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

# RICHARD FENTON ROSS

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*
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## INTERVIEW

[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Ross]

*Q: Today is June 19, 2003. This is an interview with Richard Fenton Ross, R-O-S-S. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Well, do you go by Dick, Richard, or…?*

ROSS: Richard, usually.

*Q: Richard, okay. Let's sort of start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and a little about your family?*

ROSS: Sure. I was born in Alexandria, Virginia in November 1935, and I was born in the old Alexandria Hospital, which was at Duke and South Washington, and that building's torn down now, and it was the Time Life Building; they'd built on top of it. It was a building from the late part of the nineteenth century.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I'll get into it maybe a little bit more. I lived until I was seven years old…maybe six years old…two houses away from the hospital. At that time it wasn't called Old Town; it was just called Alexandria.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So that's where I started out. My father had worked at a bank in Alexandria for 19 years, on King Street, Citizens National Bank, which doesn't exist anymore; and he came from what they used to call "up in the country." He came from the area between Middleburg and Leesburg in Loudon County, and he came from a family that had been up there for a long while, but they weren't landed. They were yeomen farmers, I guess.

*Q: Well, I'd like to get a little feel. I mean where did they come from?*

ROSS: They were English and Scots, "Ross" being Scots. My father's father had gone to Randolph-Macon Academy. His father, that is to say my great-grandfather Ross, had a dry goods store and a post office at a place up at the base of Mount Weather, where the government later dug out (ha, ha, ha) the big caverns on the other side, on the western side of the mountain. But it was called Mount Weather because there was an early weather station at the top, from the turn of the century or perhaps before.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He was the postmaster and so forth up there at the Trap, and that is a little place that's been there, called the Trap, since middle of the 1800s or before.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So the Rosses had been wheat farmers and corn farmers up there.

*Q: Were they involved in the Civil War?*

ROSS: Actually I haven't done any family history, but the Rosses seemed to avoid the Civil War. The other half of my father's parents were the Leiths, who were big landowners up there, and that's an English kind of name, or Scots too, I should say.

*Q: How is that spelled?*

ROSS: L-E-I-T-H.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The Leiths, some of them, lost their lives—there's one guy that comes to mind called Dallas Leith, second battle of Chancellorsville.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: After the Civil War, Great-Grandpa Leith gave four farms to his four extant sons, and they were four very big farms. One of them was called "Farmer's Delight," and that's an eighteenth century Georgian place; and another's now, was called "Pot Town" for a long while, then it was called "Leithtown" or "Leithton"—my Great-Grandmother Leith got that (that's my father's grandmother). These are big, big places. Another was "Foxcroft," which is now the girls' school [Foxcroft School].

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And the last one was Farmer's Delight. These were all fieldstone or brick with additions, and they're all up in the country there. One of them had an airstrip put on it so that you could put planes down on it, you know, that kind of a thing.

*Q: Well, how did your mother and father meet?*

ROSS: Well, my mother's father and mother grew up in Philadelphia, and they had run off and gotten married, I guess, when they were sixteen. It's very hard to pin these things down because the people who may have remembered all this stuff have passed away. He was from a sort of a Delaware and Pennsylvania family, and she was of Irish stock.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Her father, that's my great-grandfather on her [my mother's?] side, her grandfather, had a livery stable in Philadelphia in the 1880s or 90s. He had come over, I guess, after the potato famines, but I'm not even sure when. He did well, as a person could—he wasn't educated at all; in fact, it's said he couldn't read or write.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But he did very well. He sent his children to good schools, and so my mother had a good education in Philadelphia, a very big Irish influence, and they had Catholic connections around town. My mother went to a private school and went to a college called now Immaculata [University].

Her father and mother, how did they meet? I don't know how they met, but after they got married, he worked as a linoleum installer—huh, can you imagine! —in those days when people bought rolls of linoleum you had to put down in houses, and he did that for the big department store in downtown Philadelphia. I'm not sure whether he went to Mercersburg Academy or not. He may have finished high school at some private school there, and he went to work for Atwater Kent, who was the radio pioneer.

*Q: This was the…an Atwater Kent radio was the…*

ROSS: Oh, yes!

*Q: ...the great thing at one point.*

ROSS: Because they built them the way they, you know, they were perfectly built—

*Q: Yes, they're beautiful* _____.

ROSS: …monuments. Yes, they are. Even today, they go for 25, 50 to 100 grand [$100,000] maybe—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …for the famous ones, the famous models. Anyway, he [my mother's father] was his chauffeur.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And they were very thick, but he did all kinds of things for him besides drive his cars. Atwater Kent, at one time, had 60 or 70 automobiles. *Life* magazine did a story on him in World War II, of Atwater Kent; or *Life* goes to an Atwater Kent party in Los Angeles where it kind of ruined Mr. Kent because it showed that he had all these fancy Rolls- [Royces] and stuff sittin' around while everybody else was on the war effort. That's when Atwater Kent closed his factories, sold everything out, and went to Hollywood, kind of a, I suppose, Hugh Hefner move. But they had spent a lot of time up and down the East Coast. So my mother's father and mother would go down to Palm Beach sometimes in the winter with Mr. Kent. They had kind of a very interesting life, traveled around and stuff like that, and went to Europe, I guess, and things like that. This is in the '20s and '30s.

I don't want to embroider this or put a false caste on it. Anyway, at one point they broke up. This was after my mother was 14 or 15 years old; it was very hard on her and her

younger brother. But when they reconciled, they moved, as a kind of a gesture of starting a new life, to Alexandria, Virginia. So my mother had finished Immaculata College or was just finishing college; I'm not sure—and wound up, they bought a very famous house in Alexandria called the Doctor Brown house, which is on Royal Street, 206 South Royal. Brown was one of George Washington's doctors, and the author at that time of the first pharmacopoeia (if that's the word) for the United States' military, and was a surgeon general for the Revolutionary Army. He had built a beautiful house there, which…the site is here. It's a brick house and fireproof because the rooms are individually built of brick, the interior partitions; but the outside is covered with little wooden clapboard, because you were taxed at a lower rate if you had a clapboard house, a wooden house, a frame house, than if you had a brick house. So after he built this brick house, then he covered it with wood.

*Q: Oh!*

ROSS: My father was working at the bank, and he was one of three boys; he was the oldest of three, and they were the Ross boys in Alexandria in the '20s, and they had a band. They played at the Belle Haven Country Club and at different dances and, in fact, played in Washington at the Wardman Park Hotel; they played tea dances and foxtrots, and stuff like that. He'd started out with a band in Alexandria. The first lead singer was a 14 [or] 15-year-old girl from Cherrydale—you know that's up, starts up Route 29 in Arlington, [Virginia]—who was named Kate Smith—

*Q: Huh! My God!*

ROSS: …and Kate Smith, the first place she sang, was in the band that Daddy had.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And that band is famous because a lot of people in Old Town used to remember it.

But anyway, Daddy worked at the bank, and his two brothers did things around town too. He met my mother, who, as I said, her father and mother were operating out of Alexandria, but still had a lot of interests in Pennsylvania, particularly Malvern, Pennsylvania, and Paoli, and some…couple of row houses or something like that in Haverford. I don't know if my grandfather still worked for Atwater Kent, or whether he just sort of took care of their interests—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …because the war came along and everything changed. As a matter of fact, there was a terrible big fire at the Atwater Kent plants in Philadelphia.

Q: Yes.

ROSS: There were Atwater Kent plants elsewhere, but…I think I heard sometime that there was a suspect of arson or something like it.

Anyway, they got married in 1933; Mother and Daddy did. They moved into a little house two houses from the hospital, and my sister, myself, and my brother were born; I'm the middle of the three children. They lived in this house, which was supplied by my mother's father and mother, who had ready cash.

On Daddy's side of the family, the people were what you might call "land poor," and Great-Grandmother Leith had moved out of this place called Pot Town, which was a little town. It's north of Middleburg. It was a crossroads; it might have had a couple of stores and a blacksmith's shop and stuff like that; and she bought another place further up toward Leesburg, which was much smaller, because she couldn't, I guess, afford to keep up Leithton. It's a great big place; it's on the National Trust now. The Brown [&] Root people, the Browns of Brown [&] Root [Kellogg Brown & Root], bought it for a while. It's in the Hunt Country. Coming from there and from moving up to a place called North Fork, which is halfway up toward Leesburg, it was still out in the country, Daddy had a horse, and he rode a horse to high school for four years—for high school—coming in from the country. Since the hunts had sometimes come through the fields [that] were around there—you know, when the master of the hunt sets a course, they make agreements with the farmers that they can drag down through their fields; but, they have to both repair the damage (it might be to the crops or the fences or something), plus they have to invite the folks across whose land the hunts, you know, would ride—he did sit a horse with that sometimes.

But he was a banker by this time. He started out as a runner, five bucks a week, and after nineteen years he was chief cashier, at the edge of the war, World War II.

*Q: How long did you live in Alexandria?*

ROSS: We moved from what is now called "Old Town," out to one of the first subdivisions out Telegraph Road. I lived there till I was seven years old, and then I moved to Wilmington, Delaware, with my folks. We lived there about a year, year-and-half. Then we moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and lived there two and a half years, something like that.

*Q: What caused these moves?*

ROSS: My father had started a business, had started his own little insurance agency, and he also started into real estate. At that time the thing was just starting to move, but it was still not—starting a new business was iffy in those days.

*Q: Oh, boy! We're talking about—*

ROSS: The end of the depression era.

*Q: End of the depression, yes.*

ROSS: So he got an offer from a life insurance company to open up new territories. It's Jefferson Standard, which was out of Greensboro, North Carolina; they wanted to expand north. So he opened up Delaware, if you want to call it that; and then he went up and opened up central Pennsylvania, which is Harrisburg area, you know, Scranton, and all those towns—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: … to where he would go in, get an office, find agents, hire them away or offer them better things, and then, you know, carry on like that.

*Q: Yes. Well, for a kid, where'd you start going to school?*

ROSS: Saint Mary's, downtown in Alexandria, which is still there—old Saint Mary's. I was in first grade there.

*Q: And then you moved to what, Delaware for a year?*

ROSS: Yes, I think I was in second grade in Delaware, and I was in the second grade in Harrisburg. I went to two different schools there; I was starting the third grade at the second school in Harrisburg, because we moved in Harrisburg twice. Then we moved to Jacksonville, Florida, from Harrisburg, and I finished the third grade in one school in Jacksonville, and I went to fourth grade in another school and then went to fifth grade in another school there.

*Q: How did this affect your learning?*

ROSS: Well…[laughter] it gave me kind of a funny…I went to nine schools or something like that in the course of all this. I don't know how—you know, you don't know it's affecting you—

*Q: No, no!*

ROSS: …but it gives me, I guess, a kind of a…one thinks that everything's transient when it's like that, you know.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's like another opening, another shot.

*Q: I went to something like nine or ten schools, and it made you set up for a little bit of you want to keep moving.*

ROSS: Yes! Well, you know, tomorrow will be better!

*Q: Yes!*

ROSS: I have to say that one thing happened to me when I was less than two years old. I had a very high fever from chicken pox and woke up, as a little baby, severely cross-eyed—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …because my eyes, the muscles relaxed, or whatever happens. That was the great tribulation, which took me—I'm 67 now, but it took me well over 50 years to realize, you know, everybody wonders what screws them up, you know—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and I think it was being cross-eyed, and having to go through eight operations on my eyes over a period of years, and never finally getting it correct. But what happened at the fifth operation was that the doctors cut too far, and I became walleyed; so they had to do six, seven, and eight to make the eyes kind of, you know, aim at the same place on the bulletin board. I'm an alternate suppressor—I'm looking at you with this eye, now I'm looking at you with that eye.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So you can see how it goes off like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It doesn't bother me and hasn't bothered me for a long while, but when I was little all that grief really bothered me because I couldn't do anything right. I couldn't play sports, couldn't hit the ball, you know. I didn't know how to handle myself physically.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I got in fights when I'd get to the new schools, and stuff like that, you know.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I was the, you know…also, one is the object of…

*Q: Well, the designated hitee, or something.*

ROSS: Yes, but you're also the object of everybody's…you're the pathetic item.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Poor little you! Look, you can't even see right, you know!

*Q: Yes. [Laughter]*

ROSS: And I wore patches. That was it! I had to wear glasses, and then glasses with one thing blank, and then patches, because they had the theory then that if they used a machine called a tachistoscope, they could focus your eyes if you watch enough of these things, and they'd bring the thing together to train your muscles to overcompensate for the fact that they're not tied, you know, because they cut and tied the sclerotic muscles with these operations.

*Q: Well, what did this do to reading?*

ROSS: I'd just read with one eye—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …until recently; and I had a cataract operation, and so now suddenly I find I can read with the other eye now!

*Q: But as a kid, I mean this is, you know, such a vital time. I mean could you read in elementary school?*

ROSS: Yes, I got into books; they were an escape as it were. And so once I started reading in first and second grade, I really started reading everything.

We rented some houses in Harrisburg. We moved into town after a winter out in a wonderful place outside of town in this old house built in 1780, and it's still there! The woman who owns it said everybody in Harrisburg has lived in this house, you know [laughter]! I went to see it, and it still looks the same. Of course, there's a bloody Chevrolet used car lot in front of it now, because it's on one of the old roads.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's out toward Lemoyne, [Pennsylvania], but you could see the Blue Mountains in the distance; and there were orchards around it, and a springhouse and outbuildings, you know, and fountains and apple trees. It was great for the kids, great for my brother and sister and me.

*Q: Yes. Well, I mean what sort of books did you like?*

ROSS: When we were in Harrisburg, I started reading the *Outline of History*, the H. G. Wells thing, and I remember that in second and third grade, or in the third grade I guess; and then I read whatever was on the shelf there. A little bit later when we moved to Jacksonville, and about our second house there, they had a lot of books. It was a big old

frame house, turn-of-the-century—excuse me for saying turn-of-the-century—turn-of-the-last-century, you know. I'm aware that we're no longer turn-of-this-century. Anyway, the book that did it for me, as far as the Foreign Service, is *The Royal Road to Romance* by Richard Halliburton.

*Q: It's interesting how many people have been influenced by—*

ROSS: Halliburton.

*Q: But I mean other things. I mean Halliburton got me. I mean it—*

ROSS: Yes, *The Royal Road to Romance* was his first book.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Something about now the moonlight is drenching softly the stone casement windows, and here it is, his last day in Princeton. What to do? He doesn't want to go back to Memphis, Tennessee, where he came from.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So there's nothing to do for it, but to go to Europe to start. Of course, you could get a passage there for 50 bucks [dollars] in those days.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But I remember lots, not whole passages, but famous lines from it. Remember, "…at last, I can [actually] SPIT A MILE." That's from the top of the Matterhorn.

*Q: Yes!*

ROSS: And all the adventures. And of course I was so little, I didn't know what things were, you know.

*Q: Yes, but no, it…well, in school, let's say elementary school, how about subjects? I mean how did you…what subjects?*

ROSS: I liked geography, I liked reading, and I liked poetry and English; I liked history. I could do math well when I put myself to it. But I had all these…I was a suitable case for treatment. Now what should I call you? How do you call your—

*Q: Stu.*

ROSS: Stu. Well, Stu, you know, I even have friends right now who go to therapists and psychiatrists, and they tell me, and then they tell the psychiatrist, and I tell them, and then they tell the psychiatrists; and finally, just recently, this person said the psychiatrist said

he had to get out of town. He couldn't take it anymore. He was taking a vacation. She said, "Well, what am I to do?" and he said, "Well, call up Richard and find out what his advice is!"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So, I've worked on other people's cases for a long while, and I've worked on mine too.

I don't know how we get back to what I was saying, but how it all came to be that I did like all that stuff, and what I did or didn't do was partly insecurity of being cross-eyed, of having the eight hospital stays, because you didn't just go in and get your eyes fixed.

*Q: No, no.*

ROSS: You had to recuperate a little bit—you know, three or four or five days.

*Q: Yes, sure.*

ROSS: A lot of it was done at the EI [Alfred I] du Pont Eye Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware. In fact, there's some belief of mine that the reason we moved to Delaware was because the medical treatment would be free, you see, and good, because Alfred I. du Pont—I said EI I guess, but that's [Eleuthère] Irénée du Pont, isn't it, or whatever it is?

*Q: Irénée, yes.*

ROSS: They had a famous children's hospital, plus they had a famous eye hospital, and so we got that sort of instate or free.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I don't even—it might have been free; or else, essentially for our thought, it was free because we never paid the bills—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: [Laughter] …if you know what I mean.

So that…and my mother and father, which I'm sort of going to veer around some of the turbulent family life, but they fought all the time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: In between fighting, they drank, and they actually drank and fought too. So there was like three or four different conditions available in the house.

*Q: Well, did you find this made you sort of become a loner and often get out of the house?*

ROSS: Well, it made me seek solace in the world of *The Royal Road to Romance* or fantasy or Poe. I loved him when I discovered him, and I used to like to go to the library and, you know, sneak up upstairs to where the big people had the books and read a lot there, you know.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: In fact, still, just before I came to this discussion, I was over there looking in the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) library. That's a wonderful library, of course.

*Q: Yes…well, you know libraries are a great window to the world.*

ROSS: But actually they should all be blown up because television's more important to us nowadays [laughter].

*Q: We're saying this with a certain amount of cynicism. What about—*

ROSS: Oh, we passed cynicism. We've passed beyond that [laughter]!

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: The cynic, the Greek fourth century post-Plato, the secret dog who laughs as he bites, that's a form of cynicism, you know.

*Q: Well now, I'm just trying to get this in Jacksonville. How long did you stay there? What grades?*

ROSS: From the third grade to the ninth. We lived a bunch of different places. Even though my father was in the insurance business, we more or less started associating our lives with the naval air station there. It's World War II and thereafter. It was a navy town, if there ever was one.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: There was the romance of the military there—

*Q: Oh, yes, and it was naval aviation.*

ROSS: Jax [Jacksonville] and then later Cecil Field.

*Q: Yes, my brother taught advanced fighter tactics, I think, there.*

ROSS: In what? Corsairs (a naval fighter aircraft)?

*Q: Corsairs, yes.*

ROSS: Right, and oh, they used to thunder across us because we lived out off the Ortega River for a while. There were Corsairs; there were F-4Fs.

*Q: Yes, Hellcats.*

ROSS: There were Hellcats and Wildcats, and then there were Bearcats later on—

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: …with those huge engines. They were a fantastic thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But the Corsair's the most beautiful one. Then there was the submarine patrol out there, the one with the PBYs [U.S. Navy patrol bombers], which could fly so slowly, and they were so lovely.

We lived on the river; we rented this big wooden house (where I discovered Richard Halliburton) on the river, right on the St. John's at the widest part. We lived there long enough, three years, to really get the feeling, you know. It was a big old lot with big live oaks, and now, of course, it's an extremely desirable place to live. We lived in what they called Avondale, off St. John's Avenue, in Riverside. In Jacksonville, if you say, "I live in Riverside," that's considered cachet, as good as anything on the south side of the river; and then if when you're in Riverside you say, "I live at Avondale," that's even better cachet; and then if you say, "I live on Richmond Street," that's on the river. I mean it's to die for!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's to die for! You know, I mean it's…it was a nice place. But we didn't know it; we were little.

*Q: Well, how did you find the Florida schools, because at that time, Florida being in the South and not a particularly rich state, the school system, I would think, would not be terribly good?*

ROSS: Well, my mother came out of a background that the Catholics, you had better believe that they could do no wrong, and she herself was a very, very pious church-going Roman Catholic.

Of course, my father, I would say when he got married, didn't believe in anything and didn't go to church at all. He was a banker who thought it was fun to be a musician. The

countrymen weren't necessarily, you know, they weren't all elegant by any means up in that neck of the woods, and so his idea of fun was to get in somebody's car and go 100 miles per hour across the Fourteenth Street Bridge, into Washington you know, and at night after you've had plenty.

So my mother's solace, to a certain extent, through all this time, when she wasn't taking part in it, was to be a very good Catholic, and that included getting the children a proper Catholic education. So we, indeed, went to Catholic schools-

*Q: Oh!*

ROSS: …when and if we could, if they could afford it, and stuff like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I went partly to public schools in Jacksonville, which were quite satisfactory for kids; and partly to private schools, which, of course, taught you better manners and a better way to be, and put a little guilt into you that the public schools didn't, and certainly don't now, if I may make an aside, but they didn't teach you very much. By the time I was in the ninth grade we went to nuns there for a while at St. Paul's in Jacksonville. [Sigh] Well, you could say they didn't teach you very much; they didn't open your mind, but you got good stuff drilled into you another way. We had to memorize the conjugations in Latin. There was no opening of the mind to explain to you about Caesar's commentaries or something like that. It was just "amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatus, amant," you know, that kind of thing.

When we came back up north to Alexandria, I went to GW [George Washington] High School over in Alexandria. We moved back to Alexandria, Virginia. My father had blotched his copybook with the insurance company in such a way that, even though he was general manager for north Florida and maybe of all of Florida when it first started, they gave him a pay cut, which he refused to accept. At one point he was making very good money for those times. Of course we spent a lot of it, all of it as it were, but it sifted through everybody's fingers. We moved back to Alexandria, and by comparison, to return to the theme, the public school in Alexandria, Virginia, the high school, was incredibly good.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Ah, yes.

*Q: Well, by the time you were in high school, what were your interests?*

ROSS: Books.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Baseball…I was neurotic, although neuroses no longer exist in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders); perhaps you know that. It's not a valid analytic concept anyway.

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: It's been expunged from the manual.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: My interests: boats, I loved to draw boats, all lines of boats; I wanted to learn; I wanted to read books that weren't in the house (although they paid lip service to it, they didn't read very much); I wanted to learn about everything, you know. That sounds crazy, but I did.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: When I got into the ninth grade I got interested in girls. I couldn't play sports because I'd block whether I was a right- or a left-hander. I was a leftie that had been trained to write in school as a right-hander, like a lot of people were. So I do small work with my right hand, but I throw and bat with my left and hit golf balls left-handed—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and tennis, I'm better with my left hand in tennis. But because of this eye problem I was never any good, or at least I didn't think I was good. I didn't know that you could just shut one eye and take a whack at the ball anyway in softball, you know, so I was strikeout champ. I just gravitated toward the lamp, the recluse, the book kind of thing.

*Q: Did you get involved in dramatics, chess clubs, that sort of thing?*

ROSS: Yes, sure. I did not play chess, but at GW in Alexandria I got involved in the dramatic society.

I was only there for a year and a half, and it was a wonderful school; and then we moved back to Florida again, back to Roman Catholic schools, and I went to two different high schools there. It was essentially the same high school; it moved to the other side of town and kind of changed its style, if you can call it that. But I gravitated toward the bookish things.

*Q: Yes. By the time you were ready to graduate it would be about what…'53 or '54?*

ROSS: Fifty-three.

*Q: Fifty-three? What were you thinking about doing? A college or…*

ROSS: Well, I didn't know what I wanted to do, and we didn't have any money, and Mother and Daddy were fighting all the time and drinking all the time, and I was working at an A&P [grocery store] and loaning my father money from time to time. This was in Fort Lauderdale; we'd moved there. And my mother was kind of in…she couldn't figure it out, and she lived in a fantasy world that she was somehow on the main line with her grandfather's pretensions. Her father and mother had died in the late '40s, a head-on automobile accident and then a brain stroke within a couple years of each other. They were just 50 or 51, and so that sort of went a glimmering for her door to safety, as it were, to be able to move back with them or something like that. My mother and father talked about divorce and separated and carried on and all that other stuff, or my father had.

So I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I guess my mother said, "Get an ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), a naval ROTC, scholarship," which used to pay everything. So I applied for it, took the test, passed, took the orals and passed, and they said, "Where'd you want to go?" and I said, "Well, Princeton." That's because people talked about it. At GW in Alexandria people actually went to Princeton. In Florida they didn't talk much about it. At the Catholic school, if you went anywhere, you go to Notre Dame or something like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But it's a very small school, there were 35 people. I thought, "Well, I'll go to…I'll do this," or my mother thought that. I actually didn't know what I wanted; I was an affectless sort of individual. I didn't have any overt planning; it was just sort of cope with the situation. I think, well, most kids grow up that way one way or another.

I failed the physical because I'm colorblind, and, naturally, in the Navy you gotta read red, green, and amber, and all that stuff…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So that left that out the window.

I was asked by this family here who had very famous clothing stores (they still do) to go up to Petoskey, Michigan, on Little Traverse Bay for the summer, that being the headquarters of the summer resort crowd for a lot of people in the Midwest. So I went up there and worked in a job they found for me. I was 17 years old and didn't have any plans and came back at the end of summer on the Greyhound bus.

I guess my father and mother were really on the outs with each other at that point. So somebody said, "Why don't you go to the University of Florida?" Well, I didn't know anything about it, and so I got in some kid's car and rode up there, and school had already started. The people who were going to go to the university had applied and been accepted and all that. So I came in, I guess, the middle of September, and they said, "You know, classes are starting, and you have to do late registration." So I did, and got a job stocking

shelves down at the Setzer's, the Winn Dixie; and got another job slinging hash, if you want to call it that, serving food in the cafeteria (that was two and one-half hours a day); and got another job serving banquets to give me some cash. So I worked three part time jobs and went to classes, and did okay for a while.

*Q: Sure.*

ROSS: That's how I entered college.

*Q: Did you go through the University of Florida?*

ROSS: Yes, I did. I graduated a year late, a year and a summer school late. I was kicked out in the middle of my second semester of sophomore year for nonattendance, which was vastly annoying, a great tribulation to me, of course, because I had amour-propre to worry about. But I had been in these classes. They had machine graded progress tests and final; and I had at least a C in every class, plus I was staying in the dormitory listening to all nine Beethoven symphonies on somebody else's record player all day long, and hanging out at the university library reading, reading, reading…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …but skipping from one thing to another without any plan.

I was down in Florida last weekend, and I met a judge who's been on the bench for 23 years. It developed that he and I both agreed that the best education anybody could ever get in this day and age was to go through the University of Florida at that time and be allowed to go to the Humanities Room and just read, because that's where he got his education; and he and I agreed on finest time, finest school. We were just fortunate to be there.

So I didn't pay any attention to the professors; I was too wise for them. But I was suddenly thunderstruck to be dropped from Biology one week before the finals for nonattendance, even though I had a C. It developed that I had been the laughing stock of the class because he called my name every day and I never was there, and he'd make some facetious remark. When he dropped me, I was only carrying 14 hours; that put me below the mandatory 12. So I lost all credit in all the other classes and was thrust out of the university into the cold, horrible world of getting a job, about which I've written a poem. It was very hard to find work in those days; it was the third of the Eisenhower recessions.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I couldn't come back for a semester either. So my friends gave me books to read, and I went down to Fort Lauderdale. My father had split for the West Coast, had just gone off.

So my brother and I were paying the mortgage and we were trying to have a good time, be collegians, and be responsible, and also pick up the loose ends of the family, and deal with the parents and all. It was a real circus, I'll tell you. My sister entered a convent over that, I think. She will admit it now. A vocation is partly a calling from God, and there can be other elements in it too.

I left the University of Florida, and I went to see Dean Stan [Stanley E.] Wimberly. He got his little calculator on his desk and smoked his horrible old cigarettes, and he said, "Mr. Ross, you have one chance in a hundred and twenty-eight of graduating from the University of Florida." So, of course, I was very despondent to be told that, according to his statistics, and off I went. I couldn't even face my girlfriend. I mean she was getting A's in all this other stuff.

I stayed out the summer and a semester, and then I came back. But while I was out, I hung out in Gainesville. In those days, there weren't too many people who were in the fringes, but there are tons of them down there now because 39,000 students are [there]. I worked at the girls' dormitory. Now for a 19-year-old young man, you can't ask for [laughter] a finer situation—

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: …than work in the cafeteria in the girls' dormitory, you know.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's just lovely, and one thing and another…I had gone into majoring in psychology, that being the major that everybody takes when they want to figure themselves out—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Psychology involves a lot of hard work, like psychological tests, and every measurement taught by none other than Dean Stan Wimberly with a comptometer [type of mechanical adding machine], those old-fashioned things that used to exist before they had computers. I wasn't getting anywhere. So I went and tried to get advice and psychological advice and all this other stuff, and the brilliant psychologist up there in the administration building, J. Hillis Miller Building, said, "Mr. Ross, you can be anything you want to be. You just can be anything you want to be." What! That isn't the answer I wanted! I went, "What should I be? What should I do?" So armed with his advice I changed my major, psychology, and majored in history. I was doing good in it, and I also was good in English; so since I got good grades in those, I majored in English and history, and graduated in 1958, and had quite a nice little run at the University of Florida, along with my brother, who came along after me. We lived off-campus, you know. Who wants to live in the dormitories? Only "squares" live there. "Skways, man, skways! Only skways live there!"

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: We lived in a place called Twelve Oaks Bath and Tennis Club; that was the name we gave to it, which was a cracker, two-story place, became kind of famous. Some interesting people lived there with us. Some of them have become well known—Harry Crews, the writer, is a crazy writer-novelist in Florida. He's kind of a cult-following fictionist. Then I went right into the army.

*Q: Well, this would have been…you graduated in '58 you say?*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: How long were you in the army?*

ROSS: Three years.

*Q: What were you doing?*

ROSS: Well, I went in because I was going to be drafted.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I was number three on the draft board list for Broward County, where I was registered for the draft. Somebody said, "Well, if you go down there and tell them you want to go in right now, you can go in as PFC [private first class]."

*Q: Yes!*

ROSS: Oh! That's great! An E-3 [Service members in pay grades E-1 through E-3 are usually either in some kind of training status or on their initial assignment]! So instead of making $67 a month or $66, you could make $99. So I went in.

After I graduated from college, I worked as a bag boy for about six weeks in a Grand Union [grocery store] they opened up, and they offered to make me a management trainee without me even seeking it out.

I had by this time worked at a lumber company in Dania, Florida, south of Fort Lauderdale, after I was thrust out of the halls of ivy. It was such a terrible place that the Indians quit, the Miccosukee Indians. They call them a different name down there [Alachua or Seminoles], but they're not; they're Miccosukee. The Indians all walked out one day, and there weren't any blacks that worked there.

*Q: This was the lumber company?*

ROSS: Right. About once a week Florida Highway Patrol cars, two or three of them, would come up, and they'd come in the place. It was a mill, so it had about 120 people,

and they turned out all kinds of stuff for construction business. The Florida Highway Patrol guys would come in with their big hats and they'd take somebody away! "Come on, boy! You're goin' with us, back up there to Folsom, Alabama!" or someplace like that. No one ever knew from day to day whether they would continue to make 85 cents an hour. It was a fascinating experience!

I mean I had lots of different things that I did like that when I was growing up, where you learned a lot of things about life. It didn't help me any, but you could learn it.

*Q: Well, back to the military.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: Where'd you serve?*

ROSS: After I got out of basic [training] at Fort Jackson, I was immediately—I begged to be sent to the first [zone]. It used to be broken into five zones, and I said, "Please send me to Europe. Please send me to Germany!"

"No."

"Please, please send me to Korea."

"No."

So, "I want to go to journalism school. I want to learn how to write."

"No." [Laughter]

So they sent me to Fort Meade, Maryland, and put me in the Finance Corps, and at that time, in '58, the NSA (National Security Agency) was just forming.

*Q: The National Security Agency.*

ROSS: Right, its antecedent being right here on this wonderful campus on which we sit.

*Q: You were in Arlington Hall, weren't you?*

ROSS: Right. So they made me one of the pay people for the military wing of, that is to say, the military army officers who were attached with the formation of NSA. They were just building the buildings there—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We also paid the 325 in my group, which was an incredibly polyglot outfit, all linguists of European, a lot from Eastern Europe. But I didn't know what I was doing; I

just knew I had to get a…I didn't know what they were doing; I just had to get this vast security clearance, you know, which took a real long time; and then I learned a lot about…because we did the people's financial stuff, you tend to learn about people. Who's got a divorce, and who's paying this, and all that. You know what I mean, and all that alimony or stuff that you'd have to do with finances.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And so I was promoted to Specialist, Fourth Class, E-4 (pay grade), and, of course, I had all these ideas about what one should do with one's free time. We started going to "New Yoke" (New York). There were people that had money in this unit, kids who were drafted who had new cars who were from Kansas. They sent a whole bunch of people from Kansas there for some reason, in the finance-dispersing outfit. We started going down to Washington—get in the car and race down to Washington at night. At that time the "beatnik" movement was on, and I had been something of a beatnik at the University of Florida, hung around with the beats a little bit. Well, there weren't real…I mean real beats—well, there were real beats there! But we didn't think we were beatniks. We thought the beatniks all lived in Greenwich Village [New York City] or out in California.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So, I wanted not to be finance pay clerk. That was my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), and I applied to go to Europe, and the captain said, "No, I'm gonna turn it down," and he did. So then I applied to go through Jungle Warfare Training. And he said, "No." Then I applied to go to Airborne. "No." And I thought that you couldn't be turned down for Airborne in those days. And then I applied to go to Korea, the frozen Chosin, and "No," because he didn't want to lose…he didn't want to have people come in that would have to be retrained, and we knew all this stuff and had our security clearances.

So I found this one thing he could not turn down, and by the way, he was a terrible man and a terrible drinker; he used to keep a bottle in his drawer and lose it during payroll. We'd have a couple million dollars stacked around the office, and we all had to watch people, because one of the things we did during payday was we paid the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, which gyred in and out of Fort Meade. (It's over there in Iraq, even as we speak, the Third AC (Armored Cavalry Regiment.)

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We paid them in cash. We paid the officers who picked up the money, and everybody had to count the money; and I've seen this man totally drunk, passed out, the loaded revolver in his desk, and money spilled all over the floor. We all had fantasies about how we were going to steal the money because this guy would go to jail, and we wouldn't because he was drunk! [Laughter] But nobody worked it out, really, where you

could hide the money! I'm talking about my comrades in arms. And nobody else ever worked out when it would be done and how you could keep a secret—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …because there were burglar alarms! The place was wired, and the MPs (military police) used to come by with sawed off shotguns and all this stuff, and there were guards around the building too, because there's millions of dollars in green just sittin' around.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You're an enlisted man and you'd see the officer couldn't count it! He was drunk!

*Q: Yes, you see it's a different world, yes—enlisted man! I was one for four years.*

ROSS: Yes. So the one thing they couldn't turn down was OCS (Officer Candidates School).

*Q: Oh.*

ROSS: So I applied, and then I really got it from the guys, "Ohh! Ross! Oh, well, it's not Ross." Of course, it took a long while to get this because I applied as soon as I got there and thought that all these people did was whine and complain. (Of course, that's what the army is all about at that level anyway.) And boy, did we have some ringers! I mean we had some weird stuff.

A guy who assisted me was a West Point guy who'd never gone beyond captain. He was in this speeded-up class in the '40s; they graduated a year early and he blotched his copybook somewhere along the line, and he was very wistful and in his 30s, late 30s or so. "Well, Specialist Ross, you know I'm just not gonna be with you for a long while. I'm gonna retire." He used to sing, "The party's over and…"

*Q: "and the bells are ringing." Yes.*

ROSS: Yes, I couldn't think what led him to that ledge of despair. We had another guy who was a sergeant, who'd been riffed back from major to sergeant.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: An E-5 (pay grade), and he was the supply sergeant in our unit, because we were a STRAC (Standards in Training Commission) outfit. We had to practice packing out, because if when the balloon went up and the war started, we were going to move out with our adding machines to pay the troops!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Of course, this was a big laugh with us because it was going to be an atomic war. Everybody knew that. So what are they gonna…all they…we'd have to degauss the hand-operated adding machines.

I was in charge of allotments. Yea, that's crazy, a set of files for all this stuff. I had to do all this filing and all, and then make sure everybody's thing, "Well, did you do DS-142, Part 3, blah, blah, blah?" and the sergeant, "Who sent that thing to Alaska?" and "He got divorced, and his second child is not really—he never accepted paternity for that, so we're not allowed a legal decision, blah, blah, blah."

So anyway, this one sergeant, he said, "Well, let me tell you, Ross." This was the guy who'd been a major. He was waiting his time out, and he issued us our blankets and all our supplies and all that. He said, "The army is a great big wheel rolling forward, and it's made up out of you-know-what, and so the thing to do is you run behind this wheel. As it rolls forward, you just run behind it." He says, "But sometimes that wheel stops, and it rolls backwards suddenly, and that's when you gotta be smart, and duck out of the way!" Well, I got that piece of advice from him, but anyway, you could see what it was like.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There at Fort Meade it was so crazy: the NSA was there; the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, which was going to go into the Fulda Gap and smash the Bolsheviks; and then there was us; and then there was the library; and then there was my drinkin' (drinking) buddies in the barracks, because we lived in old World War II barracks, and drunk as hell! In the service they get drunk every night that you can, if you're a drinker. If you're not, you could go to church or something like that, or go to the bowling ally, or go over to Boomtown—that's Odenton, Maryland. The only thing important that happened in Odenton, besides a lot of guys being led down the primrose path of dalliance, is the New York Central (whatever it's called) Train crashed. Two of them ran into each other on Christmas Eve in1947. It was the biggest event that ever…160 people got killed or something. That's the only thing that ever happened in Odenton.

I got the nomination in for OCS and immediately started being called Colonel Fenwick by everybody, because "Fen." "Well, here comes Colonel Fenwick!" you know, and of course they razzed me till the day I left there. And I went down to Georgia, went through OCS, and got my commission. I became a shavetail (second lieutenant), but they didn't call them that there.

*Q: What did they do with you?*

ROSS: Well, immediately they sent me back to where I'd done basic training, Fort Jackson, South Carolina. I hadn't gotten to Germany! I'd never been overseas, as the Jules Feiffer cartoons used to say! So I got there, and they put me up on Tank Hill, the first regiment of training troops, and they gave me a company! I was a second lieutenant with my own company! We only had three platoons. We didn't have four; we just didn't have enough space in this area. So it was a three-platoon company, and I pushed troops

there. I mean I had authority! Of course, I didn't know anything. All I knew was books, and so I thought that the way you'd be an officer was sort of look sharp and walk around with your pants bloused into your boots correctly and carry, not a real swagger stick, but a stick that looks like a swagger stick, tap it on your, you know, swat yourself across the thigh with that, and I did a pretty good job. But then they had some captains come in and a captain came and took over the company. I was the second lieutenant, and so they gave the company to a captain. Of course I was horribly mortified with that.

I met a guy named Smitty, who was a first lieutenant, and he had been a sergeant for about 12 or 15 years. He'd been in the 82nd Airborne. "Ross! You gotta jump! You gotta jump, man. You gotta jump! You wanna hit the silk! You don't wanna be straight-legged!" all this other stuff. So I volunteered for Airborne, and to do that you had to extend because I was only in the army for two years.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I extended for another year, got sent to Benning, [Fort Benning, Georgia] where the Airborne school is, because I was gonna hit the silk! And guess what? The Berlin buildup came up just as this happened, and they said, "Oh, you can go to Airborne school anytime, but we're forming a new battle group and you're gonna be in the Eleventh Infantry."

So suddenly, instead of having a company, and living off post, and having my own XK120 Jaguar convertible to rip around town in, Columbia, [South Carolina] (Oh boy! Was I the cat's whiskers there, I'll tell you, or at least I thought I was…I just thought I was), I became a second lieutenant, then a first lieutenant, in an outfit that got in all raw recruits. They scraped them, you know, from the bottom of the manpower pool—country boys, and people who just…the judge said, "You've got your choice, the army or the jail," and this crowd, and tough people, and people who weren't right in the head, and all this other stuff—the real kind of old army crowd. I had to work with them, and I still hadn't gone to Europe [laughter].

See, by this time, I had gone back to Benning where I had done OCS. So I'd had five PCSs (permanent change of station) or four, five posts, and never got out of the Southeast of the United States, if you include Maryland, which is kind of Southern right up there. [Sigh] I'd never been to Europe! Now in my crowd that…you see, I'd hung around with veterans that had all lived and worked in Europe and could tell you what Paris was like. So I thought, I can't stay in the army! I'll never get out of Georgia!

Q: Yes!

ROSS: So I decided to give my…I had a 20-year commission; I was long term, which was good and hard to get I suppose. So I got out, and I went to…

I had made, not on purpose, but I had struck up a good friendship with a guy who was a colonel from Fort Monmouth, New Jersey; he was Army Intelligence. Bell Labs had just

developed the computer chip and all this stuff, and they were just starting to do important things. He invited me over to his house for dinner on weekends, and he said, "Look Richard, you don't have to leave the army, and it's not all like this." He said, "It's not all…you'd be quite happy in military intelligence and especially our end of it. It is fascinating, the things we are doing now." He was an interesting guy, because he had been captured by the Japanese, and his wife had been captured too, after Corregidor, [Philippines] fell. He'd been interned out there in the Far East, and his wife had been interned in another camp, and they both thought each other was dead. When he was released, he weighed like 80 pounds, and he was, I don't know, six feet tall. I mean just horrible stories, and they had come through it kind of nicely. They were nice people with, what seemed to me, the right attitude. I don't know. Attitude is probably not the right thing, but you know what I mean. They weren't like Smitty and those Airborne guys with 160 pounds of chilled steel, that kind of stuff. These people were different. I sometimes wonder if I should have stayed in the service.

But, I didn't like all that gettin' up so early in the morning. The army's done half a day's work before most civilians get out of bed.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: I don't need to tell you all this since you know it all anyway. That takes me to getting out of the army.

After all that, I went back to Fort Lauderdale. I had a friend who I was very close to (he's in Charlottesville, Virginia, now working on the newspaper). He was working on a paper in Fort Lauderdale, and he said, "Well, come work on the newspaper," and this editor called me up and said, "Do you want to work?" I said, "Sure!" [It was] the *Fort Lauderdale News*, which was a big circulation paper then, and they were starting another paper called the *Sun-Sentinel*, which is a Gold Coast [Publications] paper. So one day I was a soldier…

I went to Mexico in between, hung out there for two months, three months, Mexico City and Cuernavaca principally, and Acapulco too, and I did the beach bum thing—slept on the beach at Acapulco and stayed in Cuernavaca. I climbed Popocatépetl by myself and had some real hairy adventures, because I didn't know what I was doing; I couldn't speak Spanish. I had left some money with my father in Florida, and I kept sending him postcards to say, "Now send me some money," and I'd give an address. But the thing was—this shows you how naïve I was—I put American postage stamps on them and mailed them from the downtown at the post office in Cuernavaca or in Mexico City. Of course, they just threw them in the dead letter office.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I never could figure—I was highly resentful of the fact that my father was keeping my $300 and not sending it to me! [Laughter] I was putting U.S. airmail stamps

on letters in Mexico! So I really wasn't prepared to go overseas in any large way if I still thought things like that!

But I started at the newspaper, and I had a real good run there. I learned how to write news stories, and I learned what was news and what wasn't, and what the editors would cut out or what they didn't like, and how to cover disasters of automobiles, fires, city commission meetings, all kinds of good things. So I zipped around south Florida between Boca Raton, Delray Beach, and Deerfield [Beach] and got to be kind of a known quantity. The great thing is you write it, and it appears in the paper that day or the next. When you're writing a deadline, you have to do it well, and you get the feedback immediately of seeing it in the newspaper by Dick Ross, news staff writer. That's something to be said, and also, you get the inside in all the backroom gossip by all the politicians and all that.

So while I was there, I thought, "Well, I can't just do this for the rest of my life." So then I thought, "I've got to go to graduate school." I had been at the University of Florida and knew some people that hung around with writers, and there was a famous guy there named Andrew Lytle. I don't know whether that rings any bells, but he was a Southern novelist in the Jamesian sense. He said, "Well, you have to up to Vanderbilt. That's where the Fugitives came out of." Lytle was an Agrarian who was with the Fugitives from the '30s. In the '40s, now, it all split up into political movements: say like the Tates, Allen Tate, they went north, and they sort of adapted New York ways; and other people went back to the farms, and tried to farm; Lytle tried the farming like he thought he was going to be Tolstoy.

So I went up to Vanderbilt [University in Nashville, Tennessee]. I applied and, without even half trying, got into Vanderbilt, which surprised me because I had a terrible undergraduate record. I had Fs in different courses, and I failed French three times. First year, first semester French—I failed it three times at the University of Florida. In fact, my grades in French were like C, D, D, D, because you had to have a language, and I didn't know anything about what studying meant, and I didn't know how to study, and I never studied. I could write a paper; in fact, I got good at that. But you have to marshal your ideas, and you have to write a script that people can read, and stuff like that. So I went to Vanderbilt.

*Q: You went to Vanderbilt for how long? What years were you there?*

ROSS: I went in…I'll get to the Foreign Service in a minute…I went in '62, 1962.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So we'd done all this, done army and the newspaper work; and I went to Vanderbilt and immediately went to Donald Davidson, who's a very famous poet there. He'd been the founder of the Fugitives, along with John Crowe Ransom and later on Robert Penn Warren. I thought he was a fuddy-duddy old man. He was in his 70s, drove

around in a blue Cadillac, and he'd started Bread Loaf [School of English at Middlebury College] up there in Vermont with Robert Frost.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But he was very delicate and very opinionated and something of a "seg" (segregationist), if I can use the phrase. He wrote for White Citizens Councils or something like that or for people who had positions on that, and he was very—

*Q: You're trying to say a segregationist?*

ROSS: Right, yes, a segregationist. He was from Pippa Passes, Kentucky, and his father had been a Methodist minister. He was a very, very intelligent man.

Then I took courses from other people in the English department, and I got As in Shakespeare, and I got an A or B in writing from Davidson, and I got another A there, and I got an F in American literature. So my grades after one year at Vanderbilt in graduate school (you usually took four courses a semester) were six As, a B, and an F. The F was because I just ran into a stone wall with this one professor and wasn't smart enough to get away from him or to cut the golden thread there. I had one class that ended the very minute, you know, at three o'clock, and his [class] started at three, but it was on the other side of campus. I told him I had to run across campus, so I'd always arrive out of breath and ten minutes late to his seminar, and he was highly annoyed at that. I wrote a term paper on something that was different than what we seemed to have agreed upon. I thought he would accept it, and he wouldn't. He gave me an F.

I stayed there in the summer, and I tried to gin up a thesis topic with Walter Sullivan, who was also at the university at that time, and I worked. Of course I always worked everywhere I went at these places. I worked on the Development Foundation at Vanderbilt, which at that time consisted of ginning up proposals for rich people so that they would give a lot of money to the university, and I became very cynical about that. In my first semester there I realized that Vanderbilt was not really some kind of a theater of ideas that I thought it would be.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The undergraduates, to a certain extent, were the children of the wholesale hardware dealers of the Middle South, if you follow me, cotton brokers from Memphis, and nice people; their fathers were lawyers or doctors. But they didn't care about the Fugitives, or that is to say the literary movement, and they didn't care about all that stuff that I thought that's what everybody went to Vanderbilt for.

So I was walking down in the English department hall one day, and there were the announcements, and it said, "Fulbright—that the Fulbright board in Washington, DC is going to give 20 extra Fulbrights to people who want to teach English in West Bengal," and this was a special program that they ginned up. So I went and applied, got the

paperwork, took it around to professors, had to get people to back you up. I took it to Donald Davidson, the famous man, the great man, and he said, "Well, Mr. Ross, what do you ever want to do going there? And this is India?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, what do you want to go there for?" [Laughter] And I said, "Well…" (I didn't say, "I've never been out of the United States.") He said, "There's nothing that you can find there that you can't find here. It's all inside here anyway," [pointing to his heart] which is true.

*Q: You pointed to your head, yes?*

ROSS: Oh, yes, that's right, or he pointed to his heart.

*Q: Oh, I see.*

ROSS: That's what he meant, "It's all there." So I filled it out and sent it in, and never heard anything from them. I don't think I ever got a letter saying that I didn't…thank you for applying, but no, thank you. Now I have to figure out how to save money to go to Europe.

So then there was an announcement on the bulletin board, and it said, "The United States Information Agency is seeking applicants to enter the Foreign Service branch which the USIA (United States Information Agency) was a part of," and also, I didn't know anything about USIA. So I thought, "Oh!" You know, so I wrote down that a guy named Mr. Hewson Ryan would be in town on Wednesday two weeks from now, or something like that, or maybe it was that night. It was just like a last minute kind of deal, or two days from then, and I hadn't paid any attention to it.

So naturally I went and fiddled around. I had this great [room], the only private room on campus, and I used to go listen to Wagner (pronounced "Vaugner") in there, and stuff like that. I was what they called an autodidact—I always failed my courses, but learned everything on my own. So I thought, "Oh, my God! I'm late! I gotta go see…this guy's gonna give a talk on how to work overseas!" So I ran over there, and of course, he had finished talking, and everybody was leaving the room. It was a freebie at the student hall, the alumni hall, or whatever they call it. I said, "Oh, I'm awfully sorry I missed your presentation."

He was snapping his briefcase shut the way people do (snap, snap), and he said, "Well, what did you want to know?"

I said, "Well, I missed everything. I don't know what I wanted to know. I wanted to know what you had to say."

And he said, "Well, what do you want to do?"

I said, "Well, I wanted to go to teach English in West Bengal."

He said, "What?"

And I said, “Well, there was this Fulbright thing, and you all administered it somehow, or something like that, but I never heard.”

He said, “What are you doing?”

I said, “I’m in graduate school.”

“Well, what are you studying?”

I said, “Well, I’m studying taking Shakespeare, and I’m taking writing.”

He said, “Oh, well, are you taking international development or anything like that.”

I said, “No, but I know people who are because I work in the Development Foundation.”

And he said, “Oh, the Development Foundation.” I would guess he thought it was, you know, like developing new strains of rice in the Philippines or something. And he said, “You don’t want to teach English or anything like that!” and he snaps open his briefcase (snap, snap), and he whips this piece of paper out and says, “Here! Fill this in and send it in.” And so I took it, and he said, “I gotta go now!” [Laughter] I’m gonna meet some of the faculty guys for drinks. He didn’t say that, but he was obviously out of there.

So I went home and I looked at it. I thought, “Well, I’ll fill it in,” and I filled it in, and that’s [when] the curtains went up. That was the end of the prologue, the conductor paused, and act one started. What I’m saying is that everything led forward from there, but it was not my intention ever—I’d never studied anything for the Foreign Service, and I couldn’t speak any languages.

*Q: Well, had you been following world events?*

ROSS: Not really, because I remember my roommate come busting in—bought all the newspapers in the cafeteria in 1956, and he was a history major, and he went to Harvard later, and he’s a professor of history at Saint Lawrence University, and his name is [Jack] Culpepper—so Culpepper runs into our room and said, “Dick! Dick! Look at this! The Hungarians are having a revolution now, just after this Sinai thing started, and look what Eisenhower’s done, what he said…” and all this.

I didn’t know what he was talking about, because I was living in this little, wonderful ivy-covered tower where I could go over and read Torquato Tasso’s [Italian poet], “Jerusalem Delivered,” in English, of course, or read more absurd things. I was interested in finding out what magic was about, or stuff like that (I didn’t have a magic chamber or anything like that). I had no real concept of how things were or weren’t, but I liked [Lord] Byron, [English Romantic poet,] because he was cool. We didn’t say cool then, but he was sort of an interesting person, he had a sailboat and went around [laughter] the Mediterranean.

*Q: Yes. Well, what happened?*

ROSS: So…[laughter] I'm sorry. I'm spinning you along. I'm getting into the dramatic irony of this thing now.

First, I had a terrible smashup, romantically, with a girl. I ran out of money after I did my quos work for a master's degree. I didn't have a thesis topic, and all these people were so dreadfully square, I thought, in the English department, that is, the students. "Are they gonna be professors of English, and am I, if I get a master's degree and then maybe a PhD (doctor of philosophy), [going to] be a professor of English like these people?" You know what I mean. Since I had all these notions in my head, I didn't see normal people as normal, and these people weren't by any means necessarily normal or not, but they all seemed to be grasping or planning. I thought that you were supposed to throw yourself on the waves, or on the horns of life of literature shall we say. These people weren't that way at all, and so I thought, "Well, hmmm."

But I needed money. Somebody said, "You can teach in Florida without a teaching certificate. You can teach right away in high school—just like that, they need people—plus the University of Florida, which was full of interesting people and better professors, dare I say, even though it's a terrible insult to Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt calls itself "the Harvard of the South," but Harvard doesn't call itself "the Vanderbilt of the North."

So I went down to the University of Florida, and I got into graduate school; I talked my way in. And they said, "Well, okay. Are you gonna teach classes in the fall? You have to teach freshman English." I said, "Yes. I can do that." Of course I'd never done any of that. But they said, "What do you do?" And I said, "Well, I just got this temporary job as head of the English department at this school in Melrose, Florida, which is this dinky little school." The kids were bused there. It was five counties come together, and it's a famous place, Melrose, and the senior class had like 21 kids in it. I taught senior English, junior English, freshman English, psychology, because, of course, I had a great interest in psychology (Ho! Ho! Ho!), and advanced reading for fast readers.

So while I was there and getting ready to go to the University of Florida, where the smart money was, I thought, I got a letter, and it says, "Your paperwork is done. Go over to Jacksonville, Florida and take the Foreign Service test." I'd sort of filed this by now because I was running with a different crowd of people. I was living with some crazy people, literally crazy. The guy used to sit on his front porch with a .30-'06 (thirty-ought-six) [rifle] and shoot bottles set up on posts out in the yard, which was okay out there in that part of Florida, but he didn't open the screen door. He shot through the screen so the mosquitoes would come in, you know, and that would make his wife mad. So this was a real strange lash-up. Anyway, he was certifiable and had been certified before.

So he drove me over to Jacksonville in an Alfa Romeo sports car with the top down at six o'clock on a Saturday morning to take the test, and it's all rolling country. We left at 6:15 and drove it as fast as you could go, and when I arrived at eight o'clock in the morning

there, I was really in the groove to take this test! So I took it and bang! That was it—you know, the written and all this stuff. So then I thought, "Oh well. That was that."

And then I got a letter after a long while that said, "You have been assigned. You can take your orals now." I didn't plan on that; I'd planned to go to the University of Florida. So I went back to Jacksonville, avoiding him because by this time I had had the intelligence to move out of that lash-up. I went over to a congressman's office in the Federal Building in downtown Jacksonville—it was a nice old office, Charlie [Charles E.] Bennett; he was a paraplegic from World War II—and I got interviewed by some guys. I bought a second-hand blue suit, and I bought a new tie, and I had a blue shirt, and I took the orals, and I didn't think that I'd passed at all! But I must have comported myself correctly. While I was finishing up teaching, I got a letter, and it said that they were going to do a security check on me, and I guess I got a physical somewhere.

But by this time, the hippie movement had started in California.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I finished—

*Q: Haight-Ashbury [a district of San Francisco, California, famous from the 1960s and hippie times] and all that?*

ROSS: Yes. So I finished up teaching and was hanging out with kind of a with-it crowd in Gainesville, [Florida]. I'd already hitchhiked out to Mexico and back after the army. So I thought, "I've got to spend more time in California now." I met a guy who was gonna be a hippie. He got a Cadillac and cut the top off of it with a metal cutting tool, and we piled everything in the car and put a mattress in the car so you could sit and sleep in it. We drove out to California, all over, driving in kind of crazy fashion all across the United States. We got out there and immediately got started living with some crowd of what you'd call a group-house crash pad on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, in Oakland, California, in Oakland-Berkeley. I didn't grow my hair long, but I became the doorman at a blues café where Mississippi John Hurt used to play. I got to know him; he was quite an old man by that time.

But it was an interesting crowd of people, and a lot of things were happening, and a lot of people were into drugs, and at that time LSD was legal! It hadn't been criminalized. I didn't quite feel I fit in with this whole crowd of people. This was the Berkeley side, not Haight-Ashbury. I remember I hitchhiked up to Carmel.

*Q: This is tape 2, side 1, with Richard Ross, yes.*

ROSS: Someone called me and said, "You got a registered letter. Do you want me to open it and read it?" So here I am in California with these freaks, literally, you know, and I mean this crowd of people was manufacturing LSD, and I say right away, again, that this was legal at that time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Everybody was into it, and the Summer of Love and all that stuff hadn't started yet. These were the people who started it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Yes. Some of them were okay and creative. Some of them were just postal clerks or things like that. Some people were Marxists in the sense that, "I'm not gonna do anything; I'm just gonna go out and work, pick beans out there, with the César Chávez crowd," and "Oh man! Like I just can't stand this whole society thing." Vietnam was bigger than the army back when I was there in '60 in OCS and stuff, the people talking about Laos and Vietnam.

So this guy read the letter to me, and he said, "that you've been offered a position as a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Information Agency starting at $5,800 a year."

So he says, "Do you want me to send you this letter?"

I said, "What else does it say?"

He says, "Oh, you have to do this, you have to do that, and you have to report," (this is like August, late July or August), "you have to report in September or October, September, so it's only like three or four weeks later."

So here I am. I said, "Oh, well, I guess I better come back," because I was just getting involved with freaks and all this stuff. There was a girl who had a motorcycle that I used to ride around on [with] her. You know, it was her motorcycle and this kind of stuff, so it was kind of very strange times in those days. There were people from the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, (does that ring any bells?), who were living at the house and everything and all kinds of people, and people from the University of Florida, because that was the connection there, the beatnik connection if you will. There was a guy who was a philosophy major [at the University of Florida?], and the first night we got there I couldn't believe this guy was there. He always did a famous stammer, a very brazen young man, but he said, "W-w-o-o-w-w! R-r-r-i-ch-ch-ard! Howw d-d-did you g-g-get h-h-here?" All the way across the United States, and walk into a room, and here's this guy. Oh, I thought I got away from you.

Anyway, I hitchhiked back to Florida, and the hitchhiking experiences are totally something else. I've hitchhiked all over the United States, north to south, east to west. I got my blue suit and got my stuff and had my…I had a $200 car and drove up to Washington DC and stayed with my aunt and uncle, who were quite nice people—my father's middle brother, the middle of the two younger brothers—in Alexandria and got sworn in at USIA when it was at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue with the little sign at the bottom, across from the Roger Smith Hotel.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But it wasn't always Roger Smith. Before it was the Roger Smith it was the Politan Hotel.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I got sworn in, and that said, "USIA—telling America's story to the world." The upshot of it was that they said, "Well, everybody has to go overseas right away, so you can't get any long course or anything like that. We're gonna give you like five weeks of introduction." They took us all around, and we got to spend two weeks over with FSI, which at that time was in Rosslyn in Arlington, [Virginia,] in one of the Arlington Towers buildings or one of those buildings over there. I thought, "Those are the great people over there, the real officers are the Foreign Service officers, and I'm just a Foreign Service Reserve officer, you know, and USIA isn't important compared to that."

*Q: And what we'll do is we'll pick this up. We'll put at the end of the tape, so I know where we're coming from, we'll pick this up in 19__ ...what would it be?*

ROSS: Sixty-four.

*Q: Sixty-four, when you're just entering your orientation course, the orientation course.*

*Today is 8 July 2003. Well, now we go back to 1964. You came into, I guess it was called, orientation course or something like that or…?*

ROSS: They did call it an orientation course.

*Q: Yes. Why wasn't there a, you know, sort of the standard basic officer course at that time?*

ROSS: I don't remember the number of our course, I mean the number of the class, but USIA didn't hire too many…well, how would I say it…young people. They were making an attempt to bring in what was then called generalists, that is people with say master's degrees in economics, but not much experience. So they had to run courses for them because in '64 USIA was still building up its officer corps, which went up to about 1,800 plus officers by about 1968 or 1970. This was '64. In the '50s, as I understand, in coming out of OWI (the Office of War Information) and everything like that, the agency had always or been traditionally hiring experienced people out of communications professions, whether they were radio people, or in some cases television people, but mostly a lot of newspaper people, and the university professor types. So they hadn't gotten many junior officers.

So they started having some courses, but they were small because the USIA could not commission a regular Foreign Service officer. Everybody was commissioned as a

reservist. They had made an agreement early in the Johnson years or at the end of the Kennedy years, when [Edward R.] Murrow had become, of course, the very famous director of USIA, that they would start having a regular cadre of Foreign Service officers. So they then began to have a short course; in my case, I think it was eight weeks. As I mentioned earlier, we did go over for two weeks, I think, through the State Department's six-month course, and it was sort of as if we were led into the big room where people ate off the fine china or something.

*Q: I'm trying to capture the spirit of the times. You really felt like the country cousins?*

ROSS: [Laughter] Well, I had some newspaper background, so I thought I was a whizbang, you know.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There was a very attractive young lady who had been in Latin America and had a master's from Columbia or something like that, and there was some guy who'd done something, who lived in Greenwich Village—that was a big point that he made.

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: I still know about where that guy is; his name is Allen Gilbert.

I don't remember…there was one guy working on his doctorate, and he's become kind of a famous ambassador, has been an ambassador now, Bill [William A.] Rugh. Some of the other people, they faded into innocuous desuetude, at least in my mind. But we…at least I got the feeling that we were a sort of a reserve team for the main Foreign Affairs people who, of course, were political officers and economic officers. They looked like they'd been better groomed up, and, of course, they'd gone to places like Georgetown School of Foreign Service; they're tops at stuff like that.

*Q: Yes. Well, I mean was anybody telling you from the USIA side, saying, "This is…you know, it may look this way, but once you get out in the field, you're probably gonna have a lot more fun and responsibility than these political officers."*

ROSS: Well, actually that was almost a litany within the agency. It was in general agreement on that, everybody who worked there, that we had much more interesting work. My first overseas assignment was Beirut, which I went to like eight or nine weeks after I was hired. I was sworn in on the third day, and I was overseas in seven…well, seven plus weeks I was checked out of Washington. So in that sense, it was we throw you right into the breach and see how we do things. It's true; the agency being much smaller, they dealt with things in a much more immediate way. In fact, if they wanted to fire a person they could [snapping of fingers] fire 'em without a lot of hoo-ha.

*Q: Well, while you were taking this introduction-orientation and all, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do, where you wanted to go?*

ROSS: Yes. I should say a little bit about that and what we took. The things I remember…we took a course that's like "How to Fill Out a Travel Voucher," which is very important.

*Q: [Laughter] Oh, it really is!*

ROSS: Yes, right, and how to fill it out right, because they're very complicated, and of course, in those days everything was done in multiple copies on a typewriter. There was no such thing as…you had to erase all your mistakes with the typewriter eraser.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So all that had to be done. A lot of people, secretaries even in those days, when they had secretaries - they weren't called PAs (Personnel Assistants), didn't like to do other people's travel vouchers except the boss's, so nobody would do them. So they had about a two- or three-hour course on how to do travel vouchers. They had courses on pay and allowances and allotments and stuff like that, and then they had some security training, about a day or two of that. Then for American culture they had a guy who had been CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer) in Norway come in and give us a slide show, about a two-hour slide show, on American art. There were pictures of, I don't know, nineteenth century American paintings and eighteenth century American paintings; it stopped in the '50s with [Mark] Rothko and [Jackson] Pollock and things like that; but that was interesting. They didn't have a course on American music or a two-hour course.

What they did…what everybody was mainly concerned with, to go back to your question, was where they were gonna go. If you had a language, this young lady had a language for…she had Spanish, so she wanted to go to Latin America, and I guess she lived in Brazil or Argentina. Bill Rugh had German and a couple of other languages, and he tested like a 3-3 or 4-4 in about three languages because he had just come back from studying in Berlin. Anyway, everybody put down different things. Some people had lived overseas or had been overseas. Somebody, a friend (I don't know whether this was in the agency or whether this was Carter gossip scuttlebutt or somebody else), told me, "Go to Afghanistan. It's really neat!" So I put down Afghanistan as my first choice of assignment. But then there was another list; I put down, of course, Europe because, as I say, I'd never been there.

*Q: I can't remember. Had you been abroad before?*

ROSS: I'd been to Mexico.

*Q: Oh!*

ROSS: It actually was probably more Mexican then than it is now for an American going down there, you know. I mean…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: One could get around more. When I was in Mexico, I went to Cuernavaca, and lived by myself in kind of a…almost a very inexpensive Mexican establishment, like a bed-and-breakfast, and wandered all around, and went places on buses by myself. You know, I wasn't in some kind of a…I didn't go to the tourists' office to find anything out. I actually went to the Benjamin Franklin Library, a branch of it, in Cuernavaca, which was run by USIS (United States Information Service), and I really had very little idea what USIS was doing there. This was before I applied to USIS. You know, I didn't know that an American could go in. In fact, Americans weren't and haven't typically been encouraged to use the facilities of USIS places overseas—

*Q: No.*

ROSS: …because frankly, they take up all the space, and fill up all the furniture.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: All right, it's a fact of life. Of course, there're laws that say that every American should be welcomed there.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But there's a problem with that.

*Q: Well, so you applied to what? On one list you applied to Afghanistan.*

ROSS: I applied to Afghanistan and some other countries (I guess they were European), and the other list you had to put down languages to take. Somebody said, "They have a shortage of Arabic officers, and if you take Arabic, that would make you available for a whole lot of countries. You can get a lot of different assignments. It's better to take like a big language like Arabic," or they said, "Take Bengali, because there's 160 to 170 million people speaking Bengali, or Hindi." I don't think I'd ever seen Lawrence of Arabia even; maybe it hadn't even come out, but anyway, for some reason I put down Arabic.

So then these lists went, and I guess they shuffle 'em around like a poker hand or something like that. Somebody said, "Well, you didn't put down Persian for Afghanistan. You put down Arabic. They don't speak Arabic in Afghanistan. Why did you put that down?" I said, "Well, there were two different lists, and I thought that maybe they give you one language but they might send you to another place." "Oh, no, no! We don't do that!" [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: Famous last words! [Laughter] So they said, "You put down Arabic, so we'll send you to Beirut to a six-month Arabic course, and it's starting right away. It's starting at the end of November," (or whenever it was. It was starting in November, early November, and I had come in like September 6th), "so you've got to get out there right away!" Well, this was fine with me, so I told everybody I was going to Beirut. Of course I still wanted to go to Afghanistan. But ah, well, you know, can't have everything in life! And everybody said, "Oh, Beirut is the Paris of the Middle East! So if you can't get to Paris, get to the Paris of the Middle East!"

So I went over there. I didn't own very many things. I was 27, going on 28, I guess. I landed and was met at the airport by a guy, who became kind of a great companion, named Rick Rau, who was the duty officer and was sent out to meet people, I guess, for that weekend. So that's how I made friends with him, and he'd been around there for a little bit.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He had been in Yemen, and I guess he'd been some other place. Oh! He had done a lot of stuff in the Far East, different things at different times, and had kind of different occupations, if you will.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he started telling me about everything, how the cow ate the cabbage [expression to indicate the speaker is laying it on the line, telling it like it is, getting down to brass tacks - with the connotation of telling someone what he or she needs to know but probably doesn't want to hear], and so he was sort of my mentor early on.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The first thing I did this six months was go to this short course in language, which was on the third or fourth floor of the embassy, down on the Corniche in Beirut, below AUB, (American University of Beirut). This is the building that was blown up by the truck bomb.

*Q: Yes. This was back in the '80s, [April 18, 1983]?*

ROSS: Yes, yes. This was very luxurious. It had been an apartment, but it was a lovely embassy building. Of course, I didn't know anything about embassies, and when you're new, you look at everything with shining eyes. Beirut was a remarkable city, at that time, of contrasts.

I remember the thing that got me about it. I stayed in a hotel very close to the embassy, a little bitty hotel that the embassy actually more or less owned because it was always leasing or taking rooms in it for long and short periods of time for visiting firemen. Everything in Beirut smelled: I mean the sea smelled; the fish from the sea smelled; the

piles of trash in the street smelled; the fresh vegetables smelled; there was a smell that came off the mountains, even when it was from Mount Sannine. The Bay of St. George sparkled; the buses, the jammed streets with the petrol and the diesel fumes, the taxis honking, you know, these old taxis where they'd get face to face in one-car-wide streets and both of the people would stop and take their keys out of the ignition and hold them up to each other, like "I'm not gonna move," and they'd get out and face each other; they had all this wonderful street theatre. It was just full of people, and this was my very first impression. I just wandered around for like three days. I didn't pay attention to what they gave me in class to start studying. I just went around; it was like going to a sideshow for me!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was splendiferous, and of course there was every kind of character in the world because anybody in the Arab world—that is, from Libya all the way around through the Gulf—who had any money, men, and women too if they could work it, all wanted to come to Beirut to walk around and to see things. Then Beirut was loaded with this confessional system of all these different groups of people.

So there we were, and I was in a hotel room and started studying. I have to tell you that I didn't understand how to study; I didn't understand how to learn a foreign language. In fact, I may have mentioned earlier, I took first semester French four times before I passed it. I had some kind of an idea that the way you learned French was that you just memorized it. I regarded myself as having a somewhat insecure personality, so the only way I could feel confident when I spoke to anybody in Arabic was to have the whole conversation work as if I'd memorized it in a book. But then again, I wasn't very successful with memorization, and I didn't understand how to employ the learning techniques that some people had. But be that as it may, this was a short course, and I wasn't expected to be a whizbang, because they had people there who were there for two years and two and a half years. It wasn't unusual to be a 30-month student, and there was, I think, one person who'd been there 33 or 34 months, the extra time being while he waited.

It was almost invariably a man in those days; there were no female principal students. This was the FSI Field Training School in Beirut. They were all men. The people had had one or two assignments, and this crowd was very professional that I walked into, me being this, as I say, I felt like some yahoo from Florida. There were a bunch of guys who went off to become ambassadors: Roscoe Suddarth, Rocky Suddarth, became an ambassador [in Jordan]; David Newton became an ambassador [to Iraq and Yemen]; and there was a chap there whose father had been ambassador to Iraq and Germany; there was a guy, (I can't recall his name) [G.] Norman [Anderson], who became ambassador to Sudan; there was Ed [Edward Peter] Djerejian, [ambassador to Syria and Israel, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs]. There was another guy who had the two-year course and immediately resigned. Everybody thought this was a traitorous thing to do, I mean at least in the polite circles. So I mean he chucked it after the government had spent, you know, two years training him up.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There was this class of people, and then there was the short course. I was more interested, frankly…Beirut was a vastly attractive place, but I didn't see it as a place to practice my Arabic. I would now.

Anyway, I didn't really do well. I got something like a 1+ or something like that after I'd tested. I tested in five months, and they said, "Well, okay. We can…you're now gonna go on to your next assignment." Well…

*Q: This would be '65?*

ROSS: Yes, it was April to May of '65 it seemed like.

Where was my next assignment? Well, by George, it was Beirut, which fitted right in with my scheme of things, because I had all of a sudden realized that this was a wonderful thing…I mean after 200 people have said, "You're so lucky to get Beirut; you didn't get Doha, [Qatar], or something like that!" So I was a JOT (Junior Officer in Training) there, and that meant I just moved one floor in the embassy. There was a lot of presswork and there was a lot of cultural work. So first I was assigned to the Cultural Section, working under a wonderful guy who'd been around the Middle East for a while.

*Q: Who was that?*

ROSS: His first name's Russell. He left in the middle of my training period. I remember he was a chain smoker.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's funny how you remember that about people…I mean, you know, get up in the morning, cough, and start out with a cigarette.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Almost immediately in my ten- or eleven-month-JOT period the information officer went on home leave, and they said, "Put Ross up there," and that was a very interesting job. At that time we had a PAO (Public Affairs Officer), [an IO] (Information Officer), CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer), an ACAO (assistant Cultural Affairs officer), an ADM (Administrative Section) officer, or that's to say an Executive officer, and an American secretary, and a radio officer (a VOA [Voice of America] officer), and a research officer, USIA research. They had me, who was assistant Information officer. So that's a whole gaggle of people in a post!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They don't even have any idea these days of how USIS used to be wonderfully staffed overseas.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I got this office with this fabulous view of the Bay of St. George and "Jabal" (Mount) Sannine, which the snow descended upon as winter came. I had an Arabic editor, who read the Arabic press and translated certain items for me, but culled it for stuff, which was assembled with the other languages into an afternoon cable every day, which was the media reaction cable. Besides translating stuff, we wrote and released things in Arabic. His name was Namon Nacfuer, and he had a couple of people working for him. His wife worked in the USIS shop as an administrative assistant. I had three secretaries for typing: an Arabic secretary, a French secretary who was Lebanese Christian, and another Arabic secretary. Then I had a French editor, who did the French press; and I had an Armenian, who did his own typing, who did the Armenian press; and I guess I did the American press, principally the Beirut *Daily News*, [*Daily Star*] which was the Mroue interest. [Jamil] Mroue is an editor out there for *An-Nahar* now, I think.

Anyway, I had a whole bunch of intelligent people who really knew what was going on, and we covered like 80 or 90 daily newspapers. Sometimes there were over 100 published because everybody in the whole Arab world, every sheik with a lot of money, or every political interest wanted to get their voice heard or put out their own opinion, and so they could hire, you know, ink slingers in Beirut to do it. You had everything from very principal well thought out Arab press to just provocative twofold newspapers that could be communist or socialist or phalange right wing, but a very, very right wing phalange, or things like that.

*Q: I was told that, you know, when I came in in '55 that the press was really for sale. Did you get any feel that the United States, you know, through CIA money or elsewhere had its own press?*

ROSS: I was told by the then PAO, Chester Opal, that the Nationalist Chinese were black bag men, but he said it in a way that sort of pulled the curtain down on further discussion of it, but he didn't ever say that had anything to do with newspapers. In fact, there was so much different opinion in newspapers that one could go to a Centrist or a Chamounist—

*Q: As in President Chamoun.*

ROSS: Right, yes. President Chamoun was not in office at the time, but he was the president who had invited in the United States military, I think they were marines, in Eisenhower's time, and suddenly we had the marines landing in—

*Q: That was '58, I think.*

ROSS: In '58, right, yes. So there was this interest. You could go to them and get publicity if you wanted. In fact, the papers that were friendly to the U.S. tended to carry

our stuff more—now, our stuff meaning what came on the wireless file every morning, which I don't think exists now either.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But the wireless file was a ticker tape system. It was five- or six-copy print copied through paper, and it used to be with carbon even, the carbon in between three or four copies; it was dialed up on short-wave radio circuits, and you put big rolls of paper in, and the thing unspooled like 25 feet of copy, like an old newspaper office would, and you just tore it off and assembled the thing; and then you used the Gestetner offset printing cyclostyle they call it, I guess; some people called it that. I don't know exactly the technique, but it's a little duplicating machine system. In fact, they got much better and more expensive as time went on.

So you prepared this for embassy distribution. It included all the news, if it was AP (Associated Press) or UPI (United Press International) one-paragraph slugs, plus it had sports news. I mean if it was big, what were the baseball playoffs, and stuff like that. It would suddenly cover something big; if there was, say, something like a big riot in the United States or something, it would have that on. It began, as time went on slowly, to carry more and more stuff about Vietnam. It was a wonderful source of information because it was thought to be faster and to a certain extent more balanced than anything else. It was all done mostly out of ex-U.S. Navy and U.S. military equipment that had been devised in World War II, including what they called vacuum tubes, valves to bring the signal in, and it ran, I guess, up until the '70s in more and more isolated posts anyway.

I did the wireless file. I had a couple of meetings to find out what the general drift of the news of the day was, and by three o'clock I had the makings of a telegram, which could run two, three, four pages, which I'd encapsulate new ideas that were coming into the press, and you know, big resistance to other American ideas that came out of the embassy and also opinion about what was or wasn't happening in Middle East politics in general.

So this was a wonderful job for me, and I did it for about four or five months while this IO was away. His name was David Roberts. He went on a great long family leave. I got to know everybody in the embassy because I started going to meetings, and I went, of course, to the ambassador's big country team meeting.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?*

ROSS: He was a former university president, I think the president of Ohio State [honorary degree from Ohio State], Armin H. Meyer. Then following him came Dwight J. Porter. He had been Assistant Secretary of State for Administration. Beirut was, to a certain extent, a plum which people fought over to get, I guess, in the Foreign Service; and sometimes…I don't think it was political too much, in those days political embassies were, I think, like Australia or European posts.

*Q: Steered clear of the Middle East.*

ROSS: Right. I think maybe Robert Lincoln had been ambassador.

Anyway, one of the things about the embassy in Beirut—it's not only that I all of a sudden get kind of what you'd call acknowledgment for this kind of work I did because I worked really full tilt, but it was a lot of fun. I didn't use my Arabic, though, because everybody spoke in English all the time. So my six months of Arabic was sort of like put on hold, and everybody outside of the office spoke French, or at least they spoke French in the parts of town I went to. I lived in an apartment building off Abdel Aziz. The Doctor, Jon Moi Dea, was a Syrian; I think he was Christian Orthodox—I 'm not sure. But they all spoke French; everybody spoke French. So I realized that what I should try to do was learn French—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …if I was going to go to Beirut, you know, not Arabic.

*Q: Well, a couple things. During while you're looking at the press and all that, was Nasserism a major force then?*

ROSS: Absolutely!

Mohamed Heikal was the famous editor of *Al-Ahram* at that time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: His weekly (maybe even more) think page was a big deal, like it came out on Thursday before Ramadan, I think.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Nasser was looked to by the ordinary man in the street as the man of the future.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: His picture was in many, many store windows, a great many—I'd say 80 percent, or 75 percent. Even though the part of Beirut that I went around in to a certain extent had a lot of Christians in it, they still, you would even see Nasser's picture in the window. Now you have to understand Nasser being a Muslim. Underneath everything in Beirut and underneath everything in Lebanon was this acknowledged struggle about who controlled the power in the country when, according to a 1933 agreement of what they called, I think, confessionalism, the Christians dominated parliament—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …based on apportionment by a census taken there. Well, the birth rate amongst Muslims had grown exponentially so that there was more than 50 percent Muslims in the country, but they still only had maybe 30 some percent of the seats in Parliament; and they had some other party arrangement that if the prime minister was Muslim, then the president was Christian, and vice versa.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: Yet, in spite of all that, Nasser was considered an attractive personality for the future. I have to say at that time, as a new American, a young guy out of the South, you know, of the United States, I didn't find him at all attractive as a political leader. In fact, when I looked at his pictures, I thought, "The guy's nose is too big."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I mean how could [laughter]…it's sort of like looking at de Gaulle and saying his nose is too big. They portrayed Nasser, of course, in that '50s style with a kind of clouds of glory streaming away from his forehead.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: I didn't understand Arabic at all to the point where when he did speak, everybody would shut up and listen. You'd walk around on a Friday night sometimes, or if he was going to talk, you could walk around neighborhoods, everything would be quiet except the radios playing, and they'd say Nasser's talking or somebody else is talking. I remember one time I was walking around and I heard this…all the radios were being played loud, and they played them out the shop doors too, you know, the fronts of the stores, and this Arabic voice is going, "Wah-da-why-de-da-ya-da-wah-wah, wah-da-la-la-la, wah-da-wah-wah-wah," like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And I thought, "That's beautiful!" In other words, I had gotten into the culture a little bit so that my ear was opening up.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And I said to somebody, "That's Nasser talking?" And they said, "No, that's [Habib] Bourguiba!" And I said, "It sounds, you know, it's incantatory," or however you say it, and they said, "He is a great master."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "He's a great master of the style, but as far as choice of rhetoric, Nasser tops him." This is to say that even now, but certainly in those days, that the politicians of

influence in the Middle East usually have as one of their strengths a wonderful rhetorical ability that we've almost lost. It was like listening to Roosevelt in the United States.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: If you listen to something on the radio, you can hear that wonderful style, which I think he picked up from [Woodrow] Wilson, even the accent. You think, "Wow! Listen to that guy talk!"…well, even John F. Kennedy, although Kennedy spoke very fast. I mean Roosevelt spoke in a more measured way.

Well, the same thing goes for the Arabs. I've watched them a bunch of times since then, and I'll tell you, the present president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, is not behind the hand in really being able to get up to the mike and whip people up, and I watched him on television. It's amazing. I mean there's different ways to do it, but…

*Q: Well, that was Nasserism. Nasserism at that time, at least from sort of the embassy or your perspective and all, was he the enemy or a threat or what?*

ROSS: He was a threat. He was a threat because he and Foster Dulles had had kind of a standoff. I don't remember all the politics of everything, but Nasserism was something that the West—that is to say, Britain and the United States and France—couldn't control! They didn't know what to do with it, and the only people who were able to get in and work with him to a little extent at first were the Italians, who'd get into the oil business with him and stuff like that.

We, at first, liked Nasser, but then, and of course it was obvious that the monarchy was corrupt, you know, wasn't going to last and everything, and there was the Officers' Revolt, and then I guess somebody came before Nasser.

*Q: [Mohammed] Naguib.*

ROSS: Yes, that's exactly right. Mohammed Naguib. Nasser came along, and he gave everybody hope in the Arab world. He looked, he just was fabulous, and this was before television, so they heard him on the radio. Then, of course, he had a lot of vitriol in my neck of the Arab world there for Israel, because he said the famous things like, "We will drive the Jews into the sea!"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And this was what everybody—

*[Beginning of tape 2 of 10, side B, with Richard Ross]*

*Q: All right.*

ROSS: Anyway, the embassy was very guarded about Nasserism and, in my work, what the papers said about it. But I didn't do that kind of analysis. If there were things I was concerned with, they would be more like American-Lebanese issues—like the Lebanese were always trying to get the American…was it the controls of apple imports lowered. At that time, and perhaps still, up in the wonderful mountains of Lebanon on the Mediterranean littoral there was all this wonderful terraced, incredible terraces of fruit trees—you know, ten, twenty—like Yemen or like China…terrace, terrace, terrace, terrace…only one tree wide, and they were all apples; and they had been apparently exported to the U.S. until something happened in the agricultural sector of the United States.

*Q: Probably started in Washington, Scoop Jackson [Henry Martin Jackson] or someone like—*

ROSS: I guess…right, the Wenatchee crowd closed that down.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So this kiboshed the farmers, and they weren't all big, rich farmers. They were guys who brought their apples to market in maybe donkey carts, and it was slowly assembled and went to the United States. It wasn't air freighted, I can assure you; it went, you know, in the holds of ships.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …maybe reefer ships, I don't know.

Another thing was the guarantee agreements for new business, which the United States Department of Commerce and the State Department ran. It was some kind of an investment guaranty thing (IG), and that was a big thing when I was a JOT. It was kicked around Parliament a lot. And so everybody who didn't like America would be against it. It comes up every now and then; it's still on the books. What it does is, people who open up factories overseas, American companies, are protected from, you know, expropriation and…

*Q: Oh, it's the Hickenlooper Amendment.*

ROSS: Yes, they didn't call it the Hickenlooper Amendment. They called it the Investment Guaranty something or other.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …so that one had to pay a small insurance policy premium too for this; so that helped.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Maronite influence on the embassy and all that?*

ROSS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely! In the press section, of course, where I worked, I was naïve. In general, in Muslim countries the Christians tend to have a higher percentage of people working in the embassies—and it doesn't matter which embassy—than one would expect against another faith. This can go for a place like, say, Sri Lanka, where there'll be more Christians in the embassy than there are Buddhists, often; and it certainly applies in a place like Pakistan; where Christians may be three or four percent, if that much, of the population of Pakistan, we might have 20 or 25, 30, 40 percent of the people in the embassy who are Christian.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There's a lot of…you can adduce different reasons to it, but they generally just seem to be the people who apply for the jobs, who are better educated, who have the social entrée, the introduction, the friend of a friend, I know somebody who's really good and particularly the education.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Saint Joseph's College, or University, I guess, now, in Beirut was a Jesuit school from, I guess, the last century, the nineteenth century; it was turning out fantastic Lebanese graduates, in fact, Greek as well. But the Maronites amongst the Christian groups had the ear of the American embassy that others didn't, and that goes back—I'm gonna do a little sidebar here—that goes back, I believe, if my memory serves me and my interpretation of history is correct, to the Middle Ages, because the Maronites stayed with the West when the Eastern and Western church finally broke big time in…

*Q: 800, I think it was, or somewhere.*

ROSS: Oh, that was 1070 finally—

*Q: Oh! 1070.*

ROSS: Right, when they really tore it between Byzantium and Rome.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The Maronites and Urban, II [Pope Urban II] had preached the Crusade thereabouts, or whatever it was, the late 1000s; he preached a Crusade in 1095 or something. But when the Crusaders finally got down there, amongst them a great many French, they had these Maronites who had kept relationship with the Roman Church; and the Maronites were the guides for the Crusaders who came through Turkey and down the Mediterranean coasts in the first Crusade to attack and take the holy places back from the dread Saracens. That isn't why the Byzantine emperor had invited them there. He asked them to go over there and fight the Seljuk Turks in Eastern Turkey; but the Crusades, they had a different concept of what they were going to do.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The Maronites were the guides and led them all down the coast, which was then called Syria, into Lebanon, which was a province, if you will, or a part of Greater Syria; and they were the ones who could be trusted. The French, particularly, always had a relationship with the Maronites. They kept good relationships off and on through many Crusades and had trade with them when, of course, the Genoese, and the Venetians, and everybody else, and the British, and the French, and so forth had trade factories up and down the coast. So by the middle of the nineteenth century, as the sick man of Europe, the Ottoman Empire, was coming worse and worse apart, the Maronites and the French were very thick. The French by that time had Jesuits coming in there, and that is to a certain extent why the Lebanese speak French, in Beirut particularly, in the Western Lebanese crowd.

*Q: I'm told that the Maronites were very successful in a way in taking over the American embassy socially. You know, these were people often with money and very sophisticated, so that the embassy, the social life, often ended up being dominated by the Maronites.*

ROSS: I can't remember the guest lists or anything like that, but it was definitely a Western crowd. It's very interesting, if you see…I was living in Damascus up till the middle of the year 2000, and sometimes we'd see a Lebanese newspaper's old slick glossies, what you'd call society weeklies or monthlies. It strikes me that that good-time midnight crowd and now the clubs too (the young people with the 560 Mercedes), that is still Frenchified and Western and, to a certain extent, Christian Greek, that is to say Eastern Christian, or Maronite. Besides the Maronite Christians, there were the Greek Christians, and then there was a bunch of different kinds of Greek Christians: Greek Orthodox.

*Q: But did this group have much of a…when you were there, we're talking about '65, about '66 or so, I mean did you find your social life was—*

ROSS: More around Christians? Yes, Christians and Westerners. There were a lot of people, as I was not married, and AUB, the American University of Beirut, was right nearby. I could go over there to the cafeteria and have lunch and eat a quick meal sometimes when I could get away from the office, because I usually even had it sent up from the…they had a nice little restaurant in this big apartment building.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I'd have my food sent to me at the office. But there were plenty of Westerners there. I mean there were lots of Americans at AUB, plus there were lots of Christians from other countries; so I tended to run around in a Christian crowd.

*Q: Well now, after this time with doing sort of the press summaries and all, where'd you go? Where did they move you?*

ROSS: Well, finally the information officer, alas, came back from his great home leave. He came back, and so, alas, I had to go, and I went to work for the CAO.

Now I went to work for the cultural section, and I started taking all the groups around. It was fantastic, because for some reason I hit it right from the information section over to the cultural section. The American All-Star Basketball team came through, and they wanted to play the Lebanese National All-Star team, and of course, this was gonna be a big thing. It was gonna get on TV, and so I got right in the middle of organizing it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And it was really neat. I went around with these guys and saw what basketball players were like who played for different big teams. Now this was a much kinder, gentler condition of basketball than that which it has devolved to these days. These guys, they were, of course, a racially composite group. They had enough to put two teams on the court, I guess; and they played the Lebanese who were like about 18 inches shorter than them on average, but who really fought for the ball. The American team members, the All-Star team, they weren't the greatest stars.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But they called themselves the All-Stars, and they were paid for by the Department of State. I think it was a regional, cultural thing, not out of USIA. State, to a certain extent, had some of the CU (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs) stuff.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Culture went back into the Department of State for a long while and then came back out. You may help me try to remember that. I mean U.S. Information Agency had a checkered history of what it did or didn't do.

*Q: Yes, it had problems with Senator [James William] Fulbright, for example, on this; yes.*

ROSS: Yes. But for a long while, CU and, yes, all the educational exchanges went back to the State Department, which was called CU in State. I have to say—you probably heard this—but everybody who thought they were soldiering along and would take a job over from USIA over to State to work in Cultural Presentations, or something like that, or into the CU section of State didn't know it, but over in State it was called the Turkey Farm. One of the worst jobs you could get was, "Oh, I'm working down there in the Turkey Farm." That's where they'd put people who couldn't get a good assignment somewhere else, supposedly; I don't believe that's necessarily the case.

*Q: No, I think often there were things like holding assignments, and it just was not a very popular place.*

ROSS: No, the same people who said that thing would also refer to USIA as "Useless USIS"…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and, "Why don't you all just close up and let VOA run the shop," and stuff like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, I took this basketball team hither and yon, and they said, "Those guys are trying to snatch the ball from us all the time. They're playing too rough." It was very funny to see the Americans complaining about the Lebanese.

*Q: Yes [laughter].*

ROSS: "Oh, those guys!" And then they'd give away their T-shirts, and their game jackets and stuff, and the basketballs, and all that stuff. So, you know, it was like fun, get your pictures, get them in the newspaper and get it on television, because Lebanese television was just getting a good channel going with good production facilities and values and stuff. So I got to know the people with TV.

I took a group around called "Up With People," or I don't know what it was called. It was a Mormon Brigham Young University production. I used to go crank these groups up. You could get a master's degree in theater presentation or something like that, because it was part of the Mormon missionary effort to send people on their missionary efforts all over the Middle East, and, of course, I suppose, all over everywhere else they could get into. So I went up and down different, smaller sort of regional cities of Lebanon, like Sidon or Tarabulus (Tripoli), places like that, and different places in the Beirut greater conurbation; and that was interesting. They got a lot of publicity, and I got a real insight into the Latter Day Saints. I found out what sacerdotal underwear was and all this other kind of stuff, of which I didn't have any idea. So my eyes were slowly, the shingles were falling from my eyes, in general, on all different matters.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We had bookmobiles in those days, and I went on bookmobile trips up into the hinterlands, the mountains of Lebanon. These would be old, old Jeeps, again, I think, military surplus, and they'd have to be fitted with a kind of a steel box on the back that ventilated. It would have 1,000 or 1,500 books, often paperbacks, and they had loan library service where they'd actually go up and loan books to libraries in smaller towns, and the people were delighted to get it, particularly any Arabic translations, which often came out of Cairo because there was an Arabic translation service there!

*Q: Yes. Is that where the Franklin Press is located?*

ROSS: Ah, it could have been in Cairo. The one I knew about mostly was in India—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …because that was done with AID excess rupees, you know, and stuff like that.

*Q: Yes, surplus, yes.*

ROSS: They churned out hundreds of titles, and you know, where else can you get the short stories of Henry James.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, then they'd put in the policy freight with it, as well as anything else. I can't think of a particular title…they might have the speeches of Eisenhower or something like that, or, they would have America in the Second World War, or they'd have a collection of essays that might be called, "In Defense of Liberty" with maybe Elmer Davis or other people contributing to it. They were read, and it was a wonderful thing! Well, in the middle of all this, they cut out the bookmobile program! So there went the books, at least the book distribution that way, which was right down on the almost one-to-one level.

Then they had a film loan service with another truck going around with 16mm films, loaning them out to schools or any kind of institution, and they even mailed them out and got them back in great big cardboard racks of film mailers, which were real cheap. They had all kinds of stuff, interesting things on the United States, and I did a lot more of that in India later, which I could touch on.

Anyway, they had different programs like that. I did all this cultural kind of work, plus they decided to open up a…Kennedy, of course, had been assassinated, and they decided to move the cultural center. They had a small English teaching center. They had an English teaching officer (I forgot about her), Susan Fitzgerald. They rented a big house, a big old villa, as the Middle East cities were full of them from the '20s and '30s, just super handsome old houses, you know, that are all just destroyed, in every Middle East capital and principal city throughout and perhaps all over Europe too. But they got a big old one, that is to say, one with marble floors and stuff.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were the houses of the national "bourgeoisie" (middle class). In Beirut they were the houses of rich people who had money who came there to get away from the hot climates of other…actually, just from Syria. Many, many wealthy people from Syria kept a place in Beirut.

So anyway, we leased (a long-term lease) this big house, and I helped put in a library. Then we had a JOT come; I was supervising him. This was very interesting because I designed this brochure, and I had it printed. I just went ahead and did it. It was called the Kennedy Center. It was four or six pages. It was a "dépliant" (folding brochure) with the whole schedule of the month's activities and everything like that, and I sent them up to the boss, and then he nixed that. It was Chet Opal, the PAO, and he said, "Well, who designed this?" I said, "I did." And he said, "Well, who did you get to design it, you know?" Did I go get an advertising agency? I said, "No, I did it." "You did this?" you know, like I guess they expected us not to be…I mean we took a lot of action, you know, personal things like that.

Another time an army band director was coming, and he was gonna bring a couple of different people from the Seventh Army in Europe or something like that. The military end of the embassy were bringing this guy through. So I wrote it up, I interviewed him, got some pictures taken and wrote press releases and put them out, and then the PAO called me and said, "Who did this? Who authorized it?" I said, "I did." He said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, I'm the press officer, and I thought since the guy's coming to town, and he's gonna be working with the Lebanese National Military Band and all." He said, "And they're gonna give a concert?" He said, "So how'd you find out about all this?" So I went to the ambassador's staff meeting and they talked about it, and he said, "Well, who wrote the press release?" I said, "Well, I did." He said, "You did this?" you know, like it was as if I'd come out from some other room and done it or something like that. So I never could feel whether I was doing too much or not doing enough.

For when they had that IG (Investment Guarantee) Agreement or something like that, I took a lead, and you know, massaged stories together. Maybe I wasn't working the right thing or wrong thing, but people would say, you know, "Well, why didn't you just…" It was sort of as, they didn't quite say it, but it was just, "Don't you know the smart thing to do is don't call any attention to yourself." You know what I mean? And this was all okay with me. I was young and feckless.

They then sent me out to a printing plant, and, of course, they had two or three or four American USIS officers there in Beirut who one never saw at all, who worked at this vast printing plant with this huge web-fed press. It was one of the largest in the world! It was four-color, web-fed; they could print all these different kind of beautiful color magazines, comparable to *Life* magazine.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There were only three places in the world that they could do this—the Philippines, Beirut, and Mexico City. They had master printers there, you know, guys who'd been hired by the agency with 20 years' experience. They had an incredibly sophisticated, I thought (I'd never seen any of this stuff), photo room and photo system: with bellows that were as big as this room—they could open and close it; and a great, big Zeiss lens; and vacuum system to hold the thing flat that you were going to photograph; and you could make a 12 by 15 negative with a tremendous resolution and so it'd be good

for the color separations and all. They could do anything. They had a huge warehouse and all this.

Well, when I got there they had a scandal about thievery. Somebody had stolen a lot of barrels of ink—big barrels, 55-gallon drums of color printing ink—and it costs, you're talking big money. Since there's a huge printing industry in Lebanon right now and there was then—it was the printing center of the Arab world and, to a certain extent, the place where ideas were exchanged, where anything can be talked about and, to a certain extent, written (not everything, but a great many things), the media center, particularly the print center—they were investigating what disappeared from where. Some people had to go back to the United States, were relieved, you know, [sound of snapped fingers] like that. Good-bye, and they sent in a new team. So everybody was going around looking over their shoulder and thinking, "Will I be implicated in this because I didn't sign the right piece of paper that let somebody in, who took the barrel of ink and put it on a pickup truck and said, 'It wasn't good ink,' and it was delivered to the dump, but then at the dump somebody else picked it up, blah, blah, blah, blah." So you know, we're talking $25,000 or $50,000, but that's not chump change.

So I was put to work out there working on an Arabic weekly, a weekly address to the Arab world, to the inner Middle East—that is to say, Jordan, Syria, to some extent Egypt, Lebanon, and to some extent Iraq—which catered to kind of a young audience, like about a 10- or 12-page…maybe it was biweekly. Anyway, we would do some layout and adjust, which I didn't know very much about, but I was learning all the time, and produce this thing with the pictures and decide which articles, because there was a photo file that came out with this wireless file all the time, wonderful selections. The huge numbers of photos all had to be organized, and all this stuff was all kept; in fact, the wireless file was kept for a year or something, so you could know where to look for something. You know, you could look up and see what was Adlai Stevenson's [Adlai Ewing Stevenson III] speech eight months ago at the UN, what did it actually say, what was that phrase he used in connection with the Aswan High Dam, or something like that. They didn't go back to Washington to answer these things. We were decentralized in the sense that we tended to do a lot of stuff on our own, and we were expected to be responsible.

The nuttiest thing that I had to do out there in the printing shop, which was a huge, big building—you could have printed the Washington Post there, at least in a limited edition.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The thing I had to do was decide who was the winner of the regular crossword puzzle contest. Now here's the problem, that all these wonderful folks in the Arab world, I usually thought it was young guys, but I'd remember their names, you know, when they'd say how old they were and whether they were from Aleppo, [Syria] or something like that. We had a contest where you make up your own…it's kind of a let's-learn-English contest, where you make up your own crossword puzzle and send it in, and you send in the clues too. Well, as you know, there's always a botheration in the newspapers about crossword puzzles, because people were forever writing in. I'm talking about our

stateside paper saying, "That is not exactly the definition you mean when you say, you know, this or that, you know. It could also mean something else," or "Didn't you really mean…" So I'd get these things, and they'd have spelling errors that they had put into the crossword puzzle. So sometimes I'd try to change the crossword puzzle—

*Q: Oh, God! [Laughter]*

ROSS: … you know, to have a clear winner, you know. I wouldn't write any comment about it; I'd just sort of adjust it; and you'd get started on this, and after about an hour you'd say, "What am I doing? [Laughter] I'm trying to make a clear winner in a crossword puzzle contest, and these are all off!" They'd have a…I don't know…they'd have the wrong spelling for the title of a Robert Frost poem or something like that. Oh God, I remember that! That was crazy!

But the funny thing, this was out in another section of town, and I had to go out there…I forget…I took a taxi out there, I guess, and it was the first time I was away from this area all around the embassy, all around Ras Beirut. I could walk all around Ras Beirut. But now for the first time I was going out to the Lebanese University, and they were all speaking Arabic around here, and I realized that there was this—well, of course I knew, of course I knew there was this whole Arab world that went all the way to Kuwait that I really didn't, if you will excuse me, want to have much to do with.

*Q: At that time, you know, Lebanon had had this relatively brief civil war when we intervened in 1958, stayed for a while, then we pulled out. But the Palestinians had not come into…*

ROSS: Yes, there were Palestinian refugee camps that were…they were squatters, if you will, and they lived in a terrible condition between downtown Beirut and the airport.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: To drive to the airport, you had to go out what had been laid out as a kind of a pine forest or something, you know, in the '20s by the French, I suppose, before the Second War. The French had their hammy hand in all this stuff for a long while, "excuse-moi" (pardon me), and the Palestinians were there. So you had to drive through, it went on for like about five or seven minutes, in a taxi or a car from the embassy. You'd look out the window and see this dreadful shantytown, which wasn't even a "bidonville"(a settlement of jerry-built dwellings on the outskirts of a city), that is, whether they've been made of just flattened cans. It was just all rags! I mean busted tents and everything and just jammed full of people…there's nothing equivalent like it in the States! It's the way gypsies may have lived or something.

*Q: Yes. Well, I mean did—*

ROSS: When I say that, I want to clarify it. That's the way everybody treated it, "Oh, look at that! It smells so bad when we drive by here!" Or there'd be people, you know,

with little kerosene stoves trying to cook and stuff like that, and just sort of like everybody would raise their—

*Q: I'm trying to capture the attitude, but this wasn't seen as any particular threat or anything else? It was just a…*

ROSS: It was something that had to be worked on.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But the diversion of the Litani River and the Jordan River waters was much more of an important discussion in country team meetings than the Palestinians.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Only when I got to Jordan later on did the cause of or the concern about Arab-Israeli relations get more important.

*Q: Yes, we're moving into Black September and all that sort of stuff.*

ROSS: Yes, oh that was quite a…that was 1970 you're talking about.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This…'64, '65, '66, what the embassy was concerned with was like fifth freedom rights for more airplanes coming in and out. I think…I can't recall…I think TWA and Pan Am flew in there. Oh well, anyway, Pan Am I and II went in there and went around the world both ways!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And it was a Pan Am city.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's sort of like people talking about the '40s and '50s in Latin America. I don't know that people who are just coming up now have an idea of how popular and how dominant America was in a place like Beirut after the Second World War and, to a certain extent, after the French were withdrawing.

*Q: Were you getting any repercussions about our brief insertion of American troops in there in '58?*

ROSS: No, no. On the Left it was, "Well, of course we know that if the Americans want to they can come back in, so what can anybody do about it, you know," like they're the hidden hand that moves anything it wants to in the Middle East.

What we did get was "The American can move its hand to do what it wants in the Israeli issue." But there wasn't much Lebanese-Israeli stuff because I always seemed to be focused, as a young person working in the press section, on Lebanese issues, the Lebanese-American issues.

The Shiite minority in the south was discounted; nobody talked much about them. Well, they were just Muslims, you know, if I may say so. They didn't rattle their chains or make much of a racket down there, and if one went down south, one went to…as I said, I took the Mormon group down, a 25-person group. The male and female sing and dance troupe played, you know, guitar, show tunes, sang songs, very patriotic, Uncle Sam, everything all mixed up, a two-hour show (on stage two-hours, maybe about an hour and a half of entertainment), with a very positive image, you know what I mean, like cheerleaders. I'd take them down there, and we'd go to the Christian school, you know; we wouldn't go to a Muslim school. The bookmobile and the films might go to a Muslim place, but as far as reach out, you went to your traditional places where, since the end of the nineteenth century and the importance of the [Daniel] Bliss-dominated AUB thing, it was the traditional culture.

By the way, AUB started in Syria, you know. It didn't move to Lebanon until the 1870s, after some anti-Christian riots in Damascus I think, and at that time the French and some other, maybe the British, had decided to take over and run the foreign policy of the Lebanon, as opposed to the foreign policy of Syria. That was after riots and, to some extent, the burnings of the Christian enclaves, the Christian quarters, maybe in Lebanon, but in Damascus too, which Richard Burton [Sir Richard Francis Burton] had a hand in (in kind of a weird way.)

*Q: Yes, I was wondering. This might be a good place to stop, and we'll pick this up. When did you leave Beirut?*

ROSS: Oh, I left Beirut in…April of '66, I think. I have to tell you, I did such a good job that they created a new slot for me.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They decided to open, they wanted to keep me in Lebanon, they being the PAO, and I guess the embassy was for it too. I didn't realize that, you know, that they had to fight over resources—that is to say, financial stuff. They got the approval from USIA to open up a slot, and they identified me to be the assistant information officer. But I was sort of like a general dogsbody; I could do things well in different departments there. They said, "Okay, you're it, and you're gonna work for Dave Roberts in his shop." It was at the point of announcing it and publishing it, the appointment.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Somebody heard about it up in Turkey, Carla Grissmann, and she wanted to get out of Turkey because of some problems of a personal nature with other families and other grown-up adults. So she went to the then-area director Alan Carter and implored or finagled him to get her assigned vice me in Beirut, into the new slot that had been opened. For whatever reasons Alan decided to do that, and therefore I was told I wouldn't have that job, and Dave said, "Oh, but you're lucky you're going to go somewhere else." So they said, "You'll be ACAO in Amman." So Carla Grissmann got the job, and I went off to Amman, [Jordan,] in April. This was sort of a quick thing; you know what I mean; it was like a matter of 10 days.

*Q: All right. Well, again, we'll put here—we'll pick this up in 1966 when you're in Amman.*

ROSS: Yes, yes. But I want to finish one…

*Q: Sure.*

ROSS: Yes. I wanted to say I had a very funny impression also of the Foreign Service real quick.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: All the guys I worked for, those are the three I mentioned—Opal and Roberts and Gilke—by then, they were all literary people. Opal had written a book, a spy novel about Vienna; (he spoke three or four languages). Roberts was working on a novel he later published; Dave spoke Arabic. Gilke was, as I said, extremely at home in French and knew everything. These guys all liked to take a drink, and they'd get together and really get, you know, two and a half sheets to the wind—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and talk about…they wouldn't talk about embassy gossip; they'd talk about everything. I mean I've seen Gilke stand up in front of a crowd at the American Center when it was opened, the JFK Center [John F. Kennedy Cultural Center and Library] up on Abdel Aziz, I guess, and talk about William Burroughs and his influence on the modern novel. Wow! Now how many people could just go out and do that bang on?

Anyway, I began to get a different idea of what the Foreign Service was than what it apparently is or has become—that is to say, these guys were really a polymath in a way, particularly Opal! I mean he had been head of a film section of USIA. He'd been PAO in Vietnam, and he'd solved global terms. He understood different stuff. Dave Roberts was a great newspaper writer, and a great piano player and a singer. I mean he could sit down and play Chopin or show tunes. I thought the USIA was something different than I found out perhaps later on that it was.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But they'd all had careers, to a certain extent, before they came in the Foreign Service and went to other things afterwards.

*Q: Probably one of the great stories up really after World War II, an awful lot of talent was around.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: Okay. Well, we'll pick this up in 1966 when you're in Amman. And you were in Amman from when to when? I like to put that. I mean in years.*

ROSS: Well, I was in Amman from April '66. But almost immediately after I got there, and became ACAO and started in on doing that kind of stuff, they said they were going to open up a branch post in Jerusalem.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So even though I was in Amman from April '66, I was essentially living in Jerusalem by the fall of '66 and stayed there till August of '67.

*Q: Okay.*

ROSS: But I was assigned to the embassy in Amman during that time.

*Q: This is tape 3, side 1, with Richard Ross. Today is 14 July, Bastille Day, 2003. Dick, let's start. You're going to be in Jerusalem/Amman from April '66 through '67.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: Okay. Let's talk. When you talk, what were you up to?*

ROSS: Well, I have to note that besides being Bastille Day, this is the anniversary of the great revolution—

*Q: Fifty-eight.*

ROSS: Of the '58 revolution [in Iraq], when I think they dragged Nuri al-Said and the crown prince's body [Abdel-Ilah] through the streets of Baghdad.

*Q: I was in Dhahran, [Saudi Arabia], at the time. I remember that [laughter].*

ROSS: And they stopped the cars, the taxis, with the German tourists in them, or the German businessmen, and tore them to pieces.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I think that's what the phrase was.

Okay. So I was in Jerusalem, but I wasn't in Jerusalem right away; I was in Amman; and I was to be Assistant Cultural Affairs officer there. Fred Stutz was the PAO, Boulos Malik was the information officer, and a guy named Tony Mathik was the information officer. This ACAO (Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer) is a general dogsbody, and I did that, got a little bit about Amman under my belt, and saw a little bit of the kingdom.

*Q: What were you doing?*

ROSS: I helped organize the Fulbright and the International Visitors' Program selections in the CAO department; and I would escort people, American cultural presentations, again; and I sort of had overview of the library, which was in the same building.

The USIS at that time was at what was called the first circle on Jabal Amman. This is near the old downtown part of Amman in the "wadi" (valley), and so you drove up out of there, and it was in the life insurance building, which was the only high rise building in Amman—that is to say, it was like nine or ten stories. The other big building was the Intercontinental Hotel, and that was like six stories.

Actually, I lived in the Intercontinental for three months because there was some back and forth about when I would move to Jerusalem. They had decided after I got there that I would go over to Jerusalem and open up a new cultural center in the city of Jerusalem—that is to say, on the east side on the then-partitioned city of Jerusalem. The Arabs' side was the east side.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And that belonged to the Hashemite Kingdom after the '48 truce, I guess.

I went around with people. I had a State Department presentation, a guy who was a dancer, and his name was Burt Stimmel. He was brought out by the cultural presentation section (CU) of State—I think which was then under John Richardson [Jr.], or whoever followed Richardson [Joseph D. Duffey]. He was a very interesting ballet teacher and dancer, who, after World War II, had his own troupe of five or six people, had music composed, and danced around Europe as an American classical and modern dancer. We did presentations in different places in Jordan. He was very good as a cultural "animateur" (director or master of ceremonies) as the French would say, because he did the Baalbeck Festival, as the advisor to the government of Lebanon's Baalbeck Festival party, and he'd also worked in Egypt with the Egyptian government dance groups. In those days, and I'm sure still, every country has its folkloric troupe and then it welcomes other folkloric troupes from other countries—that is to say, from the Eastern Bloc of nations, you know, the Romanian National Folkloric dancers would come, and the this and the that.

And while I was there, they had this summer festival, which I was involved in, downtown in Amman, in the old Roman amphitheater, Amman being one of the cities of the Decapolis with the wonderful name of Philadelphia in good old Roman days. That's the only Hotel Philadelphia that I know of in the Middle East. That's right downtown across the street from the Roman Theatre of Philadelphia. The guy that ran the Hotel Philadelphia had married a woman who'd been the ambassador's secretary in Amman, and they were fairly well fixed since he had a hotel. But they also ran desert tours and later on got to be much larger, you know, camel tours out into the desert, down into Wadi Rum, where T. E. Lawrence [in *Lawrence of Arabia*] had been active, and to Aqaba and to Petra and all those. So I went and did all the touristic things too.

I got in a little theatre production, and we did a play, "Any Wednesday." That's a good warhorse for little theater groups. It was the first time I'd ever been in production, so it was sort of interesting.

I started going back and forth to Jerusalem. In those days, there was no border at the Jordan River, so you could drive back and forth with relative ease. You just had to slow down at the checkpoint at the bridge…a little bit. You didn't have to stop completely if they recognized your car. So you could drive back and forth in an hour and fifteen minutes.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And maybe this isn't the time to mark it, but at that point I had, in my youth, been enamored of sports cars. I got myself a Jaguar XK150, and drove it very fast one time down the very good and very empty road that winds down to the Jordan Valley and then back through the outskirts of Jericho and back up to Jerusalem—a wonderful road that runs right through the Dead Sea, that is 1,600 feet below sea level, and back up; and I claim, although I've never been able to register it to have the world land speed record between Amman and Jerusalem. Certainly it should stand these days because the checkpoint could take two and a half hours—

*Q: Yes. [Laughter]*

ROSS: …you know, once you get through being interrogated and everything else. So I started going back and forth. But I have to say that being in the Middle East you were much closer to what you would call the Arab-Israeli situation; you felt it much more than you did in Lebanon. I think I mentioned that before.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It seemed like the whole of the politics that they talked about in the embassy and in the embassy meetings was, "What this…what that." Did the Israelis, how bad was the incursion into Tulkarm, for instance, that occurred. Now, I was sort of vaguely aware of all this stuff, and the diversion of the Jordan River, how many cusecs of water would be allowed to go into the East Gohr Canal, which had been built [for] a whopping amount of

money by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) to give the farmers [on the] Jordanian side of the Jordan River Valley some return for the fact that many of them may have lost land on the west side of the Jordan. Anyway, they had brought in all kinds of fruit and crops that could grow down there near sea level, and actually below sea level for that matter. Bananas grow wonderfully at 1,000 feet below sea level if they're irrigated.

Besides things like dance troupes, I started getting interested in Biblical archaeology, and there were archaeologists who were working on both sides of the Dead Sea Valley. Paul Lapp was one; he was doing the Neolithic ruins. Then the British were working around Jericho; that was Kathleen Kenyon, who had dug up Jericho and found the original walls of Jericho, which were mud-brick they think. You know, this is 6,000 – 7,000 BC.

Then there was the business of Biblical archaeology. The Dead Sea scrolls, of course, had been discovered quite a bit earlier, but at this time they were getting a lot of attention because more of them were coming on the market out of the hands of antique dealers and would-be illicit antique dealers. So there was a center for Biblical archaeology research in Jerusalem [École Biblique of Jerusalem] run by a French Dominican, I think, named Pere Roland de Vaux. What they would do is slowly assemble all these little pieces or the broken pieces of the parchments from the caves in the Qumran Caves (the caves sitting on the face of the Dead Sea), and try to make sense out of them and put together the gospels of the Essenes, which, to everybody's great shock, the words in these Essenic gospels have somehow resembled, if I understand it correctly, some of the teachings of the prophet John, or John the Baptist, the words that…in other words, these may be other interpretations of events that occurred about the same time or slightly before the birth of Christ. This leads to the conjecture that Christ, his teachings came out of the Essenic community, which turned its back on the Romanized civilization of Jerusalem and the other cities that looked to trade with Rome and what have you.

Well, this is all by way of telling a story. At one point when I was in Jordan, the then-Secretary of the Interior, Stuart Udall, came out. All the high panjandrums who came out would be given what, as happens in every country, I guess, since the beginning of diplomatic relations, the two-dollar tour, if I may so describe it. One of these things in Jordan was a visit to Qumran to the Dead Sea Caves or the caves where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered.

These caves were kind of interesting because they're big enough to walk into; sometimes you have to scrunch down; and back in the back, that's where various things were hidden. When the Essenes were attacked, either by people of their own particular faith who didn't like what they were teaching or by the Romans or by whoever didn't like them, that's where they hid their scrolls. They had other things in clay jars and things like that down underground. This was recognized by the Jordanian Tourist Authority to be something that could be valuable on the tourist market to attract people the same way that Petra was coming to be recognized, or the cities of the north of Jordan, or other early Christian ruins in certain parts of, you know, churches in the third and fourth century, and the Roman ruins.

So they took Stuart Udall and a large party of people, and he went and looked at the whole thing, and he said, "This is all very interesting." He made a little speech there. They had the representative or the minister of tourism, something like that, from Jordan, and everybody arrived in a cavalcade of cars, you know, their black Dodges and all this stuff, and they said, "What do you think of it?" And he said, "While it's all wonderful, I don't grasp it all. But what you need to do now is pave the little paths here…"

I mean I have to say it was very wild and romantically picturesque, like a nineteenth century David Roberts drawing, you know, with the mountains of Moab facing you across the Dead Sea Valley. That's where, I think it was, Moses saw the Promised Land from, and there are these caves and you got the real sense of history there.

There were some Bedouins or Arabs in their tribal regalia, as one might say, with camels and all this stuff, and so they said, "What do you think of it?" And he said, "Now what you have to do is you want to charge admission to this, and you want to have a nice stone, little gate house, and then you'll have to put down some curving paths, and then you'll have to have the toilets, and make sure you have enough toilets, and you have to do all this kind of stuff, and then you want to have a snack bar, and you know, and water fountains, and then you probably want to have a gift shop and everything." Pretty soon after this description, you could see what was going to happen to this romantic wilderness out there.

I haven't been back to the Caves of Qumran, but I'll have to draw the curtain on what I might think of what's happened to it since then. Anyway, I guess that's another way of saying that I was out there earlier than the wave of tourism, which has since followed in several successive waves. I did fortunately meet a lot of people that way who were interested in the Bible or in Jesus of the Bible and in archaeology.

I was under a certain amount of urging to find a place for the American cultural center. We had established a little reading room on a side street, off Salah E-din Street. That's on, I think it's on—

*Q: This is in Amman or Jerusalem?*

ROSS: This is in Jerusalem.

*Q: Jerusalem.*

ROSS: All USIS was in this high-rise building, as I said, in Amman, with a wonderful, nice, new library on one whole floor, through floor of a big building; and it fact, it was really great for me because after I moved out of the hotel, there were several apartments on the top floors, and I rented one. So to go to work all I had to do was get in the elevator and go downstairs. We also had an auditorium in that building. It was sort of a big, general building that…third world insurance companies tend to have monopolies on whatever things people want to insure. In Arab countries you don't usually insure

automobiles; you can, but it's often expensive, and you just usually have a liability policy against hitting somebody; and if there's an accident, it often goes to some kind of a SSCRA (Soldier's and Sailor's Civil Relief Act) court where they decide what the blood money damages will be.

We had a couple places picked out in Jerusalem for a multi-purpose culture center. It would have to have a room that you could install or have seating to show films to give cultural presentations. We tried to get an old theater, movie house, which is still there in Jerusalem, as far as I recollect. That would be good because then you could have cultural presentations there.

In my time, most places I served early, the U.S. Information Service would have as good a cultural center or better than other nations who took the step of having a cultural center—that is to say, the British, or the French, or the Italians, or something like that. The ones that were almost comparable, generally, to ours were the Russians, the Soviet culture centers, where they existed. These things were installed, I guess, by the United States, and certainly it seemed to be by the Russians, for the political purpose, of having foreign affairs with a human face. The Russians would often have bigger things with bigger buildings, but they didn't seem to have the kind of crispness and pop that the American centers had. That may be because I'm an American and thought that! But I think to a certain extent people in those days much more looked to the West and rolled their eyes and salivated at the thought of going to the United States, and so anything that was American could be set aside from foreign policy and thought to be very good.

One of the things that happened to my outlook at that time was that I started reading the *Herald Trib* (*The International Herald-Tribune*), which is on hard times right now. [The] *New York Times* has bought it, and it's a question from month to month how it will appear and what it'll look like and whether it'll go on. It bought out the [*Washington] Post* and *LA Times* ownership of it, and it's being transformed, they say. Now I've talked to people who work for it, and I've just heard this in the last couple weeks.

My own opinions were being influenced by the news about Vietnam, which incessantly seemed to be getting worse, and on the opinion page was Walter Lippmann. In one column after another he said one thing after another about being waist deep in the big muddy. He wouldn't, of course, use such a popular phrase. He was a very elegant journalist, and he was, I guess, in his 80s living over in Georgetown; and President Johnson, as I understand, had gotten so tired of it that he went around telling everybody in Washington, "Poor old Walter, you know! He's gone gaga, you know. You can't expect Walter to say anything." Well, Walter Lippmann in '65 and '66 was saying, "Cut it and run, get out! We've made the big mistake! Stop!" and all this other stuff, "Pull the lever! Retrench!" and so forth.

At this time within the government policy was that we were going to go forward, because even when I came in the Foreign Service, there was a group of people who were selected immediately in the State Department to go to CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) training (I'm not exactly sure what the title was).

This included some of the incoming class where I sat in that group for three weeks as a USIA inductee. Everybody in State was sweating it out because 25 or 30 percent of them were gonna be told they had to go to Vietnamese language training right then and there and then be going over to Vietnam to work in strategic hamlets or the CORDS program. It was part of the huge effort in Vietnam. So I became rather disaffiliated, slowly.

I, however, had an interesting thing happen to me at this time. I had met a guy in Beirut who was a USIS officer, who was a reserve major in the army, and he wanted to make lieutenant colonel. He wanted to get enough points in the reserve corps so he could get a military retirement as well, as he was a Foreign Service officer.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he wanted to build up his merit, and I could say nothing except it sounded like a good idea to me. He said, "You don't have to really do very much. For instance," he said, "what I have to do, the army has me doing…" and of course you can't go to any reserve meetings; there aren't any in the Middle East, unless you…you know…I don't know where you would go to one. Turkey? So he said, "…I'd go around a lot, and wherever I'd stop…" he drives his car around the Middle East, he gets a mayonnaise jar (they sent him through the pouch lots of pint mayonnaise jars, empty, like Mason Jars for putting up fruit), "…and all I do is scoop up soil and put it in the jar, and put the lid on it, and when they're all full I ship that back, and that's how I get my reserve points. They expect me to turn in I don't know how many, two or three boxes, whatever it is, you know, of these things." I said, "Well, what for?" He said, "Well, if they invent this thing that they say they have invented or are trying to invent, which is a kind of a ready-mix spray-on concrete, you can fly over XYZ flat territory and just spray this stuff out, and it'll turn the desert to cement, so then you can land a C-130 or a DC-3, I suppose, you know, or a C-46." I don't think the 130…well, it was already in I guess anyway. So this was a great idea. This was part of stuff that was run out of the embassy in the Middle East, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), which has a different name now, [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)]. These are scattered civilian contractors that think up new things for the army to develop, whether it'd be better bandoliers to carry the ammo with or ways to land transport planes in the desert; they could take on great leadership training, lots of stuff.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So through his suggestion, I got involved in the reserve, and they said I had to do two weeks active duty, which was good for me. I flew up to Germany and went to a CPX (Command Post Exercise), and I was assigned to being an infantry officer. But by this time, being in the Foreign Service and being USIS, I told them I should be assigned to a psychological operations unit (PSY-Ops), which, of course, they did have in Vietnam too. I have to say, I may sound like I was totally guessing through all this stuff, but you get to learn a lot about different things that are happening. So they put me into an unreal PSY-Ops unit in Germany, which was, more or less, a paper battalion—that is to say, it had a

little command structure and two or three or four sergeants, but hardly any of the billets were filled.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was attached to Seventh Army Headquarters, as I recall, and they had a few people sort of practicing things and a few people kind of doing an overview.

They had one sergeant there who was a specialist on the Middle East. In order to do the once-a-month briefing (or whatever it was whenever the colonels came in and they would have to know what was happening in the Middle East), well, he got *Time* magazine. He clipped the articles from *Time* magazine on the Middle East and kept them in a notebook. I was a first lieutenant, and, of course, I'd come out of the Middle East. He wanted to talk to me, but I was astounded that the army psychological operations unit, at least that I was assigned to, got its information by a scissors-and-glue operation on *Time* magazine, and I guess maybe…not the *New York Times* and not the *Economist*… But they didn't even, …

*Q: UPI and AP or something like that?*

ROSS: It was kind of like very basic stuff; it was at the level of what you would do if you were in a good high school and were told to write an article on the Suez Canal. But then again, that could have been useful to somebody who didn't know anything about it.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Then they had another guy who was a PFC, who was interested in the Middle East because he was from a part of Illinois where the Baha'i faith has its international [administrative system] headquarters. [The Baha'i faith's world headquarters is in Israel.]

*Q: It'd be Evanston [Wilmette, Illinois].*

ROSS: Evanston?

*Q: Evanston, Illinois.*

ROSS: It's not too far from Winnetka, [Illinois], I take it, right?

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This guy was obsessed with Persia and was trying to teach himself Persian because he was an American and he was not of Persian origin that I could tell. But, the Baha'i had been persecuted since the nineteenth century—

*Q: Right.*

ROSS: …since the founding, I guess, or the championing of it by their great spiritual leader, who'd been put to death I think [actually just imprisoned, tortured, and exiled]. But anyway, a lot of Baha'is were always being tortured and decimated, and even at that time they were the Shah's [Shah of Iran, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi] whipping boys, I guess, or something like that. He didn't want to talk about anything but Baha'i religion, and sort of, if you will, convert me, or get me to find out how many Baha'i there were living in Jordan.

I don't remember very much other than that. All we had to do—myself and one other officer who was a Texan, who was studying medicine in Munich in a German medical school for some reason (I guess it was cheaper, or he got in, or he liked Germany, and he had a German girlfriend)—we sat in the back of this gigantic room while they fought the Third World War. I had never been in on one of these kind of exercises. It's a little bit like *Dr. Strangelove* because there was NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) there, then there were NATO observers, and we were part of NATO, and we, of course, had to have a very top secret cosmic clearance and all this other stuff. I became the liaison between Headquarters Seventh Army and Headquarters Rear, which is a standard military situation, and I was to take back and forth the documents on the latest play of the thing.

Well, the first three days of this war game it went from confrontation at the Fulda Gap or someplace like that to…it was a war game, so different things were injected all the time; and we got into two sets of nuclear exchanges, which essentially destroyed the right and left bank of the Rhine River and [laughter] the greater build of downtown Cologne and a lot of Frankfort; and it was at this point contained and hadn't spread to Paris; and the intercontinental ballistic missiles hadn't taken out Chicago or anything like that yet. Everybody had to keep standing up and getting briefings, and it went on 24 hours a day! You'd see how tired people would get.

I remember two things from this. Of course I was a Foreign Service officer, and I had begun to get kind of a more broad gauge viewpoint toward the world than just the military attitude. At the same time I felt a little bit disaffiliated from the army because I had left it, and in a sense I was only going up there to see what reserve life would be like.

They, of course, paid my way up there. I got leave out of the Middle East. I thought, "This is my chance to go see Germany," because I'm one of these people who had never been out of the mainland, except to go to Mexico.

So here I was up there in one of these big meetings. They had the chaplain; he was a full colonel, and there were several problems. One was how to replace the tires on all the vehicles that had suffered from irradiation of the atomic weapons, because apparently a car can start and run, even if it's gotten 600 roentgens for a half hour.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But the tires breakdown, and maybe the battery goes kerflooey too. I think the electrical system is still, generally, all right otherwise if you don't try to start it while you're getting a big dose.

Anyway, the chaplain stood up, and they started to ask him what he was going to do with these huge, huge numbers of casualties, and then they had got hold of an engineering battalion of bulldozers to bury everybody.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was like Joseph Stalin said, you know, "A thousand deaths is a tragedy, but a million deaths is just a statistic." I think he said that, or something to that effect. I heard that, and me and this other guy (if I may say it that way), this Texan who was a medical student, we got where we kind of laughed at some of this stuff. I don't mean laughed out loud, but smiled ironically and glanced at each other because we had to sit at observation tables while the heavy play went on in kind of a bullpen with huge maps on the wall where they put big blotches. The bigger the nuclear strike, the bigger the blotch was on this great big map. It was like an arena; these were huge maps. So I guess I smiled at the wrong time, and this one colonel stood up and said, "Lieutenant Ross?"

Oh, that's another thing that happened! We were supposed to be replicating a command post. However, we had gotten like a 250-nuclear-kiloton strike near where we were. This was taking place at an army post. It wasn't Patch Barracks, [Germany]; it was a German manufacturing town with military. I was staying at an old German casern; that's where I was billeted, and this casern was where the PSY-Ops battalion was headquartered. I had a car and a driver to drive me around the autobahn as I took these very highly classified messages of what the military orders and decisions were coming out of the exercise. The autobahns were blown up in the exercise, but nonetheless, I was ordered to get the car and take the messages. It didn't get you anywhere to say, "But colonel, I can't get there, if we take this game seriously. I can't get there! The autobahn's blown up!" That was tantamount to asking for problems.

So anyway, I did smile at my friend there at something somebody had said. I think somebody had bemoaned the fact that all the wonderful Johannesburg or German wines all the vineyards were all blown up by the atomic war, and everybody in the room went, "Ohh!"

So anyway, this colonel stood up and said, " Lieutenant Ross, even if this is a difficult situation, and even if we have received a nuclear strike right here on our headquarters, and we're all presumed dead, I'm still alive, and I'm presuming to tell you that your hair is too long. So you'd better stand up young…" you know, what did they call, "…young stud, or young stud monkey, and you'd better move out smartly, and you'd better not come back here until you have a regulation haircut. If you're not back here, you know, within a prescribed amount of time to get a haircut, you're gonna be in deep kimchi, young stud monkey." So at that point everybody in the room was under tension because the vineyards had all blown up. Everybody went, "Yea!" and cheered. I mean there were

several hundred, or it seemed like several hundred; maybe there were only a hundred people. And then they all turned and looked at me, and I could have sunk into the ground, into an atomic hole as it were. So I saluted, of course, and said, "Yes, sir," and I moved out and got my haircut. That's one thing I recall about all that.

*Q: Well, back to Jordan and Palestine.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: What was the impression you were getting from either your personal experience or others about King Hussein [bin Talal] and the rule there in…*

ROSS: My impression, my personal impression, was that King Hussein ruled an old-fashioned desert kingdom. There were several million Palestinians.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I'm not sure how many. He kept the lid on things by a very strong hand of his own private regiments and his own palace guard. They wore a different colored keffiyeh, and made it a very visible show of military strength so that the Arabs of the Middle East had respect for that, which I think they've had that kind of respect in the Middle East for 5,000 years, for the strong man. They talked democracy in the papers; there was hardly any opposition in the papers.

In the Majlis al-Ayan, that's the meeting house of the sheikhs of the elders, where the different tribal, clan leaders, major family leaders would get together, if you will, like our Senate or something like that, guns were sometimes pulled. When I was living at the Intercontinental Hotel, there was a reception for some member of a number one family, you know, first-tier family, relations of the Hashimi or important relations amongst the controlling clique. There was a party there where the crown prince, or several crown princes, pulled out a gun and blasted, shot it off, and maybe shot somebody in the leg or something like that. There was kind of a slight undercurrent of this place: this place could be dangerous; and of course if you went out to the Eastern desert or down toward Tabuk, [Saudi Arabia], in the south and out that way, it could be more dangerous. You could get robbed or something like that; you usually didn't get killed. It wasn't where anybody could just get gratuitously killed like in Afghanistan later.

The underlying theme in the American embassy was the state of play between the Jordanians and Israel. It was what the palace thinks about this or that and the other. In a kingdom there's always palace gossip. It's funny; it's more so in a kingdom than there is, say, like gossip around the president, I think; although that always flourishes too. But the more autocratic a system of government is, the more there is this or that gossip. The Hashemites had really been on the throne only since the '20s, and the king's grandfather had been assassinated in Jerusalem after Friday prayer in 1951. King Hussein was there as a young man of 12 or 14 years old or something like that. He saw his grandfather get it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: That's a signal lesson, so he ran the thing with a lot of cocky nerve. He'd gone to [Royal Military Academy] Sandhurst and learned to fly airplanes, and the British had gotten to him in the sense that he looked up to all things British. So the British seemed to have quite a hand in the Hashemite kingdom.

The Americans in the embassy also had a hand, and a chief of our intelligence services used to play poker with the foreign minister, Wasfi al-Tal. And of course this was mentioned in certain circles, and it was, "Wow! You know." I was surprised! Did we have that kind of influence where the foreign minister would come into your house and sit down at a poker game on a Thursday night? Wow! I mean like we must really be running the show, or at least, you know, be players in the game and not just a poker game, thank you! Anyway, Wasfi al-Tal got machine gunned later too.

The big thing seemed to be the United States helping the Jordanians keep the lid on things, and that meant the lid in terms of the roiling population problem of the Palestinians, and, also, the lid in terms of what it appeared from my point of view that the Israelis were always doing. It seemed like (the way I heard it) they were doing stuff all the time, flexing their military strength. It didn't seem that there were too many incidents against them, certainly not in comparison with what happens nowadays, you know, against the body politic of Israel.

There were certain things that were kind of scary—well, what's gonna happen here or there; and there was a lot of rumble about there may be a curfew in Nablus or something like this; you can't go there; it's dangerous to drive up there. But it didn't seem to me like very much happened, except as I've mentioned, say the Israeli tank incursion, where they just crash into Tulkarm, for instance, with, I don't know, 39 or 40 tanks that stay there until the next morning or a day later, and then shoot up the place a little bit, and then leave. But Jordan didn't seem to be able to do anything about any of this, if that was, which indeed they claim they had supervision over the occupied part of what was formerly Palestine, what they call the Occupied Land, still, I guess.

We had military training operations with MAG (Marine Air Group); I don't know exactly what it was called. But we had given six or eight NATO F-5s or maybe F-104s, or F-100s. I'm not sure of the kind, but they're real hot fighters. I think the 104 was the hottest one of those three, and we had an air force—

*[Beginning of tape 3 of 10, side B, with Richard Ross]*

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …in the northwest of Jordan. I never went to Mafraq; I'm not even sure where it was.

Anyway, this business of these trainers, these F-104s, while people would talk about it a little bit, it was still, "You're not supposed to talk about it," kind of thing. I mean, how could we have six or eight jet fighters in the country and not have everybody in the bazaar know about it at one level anyway. Maybe they didn't talk about it. I have lived in countries where nobody said anything bad about the king or the dictator, even though everybody knew that there was what they call a fingernail factory somewhere where maybe bad things were going on.

Just as a sidebar, so I don't forget it, what happened when the '67 War started on a Monday, somebody somewhere in the Department of Defense on a Saturday sent a cable through very effective channels of communications out there to Mafraq. One of those F-106s had crashed already; one of the jets had crashed, and maybe one or another needed maintenance; so it's maybe only four are active. But everybody knew that from the Jordan River Valley to Tel Aviv at Mach one-and-a-half it was like four minutes. It was like at the most five minutes!

So when the war was about to start, the people who were in Intelligence gave orders that all the flyable F-104s would be not available to the Jordanians! Of course, the Jordanians didn't know the war would start that day, tomorrow, either, on the Monday. So on a Sunday morning the air force guys—the pilots, captains, majors, whatever they were—who were training the Jordanians, sort of schmoozed out to the airbase and said they wanted to run the planes up and down and check them to see if they were all okay, you know, in tip top condition; and they got them all kind of cruising around or rolling around. Then they took off and flew them all out of there without any tower clearance to Turkey, to Incirlik—wwhhit [whistling sound]! There went the Jordanian capability to do any damage. And this happened, of course, before the war started.

Well, that's my sidebar on Mafraq. Wiser heads than mine had obviously realized that a decision had been made or was necessary to be made, and it's to disarm Jordan to a small extent, just fly the bloody airplanes out of there so they can't do any damage.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, I said, "I gotta go live in Jerusalem." So I went over, and the PAO wanted me to live in Ramallah and, "You have to get a villa out on the road to Ramallah." It was kind of a new section of Jerusalem. I can't exactly describe it, but it's like northwest of the town; and Ramallah wasn't a very big town, but wealthy Jordanians had built houses, which they were ready to rent to foreigners.

In Jordan, at least until about four years ago, other than tourism the largest industry was house construction in Amman and all around the kingdom of big, what we would call luxurious houses with marble or limestone floors, and fancy bathrooms with the black china flush toilets, all gold-plated hardware, six-bedroom places, built out of masonry and built to last. Maybe it was cement block, and then it was faced with finished, polished stones—limestone, or marble in some cases.

Who does this? That's what I was told; it's all the Jordanians, or the Arabs if you will, who work overseas in other countries. In Argentina, let's say, they want to invest in something; they're not even sure that the Argentine economy will hold up. They're there; they're in the United States; they're in, I don't know, Italy. They send their money back, and since labor is very cheap and Arabs are good masons and good laborers, they work hard—that is, the basic lower class, which is where you find the blue-collar workers. So you'd find a family with two, three, four, or five houses—still do—for rent.

They're dying to rent them to foreigners because throughout the Arab world they have the old Ottoman-Turkish saying, where once a person gets in and pays what they call the key money to get in, it takes almost an act of God and a religious "fatwa" (religious edict) to get a family out of the house. The family has the right to stay in it, and it can devolve from the father to the son, or from the mother to her cousin, brother, and all this stuff. That means the rent may never go up either, because if it has to go through a religious court, or any kind of a landlord thing, it could take years and years because it'll drag on with the lawyers. It'd get so involved in Yemen when I lived there that the largest group of law cases in the Yemeni law courts was real estate law cases—who owned what piece of property, and who rented it to who, and who was squatting, and who hadn't finished it and all this kind of stuff, and who really owned it (in other words, even though his name was on it, it belonged to his brother). It'd get crazy! That's something that I don't know who can straighten out or even if anybody wants to straighten it out because it gives you a lot of legal play in between the loopholes.

Anyway, they wanted me to live out in Ramallah in some big house that had four or five bedrooms, and I was a single, young officer. I said, "No, I don't want to do that! I want to live down there with them," and I said, "I found a place." I wandered around the Old City—that is, the walled city of Jerusalem with the walls built in the1600s [1500s] by Suleiman the Magnificent—and I came to this place where the first "station of the cross" is, and there's an arch across the street.

Well, the arch is part of a Roman triumphal arch built by the Emperor Hadrian [ruled 117 A.D. until138 A.D.] in the year 135. Jerusalem had been destroyed by Titus in about 70 A.D., and later Hadrian had made a great tour through the Middle East. I think he spent like two and a half years on his tour. When he came to the devastated city of Jerusalem, they renamed it Aelia Capitolina—I'm not sure of the translation of that ["Aelia" is derived from the emperor's family name, and "Capitolina" from that of Jupiter Capitolinus, to whom a temple was built on the site of the old Jewish temple]. But they built a triumphal arch for Hadrian. This arch had stood all through the Middle Ages, and supposedly Jesus had walked the "stations of the cross" and passed through under the arch…well, this couldn't have been because the arch was built in the year 135 [A.D.], and Christ had walked in the year 33 [A.D.]. The people believed that Pontius Pilate had seen Jesus from where this arch was, and it is nominally possible that a high court was there, that was built in the time of Herod the Great. There was a fortress built there; I think it was called the Antonia [Fortress], named after Marc Antony, if I'm not wrong about it. Anyway, Jesus may have been condemned to death and scourged and made to wear the crown of thorns—these events took place right around there.

There was this triple arch, and out of one arch there was a window, and this was the arch across the "Via Dolorosa" (the Way of the Cross), and I thought, "Wow! Look at that! There's a room up there! Who owns that thing?" [Laughter] Well, it was a Muslim, what they call, a convent, al Zawiah; it belonged to the Naqshbandiyah right of Islam. That's one of the, I think, four traditional Jewish _____ rights, and the people who belonged to that were to a certain extent Central Asian or Eastern, you know, Turkestan, Turkish people. They'd come to this place during "hajj" (pilgrimage to Mecca) season, and there was a bunch of big old rooms in two or three big areas.

So I went to this guy who ran it, who was a religious "qadi" (religious judge), and I said, "Can I rent a couple rooms there?" because they were empty and for rent. He thought and he said, "Well, yes, if you are a good person, and we don't want loud people. We remember when the British were here." That was before '48, in the Second World War and the First War and everything. "We don't want loud people." So I had tea with him, and he explained to me that his father had been a colonel and the telegraph officer (the communication with the Turks in the First World War) and then worked with the British afterwards. His name was Mousa Al-Bukhari from Bukhara, [Uzbekistan]. It was agreed that I would rent the place for 25 pounds a month, which was like a…maybe it was 20 pounds a month. It was nothing, you know, twenty dinars!

So I went back to the embassy and housing people and said, "I found a place to rent." "Well, where is it? Is it in Ramallah?" I said, "No, it's in the Old City." "Well, where is it in the Old City?" I said, "It's at the first station of the cross, and one of the things I have is I have this arch, and there's a window in it, and it's three rooms, and it's…well, part of it's real old because it was built in the year 135, and the rest of it is sort of like nineteenth century Turkish. It has wooden ceilings in the old Turkish style, with designs in it. The back balcony stands there, and you can see the golden dome of the Noble Enclosure, the Haram al-Sharif—that is to say, what is sometimes called the Temple Mount—and it's beautiful!" And they said, "You're gonna live down there? With them? You'll get diseases, you know! Why don't you go live in a nice villa out in Ramallah?" I said, "Well, this is really nice." "Well, I don't know. How much are they going to charge for it?" And I said, "25 or 20 pounds a month." "That can't be, you know! That's not right!" And I said, "Well, it doesn't have a Western toilet. It has a "tashnab," which is what is nowadays called a squat john; but it's an Oriental toilet."

*Q: Or a Turkish bombsite.*

ROSS: Pardon?

*Q: The Turkish bombsite.*

ROSS: Turkish bombsite, thank you! [Laughter] Anyway, and it had a shower. I said, "Well, I'll take part of my housing allowance, if you'll give me my regular housing allowance, which was like $150 a month, and I'll spend it, and I'll give you the receipts, you know, build it, enlarge the bathroom, put in a proper flush toilet. You know, it is

meet and proper that we are here. Let us build…it's not let us build a temple to the Lord God Jehovah. It is meet and proper that we Americans are here. Let us build a flush toilet." So I did this and put in a hot water heater and fixed up the kitchen and all this stuff, and bought some furniture and got it decorated and did it very simple, but it had tile floors.

Well, the first thing I heard was, "We hear you're living in the Old City?" because then I moved in there, and "Can we come visit?" and then calls from Beirut, "Can we fly down and visit?" The word got out on the grapevine, and by this time I was spending a lot of time in Jerusalem where a lot of my, as I say, visiting firemen came. Why, it was amazing! Joseph Clark, the then-senator from Pennsylvania heard about it. He wants to come to my place for drinks, and suddenly I'm having a United States' senator come.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This sort of like turned things around for me. I had an entrée into the Old City, where I went to the bakery with two eggs and had them make me an omelet in a loaf of bread (a flat Arab bread omelet), or I could send my houseboy out to shop. I could park my car, oddly enough, right outside the door—that is to say, two car lengths away. I felt it was completely quiet. The only noise you heard after about 9:30 at night was the noise of donkeys moving around, backpack donkeys moving up and down the stone steps. They go clop, clop, clop, clop, clop. They're either bringing in materials for building because they weren't allowed to do that in the daytime in the "souk" (marketplace) because a loaded donkey fills up, crashes around, or else they were the trash removal, including waste material. In the old days, the British days, and they had unloaded the human waste from a little metal catchment that was a door built in the side of these big, old houses.

Then I was introduced to people in the city that I couldn't imagine, people who'd lived there in big, old houses and stuff like that, and I'd invite some of the Arabs around for tea. So that sort of helped me, more so, I think anyway, than if I'd had lived out…

*Q: Oh, I'm sure!*

ROSS: …with what you'd call the merchant class.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: There was a wonderful woman named Caresse Crosby who came and visited me. She was one of the heirs of the J.P. Morgan fortune.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: She had been an internationalist and had published magazines in the '20s, lived with her famous husband, Harry Crosby, in Paris, and they had been a kind of a…there's lots of books written about these kind of people.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And then Edmund Wilson came, the…

*Q: The [literary] critic*

ROSS: Right, and we became friends. Some of the scholars, the Biblical scholars, came, and then, in turn, I had entrée into the American School of Oriental Research and things like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So everything was going okay there, but things got tighter and tighter with the ratcheting up of the pressure of like…things were gonna happen. Then Nasser said he was going to close the Straits of Tiran.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There were threats about closing the Suez Canal. Everybody was asking, "Do you want to leave town? Do you want to stay? What's going to happen? Better get some water," these kinds of things. In about April and May the embassy in Amman was in a get-ready mode. I drove back and forth to meetings there. I think Barnes was the ambassador.

*Q: Harry Barnes?*

ROSS: [Ed note: ambassadors to Jordan were: Robert Gaylord Barnes, March 1964 – April 1966 and Findley Burns, July 1966 – November 1967] He was well thought of, quite a nice man, but I wasn't privy to the political discussions. I'd come in once a week to the large country team meeting and report on how Jerusalem was, and they were more interested in me saying, "What does the bazaar say?" Well, my Arabic was not good enough for me to go hanging around in the bazaar. I usually went around with a coat and tie on, and I had a big, gray embassy vehicle—a truck, a Chevrolet carryall truck. Everybody knew who I was because I was one of the few Westerners around on the east side of Jerusalem.

And I wanted to be visible because then I would meet people. I'd, have a film show and have it at the Saint George's Cathedral Auditorium and introduce it. It would be like a 1920s film, you know, an American feature film; it could be *The Westerner* with Gary Cooper or something like that. I'd try to make a little speech in Arabic. It was the first time I really tried to speak Arabic, and I was terrified.

I was taking Arabic lessons at this time because after I had done my five months of Arabic in Beirut, as soon as I got into USIS work there and did all that stuff there, everything was in English. It sounds crazy, but it's like the American embassy in Paris—everything's in English! You think you're going to go to Paris, be assigned there, and

learn to speak French. [Laughter] You'll learn to speak English with a French accent, if anything, because eight or nine hours a day or however long you worked there, you'd be working in English because all the French nationals and all your colleagues all speak English. I had to go to Morocco before I finally understood French.

Anyway, here I am in Jerusalem, and everything got tighter and tighter. I had gone out a couple of times to visit people that I had romantic interest in, and I had gone to Germany. The then-Middle East/South Asia-director, Alan Carter, came through. One of the things that had happened to me was that the PAO in Jerusalem came through, Jay Gildner, who later became a whale in the agency (a big, heavy breather). He was PAO in Tel Aviv, but his writ stopped where Israel ended. In those days you couldn't go back and forth at all without getting permission from both sides, and that meant including permission from both American embassies. An American embassy officer just couldn't go back and forth through the Mandelbaum Gate because they didn't want a lot of traffic back and forth. It would be considered offensive to either side, this kind of thing; and besides that, the Jordanians and the Israelis kept track of all this kind of stuff—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …if you do this, we'll do that kind of thing; they didn't want too many people. There was hardly any tourist traffic from Israel into…East into the West Bank, into East Jerusalem and over to Jordan because the Jordanians wouldn't accept any passport that had an Israeli stamp in it and still don't. What one does is they get a piece of paper with the entrance and exit visa stamped on a separate piece of paper, which you then take out and throw away. But you couldn't do this in Jerusalem because obviously you were coming through that gate and walking that 150 feet. You didn't just parachute in.

So Gildner came over and went to the reading room, which I ran, and I had a little office there. I couldn't do any cultural presentations except show films. We didn't have any television in those days. When I wasn't there, he found that one of the things we had subscribed to was something like…I don't know…*Family Circle*, or *Good Housekeeping*…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and maybe *Hairdo*, or whatever it is, one of those hairdo magazines. So I didn't know this, but he went away and wrote a report back to Washington and said that the USIS reading room in East Jerusalem subscribed to *Hairdo* and *Good Housekeeping* and *Family Circle*. Those weren't policy magazines. They had no policy freight on them whatsoever, and why were we wasting government money on this, besides there were a lot of people sitting around reading these magazines? You know what I mean! [Laughter] Then this became the subject of other cables. I hadn't ordered the magazine, so I could get off the hook that way, but they said, "You, you gotta straighten your act up there and get rid of all these magazines which cater to families and *Seventeen* magazine or something like that. That's not real stuff!" Well, the thing is that, that really was real stuff.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Because the bourgeoisie, you know, and the children of the bourgeoisie —

*Q: Sure, sure.*

ROSS: …all came in and were dying, and the people called us up all the time and said, "Do you have any of those old World War II Walt Disney health films (that had Mickey Mouse in and were produced for the U.S. Army by Disney)? Please, please, come show it to us for our children's party!" This could be like the deputy minister of culture or the deputy minister of foreign affairs—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …while USIS in Washington said, "Away with all those things. We want to have target audiences. Children are no longer considered important. Take out all the children's books," which were all shelved and read until the ink wore off the page almost, and the films were shown, literally, until the sprocket holes got round. The sprocket holes are square, and they got round, and the film wouldn't run through the projector anymore. Anyway, all this made me kind of do a grin, as they say.

At the same time all this pressure was coming down, and one never knew what was going to happen next. The first thing you know there were spotter airplanes—little Aeronca or Piper Cubs (artillery spotter planes)—flying on the Israeli side doing little turns, and the Jordanians started shooting at them from time to time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So you'd hear this little single engine plane. It's a risky occupation, aerial spotting.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: Rrrrr-badabada-badabada…and then you wouldn't hear anything more. So I thought, "My God! What's gonna happen here!" And so we didn't know, and it was…would somebody do something? Russia was making noises, I guess, and everybody was making noises. So I'd go on over there, and they said, "Are you gonna go back? Okay. Right. Okay. Well, stay in touch with us because if anything happens we want you to get back—that is, to Amman," because I was diplomatically assigned to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and not to the West Bank.

*Q: What was your relationship to the consul general in Jerusalem?*

ROSS: Well, I'm glad you mentioned it because I had forgotten. We had a consulate on both sides. The consul general was a man who was very proud to say that he was a minister consul general.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: His name was Evan Wilson. He was a very kind of wonderful, old, I won't call him burly, a man with a certain…an alderman on it, and a wife who was feisty. He had been around the Middle East for a long while, and he'd been on the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry to Palestine. In '46, I think, Truman sent him out, or maybe he'd been there before the war because he'd been commissioned when the State Department was in Old State, War, and Navy [the Old Executive Office Building]. He showed me a picture of it in the '30s with all nine members of the class standing on the grand steps here.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He stayed mostly on the Israeli side, and he had a consul who stayed in a little building—well, it was small compared to his "digs" (living accommodations)—which was at the Mandelbaum Gate. It was what is now called, or was called, the Old City Consulate.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: USIS wasn't in there. There was some consular work there because there were a lot of people who traveled through into Israel: Americans of various religious beliefs and denominations and a lot of tourists and a lot of what we call or did call WTs (world travelers)—hippies and freaks and people of very strong religious cult persuasions and stuff; and they all had to come through.

So I saw Mack and his wife Priscilla Hall, and they lived in a little apartment above; and then Evan Wilson, the minister consul general, had a tiny little "pied-à-terre" (second lodging) in this stone building, which was a nineteenth-century Turkish building. It had a nice little garden where they could give a drinks party, and they had a wall around it—a big, high, 12-foot wall with, not broken glass, but maybe pointed iron around it, and it had Jordanian staff (Christian or Muslim) and drivers and stuff like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So Wilson came back and forth all the time. He'd just get in his car and put the flags on and drive through, and Mack Hall would go back the other way too. But I didn't go over there all that much because they seemed to be concerned a lot with everyday incidents that were always popping up. "Oh, I have to go see the Armenian patriarch because something happened about the Armenian priest who was arrested, or wasn't arrested," or, "Somebody found some Armenian scrolls from the twelfth century that popped up in New York, and the Armenians in New York want to know who gave them

to the art dealer, blah, blah, blah," all this other kind of stuff. It was like all the time was everyday kind of consular events, and that's what it was supposed to be. There was some intelligence work done out of there, but I wasn't aware of it at that time. I was only aware of it later.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I saw them, and they sometimes came to USIS things. I'd have some kind of event about every 10 days. I had a librarian and an assistant librarian and maybe kind of a secretary, and they all just sort of sat in the reading room and talked in Arabic all the time about this, and then they talked about politics all the time. They were kind of careful about me.

One of the things that I was told to do in Amman one time was that there was a rumor going around that the librarian, I think her name was Tawheeli (means needle in Arabic, if I'm not long and thin), was somehow in her family related to the Muslim brotherhood.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Now at this time the Muslim brotherhood had risen up a little bit in Egypt and got a bad name. I can't compare it to whatever is happening now with the Muslim brotherhood because I haven't kept up with it, except that it's now regarded as a gigantic threat.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Of course, Mubarak stepped on the neck of everybody about that. So I had to go ask these people, did they have anything to do with the Muslim brotherhood, and had they gone to any brotherhood meetings. Well, they were shocked, or they professed to be shocked! And I felt kind of abashed to ask them, but the PAO told me to come do these things, he'd come over too. Everybody wanted to come to Jerusalem, you see, because that was just like a place to go! It'd be like an English professor who never went to Stratford-on-Avon, if you know what I mean. Everybody went to Jerusalem. So I did a lot of kind of general dogsbody touring around, taking people around.

There was some paranoia about, would anybody work with USIS and ever gone to a brotherhood meeting? Another thing was that somebody said I should get involved with and find out who was in the Palestine Liberation Organization. Of course, I didn't know much about this because I was just an ACAO. I didn't get political briefings per se. I was expected to be kind of a sponge, but on the other hand, almost a useful idiot. I wasn't privy to what the big plan was. So I did go arrange through my special assistant Salah Halfar, who was a Christian Arab, to go to a PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel on the Mount of Olives. This was before the war, and it must have been in the spring of '67. They were going to do some kind of an Arab cultural council with some of the assistant governors of the provinces of the West Bank, something like that, plus PLO people there. I went in and sat down at the meeting.

"Well, why are you here?"

"Well, I represent the American Cultural Center, and I'd like to find out if there's anyway I can be of assistance." This is what I said.

Somebody else said, "Well, why is he here? Well, you're, you're not supposed to be here, you know. We didn't even really invite you."

"Well," I said, "I heard there was an organizational meeting."

"Well, no. This is not for you, you know, so…out you go."

Well, I apologized and made my departure, and I still don't know what they talked about at the meeting. Maybe they talked about starting a silent film festival; I hardly think that's what it was. They were probably talking about having classes to indoctrinate the children on the loss of the homeland or something. So in a way I was both a little bit aware of politics, but not particularly political, and I certainly didn't do any political reporting, except people would ask me a lot what happened. "Well, what was that thing that happened down in the valley?" or something.

Also, I went down into the Dead Sea Valley, and one time I went to a great big wonderful "mishwi" (Middle Eastern barbequed meat patty), that's a roast. They take a big camel and stuff it with a baby camel with rice and all that and vegetables and roast it, and inside the baby camel they'd have a sheep, and inside the sheep they'd have a chicken or something like that. Everybody ate with one hand, and you'd roll the food up and pop it into your mouth with your thumb if you really knew how to do it. It was affectionately known amongst one class of Americans out there as the "goat grab."

*Q: When I was in Dhahran, Aramco (Arabian American Oil Company) people used to call it a "goat grab."*

ROSS: Yes. Well, I did do that.

In the spring of '67 the political officer in the American consulate on the East side was David Morrison. He'd always wanted to go to Damascus. Well, I'd been to Damascus two, three, or four times when I was in Beirut, but I said okay. He had a little Ford Falcon, which is a little basic…your regular banger car, for the birds to a certain extent. So he and his wife and I, and they had a newborn baby about a year old, got into their car and drove across the river and drove like hell up to southern Syria to the border and then up to Damascus. I think we stayed overnight in a hotel and went shopping, and then we were going to go to Palmyra, which is northeast of Damascus, out in the desert. That's the famous desert capital—Zenobia.

So we started up the road. Well, you go up toward Hamah and turn east; that's the paved road. But if you get a map of Syria it shows dotted lines, which are tracks; and it shows

two, or three, or four tracks from turning off north of Damascus out to…and so this is like going on the angle of a right angle. You know, you save all this time if you could drive across the desert, theoretically. So we turned off, and he said, "This is right," and we'd stop and ask a few directions, start out, and went in the desert. Well, it was like four o'clock in the afternoon, and he had pretty much of a full tank of gas, and the desert was hardpan. We followed tracks and traces and tracks, traces, and it got darker. The sun was just setting, and we run across a thing that becomes a "wadi" (gully or wash), you know, where the road drops off. There's a wash that's come through, and we can't possibly get across it, turn around go back and take another thing, go around and sort of go, and then come to another wadi. Now you turn around and go back, and pretty soon you're driving in all different directions, and you don't know exactly what you're doing. You see the sun setting over there in the west, so you know you're driving north, and then the sun sets, and stars start to come out. "Well, let's drive north! There's the Big Dipper!" [Laughter] So we drove and drove and drove, and then we stopped.

Dave's wife, with the baby back in Jerusalem with the nanny, starts to get a little, as they say, velcroed to the ceiling. She starts letting everybody know what her feelings are about the matter, particularly him. There's nothing you can do. We're out in the desert and we don't have that much gas left. So this was a horrible spot of bother. It went on for maybe an hour and a half more, where we were pretty much lost, just looking for any road to get out of there, and being more or less constantly reminded that—or at least David was—that he wasn't much of a father or a husband [laughter], and that he'd better find a way out of there in the next ninety seconds or else and so forth! So she was reduced to tears, and everybody else was gripping on to the door handles.

So finally we got out and sort of walked around a little bit and said, "All right. Don't want to use up all the gas, and we can't sleep in the car, and all this other stuff. We don't want to get into sand where we can't dig out, and we can't dig out anyway because nobody brought a shovel, and there's no paper or anything you can throw under the tires to get us backed out of any kind of a sand drift we run into." I saw a light way, way, way on the top of just a faint hill. So I said, "Well, I'm gonna walk toward it. No David, you stay here, and I'll see where these stars are." I walked for what seemed like a long, long time, and there was somebody walking towards me with a little tiny penlight, like a one-AA penlight.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I walked and came up to him, and it was dark, but my Arabic was enough. I could say, "Who are you? Where are you?" We didn't have any lights on in the car trying to save the battery. He was like an 11-year-old kid, and he had a little transistor radio, because they had come in, and he was listening to the "Sout Al Qahira" (Voice of Cairo). He had a tiny penlight, which he'd shine once in a while. I said, "Why are you here?" And he said, "…I'm with the sheep." "Oh, well, where are the sheep?" And he said, "Oh, they're over there," like a quarter of a mile away. "Why are you standing there?" He said, "Oh, I like to stand on this hill." "Well, do you know where you are?" He said, "Sure. My

brother's over on that other hill over there with his sheep." "You have a brother here?" [Laughter] "Yes, our whole family's here."
"Where's your…" "Oh, you have to come to my father's tent!" he suddenly says.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "You have to come to my father's tent. I'll go get him." And I said, "How?" He says, "Well, I'll blink my light, and my brother will blink." "Well, where is your father's tent?" "Oh, it's way, way, away. Oh, he'll come get you. He'll come in his truck." I said, "No, no, no. No, you come with me, and you tell this man, my friend, and tell his wife, or I will say what you say, that it's all right. It's going to be all right, you know!" So we got him over there, and he said, "I'll lead you." I said, "Well, do you know how to get through all these holes and the wadis and everything?" He said, "Oh, sure! You know, there's a way to do that. There's another way around there," and all this other stuff. So what about your sheep?" He said, "Oh, they'll be all right. My father would want me to do this."

So we followed him, and drove real slow, and after about a half hour we got to this: there was kerosene, gasoline, Coleman light lanterns, and there was a radio playing, and these people came out of these tents; the lanterns were inside. There were like two or three tents; it seemed like two big tents, real big goat hair and camel hair tent. There was a whole bunch of people there.

And they came out and said [speaking slowly], "You are welcome to our tents. You are welcome. You are travelers; we are your hosts. You must stay three days. Now we have been looking, we're so happy, we'll sacrifice our best lamb, and we will have a good mishwi here," and "Oh, come in. Please tell us everything about your history of your life, and why you are here, why you are driving that car! Why don't you have a truck?" I mean this is a Ford Falcon in the middle of the desert.

And so we went in there, and Mrs. Morrison, God bless her, she was still so fit to be tied, she wouldn't get out of the car at first. "No, I'll stay here all night." It was, "Come on, honey. They're all right." "Well, they might kill us!" "Well, I don't think they're gonna kill us."

They put the coffee pots, the Arab coffee, on the charcoal and all this stuff, and we had a feast, and talked until we were hoarse, and they sang songs for us, and they wanted to take her to the women's section in the "purdah" (veiled or curtained) section to see what her underwear was like.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "Did she wear underwear like we saw in the newspaper?" or something like that! [Laughter] Oh, it was something else! So we all stayed there that night and slept wonderfully, you know, and got up the next morning and had coffee; and they had eggs and "ful" (broad bean) or whatever it was they prepared and "tabouli" (cracked wheat

salad) and "hummus" (a spread or dip) and all this stuff, and more coffee; and they gave us free gasoline and got a truck to guide us to the road. We went back to a paved road, and then finally found another paved road and went to Palmyra and stayed there for about two or three hours and then drove back, lickety-split, all the way back to Jerusalem; and the baby was all right, and everything was wonderful. But that was the kind of adventure you could have then.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I went to Amman in April of '66, and I was in Amman/Jerusalem until August '67.

*Q: Okay. Let's talk about events leading up to all hell breaking loose in June 1967.*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: How did you see that from your perspective?*

ROSS: Well, I had never been in a situation that seemed to get more tightly wrapped all the time. I'd been in the service and I got a commission; I was an artillery officer and stuff like that. But I just didn't…every day was always something more surprising. As I said, they started flying spotter aircraft like in—

*Q: Who was flying spotter aircraft?*

ROSS: The Israelis were.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …along the ceasefire line, which was at that time the border between East and West Jerusalem, and then further up the ceasefire line up to a place called Nabi Samuel, which was a Jordanian artillery position. It was a high point. It means Samuel's Hill, I guess, a mountain up toward Ramallah.

The Jordanians had started exercises where they were bringing M-48 tanks across the valley and trucking them up to the Jordanian or Arab side of Jerusalem if they would partition the city. They wouldn't drive the tank up; they'd haul them up in flat bed.

*Q: Yes, well, tank carriers.*

ROSS: Tank carriers, exactly. So there'd be like eight or ten or fifteen tank carriers, and they'd be coming up the mountain roads to Jerusalem from the back side. It seemed to be like this was happening more and more, like every day. Well, they had started practicing exercises, flexing their muscles; and at the same time more and more conversation was going on about Nasser closing the Straits of Tiran.

There was a lot of talk, but the people had had other things happen to them, even while I was there and before, so that it was sort of like just thought of as a rough patch of ground to get over.

*Q: Yes. I mean what were you getting from sort of your contacts? You say you had this apartment there.*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: And these were essentially—*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: ...Arab or Palestinians, weren't they?*

ROSS: Well…in the old section of the walled city where I lived the people were very traditional and, in a sense, Islam creates a kind of an old-fashioned pacifism. I mean there weren't any incidents or rabble-rousers or any demonstrations. There were some school student marches, sort of like pro-Nasser, where the Arab grade or middle schools, and perhaps the high schools too, the students would come out and walk up and down the street with one or two banners. But it was very, very mild because essentially the Arabs were, as I saw it, pretty much, I won't say in total, but overwhelmingly not concerned with politics to the point where they wanted something violent to happen.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There were violent incidents all the time, but I think they came out of a minority of the population then. But people in and around the consulate talked about how things were getting worse. My friend, David Morrison, these people were really in the [cable] traffic.

See I didn't read any [cable traffic] unless I went over to Amman—that is, drove back there. (As I said, it's an hour and a half away or more, and even then it took awhile. There wasn't much traffic then; there weren't superhighways the way there are around Jordan now.) But I'd have to go over there and go to the embassy and read the cable traffic. As you know, as people probably understand, everybody remembers nobody reads the traffic unless they almost have it handed to them; nowadays it's all on a screen in front of you. I only read it once a week, so I wouldn't know what people were saying or anything. I didn't even hear that story I told the last time about the F-106s or F-104s being flown out on the Sunday before the war until after the war because I was a USIS man on the West Bank. I knew a lot of stuff, but on the other hand, I didn't represent a political position the way a political officer would.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I was the cultural attaché. Celeste Holm had recently come; she's the famous film star of the 1940s and '50s. She's in the *Manchurian Candidate* [*High Society* and *Gentleman's Agreement*] if you want to see a good piece of acting. She was Ado Annie [Ado Annie Carnes] in *Oklahoma!* in 1944 [1943] when that started.

*Q: Yes, I remember that.*

ROSS: And she had quite a Broadway…and she still does stuff.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And she was married to Wesley Addy at the time. I mean she's quite senior; she must be in her 80s. Anyway, she came with her husband Wesley Addy, who was…he played a good role in *Broadcast News* [*Network*] with…I can't remember…but you remember the Faye Dunaway movie? I think it was Faye Dunaway anyway.

*Q: Well, I think Broadcast News was [William Hurt]…you're thinking of.*

ROSS: Yes, he played one of the *Time* magazine executives [Nelson Chaney].

*Q: Oh.*

ROSS: …if I'm not mistaken, anyway. She came with her husband as an actor. Well, I didn't even know they were married. They were presented as two Broadway actors coming out and a third guy who'd been on Broadway. I took them around, and they did a really nicely fixed-up thing of readings from the American Constitution and about the Adams' family, which I think was then later adapted to Broadway or had come out of something; but it was the letters of John Adams and Abigail Adams.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was an easy thing to do, you know. They dressed in colonial regalia, if I can call it that. She had come, and then this dancer had come (I may have mentioned him first), and different people. So I was involved with, as we say, the social end of things.

But things started getting tighter and tighter. Sunday I had seen the guy who ran AFME (the American Friends of the Middle East), and he said, "Things are gonna really get tight!" He was later, or about that time, revealed to be a creature of one of our intelligence services in the Middle East.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This all came out when the national student organization and the international branches of it were exposed in the '60s to be AFME-funded to a certain extent by American money—government money.

It started sort of strangely. I went over to the American Schools of Oriental Research on Sunday and had dinner with somebody over there. This was a bone paleontologist, if that's what it's called. (There's a word for it, people who date—

*Q: Skeletal remains.*

ROSS: …human remains to find out where in the prehistory they are. We're essentially Neolithic; we could be Paleolithic too. Somebody after the war actually had a whole warehouse it seemed like full of remains that had been dug up in different places, particularly the Dead Sea Valley, and from an archaeologist named Paul Lapp. Somebody gave me a skull of a 7,000-year-old human being. Of course I can't reveal whether I have it or not—

*Q: No.*

ROSS: …because the police will come knock on the door and charge me with murder or something like that.

*Q: Yes [laughter].*

ROSS: I came back from this and went back to my little digs in the old city, which had by this time, as I said, become quite well known. Everybody liked to come over there and go up to the arch where Pontius Pilate had supposedly condemned Jesus to death by saying, "Behold the man," in Greek, "ecce homo." That was part of the traditional, the beginning of the "Via Dolorosa" (the way of the cross). I don't know what happened. I guess I woke up on Monday, or somebody called me up and said—

*Q: This is on June—*

ROSS: June 6th.

*Q: June 6, 1967.*

ROSS: Yes. So this had been Sunday of the weekend, and Fred Stutz had called up and said, "You want to come back to Amman?" That's across the river. And I said, "No. It's okay here."

But we at this time had had a light platoon of Jordanian soldiers stationed in the reading room where my offices were. I'd had some bother about this. These soldiers were sort of a sad lot. They had real old uniforms, and they were just country boys if you will, and they weren't very sharp, and what they used the American reading room for was kind of a laundry for themselves and for their clothes. So they were washing out their undies (underwear) and their socks and everything else, and insisting that they weren't doing it, and the sergeant was musing, "What is the problem?" and they were sitting in all the chairs and everything, and they had old homespun-almost clothing on.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So we were having a hassle about what to do about that. I guess I'd gone over there Saturday, and somebody came and asked to see me. It was a Jordanian guy, and he said, "I have to talk to you right away." He came and he said, "Can I talk to you in private?"

And I thought, "Who is this guy?"

He was a young fellow about like 24 years old or something—that is to say, he wasn't much younger than me. He said, "I…you know, I don't know whether I'll see you again."

And I said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Did something happen?"

He said, "I think I'm gonna have to go away." And this was sort of like some kind of hugger-mugger. And he said, "I might have to go back to the States." This was all in English.

And I thought who is he? Who is he?

And he said, "Can you let me have some money?" He said, "I'll pay you back in about three weeks. It's all gonna be better, you know, after this problem, after these…"

So I thought, "Who is this person?"

He said, "Twenty dollars would be enough for now."

So I got out my wallet and gave him $20. I think it was $20.00. He left the office, and I realized I didn't know this guy at all [laughter]!

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: It was a wonderful confidence trick.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: …hitting somebody, as I'm thinking now, at the time when they don't expect it.

But I had seen some other friends. I had a friend, an Arab, who became quite well known. His name is Kamal Boullata. He's a painter, and he's had a bunch of shows in the United States. He's married now to an Arab; but he's a Palestinian, and he grew up in the Old City. He's married to, I think, a Palestinian, maybe Jordanian, named Riley; she's a poet.

At this time, before he met the wife he's married to now, he was going with a girl who was a visiting student from Harvard, one of these six-months or one-year courses in Arabic, and he'd fallen crazy about her. He's a very droll fellow; in fact, his hair is all

wild, sticking up, and his eyes always in a fine frenzy rolling, and he has a really goofy look on his face all time. He was coming over to the house, "Richard, what am I gonna do? I've gotta see her! I've gotta get up to Beirut! Oh, my God! I can't stand it!" I mean it was really…it was right out of Shakespeare how crazy he was about this girl and being absent from her and all this stuff. Finally he went off to see her just like that on Sunday.

At that time Joe Alex Morris was a correspondent for the Middle Eastern AP [UPI], I think, and Patrick Seale had come in; and they said this was serious, particularly Patrick Seale, who'd been studying Arabic in Syria. He'd come out of Oxford, and he was writing for British papers, and he finally wrote the great book on Hafez al-Assad [*Assad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*], the big important book; and he still files all the time; he's kind of semi retired. Morris got shot in Tehran during the problems.

But people like that and National Geographic people came through, because there's always people shooting in the Holy Land yet one more time, said, "It's not gonna last. It's not good," and all that. But down on the ground, you wouldn't guess that.

Well anyway, somebody called me up about seven o'clock in the morning in the Old City and said the Israelis had bombed the Egyptian airfields. Get over to the consulate right away, which was only about four or five blocks walking [distance]. So I went over there, and the Mandelbaum Gate was sort of…the Arabs had sort of closed it to people coming in from the other side from West Jerusalem, the Jewish side of Jerusalem.

But there were starting to be lots of tourists and everything trying to get through to get into Israel where it was safe—it was thought to be safe. There was starting to be a line of people who were what you might call consular…with consular situations, and the first thing they said is, "We have to make a list of everybody who's an American citizen on the West Bank." Well, they had been supposedly going to do this list for a while, and they had supposedly started on it. But gosh, I don't remember! There were maybe five, ten, twelve, fifteen thousand people; there were thousands of people. These were Arabs who had American citizenship who had lived in the United States and come back, retired there, often having been workers in the production belt of the Midwest, in places like that.

So they said to me, after I got over there, "What are you gonna do?" and I said, "Well, I don't know."

He said, "Well, are you gonna go back to Amman?"

By this time I heard that the taxi fare, which was like 25 dinars or 12 dinars had gone up to like 150, and it was going up every 20 minutes. I said, "Well, let me call up." So I called up the PAO in Amman.

He said, "What do you wanna do? Do you want to stay there, or do you want to come here?"

And I said, “Well, they say that they might close the road, and they might close the bridge, and it’s hard to get a taxi. I hear it’s 200 dinars or, you know, $200 or something like that.”

So he said, “Well, okay. Listen, we’re real busy here too.”

So then I said, “Well, okay, I’ll stay here.” So I went and got my car, my little Jaguar sports car and put it inside the wall (there was a gate that you could open inside the consulate wall) because it was parked on the street in the Old City and people said, “Well, anything can happen!” So you went outside, and the buses were driving fast, and people were running down the street or going in stores and buying everything that they could, buying things like boxes of cookies or whatever, matches, or kerosene. There was a filling station across the street from the consulate, which was at the large Mandelbaum crossing, which was the gate there, the standard crossing between the two sides of Jerusalem. They said, “The gas station’s nationalized. You can’t buy!” Gas suddenly stopped being sold at 10:30, so then there was a black market that immediately sprang up in getting gasoline. And all this stuff was happening all [at once].

All the people who worked in the consulate, that is, the five or ten Arab staff, they [said], “Oh, I have to go home.” “I have to see my wife.” “I have to go to the market and buy eggs.” “I have to do this,” or “I have to get my children home.” So some people were trying to get out of there and go home.

There were some people in the consulate from the other side—from the main consulate where Evan Wilson, the minister consul general, was (in the downtown American consulate in Jerusalem). When I say the consulate I’m always referring to what they called the Little Consulate Building in East Jerusalem. Somebody said, “You and David Morrison go on up to the gate and find out if or how long—ask them right there on the spot, because we can’t get through on the telephone, how long the gate will be open, or if they’re gonna close it.”

Well, as I had said before, this spotter plane had flown back and forth, and every once in a while you’d hear a “pop-pop-pa-pop,” somebody letting off a few rounds at the plane. It’s 150 yards, and David and I started walking up there. We walked out of the consulate and started walking up the street, and there’s the checkpoint, if you will. As we started up there, we got about 50 feet up or 75 feet—50 it is maybe—and we heard this “pow-powpow-powpow;” and then way far away up toward Nabi Samuel, “kaboom-kaboom;” and then [whistling noise] a shell, [more quiet whistling] how it makes a noise when it goes over the town; and then we heard a “bap-bap-bap-brrrrrr-bap-bap-bap-bap.” Then suddenly you could hear the firing from way far away come right down to pillboxes, which were known to be established in No Man’s Land, right across the street from our building and also up at the Mandelbaum Gate; and they [the pillboxes] opened up, and they’re like heavy ’30s, you know, water-cooled thing, “Rrrrrrr-Rrrrrrr,” like that.

We both looked at each other, and we both got down on the ground. We got down on our knees, and we looked at each other and said, “The war just started!” It was really funny—

I mean to be there and wondering if there was going to be anything, and then we said, "The war just started!"—just like in a comic strip…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He and I then did kind of a low crawl, but we didn't go further up there [laughter] because all the people up at the Mandelbaum Gate just got down on the ground too. You didn't know where the people were shooting from. There was shooting every old which way, and including back down the road a couple of hundred yards at the Damascus Gate, as they call it, because there was a whole bunch of troop positions that had been put up there with sand bags (I'd forgotten that part) around the walls of the Old City, on top of the walls that you can walk around on.

So we got in, at a kind of a low crawl-run, back into the [consulate], and everybody was looking at each other like, can you believe this thing. Of course then there were a whole lot of people who were in the street (when I say a whole lot, maybe ten or fifteen) who were trying to either buy gasoline or something like that, who came running like hell to the American gate, because we hadn't locked the gates. They had big iron gates with steel cladding, lightweight sixteenth-of-an-inch steel painted black; that traditional kind of third world thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: All these people came running in there like we're going to come to the American consulate where we'll be safe. And so then, of course, Mack Hall, he's a kind of an old-school-of-consulate type. He went to Harvard for undergraduate and Yale to graduate school; so he could either wear his Harvard tweeds or his Yale tweeds. But he was always this really old school guy—he had tweed suits. Priscilla was his very elegant wife that worked in French resistance somehow in London, and she subscribed to *Le Canard Enchaîne*, the French newspaper that nobody can understand unless they've got 5-5 French.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So anyway, Mack Hall says, "Who are all these people?" [Laughter] Well, we didn't know, and they weren't the locals either. They weren't the Nusadi family or anything like that.

*Q: No.*

ROSS: Is this okay to say all this stuff here?

*Q: Oh, yes, absolutely!*

ROSS: So Mack said, "Well, I think Priscilla will now supervise the hanging of blackout curtains because this is something that it says in the manual that we should do. We should

hang blackout curtains." So I was deputed then to get or find a stepladder and go start hanging black cloth. Somebody had gotten hold of some. They didn't have them made or anything, but they had bolts of crepe as it were because it was a nineteenth-century Turkish building. So we had to hang all these blackout curtains.

The consular people were thinning out fast, but Morrison was there; an admin officer from the other side, Chet Pauley, was there; and there was a guy I didn't know before named Roger, who was perhaps in the covert service, but he was over checking on things; and then there were the Halls, Mack and Priscilla; and myself; and I'm beginning to run out of names. There were some Arabs there, like the consulate driver and the consulate cook and the houseboy gardener or something like that; and my chief local, who was Salah Halfar, had come over to the consulate. So all of a sudden nobody should go anywhere because the streets were empty except for the odd person running.

So this shooting had started. The war had already started, but the shooting in Jerusalem, as I'd said, it seemed to me started around eleven or twelve (I can't remember exactly now), and then the day got kind of telescoped in the sense that things went fast.

But I remember two guys came in who had backpacks, and they were what you'd call WTs (world travelers or hippies). They had come because they'd come to the American consulate to try to get some help to get across the gate. Everybody just ran down there and tried to get through the gate, and, of course the Israelis, I suppose, didn't know who they were, and suddenly there was a war. So these guys, as I recall, had backpacks. The backpacks, both of them, were not huge hikers', mountain camping packs, but they were packs that had a lot of hair in them, false hair pieces—wigs—because they had bought it in either Greece or Italy. There was a business of smuggling hair into Israel. There was a big business of smuggling hair because some of the very Orthodox Jews required their wives to shave their heads, and then they wore wigs; and there was a huge import duty on human hair, 300 or 400 percent. So if somebody could get it in, people literally made a lot of money, I guess. It was a known thing that hippies—world travelers (WTs)—tried to smuggle. They didn't call them hippies—they weren't really hippies.

*Q: No, they were just freaks.*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: Or kids on their "wanderjahr" (year of wandering).*

ROSS: "Ja, das ist richtig" (Yes, that is correct). So they showed me this hair, and they said, "Do you think we can sell it when we get into…?" I didn't know anything about it. In fact, I had never even been through the Mandelbaum Gate; and the reason I really wanted to go up there with Morrison when the war started was to see what it was like up there, because it was impossible to get permission from the embassy, from my boss in Amman, to do this. "You don't need to go there yet. If you go there, your Arab connections will find out about it, and they'll think you're a spy." So for better or for worse, I didn't go.

These guys then said, "We have a car! It's an Opal. Do you know anybody who wants to buy a car?" And I said, "Why?" "Well, we've gone up to the gate, and they won't let us drive the car in. It has German plates on it." And they said, "Can we keep it anywhere?" I said, "I don't know. Where is it?" And they said, "It's broken down on the main road coming up into Jerusalem, oh, down say about where the Church of All Nations is; that's the Russian church coming up the hill." And I said, "Well, why is it there? I mean did you walk all the way up here?" They said, "Yea, the battery's dead," or something. "We ran out of gas." And so finally they said, "We'll give you the papers on the car—the title and whatever it was, the registration. You sell it here. Here's our address; send us half the money. Keep it, you know." And I said, "Well, how much am I supposed to sell it for?" It was just idle conversation almost. "Sell it for anything you can!" So then they disappeared…little different things like that. It was kind of strange.

The American Colony Hotel, it's about three blocks down the hill in a little part of East Jerusalem called Sheikh Jarrah, which is really nice. It had a very old Turkish-style mosque with a minaret, and it had the little walk around the parapet, and they had a very old "mullah" (Islamic clergy or man who called the prayer), who came out without an amplifier—he must have been the last one in the Middle East without a loud speaker—and he called the faithful to prayer by voice. It's very different; it's very picturesque to hear somebody singing the invocation, and not even singing it very well, without an amplifier. Where I lived in the Old City, it was, as I said, on the back side of the Haram Ash-Sharif, they had two mosques with big towers, and those guys had about a 500-watt amplifier. Everybody who's ever served in the Middle East, and I should mention this, knows this experience, where you hear the person in the mosque turn on the power or turn on the mike, and then they go [coughing…more coughing…gagging], [in a monotone chant] "L-l-la-lie-la-lon-ooh-Mahammed-ra-soo-lay-la-la," and start in, "La-lie-la-lon," and all kinds of different voices, but—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …you always hear them turn it on and then spike up the power, and this, by the way, bothers you if it's really revved up. When we lived in Yemen, I have a friend who's an Iraqi and a Muslim, who did everything in his power to try to get the loudspeakers destroyed in the mosque next to his bedroom because that's it. Unless you're a person who can sleep beside a railroad locomotive, then it does wake you up.

Well, anyway, I called up the American [Colony] Hotel down there, and it was the usual. There was a cast of characters down there who'd been there, literally, since the last century because Bertha Vester was alive, and she was like 102 years old [89 years old, 1878 – 1968]. And I said, "The war's started. How's Mrs. Vester doing?" That's one of the original families that founded the American Colony, and it was founded in—

*Q: It had a very interesting history, which I read it—*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: …and a little bit Mormon-ish.*

ROSS: Yes, in fact they had originally opened up inside the walls in what would be called…Ha-Tsara. In the American Quarter they ran kind of a little hospital there, and then they moved out and bought this land in Sheikh Jarrah and bought a Turkish, not a "pasha" (man of high rank), but one of the government residences there, and they ran it as kind of a guest house. There was a Swedish connection that came into the family. They were from Chicago and so forth, and now it's gone public, and it's considered a very sheik place, you know, but very—

*Q: Anyway, you got off the subject.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: Well, you called up…*

ROSS: I called up David Whiting, who was my buddy over there and found out how things were, because everybody used to go over there all the time and ask if they could do anything. He and I continued to have conversations.

Then darkness fell, and the electricity went off. That meant in the apartments upstairs, Mack and Priscilla Hall's apartment. They didn't know when it would come back on. Then a lot of shelling or firing started at night in what they might have called H and I (harassment and interdictory) fire. But it was "bang-bang-bang-bang," when you didn't know where it was coming from. There was a curfew, and if there were Jordanian vehicles that moved around the streets, you didn't know it. I mean you'd hear vehicles move, but there didn't seem to be any fighting around Jerusalem.

So I guess then…I don't remember when the attack occurred. Now that's funny! I should be able to tell you this immediately…but maybe the first night was all right…but we didn't sleep much for some reason. We stayed up late and finished kind of doing the list such as we could, the telephone still worked, there was shooting, we played bridge, with the kerosene light inside or gasoline light, and the radio started getting dim because there was no way to recharge them. There was no generator that worked in the consulate building at that time, and there weren't enough flashlight batteries to light up everything. Everybody had flashlights more or less, and then they started having to do rationing on the batteries. They had a GE (General Electric) style, big radiotelephone, with a big battery.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: That worked pretty good, and some of the others then stopped working. Then the radio nets got kind of confused back and forth. Some nets were good because everybody was able to be on it. Then some people had batteries in different houses. There were two people I suddenly realized had houses, if I recall, at least one or two guys in one house,

outside of the divided Jerusalem, who were essentially agents. Whether they had been there for a long while or not, I didn't know very much about this. They had radios, but there was a kind of confusion, as I recall, about which net you should be on, which you shouldn't, and it's happened…it always happens, I think.

But I called up, the telephones still worked, and I said, "Well, we'd like to order dinner." The firing started getting serious it seemed like because there were more "kabooms." I called down to the American Colony Hotel and ordered dinner from Whiting, and everybody was having drinks down there and well into the evening. He said, "Okay," and I took the order, and I said, "How much?" And he said, "Well…" I said, "What will you charge for it?" He said, "Well, whatever the price is on the menu." And I said, "Well, we'd like to have it delivered up here." And he said, "Well, that's $500 extra."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So then [laughter] we decided not to have dinner brought in! We went to bed, and there were tremendous crashes, two or three times. Everybody had gotten into the "spiritus frumenti" (alcohol) at that time; I mean there wasn't anybody walking around having taken the pledge. Twice we came downstairs and got in the kitchen after these crashes— the kitchen not being in the basement, just being on the ground floor—and put pot lids and pots on our head, the pots that fit your head because there was the feeling that plaster might fall because the building had been hit by artillery rounds, and there were tremendously loud crashes. It'd been hit supposedly by a mortar and then by a direct 105 or 155 shell because the Israelis were firing shells toward the Arab positions, which we were very near to No Man's Land, and a couple of them had hit the building.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And I'll tell you, that really wakes you up when you hear one of those! Now, I was sleeping upstairs with this guy Rod, and I think after the second time we decided not to sleep upstairs anymore, because I think he'd gotten knocked out of the bed or something.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Or maybe exploded out of the bed. But things had started falling, the glass was broken and stuff like that. We had metal grates on some, if not all, the windows that faced the street. We also had about a twelve-foot high wall around the whole of the consulate property, which was fixed up. It was stuccoed and had, if I recall, tiles or something like that on the top. Things just got worse, and everybody got kind of edgy. Then an attack on the city started, which we found out later was led by a parachute regiment, and there's a monument to that attack on the city and to the people who died in the parachute regiment right outside the front entrance gate of the consulate.

So anyway, this all started up like Tuesday morning…it seemed like. It started at night, and there were big "kabooms" because the Jordanians ran recoilless 106 rifles (those anti-

tank weapons) with a great big blowback. Mounted on jeeps, they ran them down, and they were firing at Israeli tanks that were coming up and crossing No Man's Land and were coming up and sort of doing an encirclement thing. They came around the Mandelbaum Gate and came the other way; they did a pincer action, I guess. There was a hell of a lot of firing because the pillboxes across the street, particularly one, held out, and there were four or five guys in there who were told to hold. This was in No Man's Land on the Jordanian side. These were built up cement block positions, and it could have been armored inside; in any case, they were strong points.

Then there were the walls that firing was coming from, and that's the walls of the Old City, which are crenulated. Then there was a battle that went up the street with a hell of a lot of "bang-bang."

It was by this time daylight, and I looked out. I crawled up the steps, snuck up the steps, and looked out and saw Israeli troops come up both sides of the street and tie charges onto the steel gate door of the American consulate, the building which I was in. This was the wall around it. So I ran down the steps, and I said, "They're blowing up the gate!" I think I said it in a loud voice. Of course Mack and Priscilla and everybody rolled their eyes, and then, "KA-BOOM!" They blew up the gate. Then there was some shooting into the front door. Then it stopped. So then I snuck up the steps again, and a couple guys had gotten hit, and one was lying in the street, one of these Israeli paratroopers. Everybody was pinned down at this point. There were guys hiding in sort of doorways and stuff and shooting back up the street toward the Damascus Gate. There was a guy there [that] was hit in the stomach or hit in the chest, and he screamed, "Mama! Mama!" really loudly and horribly. You know what I mean—one of these things that you hear about. There was fire coming at such a dangerous rate down the street nobody could go out and get him without getting hit too. So after about 20 minutes they got him, but then there were some other things that had been hit too, Jordanian stuff, and then the fighting went down the street toward the Damascus Gate.

At this point nobody did very much. I mean we were kind of edgy, because we didn't have any weapons or anything or radios. We were able to call over to the other side saying, "They're firing directly into the building! They're firing at the consulate! There's a flag outside on the mast on the consulate, you know, and it says American consulate in our seal on the door," blah, blah, blah, and of course it's on the maps too.

So Evan Wilson on the other side was saying, "Now I'm in touch. I've made a very serious…" and Evan was from the old school too, "rother" (rather). "Now I want to assure you that we're taking every, every, absolutely every step."

So I went and looked out. I had also driven up to the consulate a gray U.S.-government Chevrolet carryall van, kind of like early '60s kind of vehicle. I used to use it to take people around on the cultural swings and all that. In fact, it was the office van is what it was, and we had somebody who could drive it sometimes too, and we did everything with it. So I looked out the window, and there these Israeli troops were throwing my suitcase out of it and unzipping my suitcase and getting out this Leica camera. So of

course I got really…I went running down the steps and hollered to Mack, "They're stealing the van! They're taking everything out!" Of course I had put it in a suitcase with an extra suit and change of stuff in case I had to go back to Amman, and I said, "They're taking U.S. government property!"

So Hall, who'd been a navy officer in World War II, said, "It's time to do something!" [Laughter] So he went back up (he had an upstairs office), he got his consular flag, which was by his desk, this great big flag, and he said, "Here!" He got out his scissors and cut the rope or untied it from the flagpole.

I had already said, "I'll go out and stop them!"

He said, "No! You'll do no such thing! NO ONE should go outside!" That was another thing he said, "Lay low! You know."

So at this point I had said, "They're taking the car! They're taking the camera! They're taking my suitcase and stuff!"

Well, he said, "Come on, Richard! We're now going to do something." So he gets the flag, and we go out the side door, and he opens the flag up and says, "Here, you hold one side, and I'll hold the other." So we walked up the street with this flag. The fighting was down the street, and the car had been driven off by this time.

I said, "Let me get my suitcase," and, "The camera's gone!" and all this other stuff. There was fighting about a block away, or you know there were guys shooting in shooting positions. You know what I mean. We walked along. And as we strolled through the city, we encountered some of these Israeli paratroopers. Mack tried to speak English, and I tried to speak Arabic, and they speak either Hebrew or Yiddish.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But finally we were led from one person to another, and then they said, "Put your hands up," and, "Shut up," or whatever it was like that, and you know, "Put your hands up!" point a gun at you.

Mack said something (I can't even [remember]), "Put the flag away," or something like that.

"We'll take that! Who are you? Come with us!" So we were led away to be interrogated, which I thought was a little bit too much, if I may say so. But after we were taken prisoner, if you will, and went into this room where there was a bunch of people tied up and lying on the floor with [blindfolds] around their eyes…

*Q: Blindfolds.*

ROSS: …blindfolds and hogtied, you know tied with their feet behind them and their hands behind them.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We'd come onto somebody who spoke English. He was a captain with a European accent, and he said, "You have to wait. Sit down there, and we're not gonna tie you up. Just mind your business!" or something like that.

So we were there for a while and then somebody else came along and it came out and it got down to this—of course there was shooting, you know, and "Who are you?" and all this stuff. So finally somebody came out and said, "You can go. We realize that you shouldn't have been taken prisoner, but you have to understand."

We said, "Well, at what point was it we weren't really taken prisoner? We came out to find out what happened to the truck and also to the camera and stuff." So then they had to go investigate all this stuff. Finally we were let go on parole, as it were, and we walked back to the consulate, and then they started looking for the camera, and then they brought it back! I don't remember. But I had taken a whole roll of pictures, and nobody had gotten any film and put it in. It was a C-3, which is a very nice Leica. The guy gave it back to me, but he knew about the camera, and he opened it up, and he said, "Here!" and he took out all the film and exposed it! I said, "Well, what'd you do that for?" He said, "There may be some battle pictures in it that you shouldn't have." Well, he had the camera and had taken the pictures, you know, but be that as it may…They brought the truck back later, and they brought some of the stuff, maybe my shoes weren't in it or something like that and other things, you know.

We went back inside, and there was a lot more shooting. Then I looked out the window, and here came a man walking from the Mandelbaum Gate in a perfectly clean, pure white suit with a white tie (kind of like a white silk tie) and a white shirt too, and I think he had a Panama hat on. It was the most daffy-looking thing I'd ever seen! I mean there was really serious fighting going on in the Old City and around the walls of the Old City. I said, "Look at that guy!" He walks, and he walks down toward the fighting, and he gets out a notebook and a pen like I have here, and he stands in the street, and he writes, and it looks like a reporter's book—you know what I mean, like the standard old reporter's notebook, a memo book. He looks around, like if he's doing architectural estimation, then he turns around, and he walks, and he walks to the consulate, and continues to walk down the side, and knocks on the gate and comes in. Well, we went to the door, and it was a fellow named George de Carvalho, who was, I think, Brazilian or of Brazilian extraction, who was working for *Life* magazine.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He was their guy on the spot, and it was the best thing I've ever seen, because he got an immense amount of respect, at least in my eyes, and he apparently was able to

walk through shot and shell. Nobody bothered him because he actually looked like a reporter [laughter]!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You know, it was wonderful, a great piece of theater. He spent a few minutes there, and he said, "You'll have to excuse me. I have to get back to the battle," [laughter] and off he walked down the street! So then there was a lot more shooting.

Later on that day or the next morning the city fully fell, like by Tuesday. There was a lot of shooting in the city, and what happened was the Jordanian troops fell back, I guess as was their orders, to be inside the Old City. When it was surrounded, what they then did was throw away their uniforms and put on "mufti" (civilian rig) and try to melt into the throng of people or go to somebody's house or try to get somebody to hide them. There were actually Christian organizations in the Old City that did hide some of the troops who came, banged on the door, "Please hide me." Actually, the Israelis went through the city and dug a lot of them out and found anybody who in those days had a buzz haircut, which was an obvious sign of being a military soldier. Nowadays it might not be, but in those days it was. A young guy with a buzz cut looked like he was a soldier.

Anyway, everybody sort of recovered. The electricity was off pretty well all over everywhere, and the telephones had gone off, so the only way you could do anything was walk around and try to ask, and then there was a full curfew, and there was no military order put in because we're still shooting a lot.

The next day, I think it was Wednesday, I saw the most perfect military attack on the Mount of Olives. Although the Old City had been taken, then you go across the valley and then come up to the Mount of Olives. There's a great big Jewish cemetery on the side facing across to the walled city. Then there's an Intercontinental Hotel on the top of it, and then on the side of the hotel and all that, there's the road where supposedly Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem on what they call Palm Sunday, when he came in to begin his week—the Passion Week. Then there's a whole lot of things up there too, and there were little settlements and everything. Well, anyway, the Israelis decided to attack this place to the left side, if I recall, of the Intercontinental Hotel, which wasn't hit by a single bullet. It was as if somebody had made a little prior arrangement not to fire on it, the same way that what they used to say is that the famous hotel in downtown Manila that the MacArthur family had an interest in wasn't bombed. Even though we bombed a lot of Manila flat in World War II, we didn't bomb that hotel because there were orders not to do so. Well, that's an old story.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But one always wondered about the Intercontinental Hotel up there, which then changed hands after the war. It maybe changed names too, not right away, one of these kinds of real estate deals.

So I stood out on the little balcony they had and watched this attack up the hill of the Mount of Olives. It could have been filmed as a textbook exercise, the Israeli jets, because they had been flying around. Since the war started the Israeli jets flew all over. They were like F-86s—I'm not sure what they were. But they were all over, hustling around here and there; and they were doing a lot of work down in the valley around Jericho and everything, a lot of work away from the city.

*Q: I think most of them, I think they were mainly French planes.*

ROSS: [Dassault] Mysteres?

*Q: Yes, I think so because the Israelis—*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: ...at that point did not have—*

ROSS: That's right, right.

*Q: ...American planes.*

ROSS: Exactly so, right. I guess that's a false memory on my part. They were [Dassault] Mirages, I guess. Anyway, they softened the place up, and then there was some mortar fire up there. The Jordanians were dug in on the forward slope of the hill, and they laid down machine—I saw it all with a pair of field glasses, so I could watch them. It took about an hour and a half to do it, two hours, and they did it perfectly. Then they did firing maneuver all the way up—I mean excellent training—all the way up and then overran the Jordanian position at close hand. You could even see them with the glasses running right across the positions. Too bad I didn't have a 16mm camera or something because you could have gotten some good pictures of a filming of an action.

So this was by no means the only fighting that had been around there. There had been a lot of fighting on the hills behind, over…I don't even really know the names of them because they were right on the edge of No Man's Land where people weren't allowed to go. It's what they called the Jordanian horse barracks, where they had mounted horse patrols and stuff, and these places are now kind of sacred to the memory of the Israelis who seized this portion of Jerusalem in the war.

So we all started walking around a little bit, even though we weren't supposed to, and after a couple of days, I went back to the Old City where I lived to see the sheikh and the old "hajjis" (people who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca) who lived there (There were some men who were 80 or 90 years old who lived in this convent that I lived in; they were old Central Asians from Chinese Turkestan or something like that, who had come there because they had come on hajj with the Naqshbandi and just decided to stay in Jerusalem. There was one man in his 90s, little old wizened fellow, with a very austere, old-fashioned Muslim-looking chap) and how they were and all this other stuff. There

was a little private mosque in, our compound if you want to call it that, our convent that the Israelis had shot and kicked in the big doors—those were great big wooden doors from the eighteenth, nineteenth century—and gone into the mosque and thrown a grenade or thrown some kind of a bomb in there and knocked a lot of the…I don't know, decoration off the wall and chewed it all up.

Then there was a little kind of a class B hospital, which was like a Red Crescent first aid station, in the Old City because at that time (and they still do) the Arabs would minister hospital care. If somebody breaks an arm, or if the baby swallows something, or something like that, all this kind of thing, they'd take 'em right to this aid station…if somebody cuts himself badly.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So that had been attacked inside the compound because people used to come there all the time. The guy who ran it had some kind of pharmacy business; they took him away, and he was supposedly picked up; and a lot of people were picked up. So the business then became kind of like…there certainly wasn't any cultural work to be done, but it was like…try to find out what's happening.

Then there was a lot of stuff that happened. People started hearing that the USS *Liberty* had been attacked. A television team of Americans came in from the Mandelbaum Gate from Israel and heard about the consulate being attacked and came over. They were from Chicago; there was one of the Chicago papers plus some…stand up and the guy with the camera, whatever, you know a little two-man team. In those days stuff was filmed; it wasn't videoed; it wasn't handicams [camcorders] or whatever they're called now; it was more complicated. This guy Rod says, "There's some guys here and they want to talk to us." They wanted to ask us about the consulate being shot up, so we showed them. There were a couple of shell marks—great big, exploded away things—but there was a 105 shell sticking in the wall. It had come around the back and just sort of lodged there. Was it a dud or not? You know, why didn't it go off? Nobody knows; a lot of shells don't go off; at least in the old days they didn't. Once we saw that everybody was like, [whispering] "Don't even go near there. Don't walk there." You know, it could have just been right at the jiggle where it would go off.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was later taken out by a bomb recovery squad. But we showed them that, and then they wanted to ask us our experiences of being shot at, and part of the roof was blown away.

Now I forgot to tell you something. When the city was being taken in the battle, there's a parallel road to the road that runs by the consulate, and I think it's called Salah e-Din Street, and two old M3 [M26] Pershings, or whatever they are, had come up the street; and they had like 60 or 90mms [armament]. There was a unit of three of them that came up.

I was looking out the window with the field glasses, see. I was considered the right guy to do all this stuff because of my military experience, compared to the others, or anyway, I was young. Actually, I found it totally absorbed. Priscilla and Mack would say, [raspy voice] "Stay down in the kitchen. Don't go up there!" because people were sitting on the floor of the kitchen, and the plaster had fallen in in some places and stuff like this, and the glass was all broken, with a pot on your head, especially when the firing got started because it came and went.

I saw these two tanks come up the road and traverse their turret; there were a pair of them. But they both swung, and one swung right, looked right at me—that barrel. And I thought, I mean I thought the famous holy, you know, and I thought, "God! They're aimed, that thing is aimed right at me!" Well, it fired, and it hit upstairs. It went in the window upstairs, went through a room. I was laying down on the steps looking out kind of a little place where you could kind of, you could just…it was a little bit safer there, because it was on an iron steps, and I figured that the iron and cement steps wouldn't crack. It went into the halls, two shells went in, total, and tore the hell out of the bedroom that Mack and Priscilla lived in. The one shell exploded just about where his closet was, and all this shrapnel went through all his tweeds. [Laughter] Ha, ha, ha…I'm not making this up! Of course nobody wanted to—you couldn't go upstairs right away, you know, I mean because the building was under fire and there was a lot of plaster and the dust from a shell, you know, makes the dust just everywhere.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And the noise was so loud that you don't hear it. It knocks the wind out of you and makes your ears ring terrible. Even if you're protected by stone and cement block walls, it still has tremendous bang-o! Later, when everything had died down—like in about an hour and 45 minutes, two hours because you don't know whether anything that's laying up there is going to explode; I mean you just don't know—Mack went up, and he found his…he came down and said, "They got all my tweeds." Anyway, he wore his tweeds to meetings with the various armistices and the military governors over the next weeks to call attention to, "Look! Look how bad it is. Even a diplomat can't be left alone."

Things died down. The next thing, they got us more telephones that worked. People came through. Since all the electricity was off, the one nice thing that the Halls did—and I should say this, that everybody enjoyed it—was they had two or three refrigerators there; Evan Wilson had one down stairs, and the Halls had two upstairs because they entertained a lot. They said, "Well, there's a lot of beer in those ice boxes! It's not gonna stay cool very long, and also the steaks are all melting in the freezer." But since they had gas you could charcoal them on Buddha gas burners. So we lived high on the hog, as it were, for the next two or three days, eating up their steaks because the electricity didn't come back on. What could you do? You had no choice!

It was a very strange time. Evan Wilson, the consul, came over and he said, "I want you to work for me; you're not gonna go back." Well, the bridge had been blown up. There was a huge stream of Palestinians running away from Jerusalem and from the West Bank. They were sneaking around at night. There were big files of them, going around behind mountains down toward the Jordan River and trying to get across one way or another, and going up the valley, way up to what they called the Sheikh Hussein Bridge. I guess they were trying to get across in boats or anything like that, plus climbing across the broken bridge, which I think is called the Allenby Bridge. The bridge—the metalwork and the wooden work—was falling down into the Jordan and people would climb across the smashed and broken girders of the bridge to get away. And then there were people, of course, trying to cross back in, and the Israelis, if I recall correctly, encouraged everybody to leave.

On Thursday or Friday everybody started celebrating on the West side of Jerusalem because the troops who had gone up to the Golan Heights were coming back. There was like a huge, I won't call it a parade, but a huge returning brigade of them or two brigades in these half-tracks, these old American World War II half-tracks that armored, splendid vehicles (you still see them around being used). Anyway, there were jeeps and half-tracks. A lot of Israelis came over, just walked through the gate. The town got filled up with people who were lookers, who came out to see what the Old City looked like, or walk all around. The Arabs were on a 24-hour curfew, and some were allowed to go out, but you were supposed to have papers or permission or something like that, or being medical or something. People were afraid to open their shops. But the streets around the consulate going through the Mandelbaum Gate were lined with Israelis who were all clapping and screaming and cheering for all the soldiers coming back from the Golan, which hadn't been attacked until Wednesday when the West Bank was pretty much totally taken.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: At that point, the Israelis decided to go take Golan. Why not? As I have read since then, it wasn't in the original plan. I think it was Moshe Dayan who said, "We had no intention of taking that. It wasn't even in the war dispositions until Wednesday." Why not, then? You know, let's get it! I think it's relevant to mention here because the Golan Heights of Syria give Israel 30 percent of its water, or something like that comes down from that mountain "massif" (principal mountain mass).

Then the next thing that happened was that there was going to be a huge census, and everybody had to stay home; this was like Friday or Saturday. They had demographers come around and interview everybody, and you were supposed to stay home and take a huge census of everybody who lived everywhere; and then they demarcated what was gonna be the new boundaries of Israel—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …all around the outside of the Old City, and said that this will—they didn't say then what that would be, but everybody said, "Well, they're trying to establish Greater Jerusalem for the state of Israel, and that's what the census was all about."

And then there were a lot of other things that I recall happening then. They started trying to disinvest No Man's Land with whatever was leftover of the Jordanian occupation. The pillboxes had all been overcome by fire, and there were dead people in them, particularly the ones close to the consulate, I remember. So they had to go in and get the dead bodies out. There was one pillbox very close to the front gates that had…it must have had six or eight bodies in it, and by this time they'd been in there five, six days. So they took prisoners and sent them in to get them out. The literal stench of dead people was so bad that…I was close, and you know, people would be vomiting as they worked. The Israelis had a couple of guys who were what they call grave registration or something, who had gas masks on, who would go through their papers, go through the pockets of the corpses to get stuff out of them. That was the first time, I guess, in my life I'd seen a lot of bodies piled up in one way or another and how they swell up and break the clothes when they finally do it.

Well, I remember one time in that first week being sent to go down to the valley to Jericho to see what had happened at the huge refugee camp [Aqbat Jaber] down there, "al-Ariha" (Jericho), that's what it's called in Arabic. As I went into the square—there was still a curfew, but I was using the truck with consulate corps (CC) plates, so that theoretically you couldn't get stopped, or you could talk your way out of it if you got stopped because there was military everywhere—there was a truck right in the middle of the square that somebody had been driving (it was a civilian truck), and it had been hit by aircraft or rockets; and there was a body at the wheel, which had been burned up essentially. I drove up beside it, and there were two cats on the body, you know, having a snack because it was roast meat, roast flesh, and I'd never seen that before.

So you see, one sees a lot of things in events like that. So then Evan Wilson had me doing these things, and I'd go back and tell him or write a small report.

*Q: What was your impression of the Palestinian populace and the Israeli troops? You know, as you're going around, how was this working out?*

ROSS: Well, the Palestinians had to do exactly what the Israelis said, and they were very frightened! The Palestinians before the war were, if I may use the phrase, in awe of the military prowess of the Israelis. They liked to think that the Jordanians had some kind of an army and all that, and they would say, "Oh, our guys will fight if it came to that."

But as a matter of fact, the Israelis always mean business; and the Israelis took the city very firmly, and they did enough, if I may say, smashing and looting outside the gates, which I saw them…in the first day or two that the city was taken. There is a famous pottery shop cater-corner from the front of the consulate, named Jordanian Pottery or something. They had a lot of hand-blown glass and a lot of handmade stuff, copies of second century blah-blah this and all that; and it's nice, it's souvenirs, some of it quite

nice; and then they have tile work that they can do, so you can get a tile work table with a copy of an early Christian design in it, and it's all mailed back to the United States. These people had quite a business in it; they had American connections. But I saw the Israeli troops break the windows, bust in the doors, and go in and pick things out, but—I saw this with my own eyes—see these huge, big, long rows of china that were set up in kind of deal shelving, a soldier would just take his weapon, his rifle, and just smash it all down, and just knock it onto the floor like in a china shop, which is what it was.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They also went and looted the Jordanian stores on Salah e-Din Street that looked like they might have, say, like perfumes, you know, with "droguerie" (drugstore in French), I guess, and take all the perfume and all this kind of stuff.

Then they took all the cars available around Greater Jerusalem and put them all in a field, in a pound, so that there weren't any vehicles available; and then the cars were taken away and used by the army to take everybody everywhere (as transportation) because the army had been organized, and still is perhaps, by the Egged Bus Company. So once Jerusalem was taken there were these blue[-shirted bus drivers]—that's the national bus company, I believe, of Israel—they would drive around with whole busloads of troops doing troop movements and take a platoon here or take some people back there. All the cars were taken away.

Then the main thing that the consulate did on the political sense was…one of the Arab hotels was taken as a headquarters of the military occupancy, and then everybody had to go there for all kinds of, a thousand different kinds of permissions and stuff: Can the hospitals open? Can this? Can that? Can somebody get this? You know, who is…what about the electricity? Well, Jerusalem Power Company was cut out, and East Jerusalem was hooked up to the Israeli National Grid. The power company didn't know what it was supposed to do. There were a lot of things that were done like that.

And everybody who knew the Americans, and so there was a whole social structure who would go to the Americans and say, "Can you please help me? I'm a doctor. Get my car back." or "Can you please help me…this or that." So this seemed to take up a lot of time.

Then I was sent to walk around in the Old City and see what happened to the Crusader Church of Saint Anne; it had been hit by shellfire. Can you please describe it, and all this stuff. It went like that.

Meanwhile I got to go for the first time…the Palestinians—to go back to your question again, the Palestinians were in total reflexive position about their own safety and well being. Nobody…there was no front at all. Everybody was just looking to stay home where they were told to be.

*Q: Well, in essence, this is a war between the Jordanian army and the Israeli army—correct me if I'm wrong—and the Palestinians were essentially a mass that was caught between the two.*

ROSS: The Jordanian army was composed principally of the desert Arabs, desert Jordanians, and they were considered much more reliable; and I think the army military structure up was that way. The Palestinians, they didn't have—they weren't allowed to have guns, I don't think, by the Jordanians, so that they were just sort of like something malleable in all of this.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The main thing that they were concerned [with], if I can recall, was whether the shops would open.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were gentle souls too. There was a wonderful old man named Ara Falaref, who was the director of the Rockefeller Museum, which had been established in the '30s to hold the archaeology treasures of what was then British-occupied Palestine by old John D. [Rockefeller] from the point of view of his religious interests, him being a Baptist. The Israelis immediately seized that. So the question was: What will happen to the people in it? They were told to get out and go home. A lot of people were told that everywhere.

And then the Israelis came in and tried to manage the American School of Oriental Research. Now there were scholars on both sides who'd gone back and forth, Biblical scholars who were involved with archaeology and the acts of Jesus of the Bible and all these other things; so they were friends. But there was kind of like the iron hand of control came down on everything, and so people didn't know from day to day what would be the next kind of thing. There were, I guess, things published like military general orders and stuff, about what the curfew would be, whether the shops would be allowed to be open for two hours, or something like this. But it was pretty definite within the first period after the war that the Israelis intended to stay.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: As I said, a lot of Palestinians ran away, including, I think, the guy who was the janitor at my place. He tried to get his family, because everybody thought, oh, there was a great fear of the Jews. "The Jews are coming!" you know, like you're saying, "The Mongols are coming! Here comes Genghis Khan!" or something. People, because of other incursions, going back to the '48 war, where various things had happened, and there were a series of, as I go back to Ariel Sharon in the '50s had led an attack on a Palestinian town called Qibya, and destroyed 45 houses and killed 60 or 70 people.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And his explanation was, "We didn't know anybody was in the houses when we blew them up." Well, this kind of thing was instilled so that people didn't want to be around when the bad guys came.

On the other hand, there were other stories out. The sheikh I was in, before the war, had taken me over to some people's house, what you might call very strict observance Muslims, who said that there was stuff in a cabinet in a room there that had been kept because a dear Jewish friend, who they never saw again after '48, who lived in the Old City said, "Please keep these things for me." Now I gathered that they were religious objects, you know, and that no one was even supposed to ask about them; but it was done because we respect your observance. There were these kinds of things, that there was some kind of a pro forma tolerance.

But on the other hand, people wanted to get the hell out of there. I tended to have a contact with the merchant class as a USIS cultural officer, and the professional class, the lawyers or something like that, or teachers, rather than I did with the people in the street. I have to also say at that time in Jerusalem there were a lot of what you'd call small people, just one generation off the farm or from the village where they had grown up very, very simply, people who only really have one pair of shoes and two shirts, those folks who were artisans, worked with their hands—they weren't even artisans; they were manual laborers.

And newspapers weren't published, and the radio waves weren't on.

Then, if there was a first spark of resistance, it came from the newspapers, which as soon as they published something, they were closed.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were not allowed to get newsprint. But this little spark of resistance had existed before the war too. The Palestinian papers, I mean the ones that were published in Jerusalem, like *AL-Quds* or something, they would sometimes run editorials or opinion pieces that might be against the Kingdom [Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan]. Not against it, but questioning some of the actions and that kind of stuff, because there was a lot of development going on in Jordan and to a certain extent on the West Bank. A lot of that development, it depends on whose ox gets gored, or who gets to help put in the new plant.

*Q: When did you leave there? Because I'd like to see, you know, how things settled down after.*

ROSS: Right. Well, actually, they didn't quite settle down. For me, it was still up in the air. They were still trying to settle the military governorship of the West Bank. There were still all kinds of incidents, like every day there was something.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You might say it was like what you hear about Baghdad. You open the paper; you hear this happened or that happened. While there wasn't maybe so many shootings because the Palestinians didn't have weapons and the Jordanians had all…they'd all gone to the races; they'd all run away. I, myself, I have to say at this point, was highly annoyed at the Jordanians for not doing anything except seeming like they ran away, although they did fight. There were Jordanian bodies, including dead Jordanian soldiers, in the streets for a couple of days before they were taken away. Some of them at these (we call it) 106[mm] recoilless rifle positions had been blown away too. Anyway, that was the fighting at night.

But I was also, I guess, in kind of a state of unbelief that the Israelis had walked over everything so effectively (let me put it that way) and that there was definitely a new thing. There was a sign in Arabic that said, "Consule Americia" (American Consulate). Somebody said, "We have to put up a sign in Hebrew." So I got somebody who said they could write Hebrew and Arab, and he wrote a sign on a big piece of white cardboard and put it on the gate. Then somebody came up to me and said to me in a New York accent, "That's the wrong spelling …" (It was written in Hebrew.) "You've left out a letter." And I said, "Oh, oh, thank you." And he said, "Who are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm working here at the consulate." "Are you a consular officer?" I said, "No." He started asking me all these questions about myself. He said, "I'm an American." He was a soldier, an Israeli soldier. And I said, "Oh?" He said, "I'm a cab driver from New York." I said, "Well, you're a soldier here?" And he said, "Oh, I just came over for the fighting. I figured there was gonna be a war, so I wanted to get in, and I came over here. I don't live here. I'm going back to New York." I mean there were all these thousands of incidents like this that go toward giving somebody a world view about how things are, and I guess that's what the Palestinians thought about everything too.

*Q: Well, were you picking up from your Palestinian circle anything of unhappiness about the Jordanians 1) coming into the war, which they didn't have to do, and then 2) getting beaten? I mean had the Jordanian rule been such in the West Bank that they weren't liked? Or I mean how…*

ROSS: Oh, yes, very much so! There was a subtle undertone, and I'd heard it before the war, that if we got independence, that is the Palestinians speaking, the first day would be liberation if we got the West Bank, and the second day we would kick out the Jordanians and run this situation ourselves because they apparently had some kind of political authority since the British days, and they looked forward to having that back.

If there was any Palestinian political consciousness that I was aware of, it was that, "We want to be independent." They didn't like the way the king kind of squeezed economically, perhaps, the West Bank. You know, you can put the tariff up on matches or something like that or kerosene and get a little bit of money that way. But they didn't have anywhere else to turn except… People tended to believe what Nasser said, and it was revealed during the war that Nasser had called up Hussein in Jordan. The Israelis had tapped into the phone call (it was a wireless thing), and they played the original and

played the translation of it. The gist of it was Nasser was, of course, totally beside himself; and he was almost gaga at the fact that he'd lost his whole air force because they were all on the ground and the Israelis took it all out on the ground. Nasser called up Hussein and said, "Let's tell them that they started the war," or something like that. "Okay." And it was "Yea, hia," you know, my friend, brother.

Anyway, this started appearing during the war, these translations of these intercepted telephone calls, and it made Nasser and Hussein look very devilish indeed, you know, and stupid too. In retrospect, I can't recall what the translations were, but maybe it was all correct, because nobody knew at that time that the Israelis had decided to do what they call the preemptive defensive startup.

*Q: Well, what did you observe? I mean much has been said over the time that Golda Meir, for example, was very dismissive of Palestinians, saying, "There's no such thing as a Palestinian."*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: How did you find, you know, in the time you were there, the Israeli occupation? I mean how did the Israeli authorities speak to Palestinians?*

ROSS: They treated them in a very cavalier fashion; they were dismissive of them; they were second class citizens and remain that to this day. Everybody immediately had to have an identification, and everybody immediately had to go through checkpoints, and everybody this, and everybody that. They're [the Israelis] the bosses. They're the "uebermensch" (superman), they're over people, and the Palestinians are just, when I was in Florida at the University of Florida, what the people of the Jewish fraternities called "shvartses" (derogatory term in the '40s and '50s for black African Americans). They were just people to hew wood and draw water for them, that is, at the governmental occupation level.

I didn't see any interaction at any other level, except at the American School of Oriental Research, where Biblical scholars from the Israeli side would come over and meet with Arab or Western European and American scholars. I thought Ara Falaref at what they used to call the Rockefeller Museum just got shoved up on the shelf, like you're an old man anyway. He was one of the great distinguished people.

The holy sites, the Christian holy sites that is to say, were, I think, pretty much also put into the hands of some authority, which then established Israeli soldiers outside the doors and walls of those places rather than no soldiers or in some instances in the old days Jordanian police. There's always been a battle about the holy sites in Jerusalem.

*Q: Oh yes. Yes, particularly among the Christians.*

ROSS: Oh yes, very much. That's why the Nusaibi [and Joudah] family holds the key and has held it for a thousand years, because the five Christian sects that claimed to have

authority in various parts of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre couldn't trust each other. So they gave the key, which is essentially a ceremonial thing to lock the front door (it's a great big key and it does lock the door), that's why it was given to the Muslims.

*Q: Well Dick, when did you leave there?*

ROSS: August. I left there because…well, see, I was still attached to the Hashemite Kingdom.

I couldn't talk very much because international lines weren't so good. Another thing that happened was that all over the Arab world there'd been kind of an anti-Americanism that had risen to the surface. There'd been huge demonstrations in some places (some places there hadn't been too much).

I recall this, when Aleppo was attacked in northern Syria, to the point that the people had to jump out the back room upstairs. I don't think it was the code room, if they call it that. But they had a rope, and they all slid down the rope and burnt their hands sliding down the 25 to 30 feet of Manila rope; everybody got rope burns.

There were very aggressive and out-of-hand demonstrations. So various Arab governments broke diplomatic relations, not all of them, and I think Jordan didn't; but it was kind of a drawdown for awhile.

Anyway, at this point, all this was going on, and Evan Wilson said…I'd become sort of chummy with the gentleman. He was almost like the old man, or the old guy, because as I said, he'd been out there since '46 or even '39 with the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry. He was very kind of old-fashioned Swarthmore [College] and Harvard kind of guy, and old school; and he said, "Well, Richard, I want you to know that I'm asking to have you put on my staff, and I have a cable here I'm gonna read to you." So the gist of the cable was that he requested me to continue in Jerusalem and become a member of the other side staff—that was the consulate general. He said, "Now, I'm gonna sign this, if that's all right with you." And well, I was pleased that I was thought well enough of that I should stay there, and he said, "You've been very helpful." He said, "I'm not gonna sign off on it; I'm gonna sign it, because I don't know what it means to sign off on something. If you sign off it, then you're not signing on it!" [Laughter]

*Q: You now give up Foreign Service lingo!*

ROSS: Right [laughter]. I mean he was rather droll like that. He requested that I stay. This went back through State, and then, of course, it went to Jay Gildner, the PAO in Tel Aviv.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And so he [Evan Wilson] said, "Now you should go down and see Mr. Gildner. I don't know him all that well." So I drove down to Tel Aviv. I started going to Israel. This

was very interesting for me because I'd never been there, and so you can see all the things. I went in to see Gildner and he was the guy, as I told the story, he'd come in and criticized the library because we had *Good Housekeeping*, *Hairdo*, international magazines and all this stuff. So he kind of rolled his eyes when I came in, and he said, "Well, I don't know why you would want…" Theoretically, since I was a USIS officer, I'd be part of his staff but attached to Jerusalem unless I got somehow transferred into State Department, since we had different lines of authority, blah, blah, blah. So he said, "Well, really I can't make any decisions. I don't know anything about this…" and all this stuff. I was in and out of his office in about 7 minutes.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He expressed, what seemed to me, very little curiosity about Jerusalem. Well as it happened, the PAO's writ in Tel Aviv didn't run in Jerusalem, and they were just planning for a Jerusalem cultural center, and he was more concerned with that. He said, "Well, you can't speak Hebrew, so why would you want to serve in Jerusalem?" and so that fell into "innocuous desuetude" (harmless disuse).

*Q: Okay.*

ROSS: I then fiddled around for a while. I was put on "loose pack" (an order issued when an employee must permanently depart from a post abroad assignment but the onward assignment abroad has not been finalized) and told to wait orders. So they cut orders on me and I left around August 15th.

*Q: In '67?*

ROSS: Sixty-seven. I left within two months and a week after the whole thing happened.

I wanted to say one thing. There's a wonderful monastery in the Judean [Desert], [in] the Dead Sea Valley south of Jerusalem, on the west side of the valley, in these terrible hills, a very scraggly place; it's a wilderness out there.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It's where that bishop that—

*Q: The Bishop [James] Pike.*

ROSS: Yes, where he disappeared forever. There was this monastery called Mar Saba, that I had been to about three times, and it's an absolutely fabulous place! How could they have built it! It looks like a David Roberts' print, and it's been there since the fourth, fifth century, or eighth century, whenever. It's one of these places where they have rooms where they have piles of bones arranged for the previous abbots with the cloth on them and everything.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Just piles of the previous monks! I had gone there before and met a couple of monks who were German, and they had one big loaf of bread a week. They were really on a strict diet. It was like a day before they got their fresh loaf. This was the hardest bread I've ever imagined somebody would chew on. I said, "It's really hard to chew on!" And the guy said, "Not when you're hungry!" [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: But they offered me wine, you know how they do, or a glass of brandy.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And they were very ardent, spoke English and German, and they went out there and atoned for the sins of the world and lived by themselves. So after the war I drove down there, after about 8 days, and nobody had been to see them. They'd been totally forgotten in the war, and there were like 25 or 30 monks out there. By their vows they didn't ever go into town, and whoever was supposed to bring them food and everything or whatever, and letters or whatever, hadn't been out. There was a curfew, and maybe the car was taken away. So when I drove up there and rang the bell [ding dong sound]—there's this big wall and now this is a very old monastery (it's still there)—somebody came out. "Who are you?" And I said, "Ana minna safara Americia (I'm from the American embassy and their consulate)." "Come on in!" and all the monks came around me and they said, "What happened?" because they didn't have any radios. They had taken vows not to even listen [to the radio], to read the newspaper, or anything. "What has happened?" They didn't know. All they heard was this, "Ba-boom!" great artillery fire and airplanes flying over. They didn't know what had happened. It was really wonderful. It was like arriving at a desert island inside. "Who won?" [Laughter] And that was the way it was going.

*Q: Well, I'll tell you, we're going to pick this up the next time in August '67. What's happened? Just tell me where we go. What was waiting for you work wise?*

*Today is September 2, 2003. This is a continuation of an interview with Richard Ross.*

ROSS: Oh, work wise, most of the Arab posts were closed down or diminished in size. So they said to me, "What do you want to do?" My career mangler, whose name was Joe Forte, who's a wonderful guy in USIA, he was missing two fingers. I always remember him; he was short two fingers; he'd lost them in an accident—Maynard Forte. He was very kind and he said, "Well, you've had three posts, and you haven't been out for a year, so you're still on language probation. So what language would you…do you want to do Arabic right now?"

Well, at that point in the Middle East, as I may have said, I was annoyed at the Arabs for losing and annoyed at the Israelis for winning. I said I wanted to get off language [probation]…

"What language would that be? Do you want to do Hindi or Hindustani or something like that?"

I said, "How about French?" because I hadn't done very well in French at all in college. This was my chance to take the splotch off the copybook as it were. So I enrolled in French at FSI in Arlington, [Virginia] and stayed there the better part of five months and came out with a 3-3.

You met some very interesting people. Being a language school, a kind of a world language school, you do see a lot of different, interesting people. Theodore Roosevelt IV was there, and he was a young man who was going to go out to Africa; he was in French; he had a BMW (Bavarian Motor Works) motorcycle he was going to take to Ouagadougou, [Burkina Faso], which I thought was kind of interesting; he'd been a Navy SEAL (Sea, Air, Land). Sargent Shriver [Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.] was in the class; he was going out to be ambassador to Paris, [France]. Then there were people who I still stay in touch with one way or the other, or at least we know about each other indirectly.

So then it came down to the glorious day of getting a 3-3 and being able to master the "imparfait" (imperfect) and the "passé composé" (present perfect) [verb past tenses].

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I didn't really understand French at all by the way [laughter].

*Q: Oh!*

ROSS: Anybody that has a 3-3 at FSI doesn't, they're not hitting on all six [laughter]!

*Q: No.*

ROSS: Anyway, I got out of there, and they said, "Now, you've got a world language. Where would you like to go?" The things they offered me were East Africa or West Africa; there was Francophone Africa or else India. There were two or three posts in India; there were two or three jobs in New Delhi, a job in Calcutta [Kolkata], and I guess a job in Madras. So some of these people had been India hands in the career counseling section, which at that time was attached to the area; it wasn't centralized in USIA. So I said, "Wow! I wanna go to India. That's where it's all happening, you know!" I guess the Maharishi had emerged and that sort of stuff; the Beatles had gone out there, that is, George Harrison had. Everybody said India is really something…something different.

So off I went to Calcutta to a very strange job. I flew out to be the audiovisual officer for Greater Northeast India, which included the whole of the USIS purview of Calcutta.

There were the northeast frontier area, that's Assam and Bihar, and then states up there, West Bengal, and Orissa, about 160 million people; and my job was to do films and exhibits. Calcutta at that time had just been cut from 14 people down to 11 officers. I may have mentioned this earlier, but they had a radio officer at one time. India was full of USIS people. They published a paper in 11 or 13 languages, a weekly, with an ambassador's column in it every week. These were all big languages: Malayalam or things like that, Bengali. Bengali was the seventh or eighth largest language in the world at that time.

They had all this huge pile of rupees in India, which was essentially money that had piled up from AID projects that couldn't be gobbled up by the government of India and just laid in banks. At one time towards the end of my time there, it was said that the United States government could touch one-sixth of the currency in India if they demanded the withdrawal of all this specie in paper! Of course the Indians didn't like this, and so they went to cutting back all the areas that we had—seven or eight branch posts. They had wonderful places at Trivandrum. They had a branch post in Hyderabad, and the old Nizam [Mir Osman Ali Khan, 1886 – 1967] was still alive. So the person who was in Hyderabad lived in a palace that was one of the many numerous palaces that the Nizam of Hyderabad had. He was in his 90s; he had his little private army and everything; he was a collector. While he was still alive and I was in Calcutta, there was an article on him that said his favorite collection was diamonds; he was a fancier of diamonds.

*Q: That's nice!*

ROSS: I'd advise anybody to go in for a collection like that.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, I had gotten to Calcutta, and the door of the airplane, Pan Am, which flew around the world both ways (flew through Calcutta), [opened], and this blast of heat came in, and I had on a Haskell drip-dry suit, and it immediately became a drip [laughter]. I actually thought, "I can stay on this thing and just keep going, go on to Rangoon, [Myanmar] and Thailand. Look at it out there!" This is the first time I've been east of Suez. The plane had been stuck in Karachi, [Pakistan] with some kind of an oil pump problem on an engine for an extra 24 or 30 hours, and they hadn't sent a message ahead about it; at least it hadn't gotten to USIS Calcutta. So people thought I was AWOL (absent without leave) anyway, I suppose. I had seen my first sweeper crouched on the floor going around with the broom with no handle on it, sweeping the floor, and it got to me right away, all this amazing distinction of classes and poverty and everything else.

So I was entering into the heart of it there, and because it was taking off to go on and it was just a short opening of the doors and, I don't know, gas it up a little bit (in those days they didn't have jetways that you walked on the planes with), up the steps of the plane comes Jock Shirley, who was the information officer in New Delhi. He had a nice attaché case, and he had on a very snappy jungle suit or whatever they call it.

*Q: Yes, yes, a safari suit.*

ROSS: Safari suit, right, suitable for deplaning in Nairobi, [Kenya]. So I was gazing bug-eyed around at the low, low hanging monsoon clouds, and the monsoon was just getting ready to set in; they had the mango showers already. He looked at me and he said, "Are you Ross?" And I said, "Yes. Who are you?" And he said, "My name's Shirley. I'm the information officer in New Delhi. You better get into town! They're looking for you in there!" like I should click my heels when he told me that. Anyway, more of him later. I bummed a ride with some consulate general car that was at the airport and went in and reported, and Duncan Scott was the PAO. He was a very nice, sort of senior fellow who'd come into USIA from the Foreign Works Administration. He'd been a writer back in the '30s and up through the '40s, and then he joined USIA and worked in radio and then emerged up.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Maybe you knew him. He was around, he's very literate. I wouldn't describe him as sophisticated in that European way because he was from Arkansas, but he was still the nice kind of older civilization person, and his wife too.

So I got introduced to my job, and it was crazy; I could do almost anything I wanted! They said, "Well, now you're here. Now get busy!" There was a guy who had come from Vietnam and had two and a half chips on each shoulder about what he'd been through there (he'd been working out in the regions) in the sense that…when I say chips, philosophically he was very pro-Vietnam and pro the American involvement there, the way everybody was, even though Tet [Offensive] had come and gone.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This was 1968. Everybody kind of took sides; there were two sides to take amongst the USIS officers. Bob Collins, God bless him, I think he's out in the state of Washington now. He and his deputy, he was IO, and then I reported to him, but he [Bob] had an assistant IO and he had me (the audio-visual officer). He [Bob] was an old radio fellow; he was an old jazz person. He'd been on Kay Kyser, he played in the Kay Kyser orchestra, and he'd been on *Quiz Kids* when he was like nine or ten years old. He was one of these kind of people with an amount of certitude to him. Oh, it went round and round and got worse about Vietnam. It had already started getting—

*Q: When they took sides, it was…*

ROSS: In discussions at each other's houses—

*Q: On Vietnam?*

ROSS: On whether we should be there and whether we should stay, and it was like every week it was bringing you more uncertain news. It's exactly the same thing that's happening in Iraq right now.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was the same kind of thing where people were rolling their eyeballs and saying, "Well, should we put in more troops, literally, then, or should we put in more money to AID to stabilize the rice imports?" That was a big thing that had gone on in Vietnam, that they needed so many hundred million dollars or something, I don't remember the exact figures. Tet had occurred, and there had been shouting matches, at least I had had one in the State Department before I came out. Bad things had been going on in the United States. Martin Luther King had been shot. Bobby Kennedy had been shot; that was in the spring of '68, and it just didn't seem right. There was a lot of almost what you'd call insurrection. Wilmington, I guess, had been occupied for a long while by National Guard troops. There'd been riots in different places, Cambridge, Maryland, I think; stuff like that.

But anyway, this little sideshow went on, I guess, in posts all over the world. At the same time, what was going on was what was perceived to be this youth revolution, a youth cult, kind of a volcano of energy: the new music; the new thinking; and the new sort of freedom of expressions; the Summer of Love had occurred in '67 in San Francisco; [California], and psychedelic music had swept across the land; Jimmy Hendricks was a big force; and the literature, it wasn't unusual to see copies of ***Ramparts*** [magazine] on people's tables or things like that. There was sort of what they called a movement toward a new America, and that was part of the old social slant and also part of this new thing, which had, to a certain extent, came out of California, I suppose. Anyway, we felt it there.

*Q: Where did you fall in the spectrum?*

ROSS: Well, I was like one of these horrible people that had one foot in the brothel and the other foot in the convent.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I think that bodes ill for a personality resolution, but I kind of identified with the wave of the future as it was then perceived to be, and I also came from kind of a conservative background. My father was very conservative. I was against the war, but I was sort of conservative about that. It was that I didn't think we had to spend all that "gelt" (money) and blood there. I wasn't against spending gelt and blood per se. I'd been an army officer, and as I had said earlier I think on another tape, volunteered for Vietnam.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I did include that before, I think.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Yes. But all this other stuff was happening! So one of the things that they did is we'd set up great big exhibits in places like Bhubaneswar or Patna, [India]. I'm sure for people in the United States Patna probably doesn't ring any bells, but it's got three or four, six, seven, eight million people in it now. It was a very large city in Bihar, and a manufacturing capital, and they made all the rickshaws there I think.

All the rickshaw pullers were what they called Bihari wallahs; they came from Bihar and worked in Calcutta. There were seven rickshaw pullers' unions: three of them were communists, two of them were middle of the road, and two or three of them were capitalists. These people didn't own their rickshaws. They just joined the union for a nominal ten paise or something like that, and these people slept under their rickshaws. There was not much further you could go down unless you became a coolie to clean bathrooms; rickshaw-pulling was pretty down, but…it was all kind of organized in a crazy way. The universities, there were lots of them, were always on strike. There were strikes all over Calcutta the whole time we were there.

*Q: Well, how did, I mean from our foreign policy point of view, were we trying to make contact with the university students?*

ROSS: Yes, I was just kind of segueing into that. I would create these exhibits of new ideas. We'd actually get copies of underground newspapers that weren't salacious or particularly revolutionary, that were full of new ideas.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were published all over the United States, and we'd put them up on posters and say, "See what's happening. This is happening in the United States." This was our way of interpreting it. Then they'd send along speakers; sometimes we'd bring in speakers, or sometimes I would go out too.

I can remember one time speaking when I was first new at it. I'd show up in a suit and tie, and I was young. There were like 900 or 1,000 people in a big auditorium, as I was going to say, in Bhubaneswar, and these kids, the Indians, were sharp. They wore the standard third world outfit of black pants and a short-sleeved, white Terylene shirt, and they're all there; and the girls were all in saris, but they're all bright and young and just full of energy. But they're good kids. They all wanted to major in engineering and get on with making a lot of money in the Indian middle class, and they were good in the sense that they were the kinds who would accept, oh, a prearranged marriage and all that stuff and do what their parents said. But they had this energy. So I came out there, and there they all were, and it was like a theater.

So I gave a 20-minute presentation—I think it was 20-minutes (I tend to talk too long, as I need not divulge here)—about the elections, and how the United States attitude toward Vietnam seemed to be settling because of the Paris talks, and this, and that, and that a resolution could be perceived. I tried to avoid all that light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel stuff, and that, indeed, I represented the cultural aspects of America, and that you could talk if you wanted me to answer questions about this new influence in literature, and people didn't only just read Scott Fitzgerald or things like that—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …you know, which the Indians seemed to know, but they knew about Henry James and stuff.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: So okay. First question up, some guy raises his hand, they made a little speech, said, "He's the vice president of the student body," and he's very tall, good looking, looks like…an athlete, let me put it that way. So he said, "Now Mr. Second Secwetary. You say these things about the United States and you say that Lyndon Johnson is a good president. But if he's so good, why did he have to kill Bobby Kennedy?" you know, or—no, I'm sorry, "Why did he have to kill John F. Kennedy?"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …or maybe he said both. Anyway, I was flabbergasted. Of course the whole theater, big lecture hall went "ROARR." That's good, you socked it to him there.

So I said, "Well, I don't believe that Lee Harvey Oswald was acting at the instructions of the Vice President of the United States. In fact, that's not so!"

"Well, let me tell you…" and then, of course, he gets going again, and everybody roars again.

Then I'm flabbergasted again because they just wanted to hand me off, as it were, and it's very hard to deal with this because then they're always one sided.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You really can't have a discussion with a thousand people [laughter]!

*Q: No [laughter]!*

ROSS: So a couple of things like that. Then the Naxalites, which is a Left Communist movement from Naxalbari, India, got going in Calcutta. They started smashing all the USIS library windows on Chowringhee [Road, now known as Jawaharlal Nehru Road], and then they would put some kind of fizz bombs in the library. So then we started

having to have packages inspected, and everybody would come to the library, which held 150 people. You had two librarians, American librarians! So we started to have to have package check; then we had to start to say not everybody can come in, and it was one of the few air-cooled places in town; it wasn't air conditioned per se, but it was cool, and the students loved it. So we started controlling all that, and things sort of went to worst, from pillar to post. The vice chancellor of the most important university was stabbed to death, and then there were a whole bunch of riots, and there were more strikes.

I have to say that I got kind of like…well, I'm just punching the clock here, and I'm not really punching my career ticket because people had already said, "Oh, audio-visual officer for Eastern India—that's the job you took?" Well, actually it was a fabulous job because I was the only person who went up north of the Brahmaputra [River] (maybe I mentioned this before) when the intelligence services couldn't get visas to go up there. I could go up there and show films to the Lion's Clubs, to the Rotary Clubs; and I could loan out films at long length, at 35mm, to the movie theaters which were all over the eastern provinces of Bengal and had been since the turn of the century.

So politics didn't work at all, but what did work was one of my other jobs. Besides designing exhibits and always cobbling together things for the consulate general—that included something for the Fourth of July party or something (you always have them, you know)—because I had designers, and I had painters working for me, and I had my own set of offices, which wasn't even in USIS (it was on the south end of the "Maidan" [large, public park in the heart of Calcutta]), and I had this big old 1880s building, what did work was the Apollo presence. About the time I got there [Calcutta], in the United States they were gearing up for the moon; and NASA was producing just a fabulous series of movies, sort of built around every shot, which could be 30 minutes long or abridged to 20 (which is a one-reeler in 35mm terms); and then NASA also had other kinds of movies about space exploration, underwater…remember where they were doing that stuff under the sea, living there and all that. So we had just a raft of good aeronautics, aerospace short movies. I had [worked with] a guy who had people working for him, a guy named Goshe who had contact with all these film distributors all over West Bengal, all over Orissa and Bihar, and up into Assam. We would give them the film free if they would promise to run it. Well, all we did was pay for the print, and once you run 20 prints…

I don't think I've said this yet, but we would run these films, we would order 20 or 30 of, say, "Apollo VIII," and we wouldn't even have seen a preview. We got to preview everything we ordered in 35mm; they just sent us 16mm of other things (so you could keep it or send it back), of, say, the Civil Rights Movement things, like Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and things like that. We would show these, particularly these aerospace movies, till the sprocket holes got round—that is, until the film wore out. It'd get all scratched, but you could still show it until it started jumping on the frame all the time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We even had sprocket holes repaired because you could do that cheap there, and we'd order more films.

So about this time a guy named Alan Carter, who was area director, said that he'd come out of McNamara's Department of Defense, what they called the head heavy impression accounts: one person saying one thing, what impression had been made on him? If you talked to an intellectual guy who was a poet or let's say a Baul singer because that's a kind of poetry in West Bengal—well, we had 5,000 to 10,000 Baul singers who had been to conventions and they're all individuals (they're folk music people)—if you talk to one, then that was one impression; but if you showed one film to an audience of 300 people in a regional town, and you showed it three times in a night, then you had 900 impressions. So we were showing 20 or 30 copies of these films, and we were actually starting to pile up millions, you know, a million and a half impressions. A million and a half people, two million people would see our shows in a month, different ones. We'd write this up because they had this special reporting form. This was how they were going to regularize communication. Do you follow me?

*Q: Yes, yes. It was sort of you made the body count.*

ROSS: Right. Well, right. You could call it a brain count, a mind count—

*Q: [Laughter] Yes.*

ROSS: …or cerebral count.

*Q: Well, I have to point out that this was the age of quantification.*

ROSS: Exactly.

*Q: Computers were just coming on to sort of the main stream, and people were fascinated with numbers.*

ROSS: Right. There were little computer cards that you filled out for those IBM, punch card sorting things.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So we sent that up to Washington, and well, guess what? They didn't believe us. "What do you mean a million and a half people have seen your movies?" and they actually sent somebody out to check on it. "Why are you lying?" you know. "We'll get you!" And of course, we had huge, huge audiences for these things.

One of the things we had is when they finally got to the moon, they brought a moon rock back. They brought lots of moon rocks back, and you know, the first person who got one was the president. I guess Nixon had come in then.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Then they put the tiny little pieces of moon rock in Lucite. Everybody's seen one, I suppose. They had big chunks of them lying around; in fact, some of them have been stolen, and they're in secret collections now. But anyway, we had big, heads-up warning that a moon rock was gonna come to India. And I mean this was like a…they had security like if it was Einstein or something like that, not the president, not POTUS (President of the United States), but they had all kind of… They had a special Halliburton case, and inside it was another case that was lined with velvet, and it was like…well, I don't know, the tongue of Saint Vincent de Paul, you know, and the next time you go to Padua, Italy, there it is. It's all encased in chryselephantine, you know.

So the moon rock came; first it was shown to Indira Gandhi and people up in the capital, and then, of course, everybody had to make a plan. So I made a plan: we rented some circus tents and got space on the Maidan, and we put big ads in the newspaper, "The moon rock is coming!" We realized this was a crazy thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The damn thing was smaller than the head…I mean the thing it was in was no bigger than the head of this microphone.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But then it was encased in this thing, like Harry Winston set it up like the Hope Diamond.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And it was treated like that! They developed an argument in the newspaper. The *Statesman* had a correspondence; some of the people of a rather primitive, estimable religious belief said, "It's impossible! No one could have a moon rock because, you know, our God has told us nobody can go to the moon!" and things like that. And then other people had to answer that, and they got in the usual squabbles and stuff, and "Why are they giving land on the Maidan for this moon rock thing?"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, the great day came. I was in charge. We had private showings of it in the consul general's garden, and he had one, and everybody wanted to [touch it]. You couldn't touch the thing; you could only touch the Lucite around it or whatever kind of plastic it was, but you could look at it. And you could say, "Wow!" And it really was magic!

At the last minute I got some advertising agency in Calcutta, (Jay Walter Thompson was there and everybody), and had printed up these big yellow buttons. Know what it said? "I

saw the moon rock." That's all it said. We gave these to the invited audiences at the private showings of the moon rock, and I couldn't believe it. Immediately all the consul generals demanded more of these lapel pins, which were nice, actually, for their children. They were plastic; they were silk-screened on plastic. You see, there's your audience, if you can get the childhood audience.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And then the editors of the newspapers called up, "Where? I need an extra one for my wife," or you know, "My managing editor's mad because the publisher got one and he didn't," and the police chief, and this was a great hit!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I mean we had thousands of them run off, and they became as hard to find as the bloody damn moon rock itself. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: And all it said was… I wish I had one. I don't have one. I think somebody stole my last one, because whenever you wore it anywhere, people said, "Where'd you get that?" [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: This was sort of like the fun side of being in Calcutta because space was great. Nixon was not great! Then towards the end of it—that is to say, the end of my two years there, we—

*Q: You were there, and that'd be '68 – '70?*

ROSS: To '70. All the while we had this rolling struggle about Vietnam, we had the moon rock, I had these wonderful trips where I went all over India, and I got interested in films, so I wanted to make a film. I wanted to make a film about AID assistance. Well, AID had its own people, but apparently they said okay. USIS had a film officer, and I identified on that, and this guy was posted in Bombay. In fact, they had film officers in various countries around the world. How about being film officer in Rome? What a great job that would have been! Anyway, Daryl Vance was the film officer in Bombay, so I had gone over to Bombay on an orientation tour.

By the way, it was wonderful in India because they had so many rupees that everybody who was assigned to India went to New Delhi for two weeks when they got a chance. I mean if you were really important, you'd only do it for three days; but the lesser breed without the law, like me, they could go up there, and they could take you to the Taj Mahal, and they'd give you lectures on Gandhi.

Then I went on other kinds of visits, like to the U.S. government-sponsored joint economic development things, like in Bhopal, [India], where Union Carbide was, and also to Delhi. I didn't go to any hydroelectric projects, but it was the kind of thing that you would go see, all these different things. So at one point I had gone out to a General Motors sponsored plant through the Birlas, I think, one of the great families. I don't want to make a mistake, and if it goes to Tatas, I don't want to say Birla, because one should know what the Birlas control. They're like the Rockefellers.

*Q: Yes, and the Tatas, I always think of shoes and things like that, but—*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: ...there in a lot of things.*

ROSS: Oh, many things, steel mills and stuff! Anyway, the Bedford vans were kind of a British-Australian, it was a GMC-6, a big 6.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I went out to this place where they were making Bedford vans. It was, of course, trucks—they were two-and-one-half-ton trucks. They just made the basic thing; they didn't put the body on.

*Q: The chassis, yes.*

ROSS: Right, and they made a long version; you could put a bus on it in a way, and real solid. They're very simple, old-fashioned, like a 1940 GMC, really, and a 1950 GMC. They had a forge there, which was a drop forge, like a 40-ton forge, which actually knocked the billets, the red-hot steel billets, into the form of the crankshaft. I had never seen so much power wham down where it actually would change the shape of this big huge clunk of steel or billet of steel. I thought, "That would be great in a film," because it was…like awe-inspiring.

It was like life among the mill rats in 1930 in Gary, Indiana or earlier where people grabbed…and of course these guys all worked with big globs and columns because there wasn't any electric-rolled process; it was all real old-fashioned, you know. They're almost Bessemer converters; they didn't make the steel there, but it was just really… [It] looked very like [Giovanni Battista] Piranesi's prison etchings, [laughter] and everybody wearing "lungi" (short length of material worn around the thighs like a sarong) or "dhoti" (a longer lungi but with an additional length of material pulled up between the legs) and working hard. It seemed too many people on the job, but that was socialism of India.

So I got going, went all around, got a crew, went and filmed a whole lot of stuff, put a movie together, and helped edit it (I mean I had never worked on a movie or anything, but I had gotten interested in films by this time), since the USIS had, in its infinite wisdom, somebody back in the film section, which was very big in USIS. As I said, they

had regional film people, but they made their own movies in Washington D.C. in the Old Post Office Building, and they contracted out a lot of movies. The famous guy, Charles Guggenheim, who's just died over in Georgetown, did a lot of films, particularly during Democratic administration. During Republican administration other people did them. You know how that works.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They had shooting stages, sound stages in the Old Post Office Building, in the courtyard inside. It was very funny because the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) was up higher, like on level three, four, and five, and they had all their files in the hallways; and you could go to USIS and go up the steps and open the filing cabinets! I never looked, but I always wanted to see what it said for Ava Gardner! [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: I have a friend who said everybody who had a chance peeked. [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: Or at least he said that he peeked. You didn't peek per se when you were a file clerk. What happened was that a name would pop up right when you were filing something, and he was filing under M-E, and he saw James Metcalfe. James Metcalfe, he said, "That's the guy that writes…that's the guy that writes the poetry in the paper?" It used to be called "Portraits," or something like that, very sentimental little things that rhyme, "Today I think of you because the way you are, you know, and I'm glad that although you're near, my thoughts are not very far," you know, that kind of…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he looked in there, and there were letters and exchange back and forth between Metcalfe; and apparently, Metcalfe had written a poem about J. Edgar Hoover and dedicated it to him; and then there was a letter attached, a copy, and it said, "In view of the circumstances under which Mr. Metcalfe was dismissed from the Bureau, the director prefers not to acknowledge this poem dedicated to him. Sincerely yours, Clyde Toulson," or something like that. Then my friend peeked a little bit more, and it seemed that Mr. Metcalfe had been involved with the problem of too much force in interrogations or something like that, which was, of course…he's passed on to his reward. I don't know whether I'm on legal grounds for this, but it was something that [was] in high contrast with these sentimental thoughts—

*Q: [Laughter] Yes.*

ROSS: … that this guy was able to grind out 365 days out of the year.

Anyway, I got very much interested in these films, and I got interested in what they call underground movies, which were the independent cinema. Some of it's shot in 35[mm] and a lot of it's shot in 16; and the very famous ones are, of course, Maya Deren and the people of the '20s and '30s; she, in particular, I thought was wonderful. Then there was kind of a new wave of this stuff that was not shot in 35 because that was too expensive, and the cameras were too big, literally, and it had been influenced by the introduction of the Airflex and the Bolexes of World War II, Airflex being developed for the German army, I think. So there were all these new kinds of movies—a lot of them abstract; some of them done in kind of very, very fine technique, like Jordan Belson on very, very controlled things; and others just done totally crazy animation, Stan VanDerBeek did it.

I watched all these things, and I showed them a lot, and I showed them to the Calcutta Film Society, and then I showed them out at Tollygunge where they'd made the movies, and I got to know the movie crowd (what you'd call the movie colony) because Bengali movies had the great reputation of being realistic rather than Bollywood, you know.

*Q: They didn't require a song and dance.*

ROSS: Right, right. Whatever they…kiss, kiss, bang, bang, or whatever they call it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Yes, right. The erotic non kiss I think is what _____ that Bombay was specialized in. So they had all this stuff, and then they had Satyajit Ray, the great Indian.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …genius of the film, one of the great, particularly their first ones; all of them are good. I got a chance to meet him! I went to his house, and there the great man was in his dhoti, right downtown, and I talked to him, and he had a harpsichord, which I thought was wonderful. So I got into the cultural world.

When I'd first come to Calcutta, I thought I was going on the Indian experience of Eastern mysticism: tantric yoga; Maharishi Mahesh; and the way up is the way down, and the way backward is the way forward, and all this stuff—that's Heraclitis (Greek philosopher of "flux and fire") by the way; that's Greek, as you know.

I segued into something which was much more interesting and not so pop ephemeral—that is, I got good connections with people on the ground doing filmmaking, like this documentary stuff of AID and also of the Bengali. They said, "You should be in some movies," because they always have to find the odd American or the odd Westerner for their walk-ons and all that stuff. So I met Sabitri Chatterjee. I think she is perhaps the great reigning chief actress of West Bengal, and I met other people, and I'd have them over to the house or to the apartment, which was one of the best air-conditioned small flats in West Bengal, thank you. I then had met "sitar" (Indian lute with a long neck and a

varying number of strings) players and tabla (a pair of small different-sized hand drums) players, and then I'd have sit-downs, evenings, where I'd be barefoot, and everybody would come in and take off their sandals, and people would sit down and have a good session, you know, one or two or three ragas.

Then I started going to Bengali. I went to some puppet plays. I couldn't understand at all Bengali plays, because Bengali, it's a slog to get into it. I did take more Hindustani lessons; I can't say that I got very far with them. But I started going to what they call all night sittings up in North Calcutta where they had ghazal singers, which are in Urdu, and it was just turned into something totally that I didn't expect; plus my travels up in the country, I started reading Indian history, and at first I started reading John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* and stuff…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And then I started reading other stuff, and then I realized that I didn't know anything about India, or I didn't know anything about the East! I had met a wonderful Bengali fellow who was married to a very interesting woman who was a Sephardic Jew.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Dutton, Ronan and Sybil Dutton…Dutton?…Dutta…anyway, he was a stock broker. There was a stock exchange in Calcutta, and they had a summer house up in Kalimpong, that's in [West Bengal]…you know where Hope Cook was up there [Sikkim]? He taught yoga, so I started taking yoga from him, and she was the life of the party. They knew everybody that had ever come to Calcutta because they were in a little circuit that if you ever go to Calcutta, look up Ronan and Sybil; and they were of a certain age; I mean they were in their 50s or maybe a little bit older than that. They'd come to a party, say, like at the consul general's residence. He [the consul general] was big enough in a way to be like an ambassador in a small country because he had big staff: there was a big USIS staff; and AID was so big that they had to hold AID complements at technical universities or agricultural development universities where 20 or 30 people at a crack would come out from Missouri and teach there over a period of time. She would always say, "Ronan, do it! Do it, Ronan!" And he'd say, "Well, I don't feel like it, because I've just had two Scotches," or something. And she'd say, "Oh, you must!" So by George, he'd take his shoes off, and he'd do a full peacock, and that's very hard for anybody to do.

*Q: What is a full peacock?*

ROSS: Well, you're down on the floor with just your palms and you're completely up, and you put your legs into the yogic position, and you straighten it out, and your head's erect, and you just hold it, and you can go in and out, in and out, without ever losing your balance. I could never even hold myself up by my hands, and I was 30- or 31-years old. I just couldn't do it! He could do all this stuff. I took yoga from him. He came over to the house and taught me twice—well, I mean he instructed me. I wasn't a very good pupil

because yoga's not just lying down on a mat for two hours a week; it can be that. He didn't talk about the chakras or the life force and he didn't play any music or burn incense or anything like that; he just did straight Hatha yoga. It involves a whole way of looking at the way one behaves, if you will.

I was out for a good time as much as possible. In Calcutta you could go down every night to the swimming club, which I was a member of, and there'd be the tea brokers and the tea planners that had come into town, and boy, they were hard riders, British. Then you could go out to Tollygunge Club, and they had horses there, had their own racetrack, still do. You could go to the Royal Calcutta Club, and through Ronan I met other people who were stock brokers and they used to say, "Oh, he has 'lakhs' (100,000 rupees), lakhs of money," that's hundreds of thousands. Or they'd say, "Oh, he has 'crores'(10,000,000 rupees or 100 lakhs)!" which is like tens of millions or something. I met people who had their own horses.

*Q: Well, on this, were we making much of an impression? I mean or…*

ROSS: No.

*Q: I know certainly from New Delhi and the class there, there seems to be this almost contrast between Americans and Indians. They really talked past each other; they both preached past each other.*

ROSS: No, we weren't making much of an impression. In fact, we were treated…I think by the big heavy thinkers, who may not have thought this out, but Americans were seen as just sort of leftovers of the Raj. We were interesting, certainly had wonderful cars and good air-conditioning, and some things were useful to know about them, and some things were necessary. But as far as them trying to control the economy, which seemed to be what the big thing was, the Americans wanted to get their hands into it. Coca-Cola and MGM and, as I said, J. Walter Thompson—they didn't finally get their hooks into it because India would play ball with the Soviet Union. The Soviets would come down and teach them how to build MIG-19s (Mikoyan & Gurevich Russian fighter aircraft) or MIG-21s. The Indians were a huge, poor country, but they were a partially developed country, so they had factories where they could build MIG-21s—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and a navy, and they had electrified railroads.

*Q: Did you get into, sort of engage, the Indians with the fact that here was a democracy, albeit a socialist democracy, but was playing it very close to a communist apparatus—being the Soviet Union and its bloc? I would think this would be an uncomfortable position.*

ROSS: Well, one of the things I found out after a certain short period of time in Calcutta was that the whole of the West Bengal presidency was controlled by Jyoti Basu, who is

communist. Now he's still around; I think he may be in power now; I don't follow Indian politics. He married a woman who had a whole lot of coal mines in West Bengal, and so he was a millionaire many times over; he was as wealthy as the Maharajahs who had money. He controlled it [West Bengal], and they had communist demonstrations and communist this and communist that against the central government, which was socialist. So where did America fit in and all this?

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It did fit in and to a certain extent in New Delhi. But as far as talking about what we could bring to them, we could, if you will, tell our story to the world, but it didn't seem we could directly influence them except by showing them what was possible in space. We were way ahead of them and the world on that.

*Q: Well, in a way, I mean were you in your night thoughts or with others talking about what the hell or what's the point with this?*

ROSS: Well, it wouldn't be captioned as this. Yes, I would get, "What's the point?" but I wouldn't get it from that. I would get it from, say, going to the Howrah Railroad Station, across the Hooghly River Bridge, and seeing the squatters who had been living in the station since 1947, since partition—like 30 years. And then there were "bustees" (tenements), which are horrible! I've been in a bustee to visit somebody there (not just to gawk, although they do give trips to people—go see how horribly they live). Ten or twelve people live in a room that has a metal roof on it, and everything goes on with that family in that room. And then there's an open, what they call a juee, or whatever it's called in Calcutta—that is, an open, running _____ (that's an Afghani word—actually a Persian word, I think) that runs along where everybody spits and carries on their _____ right outside the door.

When you see that, you think, how can anybody do anything against Bahurghat, India when it's got these huge internal problems. Some people who tried to do it got chased out. Mother Teresa was not popular in Calcutta; she was regarded as a big political liability by the central government and they tried to shut down her operations a lot.

*Q: Why was that?*

ROSS: …and they chased out a French priest who set up soup kitchens and organized the lepers into two or three large leper colonies. The reason is because people who actually came in to do good, this is where the rot set in, if you will, in my attitude there, if I can use that phrase to throw your hands up and say, "My goodness! How's it all gonna turn out?"

The caste system in India, which still exists although it may be breaking down somewhat, tends to ascribe blame to the people on the bottom. It's their fault, because they're low caste or untouchable because they did something in a previous existence. The only way to get out of it is to do good in this existence; and when you come back, may you be born in

a “Kshatriya” (a Hindu of an upper caste traditionally assigned to governing and military occupations) or something like that, let alone a “Brahman” (a member of the highest, or priestly, class among the Hindus). Then people at the top, well, obviously they did something good in their past lives, so of course they deserve to be Brahmans, and of course they deserve not to have to touch directly (have something handed to them) from a lower caste person. They even have a caste called cook Brahmans, who are supposed to be able to cook for Brahmans without defiling them with impurities.

So you got this thing; and then you’ve got all these people in the villages. They have fights about who can use the well and who can’t because of their caste or because they’re outcasts, or even the people in the jungles too. There were lots and lots of different tribes of people who were not even in a caste. They’re just like half wild.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You have this huge contradiction of people talking about socialism and Harold Acton, and the Webbs, I guess, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and the London School of Economics [and Political Science] and all these things. At the same time you have a caste system where people say, “Don’t marry…” The newspapers are full of middle class ads. They say, “Caste and class no barrier,” but that’s not really the truth. They just want to see what that…that’s a fishing expedition. Anyway…

*Q: These are matrimonial…*

ROSS: Right, the matrimonials; you see pages of them, right.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You see this kind of obvious and patent hypocrisy [laughter] about brotherhood. At the same time, you see all this poverty, and then you think how are they ever gonna get out of it, and how could any lesson that we have about how the Midwest was developed or how the plow broke the plains in the United States have any relevance here. This place needs somebody stronger than Mahatma Gandhi in a spiritual way. Of course it does! It has all these guys that are popping up all the time.

*Q: Well, were you picking up any emanations from East Pakistan at that time which had a strong, Bengali group? But I mean you were working in that area. Was there any crossover or were you working with our—*

ROSS: The East—I never went there. It was hard to get over to Dhaka, [Bangladesh]. The bigger boats were all laid up. I’d gone up to Brahmaputra, and I’d seen 30 or 50 great big paddle wheelers, side-wheelers, just thrown up on the banks rotting, the smallish ones (they weren’t as big as the Robert E. Lee or anything like that), and I’d seen it at different places. They said, “Well, that’s all finished, you know. That was from those days.”

In India there's ambivalence to a great many things, but one of them is their relationship to East Pakistan because it was all Greater Bengal. It was joined together in 1908 or something like that; so it was all one Bengal. They appreciated the East Pakistanis' poetry, their language, their music. But the problem was that a lot of them over there, in fact 95 percent of them, were Muslim, and the Muslims didn't have the leg up in Calcutta compared to the Hindus, and that was the thing!

Now there were very estimable Muslims and others. For all I know, it could have been Baha'is. There was a fellow, OLM Macan-Markar in Sri Lanka, who was in Pakistan, and he was like "Boras" (a class of Muslim merchants), which is a spin-off of Islam, as I take it. They were respected, but they were a minority, and therefore they weren't going to have a bigger slice of the available cake than the majority.

The Muslims had a terrible time. They had to dress and appear to be Hindus to get into universities. I had a wonderful Muslim guy who worked for me who was called Chacha—that was his nickname; he was a photographer, quite an interesting one, had a very interesting mind, and he made things.

I still have some little doohickeys he made. He'd take a box and cut it and glue it together and make it into an owl, and then paste bird feathers all over it and put two lights in it for the eyes, and then get a little blinking mechanism for the electronics from the electrical store, and I'd have a little blinking feathered owl that he'd given me, and [laughter] what do you do with it? You put it in that box and you keep it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He had to dress as a Hindu to be admitted to the final examinations at the university because it was like, "No Muslims are gonna sit today."

*Q: Hmm.*

ROSS: Of course, you wouldn't find Indians who would readily admit to those kinds of things, but this kind of stuff went on all the time, and particularly with castes and all that stuff.

And then there was a regionalism in India. We had an office which I had maintained. I had a great office; and I had a super chief of staff who did my letters and handled the phones and filed things and arranged stuff; he had worked for an American advertising firm in Bombay. People would come in and ask for things all the time. But if a guy from Madras had come in to the bureau we would let people rent films. We had a rental service too, so that librarians and university people could rent them, and we had to go through a thousand checks on people because they'd just all disappear otherwise.

I mean that's the way it is in Washington, DC. You go down to the Central Library and look what isn't on the shelves; they don't even know! I know this because I've spent a lot time, and I use the library over there, down on Ninth Street.

Anyway, if somebody came in from, say, Tamil Nadu, "What's he in here for? What does he want to do? Why you talk to him?" I said, "Well, he wanted to see me. He wanted to propose some kind of film society." "What is he here for? He looks like a four-twenty!" A four-twenty in Indian civil code is a fraudulent, your bona fides, you're putting on an act.

*Q: Oh.*

ROSS: "It was really something to call somebody, "No, he's just nothing (nothing) but a four-twenty, I tell you." [Laughter]

So all this stuff was all going on, and American foreign policy was a mess! So we avoided it! I mean they ground it out in the *Indian Observer [India Abroad*?] or whatever it was called, or *Darshan*? I can't remember the name of it, the weekly newspaper. Kenneth Keating, the ambassador, had somebody ghost a thing for him, and it would be translated into all these languages and circulated. It would be about the peace talks and the this and the that, but there seemed to be confusion because of the famous starts and stops of the bombing, and whether or not we were this or that, and of course, the Indians had a hand in all the Vietnam thing because they sat on that commission [International Control Commission]—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …which met to decide—

*Q: Well, they also had observer teams.*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: Indians, Canadians, and Poles.*

ROSS: Yes, exactly, thank you. Their reports, of course, were, I guess, uniformly affected by their own flavor of international socialism.

*Q: Yes. Well, you left there in 1970.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: I mean from what it sounds like, it was an interesting time. I mean you single-handedly did not turn India around into a Western camp.*

ROSS: Nor did anybody.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Finally, Henry Loomis came out at one point. He was the Deputy Director of USIA. He came to Delhi and then somebody said, "You ought to go down to Calcutta," or something like that. "They're a hot bed of…" I don't know what, "radicals," or things like that—that is, the USIS officers. So they had a sitting for him, sitar and some kind of shadow puppetry and introduced him to the round-up of the usual suspects. Calcutta had so many interesting people and so many people with real intellectual accomplishments and pretensions that you could always…you could find 25 city planners if you wanted; they could talk for four hours about how to redo Calcutta. Then they'd all go home and that would be the end of it [laughter]!

But he came to Duncan Scott's house one night, and so everybody left, and they said, "Well, let's have another round of the cubwasiay," or something like that. Then Duncan started in—and perhaps he shouldn't have, but he was the host—and said, "Well now, Henry, tell us what the hell's going on back there in Washington about this Vietnam thing," because we read in the papers all these shocking things—you know, I mean what you'd call defections in the administration and position. Walter Lippmann had written his last ghastly, acrimonious thing; Joseph Kraft had taken his place in attacking the situation.

So Loomis said, "Well, we're gonna stay in, and if it means more people for the draft, then that's what we're gonna have to do. I have a son that I…he tells me he's gonna volunteer." or else he had, I don't remember what he said, "Besides, more people were killed in automobile accidents in the United States every year than have been killed in Vietnam."

There was one of my colleagues there, who was my age, named Ron [Ronald] Clifton. He was working on his PhD (doctorate) from [the University of] Pennsylvania, and he had six or seven years in the Marine Corps. He'd been a gunnery sergeant in the embassies before he joined USIA, and he was a good ol' boy from down south of Richmond, [Virginia]. He played football in high school, and he said, "Oh, 'at doesn't sound like a reeal (real) good…'that's not the way ya run a farin (foreign) policy, though, jus' on a automobile statistics fatalities thare (there)."

So Loomis got a little bit stepped-up, arched a little bit, and then somebody sailed in, Sigmund Cohen did, and Don Crane and myself, and other people, Lois, I guess. So here was Duncan Scott leading the charge, and here was Henry Loomis, the Deputy Director of the agency, and we were all around him. It was sort of like everybody had had that second cubwasiay and, "Well, no, no, no. We don't…no, no…that's not…no, no…no Mr. Loomis…no, no, no…you know, that's…well, we can't…that's this…that…boo, blah, blah, blah, blah." He just got more and more trapped, painted into a corner by us. Duncan wound up blotching the copybook of the organization somewhat because he wound up, "Well, we're never gonna get anywhere!" and people [are] getting ready to start cussing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So Loomis went back up to Delhi.

Of course, we had a branch post, so we had a branch post mentality anyway; we were 1,000 miles away. [Whispers] What are they talking about up in New Delhi?

So he went up there and said, "Somebody's gotta look at *that* place." So then he flew off. We had our own wireless TWX (Time Warner Incorporated) system, and the ticker tape said, "Oh, the Deputy Director and David Briggs and other people will be coming down, and people will be coming down from Delhi." Then they came down and sat down and talked to everybody independently with, "Are you unhappy?" [Laughter] The classic question, "Do you think that your private opinions conflict with your job responsibilities?" or something.

Well, I thought I dodged the bullet, and everybody thought they'd dodged the bullet. But there was a guy named Bob McDonald who had a lawsuit against USIA years later, or about that time but we didn't know about it, because in the old days your efficiency report had a portion that you couldn't read.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was called the closed portion or something like that. This was developed by the class action grievance that Bob [Robert] MacDonald led the charge on; he was an army reserve lieutenant colonel and a PhD from Georgetown and a good skier (Tenth Mountain Division World War II) and had written a book, *The League of Arab States;* he'd done all this stuff kind of early on, so he was a suitable candidate for leading the charge, I guess. It developed that Loomis had put notes in people's files. They didn't show up in your OER (Officer Efficiency Report). They were just dropped into the file, almost after-action notes, not a full page of paper. But it was something like, the Deputy Director believes that a great deal of consideration should be given before this person has further or higher responsibilities, something like that, you know, passive.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And these were in the file, but they weren't stuck in there.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They weren't part of the annual thing. I know at least one person who found them in his file. Then all the files were gone through after the class action suit and supposedly scrubbed. So nobody ever knows what Henry Loomis—who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and had his own chauffer drive him to work, or while he was in good shape he drove his own Lincoln Continental from his farm up in Leesburg every day down to the agency and went over to the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Club for lunch every day and, I guess, was an estimable man; he was certainly an estimable Republican gentleman—what he did or didn't put in files. I had been promoted that year—in 1970. The next year I was low-ranked, and then the year after that I was no

longer low-ranked. I never was low-ranked again. I was always, what do they say, "suitable for further service." I've always wondered if anything happened about all those people because they all got their knickers in a twist about it in different places, and Loomis did certainly. But this is just all hypothetical.

*Q: Well then in 1970 where'd you go?*

ROSS: I went back to the States.

*Q: Doing what?*

ROSS: Alan Carter came out. He came over to Duncan's house, and he said, "Well, where do you wanna go next?" I said, "I'm interested in films! I'm thinking about taking leave of absence from USIA and going to film school." He said, "Well, what…why?" I said, "Well, I did this stuff, and I know Daryl Vance, and I could go to film school, and I could even stay in USIA and be a films officer as Daryl Vance was." Well, Daryl Vance had come out of Hollywood; he was Walter Wanger's assistant, and he'd had his hand in productions and stuff. But I figured anybody could have a shot at it. So Alan Carter says, "Well, where do you want to go to film school?" And I said, "Well, Temple University [in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] supposedly got"—

*Q: This is tape 6, side 1, with Richard Ross. Well, in conclusion to this particular portion. What happens?*

ROSS: Well, I finished up my two years. I mean it was great!

I was thought to have done interesting work and a good job, and I went back, and Alan Carter wrote a note. It's funny how just a little note can happen!

*Q: Yes, funny thing.*

ROSS: He just wrote in a notebook—I can almost see him doing it, now that I recall—"Richard Ross—film school." So when I went back there they said, "Well, you're gonna go to film school." I was almost astounded!

*Q: So you went to film school where and for about how long?*

ROSS: Well, I first went to this International Communications Seminar—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …which was a few months long. This was really something because it was USIA. It was full of all this bafflegab and gobbledygook about the two-step level of communication, [Philip G.] Zimbardo, [Carolyn M.] Evertson, and the three psychological reasons for resistance. It was all the kind of thing that El Morocco would be interested in or if we were gonna manipulate Western Europe or something. It was

sociology and human psychology in a way, but it was abstruse. It was sort of sociology journal stuff.

Anyway, I went to that for two months, and then they said, "You can't go to Temple, that's not on the list. We have signed you up to go to the University of Pittsburgh, and you'll get a master's degree in international development." And I said, "Well, what about the film making?" "Well, that's not on for right now." So in some ways maybe I wish I had gone to Pittsburgh because I've always wanted to see what the Three River City was like and all those people that are apparently wonderful out there, and my life would have been probably different, I'm sure, if I'd gone out to Pittsburgh.

But I didn't. I went in and said, "I don't want to get a master's degree in international development!" They said, "Well, this is really good! This is the best place in the United States to get it, you know. And this guy, we're working with him. USIA has agreed, you know, to send two people in the next two years, and this'll be the opening of a new program, and AID has gotten three people there, blah, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "But I want to study film making!" So finally they drew this big sigh, and my career mangler said, "All right." Then he called me up and said, "Let me see." So he called about three days later and said, "You've been identified to go to the University of..."

I went up and got enrolled and accepted at Temple, which was in the bombed out section of Philadelphia, North Philly. It does look like a small yield hydrogen bomb hit it out there; it was all burned out and everything. I thought this would be interesting.

As it happened, he said, "Well, you can stick around. It'll be good. College Park is near Washington," and all this stuff. Maybe they thought they wanted to control me.

*Q: Putting you into Maryland.*

ROSS: Right. So they said, "We called up and you've been accepted." So at that point I thought what the heck. So I went to [the University of] Maryland.

I didn't only do films. I did then, again, more theory because they say, "Well, you have to do, not film theory, but communication theory, and that includes knowing the FCC Act of 1934. That will be on the final exam." So I did this.

"And you have to do our course, which we designed, and do regular television production films." So I took regular production, which included voice mixing and creating a dramatic thing, which I did; I did a Kipling novel, quite good, the Kipling Story; it was my Indian experience, you see! I did television production; I wrote and shot, I did the whole thing; although three other guys were on it with me, two of them didn't do anything. They broke us into teams, and I did the thing on the development of the Metro. I want to see like Carlton Sickles, he was a congressman from Maryland, who is sometimes called the father of the Metro, and went and did it all and put together statistics, made a feature. We had to do other things, and we had to show our work, video work, in front of the class. I was by far the oldest person in the class, it seemed to me.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: These kids were just beginning graduate school or just senior undergraduates, but they hadn't gone anywhere other than from Fredericksburg to College Park, most of them.

Then I did films. I did 16mm, and the film I turned in, the guy said, "This is so good, we're gonna put it in the…" He said, "You've shot it in black and white! Why did you do that?" And I said, "Well, I have a problem with color because I'm colorblind, and you didn't say it couldn't be shot in black and white, and I happen to like black and white." I mean I hadn't done anything wrong. And he said, "Well, this is good enough to win the national competition. They're gonna have that in three weeks somewhere out there, Pennsylvania, or somewhere like that. I want you to reshoot the thing in color." That was the hardest thing in the world to reshoot in color—to get to where it was location shot at National Airport. I shot a version of *Frankie and Johnny* with the music, took the music and established stuff. I didn't win a prize, although he said it was the best thing in the class.

It was very interesting. It was, for me, all of a sudden realizing that in a way I knew more than a lot of the people in the class and even the professors, but at the same time I knew less, because everybody knew about the United States culture, and I didn't know anything about it. It had changed while I had been overseas five or six years.

*Q: Yes, and when you're looking at the decades, those were very important. I mean it was a point when things were changing like mad, really during the '60s.*

ROSS: Yes. One time we had to do a sound montage in the radio class, radio production. So I did Guernica, the Spanish civil war, and I thought, well, they won't know it. So I had a big copy of *Guernica* that I had bought up at the Museum of Modern Art.

*Q: A painting by—*

ROSS: Yes, the Picasso thing.

*Q: ...Picasso.*

ROSS: They heard it, and you got an A if the people could guess what it was. They all sort of guessed because I had the countries. It was like Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*—of course it wasn't that because I had to have Spanish themes throughout. At the end of it they sort of identified him, so the professor said, "Well, what is it?" And I said, "Well, it's *Guernica*," and he said, "What?" and said to tell the class what Guernica is. So I unrolled this thing and held it up and said, "This is *Guernica*." The professor said, "Well, what's that?" [Laughter] "What is all that abstract stuff on that piece of paper, semiabstract?" It was very funny! The biggest deal at the University of Maryland, if you'll excuse me, was getting a parking place.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: It still is! All these years have gone by, and they'll still spite their grandmother to get one!

*Q: One time I was at a senior seminar, and I did one on foreign consuls in the United States; that was my thing and all. When I discussed foreign consuls, "What was your biggest problem?" it was parking space at the airport.*

ROSS: Yes, yes. And it goes on.

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: Anyway, I got As, I guess a couple Bs; and at the end of that year, I went back to the agency and went into training workshops. At that time I had bought a house in the U.S. in the District, where I still live, and people always say, "Oh, I bet you got a good price on it." Well, I'll have to say I did because people were all running away from downtown Washington—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …after the Martin Luther King riots and everything. So there I decided, why pay rent. I'd gotten older, and I'd been dating this girl that I had met in India. She was from West Virginia, and she had come out to New Delhi. She'd originally been an organizer with the National YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) after she graduated from college. <u>*Newsweek*</u> magazine had written an article on kids in '67 or something like that, or '66, "They're going to change the world," and she was one of them that had been identified and there'd been a full feature on her. I didn't know about any of that at the time, but anyway…

She didn't go to Geneva, Switzerland; she went to Calcutta, which is sort of like the antipodes. But other famous people had been to Calcutta: Gloria Steinem had been to the North Calcutta University; Calcutta had a regular cast of people coming through it; in fact, I had met the Dalai Lama and Thomas Merton there, there was always somebody coming through Calcutta, oddly enough.

So Jane and I were dating, and we got married after I started working at training workshops. In this house I'm very close to downtown; I could walk to work; I could [walk] to the old 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue [address], and I could walk down to the new headquarters; but I could ride a bike there in about six minutes. So I was one of the few people who rode a bike to work and parked it out in front with a little bicycle lock onto a meter. They had meters on Pennsylvania Avenue, and it was usually one traffic parking meter away from where Henry Loomis parked his Lincoln, and he got to keep his there, right on the front steps. Frank Shakespeare had the company car; you know the director had a car (USIA had three cars).

I worked for Bernie Udell, I think that's who it was, died of a heart attack; Dion Andersen, who left and has been an actor for a long while in the theater in Washington and New York; and Jake Gillespie, who you may know or may not know had a long career in USIA; Kathy Kline, who worked with me, went to New York and was with Channel 13 for a long while and does independent productions now. She'd been in India; Suzanne Flynt, who married John Stern, he was a USIA person too. They were both the children of congressmen (which was an interesting marriage), and she stayed in the agency until she retired. So we had this interesting group of people plus people who would come in and out.

We did all kinds of new idea things, which is very funny because I thought I didn't understand the agency. Then I was hired in a nucleus of people to put on, to produce one week programs on the arts, on the sociology of America as it changed because it was recognized to be changing. For instance, the whole race business. We would get speakers to come in, like Sterling Tucker from the DC City Commission. Or we'd get all kinds of stuff, and this went on for a year. One person would be given charge of something, say like new media. Then I'd get people from New York and from Hollywood, and we'd pay them good prices, and we'd sometimes get good people or famous people. We'd get writers or dancers, and the agency had money for this! They had Louis Khan come in and talk about architecture.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We had to get all this stuff all cleared, set up and programmed, and then we had people sign up for it, and a lot of State Department people came over, and people came from other agencies to see this.

*Q: I bet.*

ROSS: It's kind of the way they used to have it, a little bit of this over at the basic course—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …for Foreign Service officers when they'd have some big thinker come in and talk. Well, we wouldn't have giant thinkers necessarily; we'd get new people or people that wouldn't cost more than about $300 for an appearance to come in, and we'd get musicians too. We'd get strange things, like the dramatic group from inside Lorton Prison to come in. You know they'd have to come in under guard—

*Q: Well now, who was the audience in this?*

ROSS: Foreign Service officers. Almost all who'd been overseas six or eight years would come back and say, "What the hell has happened to America?" And we would say, "Well, this is what people think is happening to America." We'd get sociologists to talk,

and they weren't necessarily all liberal. We'd get conservatives too, even in arts. I once got Richard Kleindienst. We'd get the ambassadors to talk. I did this for about a year.

*Q: Till about '73 then.*

ROSS: Right. And then '73…Jane and I were married and moved into our house and started keeping an eye on the job openings. I tried to get Rome, but I thought it was too early. I should have pushed harder.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But somebody said, "Don't go to Rome because of the characters there." Anyway, I went to Sri Lanka as cultural attaché (CAO).

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I went there in, I guess, the spring of '73.

*Q: Okay, and you were there for how long?*

ROSS: Four years.

*Q: So that's '73 to '77. Your wife went too?*

ROSS: Of course, yes, yes.

*Q: As what? As…*

ROSS: She just came as a spouse; and we had our first baby there.

She got involved in film making because I was interested in films there. There's a famous director there named Lester James Peries. I later got a film produced on Colonel Olcott, "The Reinvigoration of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by Henry Steel Olcott."

*Q: Today is 5 September 2003. Dick, Sri Lanka, what was the situation in Sri Lanka when you got there in '73, sort of political-economic?*

ROSS: The island had gone socialist in the '50s with the election of the first important Ceylonese prime minister. His name was Bandaranaike. He had a double-barreled English name—SWRD he was called or Banda, but it was Solomon West Ridgeway Dias Bandaranaike. So you see the Bandaranaike, the Ceylonese name, and then Dias is a Portuguese name, and then West Ridgeway is an English name, and his family had 25,000 acres up-country in rubber and tea holdings too. So he went to Cambridge in the '30s and, along with a group of other people who took over the island, brought in socialism.

This was a remarkable thing to do because Sri Lanka had been handed its independence in 1948 when the British pulled back from the empire and left India.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They'd had governor generals there before who went back to post after the independence was achieved or declared, literally; they didn't fight for it in Ceylon. They'd had Oliver Goonetilleke, I think, and Sir John Kotelawala and people like that who were very close to the British, Sir John he was called, knighted. Bandaranaike had fought back and forth with the socialist Left and aligned sometimes with the communists and the Trotskyists (there were two or three communist parties in the Trotskyist party) against the Right.

The thing had shifted back and forth, but when the Right was in, they couldn't dismantle the socialism that had been installed in kind of a South Asian style. There were cooperatives where everybody got their rice, the whole middle class, and they got their chilies and their Maldive fish, and they got whatever else was on ration. There was strict control on everything. For instance, there were very few imports.

Ceylon had been a very wealthy, small island country before and during the Second [World] War. It had been wealthy because of the rubber trees and the need for rubber. The Japanese had tried to take it over, had attacked Trincomalee on the east coast and had actually bombed Colombo. They got rich off the rubber because it was a strategic material. The people were still living well after the Second [World] War; they used to send packages to England with stuff that was unavailable because there was rationing in England until '48 and '49, like sugar and things like that.

So with independence came a tightening of everything, and everything got into the socialist mode, and it started kind of winding down. I hadn't traveled much then, but I would say, after going around East Germany later on or Czechoslovakia or Hungary in the days when Eastern European was more monolithic than it is now, that Ceylon was sort of like that, that things just weren't available. There were no apples; there was no fruit.

*Q: This is when you got there now?*

ROSS: Yes, and it stayed that way the whole time we were there.

*Q: Well now, who was the prime minister when you were there?*

ROSS: Bandaranaike's wife [Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike]. He [Solomon] was shot by a Buddhist monk in a political affair, and she was elected [1960 – 1965] and out and then came back in [1970 – 1977]. They all knew each other, and they were all upper class, the directors of society.

*Q: Yes, well, you know, I've sort of had the impression that more than communism, that Fabian socialism coming out of Britain was more devastating to the third world than contracting a Black Plague.*

ROSS: You couldn't be more correct. The Left ministers had all gone to the London School of Economics or to Cambridge.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: As they say, the shades of Harold Acton walked the halls of the parliament. They were charming people because they were well-educated, and they became our friends. But it's very funny to have a Trotskyist over to your house and tell you how he's going to continue to dismantle the Peace Corps or something.

*Q: Well, how did we view this? I mean your job in the embassy was what?*

ROSS: I was the cultural affairs officer.

*Q: What was our view of Ceylon at the time? Did we care, we just wanted to make sure it didn't open up the harbor to the Soviets, or what were our concerns?*

ROSS: Actually, there wasn't much concern. In the '50s President Eisenhower had sent out an ambassador, Cecil (I can't recall his last name)…

*Q: Lyon?*

ROSS: Yes, exactly. He was kind of a great old fixture in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: The story was told by him. (Of course, I had never met Ambassador Lyon.) He said, "Now Mr. President, what should I do out there?" And Ike said to him, "Cecil, you don't have to do anything. We don't worry about anything out there. You just go out and play golf, and you know, keep your head above water, and have a good time."

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: The island country of then-Ceylon, and later Sri Lanka, which was the name change just before I got there, had the famous amendment against nationalization invoked against it.

*Q: It was the Hickenlooper Amendment. If American property was nationalized, we could not give it aid.*

ROSS: Yes, right. We wound up all aid, so then they thrust out the Peace Corps. There was all this kind of rhetoric, and then they recognized the Communist Chinese, and the

Chinese came in. The Russians never were very big, but there was a question of whether there was any oil in the Gulf of Mannar, which is up on the northwest coast, up toward Jaffna. The Chinese came in there, and they spread their show-and-tell kind of things. They built a great international hall, and they slowly helped Sri Lanka be a player on the scene. It was said, while I was there, that Bandaranaike was one of the great five founders of the nonaligned movement going back to Bandung [1955 Bandung Conference].

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The spirit of Bandung with Tito [Yugoslavia] and Nasser [Egypt]—

*Q: Nasser and Nkrumah [Ghana]—*

*ROSS: Exactly.*

*Q: ...and Nehru [India]*.

ROSS: Yes. He had known these people and got along with them famously as only an upper class gent with a polished education could. This culminated politically in, I think it was, the Sixth Nonaligned Conference, which was held in Colombo the last year I was there. The nonaligned movement had changed a lot by then.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Castro did not come. Some of the old guard came. Tito came—flew in and stayed on a passenger ship or a great big, not a liner, but a steamer—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …that belonged to the Yugoslav merchant fleet—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …that had been, I guess, outfitted up as a presidential—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …a huge yacht; he stayed offshore. The most interesting person who came to that—I'm skipping over some stuff—was Peck's bad boy from Libya, Muammar Qadhafi —

*Q: Oh.*

ROSS: …whose agents came about six weeks ahead of time and drove all over the island (they got in with an advance team) and gave out great eight-by-ten color photos of Qadhafi in his resplendent uniforms with his many decorations. I can remember they just

handed them out the windows of cars they drove around, and they also gave away money. They drove up to schools and gave the equivalent of $50 or $100 in Ceylonese rupees, and after a week of this, everybody thought [laughter] this Qadhafi guy was wonderful! So the town turned out. There's only one main drag down the coast from Colombo, called Galle Road, going down to the port of Galle. When Qadhafi came into town, they had a great big Landaulet convertible left over from the British days, a great big old Rolls, in a way an imperial kind of car, like what in Germany they call an Adenauer—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and they put the top down and whizzed Qadhafi down the street, and all the women in USIS stood on the balconies (we had several that faced on the Galle Road), and they all came and said, "My God! He's good looking!" Of course this was just reinforcing this wonderful Hollywood picture of him, a multicolored picture of him, which was distributed all around the island, literally all around the island.

Anyway, Ceylon/Sri Lanka played at or activated itself in this sort of third worldism. At the same time, things just went downhill. They nationalized the tea industry, which caused all the old dyed-in-the-wool tea planter types to pack up and leave. Then they nationalized the large private estates that belonged to the Ceylonese. They nationalized the plumbago mines—I think they'd already done that. Those are very fine graphite mines, and that was important because they used this sort of graphite to grease the guns of rifled artillery—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …that went back to the Civil War, and the United States bought all the plumbago it could, and everybody else did.

They nationalized anything else they could get their hands on, and they told everybody that an owner couldn't have more than one house—that is to say, a middle class person. It was quite a flourishing, little petty middle-class and then upper middle-class; and then there were the great land holdings, which included coconut production (I guess you would call it copra or something), palm oil, and things like that—

*Q: Yes, copra, yes.*

ROSS: … rubber, tea, and whatever quinine there was, if there was any. Everybody who had big old bungalows rushed to build houses on their property for their children. The old, traditional Colombo was all chopped up into little houses that were put up at high speed so that people wouldn't lose their property or could do their final investment as it were.

And then there were huge exchange controls, and the embassy worked on a foreign exchange entitlement certificate system, which was called FEECS; and that caused a great deal of pain, but that was a good thing to do. You got a certain rate that was

above…well, there were all kinds of rates. There was the secret black market rate, which I only heard about, but some Ceylonese who had money availed themselves of these. It was usually done with a bank in Tokyo or something.

Then there were rates: if the Ceylonese were going overseas, they got a real low rate to get dollars; then there was the nominal tourist rate; then there was FEECS rate and all that.

*Q: Well…*

ROSS: But the country was not happy.

*Q: Well, what about the…what was it…the sin…the two-party—*

ROSS: The SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) and the UNP (United National Party).

*Q: Yes. But what about the racial complexity of the Tamils and the Sinhalese?*

ROSS: There had already been an insurrection in the north led by a guy called [Rohana] Wijeweera, who was not nominally Tamil, but he had started a kind of a Maoist sort of revolution with a conspiracy against the government. There had been a conspiracy to throw Madam B. [Bandaranaike] out—a coup—and those people were all caught and hustled off to jail. Then there was this Wijeweera thing when he and about 20 co-conspirators had a big, long trial in very closed circumstances at a big old club in town called Queen's Club, which was tennis and bridge. There was even a conspiracy at the Queen's Club before it was nationalized for the trials. So they rigged up a courtroom there, and they got Rohana Wijeweera and all these people. The Left, the Communist paper, which was ETA—I remember that—supported all this, and some other papers sort of halfway supported the goals of Wijeweera; and then everybody else came down on him because these guys were for throwing bombs and shooting policemen. So they were tried and put away for long sentences at the time that the Left was in power.

So Madam Bandaranaike, Mrs. B., or Sirimavo as the insiders call her—everybody has a first name nickname or initials in Sri Lanka; and everybody knows everybody in society; Banda is Bandaranaike, Sirimavo is Mrs. B. It's amazing! It goes on throughout the island—so the Left was kind of put into the position of having to crack down on the Left, and the Right, the whole time there, was itching to get back in.

I was there for four years, and about half way through, suddenly the great leader of the Right, Dudley Senanayake, passed away unexpectedly. They had a fantastic turnout. The whole island turned out, millions of people went to the funeral parlor, which was built in a classic Greek fashion. It was 60 feet high of all cedar wood, and it took two or three days for the thing to burn in a Buddhist pyre. There was a great emotional upheaval, and then the Right went over to JR [Junius Richard Jayewardene]—that is, it's from Dudley to JR, that's JR Jayewardene—who then came in with an election that occurred shortly after I left.

When JR came in, everything changed. They opened up the exchanges, people could get widgets and bolts and apples and Mercedes. Ceylon then went into a kind of a frenzy of development with knitting factories making clothes for the American marketer or shoes, Bata style shoes and stuff.

*Q: But I want to go back to the time you were there.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: How did the embassy, I mean were we just, again, sort of observing? I mean did we have any…I mean what were we up to?*

ROSS: You know, it was very funny. You could do almost anything you wanted, but there wasn't a great deal of money to do it with. The controls on things were much less rigid than India. For instance, when I was in Calcutta, we had to put in a dip (diplomatic) note to the regional presidency for me to go up to Assam or something. I had to get a little, I think, a laissez-passer in the passport or something, or in my ID (identification) card. In Sri Lanka you didn't have to. They sort of like, "loved America," which was a normal phenomenon every place I've been. "Oh, we just love America." So anything we could bring was widely accepted. If it was a dance troupe, if it was a jazz band, they were crazy about it; and the library was as much as…every seat was filled.

I got a great big, wonderful, old planter's house on a place called Flower Road. I got USIS at the last minute—the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute—of the fiscal year to grant some money to redo this place. It was built of what they call "cabook" (laterite), which is a soft kind of limestone, porous material that you can saw; and it had to be strengthened. We redid this place into a fabulous, giant, two-story, attractive, colonial-looking in the sense of the old South-Asian-looking/East-Asian-looking reading room/cultural center with an auditorium. We showed films, we showed videos, we didn't travel around, we loaned some films, but we didn't have anywhere near this huge film program that I had been running in West Bengal.

But Colombo was, and the island in general was, wonderful because it was very cultural because of the hangover from the old British.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There were 25,000 or 50,000 British there!

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And they had really worked on it because they loved it. They had paved the roads by the end of the First World War; they had steamer service that went around the island, both sides; they had bullet cars, bullet coach service; they had trains that went up all the

way to Nuwara Eliya, which was the top, end-of-the-line tea station at 7,000 feet; and of course, they were on the route to Australia for the airplanes.

*Q: Well, how had relations been between the British and Ceylonese?*

ROSS: Oh, well, they kept kind of a barge pole between them because they were still members of the Commonwealth, so they had a high commissioner, not an ambassador. But the Brits were seen as, "They're our former colonial oppressors;" that was the accepted wisdom, and so everything they did was taken with a grain of salt.

A lot of other people were getting in there, particularly the Japanese. They were really onto neocolonialism. They got a lot of stuff the way they wanted it because, as people said, they weren't afraid to pass money under the table. Now that's the exact truth! They got the ilmenite sands, which have titanium in them. I've seen coastal freighters with great big claw diggers loading up the holds of these freighters from about 15 or 20 yards offshore, anchored north or south of Trincomalee, just loading up and hauling away all the sand they could from the east coast to be processed in Japan. They set up the Noritake factories and all kinds of other things. They're big in development, and thank you, they're very big in development right now, because if the United States promised as their tranche at the last AID development after the civil war of maybe, I don't know, $200,000 or $300,000, I think the Japanese promised $15,000,000 or something or even a huge amount, maybe $200,000,000.

*Q: But we're talking about when you were there.*

ROSS: Yes, okay. When I was there, there wasn't very much being done by anybody. There was a big argument about how the port of Colombo should be developed, which is a transshipment port, which is all containers.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Tea was running down. The Americans refused to do anything in the way of development. We did have a food-feeding program of giving, I think they were, cookies, a supplemental feeding program that AID ran. They only had two AID officers, and all they did was hand out these supplemental feeding cookies to schools, essentially. There were only six Fulbrighters coming a year. There were maybe 10, 12, or 15 Fulbrighters going to the United States. There were four or five cultural presentations a year, which were kind of the most exciting thing because we did the best we could. We worked real hard, and we had some great stuff come there: by accident Duke Ellington came just before I got there, we had a show from the Smithsonian, which was George Catlin's American Indian paintings (of course not all of them, because there's hundreds of them, but we had 35 of them). We could get Madam B. to come to things like that.

*Q: Well…*

ROSS: As I said, we did make a really important movie (that I urged and got the money for, shaking the money tree at the eleventh hour again) on the great American influence out there, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, who goes back to the Civil War in Lincoln's time before he gets involved in theosophy. There's a statue to him downtown now. I got very much involved with films there.

I wanted to note that one reason I took the cultural affairs officer's job was that, of course, I love cultural affairs, but the film jobs that I was hoping to get, regional film officers, were all closing down. Film production was closing down in USIA too. So there was not going to be a chance to get a job in Vienna or Bombay, or wherever, in film representation and production. I knew about it, but I didn't have years of experience, which means the contacts and the door opening ability that, say, Mr. Daryl Vance had in Bombay when he was in his 60s.

Anyway, I took that job, and I got into films, and both my wife and I got into films, and we actually took parts in films too; although my boss, David Briggs, at one point said, "You have to make a decision now, Ross. Are you going to be a film maker, or are you going to be a Foreign Service officer?" That was the second time I'd been asked that.

*Q: I was wondering what was the impact of sort of the end, the fall of South Vietnam?*

ROSS: That came a little bit…let's see…that came a little bit later.

*Q: Well, you were '73 to '77.*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: And South Vietnam fell in '75.*

ROSS: Right. I can't recall that with any distinguishing clarity, but I can very much recall the Watergate and the fall of President Nixon.

*Q: Okay, yes.*

ROSS: Well, everybody in Ceylon just smiled. In fact, the Ceylonese had a way of smiling at everything, and if you're trying to do a good job, they say, "Oh, you're building up your 'pin' again." "Pin" in "swabasha" (the [native] language) is merit—and that is, Buddhist merit—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …you know, like faith and good works.

*Q: Oh yes.*

ROSS: The Nixon business was very strange because the Ceylonese just kind of smiled and said, "What's going to happen? Awh now, what's going to happen next, Mr. Ross? He'll never go! Now [no], you'll never let him go. This is all such a joke." So it went on for about a year like this was all such a joke.

Then, the headlines started coming more and more. This put a fog into the embassy community. Privately people would say, "He can't last," and other people would say, "It's gonna stop! It'll go away!" It was the same thing as Clinton's impeachment. "They can't be possibly going to impeach him!" So it went on and on, and everybody went into a miasma of not speaking. There was really no position—the only position for what would happen, what would be released, or the printed documents that would come out of the White House.

Then, finally, towards the end I'll never forget going to an evening at the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), Pat Byrne, a wonderful woman and still around and still in the Department. Anyway, she used to give lovely outdoor parties and sit-downs out in the garden with finger bowls and things like that—I mean things that you don't much see anymore [laughter]; they're noticed in the absence. She had given an all-diplomats kind of thing. All the Russians showed up in force, and they went around to every American, one by one, as if under instructions, and said, "You can't possibly be doing this. I mean can't you and doesn't your embassy have some input into this? Ve [We] don't understand, chew [you] know. It's not…you are weak. Yeah, you're going to take some action. I mean everyone shoult [should]. You know, we think this is all ridiculous." They had done this under instructions because the next day in the embassy people were all buzzing about how they had never been approached before by Gadarin, or whatever his name might have been, and their intelligence services, and boy, they didn't want it to happen, and that was sort of like it must really be serious.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Everybody started hanging by their thumbs. I went out of town with a dance troupe from West Virginia [New York] called the Dan Wagoner [and] Dancers. He'd come out of the University of West Virginia. We were up in one of these wonderful guest houses that they have up in the hills above Kandy. We had brought along a big Zenith transoceanic portable and turned it on, and they said, "Alexander Haig is going back up to Capitol Hill and talking to Gerald Ford, and that Senator [Joseph] Clark has come down," or it wasn't Senator Clarke. It was the other Senator from Pennsylvania [Richard Schultz Schweiker] and a couple other people, and talked to the White House." And then they said he'd resigned! We almost rushed back to Colombo. We couldn't because we had a dance performance that afternoon, and the venue was already set up and, I think, maybe another one. But when we went back there, they had the famous telegram from Kissinger, which I suppose people mention in these disquisitions. It was, "This morning at 10:30 the President of the United States tendered his resignation to me," I think is what it said—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …or "I accepted the resignation of the President of the United States,"—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and it was a flash cable.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You don't usually see flashes much…

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and the original disappeared—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …of the cable in Sri Lanka, just as the original, I think, of the cable has disappeared from the Department of State, unless they found it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They found the Spiro Agnew resignation, but I don't know that they found the Nixon one; perhaps they did.

Anyway, that took up a lot of public energy because everywhere you went, people would say, "Well, what's gonna happen now?" But we soldiered on. It wasn't hard to do anything in Sri Lanka. Frankly, Sri Lanka and Syria were the best two places I've ever served.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

ROSS: A wonderful guy named Christopher Van Hollen, who was the first and perhaps the closest—not the closest, but the first time I'd ever been near an ambassador. I must say that I had never seen myself, in Foreign Service terms, as a guy who was whipping in and being a staff assistant or something like that. In fact, I looked up with shining eyes at people who had gone to the Foreign Service schools and had come out of the great East Coast universities, and it was taking a long while to let the shingles fall from my eyes on that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But Van Hollen was Swarthmore, the United States Navy, and doctorate from Johns Hopkins, and had been DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary [for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs]) in the Department, and this was his first and only embassy. He was around for a long while. His wife, Eliza Van Hollen, got to be kind of an important figure

in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research), and she also had advanced degrees, and their son now is in Congress.

*Q: In Congress, yes.*

ROSS: I haven't seen Ambassador Van Hollen in some years, but I worked with him later. I got him to be a speaker for me when I set up some programs in cooperation with the Smithsonian later.

Anyway, even though everybody repressed their public discussions and rolled their eyeballs about what American policy was in Vietnam, I mean that was going for a six by that time—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …in a very small embassy there was a PAO or a CAO, and we had almost unlimited access to anything we wanted to do there as long as we could scratch the money together or get the Ceylonese to cooperate with us. Now some wouldn't because they were very leftie. They wouldn't even want to be coming over to the house too much. Finally I got a great playwright, a poet named Simon Nawagaththegama, who came from the Wanni, which is the jungle of the east side of Ceylon. He was a brilliant person people said because he wrote in the language of the country and he wrote for the communist paper, *ETA*. He came and stayed at the house for about six weeks. He needed a place to crash, and while he was there he wrote a play called, "Suba saha Yasa." Then he staged it, and he directed and acted in it. It was a modern recreation with modern themes about a great king of the island from a Heroic period, which could be from, say, the fifth century to the twelfth century. There are great epochs in Ceylonese history. I was being attacked in editorials as the unseen hand that is guiding our young spirits away from the correct path, blah, blah, blah, which, of course, I was secretly very glad about. But that was an example of the kind of access that you could have, directly or indirectly.

We had a musicologist [ethnomusicologist/composer, Ron Walcott] come out; he also crashed in the house for about a year, or about half a year. We hired him for what would probably be the biggest events of the four years I was there; that was the 1976 – 200th anniversary of the Declaration of American independence [United States Bicentennial]. We hired him as a musician to compose a piece for orchestra. It ran about 20 to 25 minutes and featured Ceylonese devil drummers, which are guys who play a double-ended Congo drum [Sinhala drum]. This is hung around their neck, and they play with both hands, and then they wear traditional costumes, and they make tremendous racket when they start playing. They use it for exorcising the spirits from a person. They surround you with these drums, and they do that to you for about 15 minutes. Whatever's wrong with you, it's like a…yes, you've got different problems from whatever you started with!

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: So he wrote this concerto for Ceylonese themes, traditional fishermen's melodies and devil drummers and everything all together. We paid him maybe $500 or something—but we provided him some per diem, and he crashed at my place. He didn't conduct the orchestra, but he rehearsed it (they had a symphony orchestra in Colombo because they were very Westernized, they have choirs and things like that, they do Bach, they do Verdi, they do Beethoven quartets), and we put that on. We had a running thing for a year and about eight months for the whole season of all kinds of events. We shot the wad and got a lot of money about twice whatever our budget was. USIS budgets aren't necessarily very big for disposable money once you figure in the cost of books that you order for the library and everybody's salary and the petrol for the cars and all the stuff you buy.

Well, that was towards the end of that period. Ambassador Van Hollen had gone off, and John Hathaway Reed had come, who was a former governor of Maine. Reed was a very interesting, low-keyed guy, a very, very interesting Republican operative, had been head of the National Transportation Safety Board and was well connected and was interested in trotting and pacing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and actually drove his own pacers and trotters out at Rosecroft [horse track featuring harness racing in Fort Washington, Maryland] while he lived in Washington, in between being, I think it was, twice at different times [1959 – 1967] governor of Maine. He had a different kind of vision, and that was all okay. Gerald Ford had been president, and Carter was elected before I left. My life got much more, I won't say complicated, full with the birth of our son.

*Q: Oh yes!*

ROSS: Robert Knox, that's his name. Robert Knox was an English explorer who put into the island of Ceylon in the 1680s [1659] to get some masts for his East India men. He was captured by the king of Kandy—that is, the Ceylonese Buddhist king, upcountry king if you will—and held prisoner for 20 years. He escaped, got out, got down to where the Portuguese or the Dutch held the island, and he got back to England, and wrote *An Historical Relation* [*An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon in the East Indies*], which is still in print. Robert is a name on my side, and Knox is on my wife's side, so we named the baby Robert Knox. Well, every literate person in Ceylon is taught that Robert Knox was an Englishman who was captured and held by the king. So when we named this baby Robert Knox Ross, everybody thought it was the most magic thing that ever happened. I actually was introduced to Madam Bandaranaike initially by saying, "Now, Mrs. Prime Minister, this is the cultural attaché of the American embassy. *He's* the one that has the son named Robert Knox!" And so she said, "Oh, yes! Your son is named Robert Knox!" or something like that. It didn't matter what I'd done, or whether George Catlin and his American Indian paintings had been seen by her; it was that person has a baby named Robert Knox. It went all over the island because they can tell…if somebody

in Trincomalee wants to know what you had for breakfast, it takes about three telephone calls, you know.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: So it was a smart career move, as they say.

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: It opened all doors. They just wanted to look at me, and they wanted to look at Robert Knox too. We'd have big parties at our house, cultural events, whenever something had happened. They were going to build a great big telescope because there's some dry area near the center of the island, north central, with very clear skies. It's like Arizona or Chili.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Arthur C. Clark was a friend; he's still there; and he's, of course, this great man in astronomy. So I had a dinner and had all the astronomers there and had all the Americans there who were gonna gin up all this money to build this thing. Of course it never happened. They did do some small observation, but they wanted to build a 300-inch reflector or something like that, I suppose. So here you get all these people to come to the house for a big event, and everybody says, "Where's Robert Knox?"

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: "We want to see this thing named Robert Knox!" So that helped us a great deal!

*Q: Where did you go in '77?*

ROSS: In '77, let me think…well, I went to Afghanistan.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We didn't know what our choices were. My former PAO, Dave Briggs, was in Pakistan as PAO, and he had said, "You should be a branch PAO in Pakistan. You should be BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer) somewhere, or CAO of a bigger country." So I had been in Afghanistan when I was in training workshops. We'd gone out there and done a lot of development for Stan Moss, which was a great big introduction to USIA. It was an advertising agency from New York Production that was going to cost a couple million dollars in Frank Shakespeare's time, and one of the things they did was set up a multi-media show, which was just coming in—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …with a look at several posts, and one of them was Afghanistan. So I'd gone out there and thought, "Wow! This is really interesting." I mean it's sort of Central Asia. It's part subcontinent and part central in its attitudes. So we transferred from Sri Lanka and went up there. After a short home leave, we arrived there, and that was a very strange place.

*Q: You were there from '77, I guess, to…*

ROSS: To '79. My wife and I went back to Washington and studied "Dari" (Afghan dialect of Farsi [Persian]) for about two months at an international language school which somebody had spun off, who formerly worked at FSI, and they had it up at Dupont Circle [Washington, DC]. It was not such a grand way to learn Persian, Court Persian, which is old, old, old Persian, which is what Dari is, I believe. We were using Afghan school textbooks, and our teacher was an Afghan who was studying refrigeration engineering at Howard University. He had never taught anything in his life, and he'd not been in the United States for a couple years, and he was crazy about basketball. He'd come in every day and start telling us about what Doctor J. did or something like that. It was a very hard way to acquire the language Dari.

*Q: Well, what were you doing in Afghanistan?*

ROSS: I again was a CAO in a country that had a much bigger budget—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and, of course, a very huge AID development and Peace Corps. It was totally, totally different than smiling open faces with two monsoons a year or something. It was impassive faces, a kind of a coldness—warm, but an Islamic hospitality that belied whether it was real hospitality there or not. People wouldn't stare at you as much as in the south. In India and Sri Lanka everybody stared at you all the time, and they gaped at you.

But it took awhile to sort of get on to it: a much more obdurate boss, Roger Lydon, who was a PhD in Germany, who'd spent a lot of his time in Russia and East[ern] Europe; and a more problematical embassy.

*Q: Yes, while you were there, they were pretty tumultuous times, weren't they, when you were in Afghanistan?*

ROSS: It started being tumultuous and got more. There started to be incidents, and we had more and more difficulty doing anything. We had to send diplomatic notes for everything.

*Q: It was a completely communist-dominated government at that time?*

ROSS: Before I got there, there'd been a coup against the king by Daoud Khan, which was his brother-in-law; he'd married the king's sister; they were in the same family. The

king couldn't come back from Italy. He'd gone there supposedly for eye trouble, but actually he'd been hanging out in Ischia taking the waters. Daoud put the big, heavy hand on everything. Then he announced that there would be studies of a kind of a social modernism or a modern socialism. He was starting to make nice with the Shah in Iran. At this time the army was dominated by—of course no one knew this except the people that were supposed to know it, and they didn't apparently know it very well—an officer, a secret officer, an NCO (noncommissioned officer) cadre. They had been more or less picked out and identified and assembled by the Soviets since 1956 when Khrushchev came down and promised them a 20-year treaty of development and aid that was to neutralize, I guess, Pakistan and give them a foot into the subcontinent, which the Soviets had wanted since Lenin's time.

It was very forbidding to try to do things. I was head of the Fulbright board, as I had been in Sri Lanka, and it was impossible to have a meeting and get anything done. I was told there were people who were communists, but they called themselves socialists on the board, who'd say, "No, I vote against that," of a six- or eight-man board. You couldn't get a roster of people picked out to go to the United States. Now 20 years before that, in Eisenhower's time, you could. We had lost our leverage slowly over a great, long period of Soviet influence coming into Afghanistan, and we'd also lost interest because of Vietnam and things like that. In Eisenhower's time, President Eisenhower came to Afghanistan twice, and Vice President Nixon came to Afghanistan.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You would never ever hear of a president going to Afghanistan now! I mean even if they could gin up the security, if you could get that past the security boys, other than to have a victory laugh if we won.

Anyway, we got there in the middle of the dust season, which is DDD3 (dried-up donkey dung), and it blows all over. The Kirghiz, that is to say, the Paquari (Pashtun) tribes, had come up from the lowlands; and that was fascinating to see—camel caravans with people loaded up with everything imaginable, going with thousands of sheep up into the high grazing areas.

Then winter came, snow came, the Koh-i-Baba Mountains got covered with snow, and then the snow came down to Kabul, and everything gets snowy, and it becomes a fairyland. You can't drive around without driving your car into the irrigation and sanitation ditches that are up and down all the main streets.

You could tell that things weren't going well. You could send out invitations for 40 people, and two would come. They'd call you up and say, "Who's coming? I can't come if anybody's…" you know, like a professor from the university, "I can't come if the dean is coming." We lived in a rather nice house. The University of Indiana had a project there. The ex-chancellor of the university lived in the house next door with about an 18-foot wall. I'd meet him on the street, and he'd say, [spoken in a quiet monotone] "Throw a message over the wall," "Don't knock on my door. Throw a message over the wall."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: A very important religious "pir" (elder or leader) lived down the street, and you just had to nod at people. In other words, the lid was really on!

It got stranger. In winter it was cold. It was almost like, say, living in Colorado or something. We had fireplaces with wood fires; we had big kerosene heaters in the house. It was opposite of Sri Lanka where the last two years I didn't really hang around with the embassy crowd; I went to folks' houses.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …the intellectual pushers and shakers of the society. I've never thought of myself as a very political animal.

We had difficulty with cultural presentations, and you'd never know. To have somebody come in to play American ragtime and Beethoven, maybe 40 people would come to a 300-seat auditorium, if that many; and we'd have film shows where maybe 15 people would come.

*Q: This was still…we're talking about when Daoud was there.*

ROSS: When Daoud was there.

*Q: Was Daoud considered close to the Soviets?*

ROSS: He played footsie with them to get what he could out of them, but he was considered either in it for himself, or else in it for the country and also for his family.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was one of those what Napoleon said, "I wanted to be king of the world, and why shouldn't I try?" Daoud kept the Afghan king in Italy. He kept the king supplied with money! The fine stone that comes out of Afghanistan, lapis lazuli, which has come out since the earliest trade; since 7,000 – 8,000 B.C. it's been brought out. The government lapis mines and the cliffs in which they dig it out and dynamite it out and get it out anyway they can, the profits from that went directly to his family. It was controlled by the ministry of mines. The big chunks of lapis were bid on, and they were kept in a great big walk-in safe with three chains around it and three different padlocks in the headquarters of the ministry of mining exploitation [ministry of mines and industry].

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: On [April 27, 1978], a secretary was driving out of town and saw…that's funny. She was in her Volkswagen going down to Peshawar, [Pakistan], which went through the

Kabul Gorge. It was a very romantic and great chasm that you drive through, much more picturesque than the Khyber Pass, which most people who come out think they're going to see something neat. Well, the Kabul Gorge is 20 times anything at the Khyber [Pass]. So she was starting to drive into the gorge, and there came a column of 40 tanks. I guess a brigade of tanks was going up, clanking up the two-lane highway toward Kabul. [Laughter] She went by, reversed her Volkswagen, passed them all, got into the embassy on Saturday morning, and said, "Hey! You know, where's the political officer? Where's everybody? You know, get 'em! There's [singing voice] somethin' gonna happen!"

And by George, there was a tremendous revolution! By this time they'd started handing out little radios.

*Q: Yes, we're talking about intercommunication with—*

ROSS: Right, with the embassy…

*Q: ...with the embassy, yes.*

ROSS: …so you could listen to it. We had a lot of batteries, and I taped it all, which I suppose they'd take you outside and give you 50 stripes for now. It's fascinating to listen to, and everybody thought it was wonderful including the ambassador—that's Theodore L. Eliot, [Jr.] now, Big Ted Eliot as they call him—and everybody listened to it afterwards.

The firing went on for two days. Nobody knew what was happening. The telephone system mainly stayed up, and then it went out, and then electricity went out, and there were explosions. There was a lot of fighting near Herat, in Shindand Air Force Base there was fighting, and there was some incredible aerial stuff. I went up on the roof with a pair of glasses, and you could see that the pilots would come in and, I guess, swivel in in their MIG-19s or Sukhois (Russian fighter aircraft) or whatever they were, and hit the old "Arg" (which is arch in Dari), the old palace. That's the old, walled palace from the eighteenth/nineteenth century, and they tried to get at the bad guys and they'd come in upside down. I could see the color of their helmets inside their fiberglass canopies as they'd dump out with their rockets and roll out and go back up. It was the most incredible, beautiful aerial maneuvers like you'd see at an air show, but it's real!

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: We heard a lot of firing, and the shells came in, mainly not more than the ministry of the interior, which was about three blocks away; they were pounding them. Tanks drove downtown, you know, clunk, clunk, clunk, clunk, big engines and all that. After about two days it was over.

But everybody was on the squawk boxes for those two days, and it was amazing the things that people did and said to each other. Of course, Ambassador Eliot was trying to control the situation, and there'd be like, "Why are you in a car? Which car did you

take?" "Well, I just thought I'd drive over…" it was, say, like the embassy nurse. [Voice shouting] "Get, get back in that car, and get—" "Well, somebody said that they were sick, you know. I didn't know what was wrong with them, and blah, blah…" It was very amusing to hear some of this stuff. Then everybody kind of recovered.

We all got like hunkered down, and stuff started getting bad. It developed that the guy who ran this revolution was Muhammad Taraki, who'd been—guess what—a press translator for the political section of the American embassy for many years! Now this is not usually written up in the know-it-alls. So I'm the know-it-all who's gonna say that. They said, "It couldn't have been Taraki! Why that mild-mannered man with those thick glasses, who sat there and read the Persian language press and then told the political officer what it said? He, he, he…it's not him!" Oh, but oh, yes it was!

His big enemy was Babrak Karmal. Now there had been a socialist movement in Afghanistan, which Karmal had headed. It went back before Karmal to the Indian socialist movement of the '20s and '30s. There was one in Pakistan, too, with the "Frontier Gandhi" [Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan]**,** who was 90 years old, and he was still proclaiming a free Pashtunistan or Pashtunistan (the Pashtun-dominated area of Afghanistan and Pakistan)**.** But Babrak Karmal was a sort of red socialist who looked toward Moscow. The king used to drive around town in his Mercedes and get out and walk down to the main park, and Babrak would be up on a soapbox haranguing the mob, of 150 people about the necessity of, "If it comes to revolution, no more Mercedes." The king would come up and listen to him, and all the people would turn around and say [soft, loving tone], "Oh, your majesty! Oh! May I kiss your hand? I have to tell you about the problem with my neighbor's land. He's moved the fence. So will you help me?" Anyway, this cut Babrak's order, and they all used to laugh at him because Afghanistan was so-so as a monarchy, but it was also so-so as a breeding ground for socialism. But they still had prisons and all that stuff.

So anyway, things got bad. It seemed like more soldiers on the streets in tattered ex-Soviet uniforms. We went away on R&R (rest and recreation) and came back about February 13, 1979, the day before Valentine's Day. But the next terrible, bad thing that happened was that Ambassador Dubs, who'd taken Theodore L. Eliot's place—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …was grabbed [February 14, 1979]. His car was stopped on the way to the embassy from his residence, and assassins jumped into the car and drove him to a hotel downtown, and he was held for about five hours, and then shot to death.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This is quite a story, and I should get into it a little bit. Maybe we shouldn't go on anymore now. It's something of a—

*Q: Okay. Yes, I'd like your part of it, because I have some other people talking about it, but I'd like to hear what happened to you.*

ROSS: Yes. I know some of the people who have written different things about it, and I have kind of a different perspective that I picked up from different people.

*Q: Yes. Okay. Well, we could stop at this point. We might then pick up your perspective on the death of "Spike" Dubs.*

ROSS: Sure.

*Q: And then were you there…when did you leave in '79?*

ROSS: I left just before the Russians came in. In the fall of…it was getting really hairy—

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: The Peace Corps had gone, the AID had gone—

*Q: Yes, well, we'll talk about this next time.*

ROSS: …and USIS had been closed down too. There was just one person there.

*Q: Yes. So we'll talk about what happened between the assassination of Dubs and by the time you left, but also how Taraki, was it, who took over?*

ROSS: He was the deputy to…yes , Taraki…he was the deputy. I'm sorry. I'm getting him confused. No, he was killed.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He was smothered in jail—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and his deputy [Hafizullah Amin, the foreign minister] took over, who was a graduate student at Colombia University.

*Q: Yes. So we'll talk about your impressions of what happened there. You've already talked about the problems of getting audiences. We were being pretty well frozen out of things at this point.*

ROSS: They had sent us diplomatic notes through the embassy saying that nobody, no official, nobody except the private person, and there were essentially very few private people in the country, could be invited to any Western or any American house or function or presentation. You couldn't have any contact, without the invitation formally informing

the minister of foreign affairs and also delivering the invitation to the MFA (ministry of foreign affairs), which would then forward it to the person involved—that is to say, if you had the deans of the different colleges at the university, kind of a proforma list, an A list if you will, nobody ever got their invite. If you tried to sneak a card or sneak a thing, what you did is, you actually telephoned somebody.

There was a very famous old doctor, Mohammed Anas, who knew the history of everything and was a wonderful talker; and he was told to, "Sit at home"—that was the phrase; but he would come around. The people wouldn't even come out till after dark, and they'd walk and then maybe get…because everybody was thought to be an agent. It was said that the servants had to go down every two months to get vetted by the secret police, by the "Mukhabarat," [Khedamat-e Etelea'at-e Dawlati [KHAD], the Afghan secret service agency) to continue working.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So they either had to tell stuff that actually did happen at your house or else make stuff up, and we were always wondering what they made up [laughter].

We had good servants! We had a nanny there who we had brought from Sri Lanka. Boy! Did she not like the Afghans. "All very bad people, no, no, no!" She finally went back to Sri Lanka.

*Q: Well, anyway, we'll pick this up the next time, but you know, it sounds like a very nonproductive place.*

ROSS: Right, it was, and it got to the point where you couldn't "write it big," anymore, you know that old phrase. What you did is, you wrote it even worse than it was.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: Nobody came. Well, it's hard to write that 200 invitations were sent out and three people came, and they were 14 years old.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But that was the truth, 17 years old. Somebody was just too goofy to realize that their name was going to be turned into somebody.

*Q: This is tape 7, side 1 with Dick Ross, yes. Today is 8 September 2003.*

ROSS: I wanted to spend a little time talking about the assassination of "Spike" Dubs. He was known at the university as "Spike," although his name was Adolph Dubs.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He told me the reason that he let it go to "Spike" is because he pledged a fraternity in Wisconsin when he entered college, and as a pledge he came in with Adolph, and this was 1938 or whatever it was, '39; the brothers all said, "You can't be named Adolph! So we'll call you Spike." He was pleased to get away from Adolph, I suppose. He said that at the time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, he was quite a sincere and moving guy who had been DCM in Moscow, I think, and had been political officer in Moscow, and his forte was the Soviet Union. He followed Theodore L. Eliot, and the DCM was Bruce Amstutz, and the head of the political section was Bruce Flatin (pronounced Fla-teen), or sometimes calls himself Flatin (pronounced FlA-tin).

The day that it occurred I had gone down to the office; I'd walked over; it was only four blocks from my house. We had a new information officer named Bruce Byers. At this time the revolution against Daoud had occurred, engineered by Nur Mohammed Taraki, who, as I mentioned, had been the press translator in the American embassy.

Somewhere along this time Taraki had fallen out of favor with the hardliner element within his branch of the socialist revolution and had been picked up and put in prison and Hafizullah Amin had taken over. Amin had been a bright, young thing, identified by the National Foreign Student Association [National Association for Foreign Student Affairs] in the '60s, which had money sponsored to it by the intelligence community of the American government. Amin had gone to Colombia [University] graduate school and been there for a long while and become president of the Afghan Foreign Student Association in the United States. So he had nice liberal credentials. He came back and got involved somewhere in the underground that had been organized under Taraki, and they had an underground party [PDPA – People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan?]. Taraki had, as I mentioned, party card number one, and Hafizullah Amin had number two.

Taraki was strangled, smothered in prison. They came and told him that was it, and then in his cell when it happened, they asked him for his party card because you couldn't kill a member of the party, and he had to turn in card number one as the first member of the party [laughter]. They took it away from him, and he said, "Oh, by the way," and he took off his gold Rolex and said, "Please give this to my son." Now that's the story I've been given.

So Hafizullah Amin was in charge of things. A very strange thing had occurred. A week or ten days before a very important religious cleric, who had been held in a private kind of asylum—that is, a mental asylum—somewhere in town or outside of town was freed from the asylum by a violent kind of gangster move. He was spirited away and disappeared, and this was taken in the circles around Hafizullah Amin, who was first secretary, prime minister, whatever his title was, as a threat to the regime.

Ambassador Dubs had had a meeting in the embassy that I had gone to. I think the PAO, Roger Lydon, was out of town, and this was sort of heads of sections or elements of the mission. Ambassador Dubs had said, "Well, we really have to face it now. If it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck, and looks like a duck, it is a duck!" That was the famous thing he said at the meeting because that meant it's communist.

Immediately the AID representative, whose name was Owen Cylke, said he had to think. Dubs said he had a telegram that he was circulating, and he had a draft of it he handed out at the meeting and asked everybody to have a look at it and put their chomp on it. Owen Cylke said, well, he had to think this, he had to get his legal counsel because by that time USAID in Afghanistan was, perhaps, the largest mission in the world since Vietnam had collapsed. We had the whole Helmand Valley development project, which received cotton mills and stuff like that and irrigation and a lot of other projects here and there all about. AID had always spent a lot of attention in Afghanistan since the Soviets had been there. So there was some kind of backing off on signing that thing right away. Well, I do remember that.

Then something happened, and the next thing I recall…I don't remember how many days, time, weeks intervened, but…a warning occurred. By this time there'd been shooting on and off in town, and it wasn't unusual to hear shots fired or hear exchange of what sounded like machine gun fire, automatic weapons fire down in the souk. Then people would run home, buses would drive fast, and it's funny to see a woman in a burqa running with her high heels in her hand.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Children are all picked up from school real quick, and all kind of things happen, and all the merchants slam their steel grates down, and everybody's loading up for no electricity or water.

So the PAO, Roger Lydon, had gone over to the embassy in his sedan, and he came back, or he called from the embassy, and he said for me and for Bruce Byers—that's the IO, I was the CAO—to stay there. He was gonna come back, he was in a meeting, but there'd been a problem, and Ambassador Dubs hadn't showed up at the embassy.

So having done this tape recording of the coup, the Taraki coup against Daoud Khan, I mentioned that to Bruce, and he said, "That's a great idea!" He says, "I've got this radio, which is on the embassy net." So he took it outside in our compound, where we weren't seen because it had a gate and it was closed. He set it up, and set up the tape recorder, and was taping the whole thing. We listened, and we were astounded to hear all this radio traffic from Bruce Amstutz, the DCM, to the Kabul Hotel, where apparently Spike Dubs had been brought in and taken with a couple of gunmen upstairs.

I think the first person who got over to the hotel was the RSO (regional security officer). He had a couple spots of bother because after the Dubs incident, he was sent to Latin America, and another ambassador was killed while he was in that embassy or captured

for a long while. He had three different bad incidents. His nickname was Chuck. He went in the hotel, he had his gun out, he put it down on the table, and somebody picked it up. So he had…[laughter] forgotten his weapon already.

Then as we learned from the cable traffic to a certain extent, Amstutz was on the open line to Washington, and the story started coming in, "Well, how's Ambassador Dubs? How's is he? How…" Nobody knew. He was in a room. These people had rushed upstairs. There'd been some shooting. Somebody was injured and captured, something like that. I think there were four men involved, and it was very complicated; the circumstances, nobody knew what.

Bruce Flatin apparently went upstairs and went near the room, in the hall. This started around 8:30 in the morning, quarter after eight, something like that. Now it was about 10:30. Bruce could speak German, and so could Ambassador Dubs, so he was hollering at him in German from the hall, "Are you all right? Tell us how many people are there." Dubs said, "I'm tied up," or something like that or, "I'm all right, and there's some people here. There's two men here." Whatever he said, the Afghan people who were holding him told him to shut up and not say anything more, and he couldn't. So after a while, Bruce Flatin went back downstairs.

At some point the Russian security chief of the Soviet embassy or mission, which was getting very big by this time—there were hundreds or thousands of people, and I remember the cultural section had dozens of people and quite capable people, who were at home in Persian and things like that in the cultural world—went to the American embassy people, got a hold of them and said, "You know, this can't continue. Something has to be done. This is a very dangerous situation." Across from the hotel is, I think, a central bank building, and they had these kind of conversations at cross-purposes. The Russian finally said, "If you don't do something, we will have to!"

The instructions from Washington to Amstutz, which were being relayed (and everybody was running around, trying to brief each other and interrupt each other and find out what was going on), were try to bargain for time, the theory being that with hostage takers, the longer you can hold them from serious action, that the less likely they are to take it. That was the theory then. I don't know whether that still pertains.

The Russians said, "Well, we have to do something." So they placed sharpshooters on the roof of the building across the street aimed at the room, which, as I understand it, they couldn't see what was in the room.

Meanwhile, no one was allowed to go up in the American embassy because the Afghan KHAD (Khedamat-e Etelea'at-e Dawlati), they were called I think (or OX and the Mukhabarat are different nicknames for them), were preventing everybody from moving, and it was confusion downstairs too because they didn't know what to do. The Russian guys were making their own decisions, I guess, based on whoever they were talking to. So they got a guy in full, heavy-duty body armor or a great big lead suit or lead thing that you'd wear if you went to the dentist and were getting an x-ray. Somebody who saw that

said he looked like he had been recently picked out as the suitable candidate, and he was blessing himself, which might mean he was a Christian or not, and gave his identity and stuff to somebody, and he was to crawl down the hall to try to shoot in the door where they thought the guys were. That was going on, and I learned a lot of that afterwards.

What had happened was that they had taken Ambassador Dubs and put him into, as I understand it, a deal chair in the room. It was not a very fancy hotel. The Intercon (Intercontinental Hotel) was the fancy hotel out of town up on a hill. It had been the fancy hotel from the ’30s; where Dubs was was a run-down, art deco thing that was maybe built in the ’40s with Russian assistance or something. They tied him up in a chair in the middle of the room. On a signal, which must have been given by shortwave radios, the people across the street and from the roof started shooting, and this guy in the hall lying down on the ground shot into the room too. Then there was a certain immediate shouting, and the people in the room both fired shots too; they had small arms, had pistols.

Then I guess it was quiet, and the door was busted down. They took out one guy who was dead, took him downstairs. They took out another guy who was alive, wounded, and fighting because they were beating up on him, like smashing him in the face.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They took both of them out of the hotel and threw them into a car or something. They took the live guy away who was energetic enough to be cursing, beside himself because they weren’t being nice to him if I mean you can imagine. They said to the embassy that Ambassador Dubs had been moved downstairs; he was killed. The embassy had an ambulance, and it was posted over there right away, and Ambassador Dub’s body was taken over to the AID compound, which was kind of across town, and examined by a doctor.

They had several doctors always there because AID ran a six-patient hospital on the compound, and as it said, it had hundreds of people. It even had a psychiatrist, which was very interesting—Elmore Rigamer, who had patients. People had therapy there, and he was the regional psychiatrist; he was resident in Afghanistan, his choice. Afghanistan was considered quite a nice place to live compared to Tehran.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So, now, back to Dubs. Apparently he had, I think, 30 some rounds in him, and five or six were in his head. Nobody knew who…we didn’t know who fired them. I’m sure the autopsy, such as it was, says that. His wife was not at post. The body remained there, and they flew in an SP-707, one of the short ones, with the Assistant Secretary of State. They had a funeral service, and then they had some sort of a psychological grief counseling session. The service was at Ambassador Dub’s house, and then they also had a memorial service that involved the regular attending members of the Christian community.

The grief counseling session was kind of strange because they said to everybody to sit on the floor. This, of course, was a nice floor; I mean it was a white carpet in the ambassador's entertainment area of his nice residence. A lot of senior Afghan employees had come, and so when they started in with a couple of trained psychologist grief counselors, it opened up kind of a weird discussion that went on for an hour or so. It was unbelievable, but maybe that's the way those things are.

The service for Ambassador Dubs at his house was small, very serious, and well done. The Marine security guard was on both sides of the casket, which had been in stock. I don't think the plane came out with one. He was dispatched, by the way, with a whole group of people to take the body back to the United States—escorted back. I remember I was standing on the side up toward the front, and there was a Marine who was standing at full attention during some part of the service. He locked up, as some people do if you don't move your.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He fell directly in front of me, fell rigidly straight to the floor in one straight line, and he had a big jaw, and his jaw hit—

*Q: Ooh!*

ROSS: …the wooden floor or the ground first, and you could hear it break. It made a cracking noise like a bat breaking in a baseball game. I have that in my head—that's the odd thing I remember. I don't remember the remarks of different people there because it was fixated right there.

Now, I wanted to say a couple things about the circumstances surrounding what happened to Ambassador Dubs. The story is that he was picked up at his house and taken in what was the ambassador's car, which was a great, big, bullet-proof yellow Oldsmobile, a long one. It wasn't especially made long, but it was the biggest model they made, and it was the only Oldsmobile in town. It was a four-door, all the windows get to go down. It had been brought out special for Ambassador Eliot, who was six-foot-seven, and he had to have space to put his feet. Ambassador Dubs, who was a relatively compactly built man, had this great big thing. He was a different personality, totally, than Ambassador Eliot; Dubs was a technocrat in a way, and Eliot was a public-relations type, if I can speak of it in a very broad-brush manner.

Anyway, it was said that the driver drove through a stop, and somebody jumped in the car, and there are details on that, which I don't remember everybody else's version. I happened to have made the acquaintance of the driver, whose name I think is Go Mohammad, not directly, but because USIS had, in its pleasant wisdom, allowed me and some other people from the embassy to take a car and drive through the central Hindu Kush, the Hazarajat Mountains—that is to say, from Kabul up to Bamiyan and across to Herat, past the Minaret of Jam.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This is all kind of important.

*Q: Okay.*

ROSS: Other people got involved in it, and another vehicle was taken, and Go Mohammad was the driver of the other vehicle. Well, this was like a ten- or twelve-day trip all around Afghanistan. It was a great, secret kind of circuit.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Go Mohammad, driving the other car, had a breakdown, and then we had to wait and this and that. One of the things I observed was that he was buying more gas than there was for the spare tanks of the great, big Travelall truck they had—four-wheel drive with a big radio in it and all that. So when we got back, I sort of squeezed it out of our driver, a very simple fella, that Go Mohammad had, indeed, bought hundreds of dollars worth of gas that hadn't been delivered, that he was shaking down. He was collaborating with the few filling stations on the route to fill up tanks that were already full. This guy admitted this stuff to me because I said, "Why could this be?" and I had the receipts for USIS, and I said, "Well, we didn't buy gas at the last one, you know, the last place we stopped. We didn't need it," this sort of thing. So I got people, the administrator officer in USIS, to go over to the embassy and say this is the thing about what Go Mohammad's done—the driver.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: She came back with the story that the ADMIN (administrative) officer in the embassy said, "Don't try to do anything about this. This is just a waste of time. A lot of people do this kind of stuff too. Besides, now this guy thinks that your driver has ratted on him, and Go Mohammad will have him beaten up because Mohammad's a tough guy." Now that was what I was told.

So the regular driver for the ambassador wasn't on duty that morning, and Go Mohammad came through town, went through the intersection near the Blue Mosque (Masjid-e-Sherpur), and there were the false policemen there already—that is, something had happened, the real cops weren't there, and people were dressed as the policemen, the police soldiers. Mohammad, I assumed, didn't know that they were false or not, but they stopped him and said, "Where's the ambassador?" He said, "He's not in the car. You can see he's not in the car." So then he drove over to the ambassador's house, picked Spike Dubs up, and then drove right back to the intersection where he was stopped again. They said, "Roll down the window," and they said to the ambassador, "Do you have a gun in the car?" and he said, "No, I don't!" They asked that through Go Mohammad.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So at that point, they pulled out a gun, one jumped in the front seat, and one jumped in the back seat and said, "Drive to the Kabul Hotel."

Now that is the story of how the stuff occurred. The point of the thing was that the driver didn't take the sort of obvious precaution: if you'd been stopped by a car asking where an ambassador was, and by the way, they flew the flag a lot there because it was a dangerous situation in town, that he just drove right back into the trap. Dubs said, "Use the electric door locker/unlocker to unlock the door," and then they got in.

This story came out because the intelligence services, after the event, sent out somebody from Langley to polygraph people. I was at the airport flying to New Delhi for some reason, and I was introduced in kind of a weird way at the airport by some people, Fred Turco or Arnie Long or people like that, who were known to the polygrapher, or he was reporting to them, because an interim report was being drawn up on what happened. I flew on the airplane in the same seat next to this guy all the way to Delhi, and he thought that I was sort of in another organization, I guess. He told me all about his polygraph work with Go Mohammad. He said the guy admitted that he had made these mistakes, and kind of like he knew that it might be dangerous to drive the ambassador through there. But then he broke down and cried during the polygraph and said he had a family and everything. So the guy who had given him the test said, "Well, I felt sorry for him, so I thought I ought to go easy on him." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I didn't make a big deal out of it. I didn't put it in my report." That's what he told me. You know, I thought that's…I didn't know…I thought about it later, and I guess now I don't think about it at all. I think about it every fifteen years when I read somebody else's story on it.

Anyway, a lot of things happened, of course, afterwards. But one of the funny things that happened was that Roger Lydon had come back from the embassy when the thing started and driven in and saw Bruce Byers and myself outside listening to the thing and taping it, and he said, "What are you doing? You can't do that. Cut that out! Get inside and don't make a cassette tape recording! That's, you know, completely against anything conceivable!" Well, then after the events of a day or three days later when the first people started coming in to find out what happened, somehow they heard that there was a tape recording of it, and they said, "Oh, we'd love to have it! It's the only…" and they listened to it and said, "This is, you know, a minute-by-minute account of, as long as it was on, and could we have it." Bruce who had done it said, "Sure!" Of course, it was taken away, and he never saw it again. That's because these kinds of things often indicate people's personality, their deep personality characteristics. So that disappeared.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Anyway, things were very bad after that. A story came to me that the people who had kidnapped Dubs had taken him and were holding him against the release or something to do with the cleric who had escaped under mysterious circumstances from the private asylum and had either fled to the Koh-i-Baba Mountains or to the northwest frontier or was hiding somewhere in the country. This cleric was obviously against the

government, and this may have had something to do with Ambassador Spike Dubs being picked up. I heard from somebody who knew some of Hafizullah Amin's body guards that when the thing started Amin was still at home in his residence near the university or out in the new part of town that had been built in the 1920s by Amanullah the king; that they came to him and said, "Ambassador Dubs has been kidnapped, and they say he's being held down at the Kabul Hotel." And he said, "Oh, really? He was in the shower, and the body guards who were in his quarters were talking to him through the shower curtain, and then somebody said, "Is there anything to be done?" He said, "Well, we have to do something, because night can't fall on the town." That was the reason perhaps that the Soviets got involved at that time: because the situation was internally amongst the people who were really the "dérangeants" (disturbing) of the society. It was so fragile that they really couldn't afford to let night fall without having a firm resolution of it one way or the other. He said, "Do something about it. Get him!" or something. That's the story I heard indirectly from an Afghan while I was still there, who knew some of the bodyguards, and who later walked out with his family, his wife and kids, and he lives in the United States now in Texas.

The government professed great shock, and the dean of the diplomatic corps was the Russian ambassador. At the first chance he got, I guess, at the airport when the Boeing 747 took off with the casket and with the party—I was a pallbearer, so I went to a number of these things—went to Bruce Amstutz, the chargé, with tears in his eyes and said he wished, he just wished that this hadn't happened. He was a very old-fashioned-looking guy. I think they sometimes wore diplomatic, full-dress uniforms, which the Russians had—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …you know, with the gold braid and all that.

*Q: Oh yes, I've seen them.*

ROSS: He may have had that on, but anyway, tears rolled out of his eyes, and he seemed to be crying. Some of the wiser fellows who saw this said that that guy was the best actor in the world because it was everything to the Russians benefit not to have Spike Dubs there, who would certainly put a very big-powered glass on whatever they were doing at the time.

Some other funny things happened. The afternoon of the day that this occurred, around five o'clock I think, Bruce Flatin and a couple of other people were told…the government called up and said, "We have the murderers, the assassins." So they were taken over or were ordered or were invited to go over to the morgue and have a viewing. There were two guys there dead, including the guy who was taken away kicking and screaming alive, and he was laid out on the…you know. They remembered him; I guess he'd been beaten in the face or something like that, and then they published the pictures in the paper. But he had died on the way to the morgue, as it were [laughter]. So nobody knew what to say about that!

In fact, there was a kind of a false front kept up. Nobody knew what to say, so people went around their business and extended everybody great sympathies that were tendered and everything like that. But then privately everything was thought to be in a terrible mess.

I can't remember what happened very much after that, but since it's 25 years ago, I may say that the things in the country became even more bizarre. Even the embassy became a little bit unreal, maybe I shouldn't say surreal, but the way people behaved, and people started acting very strange.

An air force attaché who was an F-15 pilot, or had been, got up into a tree with a rifle and was aiming it at people or into people's windows somewhere over there in what they call the Shar-i-nau, where a lot of Americans live. I did not live over there.

A marine security guard got drunk at the marine house, and went out and went down the street and tore down some revolutionary banners written in Pashto or Farsi, which he didn't understand; he just was going to have a little revenge against this. He was taken away and held at a check-post, and they called the embassy, and they said, "We have your drunk marine here." Bruce Flatin, who was the acting DCM, said, "You must turn him loose according to the Vienna Convention." They said, "No, we don't have to. He's not in the Vienna Convention." He said, "Well you have to." So they got into one of these things. They took this marine away and kept him in the basement of the ministry of the interior for two or three days [laughter]. He got kind of climbing the walls, and he said later they kept offering him Johnny Walker and hashish, which he staunchly refused to do, because they thought they were going to break him or something, "Come on! Have a drink." He was questioned a lot, and they [the embassy] finally got permission to go see him. So Bruce Flatin, who was still insisting that the Vienna Conventions were applicable—I mean the thing was that you should have just cut a deal and gone to whoever was the captain in charge and said, "Oh, our boys are just…you know, we have to do something about this. We're really sorry about this. Give him back. We're gonna take care of it," and get him out of their custody.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: They demanded that he have a medical examination. Dr. Rigamer was around, so he and Bruce Flatin went over, and he conducted a psychiatric examination of the marine who was being held in captivity for doing something that he'd done after about ten beers or so. They wouldn't let him get within about 20 feet of him, so he conducted the psychiatric examination—this is terrible—from across the room and wrote a report, which was a cable. It said, "This is the only experience I've had, so it was novel for me, and I'm not sure my judgment was correct, but he did seem to have some kind of a psychotic break at this point, judging from the fact that I was 25 feet away from him, and I had to talk to him in not a confidential or personal voice with other people in the room and Secretary Flatin next to me and all that, so I do think he needs medical attention."

[Laughter] This is a terrible thing to joke about! But anyway, they sprung him after while.

They would do terrible things when they sprung people. I was running the American Language School or nominally responsible for it, and they had picked up some British women who were married to Afghans. As soon as a foreign woman marries an Afghan and goes to Afghanistan, they take her passport away from her. That applies to Iran too, like good luck on getting out of the country without your husband's permission. You are now the wife of an Afghan! So she had certain of "wasto," what they call "pull around town," and she went to one of the really evil guys, who was a tank commander. He'd driven the tank in at the beginning of the revolution, and lead tank—that's a big job. It's a tough job. He insulted her every way possible on her purity and things like that, then threw the passport on the floor and was [tapping sound] tapping his nickel-plated AK-47 (automatic Kalashnikov –assault rifles of Soviet design) on his desk, threw it down there, "Now you scrunch down and pick up your passport in front of me," this kind of thing to get out of the country.

Besides the marine and the air force attaché, there was an AID guy who had come not too long ago before they decided to wind everything up, and he went downtown, and he just started slugging people—just went down to the main part of town and punched people. But see, he was acting out or something like that. I mean we're not talking about a 17-year-old.

So all these kind of funny things started happening. Then there was curfew every night, and they jumped up at you with automatics, with AKs, when you were driving home before curfew and hollered, "Drush!" and made you stop (that's "halt" in Pashto); I remember that, and then they'd search the car. They had search lights on the hills because Kabul has hills that stick up in the middle of town quite abruptly, and they'd put these great, big, million-candle power search lights up there, and they'd shine 'em and move 'em around either on an automatic random pattern or else on purpose. So you'd be in your bedroom or downstairs, and a search light would come blasting in, right through the curtains; they're real strong! That was really spooky, really eerie! It really was strange—the searchlights at night—because you'd go get in bed, and then the searchlight would come in and go across the room, and you'd wonder if the babies woke up (we had two kids by this time).

Things got so bad that they decided to close everything. There were two drawdowns, and I was down to the next to the last, and I wanted to go to India. They had evacuated Jane, my wife. She'd taken R&R with the kids, and she was supposed to come back and was going to go to the airport, and they called her up and said not to go back. I had a job lined up—Northern Indian program officer—because by this time I had learned a little bit about my job. When people get hired to do USIA work—

*Q: Oh, sure, sure.*

ROSS: …you don't know anything for a tour, you just don't, I mean to understand what's going on back in Washington, Fulbright board, or something like that.

So they called me up and said, "You can't go to India," and I said, "Well, I…" "Why are you going to India?" I said, "Well, I have orders here that says I'm supposed to," "So those orders are wrong!" So I thought, well, okay, come back to the United States. So I changed my travel flights and went back and went to USIS and had a big argument because they said, "You did the wrong thing to go to India," and I said, "I had the orders here!" They said, "Well, those orders were wrong!" It went round and round. "Well," I said, "they're the only orders I had." "Well, they were wrong." "Well, I had them."

So at that point I went over to Personnel, and they said, "What do you want to do? We want you to be PAO in Ouagadougou, right away. It's great for your career. You've gotta go. You haven't been a PAO anywhere." That was my career mangler that said that.

So then I went to somebody else. I went back to the guy who told me my orders were wrong, and he said, "Well, why don't you just take it easy and be…you can go out and be branch PAO in Alexandria, [Egypt]." This is a good example of how assignments work. I said, "Oh! That's great I heard." He said, "They've just rebuilt the center in Alexandria, Egypt, "El-Iskandariya" (Alexandria). It's one of the great, classic places where everything is really like out of *Mountolive* in Lawrence Durrell." It still is! It's still got a kind of a special air to it, kind of seedy though, extremely seedy.

So I went back to the career counselor and said, "Well, you know, I don't have to go to Ouagadougou because Alexandria…" He said, "Alexandria's not open!" I said, "Well, they said it is." "Well, no, it's not open! Who told you that?" And I said, "The Deputy Area Director." "Well, how does he know that?" "Well, he said that the guy who's there…[talking quietly] he told me privately the guy who's there is thinking about getting a divorce and is planning to maybe terminate and leave early." [Shouting voice] "Well, we didn't know that! Why didn't he tell us?" I said, "I don't know. But he said that maybe I should bid on it."

Then some people said, "There's three jobs open in Paris, but they're at your grade," you know always bid on one above your grade. "There's three jobs that are just gonna open in Paris." So then I went to the career counselor and I said, "There's three jobs opening in Paris." He said, "Yes, we know, but it's not good for your career." And I said, "Well, I should maybe go to Alexandria." "No, don't do that! Go, go right away! Look! This is your chance. We're gonna talk to you, you know. You won't have it again…" and all this other stuff.

I then went to the chief of all the personnel. His name was Harlan Rosacker, and I said, "This is it." He said, "Paris is open." I said, "Yes, I think I might like to go to Paris, because I've always wanted to, you know, ever since I understood things." And he said, "Well, that's what I'd do!" So I said, "Well, I'll go to Paris," and then got kind of a crash course and trained for about six weeks, which then didn't help me learn very much more,

because you have two kids, you're living in an apartment/hotel, and when you walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, you're not speaking French.

This also was up at the Berlitz School at Dupont Circle. Notice they save money. Don't send anybody to FSI. This was the USIA theory, because those people over in State want somebody for four, five, or six months until they really get it. Don't send them there, because they'll charge a lot of money, and they have a lot of expensive linguists. So send them to one of these off-the-wall schools, International Language Institute or something; they charge less money. Of course, as I mentioned earlier, they have people who are refrigeration engineers teaching. So I went there and studied French, and went off to Paris.

But as I went out the door to go to Paris, somebody took me and said, "Well, there's something you ought to know—why those three assignments opened up. They've had a terrible problem in Paris," and actually they had. They yanked the very famous PAO.

*Q: Who was that?*

ROSS: That was Bill or William…see, he went before I got there. Jack Hedges just came in, and I'll tell you his name in a minute. He was one of what they called "the whales" in the agency. He'd just gotten remarried and had a new child, and he dodged the bullet by going up and being at Fletcher [Fletcher School at Tufts University], had worked a couple years, and then he went and became PAO in Indonesia.

*Q: Well, you can…*

ROSS: Yes, anyway, he went. The Deputy PAO, who was a novelist, retired and went to Ireland where you can live tax free if you're a creative personality or at least you used to. Two or three other people had been sacked too. Lois Roth and Dick Arndt, who had been in Italy, had come up. Dick had become CAO, which was a very good job, "attaché culturel opéra de l'ambassade" (Cultural attaché officer of the embassy), and he was very thick with Arthur Hartman, who was the ambassador.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So things weren't very good there. What they did is, they had to cleanse the Augean stables because Paris had been more or less operated with a very large budget by people who'd been there for quite a long while. They were sort of old World War II hands. I think the CAO had been there for ten years or something and was very well plugged into the "belage" on Bonheur," and all that plugged into French society.

So I got there just when this kind of Star Wars erupted and people had quit and been fired and everything else. Jack Hedges came in and he said, "I'll only take the post if I can get John Garner as my assistant, who was in Africa. Hedges had a reputation for being a guy who went around and cleaned things up. Actually, it was his fourth time in France

because he'd been there after the war in Point Four (Truman's Point Four Program, part of the Marshall Plan).

*Q: What was your job?*

ROSS: I was the assistant cultural affairs officer, ACAO.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I had gotten some three-piece suits ordered up for myself. I had two little kids, Jane, and myself, and we were in temporary quarters for about six months in a long, icy winter in an unfamiliar end of Paris where people didn't live so much then. It was called "Flan Augier," down the river, at the bad end of the 16th [arrondissement] or something like that; their metro is Michel-Ange Molitor. We lived there and looked and looked and looked till finally we found a real good apartment downtown where I could walk to work; a little bitty apartment that was owned by a French diplomat who worked in their own special diplomatic section and had gone off to be CONGEN (Consul General) in Brazil.

So I was given a very, very lovely office in the Rothschild part of the Talleyrand Building. I was there for months, and they kept changing what everybody should do. Upstairs in the PAO's office Lois and Dick, John Garner, Jack Hedges, and other people were having big differences about how the place should be operated—what should be the goals, what kind of a library they should have, and should they have a resource center because computers were just coming in and new ways to find things out were just coming in.

*Q: You were there from '79 to '84, yes?*

ROSS: Yes. But I went over to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) after three years there.

*Q: Okay. Well, okay, '79 to early '80s.*

ROSS: Yes. Anyway, it finally settled down that I would be university contacts and American Political Process; and I would do some editing and writing for a magazine, which we published, and handle all kinds of sociology professors and the political process, to a certain extent, because the elections were big. The French paid a great deal of attention to the American elections right from the get-go, as they would be right now, watching the Democratic party with its nine candidates or however many there are. There's a lot of French press, and they seem to know a lot, so I had my hands full. I'd operate a system of contacts, send them things, and then have two or three big, expensive seminars. We'd get French authorities from, say, "Sciences Po Institut d'Etudes Politiques" (that's the Institute of Political Science), and get them to talk, and get American scholars or people who were professors or people who did polling to come over and do presentations. Then we would have panel discussions to explain the

American political process to the French, but also to let them kind of feel that they had a place to go and that they could take part in it.

Every Frenchman who's literate thinks that he has a vote in the presidential election of the United States, much more than we would imagine here sitting in America, and they follow it. They'll tell you what the strengths and weaknesses are of Ronald Reagan or something like that. I'd get caught off guard—they'd talk to me about Lyndon LaRouche or something, and I wouldn't know that much about it. They're a very thorough kind of people. I also had to do a lot of different political things, which opened my eyes up in my late 30s to things that I didn't know about, like international economics, or the Mont Pelerin Society, or Leo Strauss and the Chicago conservative school.

There were a lot of funny connections between France and America, and they all popped up because France was going conservative at the same time America was in the sense of their politics. I would take, [it seemed (to me)], kind of obscure Americans around, but the French would seem to know more about them than I did. This would mean having people go to outlying conferences at universities, say Grenoble or Lyon. But at the same time, I got to know a lot of people, and I got involved, again, in the arts world, which I seem to gravitate toward, as I mentioned. I had known people in different places and they popped back up.

I became very thick with a black American poet named Ted Joans, who's just passed away; and I got to know Charles Henri Ford, who's also just passed away at 94 [1913 – 2002, 89] years old, who I first met in Sri Lanka, a very important figure in American poetry who started a poetry magazine in the 1920s [*Blues: a magazine of new rhythms*], was involved in the surrealist movement in France in the '20s and '30s, then started *View*, which was important in New York in the '40s, and had always published, and had a place in Paris part time. I got friendly with him and other people like that. Paris has a whole cast of characters, thousands of Americans who more or less know each other. So life was very full.

We lived downtown. One Sunday night I went off to a famous Sunday night, you wouldn't call it a salon, it was in an at-home that a guy named Jim Haynes had in Paris.

He's an American who was teaching at University of Paris VIII (Vincennes), who had sponsored all kinds of artists and had written a book or two and knew everybody; and everybody showed up at his house, and he cooked spaghetti—one of these things. He lived in, literally, an artist's studio with glass lights facing north.

I was coming back around 11:30 at night; and Mom—that is, to say Jane and the boys—we were downtown then in "Saint Germain des Pres," a block from the church. I came up out of the Métro, and this is right where the "Deux Magots" [Café des Deux Magots] is.

"Brasserie Lipp" is across the street, "Cazes Lipp" as they say. There was this tremendous KA-BOOM! I thought, "That is not a car back firing. That is an explosion!" So people ran out into the street—it was summerish I think—and looked down the street,

and some people started running down the street. I started running too, and I then turned down "rue des Saints-Pères" and then ran along a little street toward our house, and I saw smoke coming out from the building! (It was a five-story building from about 1890) I thought, "Oh, God! They got us!" because by this time we'd been in the revolution, I'd been in a couple of dustups, I'd actually been in a dustup in Cambodia—but that's another story, where I was shot at from both sides of the bridge and everything. So I ran around and ran into the front door, and there was broken glass everywhere, and there was this car that was on fire. Our car was parked up the street on the curb.

By this time things had gotten so bad in Paris that a friend of ours who's a military attaché got shot; the DCM had gotten shot at with the same gun they found out later; Israelis from their embassy had been killed; and there had been different kinds of threats; and somebody from the police had their feet and legs blown off trying to disarm a package that fell off a car that was at the economic officer's house, Rod's house—a package fell off when they drove away to the airport, and then the police went to disarm it, and it blew up and actually killed one guy; he died in the hospital later; it made him what they call a basket case kind of thing. So I ran, and I thought, "Oh, my God!" I felt my hair standing on end. I've never felt that before. The electricity worked, and I did the code and got in the door and ran up the steps and banged on the door, and Jane opened it. I said, "You're alive! Oh, my God! How are the boys?" She said, "You're alive!" I said, "I thought it was our apartment!" She said, "I thought it was our car!" because our car was all messed up.

There were people running up and down the street and below us was the "commissariat de police" (local police station), which they only open during weekday hours; it was like a little branch police office, "su commissariat." Somebody had put a bomb in the door and blown in the police station and blown up the car, and it cracked the building, and it blew all the glass out of all the windows. We closed the metal grates which they have in Paris, to kind of make it darker in the kids' room (they slept in the same room). Glass blew all across the floor, but it didn't cut them because of the way the blast came. Jane had just gotten into bed, and she said she was halfway asleep and saw a white thing in front of her eyes. You know it's funny how you can. The whole room lit up. We stayed up all night; we stayed there, and nothing much happened. It just caused a tremendous hassle to get everything all organized; then you had to do more security.

We didn't have CD (diplomatic corps) plates after that; we had regular Paris plates they called "banalisé" (unmarked), which was wonderful because we could get any amount of tickets [laughter]! When you had CD plates, they didn't give you tickets; Paris is famous for the parking ticket problem. So you didn't get parking tickets if you had CD plates. You could get your car towed away if it was in the wrong place, but they wouldn't give you a ticket; the French were pretty good about that. But as soon as we got civilian plates again, regular plates, everybody got tickets again, which nobody paid, of course.

*Q: Who set off the bomb?*

ROSS: It was supposedly Corsicans, a Radundi Cassio, to get back at the police for accidentally killing a 16-year-old girl in a dope bust. This was the story, that it was not against the American embassy or against us, but we didn't know it at the time. That was the conventional wisdom on it.

*Q: Dick, a question I'd like to ask you—from your perspective, during the time when you were there, '79 to '82ish or something like that, how did you find the intellectual community at the university level, which was a different level than the commentators?*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q:* How did they view the United States? I mean was there sort of a—

ROSS: The students themselves?

*Q: No, well, I'm thinking about the professors—*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: ...and then the students.*

ROSS: Actually, both those different elements really found the United States absorbent, particularly the culture of New York City, the culture of the West, you know written big what they call "cou-for-boy" (cowboy) and the culture of films. I didn't run across too many people who disparaged or just dismissed out of hand the United States. They would, of course, tell you how you made your mistakes in Vietnam and what you should have done, and they would tell you what you were doing wrong, but they didn't do it with any animus. Almost everybody, the French that I met, liked the United States They perceived it as having flaws, which they understood being French. That's partly I think, the French attitude toward things. "Oh, but of course we know, you see, the problem here is this. Now once that is done, then it'll be this way."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But there was not any on the streets or Marxist Leftist rage against the United States. That kind of '60s revolution of social mores and ideas, which may or may not have stuck in the United States, had gone over to Europe and to France later. If there was one kind of young influence which people did do, it was a newspaper period called *Le Bien [Public]* or *Liberation* which was wonderful in the sense it was full of ideas. It wasn't dumbed down, but it was different than *Le Monde*, which is very dreadfully serious, kind of the way the *Financial Times* is serious. The *Liberation* was sprightly, and *Le Figaro* was sprightly. The body politic in France was going to the Right.

These people accepted the United States. France had enough of its own problems with Africa that they didn't see too much of us to attack whatever we were doing. They kind

of raised their eyes and moaned when Reagan was elected, but then they accepted it in the sense of, well now, this is something…we're realists, real "politique" (politics).

If there was one problem that I think had affected the French, it was this kind of a nuclear…what is it…that nuclear bomb that radiates everybody?

*Q: Oh yes…a neutron bomb.*

ROSS: Right. In Jimmy Carter's time we had tried to sell that and get it positioned in Europe, I believe.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were very much against the neutron bomb, and they were very much for "rapprochement" (connecting or bringing together) with the Russians.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They weren't prepared to take on communism the way we had announced, sounded the alarm for all that, earlier. Polls showed that if the Russians rolled their tanks across the Fulda Gap and into Europe along through the north and so forth, that the French would accept it. I mean if there was some kind of a big World War II ½ or something, they didn't believe in going out and dying for all this because I guess they saw that Soviet socialism was on the way down.

Now what was also starting to come up was the Right of Jean-Marie Le Pen. I went by accident. I took a pouch run, which you could do—you went and signed up and took the pouch run. They gave you a first class pass on the French Railway, and you ran the pouches down to Marseilles, places like that. That was a wonderful deal that no longer exists, I'm sure. Anyway, I was in Nice, and I walked into this great, big, circus-tent thing where people are saying, "Come on in! Come on in!" and handing out flyers for it. I didn't know what it was. It was like 5,000 or 7,000 people, and they were very well dressed. It was one of the first of the bigger rallies because the movement of Le Pen came to a certain extent out of the south of France because of the North African immigration.

*Q: Yes, it's still his center of power.*

ROSS: Yes, and I went back…this is a good one…I wrote up a little, like two- or three-paragraph report and took it to John Garner and said, "I could make this bigger, because I saw a lot of this, what was going on down there. He said, "Don't get involved in all that!" [Laughter] So I knew the guy over at the embassy who was the French-watcher.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The deputy political officer for internal affairs is what he was called, and I went and told him. So I said, "Can I talk to you?" I went over and called a meeting with him,

and he said, "Oh, we know all about that. That's not important. There's no point in that. I know about that, and I'm not even gonna write a report on it." And I thought, "Oh, okay. Well, maybe he's right!" [Laughter]

When I was first started in Paris, they said, "You'll be in charge of American Political Processes. That'll be good for you." So American elections were coming up. So what do you do? Well, conceive up all these programs and figure out how much it'll cost, and we'll figure out what the budget can be, and find out what's been done, and what are you gonna publish, and who are you gonna get in contact with, and so on. It's like being a producer; I had to learn a lot of these things as I went along.

So I found out that [for] the previous election somebody had gotten hold of an elephant, and somebody had gotten hold of a donkey, and they'd had a big party. But meanwhile I was being approached by French promoters, who were saying, "We can put ze very large telescreen in de middle of the Champs Elysees, and we can do zis, and you rent the big ballroom at the 5,000-room hotel, and you do this, and do that;" and then the political Right and Left of France wanted to attach themselves. So there was this burgeoning interest. It seemed like it was getting bigger every day that I was there because there'd be more kinds of things than it'd be possible to do or conceivable.

So I was telling Lois, and she said, "Now, next thing, Dick, go over to the embassy and have a meeting with people over there to explain what you…and draw down on their ideas." Warren Zimmermann was political officer. So I went over there.

In those days the embassy had very fine, little paneled offices. They had little fireplaces with grates in them, and you could get wood, and have a wood-burning fireplace in your office in the American embassy in Paris—not everybody, to be sure, had this prerequisite. I went in, and First Secretary Zimmermann had his fire going, and he had his feet up on the grate or something like this, and he said, "Well, what do you intend to do? Why did you come see me?" So I [said], "I'm new here, and in fact, I don't speak French very well, and I don't know anybody, and you're here, and I understand that you may have been here before, and well, I need your advice." "Of course. I'd be glad to help you." So I said, "Well, it's been suggested that I organize certain events that have to do with the American election." [With a sudden interested tone of voice] "Events with the American election? Well, why here?" I said, "Well, the French are interested in this, and I'm the American Political Processes person. That's one of the three or four things we have in the country plan, and I've been assigned it, sir." "Well, why do you want to do it here? What do you want to do?" Of course I didn't know what, so I sort of fished around and said, "Well, I understand the last time they had a big event the night of the election, and they had an elephant and a donkey, you know, were brought in from the circus or something like that, and…" "What! What else would you do? An elephant and a donkey?" And I said, "Well, yes. People say—of course I'm new here—that the French have a lively interest, and I thought I'd have a couple of big conferences, one at the conference hall." That was the same hall that they had uptown in the 16th [arrondissement] , where they had the Vietnam peace talks—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: … in International Center (International Conference Center, "Centre De Conferences Internationales"), if you will. And so he's, "There? What? What would you do?" I said, "I'd rent it, and we'd have lots of people from the universities. Paris has sixteen universities and from, you know, important regional universities, and we'll have a luncheon, and we'll do…we'll bring in people from the United States." "Well, why do you want to do that?" I said, "Well, you know, this is…" I said, "The ambassador would like to know about these things too." "Oh! No! The ambassador? I don't think any of this is a good idea, Mr. Ross." He was about like five years older than me. He said, "No, the ambassador's not interested in this! This, this, this would be all wrong. You know, we're the embassy! We're neutral in these things! Don't you understand that?"

So I went off and went back to Lois Roth and didn't know what to tell her. I said, "You know, this is…I must have made a terrible bad impression or something!" Well, of course, I found out later that Ambassador Hartman had had one appointment to the Soviet Union by a Democratic president and another appointment to Paris by…or the other way around.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he had one foot in the Democratic sphere and one foot in the Republican sphere. It's unusual to get big posts from different presidents of different political parties, and he was also very close to Kissinger and people like that, and that was the walking on marble chips business—that's a mixing of metaphor.

Anyway, I did have quite a good thing with the political process, and I did do a lot of writing. I wrote nearly a whole pamphlet, which I don't even have a copy of, which explained the whole thing, and I was explaining down to the county levels and the municipal judges and all this stuff and trying to make it all clear, and of course, draft in French. Some people would say, "Well, why do you…you mean they do that in the United States?" I mean it was useful.

I also wrote on art and other stuff; we did layout and did photographs, did editing too.

*Q: Did you ever run across or deal or observe sort of the French intellectual establishment, which is sort of the commentators, the chattering class, but they're extremely important in France? I mean they would be different than the university level, wouldn't they?*

ROSS: Oh, yes! I did get to know some of them. I became friends with a guy named Jean Marie Benoit, who was kind of a guardian of the principals of the Right, of the conservative, in France. He lived near me, and I found him extremely good in English, and actually, I felt more at home trying to speak to him in French than I did other people because he was an attractive personality. He'd written books on the necessity of defending the conservative position.

Once Reagan was elected, a certain number of people got on the A-list to come over to France. Among them were [Norman] Podhoretz and Midge Decter. Podhoretz, he's a forceful personality, and she is too, and they seemed to know about Benoit. Anyway, they came over, and it was my job to take them around because I was in American Political Process. Of course everybody else in USIS was a little bit liberal. [laughter] They said, "Nobody wanted to really have drinks for Podhoretz," or something like that. Well, I went and did these kinds of things and took them to a restaurant with a conservative group of people—not the Jean-Marie Le Pen crowd, but a different crowd—and they were nice.

I had Tony Dolan [Anthony Dolan], who was Reagan's principal speechwriter, come over and then took him all around. A lot of Americans who were conservative, bankers too—that is to say, economic bankers' speakers—really can't speak much French, so they'd kind of rely on you, they'd kind of hang on you to help them along.

Benoit very good. I got to know Dominique d'Ambra quite well. He wrote in the *Herald Trib [Herald Tribune*. Then I got to know his boss who had started the Institute for International Affairs in France, and I also got to know commentators, Americans who had ideas about France who would come there.

NYU (New York University) has a particularly good relationship with Paris—it's as if it felt like it owned the intellectual establishment there. Anyway, I knew Serge Hurtig, who was the director of Sciences Po, very well because we did a bunch of programs together with him; and I knew people at the institute which was down the street from us, the College de France [Institut de France], and some of them were very senior guys who'd written a whole bunch of books. I knew people at [Université] Paris VI [now IV], the Sorbonne, who had studied America and were the lecturers on it. I got to know a lot of people who perceived that they needed me because I could get them information or stuff like that, but also at the same time I found very interesting because they knew so much about the United States. When I left, George Shedan gave me a beautiful book with a very special binding up of the poems of Rimbaud.

So I did that kind of stuff, and I did some film shows, and I got to know enough people that when the time came down…you see, when I first went there, it was supposed to be a full-year assignment. Then they had a hotshot, young, career supervisor come through Paris, and he had to talk to everybody, and he said, "Well now, how long are you here for?" I said, "Well, I'm gonna stay all four years." "Oh, it's not a four-year assignment!" I said, "It isn't? They told me it was!" He said, "No! No! This is a three-year assignment. All European assignments are now three years. Didn't you know that?" I said, "Well, no, I didn't." He said, "I'm gonna check on that," like, "Be prepared not to stay."

So okay, what do you do? After I was there for awhile I got involved with a bunch of people who worked at UNESCO. There had been a good ambassador there…a woman ambassador [Barbara Newell?], and she had had connections with the American groups of Indians and so forth. Who was that guy that ran for president of the United States [in

1976] from Oklahoma? [Fred Roy Harris] He's a very famous, old congressman, Fred Harris. We had programmed Fred Harris. We programmed a lot of people! He sat up in a chair and said, "Well, I'm gonna tell ya what is the story with America's political situation now in five or ten or fifteen thousand well chosen words!" and by George, he was not underestimating what he did, you know [laughter]. I mean it took him fifteen thousand words, but he told us!

At UNESCO a new ambassador got nominated by President Reagan, named Jean Broward Shevlin Gerard. She was our famous last ambassador to UNESCO. She decided she didn't like the public affairs fellow there who worked for her, who had been in Paris off and on for a long while, and knew everybody, and had a French wife, and so forth, and so she said he had to go. Somebody (the corridor gossip) said he doesn't even know that the red velvet tomahawk's in his back yet.

So I thought, "Well, am I gonna stay here three years or not?" I had already applied to try to go, and they said, "No, you have to stay." They changed it then, because I said, "I'll go be branch PAO in Peshawar, [Pakistan]," because I was getting long in the tooth not to have been a PAO. "Oh! You haven't been a PAO yet? Well, you know, that's too bad for your career!" So I said, "No, I always wanted to be a CAO," which, of course, is not necessarily a good maneuver. So I went over and told her [Gerard], "Well, I'd like to have the job of public affairs advisor in the American mission to UNESCO." So she talked to me for a long while and asked me all kinds of questions, but the subtext of the questions was, "Are you reliable—that is, for me, for the way I am personally, and for what I believe?" I must have been opaque enough or dissembled or something like that, so she called up Charlie Wick [Charles Wick], who was then the director of USIA, and said, "I want Ross to come work for me." This astounded a whole lot of people because I guess they didn't think Ross could pull it off, but it meant I would have another tour in Paris on top of the first one.

Barry Fulton, who was head of USIA personnel [chief of Foreign Service personnel] or USIA something or other, apparently had a meeting (he was back in Washington) where he said, "I'm gonna make it absolutely impossible for Ross to stay there any more than five years in Paris." Everybody always wants to go to Paris, and everybody who's there always wants to stay, and you've got all those poor, benighted souls in Sub-Sahara Africa who all think that they if they bid on it they'll get it. I've actually been to a meeting in Paris where people sat and laughed at the fact of all the people bidding on jobs that they're never gonna get. "They're not gonna get up here. We've got it locked up!" Literally.

So the upshot of it is that I went over to UNESCO, and took Judson Gooding's place. He was in a tremendous rage at the system, at the ambassador, and anybody who got in his way, which included me because I was moving into his office as he was moving out. But later we became good friends, and he's quite a sensitive fella, and I had him even come down and give some talks in Morocco.

Anyway, I worked for Ambassador Gerard, who I'm told now has passed away. The first people I met were her political friends who came hustling into her office. She ran an eccentric kind of ambassadorship. There was kind of a funny attitude of the American delegation: it was, that while we're here UNESCO's a sick monster and should collapse, but it's okay with me if it collapses just as soon as my tour is finished. Then people who were in the Secretariat who were Americans, there were a percentage of them, who'd lived in Paris for 20 years, who all just viewed us with kind of a baleful glance and said, "Oh, well, it's too late for you all to do anything! It's such a mess!"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "And I'll tell you, it's not like it was 20 years ago, but I'm staying until I retire, of course," because nobody wants to leave Paris, or very few people do!

So Ambassador Gerard came and went, and she tended to take long lunches with her friend, Mike Curb's sister. He started a very famous record company in California, and they made tons of money in the pop music industry and moved to Paris and bought himself a Rolls Royce Phantom II convertible and drove around town. Why not? If you have a quarter of a million a year, my advice is move to Paris.

So Gerard's husband was a retired, I guess, some kind of financier from New York, owned land in New Jersey, and had been a general in the 69th Infantry Regiment—or the Seventh, the Seventh Infantry Regiment on Park Avenue.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was the society regiment.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he was concerned with that.

She wore her big $100,000 or whatever it was, eagle pin, for his contributions to the Republican party. The people who came to visit her that I saw were all people who had just pots of money. There were a certain amount of very conservative people; some of them were interesting; some of them weren't. The ambassador would go off to England to the Ditchley Conference or something like that, would be very right wing kind of thing, and she was exceedingly right wing.

It became apparent to me after I'd been there for awhile that really she was hired to stick as many pins and knives into [Amadou-Mahtar] M'Bow [director-general of UNESCO] as possible. After I got there, within about two or three months, she had a speech cobbled up for her, which I didn't have a hand in, saying that the United States was now going to give UNESCO one year to clean up its act, and they had the every-two-year annual conference coming up at the end of that one year, and the United States would see how that was. We stayed there for a year, all the while making more speeches about this threat

to leave UNESCO, and had the every-two-year conference with M'Bow and everybody, and delegations coming in. The delegation that came from the United States was really strange. Some people didn't have passports when they were told they were on the delegation; some people had only traveled, say, to the West Indies or something like that and had no intention of going overseas. It was a political thing. There were other people, the attorney general's wife came, Mrs. Meese, and she was a delegate, and she was a heavy hitter.

*Q: Ursula Meese.*

ROSS: Yes, Ursula Meese, quite a nice lady.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Ed Hennessey was then chief of delegation. He was a New York lawyer—had been one of the, I don't know, inspector generals or counsels for the CIA in Langley and seemed to know something about American interagency workings, but had a practice in New York. He immediately fell into a tremendous struggle with Ambassador Gerard about who would be the point person, and who would lead the delegation, and who would give talks, or who would give backgrounders and briefings and everything. This was all kind of very confusing because at that point, I think, Judson Gooding was allowed to stay on to cover some meetings. Then he got involved with stuff a little bit, and there was a lot of confusion about who said what to whom and who was supposed to speak about this or that. These people were class A personalities, I tell you! I didn't have the strength to do it, besides they were way above me in rank.

Anyway, we went through that biennial conference. It was something else. People would not appear when they were supposed to. I was a delegate too, and I found myself in meetings where big decisions about important kinds of issues were being taken by people who were brought into the convention. I'd be representing the American position, and I wouldn't have been briefed into it at all. If there was anything I was supposed to know, it was to be the New World Information Order, which was kind of a…something that was always lashed out at by the Americans. But there'd be all kinds of other things, say, like a revision of the history of Africa texts, where you'd have 20 people and they're mostly African representatives; you'd have to vote or speak or something like that, and I'd have to say, "I can't cast my vote now," this all being with simultaneous interpreters, and serious stuff, everything being taken down, you know, subplenary session. "I don't have instructions on this at this time. Can I now leave the room, run, try to find somebody?" "What are we gonna do on…or what should we do? Should I just go with it?" you know, these kinds of things. It was a great learning experience.

Actually, there was a guy named Jan de Wilde, an American, who I'm told has gone over to the international organizations, who is now in Geneva, and he was very irreverent. Big, tall, blonde guy.

*Q: He was a brand new vice consul under me in Saigon.*

ROSS: That's right, he was there. He has a lovely wife, and his father was a World Bank figure or something like that.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: And very, very slick, and puts on that sophistication thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Always wrote with the Montblanc pen and all this.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He could skewer people very funny, as if he was Oscar Wilde. Some of the stuff we saw there, I couldn't believe it! Somebody would come steaming in totally drunk and sit down and grab the mike.

*Q: This is for the American delegation?*

ROSS: Yes! Actually, the AEP, shall we put it that way? The Cuban would try to interrupt and just go at it, both of them talking into the mike, and M'Bow would say, "Now, now, this is enough, you know." It just—

*Q: Well, you know, you're mentioning the problems with UNESCO and the United States. I mean you are the new boy on the block. What were your observations about UNESCO at the time when you got there around '82 or '83. I mean what its work was and what the organization was like in Paris?*

ROSS: The one word that springs to mind is "fromage" (cheese)—that is to say, it was just a big slice of cheesecake for anybody who wanted to get there and get themselves into a position. People jockeyed all the time to get jobs there because then they got the international salary. There was a lot of kind of make work—people seemed like their offices would be full of projects and stuff, but I don't think they did very much compared to the old days. They went into a tremendous amount of hairsplitting argument about what was the New World Information Order (NWIO), and then they got into big struggles, say, with the Algerians and the Cubans and everybody, and who had a right to say what. They were arguing about the cultural position of the world.

*Q: Well, if I recall, the New World Information Order, as we saw it, was basically that the press should be under the control of governments, wasn't it?*

ROSS: Right, on all the new governments, that would be nonaligned governments, if you will; all said no; said that, "Of course they don't understand these cultures. We applaud the fact that you think that you have a free press and that you can do anything you want, but you just don't realize you have what they call self-censorship there. Since the press

barons own everything, whether it's William Randolph Hearst or somebody, you people are manipulating your press against us, so the only way we can defend ourselves is to explain ourselves from the prime minister down, and he will control what goes in the newspaper."

Then you get into things like what correspondents will be allowed into which countries, and what correspondents will be allowed to file, and this accreditation and all that. America through Freedom House and through other heavy hitting organizations had NGOs there watching this stuff. There were different people with different axes to grind, and that always seemed to get into the argument.

*Q: But to put it, in a way we had a right wing administration under Reagan, particularly early Reagan, but at the same time to be perfectly fair, UNESCO hit the wrong buttons across our political spectrum. I mean correct me if I'm wrong, but 1) it was, as you say, a bunch of fromage. I mean it had nothing, it was a place full of nepotism and good living with a lot of American dollars involved.*

ROSS: Absolutely!

*Q: The other one was it was a control mechanism over the press.*

ROSS: That was just even one of them; it was control mechanism on all kinds of cultural ideas, on the theory of culture.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: I mean East Culture, Afro Centrist, and on a lot of colonial resentment, which seemed to have wound up into UNESCO. It was a forum for all these things. The people who were really the logicians of it tended to be like Cubans who could really do that Marxist analysis of all this stuff, and a lot of Sub-Sahara people just went along and voted whichever way they were told to.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: M'Bow had come up a long way. His first language from Senegal wasn't the major language; it was a tribal language; and he'd been a sergeant in the French army, an automobile mechanic or telephone mechanic, and he derived to the distinction of being the director general; and he'd brought other people along.

There was one chap who came, God bless him, up from Sub-Sahara Africa, and his country was so poor it didn't have enough money to send him. So when they didn't have enough money to send him, M'Bow could cut money loose from whatever big pile of money he had, central funds, and give people travel and per diem for this conference. At the end of the conference this wonderful, simple guy who was obviously a farmer—they had new clothes on that they didn't take off the labels on the outside, it still had the labels on the outside because they thought that you wore the label, the little stitched on. They

asked him what he would suggest to improve the conference, and he said, well, he wasn't staying in a very great hotel, but it was nice, but it was a little far from UNESCO in the Seventh, and what he would suggest is if they could move the subway stop closer to UNESCO—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So that people could get out across the street from UNESCO instead of having to walk in the rain or something like that. That was one of the few times that I saw M'Bow cut in and say, "Well, thank you." You know, "au France", [laughter] thank you for your intervention.

*Q: Well, were there any things that UNESCO was doing that you felt were worthwhile?*

ROSS: Some of the science stuff seemed to be very interesting. Now I didn't have any hand in that. Some education and some science—and that is to say, coordinating either country things like water catchment flows or whatever they're called, like the Rhine River's a giant mess, and they keep trying to clean it up—well, UNESCO helps with some of that; and some of the scientific kind of thing, just like mapping in the Third World where it's very hard to do, where you can bring people together; and then some education stuff. But for the most part it was all wordage; that's my feeling after I got there.

The Americans who worked there would say, "Oh, this place is a mess!" While we were there, people were playing jokes on M'Bow, tricks like letting the air out of his tires on his cars because he had three or four Mercedes. Somebody would sneak around and let the air out of his tires, and then it would get around, or put too much salt in the food in the cafeteria or something, kind of strange stuff. Who did this? Nobody knew.

*Q: Well, what were you…I mean, you know, you're the public affairs officer—*

ROSS: Right.

*Q: …and normally you would be contacting delegations and getting the word out and all this.*

ROSS: Right, yes, yes.

*Q: I mean but how did this work in this particular case for you?*

ROSS: In retrospect, I see myself a little bit as a handler for Ambassador Gerard to get her to do this or to do that or to get her to agree that these remarks that she was gonna make are all right, which you could never tell whether she was going to do it or not.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: One time it was arranged that Chirac, who was mayor of Paris, wanted to give her a distinction of some sort, the medal of the city of Paris, because of her conservative connections. Notice I never say right wing; I always say conservative. Anyway, she went off to Castille with some friends. They had the thing set up at the Mairie de Paris (town hall of Paris), and Chirac was there, and it was supposed to be at 1:30. They couldn't find her and couldn't find her and couldn't find her. It was four o'clock, and they found her just in one of these (these are very, very chichi) restaurant things. She said, "To hell with it!" like it's not important. So there was a certain amount of making sure that the guest list was right for her.

I found out I was in Tibet—that mode, you know. The people have to be good, and they have to be available because she's gonna have somebody big from New York, an old member of Congress, but she's not gonna have the party yet. So we had to call people up and ask them if they'd be free that night if there is a party. So I had Danny Wattenberg come work as my assistant. (You know the guy on television, Ben Wattenberg. He's written a bunch of books, he's a big commentator.) His son [Danny] came; Ben Wattenberg pulled a wire and got his son a job in USIA and then an overseas excursion tour. Danny had been with the *New York Times*, even, as he admitted, as a copy boy. He came over and he did a lot of stuff. He was considered a theoretician of the junior wing of the conservative element because Jeane Kirkpatrick had spotted him one time at a dinner party and said, "My goodness, that guy's very well informed. You're the best spoken young man I've ever heard." So you know, one thing led to another. So he was working for me, and he finally blew up and said, "Well, I'm not supposed to be doing this. I'm not supposed to be doing guest lists for parties!" as if junior officers all over the world didn't actually do that. He said, "I'm supposed to be doing think pieces." So he quit after we left UNESCO and went back and did hatchet jobs on Clinton, I think.

We didn't have a principle position except that we really were going to get out, and to say that we were waiting for a year to give them a chance for M'Bow to clean up his act. It was already decided.

*Q: Well, did anybody give a _____ in the regular apparatus of UNESCO about how the United States was positioned? I'm talking about the non-American staff.*

ROSS: Everybody said, "It's a shame! You shouldn't leave." That was 1) because of the money, but 2) because in the old days there was kind of a principle of operation at UNESCO, going back to Huxley, I think. Wasn't he with it? Not Julian Huxley, but another one [Aldous Huxley]. In the '50s there were some triple thinkers and stuff like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Of the staff that I knew, the guy I replaced, he was in a rage, and he didn't care whether we stayed in or not. There was a guy who was an ex-Jesuit priest, who was in Education, Ray [Warner]; he's just retired recently from the State Department; he was in IO (Bureau of International Organization Affairs); he did care, but he also cared about

being assigned to Paris. There was Jan DeWilde, the Wild, who saw this merely as moving on.

*Q: But I was thinking about the non-American professional staff of UNESCO. Was there any attempt to sort of do something, or were they just couldn't care less whether the United States was in or not?*

ROSS: The American professional staff in the Secretariat were scared that if we pulled out, that their jobs would be cut down, although we had less percentage than what we were entitled to. The British actually, believe it or not, had the most of anybody, if you just counted everybody, and then the French.

People tended to bemoan the fact that UNESCO didn't have the kind of intellectual clarity that it used to. It had devolved into a lot of sniping; and M'Bow hadn't really done anything to cut it out, in fact, may have encouraged it in a way to divide and conquer, but then got into kind of a manager of a mess; and no matter what he did, it was attacked!

So he towards the end he was trying very hard to build/mend fences. During the conference Charlie Wick came over as a delegate. He'd gotten himself named a delegate, and he was going to attend some part of it, and I went to the airport and met him. I was his handler or his escort, and that was very interesting indeed.

*Q: How did that work out?*

ROSS: He had come to be mistrusted by the career Foreign Service officers' staff, but they wouldn't give him a break! So immediately, since I was going around with him, they said, "Are you holding his lead raincoat for him?" "Oh, you're, yeah, Ross, you're the, you know, like _____ person," like "What's he up to now?" Well, these are the guys who were above me who worked for him. They were laughing behind his back; they were over in the corner sniggering.

I tried to get them to do this and that and the other thing, but they wanted him to come to a special UNESCO evening where everybody's delegation had cooked all the food of their various countries. M'Bow got me and said, "You must get Director Wick to come. I'm looking forward to it."

Director Wick had called me up after the explosion, the bomb, which busted up our apartment. He called me directly, which I didn't expect and said, "Richard Ross, how are you?" That was before I went to UNESCO. Then when Ambassador Gerard said she wanted me to work, he remembered me again because he just told his personnel, you know how they do it at the top, just get that person there.

So I said, "You've got to go to UNESCO right now, tonight." "I don't wanna. I don't want to go. You go instead of me." I said, "Well, you know Director M'Bow wants you to go." "No, I'm tired, I didn't sleep on the plane. I don't feel well…" this or that and the other thing. What he actually wanted to do was go over to see Evan Galbraith, the

ambassador in Paris—we had different ambassadors; I'm talking about the ambassador to the French—and I don't know, discuss politics, which is what a lot of people wanted to do when they came to Paris. It doesn't happen in a lot of other countries that I've ever been in, but it must happen a lot in England too, like they want to buy ties or they want to do this, but they want to talk politics, ya da da da.

So he didn't come, and I had to go over to UNESCO and see the terrible tragic look in M'Bow's eyes. He said, "He didn't come." It was like he cut M'Bow, and also the subtext there, if I can use that fancy word, was that this is the handwriting on the wall. We don't care about you, and it's gonna be gone for a six as soon as possible. So even M'Bow couldn't do anything, even if he knew how to do it.

*Q: You left. Were you there when we turned the lights off on our delegation?*

ROSS: Yes. I was there. Somebody in Washington pulled a wire, and said they could be a UNESCO watcher. So we were no longer members of UNESCO, but we had people in IO (the Bureau of International Organization Affairs) back in the States and also people that may have been assigned to Paris, were living in Paris, whose job it was to be observers, which we then pulled a wire to get because there were all kinds of observers. There were first-, second-class NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and all that other stuff.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So everybody went back, and then everybody waited. How long will it be before I can get back into UNESCO, like Ray Warner, the education officer. The science guy was wonderful.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Everybody dispersed, and Ambassador Gerard went back, and the old man, her husband, died, who was a lot older than her. As I'm told, he was on his deathbed, and she came in. She was with Cadwalader, Wickersham, and Taft (law firm), and went in and brought him a new will, which he signed; and then he died, and then the children saw the new will, and sued her. Now, this is all hearsay. Maybe this didn't happen. But anyway, she's passed away too now.

*Q: Well, before we end this session, I want to go back to the time when you were with our embassy to France.*

ROSS: Yes, yes.

*Q: You mentioned your connection to Sciences Po, which is, of course, the head sort of place that turns out the cadre of leaders of France, doesn't it?*

ROSS: Actually, Sciences Po was started after the Franco-Prussian War because the French couldn't figure out what happened to them after they got beat so handily.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There are what they call the "grandes écoles" (highly selective schools) that go back further...

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and they're all around where I lived. The most distinguished one, where Giscard d'Estaing had gone is the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA – National School of Public Administration). I had connections into a bunch of these things. The "L Écoles des Ponts et Chaussees" (School of Bridges and Roads) was right next to us, and that's very important, and the grande école [École Polytechnique] of France is important too.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You don't realize this at first, but these people get trained and then go right into management responsibilities.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The one you're talking about, [Sciences Po], I used to send some speakers there. I got in with the English teaching crowd there because I had an American friend, Olivier, who was an instructor of English there and at the Quai d'Orsay. They were a little bit difficult to reach; I could reach Sciences Po faster than others.

*Q: Well, did you sense during this time, because relations and attitudes between the United States and France…I think our present Secretary of State once said, that the Americans and the French have been in marriage counseling for over 200 years.*

ROSS: Oh [laughter], that's good! That's good!

*Q: Did you sense, was there any sort of thrust to what you were getting at, because this is what you were attuned to, towards the schools that you had connections with as far as—*

ROSS: Well, I didn't get a dislike of the Americans ever. I got a certain pragmatic attitude. They never, in any case, disliked the embassy or the Americans, and they said, "We always try to work with them."

*Q: It seems that one of the strains that run through the intellectual French society is a certain disdain for things for America. Did you catch any of this?*

ROSS: You know, I know what you're asking, but either I'm not sensitive enough to this, or else I don't think it's there. I think that Aldous Huxley said that "There aren't very many fine things in life,"…this is a quote from a novel, "and perhaps a lot of them are French." I think that the French think that they do things a certain way that's better than anything else, like they take their food seriously, literally, very serious like that; and they're real good about a lot of stuff: hunting, masculinity, sports, and what have you, this or that; and there's a certainty about that. But they didn't dislike the United States. If anything, they found it slightly amusing, like Reagan was slightly amusing, "Well, he's a cowboy. He's an actor."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "Well, what do you expect? He's an actor." I didn't run into the snotty Left of the people, who just despaired and thought that the U.S. …I'd say … I don't know where they are. I'll tell you, frankly, the Left had been kind of collapsed.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The French Communist Party with that guy, the head of it, [Georges Marchais], JoJo was his nickname, when he got on television, people laughed at him. When he made a big public pronouncement, everybody just commented on it and laughed at him, the same way that they'd laugh at Jesse Ventura or something. He kept running and running, and his percentage would keep going down and down. I mean he'd been around since the '40s or something like that, and so everybody thought this is good stuff. But they saw the French were changing. One out of five people in France live in the Greater Paris region, or one out of six.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Everybody wants to get there, and everybody wants to live inside the old walls, not in the "banlieue" (suburbs). Everybody wants to be inside, and that's a certain amount of being Right and being slightly conservative about things—it's sort of like being on the upper west side in New York—so that it was kind of a knowledging comprehension that, "we understand America." I even met people who wore cowboy boots there and would say to you, "I'm the first person that brought in cowboy boots to Paris," or something [laughter] like that.

The big event was, of course, the socialist's election, and for us the big event was, of course, the Reagan election and how that would change things. But they didn't dislike the United States too much.

*Q: Yes. Okay. Well, we'll pick this up the next time.*

ROSS: Oh! I want to say one thing. They disliked the United States intensely when the franc fell so badly.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It got to be like 15 or 17 to a dollar.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was towards the end of the time I was there. So everybody could come to Paris, and there were articles in the papers that would say, "Why do we have to have these bus drivers from Toledo, Ohio coming here? These people don't know anything! They don't properly appreciate us. Why are they coming here? Can't we do something about that?" There's that kind of a problem with Americans.

*Q: Today is 11 September 2003. Dick, you were in the U.S. when to when…by year?*

ROSS: I came over in 1984? And I left in 1988. That's four years time.

*Q: What were you doing in USIA?*

ROSS: I came back. I didn't have to seek a job. They suction pumped me back into NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs), and I was a desk officer. As somebody said, I was a little bit long in the tooth to be a desk officer. I handled Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and, I think, Sri Lanka.

*Q: What sort of things did you do?*

ROSS: Well, a desk officer, essentially, is somebody who's a general dogsbody. He reads all the cables, and he responds to any that seem to need action. Then he does whatever the NEA or whatever the area director wants, who was Jim Thurber when I started, and Kenton Keith was his deputy. The desk officer also calls up the posts. At that time we had started telephoning everybody, which had been something one didn't do before, like a decade before, and finds out what's going on and asks them what they're up to. So you call the PAO or the IO, and you find out what the programs are, if they need any support. The desk officer usually checks with people who are going out to the post in the way of cultural presentations or some Fulbright things. He also checks with people who are coming back in from the post. He keeps kind of cuff notes on everything that's going on, and he's supposed to know about all the flaps that are occurring in the embassy or between the embassy and USIA, or between USIA personnel, and what programs are successful, and what aren't.

The desk officer got to go out, unless there was a bad financial problem, once a year on kind of a tour d'horizon of the posts. He would talk to everybody informally. When he came back, he was supposed to have stuff in a draft kind of way for the area director, who had to write the PAOs' [evaluations?]. Sometimes the area director had gone out, and sometimes he hadn't, but he liked to have a framework to start off with. So you had to write a report of your trip, and you had to sort of touch on how everything was going or wasn't going.

The desk officer helped with stateside events that would have something to do with the area. For instance, there was sort of a South Asia conference and a Pakistan center for Pakistan-American studies, which was run out of Villanova University, [Pennsylvania]. I ginned up a big conference at the Smithsonian, and had a reception at the Renwick Gallery [of the National Museum of American Art], got some money out of Central Funds of USIA, got people invited, different speakers, and then got people to attend from Pakistan. These were people in the cultural sphere, education and culture, and it was whither Pakistan-American cooperation. I don't remember the exact title, but it also had to do with education. At that time there was contemplated development of a great big educational machine funded by the Ford Foundation for Pakistan. It actually got ginned up and started and then was shut down when at one point we withdrew all of our funding for this kind of stuff.

*Q: It had to do the nuclear developments in Pakistan.*

ROSS: Yes, exactly. And now of course it's back on, I think.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: You know, so this thing sort of swings in and out.

*Q: You had a good solid look at the administration. How did you find the leadership or direction of USIA at this time?*

ROSS: Well, to speak frankly, I knew some people who got into what they called the front office or the front end of things.

[Inaudible], the man who was PAO almost the whole time I was in Paris with Jack Hedges, had gone in as counselor of the agency following, I think, Jock Shirley. He had to keep everything swept together in the Foreign Service end for Wick.

Then there was a fella who'd also been in Paris, named Sheridan Bell, who'd gone to Sciences Po, had been a marine in Vietnam, an officer, and spoke fluent Chinese and fluent French; and his wife, Sally, is, as I'm told now, I think she is a Jungian analyst; and Sher is retired, and I've seen him since he retired. So he told me a little bit, and other people told me a little bit.

You heard what happened down the hall because NEA was on the same floor as the director's office. Mr. Wick ran the show. He could be very graceful, and he could be very entertaining—he was a great piano player, and knew all the show tunes and things like that, I mean in a social setting. But he ran an extremely high-key operation for USIA where it wasn't unusual to get shouted at or get told to get out [laughter], and he actually fired people in his meetings. "I've had enough of you! You get out!" I think maybe I'm telling stories out of school, but I think he fired Bob Earle one day, and the report came down that Earle's been canned. But poor Bob because he caught all the flack for so long.

He was, to a certain extent, Wick's whipping boy. He was chief of staff or something like that.

Well, anyway, what had happened one day is he fired Earle at a meeting by screaming at him, "Get out! You're not gonna work for me anymore!" up in large decibels, kind of Hollywood style. Earle left, and apparently he came back after Wick told people he'd been fired. He went away, and then he came back after lunch and was cleaning out his desk, which you have to do. Wick came back in, and he saw him sitting at his desk, and he said, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm getting rid of my stuff." It was in an ante office to the director's suite. Wick said, "Oh, well, you can stay, you know. It's all right. Forget about it!" kind of thing. You never knew who's on first sometimes, and there were a lot of stories about this or that, or what happened, or what didn't, who said what to who in the front office. But let me never let this story go without saying that most of the heavy breathers also feared Wick. They did what he wanted as much as they could or as they could see their way to do it because he had this magic of his wife Mary Jane and President Reagan's wife—

*Q: Nancy Reagan.*

ROSS: …Nancy, were very close friends. They had had their kids grow up and be teenagers across the fence from each other in the suburb of Los Angeles where they lived, and they actually were what would have been called soccer [moms]…it wasn't called soccer moms in those days…but they became good friends. As Ronald Reagan moved from stepping stone to stepping stone, Director Wick, Charlie, stayed with him and was, I think, his Santa Claus at Christmas time.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: That is he actually got dressed up as Santa Claus and went over to Governor Reagan's house and then later to, if I'm correct on this, to President Reagan's house and showed up in a Santa Claus suit and dispensed jollity.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So he had this fantastic entrée. He also knew a lot of people in Hollywood. I had an interesting experience with Director Wick. This goes back to UNESCO and things like that.

As I noted, I was one of his principal order, the supposed escort for him in Paris. We were doing all kind of things like rushing around trying to set up bilaterals where he would talk to people. The word came through that he saw the Greek delegation. It had Melina Mercouri on it.

*Q: She was the minister of culture then.*

ROSS: Yes, and she was at the conference too with her husband the famous director, Jules Dassin. He had filmed *Never on Sunday* with her. He was a great director in Hollywood, and actually left because of, I think, these Leftist leanings and did shoot films in London. He shot a film with Richard Widmark in London, I believe.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He worked, and of course, she did too. So h=Wick said he wanted to see her—

*[Beginning of tape 8, side B, with Richard Ross]*

*Q: You were saying they were expecting Charlie Wick?*

ROSS: Right. Well, I didn't know anything other than we'd set up this requested interview with the Greek minister of culture, and of course we knew who she was and everything, but I didn't see her. I saw her as a reserved, older woman. Well, [we] rang the doorbell, and a servant opened it, who had been apparently brought [along], a private secretary sort of thing, and we went in. Director Wick's eyes were flashing. From another room in the suite comes the great actress Melina Mercouri, and she rushes up, and she's dressed just as a great star would be.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: She throws her arms around him and says, "Chaaalie, Chaaalie, how are you?" Then along comes Dassin, and we go into a sort of a sitting area of the suite and sit down, and she says, "Nooow we will have champagneeeeee," and is really quite elegant. They immediately fall to talking, and they talked about old Hollywood stuff. "Whatever happened to so and so? Do you remember when he did that? Do you know? Well, she's still got a house there, and that person, I haven't seen them in 15 years. Poor old Sonny Tufts! He could never get a role after he announced he was a Republican," and all this kind of stuff, and even though that they could be sort of on absolute different poles as far as their politics…

*Q: Now she was very much left wing.*

ROSS: Oh, yes.

*Q: And Wick was very much right wing.*

ROSS: Very much so. So it came down to the crux of it. She said now she was going to bring up, and she got serious, the business of the Elgin marbles, and she's gonna bring up something in UNESCO. [Laughter] This is sort of like the forum for it, and we're going to push real hard for the English to give them back. At that point Director Wick started getting a banker's sort of visage on his face, and you got kind of looking in the middle of this and said. So she pushed it a lot more, "Chaaalie, you have to help me! Now we haaave to do something! We're going to get these marbles back, you know. They belong

to us, everybody knows it! You know it! Can you do anything? What can you do? You can talk to your president, and he can talk to Margaret Thatcher." I think was prime minister) "You can do something! How can you help us Chaaalie?" So he thought for a moment or more than a moment, and finally he said, "Let me see if I can get some of the boys up in Las Vegas to get in on this," [laughter], which…I…it was said half jesting, I didn't know what to say. He had the very, very, very finest trace of amusement when he said it. They both looked at him, and then everybody kind of chuckled. But I thought, "Wow!" So maybe that gives a little bit of a temper to the way that Director Wick carried on and was perceived, and he loved this kind of stuff.

He also loved to make home movies. He once had a formal visit to Germany where he was welcomed by the prime minister of Germany, and he flew into Bonn in some kind of an Air Force C-9 or whatever it is. The door opened; they rolled up a ramp; it was a small jet. I wasn't there, but this is the story I heard; I heard him tell this story too. He came out first with a Super-8 movie camera or else a small video camera if they had been invented then.

*Q: Yes, I don't think so.*

ROSS: Yes, and he came out, and he videoed all around in every direction, and he went down the steps, and he walked toward this sort of a cortege of people waiting for him, and somebody came up to him and said, "Where's, where's Mr. Wick?" I guess they thought he was the cameraman! He loved that! I mean he stood on ceremony, but on the other hand he liked to be perceived as sort of being impish about a lot of these things, and maybe that had that particular brand of charm added to the Santa Claus effect.

Anyway, he could sit down at the piano and knock out the show tunes, and he knew everybody in Hollywood, and he was very close to the president of the United States. He didn't travel very much at first overseas, and so all the PAOs, the big boys in the rag one countries were all calling each other up or sending each other messages or whatever they do and saying, "What's the story? When is he coming? What's going on back there?" And it more or less went like that.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He brought some very interesting people into the agency and tried to do a lot of different things, modernize it in kind of a West Coast fashion, and brought in some strange people too.

He brought in this important fellow who sort of revived the Jersey waterfront with these water taxis, Arthur E. Imperatore Sr., who was a boy wonder and was [built] a trucking company in New Jersey. People laughed at him when he said he was gonna get a hold of the Fort Lee waterfront, across from Manhattan. He set up all these water taxis, and there are railheads there where you can probably run in suburban transit and things like that.

But Imperatore came in, and he was gonna be the ombudsman for the agency. He went all around and all around and went overseas, and finally he came back, and he said, "This thing's a mess! This is a terrible mess, and I can't be…I can't get any ideas that I suggest anybody to look at them." So he got mad and quit, or didn't get mad and quit. He went away. So there were these kinds of things that were happening.

Anyway, I was concerned with the regular stuff of South Asia, and Afghanistan had gotten heated up.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I got more and more occupied with Afghanistan. I was interested in it since I'd been there through the coups and the revolution. It began to take up more of my time. Mike Pistor came in as the area director following Jim Thurber.

Thurber had been a political appointee. He had been at Stanford University and a newspaperman, *Wall Street Journal* person. He came to Washington, and his wife worked for Alan Cranston.

*Q: Senator from California.*

ROSS: Right, the liberal end of things. I think he went back; he cast the great oath and went back to California.

Mike Pistor later became, I think, also counselor of the agency or ambassador to a West African country [Malawi]. He's still around; maybe you've talked to him. He actually knows, and I think he would agree with me, he knows where a lot of the bodies are buried.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: To go back to it, Jack Hedges didn't last but a year. It was impossible for him to handle. You had to have a certain kind of a resiliency, and Jack was an amazingly clever man. As I said, he'd been in Paris four or five times, and he knew a lot of things, but it was impossible with Wick. This is what I'm told. He never told me that because he would never say anything like that. It was so arranged that he was nominated for an embassy, and he got agreement and approval of the Senate, but he was diagnosed with a galloping cancer of the lungs, I believe, and never went to his embassy, which was sort of too bad. His funeral was at St. John's Church at Lafayette Park, and it was one of those polite times when a lot of people show up, and John Reinhardt gave the talk and all that stuff. I remember all that.

Anyway, Afghanistan…they said, all right, they're going to have a special budget for Afghanistan in USIA because people had run through congress things to start, like a media service for Afghanistan.

*Q: To put it in picture, at this point we didn't have a functioning embassy.*

ROSS: No. The embassy was shut down.

*Q: And the war between the Soviets and the various forces in Afghanistan was in full swing.*

ROSS: Yes, it was. Yes, thank you. That's important, and it was a sort of high noon for the Soviets there, and they were getting boxed in, actually, by the stinger missiles.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They were having 50,000 – 70,000 troops there who were becoming demoralized. In order for them to go out, they had to have tank cover (this is kind of germane to our present time) everywhere they went as soon as they went out of garrison. In order for the tanks to be covered from rocket propelled grenades and things like that, they had to have helicopter cover; but the helicopters could get knocked down, so they'd have to have MIGs to cover the helicopters—this is what has been explained to me by strategists. So once the Stinger was brought in, which can knock a MIG out (a MIG 21 or a MIG 25) and very, very accurate—the best thing in the world I think they've come up with, better than the British thing called the blowpipe, which is now on the arms market a lot. MIGs couldn't fly, therefore the helicopters couldn't fly, therefore the tanks couldn't move. The tanks couldn't go around because you could get up in the passes and up on the sides of mountains and shoot down at the tanks, and they couldn't get up at you because they had to be on whatever tracks there were. They were building all these great, dugout fortresses down there in the Tora Bora region.

So I was reading a lot of traffic. It was all happening so fast I didn't grasp it all. You had to know the languages, the influence of the Pashto or Ahmed Shah Massoud, the line of the Panjshir Valley, was he Uzbek, or why did the Uzbeks like him, and whatever the Tajiks, and this business. It was just a thousand things all going on, and it changed, more or less, every week or ten days.

Congress gave a half a million dollars to set up an Afghan media service, and Boston University (BU) got the bid, and got the contract, and then immediately started a big fight at BU about it. The people who were the liberals and the internationalists and the people who didn't think we should be fishing in troubled waters were against BU getting this contract. The hawks on the faculty in the journalism department were for it. So that split the faculty or the people who were concerning themselves with politics into two camps, and they all started firing letters at each other and asking for…I don't know, the faculty senate votes or this or that—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and questioning people's motives here and there, including the president of the university, John Silber. Then there were players over on the Hill, like Charlie Wilson

[Charles Wilson] of Texas, Congressman Wilson. So they set up a special office to run this media, this half a million dollars; and to give these contracts out; and to try to train journalists who were Afghans, who maybe never worked for a newspaper or anything like that, to carry little Super-8 cameras or little video cameras; and to try to set up a free news service, and of course it listed radio stations already; and to try to set up a regular feed in Persian, Dari, Pashto, and in different languages into Afghanistan. They appointed me the director of Afghan Office, and so I no longer was a desk officer.

They had another man who was an old hawk, who had either come from or gone to Havana. Cuba to a certain extent attracted right wing Foreign Service officers—this is the fact of the matter—who wanted to make sure that we kept clipping Fidel Castro's wings. So Saul had come from there. He was a battler, and he was a lawyer, and he was one of these guys that you start almost every meeting by saying, "You argue all the way up the courthouse steps."

They had all kinds of struggles with how to award the contract of this money. I wasn't an operative on it. I was just supposed to sit there and make sure it all went smoothly; and also to coordinate other events which I could get money from Central funds for, like give money to conferences—like say $10,000 to a conference at Oxford University on the condition of Afghan refugees; or else to try to find out what other people in Human Rights were doing in other countries and try to get an overall program working out of Geneva; and to try to get articles written by other country intellectuals or political observers, and find out what they were doing, and see if they were being placed in Italy or something like that; and to report on all this, which I did. I was doing this for about 18 months I think, because as a desk officer I had a couple of years in the South Asia business and then Afghanistan.

I thought I better go out there. I was dying to go into Afghanistan, and I was under direct order, "Don't you ever dare try to do it!" because I had a black passport. I got orders cut on a Starlifter flight out of Andrews [Air Force Base], went out through Europe to a base in Pakistan and stayed there, then went up to Peshawar, [Pakistan]. I tried to acclimate myself about what was going on there with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Sayyaf and some of the principals in the Afghan resistance movement, who mainly fought amongst themselves it seemed to me. Hekmatyar had gotten the lion's share of the material, and perhaps money too, because he seemed to have more organized troops. There were like six or seven principal leaders, and they were in and out of Peshawar and then would go in and out of the country. I stayed in Peshawar, I guess, three weeks at the then-PAO's house.

*Q: Was there any disquiet among your group about the whys of religious fundamentalism, who was directing a lot of this?*

ROSS: Oh, very much so, because there were the different factions in the Afghan resistance, and they had loosely tied themselves together with meetings. In fact, five of the seven were brought to the United States, maybe six, to try to have a public conference to try to get more exposure to them. Some of them were secular; one had been president

or professor at Kabul University; and there were some who were religious "mullahs" (male religious leaders); and then there were some who were like, well, Hekmatyar particularly, supported perhaps by the Saudis, kind of like "Wahhabi" (members of a puritanical Muslim sect founded in Arabia and revived by ibn-Saud in the 20th century) slightly; and some of them seemed to be kinder people; having met them, some had nice, you know what I mean, open faces, and some of them, right out Richard Burton or something. They all wore their national dress—not all; I should say one or two didn't. But there was quite a difference.

There was some uncertainty about which way all this was going, but at the political leadership at the top of the U.S. Information [Agency] people didn't care, and the senators who were involved didn't care, I mean who were ginning up money for USIA, identifying, particularly, line item money for USIA expenditures, as well as pots and pots of money for the resistance in general. That wasn't a consideration.

I must tell you that having lived in Afghanistan two years, people (if anybody ever listens to this) will probably think I'm a very biased fellow, but one comes to accept what is traditional or contemporary in the society one is in, and you can't necessarily change it. You can say, "I can't work here," and leave. But when you see, say, the poorer classes, sixty percent perhaps of the people of the country, the women are wearing "chador" (large black cloth worn as a combination head covering, veil, and shawl), you're not going to change that. Maybe you don't say "viva la difference" (Long live the differences), but you do see that that's the way it is, and it's not necessarily going to change very fast. I'm talking about the fundamentalism. That said, the U.S. and when I was in Afghanistan, we encouraged as much as possible as many women to go to the United States and study.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I had been in Heart, staying at not such a grand hotel, but the best one in town. My wife and I were there one time at the Mowafaq Hotel, and all these women came in in chador. Upstairs they had this gorgeously setup drawing room, what you would call a hall, all decorated and beautiful flowers. It was a wedding, and as the women got out of the cars, they threw back the chador, and they all had to-die-for permanents and beautiful clothes, and they all went upstairs. It was obviously the merchant class of Herat booked for some wedding. So they did have a contemporary part of their lives.

The poorer people, the poorer class, everybody aged fast, and was beat down. Then, of course, the peasants, which might have been sixty percent of the whole country, tied to the land or else to grazing, transhumance, they were all…you couldn't wish to change that right away.

*Q: No.*

ROSS: That would take a giant political movement, which they nominally say they're doing now, but I don't see that happening either right away. I mean it might take 10 or 20 years, if indeed it comes to that.

I can remember later on driving around Afghanistan and seeing very, very conservative children as sheep herders, except that they didn't have conservative-like Afghan bed sheet and pillow case to use the joke phrase. They wore bale clothes, second-hand clothes that were sold in the bazaar. In every third world country in the whole world there's a second-hand clothing bazaar; and in Afghanistan, by the way, it's always been called mixen bazaar.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: And no one knew exactly why.

But anyway, to go back to "Did I see concern about the religious…?" Yes, there was some concern, but it was muted in the face of, this is a chance to get the Russians, to let them have their Vietnam, to let them run onto dry ground, and I would say that was an acceptable position.

*Q: What were we doing in India? I mean at that point relations weren't very good, were they, with India?*

ROSS: I wasn't desk officer for India, and I don't recall very much except I think Indira [Gandhi] had gotten shot. No, our relations weren't good with India for a long while. Whenever our relations are good with Pakistan, which they were then because we needed the Pakistan secret military establishment to supply the "mujaheddin" (Islamic warriors), whenever we're handy with Pakistan, then it goes without saying that we're not gonna be popular in India. I don't think we were doing very much; and we always like to sell them arms, but I don't think we did then.

*Q: Well, I'd like to move on, Dick. You left in '88. Where did you go?*

ROSS: I went to Rabat, Morocco as CAO.

*Q: And you were there from when to when?*

ROSS: I was there till '92, four years.

*Q: So you were there '88 to '92. How did you get the job?*

ROSS: Well, the area director was Ed Panne, and he came to me and said, "We can't let you go. You have to go take that job. If you want it, it's yours." It was a senior Foreign Service job. It was on the books, so I thought, well, this is good. Maybe I'll have a chance to be promoted because one always thinks about things like that. So off I went.

I did have a language refresher course before I left, and I studied Dardja, which is the North African-Arabic dialect of Morocco; well, that's what it's called. I couldn't understand a word of it, and as a matter of fact, Middle Eastern Arabs can't understand a word of it either. So after three or four weeks of it, there was one instructor, and he was sitting across the table from me like you are, and he had a ruler, and he'd pop it. He'd say, "Washbrakey!" [sound of ruler smacking desk], "Washbrakey!" [sound of ruler smacking desk]. You were supposed to say it exactly like him. Well, it was like being under Sister Pascau in the third or second grade.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: That's the way he ran it, and he was the only one who taught it. They kept him there because they needed to have somebody to teach it. But everybody universally said, "Don't take Dardja or any other dialect from him. You'll go crazy!" There was one person, only one, who had finished before me, who had said, "Don't take it! You'll go crazy!" It was a military officer. And this was an FSI course, and I said, "Well, what happened to you?" He said, "Well, I finished it, but I think I'm going crazy. Don't you take it!" So I switched over to Standard Modern Arabic, which was taught in another building—good classes, lots of students, too many people in a class, all crammed in. That's where I picked up what Arabic I have, I guess I should say.

*Q: Well then, when you got out to Rabat, who was the ambassador?*

ROSS: There was no ambassador because the ambassador who was up, [Harry Bergold] couldn't get through his confirmation hearings because he'd blotched his copy book in Romania, and he was held up for quite a while. There was a chargé. [Wendy Chamberlain] who is now an ambassador, or was recently, in Pakistan.

But it never did come through, and finally the elections took place. Let's see, what we're talking about…

*Q: It would be Bush coming on.*

ROSS: Yes. This turned loose Michael Ussery. He's a really nice guy.

*Q: I've interviewed him, yes.*

ROSS: Ambassador Mike Ussery and Lee Atwater came into politics together, and ran some very good successful campaigns for people into the Senate or into the House and maybe to the governorship of South Carolina. I think Ambassador Ussery privately said to me, "Well, they came around and said, 'What do you want to do? Would you like an embassy? Which one would you want?' which is of course a wonderful way to do it, I think, and I'm all for that as long as I'm being approached." He said, "Well, how about this Morocco thing?" And by George, you know, there it came, because he was thought well enough of by the people around President Reagan, and I guess at that time Atwater was still alive. He had immediate access to the White House, which is what the king

always wanted, and I think most political leaders would like to have in a country. Centrist leaders or monarchs or dictators, they want somebody who can pick up the telephone and say, "Get me the president's office!" and so Mike Ussery could do this. I don't think he could do it on a daily basis. He'd use up his "wasta" (merit) as they say in Arabic.

*Q: Clout?*

ROSS: Clout, right, his pin, his merit. So he came out, and it was first and last time, I believe, for him in the Foreign Service, but he did quite an effective job. It was a good learning experience for all of us.

They had had a very interesting thing happen before he came there. The crown prince, who's now king, disliked intensely being followed around all the time by everybody who wants to slobber on his hand and beg him for favors from his father the king. He wanted to have a private life. On the other hand, the king wanted him to sit in every official, public position, just totally rigid with his hands on his knees, like an Egyptian deity—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and sit there for two or three hours in a parliamentary situation and never say anything, just to be absolutely Nilotic. As if you were cut out of black basalts, just sitting there like this. So he had gotten to be where he just didn't want any of this stuff.

At some social event he showed up, which was very unusual. Of course, "He's here! He's here! The crown prince is here!" Everybody in the political section tries to figure out how they're going to get over there and get some quotes from him, or ask him the trenchant question, or size him up, or else just be able to say, "Well, the crown prince told me…" Anyway, this went on with his brother and the other royal, who was the son of the king's dead brother (the uncle). The crown prince found an African American guy who was the Air Force sergeant, I think. He had a great collection of blues and go-go albums. The guy said, "Hey, you gotta come over and hear some of my stuff. I've got Chuck Brown."

So the crown prince unannounced drives up there one day in his Aston Martin or whatever it was with a body guard behind him in a Mercedes and goes and rings the guy's doorbell and says, "Hi! What's…?" They struck up a friendship. "I want to hear these albums, and tell me about what life in America's like…" and all this stuff because, he just wanted to get away from it all. The word got back to the embassy and people were thunderstruck and didn't believe this.

So finally, after three or four of these kind of visits, the neighbors in this sort of apartment complex or series of apartments in downtown Rabat (not very fancy, but it was an embassy-owned two or three flats amongst other flats in several buildings) were all leaning over the balcony saying, "That's him over there." This is the Moroccans, and they were trying to knock on the door and ask for favors because that's what happens in this kind of a monarchy, and tell the story of "my brother's problem with his farm."

So the Air Force sergeant, who was nominally the clerk in the APO (military post office) sent a request to the housing board which said, "I would like to have a different place to live or a small bungalow," (everybody had beautiful housing in Morocco), "where I can entertain the crown prince privately and not be pestered with all these other problems." People didn't believe this.

Then the next thing that happened, he was driving around in a Mercedes, a new one, 450 or something like that. They said, "Where'd you get that car." He said, "Well, you know, the crown prince gave it to me." "He gave you the car?" "Well, he gave me the keys to it and said I could use it." You've heard these stories before?

*Q: A time or two.*

ROSS: Well, this occurs in Saudi Arabia too. But they said, "Well, is it yours? I mean did he give you the paperwork?" He said, "Well, he said he'd give it to me. I guess he's gonna. Yes, he's gonna give it to me. Actually, he gave it to me. He just…I haven't got the papers yet." "Well, you can't accept that." [Laughter] So this was the problem of the chargé, what to do.

They had some apparently great meetings about this in the part of the embassy, the meetings to which I was not invited, and they finally didn't know what to do. They finally decided, "Transfer the guy, the Air Force sergeant," so he was transferred to Germany or someplace like this. The crown prince came by to see him and he said, "Well, why are you looking so sad?" He said, "Man, I have to leave." And, "You're going? Well, that's not right!" So he told his father, and they raised some hell, and he said, "Who can we talk to?" They called up Vernon Walters, I think [it] was, ambassador to the UN—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …who was very close to Hassan II.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He called people, and it got to be kind of like an affair of State, about this Air Force sergeant and his blues records or his modern go-go records (this is before rap came in) and all this stuff, and so he had to go. They said, "No, you have to go. You must go. Get out! Now, here's your orders, or you'll be court-martialed or something." I don't know whether they went to that extent. But the gist of it was that the crown prince was exceedingly furious that the embassy had somehow deprived him of, as it were, his only friend.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: You know, who didn't ask anything of him.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: This is all water under the bridge now. I've always thought that was kind of a funny decision because if they had asked me what to do, I would have said, "Just have a friendship, and then the time will come, and the chap will go on his way, and he's now king, and then bring him back, as a senior staffer—"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "…in the military attaché's office and, 'Hi, you know, I'm back,' and you could have some access perhaps," and that wasn't seen to be the right thing to do.

*Q: What sort of programs were we running in Morocco?*

ROSS: In Morocco, at Rabat, I really began to do what I would consider a very good job. I hit my stride; I knew what I was doing. I knew about the Fulbright Commission. I knew about the comings and goings of both sides of the grant process. I knew about how to mount good Cultural Affairs things. It's easy to handle a pianist after a while, but to do something from scratch, say like, let's start a friendship society which had fallen into innocuous desuetude; gin that back up. So we did.

We moved the cultural center, which was too bad because it had been downtown and it'd been closed. But we opened up another one down the street from our offices. We had lecturers there. I sat on the board of an English language program which expanded quite a bit, and made…well, of course it made money; it was a nonprofit, so of course it made money, but it educated tens of thousands of people in English and in American ways. It had bookstores, some eight branches. It was run out of Rabat, and we had board meetings all the time. We fought all kinds of problems about management of the branches in Marrakech or Fez or Tangier; and Casa (Casablanca) was a great big operation; and there were a lot of personnel—there were hundreds of people involved. There were the incessant demands of the embassy. Richard Jackson had been a political officer in Rabat, then CONGEN (consul general) for four years [in Rabat], then three years as CONGEN in Casa, and then back as DCM under Ambassador Ussery [in Rabat].

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He knew the country inside out or the political class. He had just a long series of things, "Now you have to do this, you must do that, you must cooperate with, say like, the Association of Leather Exporters. You must do this, and Madam Such and Such has called me up. Other ministers would call up. We worked within the ministries. We worked with the schools. Well, we did everything possible.

I didn't do information work, except at the end. I did the editing of the daily feedback to Washington of what the newspapers said, you know the press summary. I did that towards the end, and I did it under very difficult circumstances because I worked for a man that I got along with like they say chalk and cheese. This was a PAO named John

Graves, who had been a hostage in Iran, and who was assured of certain certainties, and who had grown up as a Francophone in French Canada. He'd gone to Laval University, I think, in Montréal and studied under the Jesuits (I think that's the case). He was 5-5 in French, and he lived in France, just died in France. He lived in Morocco before he joined the Foreign Service. He spent a lot of time in Sub-Sahara Africa, and he spent time in Vietnam. He had a pilot's license, and he was pretty sure of himself. He spent a lot of time playing tennis; a lot of the daytime office hours were on the court. It was a situation where it was understood that nothing was going to happen to him. He could pick his post because he'd been a hostage in Iran.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So, as I say, we sort of grimaced, or at least I sort of grimaced, but I did a lot of good work. He finally was retired out of there, highly annoyed that I had been extended and that he had been retired; he was senior Foreign Service; he was a step up, two steps above me, and he went to southern France.

I ran things for a while and then had another PAO come, and he had problems. I don't want to go into it too much, but he left. I stayed on until my time ran out; I stayed on more than four years. I was acting PAO when I left, and I probably would have stayed on more. I had to retire. I was retired for "time in service."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: As Kenton Keith said, "I was the last guy retired for that." They changed the rule after that.

*Q: While you were in Morocco, one of the things I've…it's sort of around and sort of a Foreign Service legend, and that is, that the embassy, particularly ambassadors, become too closely identified with the king, and we're sending telegrams saying, "our king wants this," or things of that nature. Did you see that where you were?*

ROSS: Well, that's a good question! Ambassador Ussery wouldn't fall into that because his French wasn't all that good. Since he was a real political operative, he kept his cards a little bit closer to his vest.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The ambassador who followed him was Frickie [Frederick] Vreeland.

*Q: Ambassador Vreeland, yes.*

ROSS: For famous Diana Vreeland of *Vogue*, the Conde Nast Publications, and one of the arbiters of society, I guess, in the '50s, '60s, and '70s in New York. He grew up in a surrounding where style was the statement. He had gone to Yale with George H.W. Bush. He had been in the covert service all over Europe, and he had been nominated once for

ambassador to Burma or something like that, but didn't make it because there was some question of who said the wrong thing about the Turks when the Pope got shot. I think he had been the person who said that Ağca, who shot the Pope, it wasn't a Soviet plot. Remember there was some question about how this was done in the late Brezhnev period.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: This caused him a big spot of bother in his career, but then he came back. After President Bush came in, he arrived, having retired, to be appointed first, I think, as a deputy assistant secretary in the department and then principal deputy assistant secretary for North Africa [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (Near East/South Asia) from February 1991 to February 1992], and then to come as ambassador.

The king of Morocco has, I don't know, seven principal palaces and five others. He lives in a kind of luxury that other people can't even imagine. Every room that he walks to, there's sometimes somebody chanting ahead of him; and there's somebody who goes ahead and swings incense, a censor, so [if] the king is coming, your nose is hit by it. Then there's the staff of people that are right out of Central Casting (talent casting agency), extremely attractive, young men who are all the houseboys in white jackets. There's a class of people who work in the palaces who are the descendants of the former slaves of his father Muhammad V. They're actually housed, in some cases, in what would have been the old slave quarters. Oh, they're nice now, to be sure; they're like the garage apartments of rich people's chauffeurs or something. Everything is completely toning—I mean that's not even the word—everything is elegant, the way the Medici lived or something like that: the marble all matches, the sprays of flowers are all fresh, there's exactly the right touch. But it's also overdone at the same time, the way the Hapsburgs might have overdone it or something.

*Q: Well, it doesn't sound very comfortable [laughter].*

ROSS: Well, they say back in his own quarters he's quite at ease with his ladies. The golf course was laid out by Robert Trent Jones inside the palace walls, and it's lit because the king likes to play golf at night.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So [if] you got a par four, you can see that ball at 1 AM [laughter]. There's just this extreme luxury. There's also kind of a shabbiness on the side too.

Down the street one of his daughters lived, who was a princess, Lalla Meryem, and they used to throw the flowers out every day. This is his daughter who is married to the son of the foreign minister…down the street from my house. Our gardener would go down the street every day and bring back, not every day, but say once a week, bring back two to three dozen roses—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …which were just chucked out because there were new roses. The Westerner, the American, the simple guy, the yours truly Richard Ross would tend to get impressed by that, and so would the ambassadors because it was overwhelming.

If the Secretary of State, like James Baker, came out, they'd stay at the fancy hotel which was owned by this rich guy, Avath Parone, who was a very strange guy. It was not an Intercontinental Hotel, but one of those other kind of fancy hotels. People would all be there. The palace would send over two or three trucks and ten or fifteen bearers with all kinds of breakfasts, huge plates of food and eggs and bacon, and everything laid out as if it was a really fancy feast, and then said, "Oh, his Majesty would like you to have this. Please have some breakfast." A complete smorgasbord.

Any time you were ever invited it was overwhelming—the style and the technique. The king himself was very precise; his French was perfect. Charles de Gaulle said the only people who spoke better French than the king were some nuns in convents south of Brussels—that is to say, "Français parfait" (perfect French).

There was a tendency of the embassy, both to regard this from a distance where you couldn't get at it and to talk about, like I say, the condition of His Majesty's health—does he really have a stomach ulcer. His father, Mohammed V, had had some terrible experiences with doctors and finally died on the operating table with Swiss doctors, who had to get out of the country in the middle of the night or they would have been murdered by the population. At the same time you kind of questioned what was going on, you also were kind of swayed and snowed by the magnificence of it all. So I think that as an ambassador got entrée, where the king would say something like, "Why don't you come on over tonight. I've got this great blues piano player from Chicago who usually plays down in Marrakech at the Mamounia, but he's playing at the palace. Come on over and bring a couple of friends," then all of a sudden it's as if you're home free. It's like Francis the First, saying to his retinue, "Let's have dinner at my place tonight."

So there is a tendency to be drawn into that, and it's hard to avoid it, particularly because His Majesty…I never was there under the new king. I was always there under Hassan II. His Majesty seemed to have goals that jived with ours, and this goes back to World War II—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …to when he was twelve years old and Vernon Walters gave him his first tank ride.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Lieutenant Walters was a translator of French to English for the forces that invaded on the south, Safi (I think), on the south coast of Morocco. We had the air bases in the cold war. We had B-47s air refueling.

*Q: Yes, this is the backup.*

ROSS: Right, right.

*Q: The second strike kind of thing.*

ROSS: Yes, and I think we had nuclear weapons on those [B-]47s and [B-]52s.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They flew out of two or three principal bases.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Later on when they were withdrawn, when the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and the shuttle started, the first window of availability to land a [Dyna-Soar] Soar vehicle or whatever they call it—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It doesn't fly; it just…

*Q: Yes…*

ROSS: It is Morocco, down in the south near Marrakech, and so we always had to keep that staffed up. That was a principal reason, plus then there's the threat from Algeria, and then there's the threat from people who didn't like His Majesty. So he represents a stable Morocco, a stable gateway.

*Q: Well, as in the Public Affairs side, did you get involved in the Polisario dispute?*

ROSS: No. We always said that we wished that the United Nations would have a vote and all this stuff, and we were always urging for a vote to take place. There was a lot of private activity because I think it was Lockheed got billions of dollars to build an electronic fence between Morocco and the other side of the border there. The Algerians had a road that ran all along their side of the border in the south, and so we did a lot of backroom work with the government of Morocco to keep it up, but there wasn't much in the press about that. In fact, the king always, that was his "métier" (calling) to work in the back. In fact, you'd have this great, big panoply of observance, but things were really done out back.

*Q: Well, in the four years you were there were there any presidential visits or anything like that?*

ROSS: President Reagan came after…

*Q: Did you mean Bush?*

ROSS: No…no…there were several…Secretary of State Baker came twice, and then Eagleburger came, but there wasn't any presidential visit.

*Q: Did you get involved at all in the Arab-Israeli thing because Morocco often was sort of a site of activity?*

ROSS: It was all kind of quiet. There wasn't much conflict, and at the beginning there wasn't as much anti-Israeli stuff as there was at the end.

*Q: Oh.*

ROSS: The thing is, that what had happened with the intifada and all that stuff, it got where it was on television all the time. It got more and more and worse and worse—

*Q: This was during your time?*

ROSS: It started to be—

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: …during my time on the Arab evening news, and now I'm sure it runs a half hour, an hour a day all over the Arab world.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The Israeli thing was so well handled that the Israeli cruise ships came into Tangier and people could go ashore. I don't think they stayed there, but it was a visit.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The Israelis weren't down on the Moroccans because they liked Morocco and they saw Morocco as a stopping house for them as an entrée into the Arab world. Because of Muhammad (V)'s saint's efforts in World War II to save Jews, both by accepting them and by protecting them in various ways to get out of Spain, get across there's a statue to him down in Tel Aviv somewhere or in downtown Tel Aviv erected by the Israelis. The idea that there's a statue to an Arab leader erected by Israelis is unusual. So there were a lot of old Jewish communities, particularly in the Atlas and in the middle Atlas. There were about 25,000 or 30,000 Jews still in Morocco, mostly in the trades, in Casablanca, to some extent in Tangier, and around and about. There had been Jews all up in the mountains as farmers; and as agricultural people, this went way back, like maybe pre-Roman.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I've read substantives; that may be a great part of North Africa where there were Jewish communities all around. Maybe that's the source of the original Christians—I'm not sure about that, but—no, I don't think it is.

There are Sephardic Jewish family reunions that take place in the countryside. This is maybe a later immigration because when the Jews were thrust out of Spain…the Muslims and the Jews were kicked out by their Catholic Majesties Ferdinand and Isabel after 1492, or whatever it was when everybody had to declare a religion. So there was this tremendous ingathering of Jews at that time who represented quite a force in learning and everything else and economy. That was diminishing slowly because Israel has always put tremendous pressure on the Jewish communities in Muslim countries to get out, you know to come back to Israel. That was the case when I was in Yemen. There was a lot of pressure from New York and not necessarily directly from Israel.

*Q: Well, you retired in 1988. Is that right?*

ROSS: No, I retired in '92.

*Q: I mean '92.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: In the first place, your wife, what was she doing? She was continuing her Foreign Service career?*

ROSS: She hadn't really joined the Foreign Service. She'd been in the CLO (community liaison office). Well, that was—I'm sorry. That is a Foreign Service course or contract.

Before that she'd worked in embassies: as staff in Paris, working for Hedges; and then in Afghanistan before that, in the political section as a PIT (part-time, intermittent, temporary) employee.

*Q: Well then, what happened. I mean after you retired, you've become the camp follower. Is that right?*

ROSS: Yes, yes. I'm the spousal unit, the significant other.

*Q: But anyway, your Foreign Service career really, I mean for all intensive purposes, didn't end in '92, did it?*

ROSS: No.

*Q: So what did you do?*

ROSS: She had applied to the Foreign Service. She'd been a CLO, which is an officer job now, but the CLO has changed over the years. She applied to USIA and they said, "Well, here's the paper." So she applied as a secretary and was hired. She couldn't get hired right away because she…this is a crazy thing…she couldn't go to her post right away. They said, "We want you to work in Yemen." The deal was I was going to retire, and about the same time she was going to go to Yemen; but we had to pack up and go back to the United States because they wouldn't hire her on the dotted line and swear her in unless she had taken the urinalysis for the drug thing [screening], and they wouldn't give it overseas.

*Q: [Laughter] I suppose urine is better in the United States than overseas.*

ROSS: Well, it's something…you know, it's a legal nicety. So we had to pack everything up, ship everything back to the United States, move into our house, and she passed her urine test.

We were living downtown in Washington DC. She went out at 8:15 one morning and somebody walked up to her from behind and hit her with a two by four, broke her eye socket. She lost two teeth; her nose was broken.

*Q: What was this for? I mean was this for—*

ROSS: It was for her purse…in daylight, and he was chased down the street, and, of course, never caught. He threw the purse away and kept running. Other people saw it—heard it actually—and she has five little plates in her face. But that held her from going out to post right away because she had to have big operations for repair of her face.

*Q: Ohh!*

ROSS: She then went out a little bit later to Yemen. At that point we had a son finishing senior year at Saint Anselm's [Saint Anselm's Abbey School] in DC, and the other son was finishing his freshman year. I stayed back until summer, and one boy went off to West Point, and the other went off to school in New Hampshire.

Jane went out as a secretary, but as she left to go out there, fit for further service as they say, they said, "Why did you ever apply to be a Foreign Service secretary? Why didn't you apply to be a Foreign Service officer because now you'll have to go through all that because you should be a Foreign Service officer?" So she did do all that. In fact, they mixed up her file and put it in with the officer file, and they recommended her for promotion, called her up and said, "Congratulations! You've been promoted." Then they had to rescind it because they said, "Your name was in the wrong panel." They had to call her back up and say, "You really didn't get one." But anyway, she got promoted; she's quite capable and a good people person, you know working things out with people. She's now a class two officer—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …in Sri Lanka, as I sit here.

I came out at the end of the summer and immediately got involved in teaching English because they needed people badly at the Yemen-American Language Institute. That was wonderful in a way. It's the best kind of teaching job because one knows one's subject completely, and if you have good students, they want to learn it. Your preparation is almost facile because you have good [teaching aids]…these picture books almost. So we did that, and I learned how to teach.

Then there was a change of directors, and I became the director of the English Language Institute. They had put in to hire another person in the United States, and they said, "They can't hire you because your wife is the administrative person in USIS."

I left there and went to teach under that umbrella at the parliament of Yemen, which was very interesting because I was with almost-tribal people. I started with a class of about 38 and got down to a hard core of six, who really, their English was malleable. We did things like read the constitution aloud because Yemen has a constitution, and they have the makings of a parliament now. I had privileges to go into the parliament, and that meant I could drive our car in there, past all the guards with their "technicals," you know, these Toyota—

*Q: Oh, yes*

ROSS: …with 37mm cannons on the back or whatever—they're not 30s—they're 20s, I guess; and every sheik has five or six body guards, and shots are fired sometimes, and all this stuff, and so it was kind of a heavy experience. I became good friends with the secretary of the parliament, who's a poet. I started getting invited to qat chews, qat, you know Q-A-T—

*Q: Yes, it was sort of a narcotic—sort of a mild amphetamine.*

ROSS: Yes.

*Q: So is it opium or hemp or what's…?*

ROSS: I don't know what it is. [Qat is a naturally occurring stimulant derived from the Catha edulis shrub and has two active ingredients, cathinone and cathine.]

*Q: It's chewed, isn't it?*

ROSS: You put it in your mouth, and you gnaw on it, and you don't swallow it, but it's like chewing a privet hedge; I never could quite enjoy it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: But it was a very interesting thing. Some people in the embassy "chewed;" that's what they call it in English. In Arabic it's called "storing," "khazzana, khazzana" (to store). You keep it, you store it like with your mouth, one ball of one cheek is a warehouse of this stuff, and the effects slowly get you…I couldn't tell you that the effect was anything particularly astounding at all! It made some people talkative, and it made other people sleepy. Frankly, amongst my Yemeni friends, some would say it was great for sex, and some would say it ruined sex.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I don't know exactly what I should report about this. There were some real confirmed qat chewers in the government, including perhaps, the word was, Ali Abdullah Saleh, the president himself, of course had to have a qat session every afternoon because it's a political event. Everyone sits around a "mafraj," which is a reception room, on couches.

*Q: Sort of like, in the Arab world, the majlis.*

ROSS: Yes, and you sit down, they're all cushions, and then there's a "narghile" (water pipe) or hubble-bubble with a great long 25-foot pipe, a cord [flexible hose]; and it's all decorated, it's all done by hand, it's all crocheted, and it's very pretty. It's a water pipe; they put tobacco on it and sometimes apples or something like that. It's a good kind, it's a very refreshing kind of light tobacco. Everybody chews, and they have a big pile of this stuff, which is like a herbaceous border or something like a privet hedge. People throw it at each other; you take a stem of this stuff, and you throw it at the person, or else they'll come and break off a very nice, delicious piece for you and say, "Here, this is for you," like everybody's handing each other this stuff. It's like everybody handing you a glass of beer.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I maybe chewed six times. This sounds crazy! There was a military attaché who chewed every afternoon. He had the best information, you know.

*Q: Oh, yes!*

ROSS: They said there was a theory that you couldn't get the good information unless you chewed, but if you chewed, then the Yemeni all liked you, so "Oh, he's okay. I'll tell you what the disposition of the tank corps is…" or something like that.

*Q: You were there with your wife from what?*

ROSS: From '93 to '96.

*Q: What was the situation in Yemen in those days?*

ROSS: Well, there were the two: it was a North Yemen and a South Yemen. The South Yemen was Aden and the former Trucial Sheikhdoms down there. It was the Ottoman Empire, I think they call it. From Mukalla down to Aden, there were like 30 different principalities, sheikhdoms. They'd slowly been assembled, and they were so important because they all had to do with the desert and the approaches to Aden, which had been the coaling station for the British. So they had another president down there whose first name was Ali [Ali Salim al-Baidh]**.**

In a lot of places, people would never talk to you in an Arab world about what was going on. For instance, in Morocco, none of the Foreign Service nationals who worked for us would ever talk about the palace; only after two or three years they'd say something because everybody was afraid that the word would get back, you see. But in Yemen, the Yemenis are the hillbillies of the Arab world, and they're kind of like Daisy Mae Yokum and *Li'l Abner* and everything—they'll tell you anything, and they'll tell you how the cow chewed the cabbage. You'd get in a taxicab, and they'd say, "Boss, these two Alis," you know the Ali of the North and the Ali of the South, "well, it's a big mess! We don't know what's gonna happen. They oughta just cut it out," or "I don't believe any of this!" Anyway, it got tighter and tighter, and finally they had an agreement, they had elections or something like that because they had some insurrections and some crazy assassinations in South Yemen.

Of course they had this experience in North Yemen, too, back in the old days. A thousand year dynasty was overthrown in the '60s, I believe. They got together with this sort of popular democracy, the South being influenced by socialist unions that came out of Swansea, Wales. Yemen was a station where there were a lot of people who worked on the boats, you know unloading them—stevedores—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …and they all got to Wales, and they all became socialists and came back to Yemen. This is actually a crazy, true story. They had very good connections with the cargo handlers unions in England, and they became communist socialists. They were a shining star, and of course the Soviets supported them and all this stuff in the Horn of Africa battles. Actually, six weeks before they had the war, they had an agreement that all their armored commanders in their maneuvered units of armor would all come up and meet in some place south of Sana'a, out in the country at a base. These guys had some 60 tanks each and brigadiers and things like that. They got a parade field, two parade fields, and they all brought their tanks in, and well, you can trust each other. The barrels were all pointed at each other at point blank range.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The two presidents went in, and I don't know…they were going to have a couple of qat chews and agreed to agree because they couldn't ever agree about how to assemble their army together. So somewhere on the second or third day of this great reunion, somebody did something. Some corporal accidentally fired a shot or something, and then

somebody else shot something, and then somebody on the other side of the field shot back, and then they all ran and loaded the tanks, and they went at it point blank range. I mean it was incredible!

There was a French military attaché there, and there was an American military attaché there, and I think their hair turned white because they had to lie under beds for 20 hours while this tremendous cannon… Nobody would stop firing, because once they'd let up—it wasn't continuous, naturally, because a tank only has 60 rounds in it or something, but nobody could get to the wounded because it went on all night long. When daylight came it started up good again; and then finally around ten o'clock these guys ran away for their very lives [laughter] saying, "This is insane!"

Well, then the war almost started, but it didn't. Everybody said, "Oh, that was all a big mistake, you know! Oh, we're gonna fix all that out. Now that way then there's a lot of dead people, but you know, that's just what happens! We're gonna really have a friendship between the North and the South. We're gonna integrate, and that guy who was really very bad, who is now the minister of culture or planning or something like that, he's no longer gonna run a fingernail factory. He's gonna be out, and then somebody else is gonna be good."

So Jane and I were lying in bed, and it was 5:45 in the morning. I heard this thing come over, a jet on afterburner. It just came right over, not at rooftop, but it sounded like it was only 500 feet up, a single jet, and then a KA-BOOM-BOOM! I jumped out of bed and I hollered, "This is it!" There were mountains all around or big hills sticking up, and we were up at the Yemen-Hunt Compound where we lived. That was a compound built by the Middle Easterners' Gulf money for the Yemen-Hunt oil workers. It was all to keep the "ferengi" (nonbelievers) away from everybody.

They opened up with antiaircraft. It was a single airplane, a single jet, that had flown up from the South where they'd had a lot of firing already. Rumor was he was paid five or ten thousand dollars in gold to do this. And that started it.

Actually, I should say it started a couple of days before, but then it started and stopped. A couple of days before we had a five-piece percussion group from the United States and a brass band. It was a really weird kind of musical group. Haynes Mahoney was the PAO, and he had a nice reception laid on—a sit-down for 75 people in the garden with candles. The minister of culture and the invited guests went down to the hall where it was going to be.

Just as they started playing the lights went out. So they said, "Oh, no! Another load shedding failure in dear old Sana'a, you know." Somebody went outside and came back in and said, "The lights are off all over the neighborhood." There's no lights anywhere!"

The story was, "Well, the lights are out all the way down half way to Taiz. Somebody's blown up the power works and sabotaged the lines." We said, "Oh, okay." The band said,

"We better get back to the hotel." We drove down in the darkness. There were police with AKs all over town. Everybody drives around with guns in Yemen.

So they got out of the USIS van with some of their musical instruments. There were two to three bursts of really close automatic weapon fire, like about 10 steps away. It's night, it was just "BLIP-BLIP-BLIP…" Two of these guys just hit the dirt. I said, "Oh, it's okay. You know they're not shooting at us." They said, "I don't know, man! I'm staying down here on the other side of the car until I feel like there's an all clear." So we went into the hotel, and then they said nobody should leave the hotel. It went on, all this kind of crazy thing.

Then the war started in earnest with this bombing of the airport. This was particularly good because Ambassador Arthur Hughes had gotten an Assistant Secretary of State to fly in or was going to fly in to try to calm everybody's nerves, that is, the North and the South, and assure those on both sides of the civil dustup that it was going to be all right. Anyway, he was stuck there because they couldn't clear him to get out, and they didn't know whether the airport would be bombed again. Actually, the bombs hadn't hit the runways, which was the point of it—to put a big hole in the runway so that nobody could take a plane in or out.

The war started big time, and every night it seemed like scuds were launched; they were launched in the daytime too. Most of them went all wild as hell, but a couple of them came in and hit near the hospital, or one hit on part of the town. From the South they were launching their Russian missiles at us, and these had two-, three-, four-hundred mile range and they pack a mean wallop. They make a big noise, even if it's far away, way, way, way far away, this "KARUNCH" sound. There'd be one or two of them. When they were thought to be coming or after one hit, the town, Sana'a, was surrounded by all these antiaircraft outfits up on hills. They'd all let go to show either that they were shooting at something, or else that they were shooting and they weren't scared, or else they'd have harassing and interdictory fire (H&I).

It was fabulous because it'd be like two sets of fireworks at night. We had a good friend, Peter, who was British, who worked for Yemen-Hunt. He'd come over with a couple of bottles of Chardonnay, and we had some Brie (cheese), and so we'd sit out on the balcony and watch the fireworks. One thinks of the phrase from *The Balcony*; Genet used it, I think. The French writer said that those of us who are fortunate can watch the collapse of civilization from the balcony.

This went on for three or four days, and meanwhile the embassy got all together and got evacuation [orders], and the war tailed out, and then we got evacuated.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: That was a fabulous experience because it was Army C-130s, which were U.S. Air National Guard and they were doing their two-or three-week active duty training. They flew over and refueled in Saudi, if I'm not mistaken, and then flew down to Sana'a.

They couldn't get clearance to land; it was unsafe because nobody was sure somebody wouldn't shoot at the planes on the ground with RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) from the sides of the runway. It's a real rocky, ditchy place all around. It's a great big wadi everywhere in Yemen; it's all like Arizona highways.

These planes flew around for two hours up there, and then finally there were two of them and they said, "We're coming in." It was all okay. We'd been out at the airport, and everybody had one suitcase. They decided for security not to taxi up toward the main part of the airport, which it's not such a grand airport, I assure you. So they said, "Everybody go over here, and everybody go down to where this dry stream bed was and get on the other side, and the plane's going to come there." We had to take off and run, and some people had babies, and some people had suitcases with wheels, and other people had backpacks. You were only supposed to have one thing, and some people had brought their cat even though they weren't supposed to. It was really like in an Eisenstein movie, a scramble, like everybody running and then getting slightly out of breath, down this little ravine and back up the other side, and then running down the tarmac to run down and run up inside the tailgates of the C-130s, which were down.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Of course they had sling seats, and everybody came running up there and dragging their suitcase. It was an unequaled kind of experience; it was like steerage. We all got jammed in there, and the load master said [in a high-pitched, out-of-breath, singing voice], "Is everybody here, you know, on the flight manifest? Let me count," and they couldn't, the count wasn't right, and the pilot [announced], "We're turning her around." R-R-R-R-R-R-R, the engine had been turning the whole time. He had to run through this great prop blast. That was part of the excitement of it, and they made a hell of a lot of noise all engines going and they're turning around, and they're like, "They're only going to be on the ground four minutes from wheels down to wheels up, and you're either on it or not!"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So it was ass over teakettle, and all the babies were crying, and away we went, and took off and flew. I was deputed to sit up and talk and be the pass through between the people down in the passenger bay…the cargo bay, I suppose, and the pilot and the crew chief. So it was nice because I got to ride in the middle seat upstairs and go back and forth. It was a real Noah's ark of a thing.

We didn't have enough gas to get to Riyadh, [Saudi Arabia], so we landed at a military air base in Saudi Arabia. It was very strange because it was very Saudi dowdy in the reception area, and everybody was exhausted and had their camping clothes on. Everybody wanted to wash their kids' faces, and there was a hodgepodge of people on it.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: There were U-2s [U-2 Reconnaissance aircraft] flying in and out of there. I remember that at the time.

*Q: Yes, sort of secret reconnaissance planes, yes.*

ROSS: Yes, and the hangers were papier-mache kind of rocks. The hanger tops and front were decorated like part of the rocky landscape. So the rocks opened up and the planes went inside like in a movie. We stayed there for awhile, refueled and then flew up to Riyadh.

*Q: All right, we'll stop at this point, and we'll pick this up again for one more relatively short session next time. We are dealing with your time you came back to Yemen, and then on to Damascus, and then we'll quit at that point.*

*Let's see, where are we starting. What date?*

ROSS: Nineteen ninety-five, I think, when I came back from being evacuated from the war.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I began teaching, and then they had a problem with the director of the Yemen American Language Institute, and he got sent on his travels, and I took it over. About that time, there was a guy who was very interesting named Haynes Mahoney, whose father was in USIA too. He was PAO. His father had been CAO in Tokyo, I think.

Haynes went down one evening to the local store to buy some stuff, and some people stuck a gun in his ear and said, "Get out of your Laila Elwi"—that's the name of an Egyptian actress, which is a big Toyota Land Cruiser; it's got bulbous fenders like big hips, so it's called a…they give nicknames in Arabic to all the different kinds of cars. He thought, well, they want the car. This wasn't the first car that had been carjacked out of USIA, and so he said, "Oh, here it is! The keys are in it!" in Arabic [laughter]. One said, "No, we don't want the car! We want you too!" They got him in the Land Cruiser and made him lay on the floor, and two other people jumped in from nowhere and started driving all Sana'a.

Of course his wife expected him home. She called us and we went over there, and nobody knew what had happened to him, and as time wore on it developed that he was indeed missing.

So he was kidnapped. Then in the middle of the night they were driven at high speed around police checkpoints outside of town and across wadis and into the desert and through tribal areas where they had to pass some travel areas where you had to give signals or almost give hostages. At one point they were stopped, and the car was swiped off them, and they were given another car because this was a new $40,000 Land Cruiser. He was then driven the rest of the night in an old beat-up car and was made to wear a

"keffiyeh" (cloth headdress fastened by a band around the crown and usually worn by Arab men) and to pretend he was asleep when they went through the army-police checkpoints. He could hear what they were saying in Arabic, and he realized that if there was a shootout with the cops, he might get shot with the police. But anyway, they got though them, and they kept him awake all night long. He was taken to a house and was sort of bound up a little bit and had a 16-year-old boy to guard him.

He then heard them talking, and of course he was not being held hostage for himself. He was being held hostage because that clan of that tribe wanted to have a revenge against the Yemen-Hunt Oil Company or, literally, against the government. When he began to hear that the next day, and he'd asked to go out to perform his ablutions outside and so forth, he thought, "Well, I guess I'm not gonna get killed." So then what he began to wonder is how long is this dickering gonna take, because by this time bunches of different people had been kidnapped, including tourists.

The tribes get highly annoyed because the oil companies pay a certain percentage of their revenue shown, for how much oil they lift, to the ministry of petroleum, for functions such as guarding the pipeline—that is to say, the tribes guard the pipeline which runs through their territory, it's kind of protection.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The ministry gets the protection, and the tribes have somebody in the ministry who gets the computer printout because those people have up-to-date equipment. They look at the computer printout, and somebody explains to them, "See Yemen-Hunt or Occidental Petroleum or Canadian CanOxy (Canadian Occidental Petroleum) has paid the ministry a million and a half dollars last month, and you haven't gotten anything! Here it is, right here! Here's the money paid, the date on the check." So what they try to do is squeeze the money back out of the ministry, which disappears. The sheik wants some, the paramount sheik of the tribe or the village elders, but they want it for school or for a health clinic because that's what, written on the line, it's supposed to be for.

So he was held, and my wife was holding the fort at the office. That was very exciting because everybody got into it: the president of the republic, and of course, the ambassador, and Haynes, and everybody in Washington. Finally he was sprung after about a week or so and came back in a military helicopter of the government of Yemen, and he was cheered through the square, and then of course Washington said, "Well, you might be…tell us, are you all right?"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Haynes said, "Well, I actually am all right. In fact, I have many interesting stories to recount about my capture," and if you get a hold of him, he can indeed tell them. He's PAO in Jordan right now. They said, "Well, you have to…you don't seem all right because you say you're all right. That's, you know, catch 22. That's a sign that you got the Swedish Syndrome or something like that. So, we think that maybe you should curtail

your assignment and come back to the United States." He said, "I don't want to do that! This is all right here."

They got him to fly to London and brought over a couple of skull squeezers, and he was in a hotel room and debriefed for a day or two there to show that he really hadn't fallen in love with his captors. He said it was the saddest thing that ever happened to him, because as soon as his darling wife heard that he was going to London she said, "Well, I'm not gonna stay here! You know, they've got these good shops like Harrods in London, and I need a couple of frocks for fall." He said, "That was an expensive debriefing."

He never capitalized on it very much. Some people said, "Great career move, and now what you oughta do is give your interview to *USA Today* or something that has big circulation so that you can, you know, look good." He's just not that kind of a fellow. [Laughter]

Yemen is a wonderful place to live. It has a fabulous climate in Sana'a. The sun really beats down (because it's 6,000 feet) from about 11 [AM] to 1 [PM], so it's the point where mad dogs and Englishmen don't go out in the noonday sun. But the rest of the time it's lovely. Of course it doesn't have what you'd call anything comparable to a Western European existence, but it has many, many things to do and to get out of town. As long as they didn't have the lid screwed down on the embassy, we did all kinds of stuff, all kinds of trips across the edge of the Empty Quarter from Marib down to the Hadhramaut to Wadi Tarim where the great old houses are from the merchant princes of the last century, of the 1880s to 1920s. These are huge, Palladian mansions in the middle of a town, and they're made out of mud. So if they're not kept up by being coated with gypsum and things like that, they do wash away. There are some of them trying to be protected by the United Nations. We drove across the desert where you'd have to pay a tribal… with machine guns and a big hippo to protect you, and slept out in the desert, and went to Aden a whole bunch of times. I couldn't say it's a nicer place.

Of course, we weren't aware that al Qaeda and "Ibn Laden" (the son of Laden [Osama bin Laden]) was from Yemen and made all that money up in Saudi Arabia and, actually, was using Yemen as a base of operations. Well, when you go down to the Hadhramaut there were various honey shops in the towns like Mukalla. You'd go in, and there'd be all these jars and various containers, even one-gallon jerry cans of Yemen honey. Now Yemen honey is a greatly prized delicacy in that part of the Arab world. It sounds crazy, but you can be paying $50 for two quarts of it, $25 a quart, and for $40 a quart. Apparently you can become a honey fancier the same way you can for Tarragon vinegar in Italy or Parmesan cheese, hundred year-old cheese. Well, you can get all this kind of thing going with honey, too. So I thought it was just these fancy things of honey. But it was, apparently, Ibn Laden's front for al Qaeda because international honey transfers, especially darker honey in big, old, brown plastic 10-or 20-gallon barrels with the lid screwed on it, is a great place to hide things, to hide money. You can ship it, and nobody's going to stick their hand into a great, big, five-gallon barrel of honey and scrooch around in there. Well you can, I guess, but people generally don't do it in

customs since they think it's honey there. That was one thing that came to us in retrospect.

There were all kinds of strange things, but Yemen is a great place for a two-year tour, and some people fall in love with it and stay. The majority of people who go to a place like that go bonkers, in the sense that they stay home, they watch the videos, and they go over to the Marine House, which of course is kind of an entrepôt for all kinds of traffic. The one in Yemen was decorated with very fancy glass or Plexiglas thick floor with colored lights under it, with strobing lights in various colors, the dance floor I'm speaking of, and a super bussed-up stereo system. Thursday, Friday nights it was New Year's Eve in there, and it got very wild, and the same way with Kabul, Afghanistan, and the same way with Peshawar when I was there. There was more than just a guy-meets-girl going on. There were perhaps ulterior motives for people to go into these places.

Then downtown there were some clubs—it sounds crazy—in Sana'a, which were hangouts, in one case, for soldiers of fortune who'd fought over in Ethiopia and in East Africa; and it was a known place, that that's where you could meet people and you could do deals. As I had mentioned, there was a place where you could buy all kinds of weapons. I've gone out with people and fired RPGs. I took my boys out and fired AKs. You buy the use of an AK, and you bring your own metal cans because they don't have them in the desert. These are arms "suqs" (very special markets) in small tribal towns—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …way outside of town. You could buy land mines or Dragunov sniper rifles and all kinds of American and all kinds of hunting stuff, shotguns. Somebody told me they saw an M-30 tank for sale in an arms market up in the north near the Saudi border. Now I don't know where it came from, but…that's a big item!

*Q: That's a very big item! [Laughter]*

ROSS: When I left Yemen, my wife was transferred to Damascus. So we packed up all our stuff; she had to get up there real quick, so she flew up. We had a car, and I decided to drive up there. I had a friend who was a house spouse like me—a significant other, SO or spousal unit; there's a couple other nicknames for it. He said he'd go up with me. We got the car, and it was hell to get an export license because nobody exports any cars from Yemen. That's where they go to die. After a car's been in Yemen for like five or ten, and the roads are just hilariously horrible, especially the secondary roads! But it was a place where you could get farmers to lift the car back onto the road after it fell into an irrigation ditch that you didn't see, because we used to do that. That was wonderful. They'd get ten or twelve people and lift your car back on the road, just very nice people. And they're all chewing qat all the time out there when they did! That's part of the congeniality of the culture.

This guy Chris and I got the car, and well, we didn't know what it would be like. [We] finally got an export tag on it, and they spelled it AXPORT, A-X-P-O-R-T. So I have the

only car that's ever been axported. It was only the second car that had been axported that year because the license plate, which was hand written, it was lovely, said, "AXPORT 2," or "2 AXPORT". We drove out of town and drove down to Hudaydah on the Red Sea, and we were going in June. Well, that was just like asking for trouble. He wanted to show me a fish market, and we got there around three o'clock in the afternoon. It was 125 degrees, and it was a fish processing market! I wanted to buy some of these long bills from sharks with the teeth on it. It's a bill-fish shark.

*Q: Yes, a swordfish.*

ROSS: It's a kind of a shark where the teeth grow out the bone snout, you know.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

ROSS: They were laying on the beach, and people bring them up to you if you were tourists, and say, "You want to buy one?" I'm told now that they're endangered. It's illegal to buy them, but they're never on a fish when you see it. It's either been cast up from the sea or something like that. I saw them in Mocha, where the coffee came from. That's a little seacoast town below Hudaydah on the Red Sea. We went to Mocha twice. It's busted down as a town, all the old eighteenth-century factories, as they're called, where the Dutch and the French and the Turks assembled the coffee in bags and packed and shipped it either by camel, or by sea probably, back to Europe when the coffee boom started. The whole coffee culture had totally collapsed, and there wasn't even any Nescafé available in the bazaar; so you couldn't get any mocha in Mocha.

Here we are in Hudaydah, went to this terrible fish market and then decided to stay the night there and then got up and drove up the coast and got to the Saudi Arabia border just about the time the qat had really hit everybody. All the customs officers who had their "rubta" (their bouquet) of qat and had their chew for the afternoon were all asleep. It's very funny to go in where all the officials were knocked out from the qat; they were just taking their nap, their siesta. They were all laying on the floor, any of the soldiers and the guards at the frontier establishment—everybody. I had never seen anything like it in my life! They said, "Come back in two or three hours, and then you can…everybody will be awake!" So we did.

We got through and got up to a town on the coast, which was a dreadful place on the Red Sea, and we stayed overnight in some terrible hotel. I mean really terrible! I've stayed in hotels that cost 50 cents a night, and I've stayed in tea stalls in northern Afghanistan, and then I was on a trek last year in Nepal, in Annapurna, the big circular trek. I've stayed in some terrible places, but this was just about as bad as it gets!

So he and I stayed there. Then we tried to buy gas for the car, and we're followed everywhere we go all over town by another kind of mysterious, yellow Mercedes, a Saudi with a keffiyeh and a "jilbab" (long outer garment similar to a tunic), driving everywhere we went. We don't know who they were. They didn't look like interior police or anything. So finally we got out of town and drove up into the mountains, and we were the

only people there! The people were astounded to see us whenever we stopped, and they'd come running out; and since I could speak Arabic, that was even more astounding to them.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: We drove up into the 'Asir province, which is north of Yemen, and it's kind of nice up there. It's southern Saudi Arabia. You don't have a feeling of the Saudi dowdy or the glitz that you get in Riyadh or Jeddah. You get the poor farmer feeling.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: In fact, the cars are old and beat up, and the tractors are old and beat up, and you can see people working the fields. They still have the traditional kind of southern Yemeni houses, which have whole rows of horizontal stripe, different color, two-tones all the way up, and then they put the rams' horns on the corners of the house, which is very Neolithic. It's like Anglo-Saxon in England to put the stag horns up in the corners.

We slowly drove up and got into the desert and were driving along. You could drive as fast as you wanted or not as fast as you wanted—a lot of the bridges were washed out that had been built by Bechtel or Brown & Root, and you had to go down into the wadis into what you'd call an Irish bridge to get across and back up, temporary hairpin turns to get back up on the escarpment. The muffler blew out, and the car sounded like a P-38 (long-range escort fighter aircraft) warming up whenever you drove it above 45 to 50 miles an hour.

We got up to Medina, and we came to the divide in the highway. We'd already gone near Jeddah, and we'd gotten down near the coast superhighway and then a little bit further up. We wanted to get to the superhighway which ran up toward Jordan and not further up the coast. They have good roads in some places, but the bridges are washed out.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Oh, they also had a lot of monkeys down in 'Asir, which I must tell you, it's very strange to be driving through the desert and to see a whole troop of relatively big, like Barbary apes—a whole troop of them, ten or fifteen or twenty run across the road ahead of you, and you think, "Well, how do they live?" Anyway, there they are! They live off the date palms maybe.

We came and we took the believers and the nonbelievers—

*Q: Medina, like Mecca, is a forbidden city.*

ROSS: It's a forbidden city, yes. So if you're a Muslim, you can take the right hand; if you're an unbeliever, you can go to the left. So there was a little kind of a funny road in between, but it said, "Filling Service Station."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: So I went down that, and we found a hotel, which was hideously expensive, but it was new. It was like a conference hotel in Saudi Arabia. It's one of these things that some member of the royal family flung up and is losing money on it; it doesn't matter. They had this huge banquet, and there were like about ten people at it. The tables were all set with great big baskets of fruit and flowers, and there were really only three or four people eating. We said, "Is this the restaurant?" They said, "No, it's a private luncheon," and it was in honor of the assistant district governor of the this or that. People from the hospitality committee of the hotel were all running around, and they were all revved up; they were Pakistani or people like that and very efficient. So we went in there.

Then I went across to this beat-up, old filling station, and he said, "We'll have to go into town to get a muffler for your car." He said, "It'll be all right. We won't go near the Prophet's Mosque. We'll be a mile away from it." I said, "Well, is it going to be any problem?" He said, "No, you just sit in the passenger seat. You get down below the top of the dash, and we'll go to the Boch and the German parts place." We had an old Mercedes; actually, it was a 15-year-old Mercedes. So I said, "Okay." So I got in; he started driving. He didn't want me to give him the money for some reason to go buy the thing. He said, "I'm not gonna get…it might not be the right thing, and they'll sell us something else, but it might fit or it might not, but I don't want—I want you to buy it kind of thing." This was the story he gave me anyway. So he drove there, and I got down, scrunched down under the dash, and I thought, "I must be crazy because this is not the kind of a telephone call that the embassy is going to take. They're going to be annoyed"

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: "…when they're told that a ferengi (unbelieving) American, the husband of a Foreign Service officer, has been nabbed by policemen hiding in a car [laughter] in Medina." So I thought, "This can't…" _____ and is this a good idea? Then he said, "No problem, boss, One of those deals." Finally we went to the store, and the guy didn't seem to think that it was not all right for a guy to come in, and we bought the muffler and got out of there, and I sweated bullets again, and we got back to the place. I never saw the Prophet's Mosque. But I did say, "Are we near it?" "No! It's still blocks and blocks away." I said, "Well, okay. Let's not go any further."

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: That was a strange thing! So then we had had a terrible thing when we crossed the border to the first customs station. I had packed up a lot of books at the last minute that I thought, "Well, these would be good because all our stuff was air freighted up there. It cost…I don't know…it cost maybe less than sea freight, actually. So I had a stack of about five or ten *New York Reviews*. It used to be weekly; now it's a monthly; it's a lovely thing to read. Somebody had given them to me, and I hadn't read them all, and they're treasures to read. Well, they had an article on a French sculptor at the turn of the

century, and on an inside page of this thing it showed him sculpting in his studio. He had a smock on, and he had a sculptor's hammer, and he had a block of wood, and he was creating, and he had a model there. The model, he was standing there, sculpting from life, and it was a nude man standing on the print—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …in the sculpting studio in Paris or wherever it was. What they did is they got everything out of the car, including all these stacks of *New Yorkers* and the stacks of the *New York Review*. They took them all in, and they had a battery of people who were the bluenoses at this customs' situation. I thought, well, we'd be okay because we had this Yemen AXPORT tag on, which nobody had ever seen before, plus we had the old CD plates, and thanks to my wife, I had a black passport—

*Q: Diplomatic passport.*

ROSS: Yes, and we were going through Saudi. I mean that was our motive, was to take this car to Damascus. We were going to drive through Saudi Arabia and then go through Jordan and go into Damascus, enter it from the south, from the Jordan border. That didn't cut any ice with these people. They had buses there that they were taking apart; they were taking the air conditioning apart in the buses, and these were people who were coming on the "hajj" (pilgrimage to Mecca prescribed as a religious duty for Muslims) from I guess, Yemen.

They sat there, and they turned the pages of *The New Yorker*, and then they found a Ralph Lauren—not Ralph Lauren—somebody, a racy, these new kind of ads where the women have less clothes on than they should perhaps. And they go, "See! Ah-hah! Here it is, right here." It's Dolce & Gabbana, whatever is revved up now, or Prada. They'd say, "Huh, look!" and here would be a girl with her bodice half torn open, she's a model, there's a male model, and they're advertising, I don't know, shoes or something like that. They say, "See! This man is corrupt or lascivious." Then they found this picture of this sculptor in this great long article—I mean it's a 10,000 word article—on the turn-of-the-century sculpting studios, plus all these other long articles on Herman Melville or what all. [Laughter] They found this picture of this nude man standing on the plinth in the studio, and they said, "Ah hah! Now not only is he lascivious, but he's depraved. He's a pederast." So they said, "Look!" and they showed it to me, and I didn't know what to say. I said, "Well, there's other pictures in the magazine too. This is about writing. It's about history, and things like that."

Finally they said, "All right. You sit here." They took me into another room, which was kind of an anteroom, it was with sort of formal padded chairs. They said, "There's a judicial chamber, and there'll be a man in there you will go see. It's a judicial, the magistrate," or something like that. I said, "Do I need a lawyer?" This was at night, too. This was strange. The guy who spoke English to me, he said he had been trained for his job at customs in the United States at the dog handling school of the U.S. Government [Customs/ATF Canine Enforcement Training Center] in Front Royal, Virginia, and he

loved Virginia! "Why, I just love it, you know, and I just loved to learn how to handle dogs." They had a fantastically good electronic system to monitor all the borders.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Lockheed had gotten a bundle out of that, made billions perhaps. They said, "Now, go into the magistrate's office." He had a little chair, and the desk was set up higher. I felt like this, "Here it comes! I'm gonna have to telephone the embassy and say I'm charged with possessing pornography on my way in." [Laughter]

The guy sat up there, and he spoke in classical Fusha Arabic, and he said, "This is very grave thing, but we're gonna let you go. We're going to seal all these magazines, *The New Yorkers*, and also we're gonna seal your engine, because you have a good engine in your car, and you must go immediately to the other side of Saudi Arabia." (This was all before the muffler blew out, by the way, so I would have been in deep kimchi if the two events had come together.) "You must leave the magic kingdom or the tragic kingdom or the kingdom immediately." Excuse me for the light tone of all this, because I had not conceived of handing out any of this literature to anybody.

They then got some people who came in, and they put wires around it, and then they had really nice little lead seals, you know heated or like they put on your electric meter at your house, and they did two-way seals, and they wrapped this stuff really very effectively tight.

Then they went and got in the hood of the car, and they put wires around the engine and sealed it. I said, "Why?" They said, "Well, you might exchange the engine for another engine." Well, I never thought of it, but I guess people must do it, or why would they seal it. So then they had the problem of finding the engine number, and nobody knows where to find the bloody engine number in a 190 or 230 Mercedes, '85s, '84s, '83s, it was an '83. Nobody…I couldn't find the motor number. I don't know where it is to this day. It's cast into it in the block, and nobody knew where to find it. But finally it was written somewhere. So they couldn't verify it; they accepted what was on a piece of paper. So off we went.

I don't remember everything. We finally got to the other border. It was written in my passport that these packets of my pornographic materials had been sealed, and thank God I didn't have a Playboy or something like that! We got to the border, and we got across into Jordan, and they checked all this, and they counted the magazines in the different packets and all this stuff; it was in the trunk of the car. We got into Jordan, and they said they had to seal the engine too, but they didn't have any wire, and they couldn't use the Saudi's seal because they had a different kind of seal or something like that. We had to wake soldiers up and wander around the desert, which is right there. It was ideal location for a real gonzo movie, to use, perhaps, the wrong phrase. It was unbelievably raw there and busted down, and here we are for about 20 minutes wandering around looking for coat hangers because we got the word, a guy said, we could take a coat hanger and put it around part of the engine. I don't know how they were going to; it needed more than one

coat hanger. So we wandered around and we would bring pieces of wire to him, and he'd say, "No, not long enough," or "not flexible enough," or "I can't use it to seal," and this went on. This took an hour and a half to do all this, and I have a tape recording of a lot of this stuff because Chris and I kept a tape recording.

So then we drove through Jordan, and then civilization got better, and then we went to Damascus and arrived there, and that was my big adventure. It developed that I was considered very lucky because hardly anybody gets permission to do it anymore; especially since 9-11, I'm sure they don't let anybody do any of that.

*Q: Well then, you were in Syria and Damascus from when to when?*

ROSS: Ah, '96 to 2000, '96 to the middle of 2000.

*Q: Four years.*

ROSS: Yes, yes.

*Q: Okay. Your wife was doing what there?*

ROSS: She'd started out as a secretary, and by this time she'd become an Admin (Administrative Section) officer. So she became the Admin officer for the USIS operation there and also supervised the financial responsibility for the English Language Teaching Center, which she had done and done a good job of in Yemen, which had turned a lot of money.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

ROSS: So that everybody's fighting to get a job there.

*Q: Yes. So these four years, what were you up to?*

ROSS: My mother had gotten ill, and I went back to the States a number of times, and she passed away; but I stayed at home with her, during kind of her last year—not the whole time. But I went back three times in this four years and including the last time when she did pass away. I was fortunate to be there with her. I went back and sort of helped wind up her affairs, the house, and all that stuff in Florida where she was living. So that took me back and forth.

I did do some contract security work from the embassy, which was like guard duty for different operations. I also did do some voice work for advertising in English for Middle East advertising agencies that placed the ads on Damascus television or even on Lebanese television because they worked very closely together. There are advertisements. People think that Syria is some kind of a monolithic thing that the Ba'ath party runs, but there's a lot of free enterprise. It does, I wouldn't say exactly flourish, but it goes on.

I actually did have to sell Assad's voice in one of his last interviews for an hour with MacNeil/Lehrer, which I very much enjoyed, into English. Voicing work is interesting for me—dubbing or voicing. Generally, they will pay you New York scale, which is $50 to $100 an hour. The trouble is you don't get that many hours of that work!

*Q: No.*

ROSS: I mean if you did it four hours a day, it would be remembered.

I did a certain amount of reading and writing and things like that and was a house husband, kept things going. I enjoyed Damascus because it was a very rich place to do things in, and Syria has a fantastic history with the various empires that have swept over it, and then of course it has…for example, the Grand Mosque downtown, before it was a mosque, was a combined church and mosque in the early Umayyad period. It was supposedly the church where Saint John the Baptist's head is buried, although his head is supposed to be buried at least one other place. Before it was a church from the early Christian times, because Christianity flourished very early in Syria, it was the Roman temple of Jupiter, and before that it was the temple of Hadad. This is the same location, exactly the same place. Before that it was a Neolithic god of thunder and wind, which is what Hadad comes from, and that's an Assyrian kind of god, I believe. You could just learn all this stuff and go all around and go to all the early Christian sites and then go up to Turkey. So I'd set up trips, and Jane and I would go around and go out of town a lot.

*Q: You weren't in the game but you were there and an observer. What was sort of the political climate there?*

ROSS: Well, that's a good question. When we were first there, the embassy got along fine with the country, and that was in the days of Chris [Christopher] Ross, the ambassador, who'd been there five or six years.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He stayed seven plus years.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The man in the street, the whole time I was there, always liked the United States, and the first thing they'd say is, "Where are you from?" "United States." "Ah! I love America!" That was the standard thing. Now whether it meant that they loved to get a visa to America, or that they had a brother in Youngstown, Ohio at the sheik's steel factory, or whatever, they all liked it, and they all said, "Great place!"

Things got out of hand. We did something.

*Q: This is tape 10, side 1, with Dick Ross. You were saying something happened. Was this when we went after the bin Laden thing?*

ROSS: No. No, this was all before that. This is while the old man was still alive; Hafiz al-Assad was still alive. He died while we were there, which was a giant event in the country because he had his hand on the throttle for 32 years.

*Q: Oh yes!*

ROSS: No. The U.S. did something which caused a big backlash, which was ginned up by perhaps the Ba'ath regional command, by the Lefties of the Ba'ath, because the Ba'ath had a lot of conservative people in it. They were going to have a demonstration in front of the American embassy. It was right around Christmastime.

In the morning you could see children from school being led down the street by their teachers in our neighborhood, going down to the embassy, which was about two and a half or three blocks away from where we lived. We lived in a high rise in [what was] considered a very attractive section of Damascus, halfway up the hill. The kids all went down there; this was like teenagers. A lot of them wore military uniforms to school, like Boy Scout uniforms.

*Q: Yes, young pioneers.*

ROSS: Right, yes. It was that version of it. I've had visitors come, and they were astounded to see girls in combat fatigues, teenage girls in them—"babes with bayonets" as somebody called them, but of course they didn't have weapons or anything like that. In fact, if you stayed in these paramilitary organizations and joined the reserve, you could get some kind of a scholarship to help you with the university.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: If you went to jump school you could help get yourself into medical school, or at least pay for it—not to get in, but to get a government grant.

It was sort of gentle in the morning, and then around noon it turned real ugly because there were 40,000 or 50,000 students at Damascus University. They marched across town, which wasn't all that far away, about a mile and a half, and came up to the embassy and came out front. The people by this time had these electric loud hailers and battery megaphones, and people started chanting. Then a group of professional instigators got in with it and started getting everybody to running around and running around, and then they started throwing things, and they attacked the embassy. They attacked it big, got over the wall, got around the back side of it, started throwing rocks, crashing in, busted up a lot of the cars in the inside of the embassy parking lot, got in the compound over these walls that you would think you would need grappling hooks to get over because they're real high.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: They're twenty feet high or something, and people got some kind of two by fours, trying to hammer in the metal front door. But of course the marines were all inside, and it was a skeleton crew of people who were there or couldn't get out. Apparently the marines had a button to push, which squirted tear gas out through some kind of secret vent outside, which I had no knowledge of. So they tear gassed the people inside the compound, but outside the external door of the main building, and that stopped things there for awhile.

But the ambassador's wife and certain people were trapped in his residence, which was a lovely old house. It had belonged to a prime minister from the '30s and it's really one of the very elegant residences in the nice section of town where some other embassies, like the Italian embassy, are. The mob, a portion of it, went down there and got in the gates and overpowered the local guards and got in. They trashed the whole of Ambassador Ryan Crocker's downstairs, just smashed everything up, threw all his books (he had a lot of leather bound books), got down into the storerooms and broke every bottle of spiritus frumenti. They tried to start a fire but then got chased out. Meanwhile, Mrs. Crocker and some members of her staff were upstairs in the safe haven room, locked up, nobody knowing what was gonna happen. The RSO and a couple of marines went over there, and sort of went in in a very difficult moment, and got them.

The mob was swirling all around, and then they went up to USIS and attacked that, up the street, and broke a lot of windows. That was mainly what it was, but the damage came to maybe a million and a half dollars. Ambassador Crocker said, "No more…" They shut the consulate down. "But we're not gonna have any to and fro with the Syrian government until they pay for all this." All the damages.

*Q: Wow!*

ROSS: So after a couple of weeks they began to do that, and they came through. Afterwards relations, from the embassy's point of view, were frosty. I know Ambassador Crocker and his wife resented it greatly as a personal thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It was a violation of their space—

*Q: Sure.*

ROSS: …I mean of their psychological space. I never felt that Ambassador Crocker was very close to the Syrians anyway. He'd had some difficult Middle East tours before, including being in Beirut at a difficult time. He, of course, is now in Baghdad. So things, while still the same with the people in the street, after this incident died down one could feel that things were on something of a slippery slope with the Syrians, unfortunately.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: It didn't prevent us from doing anything we wanted—one could travel anywhere one wanted to in the country, up to the north and over to the far east to the border of Iraq which is the rich farmland. Everything went back to normal except that everybody remembered this. It was sort of like a family feud that people say, "We're all over," but it's still there.

*Q: Were you getting the feeling the thing had gotten completely out of control? If you're in a demonstration and you put too many people in it, you've got to, you know, I mean they should have been fairly astute in how they set up their demonstrations.*

ROSS: Since I'm not directly privy to the classified analysis, I can't say. But there were two opinions about it. One was that the demonstration was based and manageable and somehow it got out of control with some of these instigators who just enjoyed it and just tried to set the thing over the edge; and it surprised the hell out of the Syrians' police and the Syrians' secret police, who said, "We didn't think this would happen, and we apologize, and we're sorry, and here's the money."

On the other hand, there was another position in the embassy, depending on which group you listened to, which was this was all done on purpose to do this to us. They think they're teaching us a lesson, and we're not gonna take this sitting down, in the sense that we're going to put a big check, a big blot in their copybook big time. This has turned the tea kettle over as far as good relations because there's always talk of getting back to better relations with Syria.

There was one guy who was out there all the time [Warren Christopher]. Anyway, Secretary Albright came a number of times, and finally she came to Hafiz al-Assad's funeral. That also clouded the end of our time in Syria because that brought in a kind of uncertainty. Nobody would say very much against Hafiz al-Assad, although people would say a lot more after he died [laughter] than before he died! They would talk a little bit. They'd say, "Well, the country needs to change," or something like that.

In Morocco, when I was there with Hassan II, nobody would say that at all. Nobody would say anything! I would say that the people were more guarded in Morocco than any place I've ever been, and that includes Afghanistan. In Afghanistan they'd tell you that the other side was dangerous and crazy. The contest was out in the open.

In Syria, it was a very nice place to live if it wasn't for the fact that Syria was put on this list of dangerous terrorist nations. That all went back to an incident—a bomb being put into a package onto an airplane that was going to fly from London to Tel Aviv and was carried aboard by a Irish woman. The bomb didn't go off or anything like that. She said it had been given to her by her boyfriend or her common law husband. This was ten years or more before, and some of the information was that the bomb had been arranged or had been put into her hands through the machinations of a Syrian intelligence officer at the Syrian embassy in London. That incident had put Syria on the list, and it has never gotten off the list since then.

Now, of course, it's always accused of a great many things by people who don't wish it well who occupy the Golan Heights, from which at least 40 percent of the water of Israel comes, from the Golan. It's an instructive lesson to go up to Qunaytirah (Kuneitra) on the Golan Heights and see what the Israeli occupying authorities did to that quite nice, medium-sized town when they agreed to pull back a certain number of miles. They'd take two bulldozers and put a great big two- or three-inch wire cable between them, a hawser if you will, and go down the street or both sides of a house and drag it through the house and just…it would be like giving the house a haircut at the two-foot-high level. So the whole town was knocked down, shelled and everything else. The Syrians, well, when they were able to go back to it, everybody's house had been destroyed, so they kept it as an example. Everybody who wants to can go down there and see it.

Of course now the Syrians are accused of spitefully keeping this monument there, which of course doesn't show how much development there has been around there, and supposedly it's just a horrible thing the Syrians do to have this town that's totally destroyed.

*Q: Okay. Well then, maybe it's a good place to stop. At 2000 you left.*

ROSS: In the middle of 2000 we flew back to the United States and stayed there until now, and I'm going to Sri Lanka.

*Q: All right. Well, probably this is as good a place as any to stop.*

ROSS: Yes. I'd like to say something I was thinking about.

*Q: Sure.*

ROSS: You asked when you were talking about Paris, did I have a feeling that I talked to anybody who was philosophically or in a popular way influencing culture.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: When I opened the paper on Sunday there was an article in the Op-ed section of the [*Washington*] *Post*, by Dominique Moisi. It was a serious, long piece about what America can do with French cooperation about Iraq because the gist of it was that we French had to go through our Algeria, and with all the best will in the world maybe we can be of assistance in this situation.

That's an example of what made me think that I did know different kinds of people in Paris who actually were serious thinkers. It took me a long while to get to know them. I was in Paris five years. It took me three years because when I got there I had no experience in French and understood nothing about European modern developments and conditions, coming from Afghanistan. People were interested in what I had done in Afghanistan, so I met people who were interested in Afghanistan in France; but just to know in a general way about French it took a long while, and I think it takes anybody a

long while. I think it takes two tours there to absorb it, unless one is an undergraduate in Europe or an undergraduate in France and has two or three years there, not just a junior year abroad.

I did get to know people. I worked with Michel Debré, who had been Charles de Gaulle's foreign minister and was one of the authors of the Fifth Republic Constitution.

I knew Moisi through IFRI, which is the "Institut Francais des Relations Internationales" (the French Institute of International Relations), and he'd studied at the Kissinger Seminar.

Then there were people older than him that I knew a little bit, and I knew historians like Andre Chastel, but these are people I'd only dealt with for a particular project.

One person who was, I think, the most influential that I met there, Bernard Pivot, who was the head of a talk show, the most popular talk show in France [*Bouillon de Culture*]. It was a book talk show on Friday nights. Everybody listened to him; the whole of the chattering class listened to him. Afterwards, they all went to Brasserie Lipp and all met, all the people who'd been on the show. He went in there, and everybody went in and talked, and the socialists and the conservatives too. So there was a real interesting class of people. I never had full access or introduction. I mean I went to Brasserie Lipp with Americans, say like Norman Patoritz, and I said, "Here we are, and this is Brasserie Lipp, and here's my friend who's a conservative thinker;" but I was never, oh, let's all bring Richard Ross along kind of thing.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: I probably would have arrived at that if I'd had a couple more years, I think. And in fact, I did meet a lot of people in passing.

As I was going to say, the brightest person there, in a way, is an American writer who writes for the *Herald Trib*, [William Pfaff], and the French all read him and liked to have him around. He's very, very reflective. Pfaff has collections of essays that come out, but he writes in a really good way about moral responsibility, like Walter Lippmann used to write, and how nations think. I can remember him saying things like, "The United States can rant and rave all it wants, but the Soviet Union will change because the people of Russia want to change it." Now that sounds crazy, but when you're in America it was that, "We will change the Soviet Union." kind of a thing a lot.

Well anyway, William Pfaff aside, I want to tell one story about Paris. There was a guy I met named Francois Missen, who was a very famous investigative reporter and had won the Albert prize, the "Prix d'Albert," for his work on exposing the narcotics as a sidebar of the French Connection.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: The French Connection goes back to the Corsican Connection—

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: …but there was one in southern France too, and he did it for a newspaper called the *Provensa*. He was interested in Afghanistan, so I met him at a conference. He said, "I'd like to talk to you." He came over to dinner, and I helped set him up with people who he should see if he walked into Afghanistan, and he was going to go in sub-rosa.

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: Well, he got into Kabul, and he started meeting some of these people. He was picked up by the secret police. At that time I think [Mohammad] Najibullah was running the country. He was taken away to a prison and told to sit in a cell, and then they came back and told him (they couldn't communicate very well because his English is not so good, can't speak Dari or anything, and they couldn't speak very good French), "Somebody's gonna come talk to you now. Two men are gonna come talk to you." He realized this was serious because he didn't know where he was. He didn't know if he was in a bad jail, or whether he was gonna be badly interrogated. I mean he saw people who'd been beaten up who were sort of chucked around the jail, and he thought, "I better be very careful." He had a little time, so he got his wallet out, and he saw this card, this very thick, heavy linen-board card, and it said, "Richard F. Ross, First Secretary, American Embassy."

*Q: Yes.*

ROSS: He thought, "My God! I'm not going to be able to explain to them what this is," because it didn't say it was the Paris embassy. So he thought, "I've only got a minute." So he put it in his mouth, and he heard them walking down the hall, and he's trying to chew it up and swallow it. He said that was the hardest thing to do because this is a very thick, expensive Copenhaver-Washington diplomatic card; he said, "I never want to have to do that again!" [Laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

ROSS: He said, "Reechard, that was veery bad!" [Laughter] I thought of that when I was trying to think of people I knew that had maybe had an influence or something. He then wrote a great series of articles for *Paris-Match* when he came back from his adventures in Afghanistan. He went and saw Ahmad Shah Massoud and people like that, people that I never saw when I was in Afghanistan.

Anyway, thank you for the opportunity.

*Q: Okay. Well, this has been fun!*

*End of interview*