we couldn't ignore completely. One was Cheddi Jagan, the once and future prime minister of Guyana. When he came to town I, with my elevated position as Acting Deputy Director of Caribbean Affairs, would be given the pleasure of meeting with him because nobody of higher rank than I would see him. I only remember one meeting with him. I remember he was a very charming, engaging, articulate fellow who was fun to talk to.

Q: And didn't feel insulted that he had to talk to you as opposed to somebody else.

RICKERT: No. I think he was pretty savvy. I don't remember meeting with Eric Gairy, the prime minister of Grenada who believed in UFO's and had Grenada introduce UN General Assembly resolutions on the subject of UFO's. But I had correspondence with him and talked to him on the phone. I don't recall meeting him, but I ended up with some of those tasks.

Q: ...and the U. S. military action in Grenada came well after you left.

RICKERT: That's correct. One other little incident that was one of the less attractive sides of the Foreign Service – and I might want to edit this when I get to it – I had a call one day when I was still on the Guyana desk from a gentleman whose first name I can't remember, but his last name was McCormack, and he later became assistant secretary for EB (Economic Bureau).

Q: Richard...

RICKERT: Richard something. I can't remember for sure. But he called me up as the Guyana desk officer and chewed me up one side and down another because of the problems that a businessman who had gone – he was a staffer for Helms at the time...

Q: McCormack was.

RICKERT: McCormack was and he had a fellow who was dealing with the Guyana government and the embassy hadn't helped this guy. This was an African American fellow who was taking advantage of some kind of a set-aside to provide rum to American Commissary, military commissaries, and I had met and spoken with the guy. He had essentially a trade dispute with the Guyana authorities. He claimed that he'd been ripped off and he'd been cheated, and so forth and so on. And McCormack really tore a strip off me in the State Department for our failure to get this guy's money. He was loud, abusive, obnoxious over the phone. I put the phone down shaking and immediately typed up everything I could remember and sent it to Steve Bosworth. No one wanted to have someone be blindsided at a higher level by this. And after I calmed down, a couple of hours later, McCormack called back and, in a sense, apologized, and said, "I'm sorry I had to do that, but he was sitting in my office, and I had to put on a show for him."

Q: Thanks a lot! Anything else? We haven't, other than this trade dispute, haven't talked much about Guyana, and you mentioned Jagan coming to see you. Is there anything else...

RICKERT: There was not much. Guyana was in a quiet period then. The name of the prime minister who was somebody that we favored over Jagan escapes me, who later became a tin pot dictator of his own. He was running dishonest elections and persecuting

the Indians there mostly through disenfranchising them to a sufficient extent yet reelected though the Indians were the majority in Guyana by that time. And Guyana was of interest, but I don't recall anything of particular note had to do with our relations with Guyana during the talks the year that I dealt with it. There are a couple of other things that I might mention. The next ambassador to Trinidad after Irv Cheslaw was a black politician from the American Virgin Islands, a republican, believe it or not, named Melvin Evans. He was actually a very nice man. He'd been the Virgin Islands delegate in Congress. I learned a little something about Congress from him. He was named, and I didn't hear from him, and I waited and waited, and so forth. He finally called, and we had a chat. His hearing was scheduled for Monday afternoon. He came to town on Sunday, and I had a meeting with him on Sunday, and we chatted and so forth. His first question was, Jonathan, what does an ambassador do?" I told him a little bit, and he had read some things about Trinidad, but he hadn't done very much. Well, of course, when it came time for his hearing, he received, shall we say, members or former members courtesy, and wasn't asked any questions of any sort at all. And so he hadn't done the usual homework which, I know, you were very familiar with to assignments as ambassador. But he was very relaxed through this whole thing. He was a very nice man, a very decent man, but he had medical problems and actually died in Trinidad during his time there. He went over for his meeting with President Reagan, and he was there with his family and so forth, and I had accompanied him just to be there as kind of an escort. He said, "Jonathan, come on in. You're welcome to come in for my meeting with the president." I declined and said, "This is a moment, Mr. Ambassador, for you and your family, and not for outsiders." As much as I would like to have done it, his wife was there, his children were there, and some grandchildren. This was not...I mean it was very kind and thoughtful of him to ask me to participate, but not a situation which I thought I should insert myself.

Q: Maybe you should have. He probably really didn't _____?

RICKERT: He was, but I didn't feel that I should. I did meet Vice President Bush on that occasion. He was wandering around in the vicinity. We had another ambassador named Milan Bish who went through Barbados who was a developer of commercial real estate from Nebraska or some such place. As you recall, one of the very good things in my view as one who was never an ambassador that Ronald Reagan did was to call each appointee to tell him or her personally that he had been...or she had been...named ambassador.

Q: Actually it was really a request, a question, "Would you be willing to serve as the United States ambassador to somewhere?"

RICKERT: You're entirely right. Milan Bish was a very jovial and outgoing Elks and Lions Club type of guy but with a somewhat limited geographic background. He told us about this story about how this had happened and how he got this call. He knew he was up for something, but he didn't know exactly what. Ronald Reagan got on the line, and they chit-chatted, and he said, "Well, I want you to know that I'm offering you the position as U. S. Ambassador to Barbados, and I hope that you will accept," and so forth and so on. And Bish said, "Oh, yes, Sir, I'd be very delighted to accept." They finished

their conversation, and the first thing he did was to run for an atlas because he also didn't know where or what Barbados was. And we heard that he was telling the story in Barbados. We quietly suggested that he save that for the Elks of the Lions Club in Nebraska and not for Barbados because people from small countries can be very prickly about these things. So anyway, he was the ambassador that was totally ignored during the invasion of Grenada which was staged on Grenada which was technically one of his areas of responsibility. He was accredited to Barbados but co-accredited to Grenada and some other smaller islands.

Q: And wasn't kept informed, and wasn't consulted, certainly.

RICKERT: No. The whole thing was just done over his head because, I'm afraid, he was in over his head.

Q: Ok. Anything else about the Caribbean? I should mention that I never had any Foreign Service experience with the Caribbean but have gone as a tourist lecturer on a couple of cruise ships through a number of the islands including Trinidad. You said that tourism wasn't, at the time that you were there, too big. I'm not sure it was when I was there. We were only there for a few hours, but we certainly had a good time and went and saw the Scarlet Ibis at the Wildlife Refuge. Anything else? This was '80 to '82.

RICKERT: That's right. During 1982 I moved from the Trinidad desk to the Romania desk. John Davis was the director at the time, and Bill Farrand was his deputy. And Bill and I had served in Moscow together, and I think it was largely through Bill that I got the job. I've maintained an interest in Romania...

Q: ...since having served there and having the Romanian language.

RICKERT: ...and also, while I was working Caribbean affairs, I finished my Master's degree – my Master's thesis – for the grade of GW. The topic was "Romanian Government Policies Towards Ethnic Minorities During Post World War II Period." So, I was very pleased to go back. I'd had a long-standing interest in Eastern Europe, and I was delighted to be working with Bill whom I knew. John Davis, whom I didn't know, but whom I came to know and eventually served as DCM under in Romania some years later, so that was the beginning of a good relationship. I didn't know John very well during that time. 95% of his time was spent on Poland because it was martial law. John was one of the foreign service's biggest Poland experts and went from that job to become chargé there and stayed there from '83 to '90 approximately.

Q: That was ambassador.

RICKERT: He was first chargé and then ambassador. He ended up with 13 years service in Poland which is a lot. So I really didn't get to know him that well. Jack Scanlon was the desk officer when I arrived there, and then Mark Palmer took over shortly thereafter. Jack was supposed to go to Poland as ambassador. Because of Polish dissatisfaction with

our policy, they refused to give agrément, and he waited and waited. Eventually he gave up and went to Yugoslavia instead. And that was when John Davis went to Warsaw as chargé until the Poles saw sense. That was expected to be three to six months, but it ended up being a lot longer than that.

Q: What was going on with U. S.-Romania relations during that period?

RICKERT: Well, one doesn't want to leave the impression that personalities are essential factor in all this, but you have to recall that the U. S. ambassador to Bucharest at that time was David B. Funderburk who, by some accounts, was one of the least appropriate political appointees in living memory. I could go one for a tape and a half on David Funderburk, which I won't do, but he was hell's protégé. He knew the language, he knew a lot about the country...

Q: But he hadn't been in Bucharest.

RICKERT: He'd been in Romania. So, from that point of view it was not at all a bad assignment, but he had a deep and abiding – "distrust" is too kind of a term – for the Foreign Service, and it made it very difficult to work effectively with him. He considered the Foreign Service to be pink and soft on communism and unwilling to tackle difficult dictators, etc., etc., etc. And it was not easy working with him. His first DCM was Sam Frye who I had worked with in Moscow and was friendly with personally. I mean, we weren't close friends, but we were colleagues in Moscow and had known each other. That was the saving grace there, but Sam didn't last that long, and we had real problems trying to find somebody to go out to work for Funderburk. So, in the end it was decided, I think correctly, I recommended and ended up happening, that the political consular and career guy, a fine person with a good professional credentials but who happened also to be personally of a very Right Wing orientation. Frank Corey ended up being the DCM, and that worked perfectly OK because Funderburk didn't consider him to be a spy or worse. The two main issues that I can think of in U. S.-Romanian relations during my two years on the desk, were: one, the annual review of most favored nation status which, of course, stemmed from the Helsinki Accords in 1975. This became an annual exercise. As many people remember and many people have forgotten, the whole idea of linking Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade to this process had to do with emigration from the Soviet Union. It was broadened to include Eastern Europe subsequently. Then, by extension, interest groups of various sorts did something that I personally didn't think was correct but was entirely understandable. This involved extending the emigration aspect to cover all human rights problems. Anyone who had problems with the human rights practices of Romania and any other countries covered by the Jackson-Vanik Amendment used the annual hearings on renewal of MFN as a means to beat the country about the head and shoulders. I never was an apologist for Romania's human rights record or its treatment of its citizens. I did have some problems about using a law that speaks about emigration as an omnibus pretext to try to block MFN for Romania for purposes that had nothing to do with the stated purpose of the law. Interestingly, the Assistant Secretary for Human Rights at that time was Elliott Abrams. He had worked with Senator Henry "Scoop"

Jackson as a staffer. I went on a trip at one point with Abrams to Romania. I spoke to him on this issue on several occasions. And Abrams was certainly not soft on Commies or human rights violators. I remember him saying very clearly, "Jackson-Vanik is emigration. Jackson knew he couldn't buy more than emigration with this piece of legislation; it wasn't attractive enough to be able to carry a heavier human rights agenda." So emigration was selected as the issue where we could really make a difference and possibly get it to work. Of course, it didn't work with the Soviet Union as it turned out. It did work for some years with Romania, and emigration numbers were higher, I'm convinced, than otherwise.

Q: This was Jewish emigration to Israel?

RICKERT: No. The language of the law was...

Q: ...in the case of Romania...

RICKERT: ...for Romania was freedom for emigration, and the impetus was Jewish emigration to Israel. But it wasn't framed as a "Jews Only" law, and it was...the Jewish organizations in this country, of course, kept very careful track of the number of Romanian Jews who were allowed to emigrate to Israel or to the United States for that matter. They used their relative success and relative failure as their yardstick. They used this as a means of putting pressure on the Romanians to perform better, but that wasn't the determining factor. That was part of the mix. If fact, the majority of the emigrants were not Jews. The biggest single group during those years was Germans to Germany. Now, the sordid part of all this, as is well known today, is that both the Jews going to Israel and the Germans going to Germany were in effect bought out by the receiving governments. The exact arrangements, I don't know what they were. There were payments made. So, although Romania lost skilled people, educated people, they did get something in return.

Q: Okay, and most favored nation status for Romania was subject to annual..

RICKERT: ...annual review...

Q: ...and that was conducted at the hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or what?

RICKERT: The senate took a lesser interest in the MFN. I won't say took no interest, but it followed the lead of the Foreign Operations...no, it was the sub-committee of the House Ways and Means committee that was...

Q: They're responsible for trade legislation.

RICKERT: That's right.

Q: Who would be the State Department witness, the Assistant Secretary of...

RICKERT: There was a letter from the President recommending it. We prepared a packet of statements that included documents from other U. S. government figures. It was usually, as I recall, it was the DAS who would actually do the testifying.

Q: That's for European...

RICKERT: That's right. It would have been Mark Palmer or Jack Scanlon. I don't recall for certain on that. A document goes to the Hill with the President's name on it, and it shows that it's serious in this case. Interestingly, when John Davis was office director, he knew that David Funderburk did not agree with the idea of MFN for Romania due to human rights concerns. So he always sent a whole packet to David in both years. The whole packet went to embassy Bucharest, and Funderburk reviewed it. He may have ground his teeth and snarled and everything else, but he didn't object to it in writing.

Q: Was the package sent after the fact?

RICKERT: No. It was before it went to the Congress. To me this has always been interesting. He wrote a book after he left Bucharest called Pinstripes and Reds in which he implies that he opposed MFN but the State Department people somehow convinced the President to go along with it. And it's carefully worded because he can't say that he opposed it, he had chances to oppose it in writing, and he may even – I don't recall – he may even have made small textural suggestions, edits, and so forth, to the package, but he did not object. I think his biggest mistake was his failure to realize that the ambassador, as representative of the President, has free reign to say what he thinks should happen and should not happen. He may well be overruled, but he would have had on record that, "I think this is a mistake because boom, boom, boom, boom, boom." But he never did it. He would mumble and groan and carp and cavil, but not put forth a reasoned series of arguments as to why the policy direction was misguided or wrong in some way.

Q: Okay. Why don't we stop at this point, Jonathan, and we'll pick up on your service's remaining desk officer and finish that on our next opportunity.

RICKERT: Okay. Sounds...

Q: Today is the 15th of December 2003, and we're continuing our conversation with Jonathan Rickert about his experience from 1982 to '84 as Desk Officer for Romania in the Office of Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs. Jonathan, you had been talking before about some of the interaction you had and some problems you had with Ambassador David Funderburk, and I think you were to talk about a major U. S.-Romanian bilateral issue of the period.

RICKERT: Yes. The '80s was a period of decline in the internal situation in Romania and, consequently, also a decline in U. S.-Romanian relations. Ceausescu, the dictator of

Rumania, decided in the early '80s to repay all of the country's foreign debts because he felt, apparently, that being indebted to foreign countries was a form of dependency that he was unwilling to accept for the longer time. So there was a Draconian drive to try to increase exports, minimize imports, and pay off the outstanding debts to various countries and the international financial institutions as quickly as possible. This, of course, had a very serious effect on the standard of life of the ordinary Romanians as well as being a hindrance to Romania's economic development because the factories didn't get updated technology. They weren't even able to get parts in some cases for the equipment they had. Libraries couldn't bring in books or periodicals from abroad, so fields like medicine and science were hindered in their development. It was a dark period for Romania in general. At the same time there was a crackdown on human rights and against religious believers of various sorts, and the Ceausescu regime also had a very strongly pro-natalist policy of trying to increase the population by banning abortion and punishing those who had abortions or performed abortions. So, all in all, it was not one of the best periods in our relations. In the midst of all this, the government decreed that those who had applied for emigration and who had received higher education in Romania, had to repay the state at a certain rate for the education they had received. The repayment had to be in hard currency, and Romanians were not allowed to hold hard currency. The decree was named, if I recall "Number 409" which was the number of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. So it was really a kind of a counter-pressure to the pressure that we were putting on with Jackson-Vanik. Under Jackson-Vanik, if any country were to place more than minimal fees for emigration, we were required to suspend MFN. The leadership of the Department, principally Lawrence Eagleburger and others, felt this was not a good thing to do, that MFN was useful in our relationship. It still provided a certain amount of leverage over the Romanian government. It enabled a number of people to emigrate who otherwise would not have been able to, so the decision was made to try to find a way to maintain MFN which meant getting rid of Decree 409. That meant extensive negotiations largely between Mark Palmer who was the DAS at the time, and the Romanian ambassador who was Mircea Malita. He was a very interesting man and a scholar, a former minister of education, a former advisor to Ceausescu, a very educated and cultured man, not confrontational, and not ideological, but obviously there to serve the interests of his government and state. Mark and Malita met on a number of occasions, and through the discussions they were eventually able to come up with a solution that the Romanians bought when they saw that we were serious about pulling MFN if they didn't somehow neutralize this Decree 409. They decided that those who were leaving would not have to pay, but there were a few who had already paid and gotten out – money had been brought in from abroad. This caused certain problems as well because then they wanted their money back when the deal was struck. We would continue to support Romania and have the administration work for MFN. There was an understanding that we would try to encourage, to take certain steps with the Congress to increase trade to Romania which was something that they wanted. On the Romanian side, they did not null the decree. They simply suspended it. So, the end result was that MFN was continued, emigration resumed, and an embarrassing chapter was over. It was interesting to watch Mark and Malita work on this very important issue and to see the give and take with two people seeing the importance of maintaining *status quo* over MFN but not quite sure how to go

about it. Malita, of course, was subject to the whims of his dictator at home, but fortunately I think the end result was satisfactory for all concerned.

Q: One of the things that seemed to characterize U. S.-Romanian relations in this period and the earlier period is that Romania was rather unique in Eastern Europe, more SALT-PAC country in its foreign policy and orientation, especially in the Middle East, I think, and reform did some things or took some positions that we appreciated. Do you want to comment at all? Is that correct and if so, is that one of the reasons why we started MFN for Romania in the first place and made efforts to continue it over the years?

RICKERT: Let's go back a little bit in history. In 1965 the first long-service dictator in Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej died. He was succeeded by Ceausescu who was not really considered to be one of the top heavyweights in the party. He was uneducated, he was not very socially adept, he was definitely from a working class, but he was smarter and tougher than those who were better educated and had better credentials. He out-maneuvered them and became the dictator. That was in '65. Then, of course, in '68 was in effect the defining moment for Romanian relations with the Soviet Union and with the West, and that was the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August. And Romania alone of the Warsaw Pact countries did not participate or support that event. That was a sign of independence that was very welcome to the United States. It was rewarded in any number of ways: first of all by Richard Nixon's visit in 1969, the first Eastern European country that he visited after becoming president and subsequently by a great deal of attention in a lot of different areas including efforts to increase trade, loans, support in becoming a member in the World Bank and other international financial institutions. Romania did a number of things that were ahead of the rest of the Warsaw Pact, and that the U. S. government obviously saw as being helpful and, possibly, opening up the way for fissures within the pact itself. And they recognized the Federal Republic of Germany, the first country to do so back in...I have to check the date...the late '60s I believe that was. Alone among Eastern European countries, in the '67 War between Israel and the Arabs, they didn't break relations. They maintained relations with Israel throughout this whole period. I mentioned Czechoslovakia. Later they were to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. So they took a number of helpful steps. And they participated in the '84 Olympics in Los Angeles. They were the only Warsaw Pact country to do so. There were a number of things they did that were welcome to the U. S. government. And my impression always was that we were trying to use this realm of independence as a means of possibly prying, not maybe prying loose, but weakening the bonds within the Warsaw Pact. In the Middle East, because they had relations with both the Arabs and Israel, they played a useful go-between role, and they were always seeking mediator roles in Viet Nam and in various other places. Sometimes they ended up being able to be helpful, sometimes it didn't amount to anything, but they clearly were trying to stake out a place for themselves that was not typical of the Bulgarias or the Czechoslovakias of their time. My own view is that we stuck with them a bit too long because it became evident from the mid to late '80s that the harm that was being done internally through a very rigid and repressive regime outweighed the benefits – the possible benefits – of a somewhat independent foreign policy. That conclusion was come to in due course and acted upon.

Ceausescu himself declined to seek the extension of MFN because of the humiliations he saw at the annual hearings in order to get the renewal of MFN and all the criticism and heavy abuse from his perspective that resulted from those hearings.

Q: Okay. We'll talk some more about U. S.-Romanian relations in the early '90s when you were DCM in Bucharest. Is there anything else we ought to say about this period as the desk officer at all?

RICKERT: There are a few things I might mention, a few oddities. As desk officer, I spent most of my time dealing with...I won't say most, but a great deal of my time answering Congressional letters on human rights and also on emigration cases. That was almost a full-time job. I don't remember how many I did a week, but it was 20 to 30 Congressionals a week in many cases. Once a young American of Russian extraction came to my office wanting help with the Romanians to get a visa to go to Romania. It turned out he was American as I said of Russian extraction but was an Old Believer. He lived in Alaska, and he wanted to study to be an Old Believer priest. One of the few Old Believer congregations extant in the world was in the Danube Delta. He sought it and eventually received a visa to go and do on-the-job training to become the head of the "flock" in Alaska which struck me as being a bit unusual.

Q: You were talking about your relations with the Romanians in Washington and the two DCM's that they have.

RICKERT: That's right. One was for internal use who was usually the highest ranking person in Securitate in the Embassy, the state security. The other, whatever his other affiliations might be, was for dealing with the outside world. The DCM that I got was a man named Boris Rhongetz who was perfectly decent and pleasant to deal with. We had one interesting incident. The Romanians stopped a U. S. pouch that was coming in, claiming it was U. S. firearms, and we refused to open it. We told them that it didn't contain firearms, but we refused to open it because that would be contrary to international law, and they refused to accept it. The only way they could have known what was in it was by X-raying it which was illegal. But to make a long story short, Boris and I negotiated a solution. We promised that there wasn't a firearm in it which was true. What there was in the pouch was something that's called a ramset which is used in construction. Its a pistol-like device which you put against a wall and fire the charge which fastens a nail to the wall. Its used to fasten conduit to concrete walls and things like that. There was apparently construction work going on in the embassy, and one of these was being pouched in. But it couldn't be used to shoot at anyone. It had to be pressed against a surface before the charge could be discharged. We gave assurances that – absolute assurances – that there were no firearms in the pouch, and the Romanians eventually agreed to allow it in on that basis. What struck me was that even though relations were getting worse, and it was a difficult issue at a low level, there was an effort to find a solution, to be cooperative, to get around the difficulties which had been thrown up, in this case by their bureaucracy. I don't remember if I mentioned Nicu Ceausescu's visit to the State Department.

Q: I don't think so.

RICKERT: Nicu Ceausescu was the younger son. Ceausescu had two sons and a daughter. Valentin is the oldest and Zoia was the daughter, and then Nicu was the youngest. The older two apparently were not interested in politics, so Nicu became kind of the Crown Prince, the Heir Apparent. An unfortunate choice because he was a notorious playboy, and very heavy drinker who eventually died of cirrhosis of the liver. But he was sent on an official visit to Washington, and Quavering, Romanian embassy officer, came in and said, "Can you please set up some high level meetings for Nicu?" obviously meaning that if we didn't, his job and others were perhaps on the line. So we sent a routine meeting request up to Eagleburger thinking...

Q: ...who was deputy secretary...

RICKERT: ...deputy secretary. No, excuse me. He at that time he was undersecretary for political affairs, and he did see most of the high level Eastern Europeans who came through. I honestly thought he would just say politely, "No, I don't have time", but we got the memo back saying, "Yes, you can set up the meeting." Of course, the Romanians were delighted. And this was shortly after the incident in which the Korean Airlines plane was shot down in the Far East. It was very interesting and instructional for me to see what Eagleburger did with this meeting. He used it in order to get across our view on the KAL incident and what had happened and what it meant and so forth. Even if Nicu didn't pick up on it, he had an interpreter, and he had a couple of other embassy people there, and he had a report that would go back. He spent about 45 minutes with Nicu Ceausescu which most people would have considered to be a waste of time but used it to very good effects under those circumstances. He also used it to get other messages across from his level. Whether they did any good or not is another matter, but that's what diplomacy's all about: letting the other side know what you're up to.

Q: Okay. Anything else about the desk officer job? If not, where did you go next?

RICKERT: Toward the middle of my last year, I was assigned as DCM in Sofia, Bulgaria via foreign language training. This was before DCM committees, and the assignment was made between our office director who, I believe it would have been Dick Holmes at that time. John Davis was the first, and then Dick Holmes was the next. The DAS, Mark Palmer, it was done in-house, so it was a lot easier particularly on severely underbid posts like Sofia where there were about a dozen bidders where half of them were not at grade or had no discernable background. So at the end of my tours as desk officer, I went to language training over at FSI and studied Bulgarian for a year. I did master it fairly well and used it extensively in Bulgaria.

Q: You went to Sofia in the summer of 1985. Who was the ambassador?

RICKERT: Ambassador when I arrived was Mel Levitsky, and he was there for over a

year. And then there was a gap for a few months, and then Sol Polansky came. That was, of course, a major step forward from a career point of view. I had not had a significant supervisory position up to that point and was thrown into a DCM job in a relatively small embassy. But still, anybody who's been DCM knows the joys and travails of that particular job anywhere, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. Joe Lake was my immediate predecessor, and we overlapped for two days, and he gave me the combination to the safe and showed me where the office men's room was, and said, "I'm here if you need me, but this post is too small for two DCM's."

Q: Even for two days!

RICKERT: Even for two days, but you're it! So that was my being thrown off the back of the canoe which I think was the right way to do it, but at the time it seemed a little scary. He had been there for three years, and Mel Levitsky had already been there for well over a year, I believe. Certainly over a year, so he was well settled in, and I was the new guy who had to learn everything from scratch. There were a couple of interesting people – well, there were many interesting people at the embassy – but the one that went on to the greatest fame was Mike Hayden who was our air attaché. Mike was a major in the Air Force, a very impressive military person who is currently the head of NSA, three star, so he's had a good career. Having worked with him, even traveled with him in country, I can see why. Also, Lyn Dent was the admin officer. We'd served together in Trinidad earlier, and it was a delight to have such an exceptionally competent admin officer for the first year that I was there. There were some other folks: John Beyrle who was a junior officer and is now DCM in Moscow, and some other very capable folks. It was kind of the farm team for Moscow or a place people went to after Moscow. John had come from Moscow, so it was a good team and a pleasure to work with him. Housing was a problem in Sofia. It was some of the worst in Europe at that time. There were Soviet era apartments which were relatively small and not very well built and not very efficient, and they were all the same size. So whether you were Colonel Masterson with his five kids or a single secretary, you got the same size apartment. Interestingly, there was almost no complaining about housing. I attribute that to the fact that there was equal mistreatment for all. At a later time, when I visited Sofia from Bucharest and talked with the DCM there, she told me that housing was the biggest problem – one of the biggest problems. By then the market had opened up and some people had very nice houses, and others were still living in the crummy Soviet era apartments, and that lead to problems that we didn't have to face when I was there. My family and I lived in a new building... I'll go back in a moment. About a year before I got there inspectors looked at the chancery and said that if there were a fire, the Marines who were living on the top floor of the chancery building at the time would be incinerated. There would be no way that they could escape. The embassy went quickly to work on finding a new Marine house. The eventual solution that they came up with was a building in a diplomatic enclave on the outskirts of town that was built by the Bulgarians as ambassadors' residences, or at least their idea of what an ambassador's residence should be like. The Marines got one floor at the bottom, and then there was the multi-purpose room which could be used by the embassy for various events and activities. And then there was a DCM apartment on the top floor which had all the

quirks and foibles of Bulgarian architecture but was very spacious by local standards and had balconies all the way around and a lovely view of Mount Vitosha. We were on that side of Sofia. It had four bedrooms and was very nice, indeed, in most respects. It was about a half hour from the ski slopes on Mount Vitosha, and about 45 minutes or so from the embassy villa in Borovets, an even better skiing location, and the air was a bit cleaner on the edge of town than it was down in the center of town.

Q: It was all right to share a building with the Marines?

RICKERT: A number of pluses, a few minuses. The Marines were wonderful to our kids who were in grade school at the time, and there was a very strict non-frat policy. These were young guys who were bored. They had very few people to socialize with, and a couple of the Marines were particularly nice to our kids: took them to the zoo, taught them how to play pool and various other things. The only problem, of course, was noise. We had a rule that after 10:00 music had to go down, and for the most part it was observed. It wasn't really a problem. The building itself I thought looked like a modern minimum security correctional facility. It was not exactly attractive or welcoming, but it was a lot better than what a lot of other people had at that time.

Q: I'm glad you didn't have to move into the Marines former quarters on the top floor of the chancery! I thought maybe that's what you were going to say!

RICKERT: No, no. I might say my biggest concern when I was there was fire because of the Lonetree incident that happened in Moscow. All the security arms in the U. S. government discovered there were security problems in embassies throughout the region. Our chancery was – and is as we speak – still in a building that has Bulgarian buildings on both sides. The Bulgarian *der ja mesigernas*, state security, was very aggressive. They bored holes through the walls, and they did all sorts of nasty things. Our security people were concerned about technical and other penetrations, and I was concerned about fire because there was one staircase in the building, straight down the center of the building.

Q: And that was all.

RICKERT: And that was it. And the ambassador's office. The ambassador's and DCM's offices were, I think, on the fourth floor, maybe the fifth floor, but if there were fire down below, it would be a long jump down to the pavement. So these teams that came through were appalled by the security situation and tut-tutted. And ambassadors for years had been complaining about this without any result. But they did do some security upgrades and started getting serious about finding a site for a new chancery which is due to be opened about a year from now. I saw it this past summer when I was on TDY in Bulgaria, and it was something those of us who served back then could only have dreamed about. Its on 10 plus acres, brand new modern earthquake proof...

Q: Decent location in terms of the city?

RICKERT: Excellent location in terms of the city. It's in the city. It's not downtown, but its not far from the downtown areas, and its in a very good area. I don't know all the details on how we got that site, but I'm sure there are a number of other embassies who are building new chanceries that would like to have something as accessible and as well situated as that one is. It was not a good period in U. S.-Bulgarian relations for several reasons. The approximate cause for the problems was a campaign that was launched by the Zhukov lead Communist regime early in 1985. It started early on, if I recall correctly, to change the names of those who were Turkish to Bulgarian names. The regime decided that these people were all actually Bulgarians who had been turned into Turks by the ottomans during their nearly 500 years of oppression of Bulgaria. So the only decent thing was to turn them back into Bulgarians, and they did this in a very rigorous and oppressive way. They decided what the names of the Turks should be, and they did things like naming Imams "Christo" which is Christ. This is not only an insult of having your name changed but having the principal figure of another religion imposed on you and other things like that. We strongly objected to this and criticized it in public and in private. The second aspect, of course, is that Bulgaria was often seen as the 16th Republic of the Soviet Union and the most slavishly pro-Soviet of all the satellite countries. My view is a little bit different from that of many people in this regard. I can't prove it, but I think the Bulgarians certainly didn't dislike the Russians or the Soviets. They owe them a huge historical debt because of their liberation back in the 1800's with the help of the Russian army, Alexander III I believe it was. But I don't think they especially loved the Russians more than anyone else. Russia, or the Soviet Union, represented to them security, and it represented economic possibility. I think they found that they could get what they wanted by saying the right things and doing the right things at relatively low cost, and it made the Russians happy, and it gave them significant economic advantages, and why not? They really didn't have a whole lot of other choice. They could have resisted to an extent the way Ceausescu did and pay the price, but they ended up living a lot better than the Romanians did, and I think they were being quite opportunistic. They got oil at comicon prices, and refined it, and sold it at world prices, and they had a number of other economic advantages that were well worth voting the right way at the UN all the time and a few other slavish things like that. Although it was startling to see signs of billboards occasionally in Bulgaria that said *slava kapay ess ess,* "Praise to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union". You never see that in other Eastern European countries, but in Bulgaria you did. A small price to pay. There wasn't a whole lot going on in U. S.-Bulgarian relations as a result of these two factors. There were certain hints of change in the air. Of course, Gorbachev was in. There was talk of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. Zhivkov, the Bulgarian dictator, was in his 70's, and it was interesting how he tried to adapt to the new realities in Moscow. Gorbachev came to Bulgaria once, at least once, while I was there. Although one doesn't know what the sources were, the indications from people associated with the visit were that Zhivkov and Gorbachev had not hit it off that well, and it was a real generational difference. There were ideological difference presumably, and Bulgarians put a good show on and claimed everything was just great, but it wasn't. Things weren't as smooth as they might have been. There were small signs, very small signs, that things were changing. In hindsight one can see that there was no resistance and no dissidence of any significance in Bulgaria. In the latter part of my time

there was some ecological movements, and that enabled people, even party members, to take stands not entirely in accord with those of the party and state. It was all done on a very high level of maintaining ecology and so forth and never pointed directly at anybody. But it was a sign of independent thinking of action that hadn't been present before. These types of activities eventually turned into the parties, the core of the post-'89 governments. John Whitehead, who was Deputy Secretary of State was commissioned in effect by Secretary Shultz to look after Eastern Europe. In the latter part of my time he came twice to Bulgaria. He used to make a swing through the area, trying to do it every six months. I don't think he managed to keep to that schedule entirely, but I know he came twice. This was interesting because he was, of course, a very charming man. He was not at all unwilling to give a straight message, but he did it very nicely. An interesting little sideline on his visits: He is a cousin of my mother's. I had not really met him before, but he knew who I was. My mother had stayed with his family for vacations when she was in college. She had looked after John's parents when they were elderly and living in the same town in Connecticut and had helped, had seen them, and kind of made sure that they were okay and so forth, which he appreciated. The first time that he came to Bulgaria, he got off the plane, and I was there with the others, and he gave me a big hug and said, "Hello, cousin!" and the Bulgarians were all eyes and ears about that. The second time he came, we were having a very difficult time at the school, and I was Chairman of the School Board. We had a school director and his wife who were both aggressive evangelical Christians. The Bulgarians had told us that they had to go because apparently they were carrying their activities beyond the narrow confines of the foreign community. I didn't often play this kind of game, but by then they knew that Whitehead was related to me. I said, in preparations for the visit when they told me we had to get rid of Mr. and Mrs. Kauffman, I said, "Well, this is an important matter for us, and it would be unfortunate if Mr. Whitehead and I talked to him and he had to raise it with Zhivkov." And that was the last we ever heard of it, so they finished out their time. You have to use everything at your disposal when you're dealing with that type of situation. One little incident about John Whitehead: One of the times Zhivkov gave a luncheon for him at a place, it was an official palace called the Boyana Palace where they did official entertaining. It was not a residential place. It was a grand barn of a place, a Communist dictator's idea of what a presidential palace should look like. Not on a Ceausescu palace scale, but still some of the same mentality went into it. There was a large table for the luncheon that was about eight feet wide, and Zhivkov was on one side and Whitehead on the other side, and footmen running around with white gloves on. Whitehead had many glasses for the Bulgarian wines and so forth that were to be served which were very good, and as note taker, I was forced to only take a sip of each one, but Mr. Whitehead complimented Mr. Zhivkov on the excellent wine, and Zhivkov responded – I'll never forget – said, "People tell me that our wines are very good, and I'm sure its true, but he said, "As for me, I can tell the difference between red and white and no further than that." And when I think of Zhivkov whom I met with on a number of occasions and Ceausescu whom I never met with but saw on a number of occasions, to me a very important difference between the two was that Zhivkov had the ability to laugh at himself which is rare in dictators. He could tell stories like that without feeling embarrassed whereas Ceausescu had to know everything and be all-knowing and all wise. Zhivkov could say, "Oh, actually I prefer

beer." And during the lunch a footman with white gloves came and poured beer out of the can into his glass, crystal glass that he had. It was all rather strange! Another visitor that we had who came twice was Tom Lantos.

Q: Congressman from California.

RICKERT: California.

Q: Hungary.

RICKERT: Right. Hungarian-Jewish origin, one of the best informed, interested U.S. congressmen on anything Eastern European, and also one who spent a great deal of time focusing on Jewish issues in that region due to his own family's experience. I don't believe his family was saved by the Swedish diplomat Raul Wallenberg, but I'm pretty sure his wife's family was. Tom Lantos, was a champion of keeping the Wallenberg case alive during the Soviet time when the Soviets claimed they didn't know anything about what was going on, they couldn't find any records. They essentially stonewalled. Lantos, to my Swedish-born wife's chagrin, was a lot more aggressive in pursuing the Wallenberg case than the Swedish government was. In any case, he came twice as it happened both on Easter Sunday which was somewhat inconvenient for some of us on the embassy staff, but he was always a welcome visitor. He met with Zhivkov. I was chargé once, and he was with Ben Gilman who was the senior Republican minority member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Bill Richardson, who later became Secretary of Energy, was with them.

Q: ...and governor of New Mexico..

RICKERT: And currently governor of New Mexico...

Q: And USUN ambassador.

RICKERT: That's right. So it was an interesting group. They met with Zhivkov, and Tom, whom I greatly admire in most respects, sometimes goes a little bit overboard on the Eastern European flattery. I recall him in a meeting with Zhivkov saying to Mr. Zhivkov that, "You, sir, are one of the great European statesmen of post-World War II," which caused me to swallow hard, but there was perhaps a little hyperbole there. Tom's interest in Bulgaria was over the fact that the Jewish population of Bulgaria, at the time that Bulgaria was aligned with Nazi Germany, not a single person was sent to death camps from Bulgaria. And there are a number of reasons for this but, in fact, the then king, the church, the governing and opposition parties and intellectuals all resisted this. Germans didn't push it to the limit, but all of the Jews of Bulgaria survived the war. Well, not all survived, but no one was sent away to death camps in Germany, Austria, Poland, or the other places. It was a major accomplishment which Lantos felt was not sufficiently well known. He wanted Bulgarians to know he appreciated and others who had interest in the fate of Jews in the world appreciated what Bulgaria had done to avoid the fate of so

many others. The talks with Zhivkov... Zhivkov was rather engaging. It was all done in Bulgarian and then translation which inhibited the spontaneity of conversation, but they had good talks. But Zhivkov did say one thing to Lantos and Gilman and Richardson which struck me very, very strongly at the time. I'm not agreeing with this statement, but I think it says a lot about the Bulgarian mentality. He just volunteered that Bulgaria has no territorial claims on any of its neighbors. This was an interesting point because Macedonia is considered by many Bulgarians to be part of Bulgaria. There's a very complex history, and I think a lot of Bulgarians would like to have had Yugoslav Macedonia as part of Bulgaria. In any case, he made this statement, but he said, and this is the interesting part, "All of our neighbors have territorial claims against us." To me, that was part of the key to understanding the Bulgarian mentality and why the Soviet Union was so important. The Soviet Union, it seemed to me, was the guarantor of Bulgaria's territorial integrity. If you think that everybody else wants a piece of you, then the best thing you can have is a very big and very powerful protector, and in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria had that and needn't fear Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Romania, or even the Black Sea under those circumstances which were their neighbors.

Q: Do you want to say anything else about your involvement at the embassy as an alternate with the region, with other embassies, neighboring countries, Greece, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union at that time?

RICKERT: The diplomatic corps, as is usually the case in these situations where contact with locals is very strictly limited, the diplomatic corps was very close. I got to know and deal with all of the NATO and a few other counterparts professionally on a regular basis, and we exchanged information and so forth. Then several of them became very close personal friends. its interesting. I'm sure that a lot of people would disagree, but one piece of advice I got before going to Bulgaria from a former DCM, someone that you know, Roland Kuchel, was that the DCM must be friendly with everybody in this embassy, but "the" friend of no one, and he explained why. He said, "As soon as you become "the" friend of a person or two or three people, it immediately gets people thinking that the DCM favors this person...

Q: ...within the embassy...

RICKERT: ...within the embassy. He advised strongly... That didn't mean we didn't entertain people from the embassy. We had very good relations with, I think with everybody, but no close personal relationships with anybody except for some of the outsiders. Interestingly, the best friends that we...and not surprisingly...the British DCM, there were two of them. The second one we served with together in Romania and knew him, Mike Frost, from before. The Turkish DCM, Olive Kiddush, was very, very competent and nice and a very professional diplomat. We got to know him personally and went on picnics and did things like that. Interestingly, the first French DCM was a very good personal friend which isn't always the case. Mr. Jubierre, Mark Jubierre. He was a former French paratrooper who had been a French military attaché in Moscow. He then joined the Foreign Service and was, I wouldn't say uncritical – you don't want uncritical

friends – but he was a real friend of the United States and was very eager to work closely with Americans as he had done in his ,military capacity in Moscow. I wish there were more such relationships because that was unusual. Had good relations with the Yugoslavs. The name of the Yugoslav Ambassador, DCM rather, escapes me at the moment., but he was a Macedonian, and he and I have no other common language than Bulgarian and Macedonian. That's what I found in practical terms how close the two languages are because my Bulgarian was far from perfect, but I could understand if he'd been speaking in Bulgarian and Macedonian 10% less, and he could understand my Bulgarian perfectly. They're very close. Some differences back then and a few different words, but they're almost like dialects in the same tongue.

Q: You talked about Zhivkov and some of the visitors. Do you want to say anything about the foreign minister, the foreign ministry?

RICKERT: Yes. The foreign minister was Mladenov who had been foreign minister for many years. He was not somebody that we saw frequently but made efforts to be friendly toward the end of Mel Levitsky's stay and beyond. He was very frank to say if there was anything important that he couldn't make a decision on although he was probably the senior foreign minister in Europe at the time in terms of length of service. He had a very bright and sometimes aggressive and sometimes charming deputy foreign minister named Lyuben Gotsev who was well known by Americans from earlier. Could be acerbic, could be ingratiating. I had some dealings with Gotsev on a quasi-personal/official matter twice while I was there. I was stopped by militia and treated in a way that wasn't appropriate for a foreign diplomat. The first time was when I was going to a city in South Central Bulgaria. We had received a diplomatic note from the foreign ministry. This city had been in what we called the "PRA", Permanently Restricted Area. About 20% of the country was off-limits to foreigners, most of it the border areas. This city had been opened, so Orthodox Easter Sunday my family and I, my mother who was visiting at the time, went to the city, went to some Easter services on the way and went to the city, I don't recall the name. We were driving around, and we got stopped by the police, the "militia" as they were called, and the militia man was perfectly polite, but he said, "You're in restricted area. You're not allowed to be here, and I have to call my boss to see what to do about it." I said, "Well, I have a note from the foreign ministry which I had carefully brought with me in Bulgarian saying that this city was open and could be visited by foreigners, and I'm just doing what's permitted by the note that we have from your foreign ministry." He said, "Well, let me go and check." He went back, and he obviously was in radio contact with somebody and came back and said, "Yes, its true that this city is now open, but it's only open up to that street which is behind you, and you've gone into the forbidden part of the city, and we won't do anything this time, but you'd better leave." So, we left, of course, and I didn't say anything to the Bulgarians about it that time. We did a lot of entertaining in our apartment which was beyond public transportation, and we had a maid and a cook who could not get home afterwards. So I would usually take the official car which was parked there where I lived. The embassy garage was there along with Marine housing and other things, and drive these two ladies home. One of them lived in a workers quarter and a large black American car with diplomatic plates were not normally

seen in that area. I dropped her off, and – Svetanka Sposova was her name – and she went into her apartment, and then I was taking the cook home to her apartment, and the police came over and were fairly polite but started asking a lot of questions: "What are you doing here? Why?" and so forth, and they wanted my documentation and everything. I was polite as long as I could, and I finally said, "Look, you have no reason to be asking these questions, and I'm not going to answer any more, let me go," and they did. What I didn't know was the cook who was sitting in the front seat beside me had written down the number from the police car. I went to see Gotsev and said, "Look. You say that you want better relations, but you're treating the American chargé in a way that doesn't indicate a desire for better relations." I told him about both of these incidents, and I said, "I have not reported these to Washington," which was true. I said, "If it happens again, I will, and we'll make a real stink about it." He said, "Oh, thank you! Thank you for not reporting it!" It didn't happen again. But the state security was, indeed, very aggressive, and there were many incidents involving people in the embassy, some of it of the calling card nature of just letting us know that they'd been there. One of our employees had a teenage daughter, and the parents went away for the weekend, and the daughter was in the apartment alone. She went to go someplace to a party or something, and came back. At that time teenagers and young adults had their music on cassettes, and someone had come with something like we're using here with an ice-pick like implement and had destroyed all of their pop music cassettes in the locked apartment. Nothing else was touched. Nothing was stolen. It was just a little notice that, "We can come whenever we want and do whatever we want, and there's nothing you can do to stop it." Another thing at the time was Chernobyl. Chernobyl occurred, and it was particularly important in Bulgaria because Bulgaria in Kosovela has a similar power plant north on the Danube, some distance north of Sofia. There was great concern within the American community and, as well, within the Western diplomatic community that if Chernobyl can go, what about Kosovela? Fortunately, the flow of the radioactivity from Kosovela for reasons of air currents and so forth, was to the north, and we didn't get much in Bulgaria although we were warned against eating certain products: sheep, cheese, because sheep graze very close to the ground, and if there was any radioactivity it would be ingested and turned up in the cheese.

Q: We were talking about Chernobyl and what it meant to your embassy in Sofia.

RICKERT: An expert came out and, interestingly, they went up to the vicinity of Kosovela, the Bulgarian plant, and took readings to see if there were any signs of leakage and radioactivity from the Kosovela plant. And then they came back and took readings for comparative purposes in Sofia. They found the readings higher in Sofia than they were outside the Kosovela plant which led us to joke that there was an underground nuclear power plant in the heart of downtown Sofia. The danger was not what was happening at the time. The danger was shown that after the explosion of Chernobyl that any reactor of that type posed a risk, and people had a new appreciation for the difficulties that could ensue. One of the things that Eastern European dictators used to do and which Zhivkov still did was to have an annual diplomatic excursion. In some places there were hunts. Zhivkov did not take people hunting. He went to a different town each year. I was chargé

and went on a trip to Blagoevgrad in about May '87. I did a reporting cable on it, and it gives the whole atmosphere in the way its done and how they stage-managed these events. It was one of the most interesting things that I did in Bulgaria because you actually got to see the leadership up close, not in a formalistic kind of "on top of the mausoleum watching the troops" type of situation. So that was well worth doing.

Q: Did you get quite a bit of travel within the country to the extent that you were able? There were some of the areas that were restricted.

RICKERT: Yeah. Bulgaria is a relatively small country. Due to restrictions within the United States on East European diplomats, according to which they had to give 48 hours notice to OFM to travel certain distances, the Bulgarians who had not had restrictions on us before, aside from the permanently restricted areas, slapped similar restrictions on us. So the common mode of travel in Bulgaria was day trips because you didn't have to report that.

Q: You didn't have to ask permission in advance?

RICKERT: That's right. You could literally go from one end of the country within a day, in a very long day. In fact, I did so at one time with Major Mike Hayden. We went on a very aggressive defense attaché excursion. We went up to the northeast and back in the same day. I got to see first-hand how the really good people in that side of diplomatic life performed. We did a lot of small trips. There are many monasteries in Bulgaria. The country is beautiful. Its mountainous. There are picturesque villages. Our cook was from a village called Koprivshtitsa which is a restored village. It's a historic village, and when we were there it seemed to be about 80% restored, and the rest was being gradually restored. Her mother lived there, and interestingly, that was the only Bulgarian home that we ever visited. Only one Bulgarian ever came to our apartment privately in three years although my wife and I both spoke quite decent Bulgarian.

Q: Only one came privately, but you entertained others.

RICKERT: Yes, we entertained, and invitations went to the foreign ministry and were checked by the state security, and determinations were made who could accept and who couldn't. When I was chargé the turnout would be better on a higher level, and when I was DCM it was scaled back in accordance with my lower status. It was not possible to entertain. It was virtually impossible for an American to entertain privately.

Q: But on one occasion you did extend directly an invitation, and it was accepted.

RICKERT: It was interesting. At the end of our time there, we met a Bulgarian sculptor who obviously had a green light to meet with foreigners. We had him do busts of our two children and got to know him a bit. Indeed, I saw him last summer when I was back, and he's become a great friend of Ambassador Pardew. We talked about Balkan art, and I mentioned to him that we had some paintings by probably Romania's most famous

painter of the 20th Century, a man named Corneliu Baba. We were close personal friends of him, and we have several paintings of his. Chokov, the sculptor, said he would love to see the paintings. We said, "They're in our apartment, and we're leaving in two weeks, and if you would like to see them, you have to come there because that's where they are." He hemmed and hawed and mulled over it, and he said he would get back to us, and he did. He came for coffee, and he saw the paintings and left. That was the one case of a non-channeled invitation to a Bulgarian who came to our house. To show the mentality there, my wife did a lot of shopping herself. She spoke quite good Bulgarian, and she would go to the markets and talk with the market ladies and get fresh fruit and vegetables and so forth. Two incidents happened that were, I think, revealing. Once she arrived in the market, in the summer at some point, and found a rather nice load of wild blueberries for sale. She talked to the lady and said, "How much do you have here?" She said, "I have eight kilos," and my wife said, "I'll take them all." And the woman said, "No, you can't have them all." And Gerd said, "Why, don't you want to sell them? She said, "Yes, but if you buy them all, there won't be any left for anybody else." My wife said, "Okay. Well, could you bring more blueberries another time?" She said, "Yes." So, we set up an arrangement whereby she would bring a supply. We bought usually over 50 kilos of blueberries a year and froze them. Blueberries freeze very nicely, and they are full of iron and all sorts of good stuff. We ate them on cereal which made the ultra-UHT milk taste less unpleasant than it did otherwise, and we could get the kids to take their supply of milk that way. Another time she wanted to buy tomatoes. Bulgarian tomatoes are wonderful and really outstanding. She wanted to get large tomatoes in order to fill them. She asked the lady if she could have a kilo of large tomatoes, and the woman said, "You get what you get. I fish 'em up, and if they're large, they're large; if they're small, they're small." And she explained, "Please, I just want large ones," and so forth and so on. This discussion went on, and there was a line behind my wife, and she was arguing with this woman. The Bulgarians behind her said, "Can't you see this nice foreign lady has a good reason why she wants the large tomatoes, and she speaks our language, and she's being polite? Give her what she wants! Don't be so difficult!" So she had the others in the line probably wanting to get their tomatoes as well and being held up, but they were on her side which was interesting. The woman grudgingly gave mostly large tomatoes and a few small ones, so she didn't cave in completely. It was another indication of the local mentality.

One of the things, going back to the Turkish issue: First of all, the Bulgarians claimed there were no Turks there. We were fortunate in that the head of our political econ section, Oscar Clyatt, had served in Turkey. He spoke very good Turkish and also liked to get in a car and drive around. He went to Turkish areas, and he was usually followed but occasionally, without going through any special effort, shook free. He would go to the villages and sit down at a coffee house and order coffee in Turkish. When he did that, people would start talking with him. He provided the first in-country verification that people in these villages, whatever the Bulgarians were saying, *they* considered themselves to be Turkish. I mean, there were refugees who had gone to Turkey who said this, but Bulgarians said, "Well, they just want their refugee status and Turkey won't keep them if they say they're Bulgarian." Oscar did this on several occasions, and Oscar was a difficult

personality in some ways, but he did such a good job in this area that I put him up for the HUMINT (Human Intelligence) Collector Award which he got. I think it was well deserved because he did establish something that was important in U. S. policy and bilateral relations at that time.

Q: Anything else?

RICKERT: One time we went to a place called Bankya which is outside of Sofia. There was a handicrafts fair there which we attended. There was a cartoonist there who was selling his works there, and he had a cartoon there that I liked called "Glas Nost." It had a picture of a rather large man and a French horn-like musical instrument with a very large bell. He had it inverted, so he was obviously shouting into the bell, the large end of the horn, and you could see strong lines going there. At the mouthpiece end there were these little lines coming out. I talked with him and said, "I'm an ignorant foreigner, and I don't understand your politics here. What does this mean?" He said, "Oh," he said. "Where Glas Nost is concerned, there's a lot more noise at the source than there is at the other end." I said, "That's interesting. I'd like to buy it. How much do you charge for it?" He said, "Well, I usually get about 120, 125 leva for my cartoons," which was close to $150, and this was not in a frame or anything. I knew I had 20 leva in my pocket, so I reached into my wallet and opened it up, and I looked, and you could see there were only 20 leva. I said, "No, I'm very sorry, I can't buy it. I only have 20 leva." "Sold!" So I treasured that one. He had another cartoon which I didn't buy because I only had the 20 leva, but it was a comment on the medical profession with a doctor sitting behind a table something like this looking in a file. There's a patient opposite him who is wrapped from head to toe. You can't even tell if its male or female, but bandaged entirely. The doctor without looking up said, "Please take off your clothes." Interestingly, the Glas Nost cartoon did appear in the party daily, the "Rabota Jisko Dello." So there were some small signs of Glas Nost. There was another cartoon that I remember which perhaps presaged things to come. It was drawings set up like an equation. The equation was: state materials + state labor + state land = private villa. It was a comment on corruption which was existing even at that time.

Q: Anticipating more to come.

RICKERT: Of course, it was relatively small scale at that time. The Marines presented a number of problems, as nice and as delightful as they were in many regards. One of the few recreations they had was skiing, and they would go off to Vitosha. Most of them had never skied before, and with the folly of youth and the daring-do of typical Marines, they would just get on skis and head down the hills. They were a sight to behold. We had a couple of broken legs, and they had to be warned off from skiing because we would have had insufficient watch standards because of their limited state. Another time some of our Marines were engaged in a fight in a bar by some Bulgarians who obviously knew what they were doing. The men handled the Marines. Beat them up pretty good and pretty well. Interestingly, the proof to me that it was all prearranged was that there was one black Marine in this Group, John Cochrahan, who was the special friend of my son and

daughter. He played Monopoly with them and did things. Very, very nice man from Louisiana. He was one of the terrors on the slopes, by the way. Very athletic, but skiing requires more than athleticism. The white Marines were being pummeled by these Bulgarian thugs, toughs. Two of them just pinned Cochrahan to the wall. Didn't hurt him but didn't let him get into the fight. It said to me that they wanted to teach the marines a lesson but they didn't want to give anyone an excuse for saying it was racial or racist. After the Lonetree affair in Moscow, each one of our Marines was taken out to Vienna or Frankfurt, I've forgotten where, and polygraphed. It turned out that several of them had relations with Bulgarian girls, so they disappeared very quickly which I can understand. The one thing that was sad to me was that the brightest and sharpest of the Marines at that time apparently had not broken any rules except that he hadn't told on his fellow Marines, so he was kicked out as well. I'm not sure that the ones that were sent were any better than ones that left. It was a very tough case. The Lonetree case really did shake up all the embassies in the region because of the allegations which never were fully proved that Sgt. Lonetree in Moscow let Russians run through the communications center and other places in the embassy; and that he'd had some sort of an improper relationship with a Russian woman which I think is well established, but I'm not sure what has been proven about the more dramatically serious allegations.

Q: You mentioned the Marines on the ski slope and obviously your family enjoyed it as well. Was that a place where you would meet Bulgarians, or was it pretty much the American international community that would mostly be there.

RICKERT: That's a very good question because its one of the few places where we had free and uninhibited conversations with Bulgarians. If you're riding in a ski lift, there are two of you. There's no fear of microphones or any other kind of listening device, and you get off at the other end and one goes one way and another goes another way, and that's it. We did have some very interesting conversations in those circumstances. But those, unfortunately, were the exception rather than the rule. There was a great deal of fear, apparently, among Bulgarians. We met another sculptor that we tried to get to know and arranged to visit him in his studio. There was nothing clandestine at all about this. When we got there we found that the guy was almost shivering. We met him through the Hungarian ambassador who was a very nice man and interested in the arts. He said, "You should get to know this guy. I know him, " so we tried. When we met with him in his studio, he had a functionary from the ministry of culture there. We asked if it would be possible to buy something from him, and he referred us to a local gallery that carried his works. We found out later that he had gotten in trouble earlier in his career by consorting with foreigners. As to the difficulty of dealing with Bulgarians, it was interesting. We got to know most of the Warsaw Pact ambassadors and DCM's quite well, and most of them were very friendly. They complained that their students had great difficulty in establishing any kind of friendship or rapport with Bulgarians, so it wasn't only Americans, apparently. Another sign that things were starting to unravel a little bit was I remember getting a little diplomatic note from the Romanian embassy criticizing Hungary over some interfering in Romania's internal affairs on the ethnic Hungarian minority. That would have been unheard of earlier. The remaining DCM with whom we became quite

friendly used to tell us things that we couldn't get from any other source about what was going in Warsaw Pact meetings. Not state secrets, but he said Bulgarians were trying to get them to support Turkish name chains campaign, and none of the other Warsaw Pact countries would do so which resulted in some, I think, useful reporting. He – Toman Baloshoya was his name – he wanted us to know about this and was happy to pass along the dirt on the Romanians. The Romanians and Bulgarians, they weren't sworn enemies, but they don't have the best relations. At the end of my tour there, I mentioned earlier that I did all of my business with Bulgarians in Bulgarian. Just as I was leaving Bill Montgomery was arriving – my successor – and Sol Polanski gave a very nice luncheon to sort of "hail and farewell." There were several Bulgarian foreign ministry people there. After the luncheon two of them took me aside and said, "Mr. Rickert, we notice that you have always spoken Bulgarian with us in all of your meetings, and we know that isn't easy, and we appreciate it. We want you to know that the Soviets never speak Bulgarian with us." I thought all that work at FSI and elsewhere has done something because that was... I was going to say it was the best compliment but it was the *only* compliment I ever got from a Bulgarian.

Q: Okay.

RICKERT: One other little thing. Mel Levitsky left about February `87, and the week that he left the State magazine came out with Sofia as post of the month. The embassy had collected a bunch of photographs. In those days the post of the month was mostly photographs and very little text. Local scenes and then embassy activities. John Beyrle, now DCM of Moscow, took most of the pictures. I took two or three of them, and he took the rest. He said to us the summer before it took a while to collect these pictures but he would like to take a picture of my wife and me and our two kids in front of the National Theater which was just around the corner from the embassy. So we did that one day, and that picture went in with all the rest for the editors to select. Much to our surprise and, I have to admit, delight, when the State magazine came out, the Rickert family was on the cover. Many people have asked over the years – I usually had it hanging in my office or something like that – and they'd say, "Is that the DCM residence in the background?" I'd say, "No, it's the state national theater and considerably greater than any residence in Sofia." It says in Bulgarian *Kifan Baza State Theater*, but that's another matter.

Q: Very good. You were the cover!

RICKERT: The cover family. Right.

Q: All right. Where did you go from there? That would have been the summer of '88.

RICKERT: Summer of '88 I went to PER/FCA at that point as head of the assignments division for European and IO officers. Two years in that job. First exposure to personnel as a function in the department. We had an outstanding director at that time and deputy director in Jim Tull and Ray Ewing who was a delight to work for as was Clyde Taylor who came after. I don't think there's a whole lot to say about the time there. I thought it

was an outstanding group of people that we worked with. We worked in a very collegial way, most of us doing something we'd never done before and would never do again, so there was a lot to learn about mechanics and so forth. George Vest was the Director General when I started. I was particularly impressed by the way he dealt with the assignment process. He used his prerogative rarely, but occasionally, to overturn panel decisions. When he did so, in my experience at least, he called the officers who were involved in the decision proposing and opposing to his office and heard them out. Then he explained why he decided what he decided. One might not have agreed with what he came up with, but it was a sign to me not only of great professionalism but great personal decency to not just by fiat which he could easily have done say, "Okay, I don't like this assignment, I'm going to overturn it." I don't think that's always been the case. I'm not casting aspersions on his successor, at Perkins, but that method did not continue under Ed Perkins. I was impressed in my time there how little political involvement there was in the assignments. I felt that the vast majority of the assignments were done according to the rules and without outside influences, and that was very reassuring. The decisions weren't always the best or the right ones, but they were arrived at through a process that was fair and under the rules that existed, very conscientiously followed by all the people working in the system.

I think I might just finish up by saying how I ended up leaving because it will lead into the next part which is my assignment as DCM to Romania. I so enjoyed being DCM in Sofia that I really did want to do it again. I think I bid on eight different jobs in my final year. I hadn't even a nibble from anyone on any of them. Two or three of them were stretches which was understandable, but others... One was Dublin which had 97 bidders that year. I don't know how they ended up picking somebody for that job. It's an indication of the vagaries of the assignment process because it was very late in the cycle, and I had nothing. It's better to be in Washington with nothing than to be overseas with nothing, but I had no prospects. All of a sudden two DCM jobs became open. One was in Zambia where the then-DCM had moved down to South Africa to be DCM. The other was Bucharest where Larry Napper had curtailed to two years. Larry had gone through the 1989 revolution, and for personal reasons wanted to do a two year tour instead of three. Interestingly, it had come up before panel, and I had voted against it because it was a three-year tour, and he really had...

Q: ...against the curtailment.

RICKERT: ...against the curtailment, and it was not allowed. Larry then did what was entirely right and proper. He wrote to the DG and explained in greater detail what the reasons were. They were personal and were not of the nature that one would want to have necessarily discussed in a large setting. The DG agreed, and Larry was curtailed. No one would ever doubt Larry's commitment or dedication or work ethic or anything else. That was not the issue. It was really an issue of whether the three-year assignment rule should be upheld or not, and the DG correctly ruled that in this case it should not. Two years with the revolution with a very nice but clueless political ambassador was like four years in the normal post, so he did his time. Anyway, I bid on both jobs and quickly found

myself on the short list. And I say, not entirely with false modesty, but if you become a candidate for a job late in the cycle, competition isn't as good because all the good people have already been snapped up. I spoke with both ambassadors. I said quite honestly, I said, "If either of you wants me, I will be..." That's it. I preferred Romania, but Zambia would have been very interesting and something new and different for me, and I was more concerned to be convincing that I was ready, willing and able to go where needed. Green, in Bucharest, didn't make up his mind very quickly, and I got a tip from the office deputy director in the EU. He said, "Well, Green is really a hands-on people person, and if you are really interested in this job, you should offer and go to meet him in person, because he doesn't know you, and he is unlikely to pick somebody that he hasn't met." I gulped because financially it wasn't the plushest period in my life or my family's life.

Q: He was in Bucharest.

RICKERT: He was in Bucharest. I wrote to him and said I know you want to interview your candidates, and you're there and I'm here, and I'm willing to come to Bucharest or anyplace else in Europe at my expense to interview. He told me later that that was one of the things that... He said, "No. I know how much money you people make, and that is too much. We'll do it on the phone." We had two long interviews about an hour each on the phone during which he did 95% of the talking. He decided that I was a brilliant candidate on the basis of his extensive conversation. He told me later that my willingness to come at my own expense showed that I was really motivated and helped to balance in my favor because there were a few other good candidates. It did work out, I didn't have to go, and it ended up being eventually a... I had a bridge assignment in between when I did go with Ambassador Green. We got on very well and enjoyed each other and worked well together.

Q: Why don't we stop at that point, and when we pick up next time, we'll hear something about your bridge assignment and then embassy Bucharest.

RICKERT: Sounds good.

Q: ...this conversation on the 10th of February 2004 and last time, Jonathan, discussed how you got your assignment as DCM in Bucharest, but we didn't really talk about the bridge assignment, the one year you had before you took up that position in 1991. Why don't you talk a little bit about what you did for that year besides refreshed your Romanian.

RICKERT: I did that, indeed. I had a year to fill in before going to Romania and already having the language, it was not necessary to do a full course. I ended up looking for a job on the Hill, one year detail to Congress, and ended up working with Senator Bob Packwood on his staff. That was a very good and useful experience in a number of ways. Just being on the Hill is a useful experience for any Foreign Service officer because Congress is so important in all that we do. Having a better understanding of what they do up there and how they do it and what their priorities are and how they look at us are

useful for any FSO and particularly for more senior ones. Packwood, as you'll recall, was a Republican who was very liberal on social issues and fairly conservative on natural and fiscal monetary issues. He was not, in fact, terribly interested in foreign affairs with the exception of Israel. He had a long background of supporting Israel. He had one staffer who did foreign affairs and essentially Israel matters, and I did the other things. Oregon, which I visited but don't know well, strikes me as being an interestingly quirky state. At that time – this was '90, '91 – people there were very worked up about our El Salvador policy although there were very few Hispanics in Oregon, but it was a moral and political issue for them. Among other things I received a number of these delegations in the name of the senator and heard their polite but insistent pleas for support for change in U. S. policy. One of the other duties I had was Senator Packwood had been previously chairman of the senate commerce committee and was still a member but often didn't go to the meetings. I would go and take notes and keep him briefed on what was going on.

Q: Is he a member of the finance committee?

RICKERT: He was chairman of the finance committee then, and he had his own people there to back him up in that role, and I was not at all involved in that. There were a lot of interesting things that happened. Of course, during the time that I was there, there was a vote in the senate on the first Gulf War resolution, and I have to say that Packwood was really torn. His fellow senator from Oregon, also Republican, also liberal, Mark Hatfield, was a dyed-in-the-wool pacifist who opposed any and all military intervention anywhere. His position was relatively easy, but Packwood I think would like to have abstained if he could. He talked to me. He talked to lots of other people and asked what he should do. As you know very well, when you're working on the Hill, you're not working for the state department, you're working for the senator or congressman or committee. You're not an agent of the executive branch on the hill. He asked me what I thought, and I said, "Senator Packwood, I really don't see that you have any choice but to vote for the administration's resolution. Its topic, and you're Republican, and its a Republican administration, Its a clear-cut case of invasion, and I don't see that you have any other option." That's in the end how he did vote after a lot of agonizing. Not that it was because of my advice. I'm sure he sought many peoples' advice including those who dealt with the political situation in Oregon, but it was fun to be asked. Another issue on which he asked my advice was on a bill that was introduced by Representative Joe Moakley from Massachusetts on El Salvador. I don't remember the details of the bill, but the administration was opposed to it, and the senator was seeking advice on how he should vote. I remember telephoning the State Department two or three times saying, "I'm working with Senator Packwood, and he'd like to know what the administration's case is against this bill. Could you please give me some ammunition?" They never responded. On the face of it the bill made sense to me, I advised him to vote for it. Again, not because of my advice but after looking at a number of factors and, I suspect, very little down-side in Oregon, he did vote for the Democratic bill in that case.

Q: And did not pass the Senate?

RICKERT: I don't recall. Moakley served in the House, and I think it had already passed the House, and it came to the Senate. I think it did pass, actually, in the end. It had a different name by the time it got... [end of tape]

Q: OK. You're continuing about your bridge assignment to Senator Packwood's office in '90 and '91.

RICKERT: Right. I think the bill was one that he didn't see any reason to oppose. There was no resistance to it back in his home state, so he went along with it. One of the things I learned was that there are a lot of bills that are irrelevant to a particular senator or representative where they can go along with their party or not, as they choose, and with very little fallout or difficulty. And then there are key votes where they really have to stand up and be counted, and those are the ones that they agonize over particularly if they have personal qualms or doubts.

One of the positive experiences that related to my next assignment in Romania, incidentally, was a friend of mine who works for an NGO in Washington was kind of hosting King Michael I of Romania and his wife, Queen Anne and Princess Margareta and a couple of others. My friend called up and asked if there would be any possibility of my getting into the Senate dining room for lunch. I talked to senior staffers, and there is a form that you go through and fill out a letter where the senator's signature is forged onto. There were, by the way, three authorized forgers in his office who sign. The signatures were done with a broad tip felt pen, and they had it down. So each one was individual, and none of them was done by the senator, at least of the correspondence and the routine stuff. They happily signed, and King Michael and his family were able to have bean soup in the dining room and, incidentally, ran into the then-Czech foreign minister who was there for another purpose and had a nice chat with him in the dining room. That was very pleasant.

Q: Where was the king and his family living at the time?

RICKERT: He was living for many, many years outside of Lausanne in Switzerland. He had been active in dealing with Romanian immigrae groups of one sort of another, and was even more so in the early '90s. He came to the States and gave talks and did other things, raised money and other very un-kingly types of activities. A very nice man, and it was a pleasure to meet him. He didn't want to speak Romanian, by the way. He spoke English with me. Whenever there was a question on a foreign policy issue usually on the phone, it usually got sent to me. Often letters as well. I answered correspondence. I remember one person calling from Oregon who was irate about some issue and said, "You youngsters up there on the Hill, you don't know anything. You have no experience at all." I said to him, "Wait a minute. I'm sitting here in a room with six people, and I'm over 50 myself, and the lady here is 55, and another lady is early 50's." There was a man in his early 40's, and there was one young woman who in her mid 20's, but out of six, there was only one under 40. He had the good grace to laugh when I gave him the ages of the people who were in the one room there. That was fairly standard for that staff. They

weren't a lot of young kids. Maybe on the House side there are more very young people, but it was a fairly seasoned staff. Romanians knew that I was going to be going there as DCM, and I remember they included me on a breakfast with some Hill staffers at the Romanian embassy. The ambassador was a man named Virgil Constantinescu whom I've known slightly during my first tour. He was America's desk officer at that time. He hosted Adrian Severin who was deputy prime minister and Ujenne Dizhmaresky who was another minister. He was minister of economy at one of the economic posts. There were a number of Hill staffers. I was fairly quiet, but they were very skeptical of Romania's changes since the Communist regime had fallen. I remember one of them asking Severin, who later became a good friend of mine, "I understand that there's still a lot of influence of the *secura parte,* the Secret Police, the old, not as a living organization, but as people who had been part of that organization, were prominent in the new government. What can you say to that?" Instead of giving the expected Romanian line of, "Oh, its exaggerated, its not really the case," and so forth and so on, he said, "Yes, it is a problem, but we're trying to deal with it, but here's no easy solution to it." I thought, "Hmmm, I think I am going back to a Romania that would be somewhat different from the one that I left because any admission of a shortcoming or failure was unthinkable at earlier times." You mentioned that I was probably working on my Romanian. Actually, FSI was still in Rosslyn at the time, and I had an arrangement whereby I would go to Rosslyn for an hour each morning before classes started, and Carmen Tudrah, who was still teaching Romanian here and Ninja Falaty who was retired would take turns trying to bring me up to speed in an hour. Then I'd get on the Metro and go over to the Hill. They were extremely helpful in expunging the Bulgarian which was still uppermost in my mind at that time. I had been away from Romania nearly 20 years and had learned some other languages in between. Although the Romanian had been well established when I left, it needed some resuscitation which they were very helpful in providing. I think those were the main things that came out of that period. It was a very useful and worthwhile experience. A little historical footnote is, as everyone knows, Senator Packwood came to grief subsequently over behavior that he allegedly had been engaged in with female staffers and others. I'm not, of course, saying that it didn't happen, but there was no evidence whatsoever of any hanky panky going on during my time there. I think that very often when one goes into an office, one can sense that there's kind of an atmosphere that things weren't quite right, and that was not the case. It was a happy, productive office, and the staff was very loyal. They were, I'd say, about 85% female, but it wasn't a load of Fanny Foxes or other beautiful bimbos who were just there because of their appearance. Everyone that I knew on the staff was serious and substantive, and it was an ordinary mix of ages and sizes and shapes. Whatever happened later, there was nothing that I saw or experienced that led me to believe that there was something amiss.

Q: Were most of the staff members other than yourself from Oregon?

RICKERT: Most of them had an Oregon connection of some sort or another. The other foreign policy guy with whom I became very friendly was from Washington State, so he was an honorary Oregonian. I was taught on my first day that the proper pronunciation of the state is "Or'-eh-gun", and that was important in being able to answer the phone and

deal with the folks from the state.

Q: You probably learned the proper pronunciation of the main river that goes down the valley? The "Mul-am'et," because that also is subject to various pronunciations.

RICKERT: Yes! That came up less often than the state name, but still it was a good experience and one that I was happy to have at that time that needed to be filled in as useful and productive a way as possible. I did call on a number of the staffers on the committees who had an interest in Romania and made some contacts that were useful in that way. It wasn't only working with Packwood but that, of course, was the main purpose for being there.

Q: Were there any senators or members of the House who had a particular interest or concern about Romania?

RICKERT: Yes. Of course, Tom Lantos has for many years had a broad interest in the whole region and, as I mentioned earlier, he came twice to Bulgaria while I was DCM. He and his chief staffer, Bob King, who in an earlier life worked for Radio Free Europe, actually wrote a history of the Romanian Communist party. He was a Romanian specialist. Bob and his wife Kay Atkinson were both very interested as was Tom. Then there was a mixed bag of others for various reasons. There was a congresswoman from Connecticut – I think her first name was Barbara Kennelly who for reasons that weren't immediately apparent, was very interested in Romania. When you got to know the situation you found that her daughter was married to a Romanian, and she took a lot of interest.

Q: She came to Cyprus while I was there with Barbara Mikulski and the former vice-presidential candidate...Ferraro...

RICKERT: Geraldine Ferraro.

Q: Ferraro. I was certainly impressed with her sort of broad approach and interest in the Cyprus issue, but in international affairs more generally. Kennelly's father was John Bailey, a leader of the Democratic National Committee at one point and a very active democratic politician for many years.

RICKERT: I don't know how many years she was in the House, but eventually she ran for the Senate and did not win. I haven't seen her name since then, so I don't know what she's been up to. I found her interesting and interested where Romania is concerned

Q: OK. So you went to Bucharest in the summer of 1991. As you said, you'd been away for 20 years, lots of things had changed. Why don't you remind us again of who the ambassador was and maybe talk a little bit about the setting when you arrived and however else you want to approach it.

RICKERT: I arrived in July, and Alan Punch Green was the ambassador at the time, a very interesting and fun person. He was a Republican from Oregon, one of the reasons I decided to take the job with Packwood.

Q: Had he been close to Packwood?

RICKERT: Not close, but they'd known each other. Actually, he had been closer to the other senator...

Q: Hatfield.

RICKERT: Hatfield. But he knew Packwood, of course. He had been head of the Republican party in Oregon and had been in charge of the Oregon for Bush campaign when George Bush ran the first time.

Q: In '88.

RICKERT: In '88. Right. One never knows with Punch whether his stories were entirely right or slightly apocryphal, but he claimed that he had been promised a very nice embassy after the election and mentioned Stockholm as one of the possibilities. Then Oregon was one of the states that didn't go for George Bush, Sr. When he came to talk about embassies, the White House operatives mentioned places in Africa that he hadn't heard of before, and Romania was the only place in Europe. It was, of course, a dreadful place in 1988, but he knew where it was and what continent it was on, so he took it and, of course, he ended up being there for the revolution.

Q: So he had been there approximately two years?

RICKERT: Yes. He presented his credentials in December '89, so about two weeks before Ceausescu bit the dust. Larry Napper who was my immediate predecessor had arrived in the summer of '89 and had been chargé for several months, and Ambassador Green came, and all of a sudden it "hit the fan" as they say. They had a very difficult and challenging time which the ambassador and especially Larry and the embassy came through with flying colors. He was a very honest sort of person. He didn't pretend to know what he didn't know, and for a political ambassador – he was the first political ambassador that I'd worked closely with – he had very great admiration for the career foreign service. I remember when I arrived and we had our first chat. he said, "You have one duty: the same as Larry Napper had." And he said words to the effect that "When I leave this post, I want to leave with my head held high knowing I've done nothing to harm the interests of the United States and everything possible that I could to advance the interests of the United States. Your job is to make it happen, and the rest doesn't matter." I thought well, there's a man that has his priorities right! He was, if the truth be known, not a terribly effective ambassador, but he was a wonderful supporter of the embassy staff. He did everything that he possibly could. He took advice, he did the best that he could and gave credit to everyone possible for the things that happened. We were only

together for about six months because I arrived in July and then he left in January. I developed a very good working relationship with him and a great deal of affection for him as a human being. He's passed away since, but it was a good experience. I remember there was a delegation headed by Congressman Gibbons... What was his name...

Q: Florida.

RICKERT: Yes. he was the Chairman of the Trade Sub-committee in the House Ways and Means Committee. Sam Gibbons. He was, from what I could see, I met him as desk officer and didn't know him well, but he seemed to me to be a fine person. he was a D-Day vet, and he was traveling around in Eastern Europe with a delegation from his sub-committee, a large delegation, and they all took a rather dim view of Romania. Perhaps I should go back very briefly to mention what the problem was at the time, and that was that Romania had its revolution in December '89, and then their elections were in May of '90, and they were free but not fair. Former Communist group gained control, and when opposition to that group developed in the month of June and there were street demonstrations and so forth, a large number of coal miners from the Zhu Valley appeared in town and knocked heads and trashed opposition parties and so forth and so on. At that point, the U. S. quite rightly put relations with Romania, which had been developing fairly positively, on hold. Punch Green did not have much to do with the president particularly who was seen as the person who had instigated this, Yanney Yoyescu. It was, of course, noticed by the Romanians and it caused not any open friction, but there was some tension in the air. The Hill was very much aware of these problems, and they had no particular desire to come to Romania under the circumstances. But one of their stops got cancelled, so we had a telegram saying, "CODEL Gibbons is arriving tomorrow with 30 people including spouses and hangers-on. We want to meet with this, this and this." We were able to do everything, and it was a successful visit. Gibbons was very nice to deal with on this. Ambassador Green gave a good briefing for them in the living room of his residence. Afterwards and after they had gone he said, "Jonathan, how did I do?" I said, "Mr. Ambassador, it was a very, very good briefing." He said, "No, please tell me. I want you to be honest. How did I do?" I said, "Well, it was good. You covered all the points." He said, "Jonathan. I want you to tell me how I did." I said, "Well, it was a little bit too long." "Too long!" The honest answer isn't always the best one. He did go on a little bit too long in my view, but ever after, he was very kind to me, and he never did anything nasty at all, but occasionally when he'd give a speech he'd say, "Jon, was that too long?" Thereafter. When we had him to dinner just before he left and I gave a toast, I remember saying that after having given him advice to keep things short, I had to follow my own advice and keep my own toast short which I did. A couple of other little things about Punch Green. This is not meant in any way to disparage my predecessor for whom I have the highest regard, but after I'd been there about a month, I'd go into his office in the afternoons, and he wasn't terribly occupied. Occasionally, we'd sit down and we'd just talk, and he'd tell stories about Oregon and politics and other things. I did this about once a week. I remember he said, "Jonathan, you know I have the highest possible regard for Larry Napper. He is a prince among men and an outstanding diplomat, but in the two years we were together, he never once came in for a chat." Larry was all business. I think

Ambassador Green needed someone to come in for a chat once in a while. Whether I sensed that or not, I did, and I think he appreciated it. We had a number of issues while he was there but not much that was resolved in view of the relatively short time we were together. The adoption issue which is still current today as we speak was still very much in the forefront. The Romanians had a corrupt system which involved money and babies essentially being bought. Then under pressure from us and the Europeans, they put a halt to all adoptions. Then a lot of people were caught who were part way through the process and were not able to complete the proceedings. They were unhappy, and they'd spent money. I was called by at least one U. S. senator at home about a case, Senator Dodd of Connecticut who was completely proper. He didn't say anything that he shouldn't have said, but getting a call at home from a U. S. senator is a message in itself even if the words were entirely unexceptional. Mary Ryan called me about cases. I spent time. One week I met three times with the foreign minister and once with the president and once with the justice minister on adoptions. It was the only issue that anyone seemed to care about in the United States at that time which to my mind was disappointing and unfortunate because it was important, but we did have bigger fish to fry. When Punch Green left... I never called him Punch. I always called him Mr. Ambassador, and he said when he left, "Now you can call me Punch." I never tried before, but he was known as "Punch" by everybody outside of the embassy. He met with Iliescu for a farewell call which was polite but a little bit...I wouldn't say "frosty" but...

Q: You went with him?

RICKERT: I went with him. A little bit stiff. He talked about his tour there and what he'd experienced. He said one of his regrets was that he hadn't had a chance to learn Romanian. He said he really had a choice between trying to master Romanian and doing the best he could to build up U. S.-Romanian relations and he hoped the president agreed that he spent his time wisely on the latter and not the former. Iliescu politely agreed. Then he told a little joke, and he said regarding languages. He said, "There's a little joke I want to tell you." He said, "What is somebody who speaks three languages? The answer is trilingual. What is someone to speaks two languages? Bilingual. What is someone who speaks one language? American!" He told that one himself in a very nice, self-deprecating manner. One of the things I neglected to mention was in September of '91 we had another visit from the coal miners. It was their fourth. The last time they actually got to Bucharest. They tried another time and were stopped before they got to town. It was, as the previous ones had been, very carefully orchestrated. They knew exactly where they were going and exactly what they were doing. They were led by a firebrand gentleman named Miron Cozma who was a rabble rouser and a slime ball at the same time, in whose pay be was, and all the rest. There's a lot of speculation and not much proof, but it was fortunate in a way. This happened just after we'd had one of those embassy Crisis Management Exercises, literally within a month after that we had the events in Moscow in August where it looked like a lot worse was going to happen than actually did, and then in September the coal miners in Bucharest where a couple of people were killed. A lot of property was destroyed, and so forth. They hit the main government building, the parliament, and a TV station, not by chance. They knew where to go. There were Molotov

cocktails and gunfire and a lot of other things.

Q: American embassy, too?

RICKERT: No. No. American embassy was not a target in any of these events including the revolution. I would say – this is a selective judgment – I don't think there is any nationality in Eastern Europe that is more pro-American than the Romanians. The Poles are way up there obviously, but the Romanians had a great admiration and respect for the United States even though they claim that through the Yalta agreement we abandoned them to the Soviets; but that is another story. They say, "We've been waiting 50 years for the Americans." Shortly after this had transpired, Cozma asked to meet with Ambassador Green. We arranged for him to meet at the residence, so it wasn't a secret meeting, but at least it wasn't a public meeting. I was there as interpreter because he didn't want an FSN doing the interpreting for that occasion, and a political officer and a few others were there. Cozma had one of his – I was going to say "henchmen", but maybe "associates" would be more neutral – with him. He had a terrible cold as did the other fellow, and Ambassador Green was a pill freak. Not controlled substances but any over-the-counter medicine that could be had, he had. During this meeting he ran upstairs and he came down with Tylenol Plus or something which he gave to the coal miner. It was surreal interview. It was very difficult to figure out what they wanted or why they wanted it. I did my best to interpret, but I did not understand what he was saying. It was a real mix of fantasy and all sorts of strange things. I don't think much came out of it, but it showed that the American ambassador was ready to listen to all sides.

When Ambassador Green left, he was...I might add that he was a millionaire, and he wasn't a person who was very interested in material things, and we tried to... Interestingly, he was interested in money as a barometer of how he was doing, but he wasn't interested in money particularly for buying things. He didn't collect antiques. He didn't collect art. He wasn't out looking to find ways to show off the money, but the embassy wanted to give him a present when he left. In the end, there was a painter who sold a number of paintings to the people at the embassy, and he did very nice things at a very reasonable price. Alan Duckall who was head of the American library there who knew him well, arranged to have him do a painting of the chancery and with the Cadillac which Ambassador Green was very proud of with a flag on it. It had taken a bullet sometime in the revolution, and he never, he refused to ever have the bullet hole repaired. So the painting had the Chancery and the Cadillac in the driveway there, and the flag on the front fender, and the bullet hole. He was very pleased with his farewell gift which was well under whatever limit there was for gifts at that time.

Green left, and there was a hiatus for three or four months, and then John Davis came. John, of course, was a career diplomat and spent many years in Poland, three tours in all, thirteen years, and most recently had been an ambassador there. It was his last post, and he and his wife Helen were delightful people to work with and for, and it was very much a professional high point of my career to spend that time with him. He knew Eastern Europe, and he knew transition from Communism having been through it in Poland

although there were significant differences. He made Romanians feel that he was on their side even when he was telling them things that they didn't want to hear necessarily. He just did a terrific job. He was an ideal choice at that time. Unfortunately, his tour was cut short by illness, so he wasn't there as long as I would have liked, but he did an excellent job. Helen was a very professional, traditional foreign service spouse of the best sort. Not only did we get on very well professionally, but both I and my wife really enjoyed their company. We spent a lot of time with them "off duty," so to speak. In the end they got two dogs from a litter that was from the dog owned by the Swedish ambassador, and we got the last of the littler. So there are three of those dogs now in the United States. Cocker Spaniels.

John arrived just after the first local elections took place in Romania in the spring of '92. Then there was a new prime minister. The coal miners resulted in the ousting of Prime Minister Petre Roman and Theodor Stolojan. Stolojan was a caretaker prime minister to help prepare the country for national elections which he did. It took longer than it should have, but he was a former finance minister and subsequently worked at the World Bank for several years so he was a very well qualified person. John had excellent relations with all of top leadership including with Iliescu. He was able to speak to them in a way that wasn't talking down but which was straightforward and giving them in a sense fatherly advice on how they might help their cause which was very interesting to see.

I might mention a couple of things about Romania as it was when I got there. It was still very much in the summer of '91 not that far away from the revolution. There were lots of signs around Bucharest. There wasn't heavy artillery or anything, but there were burned buildings and bullet holes. The DCM's residence had a number of bullet holes in it. An indoor balcony in the living room had a bullet dent in it. One of the things I did there was to get a little brass plaque to put there because two DCM's come and go and nobody knows anything, and it wasn't painted over, it was something that had happened. We found that the antennae for the television in our house in the residence there had been shot by sharpshooters and had been severed in two places by bullets. That wasn't accidental when the house was not near other buildings... It was near other buildings but not that would have been used by snipers, so somebody had presumably assumed that the antennae was being used for nefarious purposes and had cut it down with rifle fire during oppressive shooting. There were a number of buildings that Ceausescu had started by weren't finished. These hulks of semi-finished buildings all over town including the famous Palace of the People, *Casa Republicii* or "House of the People" literally which was about 80% done and is reputed to be the largest office building in the world, larger than the Pentagon. It was there in all of its garish glory. People didn't know what to do with it. There was talk about tearing it down, but it was so huge, and so much had gone into it that that was not really feasible. So they finished it up, and now it's being used for parliament and a number of other purposes.

It was a country where suspicion was still widespread. Nobody knew who was behind the miners. The opposition was paranoid. They thought that everything the government was doing was designed to marginalize them and to drive them out of public life. A lot of the

opposition leaders had left Romania at one time or another and had come back. The head of the Peasant Party, one of the two main "historical parties" as they call them, was a man named Copulescu who spent 18 years in Communist prisons. There was a great deal of bitterness on the part of people who had suffered and didn't see things getting better quickly. Issues of property restitution were still unresolved. People who had been informers were still in or were active in state security in high places, and there was a lot of disappointment that things weren't moving faster. One of the leaders of post-revolutionary government, a man named Silviu Brucan, who had been a big Communist who had been ambassador to the UN and to Washington. He said in the spring of '90 that it would take ten years for Romania to become a normal country. He was roundly criticized by right, left, and center as being almost anti-Romanian to say it would take that long. Of course, he was being overly optimistic.

I recall having some friends to lunch one day, all former or present FSN's who we knew from our previous tour, and they were all supporters of the opposition. And they came to lunch on Saturday, and they complained and complained and complained, "Nothing has changed. The Commies are still running it. Its the same." Finally, I'd heard enough, and I said to them politely, "Wait a minute. You came in here through the front door without any fear. You're sitting at the table of the American DCM. You're speaking openly about your dissatisfaction with all of the things and people you don't like in this country. You have no fear that anything is going to happen to you because you've done this. And you say nothing's changed?" They said, "Yes, of course you're right, but we expected so much more." I think that was really it. I used to liken Romania at that time to a man who had been suffering from a slow growing tumor year after year after year, and as it grew he became weaker and weaker. But suddenly he woke up one morning, and the tumor was gone. He said, "Ah, I'm no longer it. I can go back to the way I was before I developed this tumor." But of course, the tumor had done its damage on his body, and this man in my little example was unwilling to accept the fact that he had to rebuild his strength to get back to where he was. I use this often with Romanians because many very intelligent and otherwise intelligent people believe the problem was communism and once you got rid of Ceausescu and communism, Romania could become a normal Western European country in two to five years. They failed to take into account the damage that had been done by 40 years of communism. There was a lot of frustration and unhappiness.

Q: You've talked some about U. S.-Romanian relations and some of the issues: adoption and so on. You might want to talk some more about that, or I'm also interested to what extent you and the ambassador and the embassy were involved in the neighborhood, the region, the issues that Romania had with some of its neighbors. I don't know whether NATO entry and entry into the European community was under discussion then. That came later.

RICKERT: Those are good questions. Actually, during the time that I was there, the partnership for PFP – Partnership for Peace – was launched, and Romania was the first country in the region to sign on because they rightly calculated that that was the gate through which they would have to pass to have a chance for NATO membership. Indeed,

Madeleine Albright came out and was the one who gave the pitch on Partnership for Peace.

Q: When she was at the United Nations?

RICKERT: Yes. The biggest issue in the region overtly during the first part of my time there was sanctions against Serbia. The upheaval was going on in the former Yugoslavia, and sanctions had been imposed on Serbia. Romania was trying, on the one hand, to observe the sanctions and get in our good graces for that and on the other hand to make as much money out of the situation as possible at least on the personal level if not on the government level. With a border with Serbia and the Danube River there was plenty of opportunity at money making. indeed, there was an arrangement we had with many of the countries in the region where we sent customs people for what we called SAMS – Sanctions Assistance Missions – and there was one in Bucharest. There was one in Bulgaria. There was one in Hungary. Those were the ones I knew most closely. There were others as well. These missions had customs officers who worked with the local customs to try and tighten up the procedures and prevent illegal smuggling.

The U. S. was providing a long-term TDY customs officers to these SAMS or Sanctions Assistance Missions to help the local customs services in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and other countries, cut down on smuggling. The idea, of course, was to prevent gasoline and other needed goods from going into Serbia. Incidentally, my wife worked as a PIT (part-time, intermittent, temporary) on the SAM team in Bucharest which put her well out of the chain of command and enabled her, with her fluent Romanian, to provide a very useful service: fluent Romanian and knowledge of the country and how things worked and all the rest. The U. S. customs folks were very professional customs officers, but they were babes in woods when it came to knowing how things work in Romania and did have the wool pulled over their eyes on occasion. Gerd was helpful in avoiding some mistakes but not all of them.

Romania lost a lot of money due to the closing down of the Danube as an artery of transport. They do a lot of transport both from Romania and as a transit. I remember the deputy foreign minister who later became foreign minister talking to me about this and saying they lost so many billions of dollars, and was there anything that the United States could do to compensate them for these losses. I remember telling him that I thought it was very doubtful that we could compensate him, but that he might want to think creatively, and he asked what I meant. I said, “Well, you come to us with these complaints. The Hungarians come to us with these complaints. The Bulgarians come to us with these complaints. I’m not saying that you would get any money out of it, but you might get people’s attention if the three of you came together with the same plea.” He was really taken with this idea because its very un-Romanian to do anything in concert with others of this nature. You look after yourself and let others look after themselves. It was a lesson that they subsequently had learned, and I’d like to think I planted one of the early seeds. In any case, it was a new idea, a very competent and career diplomat. They never have gotten anything back as far as I know, but their losses have been recognized in many

ways. During the Kosovo conflict, Romania and Bulgaria and Hungary all got UNICEF to help compensate them in that way. It wasn't dollar for dollar, but it was of some help, so I don't think it was completely a lost cause. Hungary was the other issue. Well, there were three issues. The Yugoslav situation. Hungary where traditionally there has been...I wouldn't say hatred, but Hungary was the occupying power in Transylvania and the Banat until 1918 or so. Then, after World War I, Romania got those territories back by referendum. They were majority Romanian, but there were substantial ethnic Hungarian minorities. If the truth be known, a lot of Hungarians were educated and cultured people, and a lot of the Romanians were peasants, so its been difficult politically and psychologically for the Hungarians to accept this loss. The Romanians until recently had always been fearful of some kind of irredentism or some kind of deal to take that territory back. They lost Northern Transylvania in 1940 to the Hungarians through a deal that was made between the Germans and the Russians if I recall correctly, and they lost Bessarabia in Northern Bukovina in the same manner. They're slightly paranoid but not crazy because it has happened. Relations with Hungary were correct, and there were no overt frictions. But there is always a strain because of the fear that somehow Hungary, being more advanced, would get into the West first and would block the Romanians or would demand concessions as a price for letting them into NATO or EU or other organizations.

Fortunately, none of the dire consequences that were foreseen have occurred, but it was something that preoccupied politicians, particularly those Romanians who were born in Transylvania. Its understandable, but its regrettable. The Hungarians in Romania by and large have played a positive and constructive political role, but they do have an agenda which relates to their own ethnic group when it comes to education and bilingual road signs and other cultural and educational and self-government types of issues. The Romanians, unfortunately, until recently have looked at, in effect, any concession to the Hungarians, their own ethnic Hungarians, as being a loss for themselves. One of the things that I tried to do in talking with Romanians during my time there was to say that if you have a minority within your borders that is satisfied with the way its being treated, it will be less troublesome than if it has what it perceives to be a lot of unaddressed issues. Many of the things that the ethnic Hungarians wanted, in fact, to any objective person, did not involve denigration of Romanian power, influence, or authority. I counseled them to look at the things they could do that would cost them the least but make the Hungarians less dissatisfied. They didn't do it during my time, but the present coalition, *de facto* coalition between the Hungarian Party and the Social Democratic Party, is based on that approach where the Social Democratic Party needs them to have a parliamentary majority. The Hungarians are willing to do that as long as they get some of their issues addressed. Interestingly, the Social Democrats who were empowered when I was there under a different name and were rather strongly resistant of doing anything for the Hungarians now have come around and are taking a much more constructive approach, so all sides are learning. And then the third, of course. I mentioned Serbia, Hungary, and then the third was Moldova. Although that's the most emotional issue for at least some Romanians because it was part of Romania until 1940, and then it was taken away by force.

The second president of Romania, Emil Constantinescu, was born in Moldova. Many prominent Romanian intellectuals and others are from that area or have roots there. They're torn because they recognize that Moldova is an independent country. They were the first country to recognize its independence. They believe that Moldova should have free choice and so forth. Emotionally they also believe that the only sensible thing for Moldova to do is to come back to the motherland, and it shows no sign of doing so which is cause of frustration. The large Russian minority there is part of the problem. Its not a domestic political issue in a direct way any more than the return of the royal family as king is a domestic political issue. But it is one of those things that is there in society. It comes up whenever something bad happens in Moldova. The press is full of it because of the close association, and on the part of some at least, the unrealistic dream that someday the Moldovans will wake up and see that they really belong as part of Romania.

Q: You haven't mentioned either Ukraine or Bulgaria. Those are not particularly concerns.

RICKERT: No. There was one major concern with Ukraine. It is territorial because after World War II a rocky, uninhabited piece of island in the Black Sea, under Soviet pressure became part of the Soviet Union and, therefore, part of Ukraine. The island itself has no value whatsoever, but it is the point against which the maritime boundary is delineated. There is some oil and gas in the Black Sea. Quantities are not known, but where the line is drawn could have a very significant influence on how much oil and gas either Ukraine or Romania is able to extract. That's been the main point. There have been some concerns on the Romanian side about ethnic Romanians who were living in Ukraine, mostly in what used to be known as Bukovina and in, to a lesser extent, in parts of Moldova. The ethnic Romanian minority in Ukraine was a sub-concern, not a main concern. Relations during my time there were correct, but there weren't major problems and, indeed, the Snakes Island issue hadn't really come to a fore. That happened later, but it was in the back of Romanians minds quite clearly. The case of Bulgaria having lived in Bulgaria and Romania, I'm always amazed at how little either knows about the other or cares about the other. They share so much in common, yet they don't hate each other or there are no real issues. Some territory is switched back and forth in Dibroja, but that's not an active issue. The populations moved at the time this happened, so there are very few Bulgarians in Romania and very few Romanians in Bulgaria. Neither one really thinks all that highly of the other, and they don't have issues, but they spend their energy dealing with others. I remember listening to the foreign minister at one time being asked who Romania's best neighbor was. He thought for a while, and I've heard other Romanians say this: He said, "I think its the Black Sea." They don't really care for any of their neighbors particularly, and I'm sure that feeling is reciprocated although in the last few years through NATO and other European organizations, they've worked at developing better relations with their neighbors.

Q: Speaking of the Black Sea, is that something that ever engaged the embassy in terms of ship visits or otherwise?

RICKERT: Yes. I've forgotten the name of the exercise, but there was an exercise that we carried out in the Black Sea to show that we regarded it as international water. Once or twice a year a destroyer would go in and sail around the Black Sea and show up at Constanza. It wasn't an issue with Romanians. They were very happy to have us there as I'm sure the Bulgarians were, but it was really aimed at the Soviet Union when there still was one and continued afterwards. We had a number of ship visits and used to go down to Constanza the port which was at least a couple of hours drive from Bucharest. It was always a pleasure in that the Navy officers and their commanders were I always felt in Romania excellent diplomats in showing the flag literally and figuratively at a time when our political relations were not all that great with Romania. Military relations were developing very well, and we had visits from Admiral Owens who was the head of the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and his successor Admiral Lopez very well received, very well spoken in Bucharest. They didn't mix in the politics, but they gave Romanians a feel for what they might expect if they got their political act together which is exactly what we wanted them to do. General Joulwan came as the supreme NATO commander which was a personal pleasure for me because he comes from the same relatively small town in Pennsylvania where my father was born and raised and where I used to go as a child: Pottsville, Pennsylvania, the home of Yuengling Beer, the oldest brewery in the United States dating from 1829. General Joulwan told me he had cases of Yuengling because people whenever they came from the States brought him a case knowing that's where he was from! Very nice man, also an excellent diplomat in the sense of helping to give the Romanians a taste of what they could expect, again, if they got their act together which, I think, was exactly what they needed.

Q: Were most of the European countries represented with ambassadors at the embassy level in Bucharest?

RICKERT: Yes. Virtually all of them were. I can't think of any that weren't. Ireland wasn't. All of the significant ones were and had been for years partly as a holdover from the Ceausescu period when he was seen as being a maverick in foreign policy, so a lot of countries set up embassies that might not have had them on the basis of an objective analysis of bilateral business, but it was kind of a symbol of support...

Q: And, of course, you were there fairly soon after that period.

RICKERT: That's right. Yeah. A few of the African embassies and others that were there which you could say were subsidized embassies, they folded and left, but the Europeans had not.

Q: We had talked, I think, before about the Ceausescu period and the particular role that Romania played in the Middle East. Was that continuing at all, special interest in that region?

RICKERT: The sense I had was that Romanians wanted to continue to play that role, but times had passed, and they really didn't any longer have the clout that they had had. I'm

no Middle East expert, but at that time, of course, earlier, we had no direct dealings with Arafat. Romanians did. We could communicate with Arafat through Romania but by the '90s, we were dealing with Arafat. There were other cases like that where the intermediary role was no longer as useful or as necessary. But the Romanians maintained their interest until the Russians started coming to Israel in large numbers. Jews of Romanian origin were the largest group of European Jews in Israel, and they're still very substantial. There were a lot of Israeli businessmen. Although the number of Jews remaining in Romania was estimated at around 10,000, still the community was very active. The head of the community was Rabbi Moses Rosen who had been the chief rabbi for decades and was a very prominent figure not, of course, far beyond his own community. The Joy Distribution Committee was very active in providing food and other material for the Jewish community. Jewish restitution was starting to become an issue. Stu Eisenstadt, while he was still ambassador to...head of USAC...

Q: ...became the European union later...

RICKERT: Right. He had from President Clinton kind of a special responsibility to deal with issues of restitution, and I'm happy to say that the third ambassador I served under, Alfred Moses, who is very definitely Jewish, emphasized very strongly to Stu Eisenstadt when he came to Bucharest, "You are responsible for restitution and not just Jewish restitution," because in Romania if it were seen that the United States were taking an exclusive interest in the Jewish aspect, it could have had an unfortunate backlash. Eisenstadt did take that seriously, and there was a lot of other restitutions both sectarian and just ordinary citizens that needed to be attended to, and Eisenstadt did take it on. This is later, toward the end of my time in Romania. There were so many things that happened there, I must say. I might just talk a little bit about the personal side because there were people we had known in the '70s, and you go back to a place, you've known them under one set of circumstances, and then you reestablish contact with them. They were delighted to see us because we represented something, some continuity between the old and the new, and we maintained friendships from a distance on occasion through the difficult periods. These were mostly cultural people that a number of artists and two in particular with whom we had become extremely friendly in the '70s and then resumed friendships in the '90s. One of them, I remember he came to the DCM residence, and he was just delighted to have been able to come as a free person. He sat down on the sofa, and he seemed to grow several inches. Both of these artists unfortunately have passed away since then, but I'm glad he lived to see this. We started talking about things, and it got in a little bit sensitive area – slightly – and he looked around and said, "Are there microphones here?" I said, "Probably so. We don't look for them, but I don't know who's listening nowadays." He kind of looked around and in effect said, "Oh, what the hell!" and then went on with what he was going to say. I thought, "That's a good sign!"

Q: This was in the '90s...

RICKERT: This was in the early '90s.

Q: ...when you came back.

RICKERT: ...when we came back. He apologized for having reported on us to the *securitatay* which we said, "We knew what you had to do." That was the price for being able to have any contact with us. He felt very badly about it because I guess he felt he'd betrayed us as friends. We weren't talking politics with him. We weren't doing anything that was in any way secretive or secret, and we knew that this had to happen. His name was Georgay Spiridon. He was a moderately, a decent artist, not a top artist but a very delightful human being. I still go back to Romania about once a year and always see his widow and one daughter who's living there. It was a delight to resume that contact. The other artist that we saw less of this time because of this age and infirmity was a man named Cornell Yubabba who was probably Romania's leading painter at that time. A very unusual and fascinating man who was in his 90's and had a stroke but was still painting. He lived about a block from our house, and we used to go over. Gerd would go over and see his wife from time to time. Occasionally I would go over. They were wonderful friends, and they appreciated the fact that we stuck by them during the grim period and helped them in little ways to the extent that we could. Again, whenever I'm in Bucharest, I always go and see Costenz Yubabba. She's always very pleased to see somebody who was a friend during the Bad Old Days. And then we made a number of new friends, too. Interesting people. Again, some of them we could deal with political and government people freely without any trouble at all, but it seemed that the cultural people were the ones that we developed the closest contacts with. We were very grateful for that insight into the life of the country that we got through those people rather than just what we could get through the politicians and the government servants.

Q: You had mentioned before that Ambassador John Davis was not there for too long and that he had to leave for health reasons. When was it that he left?

RICKERT: He left in August '9 I was chargé two years in all of the four years that I was there. He'd been away for virtually the whole year for medical treatment. Then Al Moses, Alfred Moses, came in December of '94. He came having just learned that his wife had ovarian cancer, so we were together from December until July '95. He had an arrangement with EUR whereby he spent one week a month in Romania and three weeks in Washington looking after his wife. He worked very hard in the Department on the Hill and elsewhere, but he was not in Bucharest. He was ambassador in name, but he wasn't in country a whole lot.

Q: It must have been tricky for you to have him there for a week, gone for three weeks, back a week. I can see that some things had to be done and you did them, but other things you probably thought, "Well, I'd better wait."

RICKERT: Well, that's true, but he was always reachable in Washington, and he was in touch with the desk all of the time. He ended up writing instructions and things from that end. He was quite close to Holbrooke, and Holbrooke was assistant secretary at the latter part there, so that made it work out easily. I found it more difficult in terms of internal

things. If it were your embassy, I think that anyone who's in charge as ambassador or long-term chargé is going to want to rearrange things in certain ways. I didn't feel it was an option because I was very much a caretaker, and it isn't healthy in an organization to have changes and have the new person come in or the person who is really in charge come in and take over and say, "No, I want to do it differently again." You put staff and other people through too many changes, and it's harmful. I kind of left things like they were organizationally and structurally and tried to make it work as well as possible and left it to the ambassador to decide whether or not he wanted to do things differently. Moses did, but nothing radical has happened under his successor, but that's another story.

Q: Somebody else's story.

RICKERT: Yes, it is.

Q: Ambassador Moses was very involved with the Cyprus problem after Romania.

RICKERT: That's right. He was appointed as sort of an unpaid envoy for Cyprus after he finished his tour in Bucharest, so that's a separate matter. There are so many ways in which one would like to express the atmosphere that existed in Romania in the early '90s. Romania is just very different from any of the other countries. It's the Balkan mentality and the extent of the way the whole system was corrupted by the leadership and the way Communism was practiced. As you know, I'm sure, the Communist party in 1945 numbered under 2,000 people, and yet it because the ruling party. This didn't happen by popular demand. It happened through the presence of the Red Army. You had in a sense an illegitimate party running the country. Of the less than 2,000 people, less than half were ethnic Romanians. There were Jews, there were Ukrainians, there were Hungarians, there were others. It was very much a non-Romanian phenomenon from an ethnic point of view. Communism in Romania was highly influenced by you might say "illegitimate" origins. I think a lot of the quirks and foibles of the experience of Romania in the '90s resulted from this very complex history and a party that had to always present itself as the voice of the Romanian people, yet everyone knowing that until it was imposed by the Russian Army – Soviet Army – that it wasn't a voice of anything or anyone. Of course, by the time I was there the first time, it was a party of close to three million people. It was a mass party, and people were encouraged to join in order to Romanianize it from the Romania point of view. They were led to believe there would be personal advantages like the admission to schools and universities and all sorts of other things. So it was not a very highly philosophical or idealistic appeal to get people in, but most everyone it seemed to me was a party member at some time or another.

Q: So, that was the case when you were there in the '90s that they were the former...the party members were still very active in politics and otherwise? ...about the former security, the securitatay.

RICKERT: The former party members... You couldn't hold a responsible position in Romania with rare exceptions without being a party member. That's the way it was. It

was your union card in a union shop. So a lot of good and decent people were party members. As you know, there was very little dissidence. There was no organized dissidence in Romania. Nothing like soladar nascurim chartered 77 or whatever it was in Czech Republic. There was no goulash Communism as there was in Hungary. It was, not too be too cruel, a very large group of opportunists who were making the best of a difficult situation. The *securitate* people were still very much in evidence as elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Various security forces knew where the money was, and they got hold of it, and they quickly became the business people as well as important in government and other areas of life. They are still in influence in Romania even today although less so than they were in the early '90s. One of the things that happened during Ambassador Davis's time and afterward, things started to warm up a bit, and we started to get visits which we hadn't had while neighboring Bulgaria and, of course, Hungary, were awash with visits. I mentioned the military folks that had come, but Ambassador Albright came during the latter part. Former President Bush came with his wife. Former Secretary Baker came. They were invited to give paid speeches but, of course, they met with all the top people in the process. A number of senators and congressmen came. Shelby came just after he switched parties. Dan Coats and Frank Wolf came when Coats was still in the senate. That was in connection with the prayer breakfast. Interestingly, they were inviting the president and other top prime ministers and others to come to the prayer breakfast which they declined to do, and now Romanians are among the eager attendees at the annual prayer breakfast. Tom Lantos came. Bart Gordon of Georgia came. Eagleburger came. He came earlier on when he was still deputy secretary. Frank Wisner came. That was an interesting one. He was under secretary of defense at the time, but his father had been in the OSS in Romania, and Frank was very eager to come because he heard stories. One of the things that he said when he was there there was a picture of his father at Sinaia which is where the summer royal palace was and a photograph taken at the Peleş Palace in Sinaia, and they took a picture of Frank at the same spot which I think was a very satisfying thing for him. The Brzezinski s came as friends of the Davises. Many of the former ambassadors to Romania came back. All but one of the living ambassadors since '62 came back during my time there, and some of them came several times. I don't think there's another country in Europe where that would apply.

Q: Or anywhere else I suspect!

RICKERT: Right! Yeah! I've often said that Romania is a benign but incurable virus: Once infected, one never really gets over it. The fact that all those folks came back: Roger Kirk, Rudy Aggrey, Harry Barnes came several times, Bill Crawford who was ambassador from '62 to '65 came back. Actually I was instrumental in getting him back. His son was the Commerce Department representative there. I've known Bill a number of years. He's since passed away, but he and his first wife founded the American school in Bucharest in the 1960's. I was chairman of the school board as DCM, so I was in touch with Bill and said, "It would be great if you could come while we're here, and your son's here." He had various excuses why he couldn't come. I'm sure he would have, but I hoped he'd come while my wife and I were still there. His second wife is Swedish, and that's actually how I met him was through her. I worked out a deal with the director of the

American school. I think the school was having its 30th anniversary or something like that, and so I asked the director, and he agreed enthusiastically to invite Ambassador Crawford to come and give the commencement address. Then he did come because he felt that, I guess, he couldn't say no to that. He saw a number of older folks he had known, and I think he was very glad that he did it, but he needed a little extra push to get him to do it.

Q: A reason to take the trip.

RICKERT: Yeah. Punch Green after he left came back on a cruise with a group of well-heeled Stanford University grads to the Black Sea and then they had a day in Constanza. He asked me well in advance. he said, "Jonathan, can you see what you can do to get a meeting with the president for this group?" So I talked to his press secretary whom I knew very well and explained the situation, and he said he would see what he could do. Katalaya was his name. He was a career diplomat. He set up a meeting when this group of older and well-heeled and worldly Stanford grads came. It was at the Presidential Palace which is a very impressive building, an old palace which had been added on to by Ceausescu with actually good taste in this case in the same spirit as the original building. Iliescu met with the group in a nice room, and they had chairs, and he stood in front and he made some remarks, and they asked questions. In the end he spent over two hours with them and gave them a tour of the palace himself. They were floored! I think Punch Green was extremely gratified. I hadn't done anything except pass on the request, but they rightly figured this would be a good investment in time after they did it, and that's what happened. One of the things we had during my first tour there was an embassy villa up in the mountains in Soniya, the town where the royal palace was located. By the time we got back, the embassy still had a villa, but it had been moved. Ceausescu kicked them out of Soniya because they were too close to where his villa was or one of his palaces. I think he was concerned about what might be going on in the American embassy and the American embassy villa. The new villa was not far from the railroad tracks, and we went there once and the trains went by regularly, and we really didn't like it, and some other people agreed. So a committee was formed of which my wife was a member to look for a new villa, and lo and behold! they found the old villa which had been nicely fixed up since we were there. So we moved back there and had great pleasure of using it from time to time until the inspectors found this was a frivolous use of U. S. government money for all of the villas, the one in Bulgaria and elsewhere. We were forced to close down, but it was nice while it lasted.

Q: Okay. Anything else?

RICKERT: Another thing. Dealing with the Romanian government. One of the things that was wonderful the second time around was that how open they were. Both as chargé and DCM, I could see anyone in the Romanian government virtually at any time just by picking up the phone. It was not an *entre* that I abused, but it was something that I could do. I did see the foreign minister very regularly. I probably met with the president 30, 35 times in four years, alone occasionally, with the ambassador more times, sometimes with

visitors from Washington. We had really an open door there which was great. Shortly after Ambassador Davis arrived, we had a very sensitive issue regarding our FSN's and the *securitate*. All of them, of course, had to report during the Communist period to the *securitate*, but afterwards many of them reported as little as they could get away with and still kept their jobs. But afterwards, people kept calling our people, and we documented this very carefully: who, what, when, where. In one of his early meetings with Iliescu, John Davis raised this and said, "If you really want good relations with the United States, one of the things you will do is call off your *securitate* people who are harassing our FSN's from the embassy. Iliescu seemed genuinely surprised. I don't know if he was or not, but he said, "We'll get to the bottom of this. I know nothing about this." He assigned his top aide for security matters, a man named Talfesch to work with me on this issue. I met several times about this, and I presented him with a paper getting all the information that we had without naming the names of the embassy FSN's, but if they did their homework they could figure out who they were. In the end he responded on the whole list, roughly 30 incidents and people. Some of them he said he tracked down, and the former handlers had been in touch with him, and they had been warned off. In some cases he came up with slightly different information from what we had, and in some cases he claimed that they couldn't identify who the person was or what have you. The response was less than perfect, but to my mind it showed a reasonably good faith effort to deal with the issue which, again, was a change from the earlier time. The incidents didn't disappear, but there was a marked diminution of interference with our FSNs. About the same time a counter-intelligence team arrived from Frankfurt and interviewed our FSN's. They did this throughout Eastern Europe to try and find out who had been doing what to whom to the extent that they could. Interestingly, when they left at the debrief, they said that the remaining FSN's were probably the most forthcoming of any. I'll never forget that one of them allegedly said to the counter intelligence team something along these lines, "You have to remember that everyone who was working in the embassy in 1989 fell into one of three categories." The first category was those who reported as little as possible to the *securitate* just to keep their jobs. Second category, much smaller, who enthusiastically volunteered to report to the *securitate* and dug up and made up whatever they could which would ingratiate them with their handlers. Then a small number of actual *securitate* officers was the third category. Everybody who says that he or she isn't in one of these categories is lying, this one person told the team.

I guess that leads to another thing that is really beyond the immediate scope of this, but our station chief who was announced and was not clandestine was a man named Harold J. Nicholson. We worked together for about a year. He was a liaison between the internal service and external service. After he left he went to Malaysia and was arrested as a Russian spy. He is now doing time someplace in federal prison. He apparently took up his espionage activities after leaving Romania, but I'm still amazed that somebody who was engaged in that kind of activity so soon after a tour in Romania that no one at the embassy in Bucharest except perhaps people from his agency were ever questioned by anybody about his activities, his lifestyle, or anything else. I know for a fact neither the ambassador, DCM or the RSO were questioned by DS, by CIA, by FBI, or by anyone else. With the concerns about Aldrich Ames and about others, it struck me as being

irresponsible, and I have actually raised this matter with friends and colleagues at the agency, and they tut-tutted and said, "That doesn't sound very good." And that's been the end of it. To my mind it was very, very sloppy because Mr. Nicholson had a number of characteristics. His personal situation was such that...not that one would have expected espionage, but there were very serious family problems. It was obvious to people at the embassy, and there were a lot of things going on that were well known that were not according to the rules that existed at the time. That was disappointing, I must say. During the time I was there – the whole time that I was there – Romania was a critical threat for both human and technical intelligence. That meant a strong non-frat policy. We had to report contacts.

Q: Continuing the second time you were there. The '90s.

RICKERT: Yeah. I'm talking about the '90s. In other words, according to the scales that were used, there were four categories: the human, the technical intelligence, terrorism, and crime. The categories were critical, high, medium, and low. If you gave each one of these a number, say low is one, medium is two, high is three, critical is four, and then did a cumulative, which I did, actually, for Romania. Romania and Havana tied as the two worst posts in the world which for somebody living and working in Romania was utterly preposterous, but that's the way it was. The only good that I could see that came out of this was we used this as a means to keep our project differential up because whenever we asked why Romania was given such a high grade, high level on human and technical intelligence, one could only conclude that we didn't have sufficiently high clearance to be told or else there was nothing there. I remember writing up one of those questionnaires and saying that this puts people under great stress to know that we're in the highest category, yet we can't be told why. We kept our high, maybe 20% differential. To show how times change, it dropped down to 15, and now its back up to 20. I saw the cable recently explaining why it is 20% now, and it cited hardships such as "uncertain internet connections." We didn't have telephone connection when I was there. It was 15% under Ceausescu during my first tour there. It is 20% now when it is a completely different situation. The standards obviously changed. Medical was another aspect. Medical care was not up to Western standards, but there are a number of Western doctors. When we were there the first time my wife had some serious medical problems and was told to see Romanian doctors in Romanian hospitals which she did. It didn't help a whole lot, but that's how it was done. So things change. I'm glad for folks there now that they have the 20% differential, but I'm not entirely sure they earned it.

Q: Anything else you wanted...

RICKERT: Let's see. One of the things we did with our Romanian friends was have a Christmas party each year. Interestingly, the first two years we had parties for the embassy community, and they didn't seem to show a whole lot of enthusiasm for this, so we decided to invite Romanians which we did. One of the most moving things that came out of this... We had a big group of Romanians, and the DCM residence is a wonderful house there, and the ceiling is about 24, 25 feet tall in the living room, and we got a

Christmas tree each year that went up to the ceiling. This had been a tradition for some years. At the end of the living room were large windows, very large windows almost up to the ceilings, that look out and a number of Romanians told us that during the dark years that they gained hope by seeing that Christmas tree through the window and to be invited in to be right next to it was a great privilege and pleasure for them. Let's see.

Oh, there are so many things. We did so much. We traveled so much. We had so many friends there. We were able to entertain anybody and everybody which was great. One thing I did as DCM was invite every new person from every agency and even long-term TDY's home for lunch with spouse which, of course, was not representational. This was just in house. There were quite a lot of them, particularly TDYers. It seems people appreciated it because there often wasn't an ambassador there, and otherwise there wouldn't have been any proper introduction to the embassy. I've met people since then who've come up and said, "Oh, I remember coming to lunch at your house." I mean, people who were from other agencies or who were TDYers and said that it meant something to them.

I remember going to Romanians' homes for dinner. Some of our best personal memories were evenings and afternoons spent with Romanian friends. One of them was a very prominent heart doctor whose son, Radu, had been one of the few dissidents, actually, and spent time in jail for putting up Ceausescu fliers. Dr. Filipescu invited us to his villa on Lake Snagov. We had a nice dinner and were sitting around talking, and people just sort of gradually disappeared, and we ended up just with Radu and his wife. It came time to leave, and we left, and we looked in the house, and they were all inside watching Dallas. Dallas was practically a disease, and no guest was too important to miss Dallas for! That was an interesting bit of culture there. One of my duties as chargé was going to National Days, and I remember going to the Mongolian National Day which was held in a museum. It was the Geological Museum. We got in, and the doors were closed, and we were served a drink, and then ushered into a room and shown for two hours a Mongolian film of Mongolian opera with Romanian sub-titles, so at least I could follow what was going on. Then we were let out, and the Mongolian chargé, I don't think he was used to having Americans showing up at his event, so he was very pleased. Every time I saw him afterwards, he just ran across the room to say hello because the American chargé came and spent the whole evening watching the Mongolian opera.

Q: Film.

RICKERT: Film. That's right.

Q: And as he got new ones, he came and told you he had yet another one?

RICKERT: No, no! I think sub-titles meant that it wasn't that easy to get new ones. He had one at least. There were a lot of interesting things. Another one, on a sadder note, we were still and are still today trying to track down former Nazis and so forth. I got a cable one day, a request from the Romanians, the records for the man who had been my

Romanian teacher at FSI who I knew had right-wing sympathies. I don't know... He's innocent until proven guilty, and he died before anything came up. They didn't produce anything, so I don't know what if anything there was in the records, but these were little incidents that occur.

Another one was when Richard Nixon passed away. We had a condolence book, and we took turns. It was at the American Center, formerly the American Library, and we sat there. We took turns being there to greet ambassadors or others who came. An interesting collection of people who came. Old Communists who met Nixon when he visited in 1969 as well as official government people and others. One of the very last people to come was an ambassador. His driver was with him, and his driver had been the driver at the American embassy. He left under scandal, but that's another story. The ambassador was in signing the book, and I saw the driver there whom I'd known in the seventies, and I spoke with him, and we were chatting a little bit, and he was shifting from one foot to another. I said, "Would you like to sign the condolence book?" And he said, "You mean I'm allowed to sign a condolence book?" I said, "Yes, its open to the public. You're welcome to sign." And he practically kissed my hands. He said, "You know, I drove for Nixon when he was here in '69," and something about being invited to come to the States afterwards. He had met Nixon. He talked with Nixon. So he was just absolutely delighted to sign the book. He felt it was his civic duty in a way.

Q: Its 3:00. Why don't we maybe stop here, and we might have a few more things you want to say. Next time
, and then we'll go on with your last assignment.

RICKERT: OK. That'll be fine.

Q: Today is the 12th of May, 2004, and we'll continue with the conversation that we had several weeks or months ago about your assignment as deputy chief of mission in Bucharest from 1991 to 1995. I think we pretty much finished it, but I believe you had a couple of more things that you wanted to cover.

RICKERT: Tom Lantos had a long-standing interest in the region. In fact, it was due to his insistence and, although no one would admit this officially, a branch office of the embassy was set up in Cluj in the traditional heart of Transylvania, traditional capitol of Transylvania to try to keep an eye on the ethnic Hungarian situation there.

Q: Why don't you tell me just a little more about this branch office? I think those are kind of curious, not too well known. Was there an American officer? How was it structured?

RICKERT: The idea was to have an American officer there and one or two FSN's. It was decided to make it a branch office rather than a consulate or some other type of office for a number of practical reasons. For one thing, if it was a branch, the mayor of Cluj was and still is as of today a rabid nationalist, anti-Hungarian named Gheorghe Funar about whom I could tell lots of stories but won't at this point. I'll tell one, the public statement

he made at one time. It gives you a flavor of how he dealt with minority issues. He said publicly one time – this was, of course in the previous century, the 20th Century – he said, "We Romanians have been in Budapest twice already this century, once after the First World War and once after the Second World War. The next time we shouldn't be in such a hurry to leave." The kind of thing that didn't endear him to the ethnic Hungarian populace which was shrinking and not terribly important numerically, something under 20%, but still very important in the cultural and social and other life of Cluj. He also insisted on raising statues to Romanian heroes and painting all of the park benches in Cluj in Romanian national colors. Some people saw humor in that since Hungarian posteriors were being placed on these tri-colored park benches! In any case, by making it a branch office, the whole deal was the responsibility of the central government and not the county or city of Cluj. The branch office of the embassy...that becomes part of the bilateral relationship between the United States whereas, at least in theory, a consulate should not be set up without some kind of assent from the receiving city or location. They skirted this in that way. Negotiating the opening of this thing was quite difficult because Romanian officials told me that there had been quite a debate within the Romanian government about allowing this. Some of the more modern thinking people said, "If we allow the Americans to have something there on a permanent basis, it will show them in a direct way that a lot of the stories they hear aren't true, and it will actually improve our image and the American understanding of what we're all about." That was the viewpoint that finally won out. I don't remember the exact date, but we found the premises in the university and opened an office. It was to have an American officer, but we didn't have anyone assigned for the first at least six months. So we sent people from the embassy up on TDY for a week at a time, sometimes two weeks, mostly officers, mostly pol and econ officers but sometimes consular or USIA or even admin people would go up and man the office. We found a house for the eventual American officer who was assigned there, an admin officer named Nate Bloom. I remember calling Nate one time when we heard there was a riot in the main square. I called him on an open phone line, and he said, "I can see the main square from my window, and there's certainly no riot there." So, in small ways it proved its value. The other thing that happened was that the officer in charge had an official car and did a lot of travel all over Transylvania, went to villages and small towns, many of which had never been visited by an American official before. I think, at least, it ended up enabling the embassy to show the flag in a positive way at very small expense because housing and the premises – we got the premises free as I recall from the university.

Q: Did you fly the flag?

RICKERT: We did have a flag, yes, outside the window. It was in part of the Cluj University buildings, was two or three large rooms, a little bit of a public affairs section with some newspapers and other such things, and an office for the officer in charge there, and a couple of desks for the FSN's. It worked out pretty well.

Q: Would it receive visa applications?

RICKERT: No. The only thing we would do on the visa side was provide information, forms and so forth, that would be helpful to people who still had to go to Bucharest to get their visas. They had in their hands information that they normally would not have received in advance.

Q: Did the State Department consider it a post?

RICKERT: I don't know if it was officially considered a post, but *de facto* it was a post, it functioned as a post. We had a weekly pouch that went out. It functioned in every way as a post. There was a house for the officer in charge that was provided, paid for, by the embassy. I think it was an interesting experiment. It was not something that's been done in many places, at least not in those particular circumstances.

Q: Is it continuing as far as you know?

RICKERT: It is still continuing. Major Funar is still there. One hopes that in the June 5 elections that he will be replaced by someone of a more moderate point of view, but he's still there at the moment. On the other hand, the more serious concerns about the ethnic Hungarian minority that apparently Tom Lantos had in mind when he requested that this office be opened in exchange for his support for giving MFN – Most Favored Nation – treatment to Romania on a permanent basis. That was the trade-off although probably all concerned would deny it, but that's what it was. The real concerns about the Hungarian minority in that region are no longer valid. They themselves did not justify having an office. The Hungarian party – there is one party that represents the Hungarian minority – is a *de facto* part of the government and has been for some time now. Although one can never say that an ethnic minority is ever satisfied with what it gets from the majority, even allegations of ethnic mistreatment are very, very few and far between and, let's face it, sometimes ethnic X doesn't like ethnic Y not because they are of different ethnic groups but because they just don't like each other. That can happen in Romania or any other place. So everything that happens to a Hungarian, bad that happens to a Hungarian, an ethnic Hungarian, to my mind shouldn't automatically attributed to ethnic tension or strife or hatred of some sort.

Q: The officer in charge of this branch office was sort of responsible for a region?

RICKERT: Yes, that's correct, unofficially. Since it wasn't a consular district, it wasn't an official designation, but we mapped out an area that he was responsible for. Essentially, much of Transylvania, not the whole, because some of Transylvania goes all the way toward the eastern part of the country, but all of western Transylvania and Von Not which is the south western most part of Romania which is nearest to Yugoslavia. As I said, the first incumbent, the only one during my time there, was very active in getting out and about, and he did quite a bit of reporting, and it was unclassified, unsensitive, faxed to us at the embassy, and then we re-transmitted it. He developed a good feel about what was going on in that part of the country, and did things first like having the first Fourth of July reception in Cluj which had ever been held under official American auspices there. it

was held on a different day than the one in Bucharest, so it was possible to get some good representation up there from the embassy which added to the flavor of the occasion. I think all of us thought at the time that this was done that it was largely a favor to Tom Lantos in order to get something that the administration wanted. Eventually, I think... Opinions vary. During my time it was considered to be on the whole a worthwhile office and operation. My successor had different views. I don't know what the current opinion is.

Q: The DCM supervised that office?

RICKERT: Yes. Well, I did during the time I was there, and one of the problems from the officer in charge's point of view was that he was put under the political counselor after I left, and he didn't feel that he had the access to the front office that he had had previously. I think there was a matter of personalities and so forth. But he reported directly to me, and then I did his efficiency report. The ambassador reviewed it, and he got a promotion out of it, so he was pleased. But the political section got everything that he wrote, and they either edited it and sent it in or incorporated it into their regular reporting. They would task him with things saying, "We heard this or that," and "Could you check it out for us?" I think, you'd probably agree, that a major problem with embassies in general is that they become capital centric, and they become very much tied down and tied up with what's going on in the capital. Their viewpoints are perhaps skewed in some cases by what they see and hear and know perhaps very well and very correctly from the capital. But the United States isn't Washington, DC, and the United Kingdom isn't London, and Paris isn't France.

Q: Did any other countries follow our model?

RICKERT: No, none had set up a branch of an embassy, but as I recall at least the French, British and Germans had sort of USIS operations there with library student advising information of that kind. So Nate did have some European colleagues with whom he could consort up there but they were in a slightly different business although our office did do some of that kind of work as well.

Q: I'm interested in this for several reasons. One, I'm interested in the question of Cyprus these days. There is an office in northern Cyprus, but it doesn't fly the flag, isn't called an embassy branch office, and I think that would make sense if it were. But the other is that I've thought for a long time that when you have a consulate general headed by a consul general, you quickly get into the pattern that it has to be kind of a large place: it needs to have visa officers; it has to have an administrative section; probably needs a security officer these days; it probably needs a political economic officer; it may need a deputy, and pretty soon you have a large post, and then it gets expensive and there are other issues. I thought, "If you could only keep it small!" One officer with maybe a few foreign service national employees and a flag pole, then you can do really quite a bit, so I'm glad it worked in Romania. I think it is working in France and a few other places.

RICKERT: That's what I was going to say. A colleague from my present office is in Lyon, and he's doing this there as a one-American operation. I haven't seen him in a while, so I don't know exactly how its working, and its not called a branch as opposed to an embassy. I don't think they have a special nomenclature for these posts in France. I know before he went out he was very enamored of the idea. I think he has a classified fax so that he can send things to Paris if he needs to, but 98% of what he does, I'm sure, is completely unclassified and open. For a very small price, you've got an American presence in a country like that. He has a very good level of French, he can do all sorts of things not only in the city but around elsewhere. One problem with Nate Bloom was that when he arrived he didn't have Romanian. There was no time to train him. The deal was that he would study Romanian at the university for four hours a day at the beginning and then work at the office for the rest of the day. I'm not sure what level he reached, but by the time I left, he had a good working knowledge of Romanian which was a lot more important in a provincial city like Cluj than it would be in Bucharest. The officers who've been sent since have had the full FSI course, so we presume they have a more than adequate level of Romanian.

Q: OK, anything else we should say about DCM Bucharest?

RICKERT: Lawrence Eagleburger came at one point. There was an interesting nuance or aspect of U. S.-Romanian relations that came out of that visit. The ambassador said, "What we'll do is we will hold a lunch, and we will invite whom we want from the Romanian government but also from other communities, minorities, churches, opposition parties and so forth." Nastasi was the foreign minister at the time. He said, "No, we're the hosts. We'll hold the luncheon, but you can do the list." So, they gave a very nice luncheon for Eagleburger. They invited everyone we asked including the chief rabbi and a lot of opposition people and NGO people and so forth. I thought it was important. It marked a shift in the old thinking that the ruling party controls everything and does what it wants to showing the beginning of the understanding that in a democracy you've got to deal with even those who are opposed to you, who criticize you, who share in different goals and objectives. It worked out fine, and the luncheon was a success.

One of the more interesting though politically unimportant people was a man named Lucien Horowitz. The DCM residence in Bucharest was built 1944 to 1946, and it was built by the parents of Lucien Horowitz who as you might guess were Jewish. Lucien left with his parents – he was about 18 in March 1948 – turned over the keys to the house to an American colonel who was there, fully expecting that they would be back in a relatively short time. Didn't take anything out of the house. His parents settled in Switzerland; he went to London, made a successful career as a commodities broker. According to his wife he built a house very much like the DCM's residence, in countryside outside of London. He had business in Romania and used to come back from time to time. He called up one time and introduced himself, and we invited him over and showed him... He was reluctant. He was a real British gentleman. My wife insisted, and she said, "I want you to see the whole house, attic to basement, garage, the works." It was fascinating going around through the house with him because his parents designed it, and

he explained the reasons for different things, the balcony, the living room, because his mother played the piano there for guests on this balcony. The zodiac signs on the ceiling in the what was called the *gasieniera*, sort of a guest room down in the basement, a serving table in the dining room. Italian stone carvers had carved the fireplace. He was eager to get the house back which as far as I know he hasn't. He said if he got it back, he would sell it or rent it to the Americans because they had taken good care of it in all those years. The most moving thing that happened was when we were showing him around the upstairs. We took him into my son's bedroom. He was there doing his homework. Mr. Horowitz had been very controlled up to that point, and he looked at the floor and saw wall-to-wall carpet as there is in this room here, and he said, "That's a pity because there is a beautiful floor" and mentioned that he had been there when the workmen had put in the last piece in the floor. Then he said, "You know, this was my bedroom when I lived in this house." He really teared up a little bit, and he looked at my son who was not that much younger than he was when he left. In a very Romanian gesture, he reached into his wallet and pulled out a bank note with Romanian king, I don't remember if it was Caroll or Yihad Michael. We introduced him to our son, and he said, "Jonathan, I've been carrying this bank note with me ever since we left Romania, and I want you to have it," and gave it to him which was a very nice gesture. We became very friendly with him, saw him every time he came. He also told stories about how while they were building it, the living room ceiling in that house is about 24' high and how they played volleyball in the living room. They set up a net with his friends and played volleyball.

The difference between Romania in the '70s and Romania in the '90s: In the '70s the embassy had a villa that was paid for by the embassy and could be used for weekend R&R and other purposes of relaxation by embassy staff. It was in the town of Sinaia which is a mountain resort town with the summer royal palace of the Romanian royal family, a place called Peleş is located. It was a nice place. It wasn't particularly modern and had a tiny kitchen, but the air was great, there were a lot of good hikes, and skiing nearby. It was a disappointment to my wife and me when we arrived back in '91 to find that that villa was no longer available. We learned that Ceausescu had forced the embassy out of that villa because it was too close to one that he was occupying, and he just didn't want "foreign spies" around. We had gotten another one that was further up the road near the railroad tracks, and either by design or by accident, the trains which were many going up and down those tracks, always tooted as they went past regardless of the time of day or night. My wife got together with some other people and said, "Why don't we see if we can find a better villa than the new one." So they made a committee, and to make a long story short, they ended up back in the old villa which had become available which was very nice for us. it was nearer, it was nostalgic, it had been upgraded since we were there, and we had a lot of fun. Inspectors subsequently came through and decided the villas in all these posts paid for by the embassy were no longer justified and so they disappeared, but it was fun while it lasted.

I mentioned the 24' ceiling in our living room. One of the things that we did, my wife being Swedish in particular, we always had a Christmas tree of maximum height, right up to the ceiling. The last two years at least, we invited Romanians for a big Christmas party.

It was very touching to be told by more than one person – by several people, "You know, during the dark years, we could see the tree in the DCM's residence, and it was always a sign of hope to us. We never imagined that we could actually be here celebrating Christmas around the tree," which was a very moving testament to the efforts of predecessors who had lived in that house. One things we did, not directly as an embassy, but as the U. S. government while I was there, because of the conflict in Yugoslavia, of course, there were sanctions on exports from Yugoslavia. Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and a number of other countries had U. S. customs teams that were called SAMS or Sanctions Assistance Missions that operated, had a base in the embassy but had teams out along the borders trying to assist local customs with interdiction of one sort or another. This was a mixed blessing from an administrative point of view and other points of view because the folks that came out from U. S. customs were professional customs people, but many of them had never been to a place like Romania before. They were a little bit blue-eyed about what they were told and what they saw. They came for short periods. They were TDYers, so you'd just get one group having a real sense of what was going on and why, and then they'd be gone and a new group would come in. Plus there were the usual problems that one can have from time to time with TDYers who are away from family or other inhibitions from their normal daily existence. My wife worked as a PIT for the customs team in Bucharest which avoided the conflict of interest situation because I didn't control the sanctions assistance mission. They have their own. I mean, they reported to the ambassador, but there was a separate operation. I must say that she as a Romanian speaker and one who knew the country extremely well was a huge help to them because she knew how things worked and didn't work and was able to give them advice on some of their hiring. They picked some of the sleaziest people that I've encountered in Romania. It has more than its fair share, and she was able just by knowing the language and knowing the types, was able to help them avoid some problems that they might have had otherwise. The sanctions teams were, I would say, of limited effectiveness, but they were a useful step forward in developing post-Communist cooperation between our two governments in dealing with practical issues. From that point of view, I think they were well worth their while. There were some other things. My last day in Romania, full day, was July 4, 1995, and Alfred Moses was ambassador. He was gone most of the time because his wife had a very serious cancer. So he would spend three weeks in Washington and then a week in Bucharest and then go back to Washington for three weeks. So, for the last three months, I was chargé about three-quarters of the time. He was supposed to be there for July 4, but he didn't make it. My wife and children had left by then, so I had to host that reception to which President Iliescu and many others came. It was a very nice farewell in a lot of respects because it brought together a lot of people who had been close friends and colleagues and whose friendship I valued. At the very end, the foreign minister, Teodor Melescanu, gave me a book, a tourist-type book of Romania and a letter in it in Romanian which was a compliment to me because he said, "I'm writing this in a language I know you understand and love." In part, he thanked me, and I'm quoting, "For exceptional personal contribution to the development and amplification of Romanian-American relations in all areas of common interest." It also cited my many years in the service of friendship, cooperation, and understanding between the Romanian and American peoples and between the authorities and NGO's in both

countries. That was a very nice note on which to depart.

Q: Sounds like a very nice tribute. Its sort of unusual to have your last official day be hosting a Fourth of July reception, but I suppose that's happened elsewhere on occasion.

RICKERT: I left the next morning, but before going to bed that night, a local radio station asked to do an interview which I did on the phone from my bedroom at about 10:30 that night in Romanian, and the next morning up and out. So I was on duty right up to the last minute. Ambassador Moses did get in actually that evening but too late to host the reception. He came for the last part of it.

Q: So you handed over...

RICKERT: I handed over...

Q: ...to him.

RICKERT: Right.

Q: Okay, and you went back to Washington to be Director of the Office of the North Central European Affairs in the summer of '95 and were there, I guess, for three years. I guess the first question I have is what countries are encompassed by North Central European Affairs?

RICKERT: The creation of this office was due to a reorganization that Dick Holbrooke carried out in EUR. I wasn't around in Washington when it happened, but I gather that he believed that some of the offices had gotten too big and too unwieldy. So he subdivided certain offices and made more of them but smaller and did away with deputy directors, so one layer was reduced. North Central Europe or NCE was created out of the old originally EUR/EE which then under Eagleburger as assistant secretary for European affairs in the early '80s, it became EEY, Eastern European and Yugoslav Affairs as it was when I was in the office. It also covered the three Baltic states. There was a political desire not to have them in the same bureaucratic unit as covered the Soviet Union because that would be kind of a tacit recognition of the earlier absorption of those countries. So it was handled out of EEY, and then when EEY was broken up it was split into three. The three Baltic states went to a new Nordics and Baltics office, EUR/NB. Six countries that were Poland, Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia were considered to be North Central Europe. The Romanians were delighted to be included with the rest of those countries.

Q: Even though I would think that Romania and Slovenia and what, Bulgaria?

RICKERT: No. Bulgaria was not. Bulgaria was in SCE, South Central Europe. So the third office was South Central Europe which was all of Yugoslavia except for Slovenia; that is, of the former Yugoslavia, plus Bulgaria and Albania. I have some disagreements

with the exact division of this, but I think it was certainly a healthy thing for U. S.-Romanian relations that Romania was put together with Hungary. It's an important rival of Hungary, but also they need each other in different kinds of ways, not have them in different bureaucratic bailiwicks so to speak.

Q: So it was Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia.

RICKERT: Slovenia was clearly the odd man out in Yugoslavia, so that made good sense. Anybody who's been to Slovenia knows its a lot more like Austria and Italy than it is like the rest of Yugoslavia. Its so small that in one sense it doesn't really matter. But the Romanian decision was an important one. The Romanians are sensitive about being considered a Balkan country. Geographically, they're not Balkan, but in terms of customs and psychology and other things, there are many Balkan elements there. By being lumped in with the North Central Europe, they were kind of extracted from the Balkans, bureaucratically if not in fact.

Q: You were the office director. There was no deputy, and how many other officers?

RICKERT: There was a desk officer for each of the six countries, and then there was a regional economic officer who covered economic issues for the whole region. The Poland desk officer was *de facto* deputy director because that was the biggest country, most senior position. First was Trevor Evans, and then Jack Pillsbury, they covered for me when I was absent and served in many ways as deputies in addition to their rather expensive Poland duties. Their help was greatly appreciated.

Q: Was there an assistant Polish desk officer or only the economic officer would help on economic issues.

RICKERT: Slovenia was not enough to keep a very active officer fully occupied. We had political-military officer, too. I forgot about that. The Pol/Mil officer had just come out of Warsaw, and was very current with the Poland situation. But this leads me to something. We had very good people, not a dud in the lot. Bosnia was overshadowing everything, and rightly or wrongly, we were viewed as being overstaffed by the EUR front office, so whenever they needed someone, they grabbed a body from our office. We lost people for months at a time, and we had other gaps due to an early departure for language training and a maternity leave and some other things. But it was the most flexible group of people that I've ever worked with. Everyone understood what the situation was, and when there was a gap and I asked for volunteers, I had a choice of volunteers, and it made the management side of my job extremely easy. I even had people come and say, "I don't have enough to do. What can you..." at different times. "Where is help needed?" I don't say that's never happened, but I've never had that happen on such a broad scale, really across the board. The office had the attitude that we're covering the region, and its not the trade union attitude, "Its not my job description. There's nothing here about covering for the Hungary desk officer or the Czech desk officer. I've got enough to do with my own country." That made it a much more enjoyable and much ,more productive experience

than it might have been otherwise.

When I came in August of l995 after some leave, the DAS when I arrived was Bob Frasure. I didn't know Bob well, but he'd been involved in selecting me for the job, and I knew him somewhat. I always found him to be not only an extraordinarily bright and knowledgeable person, but one of the great human beings of the Foreign Service. So, it was hard that I learned within of a week of my arrival that he had been killed in that terrible accident in Bosnia. He was replaced by Marshall Adair for the first two years, and then Eileen Malloy took over for the last year. Without criticizing or knocking either of the latter in any way, I had a rapport with Bob Frasure that I never developed with the other two. It was not only much more a huge human tragedy that his life was lost, but it was personal and professional loss to me not to work with somebody whom I knew somewhat and admired hugely. I went out to Andrews Air Force base when his and Joseph Kruzel, a DOD official who was killed in that same accident, coffins returned and went to the funeral. It was a very moving but extremely sad, heartrending way to start one's tour. Bob would have been my immediate supervisor during my time there. That happens. Its a reminder of the dangers and vagaries of our profession that too often are not noted by the general public.

Holbrooke was there for a while and then was followed by John Kornblum and finally was followed by Marc Grossman. Holbrooke was not there for that long, but he and Kornblum were really consumed by Bosnia and related issues, so they didn't give a great deal of attention – and correctly so – to my little patch of the world. But nonetheless, there were things happening in our area. Most of the countries were on a good track toward NATO EU, European integration. There were two trouble spots; two out of six. Slovakia with Meciar, the prime minister, and all that he represented, sort of buggish post-Communist, crummy Capitalist in corruption. A little reform rhetoric, but very little reform in behavior, and all sorts of nastiness going on there. And then Romania which, of course, I knew well, had just come from, and knew was lagging behind the others. So I really focused, I'd say, at least 80% of my attention to Slovakia and Romania knowing that the very competent desk officers would take care of the rest and keep me informed which they did. The biggest issue during my time there was NATO enlargement. Our office for whatever reason did not play a central role in that process, but we were involved in dealing with countries that were trying to get in and the lobbyists of all stripes who came to make their case. It's a long and complicated process. I have the impression that the ultimate decisions were really made in Strobe Talbott's office and, of course, the decision was that three could enter. There were five who could be considered serious candidates. The three that got in, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary, and then next a very close fourth was Slovenia, and then Romania wasn't what I'd say distant fifth, but it was considerably behind Slovenia. There was an obvious debate within the administration involving the White House and Talbott and then the EUR front office. Not a lot of it drifted down below that level about who should get in. I made the argument that if you weren't going to take all five, then you should take three, the reason being that if Slovenia went in with the first group, it would be much harder to have a second round with one country, Romania, then with two or more. Ron Asmus, who was the DAS in the front

office, a political appointee, very knowledgeable, Rand corporation alumnus and an excellent person to deal with, did a lot of the NATO expansion work for EUR. I had the impression that he accepted this logic. Whether that made a difference in the end or not, I don't know. Slovenia was so small and had so little military that it really didn't matter one way or another, but it did matter from a practical point of view for further enlargement of NATO.

Q: There was probably a further argument in that Slovenia was a part of the dissolution of Yugoslavia which, "If I'd only been independent a few years," while it was as you said very different from the other former Yugoslav republics, it was still from that background, and it seems to me that you could argue just strictly from an old Yugoslav point of view, it was better to wait a little bit longer compared to Poland, the Czech Republic, at least, and Hungary. At any rate, that's what happened.

RICKERT: That's an interesting point. It was never stated to me outright, but I found when I came in '95 that there was still, I found in various ways, there was still within the bureaucracy, I would say more than lingering resentment against Slovenia for having in effect precipitated the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Q: And that happened at a time where U. S. policy was very much to try to keep it together.

RICKERT: That's correct. It started in the summer of '91. I was in Sweden about to go to Romania. I remember seeing the mini civil war between Serb forces and Slovenia forces, it would have been in July of '91, on the Swedish television. I found in talking with people, I don't want to use too strong a word, a reticence about Slovenia partly because of this role that they had played. They, as it was viewed, had pursued their own interests rather than the interests of the greater good of Yugoslavia. Although I don't think that anyone would say that they were responsible for the dissolution of Yugoslavia, they certainly opened the door to what eventually happened. The Slovenian ambassador to the U. S. at that time was a man named Petrich. He had been here even before we recognized Slovenia. We took some time to recognize Slovenia's independence, and he'd been kind of a shadow ambassador in Washington. He was a Slovenian/Yugoslav diplomat of Slovenian origin and a very good professional. We became quite friendly during the time that I was working in NCE. He'd mentioned diplomatically some of the hurdles that he'd had to overcome in order to establish himself and Slovenia as being legitimate partners for dialogue and for a normal relationship. He did it without bitterness and without name-calling. I think he understood what the reasons were. But he would say that Slovenia's job was to look after Slovenia and two million people can't save the whole of Yugoslavia. If they hadn't moved, he'd say they would have risked a worse fate, and they had to do what was best for themselves, and the United States believes in self-determination, and why didn't you believe in our self-determination? Something along those lines.

Q: I guess one answer is we weren't all too keen on new borders.

RICKERT: Oh, I'm sure there were reasons on the other side, but it was a bit of an awkward situation. I've mentioned that the big problems were with Romania, not bilaterally, but our big concerns were with Romania and Slovakia. There were issues with Slovenia; not between us and Slovenia but between Slovenia and Italy. Slovenia is a small country, and the issue was a small one, but it was a very important one. There was a question of property restitution. There were Italian citizens living in Slovenia at the end of World War II who owned houses that were nationalized. In the 1990s there was a Nationalist government in Rome which had its strength in the north, and they refused to allow Slovenia to get EU associate member status until this old property issue was resolved. For reasons that I couldn't recreate if I tried, it seemed that – and this is often the case – that they really couldn't do it bilaterally, so we got pulled in. I was going back over my desk calendar a few days ago, and saw the number of times that I met with the Italian political consular who is now the political DCM here, by the way, on this issue. I'd see him at least once a week and sometimes more often. Stefano Stefanini was a very reasonable person, but he was representing his government, and his government had a position which he had to defend and did defend ably. But he personally recognized that it wasn't in Italy's ultimate interest to have Slovenia as an EU member, and we worked at length with the Slovenians and with the Italians to come up with the formula that provided for compensation for the houses. In some cases the actual houses would be returned, in some cases that wasn't possible. Eventually the Italians removed their hold, so to speak, and Slovenia which has the highest per capita income of any country of the former Communist world actually by a pretty good margin, over $10,000 a year, was able to get on the EU track and now as we speak is an EU member.

Q: Want to talk about Slovakia a little bit and what you did with that?

RICKERT: Yes. Slovakia was eager to gain admission to NATO. They really thought that because Czechoslovakia had been on track that even if split off that it wouldn't affect anything. They would just slide in as they would have had they remained part of Czechoslovakia. This breakup took place I believe in January of '93, so it was just a couple of years later that this happened. The U. S. watched with growing dismay the way in which Prime Minister Meciar and his cronies were running the country. Although they often said the right things, it was clear that the privatizations were being done in a very thuggish, corrupt way. The President of Slovakia, Mikhail Kováč who had been an ally of Meciar at an earlier stage, took stands against Meciar. His son ended up being drugged and put into the trunk of a car and taken to Austria and dumped.

Q: Whose son?

RICKERT: The president of Slovakia is a head of state with very limited powers. But in a young republic, its an important non-partisan position even if a person comes from the party, he or she is there as a representative of the people, not of any party or group. Some people who revealed what was going on. one former secret policeman was killed; others were terrorized in different ways. There was a lot of pre-'89 nastiness going on. Ted Russell was the ambassador at first, and he had a real frosty relationship with Meciar. As

things got worse, he was replaced by Ralph Johnson who also was not on buddy-buddy terms with Meciar. Ralph, in addition, as things got worse, went around the country making speeches in Slovak which stated the U. S. position. He was polite and correct. He didn't trash anybody, but you didn't have to be psychic about what he was driving at. And then Meciar would complain about the American ambassador getting involved in internal affairs and so forth and so on. So we used every opportunity to pass the message to Meciar and his various cronies and henchman that they could do whatever they wanted to in their own country but don't ask us to support it or accept it. One of the first things that I did as office director was to go on a trip with Secretary of Defense Perry to visit four of the countries. This was late September, early October '95, and I went to Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary and Czech Republic. That, of course, was a very interesting trip for me. I'd never been along on a trip of that sort. I'd been on the receiving end of visits but never along as one of the party. I won't go into all the details, but I found Perry to be an extraordinarily effective diplomat. He was very good and clear in explaining what was necessary for countries to do to get into NATO.

Q: Was he interested in your views of how to accomplish these goals?

RICKERT: Yes. He drew on a lot of different people. I was one of many. Joe Nye was on this trip, and Dan Fried of the NSC, and others. So I was relatively a junior figure, but in his staff meetings he asked everybody what they thought and had a very open and very collegial manner. A real gentleman and a very fine person, and I think he had an excellent sense of what was going on and what had to happen in the region. He annunciated something called "The Perry Principles." The EU had very specific, rigid hoops that have to be jumped through for a country to get in – bringing their legislation into accord with the EU and all sorts of very specific things that had to be done. NATO never had anything like that. Perry had to, I think, distill the essence of what we expected of new NATO members. There were obvious things like no border disputes, no internal interethnic conflicts. I mean not that life was perfect but that there were no open running sores as far as interethnic relations were concerned, civilian control of the military, and a number of things like that. I remember his meeting with Meciar, polite, but I view it as "the gentlemen meets the buck." It was Meciar with Briefy a former boxer and looked like he's been on the losing end in a few of his matches, and clearly in charge: rough, gruff, tough. Perry who didn't flinch, didn't back off, didn't raise his voice, but spelled out very clearly, "Mr. Prime Minister, Slovakia will be most welcome in NATO when this, this, this, this, and this happen." Meciar didn't like it but didn't stalk out or anything like that.

During that visit we also met with the head of the parliament, a man named Gasparovich who was a Meciar acolyte who gave the same Meciar line in slightly more polite terms and, interestingly, later broke with Meciar not on ideology, but Meciar left him off the list during election for a seat in parliament. So he made his own party. And the way the wheel turns, he is now president of Slovakia because through some strange turns of events, he and Meciar in the last election a few weeks ago ended up as the two leading winners, neither of them really acceptable to the west, but Gasparovich was probably the lesser of two evils.

Late that year the Romanian president Ion Iliescu came to the States, had meetings in Washington, and then he had his own presidential plane and flew out to the west coast. He went to Seattle and then to Los Angeles and I was asked by EUR to accompany him as representative of the department. That was really very interesting to watch the interplay between him and the other higher-ups in the Romanian government as well as a whole slew of hangers on of various sorts and varying degrees of respectability. We went through the Boeing plant and were received at Microsoft, and so it was for me being part of a foreign delegation seeing Boeing and Microsoft through their eyes rather than as an American because I was on this group. He was very well received in Seattle and a former FSO, who was head of the Foreign Affairs Council up there, Ron Woods, put on a really nice dinner. Boeing did some really good things. They pulled together people from the northwest who had adopted children in Romania, and they had a meeting with Iliescu along with many of the children. It was heartwarming to see how these kids at least appeared to be thriving and doing very well in their new environment. Then we went down to Los Angeles. Los Angeles is one of the largest centers of Romanian émigrés, so there were some pickets and some other unpleasantness. Iliescu was...I wouldn't say demonized by the United States, but because of his role or presumed role in the calling in of the coal miners in June '90, after the first election, and subsequently some people considered him a more evil person than he really is. He's a politician and a very smart politician. He's made some mistakes, and he has some blind spots, but ultimately he wants what's best for Romania. That's much more important than ideological attachments that he may have had growing up as the son of an early Communist and all the rest. He's never going to change his fundamental way of thinking. His reactions are formed by his youth and middle age, and he's now 73. But he knows in his head where the future is, and he's doing everything possible to help within his lights, by his lights, to help Romania get to that future that he thinks is not only inevitable but desirable.

Q: You mentioned the adopted children in the northwest. Is that an issue that you got quite involved with either in the department or previously in Bucharest?

RICKERT: It was a major, major issue during my time in Romania, the first part especially. I arrived in July '91. There had been a huge rush of adoptions right after the revolution when the horrendous situation in the Romanian orphanages became public; cases of pediatric AIDS, of malnourishment, of virtual abandonment. horrible, horrible pictures and stories. There was one family in the embassy who adopted twins shortly before I arrived. These young boys, twin boys, they were a year and a half old when they were adopted, and they were at that age unable to sit up. Neither one had any serious health problems. There were many who had serious health problems. It was a horrible situation. There were a lot of people who came from the States as well as from England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy to adopt out of humanitarian motives. I think, and this is a subjective judgment on my part, but I think after that first wave of humanitarian angst over this situation, then a lot of people who wanted to adopt for the usual reasons said, "Gee. Here's a situation where there are a lot of abandoned kids, and maybe we can find a child here." I'm not impugning their motives, but it was a little bit different from the

initial ones. What happened, in short, is the system was not designed to handle this and huge amounts of corruption got involved. A lot of money was made. Under pressure from us and others the Romanians in July of ’91 put a moratorium on adoptions. This has happened at least twice since then. Its still an issue right today as we speak. Its a major issue in Romania. I read today the embassy press summary, most of which is about adoptions. What happened at that time was that there were some hundred American families partly into the adoption process. Some of them even had taken... I won’t say taken possession, but they had taken over the children that they were going to adopt pending completion of the paperwork and all the rest.

The adoption moratorium began in July of 1991 under which the Romanians refused to allow anyone to be adopted, period, after a certain date. My best recollection is about a hundred American families had children in various stages of the process, and in some cases had had the children with them and had bonded with them and all the rest. It was a very traumatic experience for these people. A lot of them, I’m sure, had paid a lot of money to get to where they were. And then there were others who took advantage of the situation and did things that they shouldn’t do after the moratorium had been announced. In any case, we ended up with a great deal of pressure from the American adoptive parents, a great deal of pressure from the U. S. Congress. I had a call from a U. S. senator on one case, personally. I had a call from the head of the Consular Bureau (CA), Mary Ryan, on another case. Neither said anything that could not be taped and played in public. There was no pressure in anything they said, but DCMs don’t normally get calls from assistant secretaries and U. S. senators about specific cases. Just the fact of the call was a form of pressure and, of course, endless congressional letters of one sort or another, calls from congressmen and others. We worked very hard with the Romanians. To the Romanians’ credit, I think the more sensible people saw that at least there were a number of folks who were genuinely caught in a bind that was not of their own making and that their cases should be taken care of. To make a long story short, most of them were, but it was a very, very painful process. We had a lot of difficulties with Romania at that time, U. S.-Romania relations. I remember one week when I met three times with the foreign minister, once with the president, and once with the president’s equivalent of national security advisor just on adoptions. It was the only issue that Washington had any interest in. It was disturbing to me because, while I didn’t think it was unimportant, I thought: Here we are. We’re calling these people unreconstructed Communists, yet we’re demanding that they give us what we want, and we’re not putting any carrots there at all. Its just, “You have to do what we want.” To my mind, one of the less attractive features of Big American throwing its weight around in a poorer country. But the instructions were there, and I tried to do it as diplomatically as I could. In any case, either the parents gave up and left or the cases were resolved within six months or so. The last cases were in the spring of ’96. Then adoptions were not a serious issue during the rest of my time there, but its come back in various guises and, as I said, its now a serious issue again even as we speak.

Q: Okay. What else should we talk about in terms if NCE, North Central European Affairs. You were not the administrative backstop of the six embassies, but you were

being involved with them quite a bit. Is there anything special we should say about that?

RICKERT: You know, this might sound like its punting, but these were very well run embassies which with high quality professional staff, it didn't need much hand holding. They did have administrative issues with enlarging schools and getting new premises and, to some extent, security, even pre-9/11 security was a growing concern. The Indian ambassador was shot two blocks from my residence in Bucharest by sick terrorists. He had been chief of police in Punjab and apparently knocked a few heads, and they came to Romania and got him. That caught the attention of the security people. In Romania at the end of '96 there were presidential and parliamentary elections. There was a lot of concern in the department that the ruling party, Iliescu's party, if it lost it might not give up power. The opposition was a mixed bag of old émigrés and people who represented liberal, peasant, Christian, democrat, other right-of-center viewpoints for the most part with very little experience in government or in management because there were former Communists among them. They really were a group of people that had limited experience in developing the skills that were needed for government. The election was held in November of 1996, and I arranged to get myself over as an observer.

Q: Whose auspices were you an observer for?

RICKERT: I was an unofficial observer. In all the elections, the embassy sent groups of people all over, and we did our own observing. We did that during my time as DCM there, and we did it subsequently. Of course we coordinated with OFC's and with other groups that were doing observing, but we were not part of an official observing arrangement. A young embassy officer and I went down south of Bucharest to Giurgiu, the Danube River port at one end of the only bridge across the Danube between Romania and Bulgaria. The countryside around there was known as "Iliescu country," and I wanted to go to an area where Iliescu was considered a good guy and observe there. Romanians are very talkative, and I speak the language. We did the observing which was fairly desultory. I don't think you really saw a whole lot in terms of incorrectness, and you see minor violations, two in a booth and non-regulation ballot boxes, but mostly you don't see major violations. But you can talk to people, and Romanians are very talkative, and I talked to a lot of people, and they said, "Well, you know, the other guys have been in since '90, and life is worse than it was when they came in, so its time to try somebody else." This is an agricultural area. These were not city intellectuals or anything like that. These were ordinary folks. I thought, "Gee, they've learned a fundamental lesson of democracy," that you don't need to vote only for whom you'd like to see in, but you can vote against the person that you'd least like to see in. That's what I believe happened. I believe that one of the big mistakes that was made by the opposition which did win and President Constantinescu who did win, and of course the former elected governor did turn everything over completely correctly and without any muss or fuss at all. There was no cause for concern. They didn't leave a whole lot in the national bank account because they did a lot of spending prior to the elections, but that has happened in other countries beside Romania. I think the inexperienced people who came into power viewed their election as a vote for them rather than a vote against the previous crowd. I think if they

looked it as a vote against the previous crowd, they might have gone about their efforts to rule a bit more carefully and more thoughtfully. Constantinescu became president, and then the decisions were going to be made on NATO. Not all that long afterwards the initial decision with Cintra in Portugal there was sort of a NATO summit, and all the potential invitees were involved, and Constantinescu went, met with Talbott there. I wasn't there, but I heard as a sign of his political naiveté the main thing he wanted to talk to Talbott about was getting a replacement for the U. S. ambassador...

Q: ...to Bucharest.

RICKERT: ...to Bucharest, Alfred Moses because he considered – and I might say in an aside – not entirely without justification that Moses was in tight with the Iliescu government.

Q: The previous government.

RICKERT: The previous government. And, therefore, he didn't trust him. I don't think he really understood what ambassadors were supposed to do, but he apparently viewed Moses as "their" guy, and he wanted "his" guy, whomever that might be, to come in as ambassador. The criticism was not totally without merit, but because Moses was there about a week a month, when he came he really honed in on the government people, and he spent his time with the people who were in a position to make things happen. I think a career person would have seen the need to cultivate the opposition more than he did, but his attitude seemed to be that they didn't have power now, and they were more than a little feckless, so it was a waste of time to spend time with them. All of that was true except for the waste of time because even feckless oppositions can be voted in if not on their own merit but because the electorate doesn't want the present government to continue which is what happened.

Q: How long did Ambassador Moses stay?

RICKERT: He stayed for his whole three years.

Q: About through '97.

RICKERT: Right.

Q: Which was a year or so after the election.

RICKERT: That's right. And he developed good working conditions with Constantinescu, but I don't think Constantinescu ever really trusted him. He was the guy who was in bed with the other guys, and we have to work with him because they won't replace him, but anyway, that's my subjective judgment of the situation. All during that spring the Romanians had this idea that the bad guys are out, the good guys are in, the Democrats are in, now there's no reason not to let us into NATO. If we just say so often

enough and loud enough and through enough different voices, the west will accept us. That whole spring, even after Cintra, when it was clear that it was going to be the three, we had endless delegations and, of course, from Romania, most of them were people I knew. They all said exactly the same thing, and it was not really very productive, but that's the way they went about it. Its a shame because if they put all of their energy into fixing things up at home, they might have been further along. They came in on a reform platform, but they couldn't really carry out the reforms that they were talking about and make the push for NATO simultaneously. They didn't have the resources. So they kind of pushed the reforms aside and really focused on NATO which was more or less a losing proposition from the start. So by the time the decisions had been made and the summit had been held which invited the three new NATO members, I think it was in Prague, but I can't recall for certain , that summer, they'd lost their chance. I think its a political truism that if you're going to strike with reforms, you really need to hit hard early because you lose momentum afterwards. After that summit, the U. S. government sent high level delegations to the invitees and to the near misses. Clinton went to Warsaw and to Bucharest. I don't know where else. I went to Bucharest for his visit there, and Secretary Albright was along with him. She went with him to Prague, Warsaw, Bucharest, maybe another stop that I don't know.

Q: Budapest?

RICKERT: No. Perry went to Budapest because they were in. If I recall, the summit was in Prague then Warsaw was the most important post. Bucharest was the most important one that didn't get in, so Clinton went to those two. I think there was a Baltic state involved in this travel. I was there for Clinton's visit. There haven't been, many presidential visits to Bucharest. Nixon went in '69, Ford went in '75, and I think Clinton was the first after that.

Q: Bush didn't go there?

RICKERT: Bush went as vice president but not as president. The present President Bush has been there. So this was a big deal. I've been there for the Ford visit, so I'd seen it under Communist times. It was very interesting from a lot of points of view, but I'll just mention a couple of things. Clinton came in. He didn't even overnight. It was a one-day stay, but the Romanians went all out. Unlike Ford, they didn't let people out of work, they didn't order people to go. They were setting up – the White House advance folks – were setting Revolution Square, University Square, which is right in the center of town for the speech. Clinton was to make a major speech. Constantinescu was to follow with his own speech. They had an elaborate *dais* there. This is on a street called Boulevardo Niguero which is a long boulevard. It's at least a mile, six lanes wide, very spacious. They had it arranged so there was a confined space within the university where you could fill it up with 15,000 people. I said to the White House advance man, "Jonathan, why are you doing it this way? You're going to have a big crowd here, and why not turn it so you can see down the boulevard and see these thousands of people. It would be a great shot." "Oh, no, we can't. Only about 40,000 turned out in Warsaw and they got in, and the

Romanians may not be happy that they didn't get in, and they might not show up. We've got to set it up so we maximize the PR." I said, "Jonathan, I guarantee a minimum of 100,000 people. Minimum. " And, "No, no. We can't do it." Anyway, in the end conservative estimates were 130 thousand, and they could have done it my way, but they knew best. That event was very good. Clinton – I'm not a huge admirer of Clinton in some ways, but – he had a common touch and an ability to deal with people, I'm sure still does, that are unmatched in my experience. He was just fantastic in dealing with people. I really saw it work at a reception that was held in the presidential palace, a place called Cotro Chen where the President Constantinescu invited 150, 200 people from many walks of life, government, political life, academia, church, elsewhere. And Clinton was there, of course with his guards but moving very freely, and he talked with people everywhere. It was almost like he was running for election, and he looked at them, he focused on them, he connected with him in a way that few other politicians that I've seen in action have been able to do. One little anecdote about this: I was talking with the Roman Catholic Archbishop, Archbishop Rovu whom I knew slightly and whom I ran into, and he said to me, "I'm really embarrassed, but before I came here today a young boy asked me if I would get President Clinton's autograph for him, and I don't really want to ask the president for an autograph. It would be embarrassing." He went on and on, and I said to him, I didn't tell him to do it, but I said, "You know, Clinton's a very friendly guy and either he'll say yes and give you the autograph, or he'll say no in a way that doesn't make you feel embarrassed. So either way, its fine, and don't worry about it." And just then the Italian ambassador who in my experience always feel that they own me, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Eastern Europe, came along and grabbed Archbishop Rovu who's the Archbishop of Bucharest, and took him to meet with Clinton. And there were guards and there were others, Italian ambassador and all these people around. I was watching from a distance, and then after a while Rovu's head came up like this. So he put his thumb in the air: thumbs up which... I didn't have a chance to chat with him afterwards, but I felt that he got what he needed and was very happy about it. On a less happy note, one of the things that the embassy decided to do at this reception with people like me and embassy officers, was to ensure that important people got to meet Secretary Albright who was there, but obviously Clinton, the president, was then center of attraction. So knowing of the Secretary's interest in minorities and other such issues, I grabbed the head of the Hungarian party who was a good friend of mine and brought him over to the Secretary and said, "Madame Secretary, this is Bella Marco, head of Boudenaray, the Hungarian party, and he would be very pleased to meet you." She said in effect, "But what are you bringing him here to me for?" and turned away. So I didn't waste any more time bringing people to meet with the Secretary. It had been a long day for her, but I must say I was less than overwhelmed. I mean, she exchanged a couple of words with him and then turned away and turned to aides, and that was it.

Q: So you took him over to meet the president.

RICKERT: No, I didn't take anyone to meet the President because there were others who were doing that. I didn't meet the President myself, but I certainly watched and as I said was very impressed. Mrs. Albright went to Slovenia, and another near miss. She spent a

day there, and I went along on that trip. She seemed happier running her own show rather than playing second fiddle. I don't think the purpose here is to bad mouth anybody, but I was disappointed in her treatment of U. S. ambassadors to Slovenia. Vic Jackovich who was – he is retired now – a career officer with Yugoslav background and extensive professional experience: former ambassador in Bosnia, ambassador in Slovenia, served a couple of times in Yugoslavia as a USIA officer. I've known him since the early '80s. We came with the Secretary and got settled, and Vic came up to me and said, "What am I supposed to do?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Nobody from the Secretary's party has asked me anything." She said hello when he came out to the airport, and that was it. He said, "I'm happy to talk to her about Slovenia, about the people she will be meeting tomorrow, about the sensitivities, issues, anything else, or even where a good restaurant is," but she went with her little group of people, and they went off to dinner at a restaurant, never spoke to the ambassador. Could have invited him along just to chat but didn't. I thought this was, shall we say, shabby treatment among other things. As you know far better than I, one of the key things for an ambassador in any post is the symbols of support from his or her higher levels. So the pictures one always sees of the ambassador with Reagan, the ambassador with Bush, the ambassador with Clinton that sit prominently in offices or front halls of residences with the Secretary and those types of things are of some significance, and Albright did not do that. Otherwise, she did an excellent job in every way. Was very, very good there. But sometimes, it's the small things that stick in your mind. I mean, she spoke with the president, the prime minister, met with key member of parliament, both government and opposition, and was a real pro except for that one time.

Going back a little bit before the NATO summit, one thing that I learned, a lesson...this would have been in June '97 just before the final announcement...the Romanian prime minister, he was their last card they played, a man named Viktor Ciorbea, who was I think a decent soul but a very limited person to be playing on the large stage, international relations. He came to Washington and asked to meet with Talbott, had a decent meeting with Talbott. Talbott didn't give him any hope that the U. S. position was going to change and urged him not to lobby the Germans or others to cause problems for us which he didn't do. He went up to New York, and we received a call from saying that he must meet with Talbott again, he had important things to discuss with Talbott. Talbott was a little bit put off but agreed to do it. The meeting was set for one day, and the afternoon before I met with his senior aide, a man with the interesting name of Constantin Dudu Ionescu. So Dudu Ionescu came in, and I said, "Dudu, what does he want to talk about?" It was some minor stuff! It wasn't anything important at all. This was in the afternoon. So I wrote it up very carefully in an E-mail and sent it to Eric Edelman who was Talbott's senior assistant about 6:00 in the evening and thought nothing further of it. The meeting was 10 or 11 the next morning. Went into the meeting and Constantinescu did exactly as Dudu Ionescu had said he was going to do. Talbott got irritated, and Eric looked at me and said, "What is he here for?", and I realized that Eric hadn't read the E-mail. I don't say this at all as a criticism of anybody except myself: I learned then you don't just send an E-mail, especially to busy people in busy offices. You make sure that more than one person gets it, then you call to make sure that they've gotten it because a lot of embarrassment and

nothing of terrible consequence happened as a result of this but what could have been handled much more skillfully by... I don't blame Talbott for not doing it skillfully. If he had the information, he would have done it. I've seen him in action many times, and he was excellent with these people, but not knowing what I knew and what I sent to Eric, he didn't know how to react, and it was my fault. So, there it is, a mistake I haven't made since.

I'll mention another Clinton *vignette*. In February of 1997 he received credentials from ambassadors and two previous sessions had been postponed; one, since the government was closed, and then the second because of a huge snowstorm we had. So, when he finally got around to it in February in 1997, there were ten ambassadors which he did at once. The Romania Ambassador was Marasjed Juana whom I've known since he was a mid-level diplomat in the foreign ministry and knew his wife. Normally the desk officers did this, but I wanted to do the Romanian one because I knew the ambassador so well. So I took him over. It was kind of a zoo with all of the families and everyone else in the holding pen waiting for Clinton to do this. I've never seen Clinton up close, so I was curious to see how he behaved. Juana was number nine, and he was 35 at the time and he had his wife and his three-year old and his six-month old daughter with him. We came into the Oval Office, and they had the photographs and the normal chit-chat and Alexandru, the boys, was like a normal three-year old, wanted to run around. Clinton just smiled, and he had what looked to me to be a... I've seen pictures of him in Kenya. The chiefs have this sort of this whisk. Its a piece of wood with like horse hair at the end, a fly whisk of some sort.

Q: Its a symbol of authority.

RICKERT: Yes. Like a scepter in a way. He had one on his desk, so he gave it to Alexandru, and Alexandru was running around the Oval Office and shaking this, and Clinton was laughing and obviously very fond of... I mean, you can fake some things, but he was obviously very pleased to have this young boy, probably more interesting than a bunch of late middle-aged grey-haired ambassadors. He had read his talking points, he said everything he needed to say, he responded, he knew where Romania was, he didn't mention Dracula. He did all the right things. I was impressed. I often wondered what happened next because Number Ten on this list was the Croatian ambassador who went in with his wife and four kids.

Q: Small kids?

RICKERT: Small kids. Well, ranging from about four to twelve, something like that. He probably finished with a flourish.

I knew when I came to the job at NCE that I was in OC, and that I had to be promoted during my time there in order not to tic (time-in-class) out. It was a time of very few promotions from OC to MC, and indeed by looking at lists I could see that office directors were almost not ever getting promoted. It was ambassadors in small countries,

DCM's in large posts, and so forth and so on. Almost no office directors, so I was realistic about my chances even not taking into amount of whether or not I deserved it on basis of performance, but as you know very well, the decisions are made during the course of the summer, and early in August a letter is sent to those who have ticked out. In my final year, that would have been summer of '97, I sat very nervously sat through August waiting for a letter which I didn't receive. I say nervously through September for a letter which I didn't receive. The list came out if I recall, in early October, and I couldn't believe that I was on it. But I thought, "How could I not have been informed if I was not on it?" it came out, and I wasn't there. My name wasn't there. I asked the EU/EX director Don Hayes who is a friend and who knew about these things, and he said, "Oh, I've seen the list from EUR of the people who ticked out, and you're not on it, so you're okay." I checked with a couple of other people, and they said, "You're okay." I said, "Look, I know what my tic date is, and if I'm not on that list, I'm out, and if I'm out I ought to know about it." So I called CDA and talked with my counselor, and she had the same list and said, "You're not in, so you're okay. No problem." I said, "That's not good enough." So I checked with PER/PE and said, "Look, this is the situation. There's something terribly wrong here. They said, "We'll look into it." They called back an hour later and said, "Oh! You're out." And that was the end of that.

Q: You're out meaning...

RICKERT: ...ticked out.

Q: And you'll be getting a letter.

RICKERT: Yes. When the list had been prepared, my name had not been on it. Not being promoted was – I won't say delighted me – but it was not nearly as painful as the treatment by the system of not having the decency to do what is always done for people who tic out. Just a bureaucratic error and it's you're problem. Get over it. And that was essentially what the system said. I think that people deserve better than that.

I stayed on for my last year in NCE and did the best I could and then left in early July of '98. I wanted to make a quiet exit and did make a quiet exit, but we had a little party in the office. One of the desk officers who was working for me had worked for Talbott at an earlier time, and said apparently, "Look. This isn't right that a guy has worked 35 years for the U. S. government should slink out the back door,. We have to do a little more than that." So he got hold of somebody on Tom Pickering's staff. Pickering came down to the little party we were having at the office. Somebody had given him some very nice talking points which he delivered. I've met him but didn't know him, but in a very professional and thoughtful and decent way as you would expect from Tom Pickering. It was a nice little note at the end of my 35-plus years of government service.

Q: And seven years later, you're still working at the Department of State!

RICKERT: Not quite seven. After leaving there, I went into the job search program, and

then started in October 13, 1998 in EUR. What was it called? EEA it was called. It was the seed office covering support for the European democracy funds. Now its called the EUR/ACE as a WAE (when actually employed) and after that time ended, they decided they wanted to keep me on, and have done so on a contract basis ever since. So, I'm still around.

Q: And working full time.

RICKERT: I'm working full time, yes. So, there it is!

Q: OK. Well, the tape is almost over. Any last words or have you given them already?

RICKERT: I think I've given them.

I think that I have been very fortunate to have continued employment since then in a field that is relevant to my experience. I have to say I've been better treated as a contractor than I was at times an FSO, but that's another matter. It's a privilege and honor to work with the U. S. government now over 40 years. The experience and knowledge that I've gained over that time, most of it or much of it in Central and Eastern Europe is still being put to use for which I'm grateful. I have very few regrets from my career as a whole. Most of them are things I can see. I could have done better or more wisely. Occasionally I think the department could have done better by me, but I have no real regrets, certainly no grudges, and nothing but a feeling of great respect and appreciation that I was able to work as long as I could doing the things that I did.

Q: Well, thank you very much, Jonathan. I appreciate it and learned a lot and appreciate your taking the time and giving me... I don't think I've ever interviewed anybody as well prepared as you have come to these conversations, so I thank you especially for that, too.

End of interview