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

CHARLES R. RITCHESON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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Background
  Born in 1925 and raised in Maysville, Oklahoma
  University of Oklahoma (V-12 program), 1942-44, 1946 – Undergraduate
    Harvard University
  Oxford University, St. Edmond Hall, 1948-1951 – Doctorate

Military Service:
  Northwestern University - Chicago Campus, midshipmen training & commission, 1944
  Harvard Communication School, Naval Communication School, January 1945
  Military Service – U.S. Navy - Pacific

Academia:
Oklahoma College for Women, 1951-53
  Associate History Professor

Kenyon College, Ohio, 1953-65
  History Professor and Chair

Southern Methodist University, 1965-71
  Chairman and Director of Graduate Studies

Sabbatical, University of Southern California, 1971-72
  Chair in British History

U.S. Government Service:
London, England 1974-1977
  Cultural Attache; United States Information Agency (USIA)

United States Information Agency (USIA)
  Lecture Tour on the American Revolution for Bicentennial
    (Korea, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan, Egypt, Greece)

Return to Academia:
University of Southern California
    Chair in British History
    Founder, West Coast Branch of the Conference on British Studies
    Chairman, University Library Committee

Retired 1991

Post retirement:
    Fun For Arts and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe
    Senior Vice President
    Country Director for Hungary and Poland

INTERVIEW

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

Q: Today is the 10th of March, 2010. This is the first interview with Charles Ritcheson. Is there a middle initial or?

RITCHESON: R., Ray.

Q: R. Ray. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Charles?

RITCHESON: Yes, that's right.

Q: All right. All right. Well, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

RITCHESON: I was born February the 26th, 1925 at Maysville, Oklahoma, a small town about 50 miles south of Oklahoma City.

Q: All right. Do you want to tell me a bit about the Ritcheson's history? On your father's side first.

RITCHESON: My father's side. The Ritchardsons as they were at one point before we became Ritchesons in the 19th century. The Ritchenson family descends from the Ritchardsons of Hertfordshire, a little place called West Mill, Hertfordshire not far from London. The first Ritchardson appears in 1502, that is in the reign of Henry VII. They were simple people, workers on the farms. And over the decades they became small keep -- small farmers, puritans, and immigrated with Winthrop to Massachusetts Bay in 1630. My ancestor, director ancestor was Ezekiel who helped found Charlestown and then Woburn, and is buried there with his brothers. I am then a child of the westward movement on my father’s side. Generations after the settlement of Massachusetts the family found itself in Virginia and particularly in Bedford County, Virginia. Four sons fought for the American cause in the Revolution and one of those, Amos, my immediate ancestor went on to Tennessee where he died in 1853. His son, Thomas, that is my great-great grandfather, migrated to Missouri, and his son, John, veteran in the Civil War on the Federal side, finally settled in what was then the Indian territory that became the state of Oklahoma.

Q: He was a Sooner then.

RITCHESON: He was a Sooner, yes.

Q: He was a Sooner before the Sooners were Sooners.

RITCHESON: Yes. Interesting man. And his son, my grandfather, and my father continued to live in Oklahoma. My father came to settle at Maysville where he encountered another westward moving family, the family of my mother. I hope I’m not giving you too many details.

Q: No, you’re not. It’s interesting. Do you know what your grandfather on your father’s side was up to?

RITCHESON: Yes, he was a farmer at first and then became a merchant, ran a series of small stores in Oklahoma. His technique was to buy a small store, build it up, sell it, and move on to another opportunity at another town. Therefore, he very rarely lived long in any particular place. It was one of the great complaints of my father, by the way. And one of the reasons why when he found my mother he settled down and lived there for the rest of his life in Maysville.

Q: Well, now your father, what sort of life did he have?

RITCHESON: My father was basically a businessman. As a young man he was appointed postmaster of Maysville in a Republican administration, the Hoover Administration. When Roosevelt was elected and lacking the protection that civil servants had now, he was turned out and replaced by a Democrat. It was a very good thing for him because he took to business at which he became a considerable success in Garden County, Oklahoma. In addition, he acquired some land and became what I would think of as quite prosperous in that area.

Q: Had he gone to college?

RITCHESON: No, he had not. He had gone to business college, but a formal education, no, he did not have that.

Q: All right. Let’s take your mother’s side. What do you know about that?

RITCHESON: Well, we know rather less about the history of that family. We can't trace it back before the 18th century, but by the 18th century they too are in Virginia. The family name is Vaughn, V-A-U-G-H-N, a Welsh family. We do know that early in the century a Vaughn man, Thomas, migrated by ship, worked his way across from Bristol, to Virginia, settled there, established family, and ultimately the same pattern played itself out in my mother's family. Successive generations moved west, Tennessee also, and then Arkansas where my great-great-grandfather, that is to say my mother's grandfather fought in the Civil War but on the Confederate side. And then ultimately that family too, seeking new lands and opportunities in the West, went to Carbon County, Oklahoma, where my mother and father met.

Q: How did they meet? Do you know?

RITCHESON: There is a marvelous story about my mother, who was then something like 17, I think, strolling around the main street of this little town, stopped to look at a display -- through a display window. It was the shop of my grandfather, my paternal grandfather's. Or a young man was arranging some items in the window for display and their eyes met and it was magic *(laughs)*.

Q: (laughs) Ah yes, never discount display windows. What about, what sort of education did your mother have?

RITCHESON: My mother had a high school education, but she was naturally a bright, a bright mind. Loved Latin, for example. And learned much from her own father, my grandfather on that side, who was a college graduate. And I'd have to say that she had a formidable native intelligence that allowed her to make up for the lack of formal instruction.

Q: Well, of course it was an era -- I know because I come from this era too -- where many of the women, I mean they weren't going to college as much, but often they read a lot and were, were pretty strong leaders. And their children showed it.

RITCHESON: I think that applies to my mother. She was a very strong personality without really showing it. She was a natural diplomat.

Q: Well then, OK, let's talk about family life. You grew up in this town, the town of --

RITCHESON: Maysville.

Q: Where did you live?

RITCHESON: We lived in the town.

Q: What kind of house did you?

RITCHESON: We lived in a brick house, which had actually been transformed from an earlier incarnation. It was in fact a remodeled filling station, which my father owned. And, and at one point in his business development, he established a filling station someplace else in the town. And this building, which had been his major business base, was transformed into a house, a four-bedroom house. It was certainly no great thing as architecture goes, but it was comfortable.

Q: The town of Maysville, what was it like when you were a kid?

RITCHESON: What was it like?

Q; Yeah.

RITCHESON: The population was about, I should think, 500 people. I mean quite small. And the first immigrants who settled there were mostly overflow from the Civil War from the south, southern families getting out of devastated areas and so on. So there was an air of southern, and if I may so, gentility about the place. People were polite to each other and entertained, not lavishly, but supper or Sunday afternoon watermelon feasts, that sort of thing. It was in that way a southern artifact. And I saw the change in my own lifetime from a southern orientation to a western one. That southern quality had some fairly negative matters too when it comes to race, as you can perhaps imagine. For example, there was a so-called sundown law in that little town, which said that no person of color could remain in that town overnight. And that was the background for something quite dramatic in my life. A lady of the town of some means, she was the owner of the local bank, a widow, hired a domestic to live in her servant's quarters, as we called them. That was not to be tolerated by the citizens of Mayville, and there was actually an ugly gathering of people around that house one night. And the poor person who thought she had a job fled. This is just an example of southern quality of the wrong kind, perhaps.

Q; How were Indians treated? Because Oklahoma has a rather strong Indian -- in fact, ADST's president, Ambassador Ken Brown, has a grandmother from Indian, I think. He's from Oklahoma.

RITCHESON: Is he really?

Q: Yeah.

RITCHESON: That's interesting how they were treated. One of my earliest memories, when I was perhaps even two or three-years-old, is being taken by my father and mother to Anadarko, which is about perhaps 50 or 60 miles away deep in Indian territory for tribal meetings called pow-wows. And I remember Indian dancing with just great delight. So how were they treated? Well, I'd have to say not very well. They were regarded as apart from people of color, but nonetheless as a bit on the savage side. There were stories of their abuse of alcohol and that sort of thing. So two ways to look at it. One is as kind of a cultural phenomenon there. And I was fascinated by Indian culture, by the way, in my growing up years, checking out many, many books from the Oklahoma State Library on the Indians. These were the Indians who were not of the so-called civilized tribes. I'm talking now about the Arapaho, the Cheyenne, and so on. The civilized Indians -- who were not in my area, not in the Mayville area, but further north, Tulsa and the Cherokee strip. The so-called civilized Indians who were shipped out or who were driven out in President Jackson's day, the Trail of Tears and so on, they were something else again. They had a culture, they had a civilization. And maybe more important, they had money as well, which they'd got from oil. They existed outside my ken. I didn't really focus on them very much because our Indians near at hand were the Plains Indians. I think I'm going on too long about this.

Q: No, no. I like catching these sort of nuances within society that --

RITCHESON: Yep. We're talking about the 1920s, before World War II.

Q: Now, what was like life for a -- first place, did you have brothers? Sisters?

RITCHESON: I was the oldest of four. My immediate sibling was my sister. Then there was a gap of something like 13 years and I had a brother and then after that another sister. So we were four. But for the most part I would have to say that in these terms, it was my sister and I, my older sister and I who formed the first family with my parents and the younger ones came after. And this is a special case because I went to university and into the war while my brother was still quite young. I had a younger sister too.

Q: Well, let's talk about being a kid. Before we get to school, what was it like growing up in Maysville? As, particularly when you're quite young?

RITCHESON: It was a very small place. There were not many cultural amenities. I suppose the two chief cultural influences were the movies, that is to say Tom Mix and Saturday afternoon picture shows, and the other perhaps more important was the church. We were Methodist and I think it was generally agreed that the better people were Methodist *(laughs)*. The others were Baptist. And we didn't allow anything in Maysville like Roman Catholics. That was not allowed.

Q: Did you have -- often small towns have a Jewish owner of a store or something like that.

RITCHESON: That's very interesting. I suddenly recognized this fact forty years later. It was something that was kept quiet. It was never mentioned that he was Jewish.

Q: Well, how important was the church in your upbringing?

RITCHESON: Very. Very. It was a kind of organizing principle in a social way for people my age growing up. There were all sorts of activities, including of course Sunday worship. But their activities in the summer, there was even a camp down at Turner Falls about 50 or 60 miles away in the Arbuckles. And so it was very important.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

RITCHESON: Yes, yes I was. And I owe that in some measure to my mother. But even more perhaps to my grandfather, Samuel Edward Vaughn, who was a graduate of a university in Arkansas. I think it was the University of Fayetteville, which is now part of the University of Arkansas. He himself was a teacher. He and his brother founded the public schools at Maysville, and had a great influence on my development, that is intellectual development, as did my mother. And because of them I began to read. I learned to read very early. I'm told I read by two. I don't know whether this is true or not, but it's very certain that I began to read very early. And so it never left off.

Q: Well, where'd you get your books?

RITCHESON: Yes. That's an interesting question. I was always given a lot of books for Christmas, they were no longer sufficient. So I remember getting in touch with the Oklahoma State Library at Oklahoma City and arranging to have them ship me books on certain subjects. I would say, for example, "I want to learn more about Indian history in Oklahoma." And down would come -- I was allowed five books at a time -- five books neatly packaged up, selected by some dear old lady I suppose at Oklahoma City. And I would read these until I finished and sent them back to her. And it was a kind of ongoing supply like this. And I would change subjects from time-to-time. At one point I wanted to know about psychology. And down would come five books on that subject. And then I wanted to know about the American Revolution, and down would come five more books. So I read all the time.

Q: What about novels? There wasn't a book of the month club at this period.

RITCHESON: Yes, there was. There was a book of the month club and one of my aunts belonged to it. And from time-to-time I would snitch a book from her, though our taste did not exactly coincide. She favored the romantic novel type of literature, and I didn't think that was very good. But there was a book of the month club. And I think I even joined it at one point.

Q: Well, how about, you know, sort of the children's classics, Treasure Island, Mutiny on the Bounty, that sort of thing?

RITCHESON: It is true, I did that. And I bought from the local printer. He had a 50-volume set of the Harvard classics.

Q: Oh.

RITCHESON: And I bought that. He needed the space, he said, so I gave him five dollars *(laughs)*. I still have them. So I got a lot of names there and followed those out too. But the classics, yes. Robert Louis Stevenson, great favorite.

Q: What about politics? Where did your family fall?

RITCHESON: Republican. Much to the disgust of my maternal grandfather who was a Jeffersonian, true blue. But they were Republican. I suppose it came from the Civil War. The Ritchesons, Ritchardsons, were absolutely union, both in Missouri and in Tennessee. Tennessee, Campbell County, was the, the jumping off place to the west for my family. I've done some research on the subject and I have counted actually nine Ritchardsons in Tennessee and my great-grandfather in Missouri who were union. I think that the Republicans must have come down that way.

Q: Well, it's interesting because this was an era, by the time you were getting along and as a kid, when Roosevelt became the god to many people in the United States. But to some it was that man in the White House, which was the pejorative term.

RITCHESON: I'm afraid that my family was that way, the latter. His administration turned my father out of his post office job. And that confirmed us all as Republicans for a very long time. Within a very few years I strayed from the family on that score.

Q: Well, around the family was there much talk about Oklahoma, the world, the United States, et cetera, around the dinner table as a kid? Were you getting that from your family or not?

RITCHESON: Yes, there was that. We were very aware of the crisis building up in Europe. And I remember actually preserving the Daily Oklahoman with its headlines about there's an invasion of Poland, for example. We were very aware of international problems and relations. I suppose that my grandfather, maternal grandfather, must have had a great deal to do with it. There was a growing distaste for the Nazis, very early. In my family we were never in any doubt about the wickedness of Adolph Hitler.

Q: Yeah, there weren't many places -- my mother's side is German family in Chicago and there was, you know, tremendous repugnance about --

RITCHESON: Yeah.

Q: Well, schooling. I take it it was a one-room schoolhouse or not?

RITCHESON: It was larger than that. There were two school buildings. One was the elementary and junior high and the other was a high school. We had the good fortune of first my grandfather and his brother who founded the school. And there was a very interesting man named Cicero Merritt. And he was a dedicated educator, rigid, demanding, and all those other qualities to go along with it. But the result was a fairly good education available there. In addition, my parents insisted on some supplementary activities too. Do you know what the word expression means, taking expression lessons? That is to say at a very early age I was set to memorizing increasingly lengthy texts, speeches from the past, humorous declamation, and that sort of thing. And this went on for perhaps seven or eight years. The result is that at one point I had an almost a photographic memory. I could memorize a five-page text in, well, in say a day. That's not bad. So that was one addition that I got from my mother and father, that is they employed a teacher to give me this kind of thing. And the second was music. We had, just not merely the traditional piano lessons, though we had those, but I had the good fortune of falling to the hands of an incredible old fellow who had played in a circus band. And he played all sorts of instruments. But he taught me the trombone. Not a bad instrument, by the way. And we played the classics. And this went on -- we had meetings about once a week, he came to my house and he and I tooted away. I thank him, in retrospect, for having introduced me to the great joys of music. I don't play, but I am a great connoisseur.

Q: Well, did they have Saturday night on the park, a band playing and that sort of thing?

RITCHESON: Not in Maysville, it was too small. But my friend, a German gentleman played the Tuba at a band in the neighboring town. And because of him I was introduced and was allowed to play along with that band. And so we did.

Q: Town bands are a great institution. Still going on where my wife's family comes from, Lyndonville, Vermont. It's close to Sheffield, but it's part of the Lyndonville area, and they have the Saturday night band. Maybe it's Thursday night, but.

RITCHESON: My wife owns a little house in Clinton. It's her childhood home. Clinton, New York, which is a small place near Utica. And it has regular band concerts on Sunday night in the summertime, a little pergola in the middle of town.

Q: OK, school itself. From what you've said I assume you were a pretty good student.

RITCHESON: I was the valedictorian of my graduating class. I must have been a real pain in the derriere for some of my colleagues, fellow students at the time. Because I was fast and somewhat impatient, and so on. But yes, I was a good student. My best subjects were history and in those days mathematics and not much in science, I'm afraid. I think my father thought I was getting too precious. And when the vocational agriculture program was established in the high school he mandated that I should join it. I resisted like crazy. It was the first great conflict between us. Left some lasting wounds perhaps. But I did. And furthermore, threw myself into it and did very well there.

Q: What did that consist of?

RITCHESON: Well, there are two types of activity. One was to have a livestock project of one's own. I had some absolutely magnificent white Wyandotte chickens, for example. And these would be prepared for exhibition and carried around to county fairs, or even state fairs. I was actually at Enid, Oklahoma with my chickens and my colleagues too, my friends in the Future Farmers of America from Mayville on the morning of December the 7th, 1941.

Q: Hm.

RITCHESON: I remember getting up that morning and hearing something on the radio --

first of all, hearing something on the radio about Pearl Harbor. I said, “Pearl Harbor?” I couldn’t remember where it was. “Was it in Alaska perhaps? Dutch Harbor.” But suddenly, the world exploded. I’m getting off the subject about the vocational agriculture. So you had projects involving live things in my -- in my day. I had prized chickens, which I loved very dearly. And I had a calf, and a couple pigs. So I learned how to care for and prepare animals for showings and so on. So that was interesting. But another type of thing which I drew on some native talents of mine, which I’d acquired already, was in public speaking and judging. There are judging contests of these young vocational agriculture students. You were presented with a kind of exhibition of various types of pigs or cattle or even grain. And you had to judge these four exemplars and present them in what you call “reasons.” You gave your reasons for the judgment that you made. And this was in public to the adult who was judging your judging, and that was a very useful exercise. I got pretty good at that. My team, the three of us, won the Oklahoma State championship for poultry judging. And so looking back on it, I know exactly what was in my father’s mind. I was getting too bookish, too sort of closed up from what he thought of as the real world. He wanted to infuse something else into it. And resisted as I did, and as far away from it as I now am, I think he had some reason and I think the results were basically good.

Q: How had the Depression hit your town?

RITCHESON: That’s an interesting question. Very, very hard. We were in a measure exempt from it because my father had his federal appointment for a time and then he quickly pivoted to business at which he was very good. And so we were not personally affected by it. But there are incredible memories in my mind of people who really did not have enough to eat, people living on a dollar a day, that sort of thing. I don’t recall outright starvation or anything of the sort, but there was great distress. Times were hard. People were in overalls and looking shabby is my memory.

Q: Was your area part of the Dust Bowl, or not?

RITCHESON: No. We were not in the Dust Bowl, but the Dust Bowl impacted us very greatly. I have memories of days when we didn’t see the sun the air was so full of the dust from Northwestern Oklahoma. That we not only could not see the sun, but we couldn’t breathe properly. So we had to carry things around over our noses. Everything in or out of the house was covered, of course, in dust. That was sinister.

Q: High school, did you have any particular teachers -- or in grammar school too, earlier school -- did you have any teachers that are particularly memorable?

RITCHESON: My very first teacher, I’m speaking now about elementary school, the wife of that Cicero Merritt. I think she was an extraordinarily good, gentle but firm, teacher. There was a marvelous old gal, my fifth grade teacher, hard as nails and a disciplinarian of extraordinary efficiency *(laughs)*. But she held us to a standard of performance. There was another teacher who -- I feel a little ambivalent about him -- but he was an important boost to my ego, if nothing else. He actually served a term in the state legislature after I'd gone from the scene. But he had those ambitions. And there was a wonderful woman who said to me privately that, "You have got to be easier on people. You have got to be less arrogant. And I want you to read the biography of Benjamin Franklin and see what he has to say about mending his conduct."

Q: Give credit to other people for your ideas, I mean --

RITCHESON: Right *(laughs).*

Q: Among other things.

RITCHESON: Among other things. She had an impact on me. She did.

Q: Well OK, you're going to graduate from high school when?

RITCHESON: 1942.

Q: So the war -- what was the impact on the town before you graduated?

RITCHESON: On the war? Of the war?

Q: Yeah.

RITCHESON: Let me tell you about that day I was in Enid, Oklahoma. It was a Sunday, of course. The boys that I was traveling with and I had talked -- we were very excited about it. We knew we were going to be in it. And we drove back to Maysville Sunday afternoon after the poultry exhibition had ended and so we had all our gear to take back. And I arrived back home to find absolutely nobody, nobody there at all. And I was puzzled about this because I was desperately eager to talk about the war that had come on us. When I went outside the house I could hear a kind of noise off in the distance. And I knew at once where it was. And I walked down to the church and it was absolutely crammed full. I can't even talk about it now without being moved. They were singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

Q: Mm-hmm.

RITCHESON: I'd thought I'd never seen anything so moving. There was anger, yes, but also a kind of determination. If I'd been Japanese I would have just ended it right there because the Christians were on the march, "Onward, Christian Soldiers." I finished my senior year and went at once in the summer of 1942 to the University of Oklahoma, got myself enrolled there. My father wanted me to take a business major, but I cleverly deceived him and did something else. But in the long run, I was on the scene when the V-12 program was instituted.

Q: This is Navy officer program.

RITCHESON: Right. And in, in the following February, as I was about to be 18, I enlisted in the V-12 program.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RITCHESON: I remember my father said to my mother, "Nothing will ever be the same." And he was deeply moved by it. He had himself not been old enough to go into World War I, but he knew that I was just right for it. And he was deeply moved by it. It did change everything.

Q: Well, let's talk about, you were in the V-12 program at the University of Oklahoma. Talk about that.

RITCHESON: I went there in '42, in the summer. February of '43 we were activated as a unit on the campus. I suppose 600 young midshipmen who then moved into newly constructed Navy dormitories. We wore a uniform. It was the lowest grade of course. We were able-bodied seamen. And aside from taking some required courses, naval history, physics, which very nearly did me in, I must say -- I guess that was it, naval history and physics required. We were free to continue our peacetime studies. And so I almost completed the BA (Bachelor of Arts) before I left. But I still had a summer's work to do after the war to finish the BA. It was in '44 that we went from the University of Oklahoma to active duty.

Q: Today is the 17th of March, 2011, St. Patrick's Day with Charles Ritcheson. And let's start 1944. You finished your V-12 training and you're off to your naval career.

RITCHESON: Yes, I left the University of Oklahoma and went then ultimately to Northwestern University, Chicago Campus, for midshipmen training. It was a four-month program, midshipman and things, and it led to a commission in January of 1945.

Q: How did they work it? Did they sort of get you ready for engineering or gunnery, or was it just general midshipman type --

RITCHESON: No, not at all. Your first assumption was right. It was a very rigorous program. I suspect, in retrospect, one of the most demanding programs I've ever gone through. It did in fact involve gunnery and engineering and navigation, practical navigation on the Great Lakes. And with all the drilling and discipline, naval discipline, thrown in. So it was a rigorous program.

Q: So where did you go?

RITCHESON: After commissioning?

Q: Yes.

RITCHESON: After commissioning -- that was in January of '45 -- I went to Harvard

Communication School, Naval Communication School, for training in various communications methodologies, that is to say encrypting and decrypting. And that lasted four months. And so that takes us to spring of ’45. I was then sent to Pearl Harbor, with a brief stop off in Los Angeles. At Pearl Harbor I was on the planning staff of the commander. And that lasted until the bomb.

Q: The nuclear bomb.

RITCHESON: Yeah. And shortly thereafter I was sent to join the staff of Rear Admiral Elliott Buckmaster who had been Captain of the Yorktown, fought a very gallant action, as you might remember. And after the gallant loss of Yorktown he was promoted to rear admiral and had his own staff. And I became his signal officer, joined the admiral in the Philippines. And from the Philippines we sailed first to Shanghai where we assisted in the occupation of Shanghai. And in about six weeks’ time went down the coast to Hong Kong where we were the first forces to arrive in Hong Kong, presided over the first stages of the restoration of Hong Kong to allied authority. And when the British came in, about six weeks later from Australia, we began a series of voyages into the South China Sea, down to what was French Indochina. We retrieved two Chinese armies and carried them back to Taiwan where the Chinese authorities established themselves.

Q: What was your impression first of Shanghai when you went there? What was it like?

RITCHESON: Well, I was a young innocent and I found it just absolutely marvelous. There were two distinct groups. One, the huge Chinese population who were friendly to us. We had contact with the Soong family who made a point of coming to call on our admiral, the Soong family with Madame Chiang Kai-shek as --

Q: Yes, and Madame Sun Yat-sen who was --

RITCHESON: Yes, exactly. So they called on us formally at our ship tied up at the bund. Generally speaking, the Chinese were very friendly indeed. But the friendliest of all were the European expatriates who had settled at the time of the Russian Revolution.

Q: Lots of White Russians.

RITCHESON: Exactly, exactly. And they could not do enough for us in the way of kindness. I remember, for example, a White Russian restaurateur who served not only marvelous food, but absolutely incredible whiskey and wine, which he had buried in his garden throughout the whole war, and who dug it up for us to celebrate our arrival.

Q: Did you have a liaison with the renowned White Russian countess? One hears stories about the white Russian countess.

RITCHESON: That was not quite in my league *(laughs).*

Q: You’re too low on the staff.

RITCHESON: I was too junior, I suppose. I was only 19, but my memory of Shanghai is very warm. I've always wanted to go back. People say that now that today it's an incredible metropolitan place. But in those days it was of course seedy and but full of a kind of yeasty joy, liberation and so on.

Q: What about Hong Kong?

RITCHESON: Well, I loved Hong Kong. We were there for about a year. And I remember very clearly. We were based there up and down the coast, and so on. But it was our home base.

Q; What was your ship?

RITCHESON: We had the USS Charleston, which was a large Coast Guard cutter, as our flagship. It was a relatively small ship because we were going through mined waters much of the time. And a small ship doesn't attract as many mines as a big one. Toward the end of Buckmaster's mission we transferred to the Los Angeles --

Q: Cruiser.

RITCHESON: Yeah. But we were a small, well-organized group attaching CVEs, that is --

Q: Export carriers.

RITCHESON: Yeah, from time-to-time. And lots of troop transports. I liked Hong Kong a lot.

Q: Well, was there any problems when they -- I'm surprised the Americans came first. I would have thought __________ would have gotten -- I mean British --

RITCHESON: Yes.

Q: -- naval ships in there earlier.

RITCHESON: Well, yes, that was rather curious. We were there first. I think six weeks later the Brits came. When they did come we had very cordial relations with them and there was much entertaining between war rooms. More entertaining by the Brits than by us because they had --

Q: Whiskey.

RITCHESON: *(laughs)* Exactly. Exactly. It was a very interesting, very formative period of my life. I saw these young officers my age, British officers, all eager to get back to their universities. Particularly they spoke of Oxford. And that sort of registered with me and sort of underlined an impulse I had received from my grandfather that maybe I'll have to look at Oxford.

Q: Did you get into the Dutch East Indies at the time?

RITCHESON: Not the East Indies, no. No, not at all. But Vietnam, what is now Vietnam. We were in Haiphong. Never got down to Saigon, but Haiphong in the north. And of course Taiwan.

Q: Well, Taiwan must have been rather -- primitive might be the wrong word -- but underdeveloped at the time.

RITCHESON: They suffered a lot from allied bombardment. I remember when we landed we went in on the admiral's barge. We had to pick our way very carefully through sunken ships in the harbor. But Taiwan was very badly hit. Primitive? Yes, in those days. The countryside was quite undeveloped, yeah.

Q: Well, then what -- how did your naval career end? I mean what happened?

RITCHESON: When the Buckmaster staff dissolved he went to command the airbase on Okinawa. And the rest of us dispersed to various assignments. Some of the senior men actually mustered on because we were then in the winding down period in military activity. And I was assigned to a ship that was returning to the United States, the USS Ingham.

Q: Destroyer?

RITCHESON: It was a destroyer escort. It was assigned to go back to Treasure Island for decommissioning. And so I went with them as communications officer and I guess I was with them for about perhaps four, five, or six months through the decommissioning process. It too was a fascinating period of my life, made good friends. An ordinary officer on the ship forms deeper friendships and attachments, personal attachments, than you do as a staff officer. As a staff officer you're always a little bit of a burden to the ship's crew who look at you kind of out of the corners of their eyes. But I had a very good experience with the crew of the Ingham. And finally got out, was demobilized in April of 1946 just in time to catch the summer session at the University of Oklahoma, which was all I needed to complete my BA degree.

Q: And then how did you find your return to City Street?

RITCHESON: Complicated, at first. It took a while to readjust. I was demobilized in New Orleans. I remember going into a store and buying my first civilian sports jacket and slacks for the first time in two or three years. And I put them on at once and I couldn't believe it when I saw myself. I suddenly felt as if some schizophrenia was taking place. I couldn't recognize who the guy was. You can't really live in a military community for about three years, I guess, on my part, without feeling a jolt of going back into a place where there was no order giving structure immediately available, no set responsibilities. It was very different. But I quickly got back to the university and that imposed a certain structure.

Q: What sort of degree did you get?

RITCHESON: It was in philosophy and classics, of all things. But it has been very useful over the years.

Q: Had you made any goal for when you got your degree? What you were going to do?

RITCHESON: There was a sense that I would go further with my education. I hadn’t fixed on a particular goal, but I was letting it happen. And my intellectual capacity was growing. I knew that there was something out there and that I knew also that ultimately I would define it. And so I was not under any tension. I simply knew that I had to have certain qualifications. Even at that time, soon after getting out of the Navy and back to the University of Oklahoma, I thought that there would be a PhD in some place. But in what subject I didn’t know.

Q: So you had obviously the GI bill.

RITCHESON: Yes.

Q: So then what did you do?

RITCHESON: From the University of Oklahoma I went to Zurich in Switzerland to the University of Zurich because I wanted to do certain things: one was to perfect my German. I guess it was three things actually: perfect my German, get some exposure to German philosophy and theology. I was interested in that subject too, and there were marvelous people in Switzerland at the time in Zurich. The third was to get to know a little bit more about my Swiss family. My grandmother was Swiss on my father’s side and I wanted to know something about that. So I had three purposes going there. So I went to the University of Zurich. I wanted to go for a year to do this -- to accomplish these three things, and so I did. And it was a terrific experience. My German did become very good. For a time I was dreaming in German. I was deeply involved in that culture.

Heard Churchill there. Winston Churchill came to visit the university and gave his great speech on reunification of Europe. Unite, as you remember. That was very interesting. And I also met under social circumstances Harold and Mary Wilson, later the British prime minister. The personal connection lasted a long, long time. Right through my embassy years, as a matter of fact. Much later in the ‘70s I was often invited to Downing Street to the family quarters.

Q: How did this come about?

RITCHESON: There was a banker, a Swiss banker, a friend of a -- how shall I describe her -- as a private tutor of mine. I wanted to know about Jungian psychology. And there was no way in the university that I could do that. But this lady, Frau Yolanda Jakoby was a translator of Jung's work and knew him well and I engaged her on a one-to-one basis to talk to me about Jungian psychology. And she actually got me to meet him two or three times too. That was exciting in itself. Yolanda Jakoby, a Hungarian Jewess refugee, established in Zurich psychologist of renown, got me invited to this luncheon. I went with her. And we were only about 12 people. So Harold had just been a very junior minister in the acting government. He was President of the Board of Trade. Doesn't exist anymore, but that was the title he had at the time. And I was put to Mary's left and we chatted up a storm and became very animated in our conversations and struck up a conversation that lasted -- well, it lasted even until now. She's still alive. Quite amazing how these chance encounters influence one's life.

Q: Well, so after you finished Zurich, wither?

RITCHESON: I went to Harvard. By now, I knew that I wanted to be an historian. I wanted to become a professional historian, a professor, if you please. I knew my future was going to be academic. And so I went to Harvard to study with Samuel Eliot Morrison.

Q: The naval connection.

RITCHESON: Absolutely.

Q: A maritime history of Massachusetts.

RITCHESON: And the --

Q: And I have the entire history of the World War II at sea.

RITCHESON: He's a marvelous man. It was said in the war, if you want to know what the next battle is going to be, follow Sam Morrison *(laughs)*. Because he was there for the big ones. Before I arrived at Harvard, I knew that I wanted to work with him. He accepted me and we hit it off. And I put him down as perhaps the greatest influence in my professional life. We worked together developing my thesis topic.

Q: What was your thesis?

RITCHESON: I wanted it to be something to do with the American Revolution. And through talking with Morrison, we developed the idea that I would look at the impact of the American Revolution on Britain. People had done the military history and all that, nothing to do there. But no one had ever done the impact of the American Revolution on Britain, on British imperial thought. And so that's what emerged of our conversations. I remember just as clearly as if it were yesterday, sitting in his office and his saying to me, "You must go to England to get at the British sources. If you're really going to do this subject, the impact of the American Revolution on Britain, then you've got to go to

Britain to look at sources there."

I said, "Well, sure. If you say so, but where will I go?"

He said, "Well, Oxford is the place."

Many pieces fell together at that point. My grandfather, who had admired Oxford so, my friendships in the Navy with those young Brits, British officers going back to Oxford, Harold and Mary Wilson. I mean everything suddenly fell together. I said, "Great. But do you know how many people are waiting in line to get into Oxford? There are hundreds of thousands of people."

"I was the first Harmsworth professor of American History there and I know some people." And within three weeks I'd been accepted at Oxford.

Q: So which college did you go to?

RITCHESON: It was a small medieval college called St. Edmond Hall. And it still is called St. Edmond Hall, founded by St. Edmond of Abingdon, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 13th century.

Q: You're getting there just in time for the cold winter, weren't you?

RITCHESON: I went up in October of '48. The winter of '47 was a monstrous one. And of course food was very sparse. They were still suffering from rationing.

Q: Well, they kept rationing for seven years.

RITCHESON: They did indeed. When I went there we had two eggs a week, eight ounces of chocolate. Clothes were rationed; you couldn't spend more than one pound for a meal and it couldn't exceed three courses of which one -- if you had bread -- bread counted as a course. So it was wartime austerity, believe me. Yeah. But I loved it.

Q: What was your impression of the Brits at that time?

RITCHESON: You know, I reflected on this many times over the years. There was literally no difference based on nationality in my relations with them. I was accepted above all as a wartime ally, as a friend, and I never once suffered from any anti-Americanism. It was inconceivable to me that my British friends might see me in any light defined by national identity. That's the long way around, isn't it? I felt absolutely at home. My friendships continue to this very day, diminishing because some of them have died off. But I might just say that some of my closest friends, to this very day are Brits whom I got to know in those days.

Q: Well, did you find yourself falling into any political side, labor, conservative?

RITCHESON: Yes. Though the Wilsons were my strong friends on the labor side, my own inclinations went conservative. And maybe that was because of Oxford. My sympathies were conservative. I remind you from our first interview that I'd inherited a lot of Republicanism from over here. And those attitudes translated more into conservatism over there than they did into labor.

Q: How long were you at Oxford?

RITCHESON: Three years.

Q: And what was the effect of the American Revolution on British thought?

RITCHESON: Well, this is the subject of my first book. And I argue that the Revolution in the first place was not -- we're not able to think in terms of Tory/Patriot categories because Tory is a word that has no meaning at that time. The Americans fastened it to George III and his ministers, quite incorrectly. That's just sort of nitpick -- nitpicking. The basic impact is found in a peace commission, which the Brits sent to the colonies, or to the United States I suppose we have to call it, in 1778, headed by a man called Lord Carlisle, the Carlisle Peace Commission. And in it, in the instructions -- I argue -- you have the true measure of the impact of the American Revolution on British imperial thought. And it was not yet fully developed, but nonetheless a perfectly discernable idea of a commonwealth of nations. And that is the basic meaning of it. The Brits caught a glimpse of some imperial relationships very different from the one they had before the revolution, which was basically a Roman one, a Roman empire of a supreme center and subordinate parts. After the Revolution they have had the idea of a confederation of free self-governing units.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RITCHESON: That's very significant, I think.

Q: Well, then with this what did you do? This would be about 1950.

RITCHESON: It will be '51.

Q: '51.

RITCHESON: I take the degree in '51, my doctorate. And then I was on the job market. Very difficult to wangle a job in an American institution from over there. And so I fell back on my home state. I applied to maybe 50 universities in America and got an offer from three or four. One of these was the Oklahoma College for Women about 40 miles from my parental home, and so I took it. One, because it was a job and two, because it gave me a chance to visit with my mother and father and brother and two sisters. So I was there for two years, met my first wife who had arrived from Portland, Oregon, a member of the faculty too.

Q: So did you find coming back to Oklahoma a change from Oxford?

RITCHESON: I used to have a dream. It was recurring for a period at about that time. I was run over by a truck. And that's the way I felt about it, coming from one of the most sophisticated intellectual environments in the world into, well, one of the least demanding.

Q: By the way, while you were at Oxford did you run across the inklings of Tolkien and the --

RITCHESON: Well, Tolkien -- Christopher Tolkien, who is the son of the great man, I knew very well, yes. And as a matter of fact, we actually heard from him a few of the passages from The Lord of the Rings, which his father had written basically for the children in his own family.

Q: Did you have a problem at Oklahoma, you know, coming from Oxford? I think that a lot of people say oh, this guy is a little too fancy for us and, you know, I would think this would be a problem.

RITCHESON: Well, you're very perceptive. Although it didn't in fact happen that way. I saw the danger in that and made myself very agreeable and down to earth.

Q: Get a cowboy hat or boots or --

RITCHESON: *(laughs)* No, but I went to Oklahoma University football games and so on. I was pretty active in church affairs, in the Episcopal Church in those days, and made myself agreeable. Circulated some in Oklahoma City which is slightly more sophisticated than Chickasha, Oklahoma. I was blessed in a way to be able to make all my beginning teaching mistakes in a place where it didn't really matter.

Q: Yeah. How did you find the students?

RITCHESON: For the most part they were mediocre. With always the exceptional -- there are exceptional students in any major -- and it was the same there too. And I toyed around with other things like curriculum reform, creating new programs, this, that, and the other. So sure, I wanted out very badly, but you played the cards that are given to you.

Q: Well, now this is an all-female school?

RITCHESON: It was, yes.

Q: I would think that given the area and all this and the culture at the times that these would be women whose greatest hope would be to get an MRS degree.

RITCHESON: *(laughs)* Yes, and I even had some approaches in that way myself. That is to say, not very serious people. But as I say, there are always the exceptional ones who were serious students. And come out later with careers, quite outstanding careers.

Q: What were you teaching?

RITCHESON: I taught history. Don't ask me what kind of history. I taught everything. I learned a lot. And that in itself was sort of an exciting time too. I was able to learn things that had never crossed my path before. The history of India or China, world history, never crossed my mind. But I buckled down and taught that.

Q: Was the Navy trying to get you back in?

RITCHESON: I was still in the Reserve, but I had no illusion about that. No, I never seriously thought about going back to the Navy. I wanted to give just a little -- to return to the earlier subject -- give a little hint or sense of the, shall we say, the informality of the teaching methods at Oklahoma College for Women. The dean of that college was a roly-poly man of whose talents were mostly maneuvering or dealing with the Oklahoma State legislature.

Q: Well, it was the most important thing to the head of a state college.

RITCHESON: He had a course called history of education, which he taught as a kind of trophy course. And all these little girls flock in because he is the dean, and therefore supposed to know so much. Very popular course. And he called me in one day and said he had to go do some important work with the legislature. And he was not going to be able to teach his marvelous course anymore and he just knew I would be the ideal person to replace him. And I looked astonished and said, "But sir, I know nothing about your subject. I know nothing about the history of education. I've never even been in a school of education. How can I possible do justice to it?"

And he said, "Oh, never mind. It's all right. Anything can fit into it. Just do it."

Q: Yeah.

RITCHESON: So I went into this course and attacked it as an intellectual history; the history of ideas, from as far back as I could go. Crazy. Crazy. Poor little girls, they thought it was marvelous.

Q: Well, then you kept this up until when?

RITCHESON: I was there for two years. I got back in '51. And in '53 I really became a serious educator. I went to Kenyon college.

Q: Ohio.

RITCHESON: Ohio, yes. It's just superb.

Q: One of those New England colleges taken to Ohio. Ohio had a lot of them, didn't it?

RITCHESON: Oh yes. Oberlin, for example. First rate. Kenyon was a four-year men's college. Two years at this women's college and then went to men's college where the students were absolutely first rate. And in retrospect, I did my best teaching -- the best teaching of my career was done at Kenyon.

Q: What were you teaching?

RITCHESON: I was a historian. One of the advantages of being at the Oklahoma College of Women was that I was appointed assistant professor. And my second year they promoted me to associate professor. This is at Chickasha. And this rank carried over to Kenyon because they couldn't ask me to come at a rank lower than what I had. So unlike most young professors, I achieved associate rank very early. And by the time I left Kenyon I was a full professor.

Q: You were there how long?

RITCHESON: I was there 11 years. Or one marriage worth.

Q: You were there during the McCarthy years, weren't you? I was wondering whether that had much impact.

RITCHESON: I'm trying to get hold of the McCarthy -- when were the McCarthy hearings? Let me just --

Q: I think probably, well '52 or -- about '53 I think. Maybe a little off, but --

RITCHESON: I didn't get to Kenyon until '53.

Q: Uh-huh. So maybe it was pretty well over.

RITCHESON: I hope so. When did Eisenhower go out?

Q: Well, Eisenhower left in 1960.

RITCHESON: Well, the McCarthy matter had been settled by then.

Q; Oh yes.

RITCHESON: I remember being absolutely appalled by that renegade and how proud I was to hear Joseph Welch, "Have you no shame?" I can't remember when that was or in what context. But rest assured that any political matter would have had a great following at Kenyon. Kenyon was a very lively college intellectually, in every way. I mean it had the Kenyon review with John Crowe Ransom, whom I knew very well. And first-rate political scientists, first-rate philosophers, and a first-rate administration. A man called

Gordon Keith Chalmers, one of the really unsung heroes of American education. It was he who more or less invented the new conservatism. And his book, The Republic and the Person, was very highly praised back in those days. It's one of my great delights that I was actually appointed by him.

Q: Well, now you mentioned one marriage. How did you meet your wife and where was she from?

RITCHESON: My first wife I met at the Oklahoma College for Women because she was a professor there too. And maybe it was the sign of our mutual desperation. We were drawn together and married in 1953.

Q: Well, then at Kenyon, did political develop -- the Cold War or anything of that nature intrude much or was it you were in the middle of the country and the Cold War was far away?

RITCHESON: No, not at all, not at all. It was very much with us. As I said, Kenyon was very lively in every sense of the word. You suddenly remind me that one of my students in my own classes there was Whittaker Chambers' son.

Q: Oh.

RITCHESON: And we were all certainly aware of this matter. Politics and foreign policy were matters of great debate. Kenyon came from a tradition of politically involved people. One of the presidents at the time became a general in the Union Army. Rutherford B. Hayes is a son of ours and Simon Chase, I think, the brother of the founder of Kenyon College. So we have a long tradition of political involvement.

Q: Did you find yourself involved in politics or?

RITCHESON: Yes. And in a way that had considerable impact on my career pattern. Gordon Keith Chalmers asked me to become chairman of the lectureships committee that is in charge of inviting and arranging for people to come to the campus and lecture. This is very important because Kenyon is so isolated physically that it's hard to get out and when the snows come, brother, you're there. You don't move around much. This chairmanship was far more important than just an ordinary faculty committee chairmanship. And I also had a free hand to do what I wanted, to invite whom I wanted. So I decided to bring the world to Kenyon. Under my administration we had a series of people like Charlie Halleck and Everett Dirksen.

Q: These were stalwarts of the Republican Party at the time.

RITCHESON: I also sought to get Gene McCarthy and representatives from that side came too. Looking back on it we had perhaps a few more Republicans. Goldwater came. And then there were cultural people like C.P. Snow from England, the English author.

Q: Corridors of Power.

RITCHESON: Exactly. And his charming wife, Pamela Hansford Johnson. Jacques Barzun, Steven Runciman.

Q: Byzantine historian.

RITCHESON: Yeah. Exactly. And then I organized a great symposium. In the Kenyon tradition, from time-to-time once every four, five years, the college sponsored a weekend on subjects of great importance, culturally or politically. And mine was organized around the principle of C.P. Snow's little book, The Communication Between the Arts and the Sciences, the two cultures. And that turned out very, very well. We had not only Snow, but also Edward Teller. I remember so clearly even until today. And Brad Blanchard, the philosopher, and James Ackerman from Harvard, the art historian. And a number of other less visible people engaged in public dispute, if you will, about the communication between the arts and the sciences, how to do this or is it done. And I had around the periphery a little art exhibit of contemporary stuff, not huge pieces, but traveling thing that I got out of New York, a concert, and other agreeable things. That was my career as chairman of the Kenyon lectureships committee.

Q: What was the culture of Kenyon? Was it -- a men's college, rather isolated, were fraternities important? Did class or race or anything -- I mean were these elements?

RITCHESON: It was isolated, masculine. Though there was a mighty migration of females on the weekend, that sort of thing. There were fraternities. I mean they all had lodgings in university housing. They didn't have separate housing. Well, they might have had separate wings of several dormitories, but they were not as cliquish fraternities as some of the larger universities, public universities might be. Some had reputations of being very bibulous and so on. But for the most part, I think they were simply places to live.

Q: Was there any movement --

RITCHESON: Class, I just wanted to address that. There was no sense of class if you were at Kenyon. In this way it's like Oxford too. And purposefully I think too. Because Gordon has as his great ideal the Oxford system, the Oxford tutorial system, the Oxford system, once you're inside it's all one class.

Q: Where did your students go once they were finished?

RITCHESON: Well, a hell of a lot of them went on to higher degrees and to prestige scholarships, the Marshalls, the Rhodes. I had three or four Rhodes scholars pass through my hands, Marshall scholars, at least two. Many of them went into the law. Many of them into writing, publishing. The great majority of them distinguished themselves in later life. The man I consider my best student is now the Admiral King Professor of Naval History at the Naval War College, John Hattendorf.

Q: Was there any movement at the time to bring women into the school?

RITCHESON: Not at that time.

Q: I assume it's now co-ed.

RITCHESON: It is, yes.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

RITCHESON: I think it must have been '65.

Q: Mm-hmm. By the way, how did the election of 1960, which was an important election in American politics. This is Kennedy versus Nixon. And a lot of the students were very much involved in this one more than most. Did this raise much agitation, or not, at Kenyon?

RITCHESON: Oh, yes. I'm trying to remember exactly how it broke. Nixon was not an attractive candidate, even for Republicans. And I think there may have been some defection of moderate Republican students to the Kennedy side, the attractive, young -- and the religious thing didn't make any difference. I remember the debates. And Nixon looked like a bandit.

Q; Yeah.

In '65 where'd you go?

RITCHESON: I went to Southern Methodist University as Chairman and Director of Graduate Studies. I had reached the top of the ladder at Kenyon. I was chairman and professor. I had published two books.

Q: The first was on your dissertation?

RITCHESON: Yeah.

Q: The second?

RITCHESON: The second one was actually not published by the time I left, but it was practically finished. It was the Aftermath of the Revolution, a study of Anglo-American relations for the 12 years between the Treaty of Peace and the Jay Treaty. And that would come out after I'd actually got to Dallas. I was Chairman and Director of Graduate Studies. Why did I go? One was that I really needed a change of view. I'd reached the top of the ladder at Kenyon. I'd had a divorce which I wanted to put behind me. Dallas offered a tremendous opportunity to build almost from the ground up. The chairman was a local grandee, Herbert Gambrell was his name, a name well known in Dallas and in

Austin, a Texas historian who had simply done nothing except what pleased him. He had no sensibility to the department. He was an honorific figure. And the administration at the time wanted me to take the department in hand and do something -- and pull it into at least the early part of the 20th century.

Q: How did you find the university at the graduate level when you arrived?

RITCHESON: It had, I would say, a single graduate department worthy of the name, and that was anthropology. It was chaired by a man who became a great friend of mine. And there was some activity in economics as well, but otherwise it was ludicrous, is the word for it.

Q: Well, I, you know, my knowledge of Southern Methodist is purely of football. And Kyle Rote was a big name at the time.

RITCHESON: Did you follow the scandals?

Q: I can't even remember the scandals.

RITCHESON: Oh, it was terrible. The board of trustees had a kind of inner-group called the Board of Governors who were fired by a single idea, to have the best football team that money could buy.

Q: Yeah.

RITCHESON: And this finally became public. And somewhat after my day one president was fired and went off to be a very distinguished President of the University of North Carolina. And another president died from the weight of the scandal. And SMU (Southern Methodist University) was scorned by the American scholarly community.

Q: Well, at least the on the graduate side you didn't have to worry about players.

RITCHESON: Yes. I set to work and built some programs and established some institutions there that survive to this day.

Q: How did you recruit? Did you have money to recruit?

RITCHESON: I found it and certainly it was necessary. When I arrived I looked around and said, "What do we have here now? What are the opportunities?" And I saw that there was an immense number of Hispanic Americans there. Not really thought much of, but nonetheless giving a kind of cultural impact. So I decided to build a program that used that as a point of departure. Let us have a professor of Latin American -- indeed Hispanic, that would come later -- history, cultural history. Let us capitalize on this. And because Dallas is a municipal organization, they let us have a professor of urban history. And because it is a business community, they let us have a historian of business or economic history. In short, to analyze the scene was to identify certain areas where we might make an impact in teaching, in research, and so on. And so I built a program that was very pointed toward Hispanic American, and back of that, Mexican, and back of that, Spain, and Portugal, all these elements coming into play.

Q: It's an important element now at Southern Methodist, the Hispanics side.

RITCHESON: Well, that's what I gave them. That's part of my heritage, inheritance to them. How did I pay for it? Did I ask my dean for it? For money? Yes, I did. But he said, well, he was sorry, he didn't have that kind of money. I said, "I will have to look elsewhere." And where'd I look? Renegade Republican that I was, I looked to Washington. President Johnson's program, War on Poverty, the NEA, National Defense Educational Act, federal sources offered funding for programs to improve graduate and undergraduate studies. And without belaboring the point, I wrote in succession five proposals, all dealing with the subject of the melding of two cultures, those two cultures being Anglo and the second being Hispanic American, a melding of two cultures, which required teaching expertise in these fields that I had identified. And over a series of five years I was funded by the federal government something to the effect of perhaps a million dollars a pop, which allowed me to appoint people -- because I did this, my deed is in the distance. These are my programs, I want you to understand that. I was given an amazing amount of freedom to do this. No one was touching me. And not merely did I make the appointments in these subjects, but I had also enough money to pay for scholarships, that is, fellowships. Not merely for people to teach, but also for people who were going to be taught. And this brought in usually about 25 MA (Masters of Arts) candidates per year. Very pleasing to the government funds. And we did a great deal. When I actually look back on my life, I think I take great pride in that accomplishment. We trained 25 fellows a year to go back into their classrooms which are peopled with an amalgam of Hispanic and Anglo students. We taught them how to do this with sensitivity to both sides on the basis of mutual respect, cutting across stereotypes that the Southwest has about Mexicans. And I think we did a great deal of good.

Q: Did you run across the problem of prejudice of Anglos looking down on the Hispanics?

RITCHESON: Oh, yes. That was very common. It was even more noticeable toward the Hispanics than it was toward the blacks. That's one of the things that triggered my interest in the matter, the low esteem in which Hispanics were held.

Q: Were you able to recruit fellows from the Hispanic community?

RITCHESON: Yes. You understand that the fellows we chose, we recruited, all came from the classrooms. I mean they were teachers. And many of these were in fact Hispanics from the American Southwest. Not merely in Texas, but also in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, California.

Q: How about the rest of the faculty? Were they sort of welcoming or something about your efforts to bring in a different class of people?

RITCHESON: There was both reactions. I was called the racehorse chairman. The ethos of Southern Methodist University is the ethos of the lazy Sunday afternoon, sort of sitting on the porch and sipping iced tea. And all very Methodist too, by the way.

Q: Well, Methodism is important.

RITCHESON: It was in those days, yes. It was not much discussed, but everyone knew the president was Methodist, his staff was Methodist. And the bishops of the Methodist Church were all members of the board of trustees and so on. But I was given free reign. But there were those who thought -- rather who secretly were hoping I'd stumble. But for five years I kept the place going at a pretty fast pace thanks to Lyndon Johnson.

Q: And of course he was a Texan too.

RITCHESON: Yes, he was.

Q: And he had more than a -- he's often given credit for, he had a feeling for bringing everybody under the tent. He'd been a teacher too.

RITCHESON: Yes, absolutely. When his wife -- I absolutely love her. I think she's admirable.

Q: Lady -- Lady Bird.

RITCHESON: Yeah, Lady Bird. When she wrote her book I gave a reception for her at SMU. She came and we had a book signing and then a party afterward. The President came. The host was Stanley Marcus, whom I'd known very well who was a great support of what I was doing. So we had a good relationship with the Johnsons. I had a chance to thank him for all his great legislation. I still think that the war on poverty, that series of acts around it, one of the great monuments in American history.

Q: The tragedy, of course, is Vietnam. Did Vietnam play much of a role? How did Vietnam hit SMU?

RITCHESON: I think not much. While there were demonstrations and whatnot going on at many places, many university colleges, included Kenyon by the way. I was no longer there, but I heard about it. Demonstrations, some of which were quite violent. My dear old friend, Clinton Rossiter, at Cornell, was so horrified at what had happened on his campus that he went home and killed himself, just horrific. While this was going on in other more, shall we say, in-touch universities and colleges, nothing was going at SMU. Only perhaps six or seven months later would there be a kind of weak replica of some placards or whatnot being carried around. It was a lazy little backwater in that way.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

RITCHESON: I left in ’71. I was given an advanced sabbatical by the University of Southern California where I had accepted appointment to a chair in British history. It was the Colin Reese level chair, well paid and so on. And to sort of get me tied down, they gave me a sabbatical, which meant I had a year to go back to England and do some research and get on with some things over there. And that would have been in ’71.

So I went on leave of absence, ’71, ’72. I came back then to Los Angeles, new house, new job, new set of circumstances. Came back in ’72. Began teaching and doing some writing and making myself acquainted in Los Angeles. It’s a marvelous place. I know many people say that they hate Los Angeles, but I don’t hate it. I think it’s just terrific. Very lively. And that was the tenor of my life, senior member of the history department at SC (Southern California). And doing all sorts of other things off campus too. I was heavily involved in something called the National Conference on British Studies and had actually founded a chapter, the Southern Conference on British Studies when I was in Dallas and in Los Angeles I did the same thing. The Pacific Coast branch of British studies. There was a national organization of which by then I’d become the executive secretary. It was a small, elite, prestigious group of professors of British history, people like Helen Taft Manning, the daughter of President Taft, and she never let you forget it. And others. Every major professor of British history in this country was a member of that organization. And I was by then the executive secretary which required my presence in New York, because it was based in New York, twice a year. And I made some internal constitutional improvements, much to the disgust of Helen Taft Manning and some other conservatives. When I became a member I was at Kenyon College -- and Donald Barnes, another great historian from Oberlin, Helen referred to us as “our members from out West” because the head office was on the East Coast. Well, I changed that when I became executive secretary by securing seats on the board for the presidents of the newly founded regional conferences on British study. So I was doing that in my first two years at SC. Then I was in New York having a meeting of the board at the Plaza Hotel. This was I think in April of ’74. And it was the USIA (United States Information Agency) office director who asked me if I would like to go to London as cultural attaché.

Q: Let’s talk about USC (University of Southern California). You want to compare and contrast Southern Methodist and USC?

RITCHESON: Well, yes. Southern Methodist University was a regional university, and I would have to say not a very strong one at that. I’m talking intellectually. USC was moving to the national level as a university. It was not yet arrived as a major player, but it was poised to do so. It was a different world. Its view was a world view. SMU had a Dallas view, I would say.

Q: At USC you must have been looking over your shoulder at the University of California at Berkeley, weren’t you? I mean this is sort of the academic powerhouse of the West Coast. Or was it?

RITCHESON: Our closest competition was not Berkeley, but UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), which was a state university. USC was a private university. For whatever reason my whole career has been with private institutions, except for that very first one, which doesn't count really. We weren't so mindful of Berkley in those days because UCLA was much closer. As it turned out, the President of UCLA, later the chancellor, Franklin Murphy, as life would have it emerged as one of my greatest supporters when I became dean of libraries at USC.

Q: How interested were the student body in British studies?

RITCHESON: There was a widely accepted, perfectly inadequate view that the study of British history was very useful for future law students. So a lot of future law students came into my classes. There were also the literary inclined who wanted to get the lowdown on Shakespeare and so on who came in. And so I never found any difficulty in filling up my classes. There's a sense, which I sometimes fostered, that British history is just an extension of American history backward. That is to say, projected into the distant past.

Q: Well, today the universities, particularly on the West Coast the best universities are almost overwhelmed by oriental students. Had this been happening at USC or not?

RITCHESON: Well, this gets into another vast subject in which I'm going to play a considerable role at USC. And it comes after I go to the embassy as cultural attaché. When I came back after a series of interesting things, I became dean and university librarian. And there once more I had looked at the scene and said, "What do we have here now? And among them, we have a lot of Hispanics and a lot of Orientals. Not yet at USC." But at the time, over the next few years they began to arrive in considerable number. And that is in part of because of the impulse I give to building collections in Hispanic materials. Until today we have a major research institute there. I also established the Korean heritage library, which draws great support from Korea and also from the local Korean community. It's a huge community and pretty rich and very lively -- so we now have a Korean heritage library certainly ranking in the top 10 in the United States.

Q: Today is the 11th of May, 2011 with Charles Ritcheson. When did you join USIA and how did that come about?

RITCHESON: In 1974, I was then professor at University of Southern California. I had a chair in British history. I was also executive secretary of the Conference on British Studies. I had written a couple of books on British politics in the 18th century, that is to say, on the reign of George III. In these books I had argued that George III had in fact been misunderstood, that he was not a Tory. That is an anachronistic term at the time. It was Parliament which had passed the offensive acts and had caused the American Rebellion. And this argument had gained a certain public exposure. I say that because the bicentennial was approaching. And in terms of diplomacy it was a delicate time, shall we say, in British-American relations. What to do, how to celebrate the American Revolution in George III's own capital. That was a problem. And I think that USIA senior people had said to themselves that here is an academic who would at least not grate on British sensibilities. That was one thing. Second thing is that I had taken my doctorate at Oxford, was well acquainted in England, knew people in government, in business. I was well placed to fit into British life. Again, I'd been there frequently for 10 years with friends in significant places in business, in government, et cetera -- and in academe. So I think these things came together in pointing me out as somebody uniquely fitted to be what the agency called, a "super CAO."

Q: Cultural affairs officer.

RITCHESON: Yes, cultural attaché. But a super. That was the designation. They brought me in at Foreign Service grade one. And in summer of 1974 I arrived in London.

Q: Had you become tired of academia?

RITCHESON: No. But it seemed to be a sort of natural application of what my academic expertise was. I'll give you an example of that, leaping ahead a little bit. In 1976, there was the formal presentation of the British government's gift to the American government. The Golden Magna Carta, which is still on display at the capitol. There was a great ceremony in Westminster Hall. And after that, the Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, gave a reception in the throne room of St. James' palace. There I saw something, which only a historian could see. I met the Queen Mother several times before. We were on good terms. The party was about I would say 60 people in the throne room. And as the protocol required, the guests were lined up around the walls. The Queen Mother with lady in waiting entered from what was called in George III's day "the king's cabinet," that is, his office. And as she came in, she greeted each one of us individually, stopped and had a few words, and then moved on to the next one, to the neighbor. As I saw this, suddenly something clicked in my mind. I went in my memory back to Thomas Jefferson's meeting with George III in that very room.

Q: Jefferson, not Adams?

RITCHESON: Jefferson was there as the guest of Adams. Jefferson was minister to Paris, to Versailles. As protocol required, Adams took Jefferson to be presented at the king's levee, as it was called. And from that meeting there was a fable created, largely based on Jefferson's brief autobiography, that King George III had insulted Jefferson by turning his back on him at the levee. And I said to myself as I witnessed this modern levee of the Queen Mother, "Oh Lord, she is doing exactly what George III did in 1785. She is greeting each one of us and then she moves on to the next. Is that turning her back? No. She is simply moving on to the next guest." That was an epiphany.

George III was not the man to insult anybody, I knew from my historical studies, under those circumstances. He was a host. He had greeted Adams who said something like, "Your Majesty, may I present Thomas Jefferson, our minister to Versailles."

And the king undoubtedly said something like, "Mr. Jefferson, welcome to this kingdom. I hope you will enjoy your visit here," and then moved on. That is to say, turned his back, yes, you saw his back. In any event, that's an application of my scholarship to an insight. This was significant because the fable that George III had insulted Thomas Jefferson reverberated down the corridors of time. The latest resurrection of this fable was 10 years ago. But I have now written an article based on that episode, which has now been accepted by a Pulitzer Prize winning biographer of John Adams.

You ask if I was tired of academe. The answer to that is no. The two overlapped in a very fundamental way. It was a personal satisfaction as a representative of the government of the United States, which I was, and I certainly was satisfied with that, but as an academic it was a personal satisfaction to see especially the bicentennial reconciliation of the two peoples. It was -- it was really a fabulous --

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

RITCHESON: I went over with Walter Annenberg and stayed for Elliot Richardson and then for most of Anne Armstrong. So I had three ambassadors.

Q: What was your impression of their operation, and particularly your working with them?

RITCHESON: Ambassador Anne burg was a very dedicated ambassador, well received by the royal family. Got off to a rocky start by being misinterpreted by some of the popular press, but recovered from that and was really welcomed finally by the British people. He made great use of his wealth where it was needed in the world of culture. He gave endowments, pictures I should say, to the Natural Gallery. And he started the refurbishment of Westminster Abbey and did a great many things that came out only after he left his ambassadorship. He was truly dedicated to British culture, and was, I think, a successful ambassador. Richardson came in to succeed him, and of course was an instant success though he spoiled his exit by leaving in a fairly peremptory fashion. President Ford appointed him to the Commerce Department, which was thought to be a little junior in British terms, to justify his departure. So he was there only a year. Then came Anne Armstrong, who was an enormous success, a well-placed political confidant of the administration. She'd been in the Nixon White House. Was thought to be naive diplomatically, but that proved not to be the case. I would say that she was successful as an ambassador.

Q: What role did culture play in British American relations?

RITCHESON: Well, it was huge. Of course this was a sensitive time, the bicentennial. Everyone was taking a good hard look at the foundations of this special relationship. The gift of the Golden Magna Carta, for example, is testimony for that. We were worried about this at the run up to it. How are the British going to view this? Well, they treated it as a family reunion. That's -- forget the war. Let's go back to the basics: Magna Carta, the founding of the colonies based on British principles of self-government and liberty, on the shared cultural values. We read the same books, we derived our systems, social systems and political systems from the same sources. The British intended, and I responded, to make it a sense of reunion.

Q: I was wondering, did -- you talk on the cultural side, are you pretty much speaking to the upper class or what?

RITCHESON: I've written a piece about this. Their effort was organized through something called the British Bicentennial Liaison Committee, or Bicentenary, as they insisted on calling it. And it was definitely high culture. Not much in the way of middle class or labor class. That's true. Although Elliot did try and Anne did try to establish meaningful relationships with the labor unions and there was some success in that. I had nothing to do with it. I was focused on universities and senior cultural organizations.

Q: How about the universities? Was there much in the way of study of the United States? I mean one of the things that always struck me in my various tours and other places is how a lot of Americans have steeped themselves in European history, including British history. And yet, Europeans often have very little knowledge of the history of the United States.

RITCHESON: I went from Harvard to Oxford in 1948 to work on my thesis and first book, The impact of the American Revolution on British Politics, a topic that required access to British sources. I arrived at Oxford to find that there was a single field in American studies at that great university. It was slavery and succession, nothing in the colonial era at all, nothing subsequent. It was unique. When I went back as cultural attaché there had been an explosion of interest in American studies. Every university, and there were some 30 at that time including the new foundations, every university had a program in American studies. Now, sometimes they weren't very broad and not very deep, but the subject had come into its own. There was an organization called the British Association of American Studies, BAAS it was called, nationwide, who had regular meetings. They were publishing a journal. They had only one drawback as far as I was concerned. They looked to the embassy as a source of money and were always at me for funds. I thought to myself, well, the Conference on British studies in the United States didn't look to the British Embassy for funds. Why should they look to me for funds? We worked that out. But American studies caught on. There was the Harmsworth professorship at Oxford. This is a result of World War II of course. Suddenly we were the 900-pound gorilla in the room. We couldn't be ignored anymore.

Q: Did you have much contact with what is known as the chattering class? Pundits of various people, newspaper commentators, TV, BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)? Did you have much contact with them and were they important factors?

RITCHESON: I did have contact with them, though that was principally the responsibility of the press attaché. The columnists were always around. They covered exhibitions at the embassy. We had some tremendous exhibitions, including the exhibition lent to us by the Philadelphia Fine Arts Museum, which had closed down for remodeling. Reviewers were always there trying to dig out news. There were political pundits too, people like Kenneth Rose who were regulars at the embassy. I can't think that they were significant.

Q: You were there for three -- were there any crises the embassy was mobilized to deal with?

RITCHESON: No. Looking back on it there was a very curious embassy-wide alert to terrorism. And we all thought at that time that it was very curious, “Ha ha, who could think about terrorism in the American Embassy in London?” But nonetheless, somebody high up thought it -- thought fit to give us all a form in which we had to give examples of our ordinary signature and how we would use this signature to indicate that we were under duress or that we were signing a document against our will. There were some alterations that one was able to put on record. And if somebody subsequently saw that, they would say, “Ritcheson is not really serious when he says, ‘I am joining the Muslim brotherhood,’” because I have signed it in a way that does not conform to my signature on record. That was an example of what you were inquiring about. There were, of course, demonstrations in front of the embassy in Grosvenor Square. And I think I told you about my late friend, the station chief, Cord Meyer, who gave me a ride back in his car after hours. And we had just caught up with a demonstration which had left Hereford Square -- I can’t remember what it was, Turks or Greeks -- and he got out of his car and attached himself to the demonstration and went along with them. I stayed in the car -- I’d see him from time to time going, “Well oo-oo,” like that.

Q: Waving his arms, yeah.

RITCHESON: Yeah, with them. So if you’re ever at a demonstration make sure to look around because there may be a CIA agent next to you.

Q: You left there when?

RITCHESON: Late ’77.

Q: Where did you go then?

RITCHESON: I went around the world for, for USIA. I went on a lecture tour.

Q: On what?

RITCHESON: On the American Revolution. It was still bicentennial season. I started in Korea, flew from London to Korea and was there for a meeting of their organization of American studies and gave the keynote speech. From Korea I went to Bangladesh, which was very interesting. I saw the students holding hostage the rector of the university, so it spoiled my lecture. And I went up the river to Chittagong. And then I went up to Calcutta, to Delhi and to Afghanistan. Kabul in those days had just lost a king. The king had gone into exile. I remember the charming, civilized Afghan elite. I suppose they’ve all gone now. And from Afghanistan I went to Egypt where I lectured at a couple of universities, and from Egypt to Greece and then back.

Q: How were you received, say in Egypt?

RITCHESON: Very well. Courteously, politely. I had no complaint at all. The only place I was not handled politely was in New Castle on Tyne.

Q: Mm-hmm.

RITCHESON: That was when I was still at my post. There were radical students who said in effect, “You’re here to talk about a fiddling little revolution. We’re talking about a big revolution to come.” And that was their pitch.

Q: Mm.

RITCHESON: But that’s the only time in my career as cultural attaché that I was badly treated.

Q: Well, after the tour what’d you do?

RITCHESON: I went back to my chair in history at Southern California. They promoted me to distinguished professor. And I settled down for a couple of years of good work on teaching and -- which I enjoyed very much -- and writing and founding of the West Coast branch of the Conference on British Studies.

I had thought to finish a book. But the president of the university called me in one day and asked me to take on the chairmanship of the University Library Committee. And I had to be persuaded to do that because I told him, bluntly, that I had been frequently a member of university committees and they never seem to do much good. He said, “This time it’ll be different,” that he was aware of great problems with the libraries at USC, and he wanted them solved. And so I agreed. I said I would take it on for one year and went for two. I wrote two great reports saying that it was in fact desperate, that a program of reform was required including a new building and, in short, 53 million dollars would have to be found. So that was quite a lot of money back in the ‘70s. And so he said, yes, he agreed. And after a decent interval he called me back and said, “You’ve persuaded me that your reports are well formulated. I want you to take on the responsibility for the programs that you yourself call for.” And so I did and became a university librarian and dean with the responsibility of finding 53 million, because that was the way the president worked. He said, “Good, I’ll give you the help of the development office, but it’s up to you to find 53 million.” And so I spent the remainder of my career as the dean and university librarian. And without boring you with too many details I might say that I found the 53 million dollars and built the new building and the executive suite. And it’s named the Charles Ritcheson Executive Suite and there is a portrait. Not a very good one, but nonetheless. I retired in ’91, took on a couple of pro bono jobs. I was senior vice president of something called the Fun For Arts and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe. This is at a time when major cultural institutions in these countries were transitioning from the Soviet background to the West. And I was country director first for

Hungary and then for Poland.

Q: Mm.

RITCHESON: Where I worked with museums, opera, libraries, and other cultural institutions, teaching them mechanisms of self-governance, of independence in finances, raising finances.

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

RITCHESON: I have a story about the first celebration, formal celebration of the bicentennial in England. Well, actually it was in Wales at Saint Asaph Cathedral, because the bishop, 18th century bishop, friend of John Adams, was the only pro-American bishop in the House of Lords and therefore it was thought fitting that the first event should be there. And they did it, as only the Brits can, with great processions and blah, blah, blah, and music. And the Speaker of the House of Commons and I were to read the respective lessons at the ceremony. I was sitting on one side of the altar and the speaker was on the other. After we processed in and found our places and so on, the Men's Welsh Choir sang the two national anthems. I was absolutely unable to move from my seat. I was so moved. I was so stirred by this. It was as if a great circle had come to completion that the act of reconciliation had been finished, had been consummated. I was sitting there unable to move. I was transfixed. It took the Speaker of the House of Commons some effort to get me going. But that was, it was a very symbolic coming together of the two peoples.

Q: All right. Well, thank you very much for this.

End of interview